



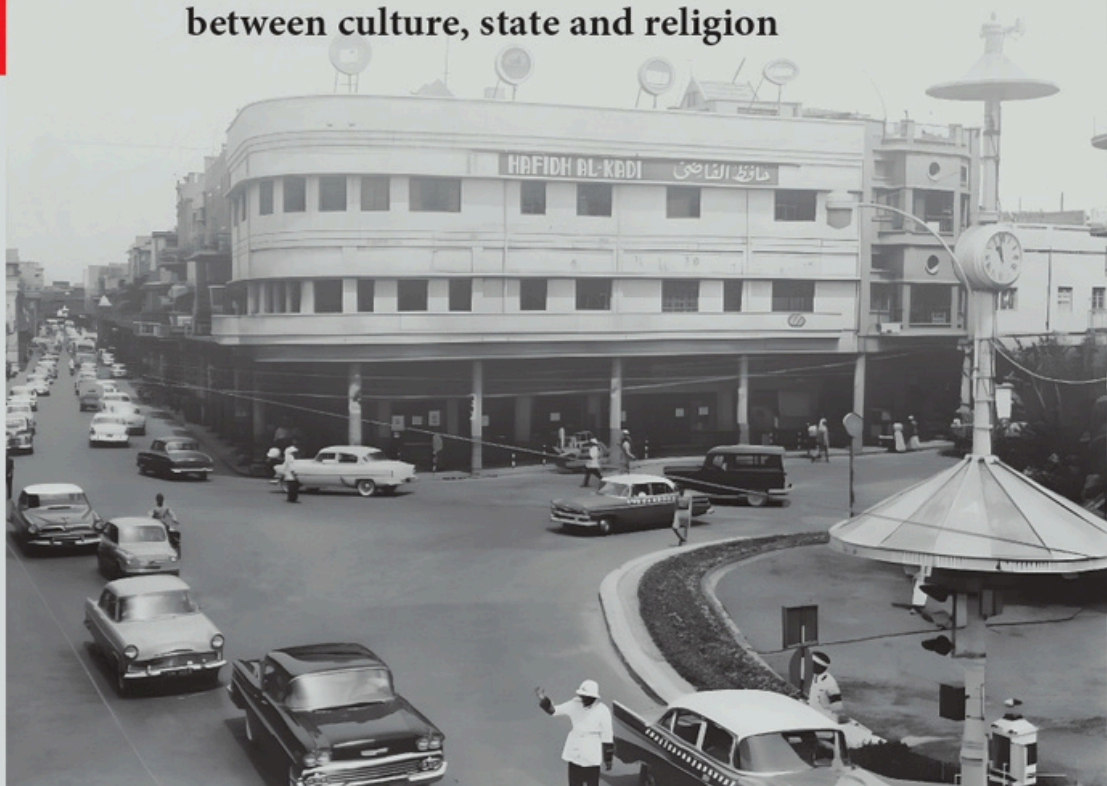
دار ومكتبة الحياة

Lukman Faily

The Iraqi Character

between Cafés, Palaces and Minarets

to understand the relationship
between culture, state and religion





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Lukman Faily

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Introduction

With the collapse of Saddam's regime, on 9/4/2003 and the fall of the republic, Iraq faces contemporary challenges in rebuilding society and defining a clear Iraqi identity. In an effort to build a nation defined by clear characteristics, with ambitious, sustainable, and attainable goals. This task requires serious efforts to understand the dimensions and roles that participate in the development of forms of cultural, governmental, and religious expressions in the Iraqi personality, in the wake of the major geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-social conflicts and transformations that it undergone in recent decades. Accordingly, it is very useful to seek a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of attraction and influence of these three dimensions: (culture, state, and religion) on the Iraqi personality.

Studying the evolution of the characteristics of the Iraqi personality, and the dynamics of its emergence and development, requires us to seek to understand in depth its past, and current realities, as well as the potential transformations in the future of the balance of influence, interaction and power between culture, state and religion. It is useful to mention that globalisation, external factors, the complexities of the Middle East and the conflict of regional and international powers have also played a role in shaping the past and present, and will inevitably affect the future, which

requires us to shed light and consider the dynamics of societal and national development.

It is necessary to move through the stages of history, each of which carved a part of the identity of society; to understand the contemporary Iraqi personality and its complexities, starting with ancient civilisations such as Sumer, Babylon and Assyria, which laid the foundation for the cultural mosaic in Iraq; Every brick in the walls of Ur and Babylon, every cuneiform inscription, every artifact discovered in the Tigris and Euphrates basin, tells a story of innovation, governance, and spirituality, and how the individual and society in Iraq's geography and history (including centuries of Ottoman rule and subsequent western occupation and mandate) evolved with the events of their time and the nature of the Iraqi character.

The twentieth century brought about fundamental changes in Iraq, starting with the end of Ottoman rule, the establishment of a modern state in 1921, the challenges of monarchy, especially during the reign of King Faisal I, in building a post-colonial nation, through the legacy of the Baath Party, especially during the period in which Saddam Hussein led (1968-2003), with its mix of secular rule and tyranny. These major and dramatic events and changes had a profound impact that will require great societal engineering; To erase or fade its influence from the memory of Iraqi society⁽¹⁾.

The composition of the Iraqi personality is mostly the result of the overlap of the forces of the three dimensions of culture, state and religion. These forces, like celestial bodies in orbit, are formed and influenced by each other, to create a delicate balance between them that determines the collective identity of the Iraqi society and people⁽²⁾.

On the other hand, there are those who say that the Iraqi personality is - in most cases - the result of the forces of attraction exercised by culture and religion, and within the narrow and limited influence of the state, as the

(1) T. Dodge 2023; A.A. Allawi 2014.

(2) L. al-Faily 2016; A. al-Haidari 2015; H. Holborn 2010; W. Mühlberger 2023; F. Fukuyama 2018.

influence of the tribe, clan and regionalism outweighs the Iraqi personality. Accordingly, our state will remain weak unless this imbalance of forces of power within society is addressed.

Forms of cultural expression, such as language and traditions, act as mirrors and stimuli that reflect societal values, and work, at the same time, to shape and develop them. Understanding these dynamics of attraction is essential, not only for historical analysis; Rather, to accommodate the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing Iraq as well, as it navigates the complex terrain of post-conflict reconstruction, wars and occupation, and political transformations such as the US campaign after the events of September 11, 2001, and what it called the war-on-terror, and the effects of globalisation and social communication mechanisms and the effects of climate and demographic changes in recent decades.

On the other hand, culture, state and religion, with their historical development, political dynamics and interaction with each other, are transformed into a source of power, and over time they evolve and become a reflection of societal values. The policies implemented by political leaders of various political orientations, from the colonial era to the present, have left an indelible mark on the character of Iraqi society, which has greatly affected its course.

Finally, religion, especially the coexistence between its sects, between Shiites and Sunnis, is a fundamental force guiding individual and societal practices in Iraq, especially after 2003. This deeper look into the role of religion in society will help us understand the research more clearly and provide a deeper analysis of the impact of the dimension of religion on the Iraqi society and personality.

This book provides a thorough examination of the dynamics of interaction within Iraqi personality, focusing on the cultural, historical, religious, social, and political aspects that shape and influence this multifaceted subject. This study seeks to illuminate the intricate relationships between culture, the state, and religion, and to analyse their implications for the current and future trajectory of Iraq.

The Iraqi personality is manifested in different environments that form the national identity and express the diversity of culture and the ancient history of this country, as places such as cafés, palaces and minarets reflect samples that mirror different aspects of the Iraqi personality and greatly influence its formation and development. This book will examine the profound connections between these places, as well as the interactions among culture, state, and religion, and how these dynamics significantly influence the Iraqi identity.

As metaphors, the word (Cafés/coffee house) was used as a place that reflects the gathering of ideas of the members of society among themselves and their meeting and cross-fertilisation in general. On the other hand, palaces were referred to as a symbol of the class of power from politicians, merchants and the ruling classes. As for the minarets, they symbolise the class of clergymen and the great degree of their influence on the members of Iraqi society. Here, religion is not limited to Muslims, but includes all different Iraqi religious groups, as their members are also influenced by the beliefs of their religious leaders.

This study will explore the interplay between culture, state, and religion, and how these three dimensions collectively influence the formation of the Iraqi identity. Additionally, it will examine the impact of cultural elements on state institutions and the religious system, as well as analyse how individuals respond to these dynamics. This book will also examine how the state influences cultural and religious practices and the opposite effect as well.

The goal of this study is to comprehend Iraqi society, identify its present challenges, and see how its citizens are tackling these problems. This study examines contemporary Iraqi history and analyses the impact of historical events on the formation of Iraqi national identity, as well as the development of the country's cultural and religious landscape.

The analysis also considers the geopolitical factors influencing Iraq and their impact on the Iraqi national identity. Additionally, it explores how regional and international contexts shape the country's political, economic,

and social developments, as well as the ways in which the population responds to these dynamics.

Finally, this book seeks to anticipate Iraq's future and explore potential pathways for achieving development and progress. It discusses the significance of collective action, social cohesion, and comprehensive economic, political, and social reforms, along with other key factors essential to the country's advancement.

The book is divided into three sections, followed by a conclusion. The first section addresses the three fundamental dimensions of Iraqi society: culture, the state, and religion. It examines the dynamics of their interaction and the extent to which these elements complement or conflict with one another in shaping the Iraqi identity. This section explores whether there is harmony among these dimensions or whether tensions exist, identifying the areas in which they diverge and the ways these tensions manifest in the Iraqi character. Additionally, it analyses the defining traits of the Iraqi personality and how culture, the state, and religion collectively influence its formation. The section concludes with an exploration of the underlying reasons for the historical scarcity of effective "historical" leadership in modern Iraq.

The second section, titled "Contemporary Iraq," examines the historical context of the country and analyses the impact of key events such as the period of Ottoman rule on the formation and evolution of Iraqi national identity. This section explores how historical legacies have shaped the social, cultural, and political fabric of modern Iraq. After that, we will discuss the contemporary challenges facing Iraq, and how the people interact with these challenges. Then, we seek to uncover the effects of dictatorship on culture, the state, and religion, and the extent of the effects of the three dimensions and dictatorship on the concept of citizenship, and the effect of the increasing influence of tribalism and clans in Iraqi society. We then address the narrative of the relationship of the Shiite sect with previous governments, and the extent of their readiness to participate or not, and the effects of that on them and on the Iraqi political and societal scene in

general. We conclude the section by contemplating the topics of the Iraqi nation and citizenship, and what are the requirements for the formation and maturity of nations? Finally, we ask the question on whether if we now have a real entity in Iraq called the Iraqi nation?

In the third and final section, entitled Several Horizons for the Future and the Path, we will discuss eleven ways that Iraq can take to move toward development and progress, and how the people, government, and its institutions can contribute to these developments processes. In this section, we present a group of important issues that affect the future of Iraq, and the way to advance it towards progress and prosperity.

We start by talking about the importance of understanding the geopolitical dimensions of Iraq, and how they affect modern Iraq, and their importance and impact on the Iraqi character. After that, we will try to detail the needs for a complete geopolitical understanding, and the possibility that this will affect internal developments. After that, we address the importance of collective action, considering it as a basic way to achieving change and development within Iraqi society.

Then, we discuss Iraq's relationship with neighbouring countries, and the extent to which these relations affect the country's internal and external policy. We also address social cohesion and its importance in building a cohesive and cooperative society. After that, we discuss the challenges and opportunities related to population growth, and the possibility of Iraq exploiting these opportunities effectively. We talk about the importance of creating new narratives that reflect the aspirations of the Iraqi people and contribute to building a better future. We also investigate the nature of reform and social engineering and how to implement them. After that, we touch on the importance of the role of leadership, the need for historical leadership, and the importance of understanding the differences between the effects of centralisation and decentralisation in governance. After that, we show the possible paths for Iraq's path, if it is able to manage its affairs or not, and the need for strategic planning accordingly. Finally, we address the importance of understanding the scale, scope and solutions of the challenges.

In addition to the general headings above, and our quest to explore their various aspects, we also seek, within this book, to answer a set of detailed questions; to help us delve into the complex and delicate interaction between state institutions and the dynamic influences of religion and culture in Iraq; that is, to shed light on the multifaceted nature of the Iraqi people, and the interacting forces embodying the Iraqi character and shaping its identity, by trying to answer the questions below:

1. How can the legacy of conflict and trauma be addressed with initiatives that focus on reconciliation, healing and psychosocial support?
2. What are the potential impacts of demographic shifts, including urbanisation and migration, on future social dynamics and economic growth in Iraq?
3. In what ways do religious institutions interact with state structures and political power dynamics? And how does this affect the Iraqi psyche and identity?
4. What roles do cultural traditions and heritage play in shaping perceptions of national identity and collective memory among Iraqis?
5. How have historical events such as colonialism, occupation, and war shaped the relationship between state authority, religious institutions, and cultural practices in Iraq?
6. How have cultural traditions, rituals, and customs been preserved or adapted over time in response to changing political and religious dynamics?
7. How do geopolitical factors and international relations influence internal power dynamics and societal cohesion within Iraq, particularly regarding religious and cultural identities?
8. To what extent do economic policies and state resource allocation decisions impact social mobility, access to opportunity, and wealth

and power disparities across Iraqi society at large?

9. How do legal frameworks reflect and perpetuate societal values, norms, and power structures shaped by religion, culture, and historical state practices?
10. What are the prospects for promoting interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange, and civic engagement initiatives that promote social justice, tolerance, and pluralism in Iraq's diverse society?
11. Is the existence of a collective identity for communities in a state, Iraq in particular, essential to the state's existence and success?
12. Can Iraq's diversity of religions and ethnicities be used as a strength or a source of weakness?

In addressing these questions, the objective is to explore the various dimensions of Iraq's social, political, economic, and cultural landscape, establish a supplementary framework for the research, and offer deeper insights into the current complexities and trajectories within the country.

Before moving on to the core of the book itself, it is necessary to clarify here that the researcher's approach and starting points in writing this study are based on an approach with a practical, intellectual and operational dimension and not theoretical or academic. This approach emerged from his hands-on work, enabling him to closely monitor and diagnose national and local issues. Hence this book was not written from a classical academic or research mental and theoretical construction. The book will also provide definitions for some concepts and cases that reflect his own point of view, based on his experience as a practitioner, observer and Iraqi citizen who has worked in various state agencies over the past fifteen years.

The author of the book believes, based on his practical experience, that the dimensions of the state, culture and religion have influenced in the past, and continue to influence greatly in shaping the Iraqi identity, and this is a hypothesis put forward by the author, and he will try to clarify and explain

it in the various sections and chapters of this research.

Although this book is not subject to the standards of writing scientific research based on scientific methods in the classical way; however, the author has been keen to use some of these methods, especially the analytical, historical, prospective, and comparative methods, as they are indispensable, with the aim of giving this study a kind of cognitive organisation, correct informational employment, and what it sometimes includes in terms of using some concepts and interpretations previously presented in the fields of the aforementioned research; in order to support its solidity and credibility.

It is necessary to point out that this book is a continuation of a previous research, written by the author and published by the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics in November 2016 entitled "Social Harmony: An Iraqi Perspective"⁽¹⁾.

(1) L. al-Faily 2016.

Section One

The Three Dimensions: Culture, State, and Religion

1.1. Definitions

The terms culture, state, and religion carry specific meanings in the historical, social, and political context of our region. The following is a summary of the meanings of each term and their relevance to the Iraqi context:

1.1.1. Culture

Culture refers to the shared set of beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and behaviour that characterise a small human group or society. It includes the way people express themselves, their art, language, rituals, social practices, and the material aspects of their lives. Culture is a dynamic and evolving aspect of human societies, influencing individuals' perceptions, interactions, and the way they understand and interpret the world around them⁽¹⁾.

In Iraq, culture is a rich fabric of a long history of diverse civilisations, including traditions, customs, arts, literature, language, and social practices that have evolved over the centuries. Iraqi culture has been influenced by ancient Mesopotamian civilisations, Islamic traditions, and interactions with different ethnic and religious groups within the region. Iraqi culture reflects a combination of Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Armenian, Assyrian, and other influences, creating a mosaic that contributes to defining and developing the unique identity of the Iraqi person and society. Perhaps

(1) M.Feeber 2011; J. Scout 2006; H. Khalil 1984; J. Firpoul 2011; al-Wardi.

the many political, social, and demographic transformations in the past one hundred and fifty years have affected and changed the nature of Iraqi culture⁽¹⁾.

1,1,2. State

The state as a political entity characterised by specific geographical borders, a government, and a system of laws and institutions that exercise authority over the population within those borders, and usually has the authority to enforce laws, maintain order, and regulate internal and international relations, including implementing foreign policy. The state is often associated with sovereignty and the ability to enact and enforce laws and plays a crucial role in organising and managing society, providing public services, and formulating national policies⁽²⁾.

The concept of the state in Iraq has evolved over different historical periods, as modern Iraq emerged in the aftermath of World War I, with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, and throughout its contemporary history, it has witnessed fluctuations in its systems of government and constitutions, including monarchies, republics, stages of authoritarian rule, military coups, and wars. The political scene in Iraq has been affected by several factors such as colonial legacies, regional and global conflicts, and internal conflicts over power and the country's wealth⁽³⁾.

1,1,3. Religion

Religion is a complex set of beliefs, practices, rituals, and moral values centred around a higher power, or a metaphysical force. It often includes a framework for understanding the nature of existence, the purpose of life, and the moral principles that govern individual and collective human behaviour. Religions and religious denominations typically have organised structures, including institutions, clergy, and sacred texts, and can provide a sense of identity, community, and moral guidance to their followers,

(1) Sarwar A.17/10/ 2019; A. al-Haidari 2015; H. Holborn 2010; W. Mühlberger 2023.

(2) A. Belqiziz 2001; S. al-Qmudi 1999; J. Scout 2006.

(3) A. al-Haidari 2015; Z.E. Preston 2000; A. Rohde 2010.

while promoting religious practices that reinforce the power of religion in their societies⁽¹⁾.

Religion is of great importance in Iraq, and the majority of the population are Muslims who believe in Allah and His teachings. The two major branches of Islam (Sunni and Shia) coexist in Iraq, with a majority of the latter. The religious landscape has played a profound role in shaping societal norms, political dynamics, and cultural practices. Historically, religious leaders and institutions have had a significant influence on various aspects of Iraqi life. However, Iraq is also home to religious diversity, including Christian, Yazidi, and Mandaean sects, as well as former Jews and other religious groups, each of which contributes to a certain degree to the religious fabric of Iraqi society⁽²⁾.

1.2. The Interaction of the Three Dimensions – Culture, State, and Religion

Human behaviour is complex and is influenced by a multitude of factors. When individuals make decisions or take action, they typically consider various internal and external factors. Cultural acceptability, the legality of their decisions, moral values, and religious legitimacy are among the fundamental factors that people take into account before they act.

Our quest to understand the dynamics of attraction of culture, state, and religion is the foundation or key to understanding the Iraqi personality, as it provides a unique perspective through which to explore the historical roots, contemporary challenges, and future trajectories of societal identity in Iraq. Perhaps understanding the interconnectedness between these elements is of utmost importance; to understand the most important factors that shape the beliefs, values, and behaviour of individuals and groups of the Iraqi people⁽³⁾.

(1) J. Firpoul 2011; J. Scout 2006; M.Feeber 2011; H. al-Majidi 2016; F. Fukuyama 2018.

(2) A. al-Haidari 2015; A. al-Wardi 1994: 251-293.

(3) A. al-Wardi 1994: 251-293; A. Belqiziz 2001.

Let us cover ten key factors that will aid us in comprehending these complex interactions:

1. The interaction of culture, state, and religion collectively forms the basis of Iraqi identity, and the way in which these elements interact and influence each other creates how individuals perceive themselves and their place in society. Perhaps understanding this interaction provides insight into the basic aspects and dimensions of the Iraqi personality.
2. Religion is often the primary source of value and moral guidance, and the interaction between culture, state, and religion contributes to establishing societal norms and values, and this moral framework affects individual behaviour, social interactions, and the collective conscience of the Iraqi people.
3. Implications of the relationship between religion and state on the nature of governance in Iraq. Historical and contemporary dynamics and combination between religious institutions and political authorities have contributed to the nature of governance, as understanding this interaction is essential to understanding the dynamics of power and decision-making processes within the state.
4. Forms of cultural expression and social practices are often deeply intertwined with religious beliefs, and thus studying the interaction between religion and culture provides a revealing view of customs, rituals, and traditional community norms, and this understanding is crucial to appreciating the richness, complexity, and sometimes contradictions of everyday life in Iraq.
5. The interaction between culture, state, and religion influences legal systems and the creation of laws. In Iraq, Islam occupies a central position in legal, moral, and cultural spheres. Understanding how religious principles influence legal frameworks and societal norms is essential to understanding the structure of the Iraqi person and society.

6. Understanding how culture, state, and religion interact helps explain how Iraqi society responds to internal and external changes, conflicts, and challenges.
7. Religion, daily state processes, and cultural narratives contribute to the formation of collective memory. Defining the interaction between them helps reveal how historical events are remembered, commemorated, and integrated into the cultural and religious fabric of Iraqi society.
8. The interaction between culture, state, and religion is characterised by complex intersections and occasional tensions. Understanding these intersections is crucial to deciphering the loyalties, affiliations, and subtle conflicts that individuals or communities may encounter, especially in situations where cultural, political, and religious forces intersect.
9. Iraq is characterised by a diverse population of different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Understanding the interaction between these elements helps to appreciate unity or disagreement within this diversity. It sheds light on the ways in which different communities, components, and groups coexist, or not, and contributes to shaping the broader Iraqi character.
10. Recognising the interaction between culture, state, and religion provides the basis for identifying paths toward social progress, inclusion, and resilience. It allows for the development of nuanced approaches that recognise and respect the interconnected elements that make up the Iraqi character.

Therefore, understanding the interaction between culture, state, and religion is crucial to understanding the Iraqi character. To understand the intricate aspects of identity, belief systems, and societal norms within Iraq's unique historical, cultural, and religious context, it is essential to analyse

and explore each dimension in detail. This approach aims to develop a comprehensive and clear strategy for engagement and to enhance harmony and cohesion among the diverse groups within Iraqi society⁽¹⁾.

1,2,1. Cultural dimensions

The cultural scene in Iraq is a vibrant fabric, woven from inherited customs and traditions, and the Arabic language in the central, southern, western, eastern and parts of northern Iraq is a unifying force, and it is the medium through which the stories of Iraq are narrated, from the eloquent verses of ancient poetry to contemporary prose, and the language is a repository of collective memory, and the same is true of the Kurdish language of the inhabitants of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or the Faily Kurds, who also live in central and southern Iraq.

Deeply rooted in historical and community narratives, literature provides a window into the complexities of Iraqi identity. The works of renowned authors, exploring the human experiences of Iraq, offer insight into the nuances of the social fabric that shape the Iraqi character.

The Islamic era enriched Iraq's cultural fabric as it served as a nexus for both Sunni and Shia Muslims, and the country witnessed a flourishing of intellectual, artistic, and scientific endeavours that contributed significantly to the broader Islamic civilisation. Baghdad, once the heart of the Islamic golden age, was a hub where scholars of diverse religions shared knowledge, creating a lasting legacy.

The arts, ranging from traditional calligraphy to modern visual expressions, also contribute to the diversity of Iraqi culture. Ancient Mesopotamian sculptures, Islamic geometric designs, and contemporary paintings form layers of artistic identity that reflect the diverse nature of Iraqi society.

(1) L. al-Faily 2016; A. al-Haidari 2015; A. al-Wardi 1994: 251-293; A. Belqiz 2001; F. Fukuyama 2018; Z.E. Preston 2000; W. Mühlberger 2023.

In addition, traditional customs and rituals are an integral part of the fabric of Iraqi culture, which has stood the test of time. Whether it is the intricate designs of traditional clothing, the melodies of folk music, dance, or the tribal and clan rituals that mark life events, these customs are a testament to the continuity of cultural practices. Weddings, funerals, and religious and sectarian celebrations are steeped in traditions that connect generations. The communal nature of these rituals fosters a sense of belonging and continuity, strengthening individuals' connection to their cultural heritage.

Iraq's cultural resilience shines through most clearly in the face of adversity. Throughout its history, the community has successfully survived conflict, invasion, and internal strife, yet cultural expressions persist. The preservation of ancient artifacts, the continued practice of traditional arts, and the resilience of cultural festivals in times of adversity highlight the enduring nature of Iraqi culture.

Despite the challenges posed by war and occupation, Iraqi artists, writers, and literary figures have continued to innovate, infusing their work with narratives that reflect the resilience of the human spirit. This resilience is a source of pride for many Iraqis, reinforcing a collective resolve to protect and celebrate their cultural heritage.

Cultural expressions, whether in the form of painting, sculpture, art, music, dance, or storytelling, play a profound role in shaping the national psyche. In times of conflict, they become not only a form of resistance, but also a means of preserving collective identity under duress. The impact of cultural expressions on the national psyche is multifaceted, and artistic endeavours serve as an outlet in times of adversity, allowing individuals to process trauma and find solace in creativity. Moreover, cultural expressions become a means of solidarity, fostering a sense of unity among people facing adversity⁽¹⁾.

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015.

In exploring the cultural dimensions of Iraq, it becomes evident that the richness of its linguistic diversity reflected in its three official languages: Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen, alongside other languages specific to various communities and ethnic groups along with its literature, arts, and traditions, serves not only as a foundation of cultural identity but also as a resilient force. This cultural wealth has endured the challenges of history and continues to respond dynamically to the country's turbulent political climate⁽¹⁾.

An exploration of Iraq's historical roots reveals that the interactions among ancient civilisations and their religious foundations have significantly contributed to the development of a cultural identity that persists and evolves to the present day. The appeal of these early influences is evident in the rituals, narratives, and societal structures that still exist, providing a context for understanding the complex dynamics of the Iraqi personality⁽²⁾.

1.2.2. The Dimension of the State

The features of the Iraqi state were heavily influenced by its colonial past, leaving a legacy that resonates throughout the pages of history. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, Iraq became a British mandate, a period that witnessed the beginning of clear external influences on the formation of the state.

The British colonial administration implemented policies that laid the foundation for ethnic and sectarian divisions that persist to this day. Arbitrary border demarcation, favouritism toward certain groups, and the imposition of external governance structures sowed the seeds of internal tensions, paving the way for future challenges in state building⁽³⁾.

Iraq's journey toward statehood reached a critical juncture, with major,

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015; H. Holborn 2010; Sarwar A.17/10/ 2019; F. Fukuyama 2018; G. Lide 2014.

(2) F. Fukuyama 2018.

(3) Z.E. Preston 2000; A. Rohde 2010.

rapid, and intermittent changes, with its formal establishment in 1932 and social change occurring in leaps and bounds; but the new independence did not erase the residual effects of British interventions, as the emerging constitutional monarchy faced internal conflict, political instability, and reflected a delicate balance between competing interests⁽¹⁾.

The structure of the Iraqi state continued to evolve with years of military rule, coups, and the establishment of the Ba'athist regime in 1968. The central authority of the state, along with secular ideology, shaped the political landscape for decades, influencing not only governance but also the national character.

Political rulers have played a pivotal role in shaping Iraq's national character since the founding of the Iraqi state, leaving an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the population. Both the likes of King Faisal I, who faced the challenges of the state in the early years, and later figures such as Saddam Hussein and his successors, have contributed to the narrative of Iraqi identity⁽²⁾.

Political rulers not only steered the ship of government, but also influenced societal values, ideological affiliations, and the perception of the "desired nation" on the regional and world stage. Their policies, decisions, and personal narratives were intertwined with the broader historical fabric, influencing the trajectory of the Iraqi character⁽³⁾. Here, it is fair to reflect the varying roles of political rulers in shaping Iraq's national character, and their mark was not identical. Some left a positive mark that contributed to the elevation of Iraq's status, while others deteriorated the country and destroyed much of what their predecessors had developed.

State policies, from community-building initiatives to cultural missions, have had a profound impact on Iraq's cultural identity. For example, the Arabisation campaigns under Saddam sought to homogenise the cultural landscape, in accordance with the vision of the dictatorship at the time,

(1) Z.E. Preston 2000; A. Rohde 2010; A. al-Wardi 1994: 251-293.

(2) A. al-Haidari 2015; H. Holborn 2010; W. Mühlberger 2023; A.A. Allawi 2014.

(3) A. al-Haidari 2015; A. al-Wardi 1995: 55-70; al-Khaqani 2013: 175-177; J. Sultan 2013.

often at the expense of minorities and their distinct identities. Moreover, the Baathist regime's emphasis on secularism, while attempting to suppress sectarian differences, inadvertently contributed to the establishment of identity, and state policies—whether promoting a particular cultural discourse or attempting to suppress dissent—played a role in shaping how Iraqis perceived their identity and their place in the broader regional context.

A deeper analysis of state influence highlights how the historical trajectory of the Iraqi state, shaped by successive political leaderships and policy decisions, has significantly influenced the fabric of society and the aspirations for a cohesive national identity. The interplay between political dynamics and cultural identity adds layers of complexity to the gravitational forces that shape the Iraqi narrative.

The formation of states began at the beginning of the nineteenth century, according to the definition of the nation, based on the majority of religious or national affiliation, and this approach means defining the Iraqi nation as multi-national (Kurdish - Arab - Turkmen, etc.), and at the same time multi-ethnic. In this context, it is worth noting that peoples usually strive to have their own state that reflects their identity, and this is a natural phenomenon. However, it can lead not only to the establishment of states based on the dominance of one people, but also on the solidarity of two or more peoples, and this can also lead to the formation of two or more peoples from one ethnic group: (such as in the case of Austrian or Belgian).

Multinational states and peoples are usually in the form of federations, as in the case of Iraq, which is also federal, in addition to the existence of two federal levels. The second level is limited to the existence of the Kurdistan region, with weak calls for the establishment of other federations in the south or west. Here, it is necessary to diagnose whether this Iraqi diversity, with its religions, nationalities, ethnicities and sects, can be employed as an element of strength for it, or if it is not managed accurately, it turns into a source of weakness⁽¹⁾.

(1) Z.E. Preston 2000.

1,2,3. The religious dimension

The concepts of Islamic faith and heritage are integral to the religious landscape in Iraq, playing a significant role in shaping the individual and collective identities of its people. Islam in the Tigris and Euphrates valley in the seventh century became an integral part of Iraqi culture, thought, politics and social life.

Iraq represents an important centre for both Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects on the Islamic map, as it hosts important religious sites and institutions, for example: the historic city of Najaf is a major centre for seminaries Shiism, while Baghdad and other areas are home to diverse Sunni communities, and this coexistence between Sunni and Shiite populations adds a unique dimension to the religious fabric of Iraq.

