



## How to Achieve a Real Pacification Amongst the Iraqi Communities?

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In the aftermath of the war, the occupiers focused on immediate tasks, such as ensuring order, providing relief to the long-suffering Iraqi people, and asserting control over the country. Very quickly, however - even before they have met these goals - they had to answer another pressing question: *How, exactly, should they go about rebuilding the country?*

Saying simply that postwar Iraq should be democratic is the easy part.

*The more difficult question will be how to make it happen.*

Establishing a governmental system that can accommodate Iraq's different ethnic and religious groups, previously kept in check by the political and military repression of the Saddam Hussein regime, is mandatory to secure peace. If that it is not planned precisely to meet the specific ethnic and religious divisions at play, any democratic government to emerge in Iraq is bound to prove less capable of maintaining order than the brutal dictatorship that preceded it.

Today, as we go through the most critical period in the transition to a new political system in Iraq, we are facing heated discussions about what that system will be.

The new system is supposed to be democratic, federal, and pluralistic.

Fortunately, the job of building democracy in Iraq, although difficult, may not be quite as hard as many critics have warned. Iraq today possesses several features that will facilitate the reconstruction effort. Despite Saddam's long repression, democratic institutions are not entirely alien to the country. For example under the Hashemite monarchy, which ruled from 1921 until 1958, Iraq adopted a parliamentary system modelled on that of the United Kingdom. And this pluralism extended to Iraq's press: prior to the 1958 revolution that toppled the monarchy, 23 independent newspapers were published in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra alone.

### **The background: ethnic and religious divisions**

Three major identity groups are present in Iraq with a long history of strife among them. These groups are divided along ethnic and religious lines. Arabs are Iraq's largest ethnic group, comprising about 75% of Iraq's population and living primarily in the central and southern parts of the country, while Kurds comprise about 20 percent, living primarily in the north. Most Arabs are Muslims although they belong to two different sects of Islam: 55–65% of Iraqis are Shi'a Muslims, and 30–40% are Sunni Muslims. Rounding out Iraq's ethnic map are Turkomans and Assyrians, with less than 5% of the country's population.

Relations between Arabs and Kurds have historically provided the greatest source of tension in Iraq. The Iraqi government has not only consistently excluded Kurds from positions of power but also tried to assimilate them into the country.

Iraqi Kurds are currently locked in negotiations over the Iraqi constitution.

The Kurdish National Alliance has stated that it "will not accept any postponement" of its demands for a federalist Iraq with full autonomy for the Kurdish areas. President Jalal Talabani had also backed a federal, devolved system of government in Iraq as the completion of the Constitution. The Kurds and other ethnic groups are opposing the

transformation of Iraq into an Iranian-style Islamic republic, with power held by the Sunni Arab majority.

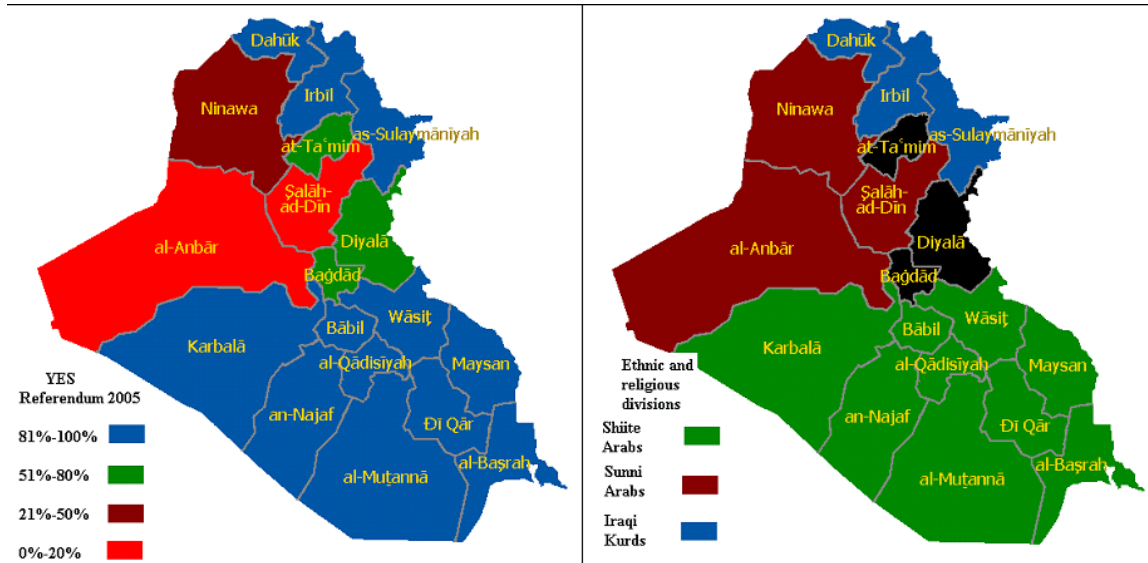
The Kurds are federalism's most zealous supporters in Iraq. Although some, including those who endorse federalism, want independence, most Iraqi Kurds are pragmatic and recognize that independence is not feasible given Turkey's adamant opposition to it. Turkey opposes Kurdish independence, fearing that it may spark a similar movement among Kurds in Turkey.