Shiism also occupies a particularly prominent position in Iraq, where a large part of the population adheres to its teachings and heritage. The influence of Shiism can be seen in religious rituals, celebrations, and cultural expressions, such as the Ashura and Muharram seasons, which characterise the lives of many Iraqis. Here, it is useful to mention the rise of Shiite culture, not just Shiite doctrine. The dynamic interaction between the Shiite and Sunni sects has sometimes led to tensions and conflicts, which have affected the social and political scenes. Understanding this religious diversity is crucial to understanding the complexities of the Iraqi personality⁽¹⁾.

The sectarian division between the Shiite and Sunni sects has had profound effects on the Iraqi personality on several historical occasions, especially when rulers exploit it to strengthen their rule, at the expense of coexistence and societal homogeneity. Historical divisions rooted in early conflicts over leadership and succession continue to shape religious practices, political affiliations, and societal norms.

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015; A. Naqqash 1996.

Often positioned as a centre of Islamic heritage and culture, Iraq also holds significance for non-Muslim communities, contributing to its diverse and multifaceted identity. Overall, Iraq's status as a centre for non-Muslims is rooted in its rich historical heritage, religious diversity, and cultural exchange.

For many non-Muslims, Iraq holds deep significance as an important religious destination steeped in history and spirituality. In addition to its association with Islam, its ancient roots and diverse religious heritage attract visitors from diverse religious traditions who seek to connect with historical legacies and make pilgrimages to holy sites.

For example, Christian pilgrims are drawn to biblical sites in Iraq, such as the ancient city of Babylon, which is believed to be associated with figures such as Daniel. The ruins of Ur, associated with the Prophet Abraham in Jewish and Christian tradition, are a poignant reminder of ancient connections and spiritual narratives.

Similarly, Yazidis find in Iraq a sacred land where their religious traditions and beliefs have flourished for centuries, and the holy sites of Lalish, the spiritual heart of the Yazidi community, invite worshippers and scholars together to experience the unique spirituality and cultural richness of this ancient faith.

Jewish heritage also has deep roots in Iraq, with historical sites such as the Tomb of Ezekiel in al-Kifl and the old Jewish quarter in Baghdad reflecting centuries of Jewish presence and contributions to Iraqi society. While the Jewish population in Iraq has dwindled dramatically over the years, these sites stand as a testament to a shared history of coexistence and cultural exchange.

Visitors from diverse backgrounds, including historians, archaeologists, spiritual seekers, and anthropologists, view Iraq as a treasure trove of ancient civilisations and religious legacies. Despite challenges and conflicts, the appeal of Iraq's cultural heritage, landscapes, and sacred sites continues to resonate, inspiring journeys of discovery, contemplation, and

connection across religious boundaries. Through these visits, non-Muslims contribute to the narrative of Iraq as a multifaceted centre of spiritual pilgrimage and historical exploration, enriching their understanding of the region's deep and enduring heritage.

In addition to the major religious groups mentioned above, Iraq's religious landscape includes smaller spiritual communities and traditions. These may include adherents of Mandaism, an ancient faith, as well as practitioners of the Naqshbandi or Qadiri Sufi orders within Islam, for example. Scholars and practitioners interested in comparative religious studies, Sufism, and esoteric traditions may find Iraq a compelling destination for academic research and spiritual exploration.

In essence, the religious significance of Iraq transcends any single faith, offering a tapestry of spiritual and cultural experiences for people of diverse persuasions. The country's ancient sites, religious monuments, and historical narratives serve as focal points for interfaith dialogue, scholarship, and pilgrimage, fostering a deeper understanding of Iraq's multifaceted religious heritage and its global significance in the world of spirituality and faith.

Iraqi religious leaders, regardless of religion, have great influence not only on religious matters but also in shaping the broader character of society. The religious establishment, particularly among the Shia, plays a pivotal role in guiding followers and influencing public opinion.

The post-Saddam era has seen a resurgence of religious influence, particularly within the Shia community. Religious leaders (Sunni and Shia) have gained not only religious but political prominence too, impacting state governance and societal norms. The rise of sectarian dynamics has further highlighted the challenges of reconciling divergent religious views within the broader national framework⁽¹⁾.

From the Grand Ayatollahs of Najaf to Sunni clerics in other provinces,

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015.

religious leaders often act as moral authorities, providing guidance on matters ranging from personal conduct to political engagement. Their influence extends beyond religious affairs, penetrating areas of governance and societal values.

Religious practices are deeply ingrained in the daily lives of Iraqis, influencing everything from family structures to community interactions. The five daily prayers, the fasting month of Ramadan, Shia and Sunni religious festivals such as Muharram and Ashura, pilgrimages to holy sites, and visits to shrines are not merely acts of worship; they are integral and inseparable elements of Iraq's cultural and social fabric. Religious practices constitute moral and ethical values and directly or indirectly influence the decision-making process in various areas of life. In addition, observing religious rituals acts as a unifying force and enhances the shared sense of different identities among Iraqis⁽¹⁾.

However, the impact of religious practices is not uniform, and individuals may interpret and deal with their beliefs in different ways. This diversity adds complexity to the religious dimensions of the Iraqi personality, reflecting the delicate interaction between personal beliefs and broader societal influences.

1.3. The Interaction of the Three Dimensions – Integration or Conflict?

The intersection between culture, state, and religion in Iraq is characterised by complex levels of conflict and tension, reflecting the diverse influences that shape society and, subsequently, the nation. The conflict between religious and secular forces is evident in the ongoing political and social dialogue about the role of Islam or religion in governance and societal norms.

Historically, Iraq has witnessed stages in which the state, after its emergence following World War I, sought to assert its secular authority

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015.

and challenge the influence of religious institutions. Conversely, religious leaders and groups competed to play a more important role in shaping state policies, leading to a complex interaction between religious and secular forces.

These conflicts also have far-reaching effects on the Iraqi character, as they affect not only the system of government, but also the cultural and social dynamics that define the nation and its essence. Achieving a delicate balance between religious and secular influences remains an ongoing challenge, affecting the trajectory of Iraq's identity. Perhaps the answer to an important question about the role of religion in Iraqi society and state is unclear or has not received a clear and comprehensive answer.

Cultural expressions are a reflection and response to the tensions arising from the interaction between culture, state, and religion. In times of conflict or societal transformations, cultural expressions become a powerful means by which individuals and communities negotiate their identity.

Cultural expressions often take the form of resistance against oppression and artists, poets, bloggers, writers and literary figures arm themselves with their creative endeavours to challenge societal norms, criticize or rebel against state policies, and assert their independence, whether through subversive art (from the ruler's perspective), dissident literature, or provocative performances, and cultural resistance becomes a tool to push back against their neutralisation.

Conversely, cultural expressions can also serve as a means of compliance with dominant ideologies, and to navigate the complex landscape of religious and political sensitivities, some cultural arts may conform to established norms and avoid overt opposition, and this form of compliance can be a strategic choice to overcome challenges imposed by the state or religious institutions⁽¹⁾.

(1) A. Belqiz 2001; N. Abdul-Fattah 2010.

The interplay between resistance and compliance also reflects cultural expressions and the nuanced dialogues and discussions that take place within Iraqi society and becomes a dynamic process through which individuals and communities navigate a complex web of influences between culture, state and religion.

Understanding the evolving dynamics between culture, state, and religion is vital. The interactions of these forces, alongside cultural expressions as elements of resistance or compliance, shape the narrative of the Iraqi character. In recent decades, the interaction between culture, state, and religion in Iraq has led to conflict and adversely affected daily life, rather than promoting integration and a positive national identity⁽¹⁾.

1.4. Characteristics of the Iraqi character - an overview

It is important to note that trying to generalise the characteristics of an integrated population group such as the Iraqi character can be difficult and may oversimplify the diversity within the country. Iraq is home to a diverse mix of ethnicities, religious groups, and cultural backgrounds, which leads to a rich fabric of individual, or collective, sectarian, regional, or partisan identities... etc.

In addition, individual personalities can vary greatly, based on factors such as upbringing, education, and personal experience, however, some cultural characteristics and social traits may be associated with the Iraqi people⁽²⁾, and it is important to bear in mind here that the generalisations below may not apply to every individual:

1. Hospitality and generosity: The traditions of hospitality and generosity have great cultural value in Iraq, and guests are often treated with great warmth and generosity, and offering food and feasts is a common way to express hospitality.

(1) T. Dodge 2023; Z.E. Preston 2000.

(2) M. al-Khaqani 2013: 175-177; A. al-Wardi 2007: 22-28; A. al-Wardi 1969: 33-169.

2. Strong family ties: Family and clan hold high importance in Iraqi society, with families often living nearby and maintaining a strong sense of connection.
3. Resilience and adaptability: Iraq has faced various challenges, including wars and conflicts, and its people have demonstrated a high capacity for resilience in the face of adversity. Iraqis are known for their ability to adapt, persevere, and be resourceful in difficult social and political circumstances.
4. Religious influence: Religion plays an important role in Iraqi culture, and most of the population are Muslims or claim that religion has a special place among them, and this religious influence can be reflected in daily life, customs and traditions, and how they deal with the state and its institutions.
5. Collectivism: There was often a strong emphasis on the concept of the group, especially the tribal, clan and "household", and its cohesion and importance in Iraqi society, and people gave priority to the needs of society over individual interests, and it is very possible to notice that this trait has diminished, especially in recent decades, as a result of the policies of successive regimes, which were major factors in undermining or weakening the sense of citizenship, or for people to put the interests of society above individual interests.
6. Expressive communication: The Iraqi people are often characterised by being expressive in their communication. Signals and gestures (called in colloquial language "Hascha"), and non-verbal facial expressions, can play an important role in conveying feelings and intentions.
7. Respect for the elderly: Respect for the elderly is a cultural and social norm in Iraq, and the elderly are often given a high level of respect, and their opinions and advice are valuable within the family, clan, and society.

8. Strong cultural identity: Iraq has a rich cultural heritage, with a history dating back to ancient civilisations, and many Iraqis are proud of their cultural identity, including traditional customs, music, literature, art, and poetry.
9. Educational aspirations: Despite the challenges, there is a high focus - most of the time - on education in Iraqi families, and many individuals aspire to pursue higher education and professional success. Yet, in the last two decades, the interest of Iraqi society in education has declined, and obtaining a certificate of education has become a goal for the Iraqi individual; for social status, government position, or financial job privileges without caring about developing the personal experience; that is, caring about quantity at the expense of quality, and accordingly there is an abundance of Iraqis who have obtained high level certificates, without this being reflected in the reality of society and its development.
10. Traditional gender roles: Traditional gender roles may affect societal expectations and family structures, and despite changes over time, some gender-related standards and expectations may continue in different regions.
11. National pride: Despite internal and external challenges, Iraqis in general are accustomed to expressing a strong sense of national pride, and attachment to their homeland and its identity, especially among foreigners, although they have different interpretations of its nature.

It is necessary to deal with these characteristics with sensitivity and awareness, since individual experiences and personalities vary greatly, and because the influence of historical events, political instability, and economic challenges can shape individuals' traits and behaviour in complex ways, generalisations should be approached with caution, and it is always advisable to consider the diversity of individuals⁽¹⁾.

(1) A. al-Haidari 2015; "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Educa-

1.5. Where is the problem then?

Given the richness of the Iraqi personality in the above-mentioned traits, the question that arises thereafter is the reasons for the weakness of social and national cohesion within Iraqi society, especially in recent decades, and despite the presence of some cultural and societal characteristics, it is important for us to realise that social cohesion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, affected by a wide range of factors, and the above characteristics may be useful, but they are not sufficient to promote strong social and national cohesion, and perhaps the presence of cultural characteristics alone does not guarantee social cohesion, and various challenges can contribute to its absence or dispersion.

The struggle of Iraqis to achieve social harmony stems from a complex interaction of historical, political, social and economic factors that have shaped the course of society. The following are key factors contributing to the challenges Iraq faces in fostering social harmony, which serves as a crucial foundation for the development of inclusive national spaces:

1. Historical conflicts: Iraq has witnessed a history of conflicts, including wars and internal conflicts, and historical tensions and unresolved issues have a lasting impact on social relations and trust within societies.
2. Political instability: Political instability and changes in government have weakened trust in institutions and hindered efforts to build social cohesion⁽¹⁾. Frequent changes in leadership can lead to inconsistent policies and governance, making it difficult for long-term initiatives to gain traction.

Furthermore, political instability often results in social unrest, protests,

tion in the Centre and the Region" (for the Years 2011-2020) 2012; A. al-Wardi 1994: 251-293; B. Fattah 2018: 1244-1263; L. Faily (A) 2023; A. Al-TaHER 2016; M. Hijazi 2005; Iraqi Society Sociological Excavations in Ethnicities, Sects and Classes Ishaq Naqqash and others 2006.

(1) A. Cordesman 2023; B. Connable, M. Mostajabi 2022.

and conflicts that disrupt everyday life and economic activities. These conditions erode public confidence in both elected officials and the systems meant to protect and serve the populace. As a result, efforts to foster a sense of community and cooperation among diverse groups are adversely affected.

3. External influences: represented by external parties, which are important factors that have an effective impact, in addition to geopolitical actors, and their interference with internal affairs, which have affected and led to new internal dynamics in society and contributed to social divisions. External actors, including neighbouring countries and global powers, have often pursued their strategic interests at the expense of Iraq's unity. Proxy conflicts, interference in internal affairs, and geopolitical rivalries have exacerbated internal tensions and hampered efforts to achieve social harmony⁽¹⁾.
4. Lack of regional stability: Iraq's geopolitical environment, characterised by regional conflicts and rivalries, has an indirect impact on internal dynamics. Proxy conflicts, foreign interventions, and regional tensions can exacerbate internal divisions, complicate reconciliation efforts, and impede progress toward social harmony⁽²⁾.
5. Security concerns: Ongoing security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, and organised crime, have also hampered efforts to build social harmony; widespread violence and instability have created a climate of fear and undermined confidence in the state's ability to provide security and protect citizens' rights⁽³⁾.

(1) H. Hasan 2024; G.W. Bush 2006; K. Kausch 2015; Borshchevskaya A. 2019; Cordesman A.H. 2021; Ebel R.E. 2010; Mahmoud S. 2022; Sudani al- E. 2022; Rashed D. 2019; Lockhart P.G, 2014; Cordesman A.H. 2023; Feltman J. et al. 2019; Sultan J. (A&B) 2013.

(2) Baker III, James A., and Lee H. Hamilton 2006; Cordesman A.H. 2021; Cordesman A.H. 2023.

(3) The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-

6. 6. National, religious and sectarian affiliations: Iraq is characterised by national and sectarian diversity, which has led in some cases to social fragmentation and a sense of identity based on religious or national affiliations; Nationality here means Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, etc., rather than a common national identity. Although this diversity enriches the cultural fabric of the country, it has also been a source of tension, conflict and division, especially when political and economic power is seen as being distributed unequally among these groups.

Political and religious leaders have often exploited these divisions to achieve their own gains, which has led to the strengthening of a climate of sectarianism and identity-based policies that undermine efforts to build national unity and social cohesion⁽¹⁾.

7. Economic inequality: Economic disparities have contributed to social divisions, with certain groups or regions feeling marginalised or deprived, leading to tensions and a lack of shared societal goals.

The lack of economic equality and limited access to basic services create fertile ground for social unrest and exacerbate existing fault lines within society.

8. Displacement and refugee crisis: Iraq has faced significant internal displacement and refugee influxes from abroad due to conflicts and instability in the region, which has created social tensions, competition for resources, and challenges in reintegrating displaced populations into their communities, contributing to fragmentation and social division⁽²⁾.

2030; The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP); Cordesman A.H. 2023; Pfaff C.A. and Others 2022; Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq; Hamid A. and A. Abdullah 2020.

(1) Muhlberger W. 2023; Sarwar A. 2019; A. al-Haidari 2013; S. al-Qmudi 1999; H. Holborn 2010.

(2) UNHCR Iraq situation overview 2023; International Organization for Migration (IOM) IRAQ MISSION 2016; The Centre for Preventive Action 2024.

9. Weak trust in state institutions: A history of political instability, widespread financial and administrative corruption, and a lack of effective governance have eroded trust in state institutions; when people lack confidence in their institutions, this will hinder collective efforts to achieve social cohesion. The post-Saddam era in Iraq was characterised by challenges in governance, the rule of law, and institutional capacity⁽¹⁾.
10. Conflicts and trauma: Iraq's history is characterised by conflict, oppression, and trauma, including wars, dictatorships, and external interventions. The collective memory of these painful events can perpetuate cycles of mistrust, resentment, and hostility between communities, hindering efforts at reconciliation and social cohesion. There are lasting psychological effects of past conflicts and traumas, such as the bombing campaign or suicide attacks by the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda or the control of terrorist gangs of ISIS/Daesh over parts of Iraqi territory, and this trauma may affect personal relationships and internal community dynamics as well as its relationship with the outside⁽²⁾.
11. 11. Media Influence: Traditional and social media have played a role in shaping perceptions, creating narratives, and influencing public opinion. Biased or divisive narratives in the media have contributed to social polarisation. The spread of misinformation and divisive rhetoric can fuel societal tensions and hinder efforts to build mutual understanding and trust between different groups.
12. Educational Challenges: Educational systems that do not promote equality, diversity, and critical thinking can contribute to perpetuating stereotypes and divisions⁽³⁾.

(1) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024; Mahmoud S. 2022; M. Radhi and H. al-Taie 2015; H. al-Ziyadi 2023; A. al-Hadrami 2014; A. al-Hamoud 2023.

(2) M. Hijazi 2005; A. Amer 2020; A. Discussion with a group of researchers 2006; M. al-Shinawi 2012.

(3) UNDP / Iraq Publications page, (Accessed February 20, 2024); «National

13. Lack of Inclusive Policies: Iraqi government policies that have not met the needs of diverse communities, or that perpetuate discrimination, have undermined efforts to build social cohesion⁽¹⁾.
14. Legacy of Authoritarian Rule: Decades of authoritarian rule (perhaps most notably under a ruler like Saddam Hussein 1968-2003) have left a legacy of mistrust, fear, and repression among different segments of Iraqi society. The regime's policies of sectarian patronage, human rights abuses, and violent suppression of dissent have sown seeds of division and hostility in society that persist to this day⁽²⁾.
15. Weak social institutions: Iraqis have struggled, especially after 2003, to develop strong social institutions that can undermine divisions and promote unity. Civil society organisations, community centres, and interfaith and interethnic dialogue platforms have often been marginal and ineffective or face significant challenges in gaining power and influence.
16. Marginalisation of youth: Iraq has many young people who face challenges such as limited educational and employment opportunities, isolation from traditional institutions, and susceptibility to radicalisation and extremism. Engaging and empowering young people (not just those close to the ruling parties) in constructive ways is crucial to building a more inclusive and harmonious society⁽³⁾.

Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, 2011-2020".

- (1) The Transformation Index: "Analyses Transformation Processes toward Democracy and a Market Economy in International Comparison and Identifies Successful Strategies for Peaceful Change." Iraq Country Dashboard Report 2024, (Accessed: 12/05/2024).
- (2) "Human Right Watch 2023 events in Iraq", (Accessed: 11/06/2024).
- (3) UNDP / Iraq Publications page, (Accessed February 20, 2024); «National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, 2011-2020,» Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012; M. Hijazi 2008.

Social harmony is a cornerstone of the development and progress of any nation, and its importance is particularly evident in the context of Iraq. The narrative of social harmony in Iraq is intertwined with the country's history, diversity, and aspirations for a peaceful and prosperous future.

At the heart of this narrative is the recognition that Iraq is a mosaic of ethnicities, religions, and cultures, each contributing to the rich fabric of the nation. Social harmony encompasses the ideals of mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among these diverse groups, fostering a sense of unity and common purpose.

One of the main reasons why social harmony is crucial to Iraq's development is its ability to mitigate internal conflict and divisions. Iraq has experienced times of sectarian tensions, ethnic conflict, and political discord, which have hindered progress and stability. Social harmony acts as a counterforce to these challenges, promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and equality across society at large.

In the narrative of Iraq's development, social harmony is clearly seen as a catalyst for peace, prosperity, and the "desired" nation-building—not just the absence of conflict, but also the presence of mutual respect, social cohesion, and solidarity across all segments of society. Achieving social harmony requires concerted efforts at the individual, community and national levels, including promoting interfaith and inter-sectarian dialogue, cultural exchange, social integration and reconciliation initiatives.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that addresses root causes, promotes inclusive governance, economic opportunities for all and social cohesion initiatives, addresses sectarianism and identity politics, and fosters a culture of dialogue and reconciliation, respecting diversity to build a more harmonious and resilient Iraqi society. This approach must encompass political, economic, social and cultural dimensions, including promoting inclusive governance, investing in infrastructure and social services, empowering marginalised groups, and promoting media, culture and responsible journalism, and enhancing inter-regional cooperation for stability and peace.

Efforts to achieve social cohesion also include promoting inclusive governance, addressing economic disparities, enhancing cultural understanding, and building trust among diverse communities, a long-term process that requires a commitment to dialogue and reconciliation, and the creation of a society that works to establish justice and social equity. Accordingly, the weakness of social cohesion in Iraq is affected by a combination of internal and external factors, and these factors are interconnected and often reinforce each other, contributing to the complexity of the already complex social and political landscape⁽¹⁾.

Ultimately, social harmony in Iraq is not just a noble ideal, but a practical necessity to unleash the full potential of the nation, promote sustainable development, and ensure a brighter future for future generations. It is a narrative that envisions Iraq as a unified and resilient state and nation, drawing strength from its diversity and collective aspirations for peace, progress, and prosperity⁽²⁾.

1.6. Reasons for the scarcity of historical leaders

In the context of this book, the term "historical leaders" refers to influential Iraqi figures who played important roles in shaping Iraqi society, politics, and culture throughout its modern history. These leaders may include political leaders, religious figures, intellectuals, and community icons whose actions, ideas, and heritage have had a lasting impact on the path of Iraq as a state or nation. They may have led movements, initiated major societal reforms, or advocated ideologies that shaped the path of modern Iraqi history⁽³⁾.

(1) A. al-Wardi 1995: 32-38.

(2) World Food Programme, "Iraq Country Strategic Plan (2020-2024)", 22 October 2019; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement"; L. Al-Faily 2023 (14 articles published in al-Sabah newspaper); A. al-Taher 2016; M. Hijazi (A & B) 2005; A. Discussion with a group of researchers 2006.

(3) Allawi A.A. 2014.

The current lack of historical leaders in Iraqi society as role models in society can be attributed to several factors, including:

1. Authoritarian rule: Iraq has had a history of authoritarian and centralised rule, as dictatorial rulers such as Saddam Hussein dominated the political scene for decades, leaving a legacy of political repression, corruption, and distrust in government institutions. Authoritarian regimes suppress and marginalise opposition, making it difficult for alternative voices and leadership styles to emerge. As a result, there was little space for developing diverse and inclusive leadership models that reflected the aspirations and values of the population as a whole. Many Iraqis are wary of central authority and may be reluctant to trust new leaders, especially if they are seen as part of the old regime or beholden to external interests⁽¹⁾.
2. Political instability and the legacy of conflict: Iraq has experienced significant and prolonged political turmoil, including coups, revolutions, wars, and foreign interventions, which have disrupted the continuity of leadership and governance. Frequent changes in government, coupled with power struggles between competing factions, have hindered the emergence of stable and effective alliances. This instability has prevented the consolidation of leadership legacies and the creation of lasting models for future generations. It has had a profound impact on the country's leadership dynamics. In times of crisis, leadership tends to be militaristic, authoritarian, and prioritises security over democratic values. This military leadership model can overwhelm alternative forms of leadership based on diplomacy, dialogue, and consensus building⁽²⁾.

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010; Papaioannou K.J. and J.L. van Zanded 2015.

(2) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq".

3. National, ethnic and sectarian divisions: Iraq is a diverse country with many ethnic and religious communities, each with its own historical narratives and leadership traditions. However, ethno-sectarian tensions and power struggles have often undermined efforts to promote national unity and develop shared leadership models. Instead, leadership has often been defined on sectarian grounds, perpetuating divisions and hindering the development of inclusive role models that transcend ethnic and religious identities. Moreover, ethno-sectarian politics have long dominated Iraqi politics, with leaders often prioritising the interests of their communities over the broader national interest. This has led to a lack of trust and cooperation between different groups, making it difficult to find consensual leaders who can bridge the gap of divisions. Pluralism and diversity in Iraq were a source of strength and enrichment, but with the application or adoption of zero-sum equations and the marginalisation of the other, pluralism here has now become a point of weakness and a cause of divisions.
4. Economic challenges: Iraq faces significant economic challenges, including high unemployment, poverty, and inequality, which have hindered the development of leadership models that focus on economic development and social welfare. In the absence of effective economic leadership, populist and authoritarian leaders may exploit economic grievances to maintain power and influence, further eroding trust in traditional leadership institutions and models⁽¹⁾.

(1) International Labour Organization (ILO), "Iraqi Labour Force Survey 2021"; The Transformation Index: "Analyses Transformation Processes toward Democracy and a Market Economy in International Comparison and Identifies Successful Strategies for Peaceful Change." Iraq Country Dashboard Report 2024; World Food Programme, "Iraq Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024)"; International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement"; "Iraq Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018–2022," Ministry of Planning and World Bank 2018–First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals - Iraq"; A. al-Mawlawi 2019.

5. Cultural factors: Cultural norms and traditions in Iraqi society may also contribute to the lack of historical leadership as role models. Hierarchical social structures, patriarchal norms, and respect for authority figures may prevent the emergence of new leadership models that challenge existing power structures and promote inclusive governance. In addition, the glorification of strongman leadership and militarism in popular culture may overshadow alternative leadership models based on cooperation, empathy, and servant leadership⁽¹⁾.
6. Weak governance and corruption: Iraq has suffered for years from weak governance, institutional dysfunction, and widespread corruption, which has undermined public confidence in the government and political leadership. Many Iraqis accuse their leaders of being more interested in personal enrichment and seizing power than in addressing the country's pressing challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and poor security⁽²⁾.
7. External interference: Iraq has been subjected to external interference from regional and international powers seeking to achieve their own interests. Foreign interventions, including the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 destabilised the country and exacerbated internal divisions. Some Iraqi leaders may be seen as subservient to foreign powers, further eroding their legitimacy in the eyes of the public⁽³⁾.

(1) S. al-Qamoudi 1999.

(2) International Labour Organization (ILO), "Iraqi Labour Force Survey 2021"; The Transformation Index: "Analyses Transformation Processes toward Democracy and a Market Economy in International Comparison and Identifies Successful Strategies for Peaceful Change." Iraq Country Dashboard Report 2024; "Iraq Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018-2022," Ministry of Planning and World Bank 2018; H. al-Ziyadi 2023; A. al-Hadrami 2014; A. al-Hamoud 2023.

(3) Mohammed Shia al-Sudani: "Iraq Needs a New Kind of Partnership with the United States-

8. Security concerns: Iraq continues to face security challenges, including terrorism, insurgency, and militia violence. Leaders who prioritise security and stability may be viewed favourably by some segments of the population, even if they are seen as authoritarian or undemocratic. However, reliance on heavy-handed security measures may exacerbate grievances and further erode trust in government institutions⁽¹⁾.
9. Lack of vision and leadership qualities: Many Iraqi leaders are seen as lacking the vision, charisma, and leadership qualities needed to inspire confidence and mobilise the population toward a common goal. Although some leaders may excel at navigating political machinations and maintaining power, they may find it difficult to formulate a clear vision for the country's future or implement effective policies to address pressing challenges. Wisdom in leadership can be achieved if leaders have the ability to formulate a compelling long-term vision that aligns with the aspirations of the population and provides a roadmap for progress. Without a shared vision for the future, leaders may find it difficult to mobilise community support and bring about real change⁽²⁾.

The Path to Sustainable Cooperation", Foreign Affairs Magazine - April 11, 2024; Bluedorn J. and Koranchelian T., "Middle East Conflict Risks Reshaping the Region's Economies", International Monetary Fund - December 1, 2023; "Iraq and Its Gulf Neighbours: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities", Gulf International Forum (GIF); The Atlantic Council think tank, Rafik Hariri Center & Middle East Programs, "Iraq Initiative"; Fawcett L. 2023; Cordesman A.H. 2020; al-Mawlawi A. and al-Mawlawi M. 2024, "A Framework for Evaluating Iraq's National Strategies", 1001 Iraqi Thoughts; US Department of State, "Iraq - Integrated Country Strategy", March 03, 2022; NATO, "Mission Iraq"; Republic of Iraq, Ministry of planning, "Iraq 2030 Vision".

- (1) The Transformation Index: "Analyses Transformation Processes toward Democracy and a Market Economy in International Comparison and Identifies Successful Strategies for Peaceful Change." Iraq Country Dashboard Report 2024, (Accessed: 12/05/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; A. Hamid and A. Abdullah 2020.
- (2) S. al-Qamoudi 1999.

10. Short-term focus and lack of strategic thinking: Some Iraqi leaders have been accused of prioritising short-term gains, as well as political survival, over long-term strategic planning and state-building⁽¹⁾. In a volatile political environment characterised by frequent changes in government and power struggles, leaders may focus on immediate concerns, such as maintaining power, appeasing powerful interest groups, or suppressing unrest, rather than addressing systemic issues or investing in sustainable development. It is essential not to forget the requirements of strategic thinking and problem-solving skills for effective leaders, to overcome complex challenges and seize opportunities for growth and development. However, many Iraqi leaders may lack the acumen, strategic vision, and analytical skills necessary to develop and implement effective policies and reforms. This can lead to ineffective decisions, limited reactive responses to crises, and missed opportunities for progress. Not to mention that the lack of consideration or benefit from previous experiences means the possibility of repeating mistakes and weak consideration⁽²⁾.
11. Poor communication and engagement: Leadership is not just about making decisions, it also involves communicating effectively with the public, building consensus, and fostering trust among stakeholders at large. However, some Iraqi leaders may struggle with communication skills, or fail to engage with the population, listen to their concerns, or explain their policies and priorities. This lack of transparency and engagement can breed resentment and mistrust among the population.

(1) Sharp, G., & Raqib, J. 2010; Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. 2017; Chow, J. C. 2020; F. Fukuyama 2007.

(2) World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)", 22 October 2019; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; The First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals – Iraq; A. al-Mawlawi 2019; L. al-Faily (B) 2023; S. al-Qamoudi 1999.

12. Ethical and moral leadership: Effective leadership is not just about achieving results; it is also about upholding ethical principles and values. However, some Iraqi leaders may be seen as lacking integrity, honesty, and accountability, and engaging in corruption, favouritism, and abuse of power for personal or political gain. This erosion of ethical leadership undermines public trust and efforts to build a cohesive and just society.
13. Adaptability and Innovation: In a rapidly changing world characterised by technological advancement, globalisation, and evolving geopolitical dynamics, effective leaders must be able to adapt and innovate. They must be able to anticipate and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, and harness new technologies and ideas to drive progress and improve the lives of their citizens. However, the rigid and entrenched nature of Iraqi politics may hinder leaders' ability to adapt to changing circumstances and embrace innovation⁽¹⁾.

Addressing the lack of historical leadership to emulate in Iraqi society will require efforts to foster a culture of leadership development, promote equality and diversity in leadership positions, and develop shared values and aspirations that transcend ethnic, religious, and sectarian divisions. By investing in empowering emerging leaders and promoting models of ethical and visionary leadership, Iraq can build a more resilient and inclusive society capable of addressing the complex challenges it faces. Perhaps one of Iraq's most important crises is its lack of leadership that can overcome the challenges of the moment and strengthen the nation and society.

(1) Hasan H. 2024; Kausch, K. (Ed.) 2015; Borshchevskaya A. 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010; Sheikhlari S. 2019, "Iraq's Geopolitics, Key Factor for US, EU Energy Security Strategies", *Modern Diplomacy* - MARCH 23, 2023; Sudani al- E. 2022, "Geopolitics: Middle East and North Africa", *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 08, 2022; Rashed D. 2019; Lockhart P.G, 2014; Feltman J. and Others 2019; J. Sultan (A and B) 2013.

Part Two

Contemporary Iraq

Due to various historical events and political changes in the region, Iraq has seen many cultural, political, and religious interactions. The Iraqi atmosphere combines the memory of ancient cafés, which reflect a vibrant social life, with palaces bearing the imprints of rule and its resulting effects of power, and with minarets rising to express the religious, cultural and sectarian depth of the place.

This second part of the book examines the factors that shaped modern Iraq, highlighting the interconnections between culture, state, and religion in defining its identity. This study examines the impact of Ottoman rule on the social and cultural fabric of Iraqi society, while also addressing contemporary challenges and exploring the multidimensional roots of the country's ongoing instability.

Through an exploration of the concepts of nationhood and citizenship, alongside an examination of the effects of dictatorship on the core of Iraqi identity, this study aims to identify the prerequisites for the formation and maturation of nations. It further investigates how these processes are shaped by the increasing influence of clans and tribes within Iraqi society, the growing prominence of religious authority in the social structure, and the distinctive Shiite approach to governance and its broader implications. Our goal in writing this section is to shed light on the interactions of various factors, and their impact on the concept of citizenship and national identity in contemporary Iraq, and to identify the nature of the Iraqi disease which is holding it from stability and persistence development.

2.1. A Historical Perspective on Iraq

Iraq's historical legacy is rich and complex, and has been shaped by a series of civilisations, empires, and geopolitical and geoeconomic transformations. Narrating and understanding this history is of paramount importance to understanding the current character of Iraqi society. Below is an overview of Iraq's historical path:

- Mesopotamia: Iraq is often referred to as the "cradle of civilisation"; Mesopotamia embraced the oldest centres of human civilisations, as the civilisations and sciences of the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians flourished in this region, and contributed to the development of writing, agriculture, and the construction and growth of complex societies⁽¹⁾.
- The Islamic Conquest: Iraq was the gateway to the Islamic conquest in the seventh century to the region and the world; which represented an important historical turning point, and Baghdad became the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, as it was for many long years the most important capital on earth, and witnessed a golden age of arts, sciences, culture, intellectual and philosophical development.
- The Mongol Invasion (13th century AD): The Mongol invasion led by Hulegu destroyed Baghdad in 1258 AD, marking the end of the Islamic golden age, and Baghdad subsequently faced a decline in influence and power on the world stage, and then within the region.
- Ottoman rule (16th century to early 20th century AD): Iraq, with its various provinces, became part of the Ottoman Empire, and witnessed a mixture of central rule and local autonomy, and Baghdad retained its symbolism, but faced challenges from tribal conflicts and external threats⁽²⁾.

(1) F. Rashid 1973.

(2) K. Saya et al. 2015; Y. Oztuna 1988.

- World War I and the British Mandate: After World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the League of Nations granted Britain the mandate to administer Iraq, which was the beginning of formal British influence in Iraq and the region.
- The formation of modern Iraq: Iraq gained its independence in 1932, with the establishment of the Hashemite monarchy under King Faisal I, and since the emergence of the new state, the country has faced a lack of political stability, including military coups, and conflicts between the monarchy and later advocates of the republic⁽¹⁾.
- The Baathist period (1968-2003): The Baath Party, led by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and then Saddam Hussein, seized power in 1968. The regime began economic development; however, the years of Baath rule were characterised by tyranny, human rights violations, and conflicts, including the central government's war with Kurdish forces in northern Iraq, then the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), and harsh UN sanctions thereafter (1990-2003)⁽²⁾.
- The US invasion and the overthrow of the Baath regime (2003): The US-led invasion in 2003 led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the fall of the state established by the British mandate. The subsequent phase witnessed several challenges relating to rebellion, sectarian tensions, terrorism, and the formation of a new political system. This development may be interpreted as the establishment of a new republic facilitated by the influence and oversight of the United States. Post-Saddam Iraq witnessed the rise of a political system based - in essence - on sectarian and national quotas, including arrangements for sharing power between Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish groups. This

(1) Allawi A.A. 2014.

(2) International Committee of the Red Cross, "Iraq: 1989-1999, a decade of sanctions 14-12-1999 Report", (Accessed 24.04.2024).

system led to the stability of the political scene (i.e. transfer of power without violence), but at the expense of fragmentation. Iraq also faced security challenges, including the rebellion of terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, and the subsequent emergence of ISIS/ Daesh terrorist. Despite the great achievements in the security field, efforts are still being made to rebuild the country in a manner befitting Iraq, as a country rich in its ancient history, civilisations, and wealth, and to achieve political, security, and economic stability in it, and to consolidate rule of law⁽¹⁾.

The historical context above has left lasting imprints on the social and cultural fabric of Iraq, and historical divisions, grievances, and identity dynamics continue to influence the Iraqi character. Iraq has faced the repercussions of ISIS/Daesh terrorism, population displacement, and the challenges of reconstruction, and society seeks to deal with issues related to governance, security, social justice, and societal reconciliation⁽²⁾.

It is essential to consider the influence of regional and global dynamics on Iraq, covering both its state and its citizens. This includes Iraq's relationships with neighbouring countries and the impact of external actors as geopolitical changes persistently affect Iraq's status within the Middle East.

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- (1) Pugh C. et al. 2020; Strategies (think tank) 2019, "The Future of Iraq's Stability, The Political, Economic, and Security Levels"; The United States Institute of Peace 2020, "The Current Situation in Iraq- Fact Sheet"; The United States Institute of Peace 2019, "After ISIS, Stability in Iraq Requires Addressing its Fragility. Unless Iraq can repair its torn social fabric, expect the return of the Islamic State"; RAND research organization 2023, "Twenty Years After the Iraq War, a Q&A with RAND Experts"; Connable B. 2022; Cordesman A.H. 2020; Mawlawi al- A. Mawlawi al- M. 2024; NATO, "Mission Iraq", Last updated: 27 May. 2024 10:04; US Department of State, "Iraq - Integrated Country Strategy", March 03, 2022; A. Hamid and A. Abdullah 2020.
- (2) Munnberger W. 2023; Sarwar A. 2019; A. Al-Wardi 1995: 262-271; H. and Holborn 2010; I. Al-Haidari 2013.

The historical context of Iraq, shaped by ancient civilisations, Islamic empires, colonial influences, and modern geopolitical developments, has profoundly influenced its present character. Understanding this history provides insight into the complexities, challenges, and resilience of contemporary Iraq, and the interplay between culture, state, and religion is deeply rooted in this historical fabric, affecting the identity of the nation (existing or desired) and its societal dynamics.

2.2. The Impact of Ottoman Rule on Iraqis – As an example

As an example of the complexity, let us now look at one of the major component in Iraq's recent history, the Ottoman rule, which seriously affected the Iraqi character on its three dimensions: culture, state, and religion. The period of Ottoman rule in Iraq (16th to early 20th century AD)⁽¹⁾ had a lasting impact on the region, as it affected the current character of society and contributed to the interconnection between culture, state, and religion. This impact is represented by:

1. **Defining Islam:** The Ottoman Empire was embodied in its leadership of the Islamic Caliphate, and its Islamic rule in Iraq played a role in shaping the religious landscape. While Islam was already present in the Mesopotamia region, the Ottoman administration added its institutional Ottoman imprint to Islamic practices, which contributed to consolidating a deep-rooted relationship between religion and government.
2. **Administrative structure:** The Ottomans introduced a central administrative structure in Iraq, which included governors known as "Pashas" appointed by the Ottoman rulers. This top-down rule affected the relationship between the state and local communities,

(1) Y. Oztuna 1988; K. Saya et al. 2015.

setting a precedent for central authority⁽¹⁾.

3. Islamic law: The Ottoman Empire applied Islamic law as the basis for its legal system, and this integration of religious principles into legal structures strengthened the relationship between religion and state, and Sharia continued to play an important role in the Iraqi legal system, even after the end of the Ottoman era.
4. Religious institutions: Ottoman rule preserved religious institutions, and in some cases reorganised them. Religious leaders and scholars played their roles; not only in spiritual matters, but also in matters of governance, and this influence continued for centuries, which contributed to the continued importance of religious figures within Iraqi society.
5. Cultural influence: Ottoman rule affected the cultural fabric of Iraq, and art, architecture, cuisines and daily life were effected by Ottoman cultural elements. This cultural integration contributed to the diversity and richness of Iraqi heritage and created a synthesis of diverse cultural influences.
6. Dhimmis and Religious Minorities: The Ottoman Empire introduced the concept of Dhimmis, referring to non-Muslim religious sects. This system provided a framework for coexistence among religious minorities within the empire. The legacy of Dhimmi status and interactions with religious minorities continues to influence Iraq's approach to diversity.
7. National and Sectarian Dynamics: The Ottoman Empire had a policy of co-opting local elites and maintaining a balance between different national and religious groups. This approach influenced the demographic and sectarian composition of Iraq, contributing to the complex interplay between identity and loyalty.
8. The Legacy of Ottoman Rule: The end of Ottoman rule in the

(1) Ibid.

aftermath of World War I was a turning point in Iraq's history. The influence of Ottoman rule, along with subsequent developments, laid the foundation for the interconnectedness between culture, state, and religion that still exists in contemporary Iraq.

9. The Modern State: The transition from Ottoman rule to the British Mandate and the eventual independence of the modern Iraqi state, and the dynamics that emerged during Ottoman rule, including governance structures and identity considerations, influenced the early development of the Iraqi state.

Ottoman rule, which lasted for almost three centuries, left a lasting and profound imprint on the Iraqi state and society⁽¹⁾, affecting its religious, cultural, administrative and social landscape, and the nature of the relationship between the state and individuals in society. The interconnectedness between culture, state and religion in contemporary Iraq reflects the historical legacy of Ottoman rule, which contributed to the complexities and dynamics that define the character of society today. It is necessary to study this stage more deeply in order to better understand its multiple influences, and it may also help us understand the challenges and opportunities facing Iraq in building its national identity and social and political stability.

2.3. Effects of Dictatorship

Before discussing the impact of dictatorship on Iraqi society, let us assess the general framework of the profound effects that dictatorship can have on culture, state, and religion within societies (not just with Iraq). It often affects these aspects in an important and far-reaching ways, as follows:

(1) Y. Oztuna 1988; K. Saya et al. 2015.

2,3,1. On Culture

1. **Suppression of Cultural Expression:** Dictatorial regimes usually seek to control and manipulate cultural expression, and artists, writers, intellectuals, and literary figures may face censorship, restrictions, or persecution if their work is seen as challenging the narrative or ideology of the dictatorial regime.
2. **Imposing Ideological Culture:** Dictators attempt to impose a certain ideological or national culture that is consistent with their political agenda, and this can lead to the marginalisation or suppression of diverse cultural practices and identities within society.
3. **Cultural unification:** Dictatorships may seek to achieve cultural unification to strengthen their power, and this can lead to the erosion of cultural diversity, and the imposition of a single narrative that supports the regime or ruler⁽¹⁾.

2,3,2. On the state

1. **Authoritarian rule:** Dictatorships are characterised by authoritarian rule, as power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small group, and state institutions, including the legal and bureaucratic system, to the dictator's will and imposition by force⁽²⁾.
2. **Absence of democratic processes:** Dictatorships usually lack democratic processes, such as free and fair elections, and political opposition is often suppressed, and state apparatuses are used to maintain control and eliminate opposition⁽³⁾.
3. **Centralised decision-making:** The decision-making process is highly centralised in dictatorial regimes, and the state apparatus is subject to the control of the dictator, or a small elite, which leads to limited checks and balances⁽⁴⁾.

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

(2) A. al-Wardi 1995: 55-69.

(3) A. Belqaziz et al. 2001.

(4) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

2,3,3. On religion

1. Control of religious institutions: Dictators may seek to control religious institutions; to gain legitimacy, or to suppress potential sources of opposition, and may attract or manipulate religious leaders to support the regime's agenda and ideology.
2. Persecution of religious minorities: Dictatorships may target religious minorities, using religion as a tool of division and persecution, which can lead to discrimination, violence, and forced displacement of religious minorities⁽¹⁾.
3. Secularisation or manipulation of religious identity: Dictatorships may promote a specific interpretation of religion that serves their interests, and instead, they may try to secularise society; to reduce the influence of religious institutions that could challenge their rule.

It can be concluded that dictatorship exerts a profound influence on culture by restricting freedom of expression and enforcing a singular narrative; on the state by centralizing authority and dismantling democratic processes; and on religion by manipulating religious institutions or exploiting religious identity for political ends. These effects are often detrimental to the diversity, autonomy, and dynamism of these fundamental components of societal identity⁽²⁾.

Let us now delve a little deeper into explaining the impact of Baathist or Saddam's dictatorship, and the regimes that preceded it; especially the military rulers on the Iraqi character, in the corridors of fear and oppression that characterised the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's regime, the

(1) Human Right Watch 2023, "Events in Iraq"; The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), "Iraq Page"; "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; United Nations Population Fund 2018; "National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence 2018-2030"; H. Bozarslan 2015; D. C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

(2) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010; A. Al-Wardi 1995: 55-69; I. al-Haidari 2013; H. Holborn 2010.

formation of the Iraqi character developed in the crucible of tyranny, for decades, the iron fist rule of Saddam's regime and the Baath Party controlled the Iraqis in the shadow of terror, which left an impact that will not be quickly or easily erased on the psyche of Iraqi citizens⁽¹⁾.

Iraqis lived under the rule of Saddam and the Baath regime, under the prevailing cloak of fear and exposure to the cruelty and oppression of the dictator, as opposition was met with quick, harsh and merciless revenge. The resolve approach of the regime's security apparatus led to the inculcation of a culture of megalomania and self-censorship, as even whispered opposition could lead to dire consequences for the person himself or his family or acquaintances. In this environment, silence or hypocrisy became the citizen's strategy for survival, as citizens learned to navigate the treacherous waters of tyranny with caution, isolating themselves from the state apparatus as much as possible, and even seeking to completely break with the state if possible⁽²⁾.

The cult of personality surrounding Saddam Hussein may have served to entrench the regime's grip on power, as propaganda celebrated the dictator as a symbol of strength and stability. Through a carefully orchestrated narrative, the dictator portrayed himself as invincible, instilling a sense of awe and reverence among the population; but behind the façade of strength lay a nation haunted by repression, as disappearances and executions reverberated in the collective consciousness.

Saddam's regime ruthlessly exploited sectarian and ethnic divisions to perpetuate its grip on power. Shia Muslims and Kurds in particular, including the Faily Kurds, bore the brunt of the regime's brutality, and were subjected to massacres, chemical attacks, the Anfal campaigns, and forced displacement. The scars of these crimes ran deep, leaving wounds that would not heal for generations, and fuelling a cycle of mistrust and hostility that, if left unaddressed, would continue to ensue among Iraq's diverse communities.

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

(2) A. al-Wardi 1995: 36-54; A. al-Wardi 2007.

Under dictatorship, Iraqi society was ensnared in a web of fear and division. The iron fist of authoritarian rule stifled dissent and divided communities along sectarian and ethnic lines. Under Saddam Hussein's regime, repression cast a long shadow over the land, with citizens navigating a perilous path between compliance and resistance. The cultivation of fear permeated every aspect of daily life⁽¹⁾, silencing dissent and eroding the bonds of trust that once connected communities together.

In this climate of repression and cruelty, Iraqi citizenship became a hollow shell, stripped of its essence and reduced to mere obedience to the regime. Citizens found themselves trapped in a cycle of oppression and subordination, as the state exercised unfettered authority and, in turn, some individuals sought to assert their rights and agency in the face of tyranny.

But amidst the darkness, a glimmer of steadfastness and resistance appeared, despite the strangling grip of tyranny. Iraqis found ways to challenge the tyranny of the regime, and they were often exposed to great personal risks. Secret opposition networks developed first in the shadows, and then during the various uprisings, including the Shaaban uprising in southern, central and northern Iraq in 1991, when whispers of defiance mixed with the silence of oppressive surrender. In acts of quiet defiance, Iraqis clung to their dignity and humanity and refused to be extinguished by the Baathist darkness that swept their land⁽²⁾.

With the fall of the dictatorship in 2003 and the Americans taking control of the land, the moment of reckoning came as Iraqis confronted the legacy of past injustices and embarked on a journey toward reconciliation and renewal. Transitional periods, with all their complexity, turmoil, and violence, provided opportunities to rebuild shattered societies and redefine citizenship in more inclusive terms. Through new governance structures and grassroots initiatives, citizens began to reclaim their voice in shaping

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

(2) Ibid.

the future of their desired nation.

Today, the legacy of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial rule still casts a long shadow over Iraq, forming a significant part of its social and political landscape and collective memory. The scars of oppression run deep and are etched into the fabric of Iraqi society, yet amidst the remnants of tyranny, there is a glimmer of hope, a resilience born of adversity, a determination to reclaim what was lost, and a firm belief in the resilience of the human spirit, even in the face of the darkest hours of tyranny⁽¹⁾.

As Iraq navigates the winding path toward social harmony and citizenship, the echoes of its past continue to resonate, educating citizens about the challenges that lie ahead in shaping a brighter tomorrow. Amid Iraq's volatile political landscape, a complex tapestry unfolds interweaving dynamics of social cohesion, authoritarian governance, and evolving conceptions of citizenship illustrating the ongoing struggle of a nation to reconcile its historical legacies with efforts to construct a more inclusive and representative political order⁽²⁾.

2.4. Contemporary challenges and their causes

The post-Saddam and Baath regime era constituted a critical turning point in the modern history of Iraq, as it presented unprecedented opportunities with enormous challenges. The fall of the Baath regime in 2003 heralded a new phase of political transformation and efforts to build the new republic, but the effects of the conflict and its depth, especially at the level of the national and sectarian scene, posed major obstacles⁽³⁾.

It must be noted that the process of rebuilding the "Iraqi" nation faces immediate challenges in establishing security and stability. The power vacuum left by the collapse of Saddam's regime (and the fall of the republic)

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

(3) United Nations Security Council Reports on Iraq, UN Documents for Iraq: Secretary-General's Reports, (Accessed 01.06.2024).

led to a state of rebellion, internal conflict, and the spread of terrorist operations, in addition to occupation and foreign interventions, which led to the creation of an environment of continuous insecurity⁽¹⁾.

The process of sharing political power on sectarian and national bases also increased the complexity of the reconstruction process, and the new politicians in power faced difficulty in establishing a new political system that could overcome historical divisions, which led to years of political and security instability, and challenges in forming a cohesive system of government⁽²⁾.

As a result, Iraqi society faces several challenges resulting from historical, political, economic and social factors. These challenges greatly affect the well-being, stability and development of society. The following are some of these main challenges and their causes:

1. Lack of political stability: Iraq has witnessed decades of lack of political stability due to several factors: such as weak governance, corruption, sectarian divisions, and foreign interference. The legacy of authoritarian rule, including the Baathist era and the repercussions of the US-led invasion, also contributed to the ongoing political and security unrest⁽³⁾.
2. National and sectarian divisions: Their root causes mean that Iraq is a deeply divided society, with national (Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen) and sectarian (Shiite and Sunni) divisions that have historically

(1) Allawi A.A. 2008.

(2) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024; Pugh C. et al. 2020.

(3) Pugh C. et al. 2020; Mohammed Shia al-Sudani: "Iraq Needs a New Kind of Partnership with the United States: The Path to Sustainable Cooperation", Foreign Affairs Magazine - April 11, 2024; Bluedorn J. and Koranchelian T. 2023; Gulf International Forum (GIF) 2019, "Iraq and Its Gulf Neighbours: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities", (Accessed 05.4.2024); Cook S.A. 2021.

fuelled conflict and fragmentation. The roots of these divisions go back to historical grievances, discriminatory policies, and power struggles for control of resources and political influence. National and sectarian tensions undermine national unity, hinder efforts to establish inclusive governance, and social cohesion. Perhaps divisive policies perpetuate cycles of violence, hinder efforts to build a cohesive nation, and create fertile ground for external interference and manipulation⁽¹⁾.

3. Security challenges: Iraq continues to face security challenges, including terrorism, insurgency, and armed conflict. The emergence of groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS/Daesh, and outlawed armed groups, as well as ongoing sectarian tensions, have undermined stability and hampered efforts to achieve reconciliation and build society, and thus the cohesion of the nation.

These security threats and challenges are fuelled by factors such as weak state capacity, or the absence of real political will in many cases, weak border security, regional conflicts, and the proliferation of weapons. Here, insecurity undermines stability, disrupts public services, and hinders economic development. Not forgetting that the presence of armed groups and the threat of violence hinders investment, weakens social trust, and impedes progress towards peace and reconciliation⁽²⁾.

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- (1) The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), "Iraq Page", (Accessed: 01/06/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; Strategies (think tank) 2019, "The Future of Iraq's Stability, The Political, Economic, and Security Levels", published on February 12, 2019; The United States Institute of Peace 2020, "The Current Situation in Iraq- Fact Sheet", published on August 4, 2020; The United States Institute of Peace 2019, "After ISIS, Stability in Iraq Requires Addressing its Fragility. Unless Iraq can repair its torn social fabric, expect the return of the Islamic State", published on Monday, May 20, 2019.
 - (2) The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP),(Iraq Page), (Accessed: 01/06/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; Pugh C. et al. 2020; World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020-2024)", 22 October 2019; Inter-

4. Economic weaknesses: Despite Iraq's vast oil reserves, the economy faces major challenges, including over-reliance on oil revenues, administrative and financial corruption, which deprive the Iraqi economy of significant financial resources from possible non-oil sources, obsolete and limited infrastructure, and the lack of economic diversification as a result of its heavy reliance on oil revenues, which makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices, market fluctuations; economic mismanagement, corruption, and lack of diversification perpetuate poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic disparities.

These economic weaknesses exacerbate social unrest, fuel grievances, and undermine the legitimacy of the state. Inadequate infrastructure, limited job opportunities, and unequal access to basic services contribute to public frustration and disillusionment with the government.

5. Corruption and weak governance institutions: Corruption, both administrative and financial, is widespread in various sectors of Iraqi society, eroding trust in state institutions and hindering development efforts. Weak governments, lack of transparency, and political favouritism contribute to the spread of corruption, which exacerbates social and economic inequality and undermines public services.

The dysfunction that weakened institutions goes back to decades of authoritarian rule, institutional corruption, and political instability, which weakened governance institutions in Iraq.

The legacy of successive centralised regimes, including Saddam Hussein's, has hampered the development of inclusive and accountable governance structures. This has weakened and undermined institutions of governance that support the rule of law, fostered corruption, and exacerbated social and economic inequality. The lack of effective

national Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; H. Bozarslan 2015; D. C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

governance leads to a lack of public trust in state institutions, which in turn hinders efforts to build a stable society with cohesion.

6. Social services and infrastructure: Iraq faces challenges in providing adequate social services, including health care, education, and effective infrastructure; decades of conflict, neglect, and underinvestment have left infrastructure in poor condition, while public services struggle to meet the needs of the population, particularly in rural and marginalised areas, or so-called slums or shanty towns.
7. Internally displaced persons and refugees: Iraq has many people displaced internally and from abroad due to ongoing conflict, persecution, and regional instability. The presence of internally displaced persons puts pressure on resources and infrastructure, exacerbating social and economic challenges and hindering their integration and resettlement.

Although Iraq has succeeded in recent years in reducing internal displacement, returning most of the displaced to their original areas of residence or settling in other areas, and is close to closing this file, its repercussions, especially security, economic and social, remain an ongoing challenge for the government, and it must also develop future solutions to avoid confronting the original causes that led to displacement⁽¹⁾.

8. Unemployment and education among young people: High levels of unemployment among young people, along with the lack of sufficient educational opportunities, pose major challenges to Iraqi youth, the government and society. Limited access to quality education, vocational training and job opportunities perpetuates cycles of poverty and deprivation, contributing to social unrest and

(1) UNHCR Iraq situation overview, (Accessed: 09/03/2024); Pugh C. et al. 2020; The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024; A. Hamid and A. Abdullah 2020.

disappointment, especially among young people, and has potential social and security repercussions, including migration abroad, especially for those with intellectual abilities⁽¹⁾.

9. Gender inequality and women's rights: Despite legal reforms, women in Iraq face significant challenges to achieving equality and empowerment. Gender discrimination, denial of access to education and employment opportunities, and societal norms perpetuate gender inequality, limiting women's participation in decision-making and hindering their full potential⁽²⁾.
10. Regional and geopolitical dynamics and foreign intervention: The regional and geopolitical dynamics surrounding Iraq greatly affect its internal stability, security, and development. These dynamics are affected by a complex network of regional rivalries, power struggles, sectarian tensions, and external interventions.

There are many reasons for external intervention by regional and international actors seeking to advance their own geopolitical interests. Foreign intervention contributes to perpetuating instability, undermining national unity, and complicating efforts to achieve peace and stability. External actors often exploit internal divisions to achieve their agendas and fuel the continuation of these divisions, which exacerbates conflicts and hinders reconciliation efforts⁽³⁾.

(1) International Labour Organization (ILO), "Iraqi Labour Force Survey 2021"; UNDP / Iraq Publications page, (Accessed February 20, 2024); "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Central and Regional Iraq for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012; M. Hijazi, 2008.

(2) Human Right Watch 2023, "Events in Iraq", (Accessed: 11/06/2024); United Nations Security Council Reports on Iraq, "UN Documents for Iraq: Secretary-General's Reports, (Accessed 01.06.2024); "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

(3) United Nations Security Council Reports on Iraq, "UN Documents for Iraq: Secretary-General's Reports, (Accessed 01.06.2024); The Centre for Preven-

Regardless of the accuracy or breadth of the ten observations above, there is a general societal impression and perception about them, and this impression will remain unless the reasons for the prevalence of this impression, or the truth, are addressed. This requires a large governmental and societal transformational programme, and for a period of time; not forgetting that societies by nature deal with perceptions, and do not search deeply for the truth and its causes. Here comes the importance of the leadership of society and the state, and their role in proceeding with programmes of recovery, reform, and societal development, and in the state apparatus and its institutions.

The challenges facing Iraqi society are multifaceted and interconnected and are rooted in a complex mix of historical legacies, political dynamics, economic weaknesses, and social disparities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms, inclusive governance, sustainable development strategies, and concerted efforts to enhance reconciliation, social cohesion, and resilience.

As Iraq continues to face contemporary challenges, the evolutionary trajectory of its character is in a state of constant change and transformation, and the delicate interplay between culture, state, and religion will continue to shape the nation's identity and its ability to come together to solve its deep and interconnected problems. The challenges Iraqis face by post-Saddam provide a backdrop against which Iraqi society's resilience, its debate on its diverse identities, and the pursuit of a stable future can be demonstrated.

Addressing these root causes requires comprehensive reforms that prioritise inclusive governance, social justice, and sustainable development. Strengthening state institutions, supporting dialogue and reconciliation, economic diversification, and regional cooperation are essential steps toward building a stable and prosperous Iraq. Empowering civil society,

tive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024.

protecting human rights, and fostering a culture of accountability are critical to building trust between the government and the people and laying the foundation for a more stable and resilient state⁽¹⁾.

2.5. Expansion of the sphere of religious influence

An examination of the political and social developments post-2003 reveals a notable expansion in the role of religious influence within both the governance system and society in Iraq. The underlying reasons for this shift include:

1. Historical importance: Iraq has a rich religious history; because it is an important geographical and moral axis for a number of major world religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the religious importance of sites such as Babylon, Ur, Najaf, Baghdad and Samarra contributed to the manifestation of Iraq in the religious imagination of believers, Muslims, Jews and Christians all over the world⁽²⁾.
2. The Shiite sect as a majority: The majority of the Iraqi population adheres to Islam, with a Shiite (Twelver) majority, and accordingly, Shiite religious institutions and clerics play an important role in shaping religious discourse and practices. The city of Najaf, which hosts the shrine of Imam Ali (peace be upon him), as one of the most important centres of Shiite education, has strengthened Iraq's position as a global centre of Shiite religious authority.
3. Political turmoil and instability: Times of political unrest have created a power vacuum, with religious leaders (particularly Shiite) often stepping in to fill the void. In times of crisis, religious institutions and clerics have provided social services and mediated conflicts, particularly the Najaf Seminary, represented by the

(1) A. al-Wardi 1995: 262-271.

(2) F. Rashid 1973.

highest authority, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, and his role in providing moral and ethical guidance to the people, which has enhanced their influence and legitimacy.

4. The return of identity politics: Following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the subsequent political transition in Iraq, identity politics based on sectarian and ethnic lines gained great importance. This shift towards identity-based politics has strengthened the influence of religious leaders and institutions, as they often act as representatives and guardians of the interests of their communities⁽¹⁾.
5. Providing social services: Religious institutions, particularly those affiliated with the Shiite, are active in providing social services, including education, health care, and social welfare, to marginalised communities in Iraq. The provision of social services has strengthened the sense of loyalty and reliance on religious institutions, which has led to the strengthening of their influence and authority for several years after the fall of the former regime.
6. Moral authority and legitimacy: Religious leaders in Iraq are often viewed as moral authorities and symbols of legitimacy, especially among the religious segments of the population. Perhaps their adherence to religious principles, calling for social justice, and opposition to corruption and tyranny have earned them respect and credibility among their audience, thus strengthening their sphere of influence.
7. External factors: Regional and international developments, including the rise of political Islam and the influence of neighbouring Iran, which has a Shiite majority, have contributed to strengthening the sphere of influence of religion in Iraq, especially the Shiite part of it. External factors, such as neighbouring countries, have often sought to benefit from religious identities and affiliations to

(1) Muhlberger W. 2023; Sarwar A. 2019; H. Holborn 2010; A. Al-Haidari 2013.

advance their pragmatic and geopolitical interests, which further consolidates the role of religion in Iraqi society.

8. Diversity of religious centres: The presence of some important religious centres for Sunni Islam as well, especially in Baghdad, such as the Imam Abu Hanifa Mosque, Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, and others.