Iraqi Turkomen whose homeland overlaps with Iraq's Kurdish areas, are also seeking representation under the new Iraqi constitution. They claim they have been sidelined and victimised by successive Iraqi regimes and the autonomous Kurdish administration. They fear a "Kurdification" of their homeland and oppose Kurdish demands to include Kirkuk into a Kurdish zone of authority.

Islamist [Shiite] factions believe that they have a chance, perhaps their last, to establish the Islamic republic they have always dreamed of establishing in Iraq—even if it comes at the cost of the other factions. These Islamist factions consider the system in Iran democratic. At the same time, they see that the definition of federalism in current Iraqi political discourse remains ambiguous. And so they see an opportunity to move away from the kind of federalism the Kurds would like to see and replace it with some kind of mere autonomy.

The Islamists know the Iranian system doesn't allow for much pluralism. Yet they believe the Iranian system provides a model for Iraqi federalism: there will be room enough for everyone to participate, but within the framework of an Islamic republic.

**The results of the 2005 Referendum reflect such divisions.**



Results of the referendum and ethnic and religious divisions in Iraq

The trick is to work out a constitutional arrangement that makes sense of Iraq's social and cultural mosaic, transforming diversity into an agent for positive change. This is a global question addressing both East and West, North and South: and Iraq has the chance to show that diversities could be resources for a Country.

**A question of democracy**

federalism represents a guarantee against the return of authoritarian regimes and suppression by centralised government. This could be achieved through establishing a stable democratic government.

federalism should not be the victim of the fear that it is somehow breaking up the country. That would be legitimate if there was the will for division but that would not be imposed under a democratic system, which believes in multi-party rule and peaceful rotation of power.

By definition, democracy aims to provide representation and protection for the rights of everyone in society. Creating and sustaining such a system in Iraq, without opening the door to ethnic conflict, is no easy task.

But must be clear that democracy is a set of common and global values implemented with specific policies. Those core democratic values are not negotiable.

democracy is a "one way street": democracy does not provide tools to escape democracy when established. Majority cannot vote against democracy to remove democracy or it is not possible to change a democratic system in a non-democratic one by voting, because democracy is an "a priori". The only way to change a democratic system into a non-democratic one is the use of weapons.

### **The questions of federalism**

Preference for a federal Iraq has stemmed from claims that the Kurds cannot and should not be ruled by the majority Arabs of the country. From this starting point reasons against the possibility of a federal system in Iraq come up:

1. Immediately the first problem of this analysis confronts us; despite claims that Iraq remains united, the country is being divided along ethnic lines. Yet ethnic division is not the basis of federalism. federalism is a political doctrine that allows people to rule themselves locally.

2. The basis of federalism is economic and martial cooperation. In Iraq, the risk is to proceed to do the reverse - breaking down the country into ethnic economic claims and militias, making a once strong country and one of the most advanced in the region, a weak and fragile conglomeration. The maintenance of ethnic militias is not an expression of political freedom and pluralism in a new Iraq, but rather a testimony to the suspicion and hostility that has been stirred between factions of Iraqi people.