In general, the sphere of influence of religion in Iraq was strengthened by a set of historical, political, economic, social, security, and external factors, which together shaped the religious scene and the dynamics of influence of religious power at the state and society levels.

2.6. Increased influence of tribalism and clans in society

Amid years of political instability, sectarian tensions, and both internal and external security threats, many Iraqis have turned to tribalism and clan affiliations as mechanisms for securing their identity and ensuring safety. Several factors contribute to the persistence of tribalism and its increasing influence during times of turbulence.

One of them is related to the weakness of the central authority and local authorities; When the central government fails to provide security, basic services, or the rule of law, people often turn to alternative sources of power and protection. In the absence of effective state institutions, tribal leaders and networks may fill the governance gap, provide security, resolve conflicts, and administer justice according to prevailing tribal and clan customs, traditions, and norms, especially when other institutions, such as trade unions and political parties, are weak.

Other factors include national, ethnic, and sectarian divisions in Iraq. Iraq is a diverse country, comprising diverse national, ethnic, and sectarian groups, each with its own social structures and identities. In times of crisis and social, political, and security unrest, people may be drawn to their national, ethnic, or sectarian communities for solidarity, support, and protection. Tribal affiliations often overlap with ethnic and sectarian

identities, reinforcing tribal loyalties and influence⁽¹⁾.

There is also the historical precedent of tribalism and clans, and their deep roots in Iraqi society. Tribal structures and customs date back centuries. In times of crisis, people rely on historical precedents, traditional values and heritage associated with the tribe and clan, and view tribal leaders as legitimate, trustworthy figures who can provide stability and guidance.

Security concerns in a volatile and insecure environment, individuals and communities prioritise security and protection over other considerations. Tribal networks, with their emphasis on kinship ties and mutual obligations, provide a sense of security and belonging that may not exist in the wider society. Individuals may become affiliated with influential tribes or clans to improve their security and leverage the advantages of their power and influence.

The factor of resource distribution in the absence of an effective state is one of these factors, as tribal networks often play a major role in the distribution of resources and access to basic necessities such as food, water and shelter, and tribal leaders may use their influence to allocate resources, resolve disputes over land or resources, and provide assistance to members of their tribe or affiliated groups.

Finally, there is the factor of identity and belonging, which provides tribalism and clans with a sense of identity, belonging and solidarity in times of crisis and unrest; in a society like Iraq, which has gone through several stages of polarisation, where national identity may be contested, tribal affiliations provide a strong sense of community and shared identity that transcends political divisions and conflicts⁽²⁾.

(1) Pugh C. et al. 2020; A. al-Wardi 2007.

(2) Muhlberger W. 2023; Sarwar A. 2019; A. al-Wardi 2007; H. Holborn 2010; A. al-Haidari 2013.

In general, the embrace of the tribe and clan and the increasing influence of tribal networks in Iraq in times of uncertainty reflect the complex interaction of historical, social and political factors, and while tribalism may provide stability and security in the short term for some, it can also exacerbate divisions and perpetuate inequality, and obstructing efforts to build a state of law, in which society is cohesive and inclusive, based on the principles of citizenship, equality, the rule of law, and an independent, and fair judiciary.

2.7. Shiites in opposition and participation in government

This section will focus on Iraqi Shiites and their relationship with the government, as they constitute the majority of the Iraqi population. A prevalent narrative among Iraqis suggests that Shiites may feel more aligned with the opposition than with active participation in government and its responsibilities. This perspective is shaped by various factors that have reinforced this approach and understanding. This somewhat confused understanding may develop, negatively or positively, over time based on political circumstances and historical context. The following are some of the reasons behind the existence of this perception of Shia relationship to governing and its potential impact:

1. **Historical marginalisation and the legacy of oppression:** Iraqi Shiites have a long history of marginalisation and oppression; Especially during the Saddam regime, this historical context can lead to a cautious approach to governance and power, as some Shiites may feel safer defending their rights from outside the government, rather than risking retaliation or persecution while in power. This history of persecution and marginalisation has instilled a sense of caution among Shiite leaders and activists regarding assuming direct tasks and governance responsibilities.
2. **Fear of Retaliation:** There may be concerns among some Shiite leaders and activists about potential reprisals or violent reactions from rival political factions or external actors if they assume prominent roles in government. This fear, which is historically

credible, can influence their preference to maintain a critical stance within the opposition rather than assume direct responsibilities⁽¹⁾.

3. Complex political dynamics: The political landscape in Iraq is characterised by complex dynamics, including sectarian divisions, nationalist tensions, and competition for resources and influence. Some Shia leaders and groups may find it strategically advantageous to operate from the opposition, leveraging their positions to negotiate and bargain for political concessions or gains, without taking full responsibility for governance challenges.
4. Checks and balances: Participation in the opposition can serve as a mechanism to hold those in power accountable, and to advocate for reforms without being directly responsible for day-to-day governance and the challenges associated with it; especially with the consensus that governance is difficult. This role allows greater freedom to criticise government policies and actions, while offering alternative visions and solutions.
5. External influence: Regional and international factors can also affect the comfort level of Iraqi Shia in assuming governance roles. External actors, such as neighbouring countries or global powers, may prefer to work with opposition groups, or moderate voices within Shia communities; To advance their interests or exercise influence, which can shape the dynamics of power and opposition.
6. Strategic calculations: Some Shiite parties and political leaders may engage in strategic calculations, by balancing participating in the government or maintaining their presence in the opposition; to maximise their political influence and ability to manoeuvre, and this approach allows them to deal with complex alliances, while preserving their political base and goals⁽²⁾.

(1) Cambanis T. et al. (eds.) 2023; Taie al- A. (ed.) 2023; Sh. Shakir 2009; A. al-Wardi 1995; A. Belqaziz (et al.) 2001; A. al-Mawlawi 2023.

(2) Taie al- A. (ed.) 2023; Sh. Shaqir 2009; A. al-Wardi 1995; K. Saya et al. 2015; A. al-Mawlawi 2023.

7. Opposition mentality: The entrenched opposition mentality without means for constructive dialogue and cooperation can also contribute to political polarisation, stagnation, and impede progress on critical issues facing the country⁽¹⁾.
8. Complex power dynamics: The political scene in Iraq is characterised by complex power dynamics, shaped by sectarian, ethnic, and regional factors. The political system in the post-2003 period, based on national and sectarian quotas, has succeeded in creating a turbulent balance equation between Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish forces. Some Shiite leaders may find it strategically useful to maintain a strong opposition to negotiate and benefit from power-sharing agreements without bearing the full burden of governance responsibilities, especially since they do not believe in the possibility of success due to the difficulty of managing the stage and its many and great complexities⁽²⁾.
9. Divisions within the Shiite sect: While Iraqi Shiites constitute the majority of the population, there are divisions within the Shiite political and religious circles themselves, and these divisions may be based on ideological and jurisprudential differences, regional affiliations, or competing visions of governance. Working from the opposition allows the different Shiite factions to maintain their distinct identities and pursue different agendas and avoid potential conflicts that may arise from sharing governance responsibilities⁽³⁾.
10. International and regional dynamics: External factors, including the influence of neighbouring countries and global powers, also shape the preferences and strategies of Iraqi Shiite political actors. Regional rivalries and geopolitical interests often intersect with

(1) Cambanis T. et al. (eds.) 2023; Sh. Shaqir 2009; A. al-Wardi 1995; L. al-Faily (A) 2023.

(2) Taie al- A. (ed.) 2023; Sh. Shaqir 2009; A. Al-Wardi 1995; K. Saya et al. 2015; A. al-Mawlawi 2023.

(3) Ibid.

Iraq's domestic politics, leading to external support for certain factions or movements. This external influence can influence the decision-making process of Shiite leaders regarding their roles in government or opposition⁽¹⁾.

It is important to note that the level of comfort of Iraqi Shiites with governance versus opposition roles is not fixed; it can evolve based on changing political dynamics, security conditions, public sentiment, economic incentives and external pressures. Balancing the need for effective governance, national unity, democratic accountability, and the protection of minority rights remains a complex and major challenge within the Iraqi political landscape.

Therefore, it can be said that the nature of the Shiites' participation, interaction and dealings with the Iraqi governments will depend on the extent of their conviction and comfort with the opposition's narrative or not, knowing that their presence within the opposition, or rather their lack of strong participation in successive governments, has been for decades or, as some say, for centuries.

On the level of participation in governance and leadership of the political arena, it can be said that the Shiites, especially in Iraq, are facing a serious challenge or are at a crossroad, and they will need to revise their intellectual understating and political culture to be consistent and comfortable with the rules of governance and politics and their responsibilities and opportunities⁽²⁾.

(1) A. Belqaziz (et al.) 2001; R. Jaafarian 2008; L. al-Faily (A) 2023.

(2) Taie al- A. (ed.) 2023; Sh. Shaqir 2009; A. al-Wardi 1995; R. Jafarian 2008; A. al-Mawlawi 2023; A. al-Anbar 2020; N. Yassin 2007.

2.8. The effects of the three dimensions and dictatorship on the concept of citizenship

The interaction between culture, state, and religion can greatly affect - under dictatorial rule - the concept of citizenship within society. The following are some of the ways in which these factors affect citizenship:

1. Cultural identity: Culture plays a decisive role in shaping the identity of citizens. In culturally diverse societies, cultural practices, languages, and traditions contribute to a sense of belonging and shared identity. Dictatorships may try to manipulate or suppress cultural diversity, which affects the way peoples view of their cultural identity in relation to citizenship.
2. Influence on social norms: Cultural norms often influence social expectations and behaviour within a society, and dictatorships may seek to impose certain behavioural standards that are consistent with their ideology, which affects citizens' freedom to express their individuality and adhere to cultural practices.
3. Citizenship rights and legal frameworks: The state defines and enforces citizenship through legal frameworks, and dictatorships may manipulate nationality laws, as happened with the Faili Kurds in the 1970-1975 and 1980-1988 deportation campaigns, to exclude certain groups or individuals based on political or ethnic criteria. The rights that come with citizenship, such as the right to vote, can be restricted or manipulated to maintain regime control⁽¹⁾.
4. Authoritarian control and citizen participation: In dictatorial regimes, citizens may have limited opportunities to participate effectively in governance, and authoritarian control can suppress civic participation, limit political freedoms, and limit citizens' ability to effectively shape the direction of their society.

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010; Papaioannou K.J. & van Zanded J.L. 2015.

5. Religious identity: Religion can be a determining factor for citizenship, especially in societies where religious identity is closely linked to national identity. Dictatorships may exploit religious divisions or manipulate religious institutions to control citizenship discourse, often favouring certain religious groups and marginalising others.
6. Discrimination and religious minorities: Dictatorships may discriminate against religious minorities, affecting their citizenship rights. Discrimination can range from limited access to political participation to restrictions on religious practice, leading to feelings of exclusion among minority communities.
7. Manipulation of nationalism: Dictatorships may manipulate nationalism to foster loyalty. Citizenship can be linked to absolute loyalty to the regime, and individuals who oppose or question the government can be seen as disloyal citizens.
8. Influence on education systems: Dictatorships often control education systems to shape the discourse of citizenship, and the curriculum may be designed to reinforce the regime's ideology and shape citizens' understanding of their roles and responsibilities; in ways that are consistent with the goals of the dictator⁽¹⁾.

In summary, the impact of culture, the state, and religion on citizenship is multifaceted under dictatorial regimes. As demonstrated during the Baath and Saddam Hussein regimes, dictatorships can exert considerable influence over discourses surrounding citizenship, rights, and political participation, often utilizing these elements to consolidate and sustain their power. Citizens may find their identities and rights manipulated or restricted, leading to complex and exceptional relationships between the individual and the state⁽²⁾.

(1) "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

(2) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

2,8,1. Requirements for the formation and maturity of nations

The formation and maturity of nations, whether Iraqi or otherwise, usually requires several basic conditions, including:

- Common identity: Nations are built on a shared sense of identity among their members, and this identity can depend on various factors, including language, culture, religion, nationalism, ethnicity, history, or a shared set of values and beliefs. Perhaps a strong sense of common identity enhances solidarity and cohesion among the population and forms a strong base for a nation.
- Regional cohesion: Countries often have a specific region or homeland in which their members reside, and regional cohesion provides a physical space for expressing national identity, exercising collective rights and responsibilities, and allows for the development of common institutions, infrastructure, and governance structures.
- Cultural cohesion: It represents a necessary requirement for the formation of nations; because it reflects the common customs, traditions, symbols, and practices that bind people together; and cultural cohesion can be enhanced by relying on education, media, arts, and other forms of cultural expression that enhance national identity and solidarity.
- Historical narrative: Nations often have a shared historical narrative, which provides a sense of continuity, collective memory, and identity. This narrative may include key events, figures, symbols, and myths that shape national consciousness and provide a sense of belonging to the nation's past, present, and future.
- Inclusive citizenship: Nations thrive and develop when they embrace this requirement, granting rights, opportunities, and equal representation to all members of society, regardless of their secondary sub-identity. Inclusive citizenship fosters social cohesion, enhances

trust in institutions, and ensures that all individuals can contribute to and benefit from the nation's development.

- **Effective governance:** It is a necessary requirement for the maturity of nations because it provides the framework for addressing collective challenges, managing resources, and promoting the public interest. Nations need stable and accountable institutions, transparent decision-making processes, and responsive leadership to govern effectively and meet the needs of their citizens.
- **Development Economic:** It plays a crucial role in nation-building, providing resources and opportunities to improve living standards, reduce poverty, and promote social mobility. Nations need strong economic policies, infrastructure, and investment in human capital to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity.
- **Social cohesion:** The interconnectedness of individuals in society is essential to the stability and resilience of nations, as it fosters trust, cooperation, and solidarity among diverse groups within society. States must address social inequality, discrimination, and exclusion to build inclusive societies, where all members feel valued and respected.
- **Rule of law:** It involves subjecting societies to a set of transparent, impartial, and enforceable legal rules and institutions. Nations need a strong legal framework that protects individual, or group rights, ensures justice and accountability, prevents impunity, and promotes stability and predictability in society.
- **Political stability:** It works to provide an environment conducive to economic growth, social development, and the protection of rights and freedoms. Nations need stable political institutions, a peaceful transition of power, and mechanisms to resolve disputes and grievances peacefully.

- National symbols and icons: National symbols, such as flags, anthems, slogans, and national or other formal holidays, play a crucial role in fostering a sense of national identity and pride among citizens. These symbols serve as points of convergence for the nation and evoke common sentiments and values that unite the population.
- Education and knowledge: A vital requirement for the formation and maturity of nations, as it develops a sense of citizenship, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among the population. Nations need comprehensive education systems that promote civic values, tolerance, and respect for diversity, while also equipping citizens with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in society⁽¹⁾.
- Civic engagement: Nations thrive when citizens actively participate in the political, social, and cultural life of their communities. Civic engagement includes activities such as voting, volunteering, advocacy, and community organising, which enable individuals to contribute to the public good and shape the direction of their nation.
- Social trust: The belief that people can rely on each other and on institutions to act in their best interests. Nations need high levels of social trust to foster cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork to meet common challenges and achieve common goals⁽²⁾.
- Cultural exchange and integration: Nations benefit from cultural exchange and integration, which enhances understanding, tolerance and mutual respect among diverse groups within society. Encouraging cultural exchange - through arts, sports, tourism and people-to-people interactions - helps bridge gaps and foster a sense of unity and

(1) "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

(2) A. Brown 2017.

belonging among citizens.

- Collective identity: From the Iraqi perspective, collective identity can be defined as a sense of belonging and harmony with the national community, and recognition of the values, customs, traditions, history, language and culture that unite members of society within a common national framework. Collective identity in Iraq is influenced by several factors, including history, social, political and cultural experiences, which constitute the source of the common national identity among members of society.

In general, the formation and maturity of nations requires a combination of shared identity, national cohesion, cultural cohesion, historical narrative, inclusive citizenship, effective governance, economic development and social cohesion. These basic requirements provide the foundation for nations to flourish, adapt to change and achieve the aspirations of their people.

These requirements also contribute to the formation and maturity of nations, by enhancing unity, stability, prosperity and equality within society, and each of them plays a decisive role in shaping the collective identity, cohesion and flexibility of nations as they develop and adapt to changing circumstances and challenges⁽¹⁾.

2,8,2. Citizenship Requirements

Citizenship is the embodiment of belonging to a particular state, and it is a story woven into the fabric of nations and the modern state, especially after the eighteenth century, and it connects individuals to their country through rights, responsibilities and a common identity, and it begins with the story of birth or legal recognition, which indicates the moment when the individual becomes a member of a political community, and with this

(1) L. al-Faily 2021; L. al-Faily 2022; L. al-Faily (c) 2023; F. Fukuyama 2015; G. Le Bon 2014.

recognition the person enters a world of rights and privileges, which qualifies him to participate in the life of society⁽¹⁾.

As citizens, individuals find themselves endowed with a set of civil, social, economic, political, cultural and legal rights, which is the basis on which citizens build their lives and shape their interactions with the state and their fellow members of society.

However, citizenship is not only about entitlement, but also about duty and responsibility. Citizens are committed to their country and fellow citizens, pledge loyalty to the state, commit to obeying its laws, and contribute to its welfare through taxes and services. Citizenship calls on individuals to be active participants in the collective endeavour to build society and then the nation, and to foster a sense of civic duty and solidarity⁽²⁾.

Citizenship is a legal status that grants individuals certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities within a state and a specific national geography. It denotes membership in a political community and carries with it a set of entitlements and duties that shape the individual's relationship with the state and other citizens. The specific rights and obligations associated with citizenship may vary from country to country.

The concept of citizenship generally involves belonging, and an individual's deep sense of connection to a nation. Citizens learn about the shared values, culture, and history of their country, and find meaning and purpose in their membership. This sense of belonging transcends individual differences and unites people from diverse backgrounds under a common identity.

In the citizenship narrative, individuals find protection and representation under the umbrella of the state and have the right to seek assistance and redress from the government. If accused of a crime, individuals have the right to be heard and represented. Citizenship provides a voice in shaping

(1) F. Fukuyama 2015; G. Le Bon 2014; J. Scott 2009.

(2) G. Le Bon 2014; F. Fukuyama 2015; L. al-Faily (c) 2023.

the nation's future and enables individuals to hold leaders accountable and advocate for change.

Perhaps citizenship at its core is a story of inclusion, equality and belonging, a story that celebrates the diversity of its participants while emphasising their common humanity, a story of rights and responsibilities, loyalty and duty, woven together to form the fabric of the nation, and with this vision of citizenship, citizens find their place in the great epic of human civilisation, where they are bound by citizenship that transcend borders and generations⁽¹⁾.

In the complex mosaic of human identity, the character of citizens in any country is the product of many interconnected factors, from cultural norms to historical legacies, from social and economic conditions to political systems, from individual experiences to global influences, these elements converge to shape the attitudes, behaviours and values of individuals within societies.

At the heart of this complex interaction are cultural influences, which imbue citizens with shared values, traditions and customs that shape their national or worldview and interactions with others. Historical legacies leave indelible imprints on collective consciousness, influencing perceptions of identity, social cohesion and national pride. Socioeconomic factors, such as social class and education, influence individuals' life chances and trajectories, shaping their aspirations and opportunities for success.

Political systems and governance structures dictate the boundaries of citizenship, defining rights, responsibilities and ways of participating in public life. Individual experiences shaped by family upbringing, peer relationships and community interactions contribute to the development of personality traits and coping mechanisms. Media and technology serve as powerful channels and platforms for disseminating cultural narratives, shaping public perceptions and fostering virtual communities across borders.

(1) Ibid.

Religious beliefs and practices play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' values, morals, and sense of identity, while environmental and geographical influences shape lifestyles, coexistence, and cultural practices. Globalisation and transnational influences facilitate the exchange of ideas, goods, and information, which enhances cultural hybridisation and diversity within societies.

In general, citizenship is a multifaceted concept that includes legal, political, social, and cultural dimensions. It is the basis for democratic governance, social cohesion, and collective identity within a nation-state, and the formation of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities available to individuals as members of society.

The personality of a citizen, in any country, is a dynamic fabric woven from threads of cultural, historical, social, economic, political, individual, and global factors. Understanding this complex interaction sheds light on the complexities of human identity and human behaviour within societies⁽¹⁾.

2,8,3. Iraqi nation?

A nation is a community of people who share a common identity, often based on factors such as language, culture, history, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or region. Nations typically have a sense of solidarity and belonging among their members, as well as a collective awareness of their common identity and interests. While a nation can exist within the borders of states or a single state, it can also transcend political borders, encompassing population groups dispersed between states, with a shared sense of identity.

Nations may aspire to self-determination, sovereignty, and political independence, and seek to govern themselves according to their customs, laws, and values. Thus, the concept of nationhood is inherently complex and subject to varied interpretations, influenced by cultural, historical, and political contexts.

(1) G. Le Bon 2014; F. Fukuyama 2015; L. al-Faily (c) 2023.

Whether Iraqi society can be collectively identified as an 'Iraqi nation' today is contingent upon the definition of nationhood and the extent to which one believes in the cohesion and unity of Iraqi society. The term "nation" usually refers, as mentioned above, to a community of people who share a common identity, history, culture, and territory, while Iraq includes a diverse population, from different national, ethnic, religious, and sectarian backgrounds. However, there are several elements that contribute to the sense of Iraqi national identity, including:

1. Historical heritage: Iraq has a rich history and cultural heritage, including the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, which contributed to shaping the collective identity of its people.
2. Regional cohesion: Iraq has a defined territory with recognised borders, providing a physical space where its diverse population resides and interacts.
3. National symbols and institutions: Iraq has national symbols, such as the flag, national anthem, and state emblem, as well as governance institutions that represent the Iraqi state⁽¹⁾.
4. Influence on Education Systems: Dictatorships often control education systems to shape the narrative of citizenship. The curriculum may be designed to promote the regime's ideology and to shape citizens' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in ways that align with the goals of the dictatorship⁽²⁾.

The influence of culture, state, and religion on citizenship under dictatorial regimes is multifaceted. As observed during the Ba'athist rule and

(1) Human Right Watch 2023, "Events in Iraq", (Accessed: 11/06/2024); Relief-Web Response (RW Response) is a specialised digital service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports page on Iraq, (Accessed: 30/04/2024).

(2) «The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq: Central and Regional Levels for the Years 2011–2020,» Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

Saddam Hussein's regime in particular, dictatorships can exert significant influence over discourses of citizenship, rights, and participation⁽¹⁾.

5. Common challenges and aspirations: Despite internal divisions and conflicts, Iraqis share common challenges and aspirations, such as economic development, security, and social justice, which can foster a sense of national solidarity⁽²⁾.

However, it is important to recognise that Iraq faces significant challenges to national unity and cohesion, including ethnic and sectarian tensions, political divisions, regional rivalries, and external interference. The fragmentation of Iraqi society along ethnic, religious, and sectarian lines, exacerbated by decades of conflict and instability, has hindered the emergence of a strong, inclusive, and cohesive national identity⁽³⁾.

Moreover, the concept of nation is fluid and not universally agreed upon, and different groups within Iraqi society may have different perceptions of their national identity, some of whom may identify primarily with their national, ethnic, religious, tribal, or sectarian community, while others may embrace a broader Iraqi national identity.

Although Iraq has elements that contribute to a sense of national identity, the fragmentation and divisions within its society make it difficult to classify the Iraqi population collectively as an "Iraqi nation." Achieving national unity and cohesion will require addressing fundamental obstacles and grievances and promoting equality, especially a shared sense of citizenship and belonging among all segments of Iraqi society.

After examining the three dimensions—culture, state, and religion—in

(1) Ismael S.T. 2004; Rohde A. 2010.

(2) World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)", 22 October 2019; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; The First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals - Iraq, (accessed 04.03.2024); A. al-Mawlawi 2019; A. al-Wardi 1995: 262–271.

(3) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict- Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024.

the first section of this book, including their definitions, interactions, and their connection to the characteristics of the Iraqi identity, as well as the roots of distortion within these dimensions, the second part of the book sought to further explore the Iraqi reality. This includes analysing the nature of Iraqi social cohesion, the political and social challenges faced, the impact of tribalism and dictatorship, and the fragility of national identity.

In the third part, this work will propose a set of treatments, solutions, and remedies for the issues which was discussed in these first two sections. This approach will consist of thirteen strategies designed to guide progress toward the reform of both the state and society.

Section Three

Prospects for the Future and the Path to Progress

The future trajectory of the Iraqi identity suggests potential dynamic shifts in the balance of influence among culture, state, and religion. As Iraqi society continues to navigate the consequences of conflict and political transformations, it is likely that the nature of the Iraqi character will evolve in response to these ongoing changes.

The ongoing sectarian tensions that have characterised Iraq's modern history need to be re-evaluated. Efforts to promote good governance and national reconciliation may help mitigate the impact of sectarian divisions on political and cultural identity. The evolving political landscape may see the emergence of new models that challenge historical power structures and offer alternative visions for state governance. Change in political leaders and new narratives may redefine the relationship between religion and state, affecting the overall character of society.

The interconnectedness brought about by globalisation and social media has the potential to reshape Iraqi culture. Exposure to global ideas, media, social cohesion, and cultural exchanges may influence the way Iraqis view their identity, leading to a synthesis of traditional values with contemporary global influences, creating a nuanced, new, and multifaceted cultural landscape.

External factors (regional and international), particularly economic influences and international partnerships, are likely to continue to play a crucial role in shaping Iraq's future. Economic development, investment, and trade relations can affect not only the state's ability to govern, but also the cultural and social dynamics within society.

Iraq's engagement in global diplomacy may present both challenges and opportunities. Navigating geopolitical dynamics, enhancing regional cooperation, and participating in international forums will contribute to enhancing Iraq's position on the world stage. Such connections have the potential to influence Iraq's character, based on policies and cultural and social exchanges.

The future prospects of the Iraqi character are intricately and fundamentally linked to the ability of Iraqis to deal with complex interactions between internal dynamics and external influences. Potential shifts in the balance of influence and the impact of globalisation underscore the need for thoughtful thinking and strategic decision-making as Iraq and Iraqis try to chart their path toward progress.

As Iraqis face the challenges of the twenty-first century, the Iraqi character will continue to evolve and form its own process, influenced by many factors, whether in the fields of politics, culture, economics, or global interactions. The future holds within it doubts and opportunities to shape an identity that reflects the aspirations of the Iraqi people and their ability to endure.

After thoroughly discussing the confusion and dysfunctionality within Iraq in the first and second sections, this third section will focus on identifying a series of remedies, collectively referred to as a theme of 'Path to Progress.' These proposed solutions aim to significantly contribute to the development of strategies for recovery, with the goal of building a cohesive and effective state and society capable of managing its own affairs and safeguarding its sovereignty.

3.1. The Path to Progress – Understanding the Geopolitical Dimensions

Iraq is one of the countries with a remarkable presence in the regional and global geopolitical arena; it constitutes an important axis for the interaction between cultures, religions and states in the Middle East region, and the dimensions of the relationship between culture, state and religion

are clear in shaping the geopolitical character of Iraq, where diversity and different terrains clearly coexist and interact.

Understanding the relationship between these three elements (culture, state and religion) represents an essential key to understanding the historical transformations and geopolitical developments that Iraq has witnessed over the ages, and this comprehensive understanding provides an opportunity to explore the impact of cultural and religious factors in shaping national identity, government policy orientations, and Iraq's international role in the region and the world.

In this third section, the focus will shift to the geopolitical dimensions of Iraq, examining the historical transformations that have shaped the relationship between Iraq and the modern state. Emphasis will be placed on the significance of understanding geopolitics, as well as the challenges Iraq faces within the realm of international relations. The section will underscore the critical need for a comprehensive geopolitical understanding of Iraq, highlighting its role in shaping both its own future and its broader impact on the region and beyond⁽¹⁾.

3.1.1. Iraq and the Modern State

Describing Iraq as a "modern state" that has all the necessary features of modernity for citizenship to prevail over other types of membership in society is a complex matter and requires careful study of various factors. While Iraq has made great strides towards modernisation in certain areas, such as infrastructure development, economic growth, and political reforms, it still faces major challenges that affect its ability to function as a modern state in all its aspects, including the powers and responsibilities of citizens and the state. There are some key elements that must be considered to complete the pillars of the modern state⁽²⁾.

(1) Fawcett L. 2023; Preston Z.E. 2000; "EU Strategy for Iraq," European Union Delegation, 2021.

(2) Fawcett L. 2023; Preston Z.E. 2000.

Among them, Democratic governance, as Iraq has witnessed major political changes since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, including the establishment of a democratic system of government. However, the country continues to struggle with issues of political corruption, sectarianism, and weak institutions, which undermine the effectiveness of democratic processes and the rule of law.

As well as the rule of law and respect for human rights, although the current Iraqi constitution of 2005 enshrines the principles of human rights and the rule of law, the levels of implementation and its conformity remain uneven⁽¹⁾.

Divisions of all kinds are another important element, as Iraq is characterised by deep-rooted national, sectarian, and tribal divisions that have historically affected political dynamics and social cohesion, and sectarianism and nationalism, in particular, continue to shape political alliances, and will Identity issues, which hinder efforts to promote a sense of national unity and citizenship that transcends sectarian affiliations.

There is also the element of security challenges facing Iraq, including terrorism, insurgency, and internal conflict, which undermine stability and public confidence, and the presence of weapons outside the control of the state, which further complicates efforts to establish effective governance and the rule of law⁽²⁾.

In addition to the element of economic development, despite Iraq's possession of significant natural resources, including oil and gas, economic development has been hampered by corruption, mismanagement, and reliance on oil revenues. Persistent poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic services contribute to social inequality and deprivation of rights, which undermines the possibility of citizenship and weakens the sense of belonging⁽³⁾.

(1) Research Group2022, «Constitutional Reform in Iraq: Problems and Proposals.»

(2) Faust L. 2023; Bogd S. et al. 2020; Faust L. 2023; Pfeiff S. A. et al. 2022; A. Hamid and A. Abdullah 2020.

(3) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", No-

Finally, there is the element of regional and international influences, especially since Iraq's geopolitical location in the Middle East exposes it to regional power struggles and external interference, which can complicate efforts to assert sovereignty and pursue independent national interests. The influence of neighbouring countries and global powers is an ongoing and influential factor shaping Iraq's domestic politics and security environment⁽¹⁾.

Although Iraq has made progress toward democratic transformation since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, it still faces enormous challenges that hinder the achievement of citizenship as the dominant form of membership in society. Overcoming these challenges will require continued efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights and the rule of law, establish the principle of citizenship with its rights and duties, address sectarian divisions, and promote comprehensive economic development. In addition, it will require dealing with complex regional dynamics and asserting Iraq's sovereignty in the regional and international arena⁽²⁾.

vember 2022; International Labour Organization (ILO), "Iraqi Labour Force Survey 2021"; International Energy Agency, "Iraq's Energy Sector, A Roadmap to a Brighter Future", April 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010; RAND research organization 2023, "Twenty Years After the Iraq War, a Q&A with RAND Experts", published on Mar 21, 2023; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; The First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals - Iraq, (accessed 04.03.2024); A. Al-Mawlawi 2019.

- (1) Fazil S. & Tartir A. 2023; Heau, L. et al. 2023; Fawcett L. 2023; Preston Z.E. 2000; A. Hamid and A. Abdullah 2020.
- (2) Preston Z.E. 2000; World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)", 22 October 2019; Pfaff C.A. et al. 2022; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024.

3,1,2. The need for a geopolitical understanding

Understanding Iraq's geopolitical landscape is not just a matter of academic interest to Iraqi leaders. It is a fundamental necessity for effectively managing state affairs and confronting the complex challenges facing Iraq. The narrative that explains why Iraqi leaders need a complete understanding of their geopolitical geography; It is rooted in the interconnectedness of regional and global dynamics that directly impact Iraq's stability, security, and prosperity.

Strategically located at the crossroads of the Middle East, a region characterised by geopolitical rivalries, conflicts, and shifting alliances, Iraq's leaders must understand the complex web of regional power dynamics, historical legacies, and contemporary trends to formulate informed foreign policies, anticipate potential threats and manage their risks, and seize opportunities for cooperation.

In this regard, one of the main reasons why understanding geopolitics is so important for Iraq is the region's history of interventions, external influence, wars, armed conflicts, and political unrest; Iraq has witnessed firsthand the repercussions of geopolitical manoeuvres conducted by previous governments, as well as neighbouring countries, global powers, and non-state actors. Understanding these dynamics helps Iraqi leaders confront diplomatic challenges, protect national sovereignty, and build alliances and relationships that serve Iraq's interests without compromising its independence.

Examining the impact of Iraq's geopolitical positioning on the formation of the Iraqi identity is essential, as it provides valuable insight into the patterns underlying many of the country's past and present crises particularly those involving regional powers such as Turkey and Iran, as well as global actors like the United States⁽¹⁾.

(1) Pfaff C.A. et al. 2022; Preston Z.E. 2000

Geopolitical awareness also plays a pivotal role in managing the security environment in Iraq. The country faces various security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, and regional conflicts. A thorough understanding of geopolitical fault lines, transnational networks, and the dynamics of some states activating their proxies allows Iraqi leaders to develop effective strategies for combating terrorism, border security, and defence cooperation, while mitigating the risks of destabilisation.

Moreover, Iraq's economic development and energy security are closely linked to its geopolitical position. As a major energy producer, and exporter, Iraq's economy is vulnerable to global energy markets, regional supply chains, and geopolitical tensions that affect oil and gas prices and investment flows. Iraqi leaders need to manage energy diplomacy, diversify the economy, and attract foreign investment while balancing domestic priorities and external dependencies⁽¹⁾.

Geopolitical understanding also affects Iraq's regional and international engagements. Whether in diplomatic initiatives, trade agreements, or multilateral forums, Iraqi leaders must clearly articulate Iraq's interests, build strategic partnerships, and advocate policies that promote peace, stability, and mutual prosperity. This requires not only understanding geopolitical interests but also demonstrating Iraq as a constructive and reliable player on the regional and then international scene⁽²⁾.

In essence, this narrative emphasises that Iraqi leaders cannot operate in isolation, or with a narrow focus on internal affairs alone, and that geopolitical realities shape Iraq's security, economy, diplomacy, and long-term prospects. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of geopolitics is not just a strategic advantage, but a prerequisite for effective governance,

(1) Pfaff C.A. et al. 2022; Preston Z.E. 2000; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)", 22 October 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010; International Energy Agency, "Iraq's Energy Sector, A Roadmap to a Brighter Future", April 2019.

(2) Fawcett L. 2023.

strategic decision-making, and the protection of Iraq's national interests in a complex and interconnected world⁽¹⁾.

Here is a more detailed look at how regional and geopolitical factors affect Iraq:

1. Conflicts, proxy interventions, and rivalry between Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia: Iraq has often been caught in the crossfire of the broader regional rivalry between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, with the three countries seeking to exert their influence in Iraq through political, economic, sectarian, and media channels, exacerbating internal divisions and instability at the domestic and regional levels⁽²⁾.
2. Regional proxy groups: Various regional actors support armed groups and proxy militias in Iraq, further complicating the security situation. These groups often operate according to their own agendas, leading to violence, insecurity, and challenges for the Iraqi government in maintaining control over its territory⁽³⁾.
3. Spillover from the Syrian conflict: The Syrian conflict and civil war have had direct impacts on Iraq, including the influx of refugees, the spread of extremism, and the destabilisation and fragility of border areas. The presence of ISIS/Daesh terrorists in both Iraq and Syria has highlighted the interconnectedness of security threats in the region⁽⁴⁾.
4. The Kurdish Question and Regional Dynamics: The Kurdish region in Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have aspirations

(1) Pfaff C.A. et al. 2022.

(2) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024; Fawcett L. 2023.

(3) United Nations Population Fund 2018, "National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence 2018-2030"; H. Bozarslan 2015; D. C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

(4) UNHCR Iraq situation overview, (Accessed: 09/03/2024); Pugh C. et al. 2020; Fawcett L. 2023.

for greater autonomy or independence, which has implications for regional stability. The possibility of Kurdish independence raises concerns among neighbouring states with large Kurdish populations, such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria, leading to tensions and potential destabilisation.

5. US influence and presence: The US-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in 2003 reshaped the regional geopolitical landscape. The presence of US advisors in Iraq, as well as ongoing military operations and security assistance, has implications for regional security dynamics and perceptions of Iraqi sovereignty⁽¹⁾.
6. Regional power dynamics: Gulf states such as Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE also seek to influence developments in Iraq. Their political, economic, and diplomatic engagements in Iraq reflect broader efforts to assert regional influence and counterbalance Iranian or Turkish influence in the region.
7. Oil and Energy Policy: Iraq's vast oil and gas reserves make it an important player in global energy markets. The ongoing competition for control of oil and gas resources, as well as disputes over export routes and revenues, have geopolitical implications and could exacerbate regional tensions.

(1) Baker III J.A., & Hamilton L.H. 2006; Mohammed Shia al-Sudani: "Iraq Needs a New Kind of Partnership with the United States- The Path to Sustainable Cooperation", *Foreign Affairs Magazine* - April 11, 2024; Bluedorn J. & Koranchelian T. 2023; The United States Institute of Peace 2019, "After ISIS, Stability in Iraq Requires Addressing its Fragility. Unless Iraq can repair its torn social fabric, expect the return of the Islamic State", published on Monday, May 20, 2019; The United States Institute of Peace 2020, "The Current Situation in Iraq- Fact Sheet", published on August 4, 2020; RAND research organization 2023, "Twenty Years After the Iraq War, a Q&A with RAND Experts", published on Mar 21, 2023; Strategies (think tank) 2019, "The Future of Iraq's Stability, The Political, Economic, and Security Levels", published on February 12, 2019; Cordesman A.H. 2020; Mawlawi al- A. Mawlawi al- M. 2024; NATO, "Mission Iraq", Last updated: 27 May. 2024.

8. Regional Counterterrorism Efforts: Despite regional rivalries, Middle Eastern countries recognise the common threat of terrorism and extremism. Collaborative efforts to combat ISIS/Daesh and other extremist groups have led to regional partnerships and initiatives aimed at enhancing security cooperation.
9. Interaction between Sectarianism and Geopolitics: Sectarian divisions, particularly between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, intersect with regional geopolitics, and regional powers often exploit sectarian tensions in Iraq to advance their own interests, exacerbating internal conflicts and hindering efforts to achieve national reconciliation.
10. Diplomatic Efforts and Regional Mediation: International organisations and regional actors, such as the United Nations and the League of Arab States, play roles in mediating conflicts and facilitating diplomatic efforts in Iraq. These initiatives aim to promote stability, dialogue, and cooperation among regional stakeholders⁽¹⁾.
11. Impact on Iraq's Sovereignty and Independence: Iraq's sovereignty and independence are often tested by external and regional interventions. Balancing Iraq's national interests with regional dynamics presents challenges for Iraqi policymakers and leaders.
12. Regional and Geopolitical Factors: Competition among major powers themselves, as well as between major powers and influential regional states, and its impact on Iraq.

In short, regional and geopolitical dynamics greatly influence Iraq's internal stability, security, and sovereignty. The interconnectedness of these factors underscores the need for comprehensive dialogue, diplomatic engagement, and collaborative efforts among regional stakeholders to promote peace, stability, and development in Iraq and the broader Middle East⁽²⁾.

(1) Fawcett L. 2023.

(2) Pfaff C.A. et al. 2022; Fawcett L. 2023.

3.2. The Path to Progress - Teamwork

One of the most important social challenges facing the reform process is developing the quality of teamwork, which means that Iraqis must think and act as groups and teams, not as individuals, in order to develop their country together.

Thinking and acting as groups and teams, not as individuals, is crucial to Iraq's development on several fronts, reflecting a narrative deeply rooted in the collective aspirations and challenges facing the nation. Its advantages can be summarised as follows:

- More effective teamwork: Iraq's complex social, political, and economic landscape requires concerted efforts and cooperation between diverse groups. By coming together as cohesive teams, Iraqis can pool their talents, resources, and expertise to achieve common goals, such as economic growth, infrastructure development, and social progress. This collaborative approach allows for the harnessing of collective intelligence, innovation, and synergy, leading to more effective solutions to complex problems⁽¹⁾.
- Strength in Unity: Unity and solidarity among different groups enhance social cohesion and national identity. Although diversity in Iraq is a source of strength, it can also be a potential source of division if not managed effectively, and with the emphasis on collective action. Iraqis can bridge ethnic, religious and sectarian divides, and foster mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity. This inclusive approach lays the foundation for a harmonious society, where all citizens feel valued and included in the country's development journey.
- Resilience and dynamism: Teamwork and collaboration foster resilience and build capacity at the individual and community levels. By working together to achieve common goals, Iraqis can build stronger

(1) A. Brown 2017.

institutions, improve governance practices, and address systemic challenges more effectively. This collaborative mindset also extends to disaster preparedness, conflict resolution, and crisis management, as coordinated efforts can mitigate risks and enhance the country's ability to withstand external shocks.

- Ownership of their destiny: Thinking and working in groups and teams is consistent with the principles of participatory democracy and civic engagement. It enables citizens to take ownership of their collective destiny, participate in decision-making processes, and hold those in positions of power accountable. This bottom-up approach to development fosters a sense of power and empowerment among ordinary Iraqis, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive governance framework.
- Economic development: Collaborative initiatives between companies, entrepreneurs, and government agencies can stimulate innovation, create jobs, and attract investment. Teamwork enables the exchange of best practices, knowledge transfer, and joint ventures that drive economic growth and competitiveness in global markets.
- Strength in diversity: Iraq is a diverse nation that includes different ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Embracing teamwork allows Iraqis to benefit from its diversity, considering it a source of strength, not a source of division. Collaborative efforts bring together different perspectives, experiences, and skills, which enhances creativity, innovation, and comprehensive approaches to solving problems.
- Shared responsibility: Development requires collective responsibility and commitment. When individuals come together in groups or teams, they share the burden of challenges and work collectively to find solutions. This shared responsibility creates a sense of ownership and accountability and encourages active participation and engagement in

state-building activities.

- Efficient use of resources: Limited resources, whether financial, human or natural, are common challenges facing developing countries. By collaborating and pooling resources, Iraqis can improve their use more efficiently, which translates into better infrastructure development, improved public services and enhanced economic productivity.
- Building trust and social capital: Collective action fosters trust, cooperation and social capital within and across communities. Trust is essential for successful partnerships, business ventures and government-citizen relations. Strong social capital leads to improved communication, cooperation and mutual support, laying the foundation for sustainable development and resilience.
- Empowering local initiatives: Grassroots initiatives and community projects play a vital role in meeting local needs and promoting inclusive development. Collective action provides a platform for communication, resource sharing and access to expertise. It enables communities to drive positive change from the bottom up, in line with their specific contexts and priorities.
- Promoting civic engagement: Active participation in collective activities and collective action fosters a culture of civic engagement and democratic values. When citizens work together to achieve common goals, they become more invested in the democratic process, defend their rights, and hold decision-makers accountable. This engagement strengthens democratic institutions and promotes good governance practices.
- Adapting to the global challenge: In an increasingly interconnected world, global challenges such as climate change, the threat of pandemics, and economic transformations require collaborative and coordinated responses. By emphasising collective action and

partnerships at the national level, Iraqis can better overcome these challenges, access international expertise and resources, and contribute to global efforts to achieve sustainable development and resilience⁽¹⁾.

In short, the narrative of thinking and working in groups and teams emphasises the interconnectedness between individual efforts and broader societal goals and emphasises the power of collective action and solidarity in overcoming challenges, building resilience, and guiding Iraq towards a future of prosperity, peace, and sustainable development.

In general, it embodies a comprehensive approach to development that prioritises cooperation, equality, and shared prosperity. It reflects the recognition of the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and institutions in shaping Iraq's current and future path, with an emphasis on collective action for positive change⁽²⁾.

(1) World Food Programme, "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)", 22 October 2019; International Monetary Fund International Monetary Fund, "Mission Concluding Statement", March 3, 2024; The First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals - Iraq, (accessed 04.03.2024); A. al-Mawlawi 2019.

(2) Deng C. et al.; Sandell K. 2012; "What is transformational leadership? Understanding the impact of inspirational guidance", University of Massachusetts Global, (Accessed: 05.05.2024); Karimi S. et al. 2023; "The Transformational Leadership Report", TL Publications 2007, (Accessed: 05.02.2024); A. Brown 2017.

3.3. The path to progress – Neighbouring Countries, Friends, Partners or What?

The relationship of Iraq with its neighbouring countries is usually one of the most important factors affecting stability and security for Iraq. In fact, tension between countries and their neighbours can be a natural state as a result of many geopolitical, historical, and cultural factors.

The nature of relations between countries and their neighbours varies greatly, ranging from close cooperation and successful economic exchange to ongoing tension and conflict. Factors such as geographical borders, natural resources, religion, nationalism, history, and domestic politics all play an important role in shaping these relations.

In the case of Iraq, tensions with certain neighbouring countries can be attributed to a range of factors, including border disputes, political, religious, and sectarian rivalries, competition over resources, and the broader repercussions of regional and international conflicts. However, there are also positive aspects in relations between Iraq and its neighbours, such as trade exchange and cooperation in the economic, cultural, and academic fields.

3.3.1. Why continued tension with neighbouring countries?

A review of Iraq's contemporary relations with regional countries reveals a tendency among Iraqis to struggle with empathizing toward neighbouring states. This phenomenon is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, political, social, and cultural factors, including:

- Historical conflicts: Iraq has a long history of conflicts and tensions with neighbouring countries, including Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Kuwait. These conflicts, often fuelled by regional disputes, political rivalries, and national, ethnic, or sectarian tensions, can create deep animosities and undermine trust between countries, making it difficult for individuals to empathise with people from neighbouring countries.

- Geopolitical competition: Iraq's geopolitical location in the Middle East has made it a battleground for regional power struggles and rivalries. Competition for influence among neighbouring countries and external actors has exacerbated tensions and hampered efforts to build mutual understanding and cooperation. This geopolitical context can foster suspicion and hostility among Iraqis toward neighbouring countries.
- Nationalism and identity: Nationalism and national identity play an important role in shaping attitudes toward other nations. Iraqi nationalism, often rooted in historical narratives and collective memories of past conflicts and struggles, may emphasise pride in the nation's achievements and resilience, while perceptions of "otherness" toward neighbouring countries reinforce this sense of national identity and can make it difficult for individuals to empathise with the experiences and perspectives of people from other countries.
- Media and propaganda: The portrayal of neighbouring countries in the media and public discourse can influence perceptions and attitudes toward them. Negative stereotypes, biased reporting, and propaganda can contribute to the dehumanisation of people from neighbouring countries, making it difficult for Iraqis to empathise with their experiences and struggles.
- Security concerns: Iraq has faced security challenges, including terrorism and insurgency, that are linked to dynamics both internally and externally. Perceptions of threats from neighbouring countries, whether real or perceived, can fuel fears and anxieties among Iraqis, making it more difficult to empathise with people from those countries.
- Ethnic, national, and sectarian divisions: Iraq is a diverse country with diverse ethnic, national, and sectarian groups, some of whom have kinship or historical ties to communities in neighbouring countries. National, ethnic, or sectarian divisions within Iraq itself can spill over

into perceptions of neighbouring countries, further complicating efforts to foster empathy and understanding across borders.

- Political rivalries: Political rivalries and tensions between governments in Iraq and neighbouring countries can shape public perceptions and attitudes toward those countries. Diplomatic disputes, border conflicts, and competing regional interests can contribute to a climate of mistrust and hostility, making it difficult for individuals to empathise with people from neighbouring countries.
- Economic competition: The emergence of conflicts over resources can lead to tensions between neighbouring countries. Disputes over natural resources, trade routes, or economic opportunities can increase tensions and foster a sense of competition between countries. This economic dimension can also affect perceptions, making it difficult for Iraqis to empathise with people from neighbouring countries that are seen as economic competitors.
- Cultural differences: Cultural differences between Iraq and its neighbouring countries can contribute to misunderstandings and barriers to empathy. Differences in language, customs, traditions, and social norms can create cultural divisions that hinder meaningful interaction and understanding between people of different nations and ethnicities. Stereotypes or misconceptions about cultural practices in neighbouring countries can further complicate efforts to empathise with their perspectives.
- Colonial Legacy: Iraq, like many countries in the Middle East, has a colonial history shaped by European powers. Colonialism and imperialism have left a legacy of resentment and mistrust toward former colonial powers, as well as neighbouring countries that are seen as collaborating or benefiting from colonial rule. This historical legacy can contribute to negative attitudes and perceptions that hinder empathy and reconciliation.

- Border Issues: Border disputes or unresolved territorial claims between Iraq and its neighbouring countries can contribute to tensions and hinder empathy. Controversial border issues can fuel nationalist sentiments and regional ambitions, making it difficult for individuals to empathise with the views or concerns of people from neighbouring countries involved in such disputes.
- External interference: Foreign interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and its neighbours can exacerbate mistrust and hostility between countries. Perceptions of foreign interference or manipulation can foster resentment and resistance, making it difficult for Iraqis to empathise with the experiences or struggles of people from countries, such as neighbours, that are perceived as agents of foreign interference.
- Trauma and conflict: Ongoing conflicts and violence in the region, including with neighbouring countries, can contribute to collective trauma and reduce sensitivity to the suffering of others. Prolonged exposure to conflict-related trauma can lead to apathy toward the experiences of people in neighbouring countries, making it difficult to empathise with their plight⁽¹⁾.
- Language barriers: Language barriers can create communication challenges and prevent cross-cultural understanding between Iraqis and people from neighbouring countries. Limited proficiency with foreign languages spoken in neighbouring countries can hinder meaningful dialogue and communication and limits the opportunities for empathy and mutual understanding.

In general, stability in the region depends on the ability of Iraqis to manage conflicts constructively, and work to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding, especially with neighbouring countries. It is also

(1) M. Al-Shennawy 2012.

important to look at international relations comprehensively, and direct efforts towards building bridges of trust, promoting open dialogue, resolving conflicts, and promoting peace and stability in the region⁽¹⁾.

Addressing the challenges facing empathy and understanding between Iraqis and their neighbouring countries requires efforts to overcome historical grievances, promote dialogue and reconciliation, challenge stereotypes and prejudices, and enhance mutual respect and cooperation. Building bridges of empathy and understanding can contribute to achieving regional stability, peace, and prosperity in the Middle East.

3.3.2. Tension with neighbouring countries, the solutions

The following are some solutions and suggestions to address the problem of ongoing tension with neighbouring countries, which is deeply rooted:

1. Cultural and educational exchange programmes and reform of educational curricula: Promoting cultural exchange programmes, educational initiatives, and people-to-people interactions between Iraq and its neighbouring countries can foster greater familiarity, mutual sympathy, and appreciation for diverse cultural traditions and perspectives. In terms of reform, this involves the development of educational curricula that incorporate lessons on regional history, geography, and cultural diversity. Such reforms should aim to cultivate empathy, tolerance, and mutual understanding, while also encouraging critical thinking and openness as a means of challenging stereotypes and countering prejudice⁽²⁾.
2. Promoting dialogue between sects and communities and adhering to pluralism: Cross-border communication by emphasising shared

(1) "EU Strategy for Iraq," European Union Delegation, 2021.

(2) "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

values, mutual respect, and the importance of religious pluralism in promoting harmony and understanding among diverse population groups. On the other hand, pluralism and regional cooperation frameworks can be greatly enhanced by promoting dialogue, confidence-building measures, and conflict resolution mechanisms between neighbouring countries, and encouraging participation in regional organisations and forums to address challenges and obstacles and promote common interests.

3. **Media and public diplomacy:** Promoting positive narratives and accurate portrayals of neighbouring countries in the media and public discourse, combating negative stereotypes, misinformation, and propaganda that fuel mistrust and hostility, and instead highlighting commonalities, shared history, and areas of cooperation.
4. **Cross-border economic partnerships:** Promoting trade partnerships and infrastructure development projects that benefit Iraq and its neighbouring countries. Economic interdependence can create mutual interests and incentives for cooperation while contributing to shared prosperity and development.
5. **Track 1 Diplomacy:** This refers to increased direct formal negotiations between governments, generally conducted by official representatives, such as heads of state, foreign ministers, or official government delegations. Track 1 diplomacy involves making high-level decisions and concluding formal agreements between states, often through established diplomatic channels, such as embassies and consulates, and through international organisations.
6. **Track 2 Diplomacy and Civil Society Initiatives:** Supporting Track 2 Diplomacy efforts and civil society initiatives that bring together stakeholders, including academics, activists, and grassroots organisations, to discuss regional issues, build trust, and explore avenues for cooperation outside formal diplomatic channels.

7. Track 3 Diplomacy and Academic Partnerships: Expanding Track 3 Diplomacy and Academic Partnerships initiatives that include scholars, researchers, and experts from neighbouring countries to facilitate joint research projects, academic conferences, and policy dialogues focused on regional issues to generate innovative ideas and policy recommendations for cooperation and conflict resolution.
8. Citizen Diplomacy Initiatives: Encourage citizen-led initiatives that promote people-to-people and cross-border community relations, as well as support cultural exchanges, joint projects and collaborative initiatives organised by ordinary citizens to enhance mutual understanding and friendship.
9. Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism Promotion: Harness the power of cultural diplomacy and tourism promotion to showcase the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of neighbouring countries, and encourage cultural exchanges, heritage preservation and tourism initiatives that highlight shared history, traditions and attractions to enhance mutual appreciation and understanding.
10. International Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Support Mechanisms: Strengthen regional conflict resolution mechanisms and dialogue platforms that provide opportunities for the peaceful resolution of disputes and grievances, emphasising the importance of dialogue, mediation and negotiation in resolving and preventing conflicts from escalating. On the other hand, the importance of seeking international mediation and support from regional organisations, neighbouring countries, and global partners to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, confidence-building measures, and engagement with international actors to leverage their diplomatic influence and resources to promote peace and stability in the region.
11. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief: Cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts to address

common challenges, alleviate human suffering across borders, and prioritise cooperation in areas such as refugee assistance, emergency response, and resilience building to demonstrate solidarity and goodwill⁽¹⁾.

12. Environmental conservation and resource management: Strengthening cooperation in the field of environmental conservation, sustainable development, and resource management initiatives that go beyond the limit of a country, to address common environmental challenges, such as: water scarcity, pollution, and climate change, through joint research, policy coordination, and environmental conservation efforts⁽²⁾.

By implementing these solutions and suggestions above, Iraq can take meaningful steps towards overcoming historical grievances, enhancing empathy, and building constructive relations with its neighbouring countries, and ultimately contributing to stability, prosperity, and regional peace.

(1) UNHCR Iraq situation overview, (Accessed: 09/03/2024).

(2) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", November 2022; Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet 2023, "Iraq", SIPRI-Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2023; Bourhrous A. et al. 2022; The First Voluntary Report on the Sustainable Development Goals - Iraq, (accessed 04.03.2024); A. al-Mawlawi 2019.

3,4. The path to progress – social cohesion

Having examined the influence of culture, the state, religion, and authoritarianism on the concept of citizenship, it becomes essential to prioritise the enhancement of social cohesion in Iraq as a key objective for fostering more constructive interaction among these domains. Achieving this goal necessitates a multifaceted and comprehensive approach that takes into account the diverse dimensions of Iraqi society.

The main areas that need attention for better governance and enhancing social cohesion in Iraq are several, including:

1. Promoting inclusive policies and political stability: Developing and implementing policies that respect and accommodate the diverse cultural, religious, national and ethnic identities within Iraq. Inclusive governance enhances the sense of belonging and representation, which will help increase trust in the government, establish and maintain political stability, through transparent and accountable governance, and provide the stability that is the basis for social cohesion and trust in state institutions.
2. Addressing historical grievances and facilitating national dialogue: Implementing reconciliation initiatives to address historical grievances, promote healing, acknowledge past grievances, and work to build bridges between different communities. Perhaps part of addressing historical grievances is linked to creating opportunities for national dialogue that includes diverse voices, as participating in open conversations about national identity and shared values can enhance understanding.
3. Investing in post-conflict or post-disaster reconstruction: In post-conflict areas, investment must be made in reconstruction efforts that prioritise social cohesion, infrastructure development, and community resilience. It is also important to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness and response plans that take into account the needs of communities in general and promote solidarity in difficult times.

4. Protecting human rights and ensuring access to justice while strengthening the rule of law: Ensuring the implementation of constitutional and legal texts protecting human rights and public freedoms, regardless of their backgrounds and orientations, as ensuring equality of rights contributes to a sense of justice and fairness. It is also important to establish mechanisms that ensure that all citizens receive justice and that legal and judicial bodies are impartial, as legal systems that protect individual rights contribute to achieving social cohesion. The state must ensure the preservation of the rule of law and provide a fair legal system for all citizens. Effective legal frameworks contribute to strengthening a sense of justice and equality.
5. Implement trauma-informed approaches and build conflict resolution mechanisms: Identify and address the impact of historical trauma on communities. Trauma-informed approaches in policies and programmes contribute to healing and resilience and then work to develop effective mechanisms to resolve internal conflicts peacefully, address and resolve differences to prevent the escalation of tensions.
6. Facilitate interfaith dialogue: Encourage and facilitate dialogue between different religious communities to promote understanding, tolerance and cooperation. Joint interfaith initiatives can bridge gaps and build common ground.
7. Implement social programmes and encourage civic engagement: Provide social programmes that meet the needs of vulnerable population groups. These programmes can help reduce social inequality, contribute to social cohesion, create opportunities for civic engagement and community participation, and enable citizens to participate effectively in decision-making processes and community projects.
8. Encouraging social innovation and volunteerism: Supporting and promoting initiatives and projects that aim to find creative

solutions to various social challenges and problems. This includes encouraging ideas and projects that use technology and innovation to positively impact society and improve the quality of life of individuals. Initiatives that encourage social innovation can be very diverse and include a wide range of areas such as education, healthcare, sustainable development, social communication, economic stimulation, and others. It is important not to forget the importance of promoting a culture of volunteerism and charitable work, as active community participation in volunteer work strengthens social ties.

9. Youth participation and facilitating intergenerational and gender dialogue: Investing in programmes that empower and engage youth, as providing opportunities for education, employment, and civic participation can contribute to shaping a bright future for Iraq, and will enhance understanding and cooperation between different generations as dialogue between generations and between genders contributes to building a more inclusive and cohesive society.
10. Strengthening family and community support systems: Strong family and community support networks contribute to the well-being and resilience of individuals and enhance comprehensive social cohesion.
11. Promote responsible media: Encourage responsible journalism that promotes understanding and avoids divisive discourse. Media literacy programmes can help citizens evaluate information critically.
12. Address economic disparities: Implement policies that address economic disparities and create opportunities for all citizens. Economic development contributes to a sense of shared prosperity⁽¹⁾.

(1) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", November 2022.

13. Promote shared environmental goals: Encourage shared environmental goals and sustainable practices. A collective commitment to environmental responsibility can foster a sense of common responsibility.
14. Improving education systems: Reform education to promote equality, diversity and a shared national identity, and ensure that curricula reflect Iraq's rich cultural and religious diversity.
15. Engaging in international cooperation: Cooperating with international organisations and neighbouring countries to share best practices and resources and supporting initiatives that enhance social cohesion.
16. Supporting artistic and cultural initiatives and preserving heritage and languages: Artistic and cultural activities can serve as bridges between communities, and supporting these initiatives enhances shared experiences, and the importance of protecting, supporting and celebrating efforts to preserve Iraq's rich cultural heritage, as preserving culture contributes to strengthening a sense of identity and continuity. It is essential to consider how to adopt language policies that respect and value linguistic diversity, as policies that respect languages other than Arabic and Kurdish contribute to a sense of belonging to linguistic minority groups.
17. Digital inclusion and access to information: Leveraging technology for communication and digital inclusion, ensuring that technological progress contributes to bridging gaps, or at least narrowing them, rather than creating more divisions, and ensuring that all citizens have equal access to information, as equality in information promotes understanding and helps combat misinformation.

Addressing these additional factors requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort that includes all stakeholders and those concerned with building society and the state. Designing interventions that are appropriate to the specific needs and dynamics of Iraqi society will contribute to

developing more effective strategies to strengthen social cohesion. The success of these initiatives depends on collaborative efforts that include governance, civil society, religious leaders, educational institutions, and the international community. It is essential to recognise the unique context of Iraq and design strategies to address specific challenges and opportunities within the country⁽¹⁾.

3.5. The path to Progress – Population Growth

Over the past two centuries of Iraq's history, demographic shifts have profoundly impacted the country's social, political, and economic landscape. These shifts have shaped the dynamics of Iraqi society in multifaceted ways.

Understanding these demographic changes and shifts is essential for policymakers, planners, and stakeholders to address challenges, capitalise on opportunities, and promote sustainable development and inclusive growth in Iraq. These major shifts have reshaped the contours of Iraqi identity and community life, ushering in a new era of complexity and diversity. Some of the key challenges and impacts are:

- **Urbanisation and Internal Migration:** Over the past two centuries, Iraq has experienced significant urbanisation, with an increasing proportion of the population migrating from rural areas to cities. This rapid urban growth has led to the expansion of urban centres, the development of infrastructure, and the emergence of new social and economic dynamics in urban areas. Internal migration has been driven by various factors, including economic opportunities, conflict, displacement, and government policies. Development disparities between regions, such as the oil-rich south and the less developed north, have fuelled

(1) "The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education in Iraq, Central and Regional, for the Years 2011-2020," Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012.

internal migration patterns, leading to population movements within the country.