3. Creating completely homogenous regions in Iraq is impossible because Iraq's different ethnic and religious groups are intermixed in some areas of the country. Relocating these groups to different regions would also foster ethnic conflict or secessionism.

4. It remains unclear why Iraq - an integrated society in which intermarriage between Arab Sunni, Arab Shia and Kurd has always been high - would descend into civil war; none the less a civil war has been considered a great threat.

If those are the principles of federalism, Iraq seems far from them. But federalism is not a fixed model: Iraq can promote it's own model despite the one already implemented in different Countries. If democracy is a non-negotiable set of values, federalism is the possibility to implement the values in a local way, negotiating with local and cultural issues of people.

I try to address the previous point in the Iraqi perspective:

1. Civil war: I don not believe a civil war is consistent with Iraqi situation. Security and terrorism are problems but: terrorism is a problem for Iraq as it is for other Countries; terrorists mostly are from other Countries than Iraq; terrorist groups are supported from abroad; the tasks of terrorism are against Iraqi people, targetting a wider scenario.

2. Ethnic borders: the question therefore becomes how to increase the chances that federalism will work in Iraq. To begin with, it would be a mistake to create only three ethnically or religiously based federal units: a Kurdish north, a Shi`ite south, and a Sunni

center. Such a structure would only entrench current divisions and might even lead to ethnic cleansing. A better idea would be to maintain Iraq's present administrative structure, under which the country is divided into 18 units and respects the ethnic/religious lines. Keeping these provincial boundaries would serve the interests of Iraq's various communities, increasing healthy political competition for resources - even within various ethnic or religious communities. The greatest advantage to respect ethnic and religious lines rather is that this design is much more likely to prevent the dominance of identity-based parties. When regional borders are drawn along ethnic and religious lines, other institutions in a country, such as cross-regional voting laws and presidential systems of government, can prevent identity-based parties from dominating the government.

3. Cooperation: Successful federal systems also divide power to raise and distribute revenues between the capital and the periphery. Central revenues can be used to redistribute resources from rich to poor regions, whereas local revenues support local economic and cultural initiatives. Such revenue-sharing arrangements are critical because power follows resources. Revenue sharing, on the other hand, can also decrease the temptation for one ethnic group to either capture the state or seek separation. The financial power allows local governments to legislate on economic policies that address needs specific to their region and to raise their own revenue so that they can pursue them. Without independent sources of revenue, the regional governments will remain dependent on the central government for funding. This will not only undermine their political autonomy but also prevent them from implementing the policies they create. With most of Iraqi revenue coming from oil sales, the entire country should share in that revenue. Individual ethnic and religious groups in Iraq should also be integrated within a national military force with fair representation of all groups; allowing each region to have its own military force would make secession and ethnic conflict all the more likely.

4. Ethnic reasons: Local governments should in general have widespread control over their territories. This includes responsibility for all citizens in a given region, not just those of a given ethnicity. Modern states, with their massive infrastructures, must be organized territorially and can function only in that manner. Limiting authorities to caring for their own kind only reinforces tribal, ethnic, and religious divisions, which can undermine democracy. For these reasons, any attempts on the part of Iraq's Arab elites to once again grant the Kurds autonomy will likewise be doomed to fail. At a minimum, Iraq's regional governments should control language policy and education to enable the Shi'as and Kurds to protect their identities. The regional governments may also control other social, economic, and political issues such as health, unemployment, and intraregional trade, depending on the specific demands of different groups for autonomy. The federal government should retain control, however, over issues affecting the entire country such as defence, foreign affairs, currency, citizenship, and infrastructure.

Finally, most of western people support federalism as the only chance for Iraq to avoid ethnic conflicts and secessionism. I do not believe. federalism is something... more. It is the chance for Iraq to assure freedom and democracy in a modern society. For these reasons I'm not so optimistic that the Iraqi transition will be truly supported by its neighbours (despite the past cooperation): Syria, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia are interested in the Iraqi modernization path because their own interests and Iraqi future is driven by their own national policies rather than a matter of regional stability.

Iraq. Iraqi people must run their way to the future alone. And their strength is in the unity of their diversities.