- National, Ethnic and Religious Composition: Demographic shifts have also affected the national, ethnic and religious composition of Iraq. The country is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians and others. Migration patterns, political developments and conflicts have affected the distribution and representation of these groups within Iraq, contributing to tensions and identity politics dynamics.

The country has witnessed several patterns of migration and population distribution as a result of political, economic and social developments. For example, take the case of Kirkuk Governorate or Nineveh Governorate, which witnessed, not long ago, a large migration of Kurds, Turkmen and Assyrians as a result of internal conflicts, displacement or as a result of ISIS/Daesh terrorist crimes. This change in population distribution has affected the political and social representation of these groups within Iraq, leading to tensions and conflicts over identity and belonging.

- Political representation: Changes in demographic patterns, particularly shifts in the distribution of ethnic and religious groups, have implications for political representation and power dynamics within Iraq. Discussions about minority rights, electoral systems, and decentralisation efforts reflect the complex interaction between demographic factors in shaping political institutions and governance structures.
- Demographic dividends and challenges and the youth bulge: Demographic shifts, including changes in fertility rates, mortality rates and age structures, have presented opportunities and challenges for Iraq. While declining fertility rates may offer the potential for

a demographic dividend by increasing the working-age population relative to dependents, they also pose challenges related to population aging, health care and social welfare. On the other hand, the youth bulge provides opportunities for economic growth, innovation and social development, but it also poses challenges related to youth unemployment, education, equality and social inclusion. Harnessing the potential of youth is essential for Iraq's future prosperity and stability.

- Cultural dynamics: Demographic shifts have affected cultural dynamics within Iraq, leading to the mixing and exchange of cultural practices, traditions and languages between diverse ethnic and religious communities. This cultural diversity enriches Iraq's social fabric, but poses challenges related to intercultural dialogue, identity preservation and social cohesion.
- Infrastructure development and environmental pressures: Demographic shifts, particularly urbanisation and population growth, have increased the demand for infrastructure development in Iraq, including transportation networks, housing, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Meeting the needs of the growing population requires strategic investments in infrastructure to support economic growth, improve quality of life, and ensure social inclusion. On the other hand, population growth and urban expansion put pressure on the natural environment in Iraq, leading to challenges such as pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, and destruction of natural resources. Sustainable urban planning, environmental conservation efforts, and resource management strategies are essential to mitigate the environmental impacts of demographic shifts and enhance environmental resilience⁽¹⁾.

(1) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", No-

- Health and social care systems: Demographic changes, including shifts in population age structures and disease patterns, affect the demand for healthcare services and the effectiveness of health facility systems in Iraq. Meeting healthcare needs, improving access to medical facilities, and enhancing public health interventions are critical to promoting the health and well-being of the population.

On the other hand, these changes, such as population aging or the influx of refugees, pose challenges to social welfare systems in Iraq. Ensuring the provision of social services, including pensions, health care, education, and humanitarian assistance, requires adaptive policies and strategies for allocating resources to meet the evolving needs of diverse population groups⁽¹⁾.

The aforementioned impacts highlight the multifaceted nature of demographic shifts and their far-reaching effects on various aspects of society, the economy, the environment, and governance within Iraq. Addressing the challenges and opportunities arising from demographic changes requires a comprehensive approach and proactive interventions to promote sustainable development and enhance the well-being of all population groups⁽²⁾.

Demographic shifts in Iraq's modern history have shaped its social

vember 2022; Fazil S. & Tartir A. 2023; Héau, L. et al. 2023; Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet 2023, "Iraq", SIPRI- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2023; Bourhrou A. et al. 2022.

- (1) UNHCR Iraq situation overview, (Accessed: 09/03/2024); Iraq: Concluding Statement of the IMF Staff at the End of the 2024 Article IV Consultation Mission, International Monetary Fund, 2024, accessed 9/6/2024.
- (2) WorldData.info - Population growth in Iraq, Updated on July 2024; United Nations Population Fund Fact, page on "Iraq", (Accessed: 06/04/2024); Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation - Central Statistical Organization, (accessed: 6/23/2024); A. Amer 2020; Ministry of Planning and United Nations Population Fund (UNDPA) 2015 Report, "Fertility and Family Planning Trends in Iraq: Challenges and Interventions."

fabric, political dynamics, and economic trajectory. Understanding these demographic trends is crucial for policymakers, planners, and stakeholders to address challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and promote sustainable development and inclusive growth in Iraq.

Let us now try to answer an important question about the huge population increase in Iraq: is it a blessing or a curse? It is possible to look at the huge population increase in Iraq as both a blessing and a challenge, depending on how it is managed and addressed. It is important to consider the potential of the workforce, as population growth can lead to an expanded labour force capable of contributing significantly to economic growth and national development. With the right policies and investments in education and skills training, the expanding workforce can drive innovation, productivity, and entrepreneurship, leading to overall economic prosperity.

While Iraq's population growth presents opportunities for economic and social development, it simultaneously poses significant challenges in areas such as resource management, infrastructure development, governance, and social cohesion. Realizing the potential benefits of this demographic shift requires effective policies and strategic investments. Without such measures, the country risks facing substantial social and political instability⁽¹⁾.

(1) WorldData.info - Population growth in Iraq, Updated on July 2024; United Nations Population Fund Fact, page on "Iraq", (accessed: 06/04/2024); Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation - Central Statistical Organization, (accessed: 6/23/2024); A. Amer 2020; Ministry of Planning and United Nations Population Fund (UNDPA) 2015 Report, "Fertility and Family Planning Trends in Iraq: Challenges and Interventions."

3.6. The Path to Progress – Creating New Positive Narratives

Creating new positive narratives in Iraq to improve social cohesion would ideally focus on strengthening citizenship and a sense of Iraqi nationalism, recognising diversity, and promoting shared values. The specific content of these narratives should address the unique challenges and opportunities within the cultural, religious, and historical context of Iraq.

Below are potential themes and elements that could be incorporated into much needed new narratives:

1. Unity in diversity: Emphasising the richness of cultural and religious diversity in Iraq, viewing it as a source of strength, highlighting the contributions of different communities to the collective identity of Iraqis, promoting narratives that emphasise the importance of religious harmony, emphasising shared values across religious lines, and showcasing examples of interfaith cooperation locally and internationally.
2. Shared history and heritage: Developing narratives that celebrate shared historical experiences, focusing on common threads that connect different communities, and showcasing historical moments that reflect bright images of cooperation and coexistence.
3. National pride: Instilling a sense of national pride that transcends individual national, ethnic or religious affiliations, focusing on collective achievements, and the possibility of building a unified and prosperous Iraq, while developing a sense of civic responsibility and participation. Narratives must encourage effective participation in building society and enhance the sense of ownership in the development of Iraqi society.
4. Youth empowerment: Highlighting the role of youth as agents of positive change. Narratives should inspire the younger generation and enable them to contribute to the development of society,

regardless of their background⁽¹⁾.

5. Social justice and inclusion: Advocating for narratives that advocate for social justice and inclusion, addressing issues of inequality and discrimination, promoting discourses that stand against the marginalisation of any community, segment or sect, developing narratives that acknowledge historical injustices and promote reconciliation, and emphasising the importance of recovery and moving forward as a unified nation, especially when there is a history of divisions and violent conflicts.

The term 'healing wounds' refers to efforts aimed at overcoming conflict and reconciling opposing or warring parties. This process involves acknowledging historical grievances, working to repair relationships, and striving to achieve lasting peace. Addressing this issue is particularly sensitive, as it necessitates that conflicting Iraqi parties confront traditional narratives and engage with history openly and honestly, a process that may require relinquishing long-held and deeply entrenched positions.

It is necessary to acknowledge that developing narratives that acknowledge historical grievances means changing the prevailing narratives and looking at events and history from a new perspective that allows for reconciliation and building bridges of trust between the conflicting parties⁽²⁾.

6. Resilience in adversity: Showcasing stories of resilience in times of conflict and adversity, and highlighting the stories of communities that come together, support each other, and rebuild after challenges.
7. Environmental stewardship: Integrating narratives that emphasise the importance of environmental stewardship, as a shared commitment to environmental sustainability can transcend cultural and religious differences.

(1) M. Hijazi 2008.

(2) A. al-Wardi 1995: 262-271.

8. 8- Inclusive education: Advocating for narratives that support inclusive education, demonstrating the value of diverse perspectives in shaping a comprehensive understanding of history, culture and society, and recognising the role of technology in enhancing communication and understanding, as narratives can focus on the positive aspects of digital communication, in bringing people from different backgrounds together.
9. Community collaboration: Highlighting stories of successful community collaboration and initiatives, which illustrate the positive outcomes of diverse groups working together.
10. Economic prosperity for all: Developing narratives that promote inclusive economic policies, emphasising the importance of fair opportunities for all communities to contribute to and benefit from economic prosperity.
11. Celebrating cultural expressions: Encouraging narratives that celebrate the rich fabric of Iraqi culture, including language, literature, arts and traditional customs, as cultural expressions can serve as a unifying force.

It is important to note that creating new positive narratives should be a collaborative effort, involving stakeholders and interested parties in general, including community leaders, teachers, artists, and representatives of different communities, and these narratives should be dynamic, adaptable to changing circumstances, and evolving with the continuous development of the Iraqi social fabric.

3,7. The path to progress –Reform Gradual or Else?

3,7,1. Is gradual reform enough?

Does Iraq need a new revolution to rebuild politics and society quickly? Or does it need only gradual reform, and to give reform initiatives time to create its effect? The answer depends on a range of factors, including the country's current circumstances, the aspirations of its people, and the viability of various approaches. It is therefore essential to take several key considerations into account.

The first consideration is related to the current situation. If Iraq continues to face widespread corruption, political pressure, social injustice, economic difficulties, and foreign interventions, the people may feel the need for radical change. In such cases, the call for a new revolution to reform the existing system and address systemic and structural issues in the political system may gain more attention and urgency.

The second consideration is related to the societal desire for stability. If Iraqis prioritise stability and fear the potential chaos and violence that may accompany revolutionary unrest, they may prefer a more gradual approach to reform. Gradual reform will allow for gradual changes, take longer, and can address immediate concerns while reducing the risk of instability⁽¹⁾.

There are those who give priority to the capacity to change, that is, the extent to which the current political system and institutions are able to enact impactful reforms, also plays a crucial role. If the system is entrenched and resistant to change, revolution may be seen as necessary

(1) Relief Web Response (RW Response) is a specialised digital service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), reports page on "Iraq", (Accessed: 30/04/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024; United Nations Population Fund 2018, "National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2018-2030)"; H. Bozarslan 2015; D. C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

to break the status quo and usher in a new era of governance. However, if there are channels for peaceful reform and dialogue, gradual reform efforts may instead be pursued.

The level of public participation and involvement in the political process is another factor to consider. If there is widespread disillusionment with the political establishment and a strong popular movement calling for change, revolution may be seen as a means of mobilising people's power and bringing about transformative change. Conversely, if there is a lack of popular mobilisation or a preference for stability, gradual reform may be more acceptable.

Finally, it is crucial to consider international dynamics, as external factors particularly the positions of regional and global actors exert a significant influence on the Iraqi context and can shape the choice between revolution and reform. Support from the international community for peaceful transitions and reform initiatives may promote gradual change, reducing the likelihood of revolutionary upheaval.

The history of revolutions, uprisings and coups in Iraq goes back many times and is characterised by major political and social transformations. The most prominent of these events are: (1920, 1936, 1941, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2019, i.e.) at a rate of a major political change once every decade⁽¹⁾.

The nature of these revolutions, uprisings and coups varies according to the historical, political and social circumstances at each stage. It is noted that the Iraqi people may tend to revolt under conditions of injustice, oppression and political corruption, especially in times when governments lack legitimacy, transparency and rampant corruption. However, the Iraqi people may also be hesitant to resort to revolution and violence as mechanisms for change due to fears of security deterioration and economic turmoil that may result from them⁽²⁾.

(1) Dodge T. & Simon S. (Eds.) 2003; F.K. Nazmi et al. 2020.

(2) "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA.

As for the uprisings in Iraq, it refers to popular mass protest movements that aim to express anger and dissatisfaction with the political, economic and social situation in the country. These uprisings differ from revolutions in character, scope and goal, as they are characterised by informal organisation without central leadership, and the lack of a clear political programme. Uprisings are characterised by self-organisation and broad popular participation that are often directed against the ruling authority and the existing political system, with aspirations for change and reform. Although some uprisings may succeed in achieving some gains, achieving radical change remains a major challenge, given the complexities and overlap of the political, economic, social and security situation in Iraq⁽¹⁾.

As for gradual reform, some individuals and groups may see it as the most stable and feasible option at times, as revolutions or uprisings can lead to chaos and unrest, which increases the challenges facing Iraq. However, the success of gradual reform depends on the government's ability to meet citizens' demands and implement political and economic reforms effectively⁽²⁾.

Ultimately, the choice of Iraqis for a new revolution or gradual reform depends on a complex interaction of factors, including the prevailing social, security, economic and political conditions, popular sentiments, institutional capacity, and external influences, not to mention the positions of political forces, religious authority, elites and the street. Each of the two approaches has its risks and challenges, and the choice between them will depend on the unique circumstances and dynamics of the Iraqi context⁽³⁾.

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- (1) Pugh C. et al. 2020; USAID-TARABOT, Iraq Administrative Reform Project Annual Report 2013, October 2013, (accessed: 02/05/2024); Dodge T. & Simon S. (Eds.) 2003; A. al-Haidari 2015.
 - (2) USAID-TARABOT, "Iraq Administrative Reform Project Annual Report 2013", October 2013, (accessed: 02/05/2024).
 - (3) Mawlawi al-, A. 2020.

3,7,2. The New Republic - A Necessity or a Luxury?

The call for a "new republic" as a solution to Iraq's challenges and legacy is a complex proposition that requires careful consideration of the country's political, social, and historical context. While some may argue that establishing a new form of government could address long-standing issues and pave the way for positive change, others may have reservations or alternative views about how best to address Iraq's challenges.

The call for a "new republic" may imply a fundamental restructuring of the Iraqi political system, which could include drafting a new or significantly amended constitution, establishing new institutions, and redefining the relationship between the state and its citizens, and between the governorates and the political capital. Proponents of this approach may argue that a fresh start is needed to break from the past and build a more inclusive, just, democratic, and accountable governance framework.

However, the transition to a new republic is not without risks and complexities, and will require overcoming many political, legal, administrative, and logistical challenges, as well as addressing the deep-rooted divisions and power dynamics within Iraqi society. Moreover, there may be different visions and priorities among Iraqis regarding the shape and nature of the new republic, leading to potential conflicts and disagreements⁽¹⁾.

In addition, it is necessary to consider the broader regional and international context in which Iraq operates, including geopolitical dynamics, external influences, and regional rivalries, as any major political change within Iraq may have far-reaching implications for regional stability and security, which requires careful management and handling.

It can be concluded that the question of whether the establishment of a 'new republic' represents the most feasible and effective solution to Iraq's challenges remains a subject of ongoing debate and deliberation among Iraqis. Advancing this vision will require extensive dialogue, consensus-

(1) A. al-Wardi 1994: 113-131.

building, and cooperation among all stakeholders in order to chart a path forward that genuinely reflects the aspirations and interests of the entire Iraqi population⁽¹⁾.

3.8. The Path to Progress – Reform and Social Engineering

Social reform in Iraq is an urgent necessity to achieve social balance and stability, in light of the increasing challenges facing the country, noting that the process of social engineering aims to reshape social relations and institutions, in line with the values of justice, equality and development.

Below, an examination will be presented on the key actors responsible for social engineering, the mechanisms through which influence is exerted, and the reasons behind the urgent need for social engineering in Iraq. Furthermore, the discussion will explore how social engineering can serve as an effective tool for achieving comprehensive reforms and strengthening social cohesion.

3.8.1. Those Responsible for Social Engineering

In a turbulent society such as Iraq, the responsibility for social engineering falls on multiple actors, including:

- Government institutions: Government institutions play an important role in shaping social policies, implementing development programmes, and regulating societal norms and behaviours. They are responsible for creating and implementing strategies that aim to enhance social cohesion, economic development, and political stability, including initiatives related to education, healthcare, infrastructure, employment, and social care.
- Political leaders: Political leaders have the power to influence public discourse, set national agendas, and mobilise resources to

(1) L. al-Faily 2021.

achieve specific social goals. They play a critical role in promoting inclusive governance, encouraging dialogue among diverse groups, and addressing grievances and inequalities within society. Effective leadership can help build and instil trust and a sense of unity among citizens.

- Civil society organisations: These include non-governmental organisations, community groups, and advocacy networks. They play a vital role in promoting social change, defending the rights and interests of marginalised groups, and often work at the grassroots level to address social issues, provide services to vulnerable populations, and enable communities to participate in decision-making processes.
- Educational institutions: They play a major role in shaping values, attitudes, and behaviours among individuals and communities. They are responsible for transferring knowledge, enhancing critical thinking skills, promoting tolerance and diversity, and instilling values and civic responsibilities in future generations. High-quality learning is essential for promoting social cohesion, economic mobility, and democratic participation.
- Religious and cultural leaders: Religious and cultural leaders have a significant influence on societal norms, values, and practices. They play a crucial role in shaping ethical frameworks, mediating conflicts, and promoting social cohesion within societies. Religious institutions and cultural traditions can serve as platforms for promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual respect among diverse religious and ethnic groups.
- International community: The international community, including intergovernmental organisations, donor agencies, and foreign governments, can provide support and resources for social engineering efforts in societies in need of recovery, such as Iraq. They can

provide technical assistance, financial aid, and diplomatic support to strengthen governance systems, promote human rights, and address the underlying causes of conflict and instability⁽¹⁾.

- Media and communication channels: Media and communication channels have the power to shape public opinion, influence societal norms, and disseminate information to a wide audience. Responsible and ethical journalism can promote transparency, accountability, and public awareness of social issues, while irresponsible or biased reporting can exacerbate divisions and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Individual citizens: Ultimately, individual citizens also have a responsibility to contribute to social engineering efforts within their communities and society as a whole. This includes engaging in constructive dialogue, respecting the rights and dignity of others, participating in civic activities, and advocating for positive change. Active citizenship is essential to fostering a culture of democracy, tolerance, and social responsibility.
- Community leaders: Community leaders, including tribal elders, clan leaders, and neighbourhood representatives, often have a significant influence on social dynamics and community cohesion, and can act as mediators, facilitators, and supporters of grassroots initiatives aimed at addressing local concerns and promoting solidarity within communities.
- Academic and research institutions: Academic institutions and research organisations can contribute to social engineering efforts

(1) The Amnesty International 2024, "The State of the World's Human Rights", p. 206; The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024; International Monetary Fund 2024, "Iraq: IMF Staff Concluding Statement at the End of the 2024 Article IV Mission," (accessed 9/6/2024).

by drawing on research, analysis, and policy recommendations. They can generate knowledge on social issues, identify best practices, and inform evidence-based decision-making processes at local, national, and international levels.

- Youth and student movements: Youth and student movements are often at the forefront of social change and activism in troubled societies. Young people can mobilise their peers, raise awareness about pressing issues, and advocate for political and social reforms. Their energy, creativity, and representation can catalyse positive transformations within society.
- Professional associations: Trade unions and professional bodies represent the interests of specific professional groups and sectors. They can play a role in advocating for labour rights, professional standards, and ethical practices, as well as contributing to broader social and economic development agendas.
- Charitable foundations: Charitable foundations and organisations can provide funding, technical assistance, and capacity building support for social engineering initiatives in troubled communities. They often focus on addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, and injustice, and promoting sustainable development outcomes.
- International non-governmental organisations (NGOs): International NGOs work in troubled societies to provide humanitarian assistance, promote human rights, and support peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. They can complement and enhance local initiatives, drawing on global networks, expertise, and resources to address complex social challenges.
- Iraqi communities abroad: Iraqi communities abroad, made up of individuals who have migrated from troubled societies to other countries, can play an important role in social engineering efforts.

They often maintain strong ties to their countries of origin, contributing remittances, expertise, and support for development projects, peacebuilding initiatives, and cultural exchange programmes.

In short, social engineering in a society in need of recovery such as Iraq requires a collaborative and multi-dimensional approach, involving (government institutions, political leaders, civil society organisations, educational institutions, religious and cultural leaders, the international community, the media, and individual citizens); It requires concerted efforts to address fundamental social, economic and political challenges, promote inclusive governance, and build resilience to conflict and instability, and each of these actors may bring unique perspectives. The resources and capabilities of social engineering efforts in troubled societies such as Iraq, and by collaborating and coordinating their efforts, can collectively contribute to building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable societies that address the root causes of conflict, inequality and instability⁽¹⁾.

3.8.2. Mechanisms of influence for social engineering

Social engineering refers to the manipulation or influence of individuals, groups or communities to achieve specific outcomes or goals. It includes various techniques, strategies and tactics aimed at shaping behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and social norms. Social engineering can influence society through several mechanisms:

- Propaganda and media manipulation: Social engineering often involves the dissemination of propaganda and the manipulation of media channels to shape public perceptions, opinions and attitudes. Through selective information, biased narratives and persuasive messages, individuals and institutions seek to influence public opinion and behaviour on specific issues or ideologies.

(1) The Centre for Preventive Action 2024, "Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker Instability in Iraq", Updated February 13, 2024.

- Education adaptation: Formal education systems and informal socialisation processes play a crucial role in social engineering by instilling values, beliefs, and norms in individuals from an early age. Governments, religious institutions, and ideological groups can use curricula, textbooks, and cultural activities to promote particular ideologies, identities, and worldviews.
- Social control mechanisms: Social engineering relies on various forms of social control, including laws, regulations, norms, and informal sanctions, to regulate behaviour and maintain social order. By enforcing rules and norms, authorities and institutions exert influence over individuals and communities, shaping their actions and choices.
- Cyber development: Technological advances have provided new avenues for social engineering, including the use of algorithms, social media platforms, and surveillance systems to monitor, manipulate, and influence human behaviour. Targeted advertising, algorithmic recommendations, and online echo chambers can reinforce existing beliefs, polarise opinions, and shape consumer preferences.
- Investment in cultural production: Cultural products, such as literature, art, music, film, and television, serve as influential tools for social engineering, shaping collective identities, values, and aspirations. Governments, corporations, and interest groups may promote specific cultural narratives and representations to advance their agendas or influence public discourse.
- Psychological persuasion techniques: Social engineering may use psychological persuasion based on ion techniques, such as framing, priming, and cognitive biases, to manipulate decision-making processes and influence individual behaviour, exploiting cognitive vulnerabilities and emotional triggers. Social engineering can influence opinions, induce compliance, and promote desired outcomes.

- Community and social networks: Social engineering often operates through social networks, communities, and personal relationships, leveraging social influence and peer pressure to shape behaviour and attitudes. By targeting influential individuals, opinion leaders, and social groups, social engineering can spread messages, mobilise support, and motivate collective action.
- Perception management: Social engineering often manipulates perceptions and reality to create a desired narrative or image. This can include shaping public opinion through selective information, framing events in a certain light, or even fabricating lies. By controlling the narrative, social engineers can influence how individuals perceive themselves, their communities, and the world around them, ultimately shaping their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Perception management techniques may include strategies such as "gaslighting," where individuals question their perceptions and memories, or promoting conspiracy theories to sow confusion and distrust.
- Behavioural conditioning: Social engineering may use behavioural conditioning techniques to shape desired behaviours and outcomes. This can include rewards for conformity or punishments for deviance, which prompt individuals to internalise and adhere to social norms. Techniques such as operant conditioning, where behaviours are reinforced or extinguished with rewards and punishments, are commonly used in social engineering to modify behaviour.
- Socialisation processes: Social engineering works with the help of socialisation processes that occur within families, peer groups, and other social institutions to care for the human being and his development in his social environment, and requires that individuals absorb the societal norms, values, and roles that guide their behaviour and interactions. Social engineering may seek to influence the development of the social human being by promoting certain ideologies

or narratives within educational institutions, religious organisations, and cultural groups.

- Exploitation of crises: Social engineering may exploit crises, such as natural disasters, economic recessions, or political unrest, to advance its agendas or implement changes that would not be acceptable under normal circumstances, and by taking advantage of fear, uncertainty, and the desire for stability. Social engineering can advance policies, systems, or social changes that may not have been possible in times of stability.
- Psychological warfare: In times of conflict or war, social engineering takes a more overt form, relying on psychological warfare tactics. These tactics aim to undermine the enemy's morale, sow dissent within opposition groups, and manipulate public opinion to gain strategic advantages. Psychological warfare may include propaganda campaigns, disinformation operations, or psychological operations (PSYOPS) aimed at influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of the target population.
- Surveillance and control: Advances in surveillance technologies allow social engineering to monitor and control populations more effectively. Surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras, facial recognition software, and digital tracking tools, allow authorities to monitor and regulate individual behaviour. The threat of surveillance can also serve as a form of social control, shaping behaviour through fear of surveillance and punishment for deviance.
- Normalisation of deviance: Social engineering may normalise some behaviours or attitudes that were previously considered deviant or unacceptable, and through gradual desensitisation and incremental changes, they seek to change societal norms and values over time, and by framing deviant behaviours as acceptable or even desirable. Social

engineering can change the moral compass of society, making it more receptive to their agendas or goals.

In general terms, social engineering comes into effect within society, through a set of psychological, cultural, technological and institutional mechanisms, which exert influence on individuals, groups and societies, to achieve specific social, political or economic goals⁽¹⁾.

3,8,3. Urgent need for social engineering

The discussion will now turn to the question of why there is a critical need to focus on social engineering in Iraq. Emphasizing social engineering is essential for several key reasons:

Iraq has a complex history and legacy of authoritarian rule, sectarian tensions, and external interference. Social engineering can help address deep-rooted societal issues that have persisted for decades and contributed to instability and conflict.

Iraq is also home to an ethnically and religiously diverse population, comprising different ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Yazidis, Armenians, Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims. Social engineering efforts can promote inclusiveness, tolerance, and respect for diversity, foster social cohesion, and reduce sectarian divisions.

Iraq has faced significant challenges in reconstruction following conflicts, including the Gulf War, the occupation of Iraq, the rise of Qaeda /Daeesh, and most recently the October protests of 2019 and 2020. Social engineering initiatives are essential to rebuilding trust between communities, promoting reconciliation, and addressing the grievances that have fuelled violence⁽²⁾.

(1) M. Al-Shennawy 2012.

(2) Relief Web Response (RW Response) is a specialised digital service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),

With a large youth population, investing in youth empowerment social engineering programmes can enable Iraqi youth to become active participants in shaping their country's future, providing education, employment opportunities, and platforms for civic engagement. Social engineering can channel its energy toward positive social change.

As Iraq continues its transition to democracy, social engineering can strongly support the process of democratic development, the development of democratic institutions, civil society organisations, and a culture of political participation, including the promotion of democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law.

It can be concluded that social engineering is essential for constructing a more stable and prosperous Iraq over the long term. By addressing the root causes of social, economic, and political challenges, social engineering provides a foundation for sustainable development, peace, and lasting prosperity.

A focus on social engineering in Iraq is therefore essential to address historical grievances, promote social cohesion, empower youth, promote democratic values, and enhance long-term stability and prosperity⁽¹⁾.

reports page on "Iraq", (Accessed: 30/04/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; Allawi A.A. 2008; United Nations Population Fund 2018, "National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence 2018-2030"; F.K. Nazmi et al. 2020; H. Bozarslan 2015; D.C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

(1) M. Hijazi 2008.

3.9. The Path to Progress – Reform and the State

Reform in the Iraqi state is an imperative necessity to ensure sustainable development and social and political stability. Over the decades, Iraq has suffered from political fluctuations and economic crises, which made the state the focus of citizens' attention, in the search for security, stability and basic rights. However, this heavy reliance on the state has led to several problems, the most important of which is the reduction of the role of civil society and the strengthening of sectarian and tribal conflicts when the state fails to meet the needs of its citizens⁽¹⁾.

3.9.1. Reliance on the state

As for the reasons for the abnormal reliance of Iraqis on the state more than other non-governmental community bodies, they are due to several reasons and interconnected factors, including:

1. History of centralisation of governance: Iraq has a history of strong centralised governance, dating back to the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia. Throughout history, central authority has played an important role in organising society, providing security, and managing public services. This legacy has contributed to a culture in which the state is viewed as the primary provider of resources and services.
2. Authoritarian rule: Decades of authoritarian rule by rulers such as Saddam Hussein reinforced the idea of a strong state that controlled all aspects of public life. At that time, state institutions were centralised and militarised, and citizens often relied on the state for employment, welfare, and protection. This legacy of centralised control has continued, shaping citizens' perceptions of the state as a central authority, even though the latest constitution calls for decentralisation.

(1) The Amnesty International 2024: p. 206; Dodge T. 2012; Mawlawi al-, A. 2020; A. Al-Wardi 2007; A. Al-Mawlawi and G. Al-Manhalawi 2024.

3. Resource dependence: The Iraqi economy is heavily dependent on oil revenues, which the state controls and distributes; as a result, most Iraqis rely on the state for employment, subsidies, and social services. The state's control over major economic resources enhances its role as the main provider of livelihood and well-being for a large number of citizens⁽¹⁾.
4. Weakness of civil society: Iraq has historically provided limited space for independent civil society organisations and popular movements due to political repression and conflict. Despite the growth of civil society in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, it remains relatively weak compared to the state. As a result, citizens may turn to the state, rather than civil society, as the main means of addressing their needs and grievances, noting that the sphere of action of civil society organisations in society is necessary to complement the role of the state and not replace it.
5. Security concerns: Iraq has faced major security challenges, including terrorism, insurgency, and sectarian violence. In such an environment, citizens may look to the state for protection and security and view it as the main guarantor of stability and order, and that the state's role in maintaining security enhances its importance in the eyes of the population.
6. Social contract: There is a perceived social contract between the state and citizens, whereby the state is expected to provide welfare and security to the population, in exchange for loyalty and obedience. This social contract, although often implicit, reinforces citizens' dependence on the state to meet basic needs and services.
7. Cultural norms: Iraqi society may have cultural norms that prioritise collective welfare and social cohesion, which may lead to reliance on central institutions such as the state to provide the

(1) International Energy Agency 2019, "Iraq's Energy Sector, A Roadmap to a Brighter Future", April 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010.

public interest. Concepts such as mediation (communication) and shura (consultation) may influence individuals to seek assistance and resolve problems by relying on official channels, including government agencies.

8. Lack of alternatives: In many parts of Iraq, especially in rural and marginalised areas, there may be limited alternatives to the services and support provided by the state, and private sector development, community organisations, and non-governmental entities may be underdeveloped or inaccessible, making the state the main viable option for meeting basic needs.
9. Political patronage: Political patronage networks, often linked to sectarian, ethnic, or partisan affiliations, can play an important role in the distribution of resources and access to opportunities. Citizens may rely on political leaders and parties allied with the state to secure benefits, services, and protection, which reinforces their dependence on state institutions.
10. Improving the level of education: The education system and state-controlled media in Iraq may promote discourses that emphasise the importance of the state in building, developing, and securing the nation. From a young age, Iraqis may be socialised to view the state as the ultimate authority and provider, which shapes their attitudes and behaviours toward state institutions.
11. Historical trauma: Iraq has witnessed decades of conflict, oppression, and unrest, which can leave lasting negative psychological consequences on individuals and societies. In times of uncertainty and insecurity, people may seek refuge in institutions that are seen as stable and strong, such as the state, as a source of protection and stability.
12. Legal Framework: The legal framework in Iraq may enhance the state's authority and centralisation in governance and public life. Laws and regulations may grant broad powers to state institutions,

while limiting the independence and influence of non-state actors, further entrenching the state's dominance over society.

The above factors interact in complex ways to shape Iraqis' dependence on the state, affecting their attitudes, behaviours, and expectations regarding governance, welfare, and security. Addressing this dependence requires comprehensive reforms that promote decentralisation, accountability, the rule of law, and the empowerment of non-state actors, which fosters a more balanced and resilient societal ecosystem⁽¹⁾.

3.9.2. Alternatives to the state

When the state is unable to provide security and basic services, citizens resort to traditional social structures such as clans and sects. There are several factors that push individuals to rally around these structures, and how clans and sects can be alternative sources of support that provide social and economic protection. In recent years, Iraqi society has experienced a range of significant developments, including:

The emergence and rise of non-governmental organisations, community groups, and popular movements to fill gaps in service provision and defend the rights and interests of marginalised groups. These organisations often operate independently of the state and may gain the trust of frustrated citizens.

In certain areas, there has been a marked rise in the significance of tribal and religious networks, which play a crucial role in providing social support, resolving conflicts, and maintaining order. These networks often serve as alternative sources of governance and protection for communities, particularly in contexts where the state is perceived as absent or ineffective.

On the other hand, the absence of formal state institutions has led to the flourishing of informal economies, including street vendors, informal labour markets, and black-market activities. While these economies

(1) Dodge T. 2012; A. al-Mawlawi and G. al-Manhalawi 2024.

provide livelihoods for a wide range of Iraqis, they also operate outside legal frameworks and may exacerbate social inequality.

Amidst this rise of alternative actors to the state, Iraqis are receiving support from international organisations, foreign governments, and humanitarian agencies to address humanitarian crises, rebuild infrastructure, and strengthen governance. Citizens may look to these external actors for assistance and guidance when state institutions fail to meet their needs.

In general, the loss of trust in state institutions can lead to increased reliance on alternative sources of support and governance, including civil society organisations, traditional networks, informal economies, and international actors. However, building trust in the state remains essential to enhance stability, inclusiveness and prosperity in Iraq.

3.9.3. Remedies to reduce dependence on the state

On the other hand, addressing the crisis of Iraqi dependence on the state requires a multi-faceted approach that enhances individual empowerment, community resilience, and the transition towards a more equal and participatory society. The following are some suggestions and solutions to help Iraqis take measures to solve this problem:

Encouraging the growth and empowerment of civil society organisations, community groups, and grassroots initiatives that can provide social services, defend citizens' rights, and enhance community resilience independently of state support, and enable citizens to participate effectively in governance, advocacy, and community development efforts to hold government institutions accountable and formulate public policies.

Investing in initiatives that promote economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and job creation at the local level, providing training, access to capital, and supporting business development; To help individuals and communities generate sustainable livelihoods and reduce dependence on government social welfare programmes, economic empowerment can be enhanced by encouraging public-private sector collaboration to deliver

essential services and meet community needs. Public-private partnerships can leverage the strengths of both sectors to improve service delivery, infrastructure development, and economic growth.

Prioritise investments in education, skills training, capacity building, and human capital development to enable individuals to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy. Equipping citizens with knowledge and skills enhances their employability, productivity, and resilience to economic shocks.

Supporting the growth of social enterprises and entrepreneurial projects that address social and environmental challenges, while generating sustainable sources of income. Social entrepreneurship enables individuals to create a positive social impact and build resilient communities from within. Here, it is also necessary to think about how to strengthen and expand social welfare programmes to provide a basic level of support and assistance to vulnerable population groups, including the poor, the elderly and the disabled, and to ensure that social services are available, equitable and responsive to the needs of all segments of society⁽¹⁾.

Prioritising gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives, allowing them to fully participate in economic, social and political life. Empowering women strengthens families, communities and the economy, leading to more inclusive and resilient societies, as well as gender equality. It is essential to explore ways to facilitate dialogue and cooperation across generations, thereby leveraging the wisdom, experience, and energy of diverse age groups. Such initiatives are crucial for fostering social cohesion, mutual support, and cultivating a shared sense of collective responsibility for the well-being of society.

Likewise with promoting transparency, accountability and integrity in government institutions to build public trust, enhance anti-corruption measures, encourage open government initiatives, and ensure that public

(1) Ministry of Planning and World Bank 2018, "Iraq Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018-2022," (accessed 22/3/2024).

resources are managed responsibly and effectively for the benefit of all citizens.

Calling for promoting decentralisation policies that empower local communities and regions to make decisions and manage resources independently. Transferring power from the central government to local entities can enhance innovation, accountability and responsiveness to local needs. Part of the process of promoting decentralisation may be to transfer power and resources to local governments and municipalities to enable them to meet the needs and priorities of their communities more effectively and enable local leaders and institutions to engage citizens in decision-making processes and provide basic services at the grassroots level.

Expanding access to digital technologies and information resources to bridge the digital divide and enable citizens to access information, services and opportunities online. Digital inclusion initiatives can enhance civic engagement, economic participation and social communication.

Promoting a culture of innovation, creativity and problem solving that enables individuals and communities to find new solutions to complex challenges. Investing in research, technology and entrepreneurship can unleash the potential of Iraqi society to drive positive change and transformation.

Integrating environmental sustainability principles into development policies and practices to protect natural resources, mitigate the effects of climate change, and enhance environmental management of society's resilience, contributing to long-term sustainability and well-being.

By adopting these proposals and solutions Iraqis can gradually reduce their dependence on the state and create a more vibrant, resilient and empowered society, where individuals and communities play active roles in shaping their own destinies and contributing to the public good. In addition to continuing to build on their strengths and aspirations, to create a more resilient, inclusive and self-reliant society, where individuals and

communities thrive independently while contributing to the collective prosperity and well-being of the Iraqi people⁽¹⁾.

3,10. The path to progress – The Desired Leadership

3,10,1. Reform and Leadership

Leadership cannot be effective without the person who takes on the reins possessing all the right qualities. The leadership that wants to lead a complicated country like Iraq must represent everyone and not be limited to the ethnic, sectarian or national group to which they belong to only. It must be wise, inspire hope and mobilise citizens, responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, loyal, possess high morals and integrity, cooperate to solve the problems and issues facing Iraqis, not monopolize power, adopt decentralisation as an optimal management method, have flexibility and the ability to adapt and learn from mistakes and address them, resolve conflicts, have the ability to be selfless, harness technology, and achieve development. It must, first and foremost, be courageous and able to make bold and necessary decisions.

By embodying these leadership qualities and styles, Iraqi leaders can inspire confidence, foster unity, and lead their country toward a more stable, prosperous, and inclusive future. When delving into the complex fabric of Iraqi history, one cannot ignore the profound impact of dictatorship on the collective psyche of the nation. Beyond the infamous era of Saddam Hussein, many other authoritarian regimes have cast their shadows on the character of the Iraqi citizen, each leaving his indelible mark on the fabric of society and its collective memory⁽²⁾.

(1) A. al-Mawlawi and G. al-Manhalawi 2024.

(2) Sandell K. 2012; Deng C. et al. 2023; "What is transformational leadership? Understanding the impact of inspirational guidance", University of Massachusetts Global, (Accessed: 05.05.2024); Trevor J. & Hill R. 2012; Karimi S. et al. 2023; "The Transformational Leadership Report", TL Publications 2007, (Accessed: 05.02.2024).

3,10,2. Sistani and Historical Leadership – A Model

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, one of the most influential religious figures in Iraq, is a distinguished contemporary figure who has been able to gain the trust of all segments of Iraqi society, especially through his role in preserving the existence of the state and civil peace. This great man has had a profound impact on Iraqi society in many ways, including:

1. Religious authority and guidance: As a highly respected religious authority within the Shia Muslim community, Grand Ayatollah Sistani has great influence on religious interpretations, practices, and rituals in Iraq. His fatwas and directives on matters of faith, morality, and social behaviour are widely followed by millions of Shia Muslims in Iraq and around the world.
2. Political influence and resolution of many political disputes: Grand Ayatollah Sistani has played a pivotal role in shaping the Iraqi political landscape and mediating political disputes. His interventions have helped resolve political crises, mediate power-sharing agreements, and promote national reconciliation efforts. He has advocated peaceful methods and dialogue for political stability and democratic transformation in Iraq.
3. Promoting democracy and civil rights: Grand Ayatollah Sistani is described as a strong advocate for democracy, human rights, and civil liberties in Iraq. He has called for free and fair elections, the protection of minority rights, and a government accountable to the people. His support for democratic governance has helped Iraq's transition to a more inclusive and representative political system⁽¹⁾.
4. Moral authority and social justice: Grand Ayatollah Sistani is widely regarded as a symbol of moral authority and social justice in Iraq. His emphasis on ethical behaviour, compassion, and solidarity has inspired many Iraqis to engage in charitable activities, community

(1) The Amnesty International 2024: p. 206.

service, and social welfare programmes. His advocacy for the rights of the poor, marginalised, and vulnerable has helped address social inequality and promote social cohesion.

5. Role in religious education and scholarship: Grand Ayatollah Sistani has played a crucial role in religious education and scholarship in Iraq, overseeing religious institutes and religious institutions that train future clerics and scholars. His emphasis on religious tolerance, dialogue, and intellectual inquiry has helped create a more open and diverse religious discourse in Iraqi society.
6. Stabilizing force in times of crisis: During times of political turmoil, conflict, and insecurity, Grand Ayatollah Sistani has been a stabilising force, urging calm, restraint, and unity among Iraqis. His interventions have helped prevent further escalation of violence and sectarian tensions and have fostered national unity and solidarity⁽¹⁾.
7. His distinguished role in fighting ISIS/Daesh and terrorism: The role of Sayyid Ali al-Sistani was of great importance in fighting ISIS/Daesh and terrorist gangs in Iraq. This role was represented in several aspects, including religious issuances and fatwas, and political support for the Iraqi government in its battle against the terrorist ISIS/Daesh. He encouraged cooperation between the various political and societal spectrums to confront the terrorist threat, as well as with social influence. His religious directives and positions had a great impact on the masses, which contributed to enhancing awareness of the danger of extremism and terrorism and strengthening the spirit of resistance against them. Finally, his

(1) Relief Web Response (RW Response) is a specialised digital service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), reports page on "Iraq", (Accessed: 30/04/2024); "The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030", UNFPA; United Nations Population Fund 2018, "National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence 2018-2030"; H. Bozarslan 2015; D. C. North et al. (ed.) 2016.

adoption of humanitarian support, as institutions and organisations affiliated with the religious authority provided humanitarian support and assistance to the displaced and those affected by the actions of ISIS/Daesh, which contributed to alleviating their suffering and strengthening national unity⁽¹⁾.

In general, the influence of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on Iraqi society is multifaceted, and includes religious, political, social and moral dimensions. His leadership helped shape the course of the post-Saddam era in Iraq, and his efforts to establish democracy, reconciliation and social justice in the country.

The shadow that the looming presence of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani has a profound impact on Iraqi politics, and his absence from the scene in Iraq is expected to send waves of change and challenge throughout the country, it will undoubtedly leave a huge void that will impact Iraqi politics and Iraqi society in many ways⁽²⁾.

(1) Sayej C. 2019; Jiyad S. 2023; Khalil L. 2019; The Associated Press 2021, "Shi-ite powerhouse al-Sistani helped shape today's Iraq", published in March 6, 2021; Alshamary M. 2021; Alshamary M. 2021; Slavin B. 2019; Mamouri A. & Khalaji M. 2019; "Sayyid al-Sistani is an exceptional leader who embodies a spirit of creativity in his leadership positions," an article published on the Imam Ali Foundation website/London, (accessed June 7, 2024); A. Al-Rubaie 2022; S. Abdul-Razzaq 2019.

(2) Sayej C. 2019; Jiyad S. 2023; Khalil L. 2019; The Associated Press 2021, "Shi-ite powerhouse al-Sistani helped shape today's Iraq", published in March 6, 2021; Alshamary M. 2021; Alshamary M. 2021; Slavin B. 2019; Mamouri A. & Khalaji M. 2019; "Sayyid al-Sistani is an exceptional leader who embodies a spirit of creativity in his leadership positions," an article published on the Imam Ali Foundation website/London, (accessed June 7, 2024); A. Al-Rubaie 2022; S. Abdul-Razzaq 2019.

3.11. The Path to Progress – Centralisation vs. Decentralisation and National Unity

From the Iraqi perspective, national unity can be defined as a sense of belonging and loyalty to one country, and adherence to a common national identity that unites the different sects, ethnicities, and cultures within Iraq. Accordingly, national unity here means joint work and cooperation among members of society, from all classes and regions, to achieve the interests and well-being of the country.

National unity also means social harmony despite differences, as members of society work towards peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding, despite differences in ideas, beliefs and cultures. It also means commitment to common national values, such as justice, freedom and equality. However, national unity is not limited to political consensus, such as party alliances to form a government; rather, it extends to building a system of government that enjoys legitimacy and inclusiveness and is accepted by different segments of society.

On the other hand, to complete the solutions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and fostering national unity, it is essential to consider the governance choice between centralisation and decentralisation. This decision can significantly influence social cohesion, as both approaches present distinct advantages and challenges. Their impact is contingent on various factors, including the specific context, cultural diversity, and historical background. Below is an overview of how centralisation and decentralisation affect society:

Advantages of centralisation

- A. **Standardisation:** Centralisation can provide a unified approach to governance, ensuring consistency in policies and practices across the country. This standardisation may contribute to a sense of national identity.
- B. **Efficiency:** Centralised decision-making can be more efficient,

particularly in implementing large-scale projects or responding to national crises.

Challenges of centralisation

- A. Marginalisation: Centralisation can marginalise local voices and perspectives, and communities may feel excluded from decision-making processes, leading to feelings of alienation.
- B. Cultural insensitivity: A one-size-fits-all approach may not adequately address cultural diversity within a country, which can lead to cultural insensitivity and dissatisfaction among certain communities.

Centralisation and social cohesion

- A. National unity: Centralisation can contribute to a sense of national unity, by emphasising a common set of values and policies.
- B. Potential alienation: If centralised decision-making ignores the diversity of local cultures and perspectives, this can lead to feelings of alienation among certain groups.

Advantages of decentralisation

- A. Local empowerment: Decentralisation empowers local communities, giving them more control over decision-making processes, which can lead to greater community participation and ownership.
- B. Cultural sensitivity: Local government structures are often better placed to understand and address the unique cultural and social dynamics of their communities.

Challenges of decentralisation

- A. Uneven consistency: Decentralisation can lead to differences in policies and services between regions, and while this allows for flexibility, it can also lead to inconsistencies that can exacerbate social inequality.
- B. Capacity challenges: Some local governments may lack the capacity and resources to effectively manage certain responsibilities, affecting the quality of services provided.

Decentralisation and Social Cohesion

- A. Local Identity: Decentralisation can enhance local identities and foster a sense of belonging among diverse communities.
- B. Potential Fragmentation: On the other hand, if decentralisation leads to significant disparities between regions, it may lead to a fragmented society with varying levels of development and services.

Useful recommendations for decision-makers in the process of achieving national unity:

The Iraqi character represents a unique combination of culture, state, and religion; these three dimensions blend to form the identity of individuals and groups. In light of the long history and current challenges, Iraqi forces today seek to achieve national reconciliation and unity among the people, but achieving national unity requires concrete practical steps and recommendations based on a deep understanding of the relationship between culture, state, and religion, with a focus on the challenges specific to Iraq⁽¹⁾.

Having outlined the advantages of both centralisation and decentralisation, it is crucial to translate this understanding into actionable

(1) Dodge T. 2012.

steps for decision-makers, particularly in their efforts to foster national reconciliation among Iraq's diverse population. Below are practical steps and recommendations aimed at achieving national unity in Iraq, which require:

Reforming the political system by applying decentralisation in a balanced manner; there must be a fair distribution of powers between the central government and the provinces/governorate, while enhancing the ability of the provinces to manage their internal affairs, which can reduce regional tensions and provide a local solution to problems. It is also necessary for this political reform to include a decision to improve transparency and accountability; by strengthening oversight and accountability institutions to ensure the effective and fair use of resources, and applying the transparency system, citizens' confidence in the government will increase.

There is also a need to achieve justice and equality by reforming the judicial system; the judiciary must be independent and impartial, to ensure justice for all, and improving the justice system contributes to the stability of society, as well as combating corruption by adopting a comprehensive national strategy to combat corruption in all governmental and private institutions, as corruption undermines confidence in the state and hinders development.

Strengthening social cohesion is also very important to achieve national unity, and this is achieved through national reconciliation programmes, launching campaigns and initiatives for reconciliation between sects and different ethnic groups, and encouraging dialogue between communities; to enhance mutual understanding. It is also essential to strengthen the national identity by emphasising common denominators among Iraqis, utilising educational curricula and media as key tools to foster a comprehensive sense of national identity.

Any national unity process is not complete unless the developmental, economic and social dimensions are taken into consideration. It is necessary to prioritise the development of infrastructure and invest in related projects to improve service levels and create new employment

opportunities. This will contribute to both economic and social stability, while promoting balanced development through the equitable distribution of resources and wealth across regions. Such measures are essential for ensuring sustainable, comprehensive development and mitigating economic and social disparities.

Reforming the educational system, with the launch of awareness programmes necessary for any national unity programmes; here, developing educational curricula to enhance the values of tolerance, coexistence and acceptance of others is important; Because it will contribute to building an aware generation capable of facing challenges, especially if awareness campaigns are launched to enhance the concept of citizenship and social responsibility among citizens.

The issue of openness to civil society, supporting its organisations, and encouraging them to enhance social cohesion and peaceful coexistence is important because it will contribute to building a strong civil society, and this cannot happen without involving the local community, and enhancing its role in decision-making processes, and determining development priorities, which enhances the sense of ownership and shared responsibility.

National unity cannot be achieved, and the citizen believes in the importance of his role, except after enhancing security and stability, and rebuilding trust between the citizen and the state, by improving security services, and ensuring human rights, which contributes to the stability of society, without forgetting the importance of combating terrorism, and controlling loose weapons, by adopting a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism and extremism, in cooperation with neighbouring countries and the international community, to ensure the security and stability of Iraq.

Achieving a balance between centralisation and decentralisation is one of the most important challenges that Iraq will face, in the matter of consolidating national unity; It will be the starting point for fair distribution between the various powers of the central government and local governments, ensuring balance and enhancing national unity. This cannot

happen without conducting periodic assessments of the effectiveness of decentralised policies and amending them based on results and developments.

Encouraging national dialogue based on national conferences and forums and holding them periodically to discuss national issues. Perhaps common challenges are important and necessary to consolidate national unity, and this requires involving religious and tribal leaders in the national dialogue process; to enhance understanding and cooperation between the various segments of society in general.

Finally, developing social policies and programmes that aim to improve the standard of living. Providing social protection for vulnerable and marginalised groups is also crucial, as it serves as an important component in consolidating national unity. In this context, it is essential to focus on the development of rural and marginalised areas to achieve a developmental balance across the various regions.

Achieving national unity in Iraq requires the cooperation of all parties and hard work to achieve comprehensive reforms in the political, economic and social system. By implementing these practical steps, decision-makers can enhance social cohesion and achieve national reconciliation among the Iraqi people, ensuring a bright and sustainable future for Iraq. Achieving national unity is not just a goal; it is the basis for building a strong and stable state capable of facing challenges and achieving sustainable development⁽¹⁾.

3.12. The path to progress – the Future Path for Iraq?

Looking ahead to the future of Iraq, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexities and challenges that have defined its modern history, alongside the intricate and interconnected political landscape. The following

(1) Mawlawi al-, A. 2020; USAID-TARABOT, "Iraq Administrative Reform Project Annual Report 2013", October 2013, (Accessed: 02/05/2024).

narratives and trends offer potential pathways for the future development of Iraq:

If the political class in Iraq is unable to effectively lead the country along the potential paths outlined above, potential negative scenarios may unfold, including:

Continued instability and conflict, especially with the lack of strong leadership and effective governance. Iraq may face difficulties in addressing fundamental grievances and divisions; This could lead to continued political instability, social unrest, and local conflicts, especially in areas with unresolved legacies or marginalised populations.

Economic stagnation and dependency will also be a natural and expected result of the weak effectiveness of the political class. This could lead to the lack of economic reforms and diversification efforts, to continued dependence on oil revenues, and exposure to global market fluctuations. Economic stagnation, high unemployment rates, and limited opportunities for youth could exacerbate the loss of social and economic equality, leading to discontent and frustration among the population⁽¹⁾.

As for regional fragmentation, it will lead to the loss of the ability to enhance regional cooperation and stability, and to escalating tensions with neighbouring countries, or involvement in regional conflicts, which could lead to further fragmentation of the social fabric in Iraq, and hinder efforts to achieve reconciliation and national unity⁽²⁾.

The same applies to environmental degradation; Without taking proactive measures to address the environment, and with the great

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- (1) International Labour Organization (ILO), "Iraqi Labour Force Survey 2021", (Accessed: 11/06/2024); International Energy Agency 2019, "Iraq's Energy Sector, A Roadmap to a Brighter Future", April 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010; Republic of Iraq, Ministry of planning, "Iraq 2030 Vision", (Accessed: 11/03/2024); USAID-TARABOT, "Iraq Administrative Reform Project Annual Report 2013", October 2013, (Accessed: 02/05/2024).
 - (2) The International Crisis Group 2024, page on "Iraq", (Accessed: 02/07/2024); R. Gatti et al. 2024.

challenges, Iraq may face increasing environmental degradation, water scarcity, and pollution, which may have harmful effects on public health, agricultural productivity, and the general quality of life for Iraqis⁽¹⁾.

As for cultural erosion, the weakness of the political class and the identity crisis, will contribute to the lack of focus on preserving cultural heritage and enhancing knowledge exchange in cultural erosion and the identity crisis among Iraqis, and the loss of traditional practices, heritage sites, and cultural diversity may lead to weakening social cohesion and national identity⁽²⁾.

The weakness of the political class can lead to the separation of youth from society and their radicalisation; especially if opportunities for education, employment, and civic participation remain limited; frustrated youth may become vulnerable to extremism or involvement in criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, and this can pose security challenges and undermine efforts to build a peaceful and inclusive society, not to mention that their frustration may translate into their migration outside Iraq and the loss of their capabilities and youthful energy⁽³⁾.

The consequences of a weak political class include an increase in humanitarian challenges, including migration, especially for the young and the intellectually disabled, which will naturally lead to prolonged instability and economic hardship, in addition to the environmental pressures that lead to increased humanitarian needs and internal displacement, and may also contribute to migration abroad, as individuals seek better opportunities or better refuge in other countries, which puts pressure on regional and international resources.

(1) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", November 2022; Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet 2023, "Iraq", SIPRI-Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2023; Bourhrous A. et al. 2022; Mahmoud S. 2022; Noncommunicable Diseases, WHO/MENA Office Report, 2019.

(2) Muhlberger W. 2023; Sarwar A. 2019; H. Holborn 2010.

(3) M. Hijazi 2008; Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for the year 2023, United Nations, 2024.

Ultimately, there is a risk of increased isolation and dependence of both society and the state at the international level, which could perpetuate challenges in governance, security, and economic development. This may result in international isolation or a reliance on external actors for support, potentially undermining Iraq's sovereignty and limiting its capacity to pursue independent foreign policies or regional initiatives.

On the other hand, if Iraq's political class is able to effectively lead the country along the potential paths outlined above, several positive scenarios could emerge, including:

A path of genuine reconciliation, healing the wounds of past conflicts and divisions, inclusive dialogue, and efforts to address grievances so that Iraqis can build bridges and overcome ethnic, religious, and sectarian divisions. This path envisions a unified Iraq that celebrates diversity and fosters social cohesion.

Iraq's democratic journey has been turbulent, but the future holds promise for strengthening and consolidating democracy, especially with continued efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure the rule of law, and protect human rights. Iraq can foster a culture of accountable governance and civic engagement, and this narrative sees Iraq evolving into a stable democracy where every citizen's voice is heard and respected.

Iraq's economy has long been dependent on oil revenues, which leaves it vulnerable to global market volatility. The future path includes efforts to diversify and resilient the economy, promote private sector growth, and invest in non-oil sectors such as technology, renewable energy, tourism, and agriculture, as well as investment in transportation and communications projects. By enhancing economic resilience and creating opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship, Iraq can achieve sustainable development and prosperity⁽¹⁾.

(1) International Energy Agency 2019, "Iraq's Energy Sector, A Roadmap to a Brighter Future", April 2019; Ebel R.E. 2010; Republic of Iraq, Ministry of planning, "Iraq 2030 Vision", (Accessed: 11/03/2024); S. Hussein 2018.

Iraq's geopolitical location presents both challenges and opportunities. The future path for regional cooperation and stability involves strengthening constructive relations with neighbouring countries, encouraging dialogue to resolve regional conflicts, and playing a positive role in regional initiatives. By serving as a bridge for diplomatic engagement and economic integration, Iraq can contribute to peace and stability in the greater Middle East.

Iraq's future depends on investing in its greatest asset, its people. Prioritising and investing in education, skills development, and human capital will empower Iraqi youth, enhance human capital, and drive innovation and productivity. This narrative envisions an educated and skilled workforce that fuels economic growth and technological and social progress.

Iraq faces environmental challenges, such as water scarcity, pollution, and desertification. The future path emphasises sustainable environmental policies, conservation efforts, and climate resilience strategies. By protecting natural resources, adopting green technologies, and promoting environmental awareness, Iraq can protect its ecosystems for future generations⁽¹⁾.

Finally, Iraq has a rich cultural heritage spanning thousands of years; however, it has also suffered from cultural loss and heritage destruction due to conflict. The future path includes cultural renaissance initiatives, through the preservation of cultural landmarks, the revival of traditional arts and crafts, and the promotion of cultural exchange and tourism. This narrative envisions Iraq as a beacon of cultural renaissance, celebrating its diverse heritage and contributing to global cultural dialogue.

These scenarios (negative and positive) are not mutually exclusive;

(1) The World Bank Group Iraq, "Country Climate and Development Report", November 2022; Bourhrous A. et al. 2022; Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet 2023, "Iraq", SIPRI- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2023; Héau, L. et al. 2023; Fazil S. & Tartir A. 2023; Mahmoud S. 2022.

Rather, they are interconnected aspects of Iraq's potential future, and by navigating these paths with determination, comprehensiveness, and flexibility; especially with effective leadership, governance reforms, and comprehensive development strategies, Iraq can chart a path toward a brighter and more prosperous future for all its citizens. Perhaps addressing the main challenges and seizing opportunities requires concerted efforts from political leaders, civil society, and the international community to overcome these potential risks and chart a path of sustainable progress for Iraq and its people⁽¹⁾.

3.13. The path to progress – Realizing the Scale, Scope, and Solutions of the Challenges

When one looks at the scale, scope, and depth of the ongoing challenges facing Iraq – as a state and a society – one can only take a deep breath and say to oneself: Can one person or a group working together overcome these many, complex, and intertwined obstacles? Will a group of leaders work together to address these deep-rooted challenges? Note that these challenges go beyond politics, to the economy, society, and perhaps even culture, and to the deeply rooted beliefs, and possibly, also, to challenge the basic assumptions of society as a whole; and therefore: Will the individual and society be able to reconcile their cultural aspirations, religious obligations, and the positive engagement of the official and citizen with the state and society and their common challenges?

Iraqi society has transformed and changed greatly over the past fifty years, and therefore one can say that demographic development alone can be overwhelming, in addition to many other developments, social, political, security, economic, environmental, and others, that Iraqis face.

(1) Republic of Iraq, Ministry of planning, "Iraq 2030 Vision", (Accessed: 11/03/2024); Dodge T. 2012; S. Hussein 2018.

Also, once one realises the size and magnitude of the challenge, he will be subconsciously limited in his ability to confront these challenges. On the other hand, if the group or the person does not know the size of these challenges, his suggestions and solutions may not be deep enough and may treat the symptoms instead of treating the causes of these diseases⁽¹⁾.

Here comes the role of will, high determination, depth of experience, confidence in leaders, and their ability to manage these challenges steadfastly; and it is certain that these challenges, with their depth and breadth, exceed the ability of any single person to address them; Therefore, there is a need for a team, or a group of real statesmen, to confront them together⁽²⁾.

Any solution to any major challenge alone will be of no real benefit; because these challenges are interconnected and interdependent, and therefore require us to address and confront them on several fronts; therefore, there is no economic solution to any challenge without understanding its political, social, and other aspects, such as environmental, legal, and/or technological, etc.

It is okay for a person to realise the size of the Iraqi challenges when they are revealed to him, this is normal; but real leaders do not restrict themselves, or surrender to the restrictions that tie their hands, and they must seek to work together to liberate and unshackle the state and Iraqi society from the restrictions of these challenges, and here they need to involve society with them, on the rugged and difficult path of solutions that they face, otherwise the future does not look bright.

What Iraq is going through is not far from the lessons of history, yes, a difficult stage facing society; Because it needs to review its performance and answer important questions related to the essence of its existence, such as the nature of its social contract, its identity, the role of religion in society, the extent of state intervention in the citizen's daily life, and more.

(1) Diamond J. 2019.

(2) A. al-Wardi 1996.

History teaches us that if nations are determined together, they live and grow stronger in the face of hardships, and on the other hand, they decline and end if they surrender to these hardships, under the pretext of their magnitude. The answer and solutions to the problems of the Iraqi personality do not come from outside or imported; rather, it will need an internal engine and rhythm controller, and this is very possible, with the depth and richness of the Iraqi heritage throughout history.

Conclusion and My Doctrine

It is clear from the above that religion, state, and culture play intertwined and influential roles in shaping the various aspects of Iraqi society. As for culture, it shapes individual and collective identities, influences how people see themselves and others, and enhances the sense of belonging to a particular group or community. Culture also provides a platform for artistic expression, creativity, and innovation, and includes various forms of art, literature, music, dance, cuisine, and traditions. Finally, culture facilitates the transmission of knowledge, values, and traditions from one generation to the next, which preserves cultural heritage and enhances continuity between generations.

Iraq also has a rich cultural heritage, stemming from ancient civilisations such as Mesopotamia, and its cultural diversity is reflected in its literature, art, music, cuisine and traditions, contributing to a vibrant cultural landscape. Despite the challenges, Iraqi culture continues to flourish, as artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers express themselves and address social and political issues through their work. Cultural expressions are a form of resilience and identity in the face of adversity. Iraq's cultural heritage has faced threats from conflict, looting and neglect. Efforts to preserve and protect cultural sites, artifacts and traditions are essential to safeguarding Iraq's cultural heritage for future generations.

On the other hand, the state is responsible for managing society, enacting laws, and providing basic services to its citizens, including security, infrastructure, education, and health care. The state also protects the rights and freedoms of its citizens, ensures equality before the law, access to justice, and the protection of human rights. Finally, the state works to enhance the well-being of its citizens by addressing social and economic challenges, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development.

The Iraqi state is responsible for governing the country, enacting laws, and providing basic services to its citizens. The structure of the government and its policies affect various aspects of society, including security, the economy, education, health care, and infrastructure. The structure of the Iraqi state was influenced by its colonial history and post-colonial development.

The legacy of authoritarian rule, under regimes such as Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime, has shaped political institutions, power dynamics, and governance practices. Iraq faces governance challenges, including corruption, sectarianism, and instability. Efforts to strengthen state institutions, promote the rule of law, and ensure equality are critical to promoting stability and prosperity.

As for the third dimension of religion, is often a source of spiritual guidance, which provides individuals with moral principles to guide their behaviour and beliefs. Religion can also enhance social cohesion by bringing communities together through shared rituals, values, and beliefs, creating a sense of belonging and identity. Finally, religion can provide the moral foundation for society and influence laws, customs, and social norms by promoting virtues such as compassion, justice, tolerance, and compassion.

Islam is the official religion of Iraqi society, based on the fact that the majority of the population are Muslims. Religious beliefs and practices guide many aspects of daily life, including rituals, ethics, and social interactions. Iraq has a large Shia Muslim population, who have historically formed a large part of the country's religious and political landscape. The interaction between the Shia and Sunni sects influences religious practices, cultural traditions, and political affiliations. Religious leaders, including clerics and scholars, have significant influence in Iraqi society. They provide spiritual guidance, interpret religious teachings, and often play active roles in shaping public discourse and political affairs, especially during crises.

While culture, state, and religion each have distinct, often interconnected and mutually reinforcing roles and functions that shape the overall character and dynamics of a country, the relationship between these

elements can vary greatly depending on historical, political, and cultural contexts. Each plays a vital role in shaping the social, political, and cultural landscape of society. In Iraq, culture, state, and religion intersect in complex ways, affecting societal norms, governance structures, and individual identities. Understanding the interaction between these elements is crucial to understanding the dynamics of Iraqi society and addressing the challenges and opportunities it faces.

The fundamental roles of culture, state, and religion in any country are multifaceted and interconnected, and each contributes to the social, political, and cultural fabric of society in different ways. In this book, we have tried to reveal the complex interaction between the forces that shape the Iraqi character; by moving through the features of the complex fabric of Iraq's present and history, with its culture, state, and religions; from the ancient civilisations along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, to the challenges of the era, the dynamics of gravity between culture, state, and religion left an indelible mark on the identity of Iraqi society.

Regarding the Iraqi nation, and the disagreement about its existence or nonexistence, or about its being weak and in need of restoration and revival, it is necessary to distinguish between the perception and the truth, that Iraqis - now - are one nation, or that they were a nation, and a major rift occurred; as a result of the major changes and the difficult circumstances that Iraqis have suffered over the past decades, some may deal with the perception of the existence of the Iraqi nation, and may forget or ignore the reality of the internal rift. The nation may very well exist, but for it to have an impact, we need a high degree of belief among Iraqis in its existence, and a diagnosis of how to strengthen it and revitalise it as an entity. A homogeneous one, and we may need to agree on a community work project, to find a new, more positive and constructive essence for it.

There is always a question: Which is older or prior, the nation over the state, or does the state emerge and based on its stability, emerge and develop a nation? Not forgetting that Iraq is a country, or a geography inhabited by Iraqis, well before the emergence of the modern state, after

World War I, and accordingly, Iraqi society existed before the emergence of the Iraqi state, with many calling for the revival of the Iraqi nation, it is necessary not to forget that we need to know what the characteristics of the desired Iraqi nation is? And how can we work together to revive this new essence for a nation?

Let us now summarise the main findings reached by the author:

On culture

1. Ancient civilisations such as the Sumerian and Babylonian contributed to shaping the cultural identity of Iraqis as well, and when we delve into the historical roots of Iraq, it becomes clear that the interaction between ancient civilisations and their religious foundations planted the seeds of a cultural identity that continues to develop to this day⁽¹⁾.
2. Language, literature, and the arts, along with traditional and tribal customs, contribute to Iraq's cultural richness.
3. Cultural expressions have often served as a form of resistance and compliance in the face of adversity and hardship faced by Iraqis.
4. Cultural resilience remains a hallmark of the complexities of nation-building. Iraq's cultural resilience shines through in the face of adversity. Throughout its history, the community has successfully survived invasions and conflicts, both external and internal. Cultural expressions, whether in the form of painting, sculpture, art, music, or storytelling, play a profound role in shaping the national psyche. In times of conflict, these expressions become not only a form of resistance, but also a means of preserving collective identity under duress.

(1) F. Rashid 1973.

On State

1. The colonial legacy has influenced the emergence of the new Iraqi state, creating ethnic and sectarian tensions.
2. Political leaders and their policies within the state have played a role in shaping the structure of governance and societal values.
3. Globalisation and external factors have played and will play a very influential role in shaping the Iraqi identity.
4. Political rulers since the founding of the Iraqi state have played a pivotal role in shaping the national character of Iraq, leaving an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the population. The likes of King Faisal I, who faced the challenges of the state in the early years, and later figures such as Saddam Hussein and figures after him, contributed to the narrative of the Iraqi identity. They also influenced societal values, ideological affiliations, and the perception of the "desired nation" on the world stage. Their policies, decisions, and personal narratives were intertwined with the broader historical fabric, affecting the course of the Iraqi character⁽¹⁾.
5. The process of sharing political power, on sectarian and nationalist bases, increased the complexity of the development process, and politicians new to power faced the difficulty of establishing a new political system to overcome historical divisions, leading to years of political and security instability, and challenges in forming a coherent system of government.
6. Addressing Iraq's challenges requires comprehensive reforms that prioritise good governance, social justice, and sustainable development.
7. Dictatorship, especially Saddam's, has a profound impact on culture

(1) Allawi A.A. 2014.

by controlling expression and imposing individual discourse; on the state by relying on centralisation of power and eliminating democratic processes; and on religion by manipulating religious institutions or exploiting religious identity for political purposes. The effects of dictatorship are often detrimental to the diversity, independence, and vitality of these key aspects of community identity.

8. Under Saddam and the Baath regime, Iraqis lived under a blanket of fear and were exposed to the brutality of the dictator, as opposition was met with swift and merciless retaliation. The absolute view of the regime's security apparatus instilled a culture of paranoia and self-censorship, as even (whispered opposition) could lead to dire consequences for the person himself, his family, or his acquaintances. In this environment, silence has become a citizen's survival strategy, as citizens have learned to navigate the treacherous waters of tyranny with caution, and have adapted to isolate themselves from the state apparatus as much as possible, even seeking a complete break with the state if possible.
9. The legacy of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial rule continues to cast a long shadow over Iraq to this day, shaping its social and political landscape and collective memory.
10. Citizenship is essential and should not only be about entitlement; it should also be about duty and responsibility. In addition to their rights, citizens bear a set of obligations towards their homeland and fellow citizens, pledging loyalty to the state, committing to obeying its laws, and contributing to its welfare through taxes and services. Citizenship calls on individuals to be active participants in the collective endeavour to build society, and then the nation, and to foster a sense of civic duty and solidarity.
11. Describing Iraq as a "modern state" with all the necessary features

of modernity, in which citizenship prevails over other types of membership of society, is a complex matter and requires careful consideration of various factors. While Iraq has made great strides towards modernisation in certain areas, such as infrastructure development, economic growth, and political reforms, it still faces significant challenges that affect its ability to function as a modern state in all its aspects, including the powers and responsibilities of citizens and the state in addition to the prevalence of rule of law.

12. Although Iraq has made progress towards modernisation and democratic transformation since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, it still faces enormous challenges that hinder the achievement of citizenship, as the dominant form of membership in society. Overcoming these challenges will require continuous efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, the rule of law, establish the principle of citizenship with its rights and duties, and address divisions. sectarianism, and promoting comprehensive economic development, in addition to dealing with complex regional dynamics, and asserting Iraq's sovereignty in the international arena.
13. Regional and geopolitical dynamics greatly affect Iraq's internal stability, security, and sovereignty, and the interconnectedness of these factors underscores the need for comprehensive dialogue, diplomatic engagement, and collaborative efforts among regional stakeholders to promote peace, stability, and development in Iraq and the broader Middle East
14. Addressing the challenge of empathy with neighbouring countries requires a multifaceted approach that addresses core issues and promotes mutual understanding and cooperation. Only then will Iraq be able to take meaningful steps toward overcoming historical grievances, promoting empathy, and building constructive relations with its neighbours, ultimately contributing to regional stability,

prosperity, and peace.

15. Demographic shifts in Iraq's modern history have shaped its social fabric, political dynamics, and economic trajectory. Understanding these demographic trends is crucial for policymakers, planners, and stakeholders to address challenges, capitalise on opportunities, and promote sustainable development and inclusive growth in Iraq.
16. Reviving and reminding Iraqi society of ethical and social principles and values will improve social cohesion and ideally focus on strengthening citizenship and a sense of Iraqi nationalism, while recognising diversity and promoting shared values.
17. Whether Iraqis choose a new revolution or gradual reform to solve their problems will depend on a complex interplay of factors, including prevailing social and political conditions, popular sentiments, institutional capacity, and external influences, not to mention the positions of political forces, religious authority, elites, and the street. Each approach has its own risks and challenges, and the choice between them will depend on the unique circumstances and dynamics of the Iraqi context.
18. Whether the "New Republic" is the most feasible and effective solution to the many challenges facing Iraq is a matter for debate and deliberation among Iraqis themselves, and it will require intensive dialogue, consensus building, and cooperation among all stakeholders to chart a path forward that reflects the aspirations and interests of the Iraqi people.
19. Social engineering is implemented within society through a set of psychological, cultural, technological, and institutional mechanisms that influence individuals, groups, and communities to achieve specific social, political, or economic goals. Social engineering in a troubled society such as Iraq requires a collaborative and multidimensional

approach that includes government institutions, political leaders, civil society organisations, educational institutions, religious and cultural leaders, the international community, the media, and individual citizens.

20. There are many factors that encourage Iraqis to increase their dependence on the state to solve their problems and aspirations, which affects their attitudes, behaviours, and expectations regarding governance, welfare, and security. Addressing this dependence requires comprehensive reforms that promote pluralism, decentralisation, accountability, and the empowerment of non-state actors, which promotes a more balanced and resilient societal ecosystem.
21. Addressing the lack of historical national leadership as role models in Iraqi society will require efforts to promote a culture of leadership development, enhance equality and diversity in leadership positions, and develop shared values and aspirations that transcend ethnic, religious, and sectarian divisions. By investing in empowering emerging leaders and promoting models of ethical and visionary leadership, Iraq can build a more resilient and inclusive society capable of addressing the complex challenges it faces.

On Religion

1. Coexistence between the Shiite and Sunni sects has played a pivotal role in shaping religious dynamics among Iraqis.
2. Conflicts, often, arise from the intersection of cultural, governmental, and religious influences, or from the intersection of religion and secularism.
3. The challenges of post-Saddam Iraq include the security dimension, political divisions, and the rise of religious influence.

4. Overcoming sectarian divisions and promoting national reconciliation are central to achieving a stable and cohesive future.
5. Religion is often the primary source of value and moral guidance, and the interaction between culture, state, and religion contributes to establishing societal norms and values, and this moral framework influences individual behaviour, social interactions, and the collective conscience of the Iraqi people.
6. The sectarian division between the Shiite and Sunni sects had profound effects on the Iraqi character, and the historical division rooted in early conflicts over leadership and succession continued to shape religious practices, political affiliations, and societal norms. Here, it is useful to mention the revivalism of Shiite culture, not just Shiite doctrine. The dynamic interaction between the Shiite and Sunni sects sometimes led to tensions and conflicts, which affected the social and political scene. Understanding this religious diversity is crucial to understanding the complexities of the Iraqi character, and perhaps the answer to the role of religion in society and the state is still unclear or has not yet been fully clarified.
7. Religious leaders, Muslims and others, have great influence in Iraq, not only in religious matters, but also in shaping the broader character of society. In recent decades, the religious establishment, especially among the Shiites, has played a pivotal role in guiding followers and influencing public opinion.

Conclusion: The interaction of culture, state, and religion

1. The historical context of Iraq, which was characterised by ancient civilisations, Islamic empires, colonial influences, and modern geopolitical developments, has deeply contributed to shaping

its current character, and understanding this history provides insight into the complexities, challenges, and resilience facing contemporary Iraq, and the interplay between culture, state, and religion is deeply rooted in this historical fabric, shaping the nation's identity and societal dynamics.

2. Centuries of Ottoman rule in Iraq had a lasting impact on the region, shaping the current character of Iraqi society and contributing to the interconnectedness between culture, state, and religion.
3. Potential shifts in the balance of influence between culture, state, and religion will reshape Iraq's political, cultural, and security landscape.
4. Major challenges require concerted efforts from all segments of society to achieve progress and prosperity.
5. Understanding the gravitational dynamics of culture, state, and religion is the foundation or key to understanding the Iraqi character, providing a distinct perspective from which to explore the historical roots, contemporary challenges, and future trajectories of societal identity in Iraq.
6. The interaction between culture, state and religion affects the legislative system and the creation of laws. Perhaps understanding how religious principles and cultural elements affect legal frameworks and societal norms is essential to understanding the structure of the Iraqi person and society.
7. Iraq is characterised by a diverse population of different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Understanding the interaction between these elements helps to appreciate unity or difference within this diversity. It sheds light on the ways of coexistence or not, for different societies, components and groups, and

contributes to shaping the broader Iraqi personality. It also reveals the complex threads that weave identity, belief systems and societal norms, in the unique historical, cultural and religious context of Iraq⁽¹⁾.

8. In recent decades, the process of interaction between culture, state and religion has become a process of conflict that negatively affects the daily lives of Iraqis, instead of being a process of integration and creating positive climates and spaces to build the features of a clear nation with a clear national identity.
9. It is essential to deal with the characteristics of Iraqi society with sensitivity and awareness. The impact of historical events, political instability, and economic challenges can shape individuals' traits and behaviour in complex ways. Generalisations must be treated with caution. It is always advisable to consider the diversity and uniqueness of each individual. Perhaps the answer to the question "Who are we?" Iraqis! will remain a matter of debate for a long time to come.
10. Social harmony is the cornerstone of the development and progress of any nation. Its importance is particularly evident in the Iraqi case. The narrative of social harmony in Iraq is intertwined with the country's history, diversity, and aspirations for a peaceful and prosperous future. Social harmony in Iraq is not just a noble ideal, but a practical necessity to unleash the nation's full potential, promote sustainable development, and ensure a brighter future for future generations. It is a narrative that envisions Iraq as a

(1) Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation - Central Statistical Organization, (accessed: 6/23/2024); A. Amer 2020; Ministry of Planning and United Nations Population Fund (UNDP) 2015 Report, "Fertility and Family Planning Trends in Iraq: Challenges and Interventions."

unified and resilient state, drawing strength from its diversity and collective aspirations for peace, progress, and prosperity.

11. It is important to note that the level of comfort of Iraqi Shia with governance versus opposition roles is not static and can evolve based on changing political dynamics, security conditions, public sentiment, and external pressures. Balancing the need for effective governance, national unity, democratic accountability, and the protection of minority rights remains a complex and ongoing challenge in the post-conflict context of Iraq.

Balancing the benefits of a strong opposition with the need for effective governance and national unity remains a key challenge in the Iraqi political landscape, and we may also need to monitor the level of engagement or comfort of Sunnis, ethnicities, and other components with political changes and governance.

12. With the loss of political stability, sectarian tensions, and external threats, we see individuals and communities of the Iraqi people resorting to tribalism and clannishness as a means of seeking security and protecting their identity. It is therefore necessary to recognise that Iraq faces major challenges to national unity and cohesion, including national and sectarian tensions, political divisions, regional rivalries, and external interference. The fragmentation of Iraqi society along national, religious, and sectarian lines, exacerbated by decades of conflict and instability, has hindered the emergence of a strong, comprehensive, and cohesive national identity.

13. The formation and maturity of nations generally requires a combination of common identity, regional cohesion, cultural cohesion, historical narrative, inclusive citizenship, effective governance, economic development, and social cohesion. These key requirements provide the foundation for nations to flourish, adapt to change, and realise the aspirations of their people.
14. Thinking and working as groups and teams on the interconnectedness of individual efforts and broader societal goals and emphasising the power of collective action and solidarity in overcoming challenges, building resilience, and guiding Iraq toward a future of prosperity, peace, and sustainable development.

As we reflect on these key findings, it becomes clear that understanding the dynamics of attraction between culture, state, and religion is not just an academic vision or exercise, but a critical endeavour with far-reaching implications. Dealing with the Iraqi character requires cultural sensitivity, and recognising the diversity within cultural, ethnic, and religious identities allows for a more nuanced understanding of individual and collective experiences. This awareness is essential for Iraq's rulers and opinion and decision makers, as well as for diplomats, policy makers, and international actors seeking to participate in the construction.

The Iraqi character is a mirror that reflects a rich history and tremendous cultural diversity. However, Iraq today faces several challenges that affect its development and stability, requiring an understanding of the profound relationship between culture, state, and religion, including It can contribute to determining the future paths of development for Iraq, and achieving development and prosperity for its people. This process of understanding will require comprehensive efforts and cooperation among all groups in society; to reach sustainable and effective solutions to the challenges facing the country. The dynamics of attraction between culture, state and

religion in Iraq are multifaceted, and perhaps overcoming the challenges and seizing the opportunities provided by this complex interaction requires an ongoing commitment to understanding, respecting and celebrating the diverse aspects of the Iraqi personality. As we look to the future, the lessons learned from this exploration provide a basis for enhancing dialogue, building bridges, and contributing to the continued development of Iraq's rich and resilient identity.

The research, opinions and viewpoints contained therein were written through the eyes of a practitioner who has experience working within state agencies, large international companies, and civil society institutions, and in managing institutions and political and party practice for decades, and not as a purely academic analyst. The author of the book also has long and deep knowledge and experience, as a result of living, in addition to Iraq, in Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany, in how other nations overcome their challenges, following calamities that may be greater than what Iraq faces.

Academic research, theories and tools on ways to analyse a specific personality or society have facilitated and helped the author the opportunity to define a framework for articulating and determining the characteristics of the Iraqi as a person or as a society. In the Iraqi case and since the middle of the last century, the internal variables and factors of influence have been many and varied, such as: a rentier economy, wars, large and continuous uprisings and demonstrations, a major demographic change, a very large financial revenue fluctuation, a huge climate change, etc., while the external ones are no less complex than the internal ones, such as: occupation, sever international decisions and sanctions against Iraq and Iraqis, a terrorist ISIS/Daesh invasion, etc., which made it difficult for the author to determine a clear and fixed theory or framework regarding the nature of the Iraqi personality and what makes him tick.

The developments of the Iraqi personality in the last century, or rather the paradigm/radical variable, cannot be seen from a cumulative development scale; that is, through the process of creating a straight

and continuous graph to build the Iraqi personality; Rather, it is closer to "non-linearity"⁽¹⁾ path, and the creation of a curve in his personality and interactions, and accordingly we see a rapid change in his personality and the way he reacts to events.

Yes, it is possible to diagnose the define of a social and political theoretical framework, by means of evaluating, monitoring and analysing the process of interaction between the "trinity": culture with the state with religion, to illuminate for us some of the darkness of the path we are walking on, and this is what the author tried to include in the sections of this brief book.

Perhaps one of the most important challenges that will face the political leadership of Iraq is their ability to understand the degree of complexity and its depth in the composition of Iraqi society, as Iraqi society is a religious, ethnic, national and sectarian mixture. Managing its differences cannot be done via convincing all stakeholders, individuals and groups, of what the political leadership wants to take in terms of decisions, reform and development policies. Especially since the dialectic is part of the Iraqi nature, and accordingly these leaders need to devise mature policies, and impose well-studied, clear and strict laws, with which to control the country's security, and prepare environment for developing society, towards a constructive culture with new customs required for the next stage. Since society cannot move forward and develop with its negative backward culture, unconstructive policies, and a society whose components are in conflict and do not live in harmony with each other.

As for the state, we need to understand, as individuals, elites, society and leaders, the factors of strengthening it, as an organised cohesive entity

(1) Note: "non-linearity" is a statistical term used to describe a situation where there is no straight line, or direct relationship, between an independent variable and a dependent variable. In non-linear relationships, changes in the output do not vary directly with changes in any of the inputs. Therefore, a linear relationship creates a straight line when plotted on a graph, while a non-linear relationship does not create a straight line, but rather a curve.

for society, and as a means that accelerates, facilitates and manages the process of development, growth and societal stability. We need to agree on a common political dictionary, and we do not differ, for example, in understanding the meaning and implication of citizenship, or good governance, or the meaning and cost of democracy on us.

Regarding religion, we need to define, exactly, its role in society, and the extent of the need for us to adopt it, and practice its concepts and teachings, as individuals or as groups. That is, do we fully appreciate the impact of our call for implementing, in the name of the sectarian or religious majority, our beliefs, practices and thought? or do we see religion as the best supporter to complete the process of building the state? Or does it contradict the concept of the modern state? However, if we have another understanding of religion, and we want to carry a religious thought that transcends the Iraqi state and society, then that is the right of every citizen; but on the condition that it does not make other hostage to our beliefs, but rather works with others to define the outline of the role of religion in society, while preserving the rights of those who disagree with them.

Regarding culture, here it is necessary for us, as individuals and as a society, to understand what is the desired custom and the culture required to build a stable state that grows according to our aspirations, versus the current custom and cultural practices. For example, we cannot have cultures that are against the rule of law, and at the same time talk about the importance of establishing inherited customs and cultures that oppose state rule or are contrary to agreed-upon religious values.

Finding a useful, fruitful and harmonious equation and mix between culture, state and religion must be a priority for societal, religious and governmental leaderships; otherwise, we will continue to revolve in a cycle of tension, instability and zero-sum applications (loss-loss), instead of building an Iraq in which its individuals and societies, in all their spectrums, live in practices that establish a culture of integration (win-win) and harmony.

We can say that there is a weakness in the Iraqi societal compass in building the state and its solid foundation, especially with regard to its development path to reach its hopes and dreams, and it always compares its "nostalgic" past with its distorted present. The weakness or loss of the compass has led to a state of real societal confusion regarding how to manage state affairs, and before that, how society manages itself, and the means to achieve its goals.

In addition to the fact that these goals, in some cases, are conflicting or contradictory with theories of modern state management and good governance, and here we, as Iraqis from different backgrounds, will need to begin by defining and agreeing on a clear Iraqi and national identity that defines the characteristics of the desired path and the ways to reach it. This cannot be achieved unless we find and adhere to historical leaderships that can anchor the Iraqis to the shore of safety, amidst the waves of its challenges, dreams, and various goals.

In conclusion, and from a personal standpoint, I would like to say, as a researcher, author, politician, and diplomat, that my geostrategic doctrine towards Iraq can be summarised as follows:

The quest to implement the doctrine that Iraq should be the centre of the globe or any similar concept, and it is necessary for Iraq to produce everything, and to be the axis and heart of the Middle East region is a theory that is not based on sound foundations and its hypotheses are originally incomplete. Yes, it is very possible that Iraq is a strategic transit country (not an island country), and it can be a prime hub that provides goods and services to its regional neighbours and others; let us call it a "Multi-Purpose Service Station/Hub". It is very possible that Iraq can be:

- A regional and global hub for energy supplies of all kinds.
- A regional and global hub for supplying and strengthening the Shia heritage, and be a Mecca for Shiites around the world, and at the same time a very important Sunni Islamic centre.
- A regional and global hub for religious, archaeological and recreational tourism.

- A regional and global hub for the cross-pollination of ideas, religions and sects, based on the fact that the mosaic of Iraqi heritage is very rich, and that the Iraqi political system is based on democracy, and freedom of expression and thought, a natural practice protected by the system and societal culture.
- A regional and global hub, geographically and transportation hub for goods and people between countries, and a bridge between Asia and Europe.
- A regional station for food supplies, minerals and other natural resources.

In short, we make Iraq a "Regional Duty Free-Zone/Hub"

The Iraqis need, first, to define and agree on a new and vital political and strategic doctrine; and this comes after determining the answer to the question of who we are? What we want and what can we offer to the region without provoking the other or and making them hostile toward us? This doctrine comes after a deep study of the geopolitics of Iraq, with a full understanding of the nature of the neighbouring countries, and the major powers in their contemporary dealings with Iraq, and with each other.

The life cycle of this doctrine will need between twenty and forty years, and then it is very possible for Iraq to be among the top twenty countries. Iraq does not lack human, wealth, natural resources, cultural depth, or a pivotal geography, and progress does not come by possessing wealth, rich history, and geography only; rather, it comes by good management of these resources and their correct investment after possessing the will and realistic and effective strategic planning, otherwise the Iraqi situation will remain unstable, and its development faltering, and will also remain the object of others' desires, or their concern.

We need to form a societal awareness to redevelop and reproject ourselves as a productive society, and to restore vitality and dynamism

to the flabby state apparatus. We need a serious pause to review the performance of our state and society, because without production and vitality we will remain where we are, without clarity and awareness of how to grow and stabilise. In this book, we have tried to show the landmarks of the path to the recovery of the state and its people, and to reflect that development and stability do not come by wishing; rather, by clarity of mission, good planning, and the solidarity of its citizens.

Annex 1 – Future questions to follow up on

It is useful to recall a set of future questions that may help researchers in the next stages to further crystallise this research topic:

1. How can Iraqi narratives and myths be reshaped, reformulated, or revised, which can enhance national unity and equality in Iraqi society?
2. How can advances in technology and communications shape the future path of Iraq and its people?
3. What role does education play in shaping the future of Iraq? And how can educational institutions adapt to meet the evolving needs of society?
4. How can we preserve and celebrate cultural heritage and identity in the face of ongoing challenges and changes?
5. What strategies can be used to address sectarian tensions and promote religious tolerance and coexistence in Iraqi society?
6. What are potential strategies to promote better understanding and empathy between Iraqis and neighbouring countries?
7. In what ways can the Iraqi government and civil society address specific governance and leadership challenges?
8. How can Iraq navigate its geopolitical relations and regional dynamics to promote stability and security within its borders?
9. To what extent do external actors, including neighbouring states and international stakeholders, influence the gravity dynamics of state, religion, and culture in Iraq?
10. How do socioeconomic factors, such as income inequality and access to resources, intersect with state governance, religious beliefs, and cultural values to shape the Iraqi character?

11. How do evolving notions of gender roles and family structures intersect with religious teachings, state policies, and cultural norms to shape gender identity and social dynamics in Iraq?
12. What is the impact of diaspora communities on the gravity forces shaping the Iraqi character, particularly with regard to transnational ties and cultural exchange?
13. How do diaspora communities and transnational networks influence the transmission of cultural values, religious beliefs, and political ideologies among Iraqis inside and outside the country?
14. How do perceptions of national security and geopolitical threats influence state policies, religious discourse, and cultural narratives, and how do these affect the sense of collective identity and solidarity among Iraqis?
15. What mechanisms exist for opposition and resistance to state control, religious dogma, or cultural hegemony, and how do they contribute to the development of the Iraqi character?
16. How can technology and innovation be leveraged to address pressing challenges in areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development in Iraq?
17. What role does language and communication play in mediating interactions between different cultural, religious, and ethnic groups within Iraqi society?
18. In what ways do religious institutions and leaders shape societal norms, behaviours, and attitudes within Iraqi societies?
19. How have Iraq's geopolitical and geo-economic factors played a role in understanding the dynamics of gravity in shaping the Iraqi character?

20. How do Iraqis view their national identity as they navigate alliances, conflicts, and economic or political dependencies with neighbouring and global states?
21. How do those outside Iraq, including foreigners, neighbouring countries, and others, view Iraqis and their characteristics?
22. What is the role of the Iraqi middle class in diagnosing the nature of the Iraqi personality, and then seeking to clarify it and address some of the challenges it faces in this personalisation process?
23. How can we succeed in addressing the question of whether the nation creates and establishes a state? Or is the state responsible for creating and evaluating the narrative of the nation and its nature?
24. Since the emergence of the modern Iraqi state, what stages has the Iraqi personality gone through in its relationship with the state and the degree of its belief that it is part of an Iraqi nation?
25. What is the relationship between the emergence of the Iraqi nation and the features of national identity? And how to create and revive it?
26. How have the characteristics of values and ethics changed in Iraqi society after the change of regime after 2003?
27. Sociologists and political scientists divide states into several categories, including nation-states, religious states, and artificial states, each of which has a special definition that stands on different components, and accordingly we need to delve into understanding the nature and type of state in Iraq?
28. Just as the author theorised and diagnosed the Shiite component's within the government and the nature of its relationship with state, we need a similar review and study of the Kurdish and Sunni components individually, especially what they hope for from a partnership relationship between them and the central governments

and the nature of the political contract that supports and fulfils their ambitions, as well as answers their concerns.

29. Just as the author theorised and defined the character of his strategic political doctrine towards Iraq's future path, we need other researchers or the author of this book himself to expand on it, and write its features and details clearly; to be one of the options or visions for the next stage of the Iraqi government, in which we need to draw a clear and accessible path.

As we see from above points, these questions aim to delve into the various aspects of the social, political, economic and cultural scene in Iraq, and to provide a comprehensive framework for further research and analysis of the Iraqi character, citizenship and other important requirements and concepts, and together they may provide a clear strategic vision regarding the complexities and potential paths for future development in Iraq.

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This book delves into the depth and diversity of the Iraqi character by exploring the various environments that shape it — from the popular cafés of 'culture', where conversations and ideas are exchanged, to the palaces and their rulers of 'state', which have witnessed chapters of history, and the minarets of 'religion', which stand as enduring witnesses to deep-rooted traditions and rituals.

It examines how these elements have interacted through the ages to shape the features of the Iraqi personality. This work seeks to analyse the formation of a complex, interwoven, and unique identity by advancing visions and solutions to the ills afflicting society, and by anticipating possible remedies through the restoration of balance and the envisioning of a path out of crises. It aspires to build bridges of trust and unity among the people, and to open new horizons for the creation of a more stable and cohesive future.

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