

Review Article

Dynamics of the Salafi-Takfiri movements in Iraq (from the occupation of Iraq until 2017)

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ABSTRACT

The Ba'ath regime collapsed by invading Iraq by the US forces in 2003. Overthrowing the Ba'ath regime and the end of the Sunni minority's dominance, various political parties and political groups were formed while simultaneously increasing the role of the Shiites and the Kurds, and the activities of these groups increased sharply in the political arena. These parties include different ethnic groups and sects in Iraq, with different Islamic, secular, nationalist, Salafi, and Takfiri tendencies. The reason is the importance of Iraq, on the one hand, due to it becoming the main focus of the growth of extreme Salafists, and on the other hand, the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq group, known as ISIS, which has become the strongest since 2010, the terrorist group has been in the Middle East and has seriously threatened the security of the region. The distinguishing feature of this group is the use of the Takfir's weapon against its enemies. Thus, this group provides the ideological weapons and easily convinces its forces to kill other followers of other religions.

Keywords: America, Iraq, Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant, security, terrorism

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IRAQI CULTURAL-SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Iraq is among the countries created in the 20th century, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Iraq is a totally artificial archetype of Englishmen who decided to monopolize the oil field in Kirkuk and Basra.^[1] A country with many ethnicities and religions, despite the ancient civilization, appeared in the geopolitics after the First World War and has not yet become a stable identity.^[2] Geopolitically, Iraq has a strategic position due to its location at the intersection of the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, and the East-West route. Iraq is from the south with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, from the West with Jordan and Syria, from the east with Iran, and from the north by Turkey.^[3] Iraq is one of the largest countries with oil reserves. The country has 143 billion barrels of verified oil reserves. The Iraqi population is about 36 million people (according to 2016 statistics). Arabs are 75–80%, Kurds 15–20%, Turkmen, and Assyrians account for about 5% of the Iraqi population.^[4] Furthermore, about

68% of Iraqi people are Shiite, 30% Sunni, 2% Christian, and followers of other religions.^[5]

In terms of the sociocultural structure, Iraq can be divided into three completely different areas: In the central province of Iraq live Sunni Arabs, in the north of Iraq live the Kurds, and in the south are the Shiites, and each of these groups has its own cultural and social characteristics. Of course, along with these three main groups, there are smaller cultural identities, such as Turkmen, Assyrians, and Yazidis, who have distinct culture and beliefs.^[6] Shiites constitute the largest Iraqi population group and mostly inhabit the southern and central parts of Iraq. The existence of the shrine's shrine in the cities of Karbala and Najaf, as well as the existence of the seminary of Najaf, and as a result of the permanent presence of the Shiite scholars in these cities, has strengthened the Shi'ite culture, which has brought the Shiites of Iraq closer to the Shi'ism of Iran, culturally.^[7] Relations between the Shiites and Iran have raised concern among Sunni Arabs and some Sunni Muslim neighbors. Hence, Shiites sometimes try to prove their loyalty to Iraq for such states and groups.^[8]

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Sunni Arabs form a part of another Iraqi social-cultural structure. The Sunni Arabs, due to being a minority, define their Arab identity in the direction of the Sunni Arab world and consider themselves part of the Arab world to have full support for a greater share of Iraqi power and they regard the Arab countries as their natural and permanent supporters, and even the majority of the behaviors and roles of this group are based on the views and policies of the Arab states. Furthermore, most of the terrorist operations in Iraq are either from this group or by radical groups outside Iraq through mediation and companionship with the Sunni.^[9]

The Kurds are also another part of the Iraqi cultural-social structure and live in areas that include an important part of its oil-rich regions.^[10] Since the beginning of Iraq, the Kurds have called for autonomy to build political interactions and international recognition based on Kurdish culture and language. They want to be recognized as a Kurdish language and have been trained in this language and have always resisted this language, culture, and institutions. This feeling of Kurdish identity differing from the Iraqi Arabs has led to many differences and conflicts in Iraq.

SALAFIST PROCESS IN IRAQ

The current Iraq, with the ancient name of “Sumerian” and the civilization in the 5th millennium BC, can be regarded as one of the most important cultural centers in the Middle East, which entered into one of the poles in the territory of Islam in 642 AD. Anti-Salafist income, as what is known today as “Salafism” in Iraq, is in fact the continuation of the same “Hadith” school that was formed in the 1st century of Islamic history and its centrality was in Hejaz, but Iraq was considered to be the center of the “Rai” school.^[11] The major contradiction between these two trends is clearly related to the late 2nd century (8th century), in parallel with which different political ideas emerged in the Muslim world. At the same time, the occasion and convergence of the Hadith School with the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs cannot be denied. That is why Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad’s central city in the year 750 was considered a new stage of Salafi development. So that in the able period, the hardening of the system of caliphate and related jurisprudents, to the extent that the caliph wrote a book called “belief of al-Qaderi” based on the beliefs of the hadith and the rejection of Mu’tazilites and Shiites, and the jurisprudents of Baghdad gave fatwa anyone who disagrees with it is disobedient and disobedient. At the same time, the revolution and the Hanbali uprising, as one of the Salafist waves, took Baghdad, and eventually, Ibn Taymiyah emerged as the theorist and founder of the Salafist current.^[12] After this era, Mohammad bin Abdul Wahhab entered Baghdad in the early years of Ahmad Pasha’s rule, the Ottoman sultan, but could not survive for Salafist thought. Afterward, following his alliance with Mohammad bin Saud, he attacked Iraq,

killing thousands after the attacks, and the Karbala shrine was plundered and vandalized.

During the Ottoman rule over Iraq, no Islamic organization or religious movement was formed by religious scholars and religious institutions. The main reason for the lack of formation of religious organizations in Iraq during this period should be considered in line with the loyalty of the Sunni scholars to the Ottoman caliphate as well as their political attitude in emphasizing compatibility with the rulers, that is, the Sunnis, in particular the scholars and their leaders always strived for the renewal of the Islamic caliphate and the great Islamic alliance.^[13] In this regard, basically, no formations took place before Iraq in 1908.

Thus, historically, the first self-defeating organizations in Iraq should be considered as a function of the expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt in contemporary times, influenced by the Iraqi branch of the Brotherhood, including the “Islamic Party of Iraq,” “the Ulema Union Muslim Kurdistan,” “Kurdistan Islamic Union,” and “Muslim scholars’ population.” This trend intensified with the occupation of Iraq by the United States in 2003. Salafist armed groups such as Jaish Mohammed, Al Qaeda, Iraqi Islamic Army, and Jaish Al-Mujahedin were formed during this period and mainly began their activities in the Sunni areas of Iraq. The combination of these conditions has led Iraq to become the main focus of the growth of extreme Salafists and ultimately to the central al-Qaeda front under the leadership of Abu Musab Zarqawi.^[14] The strategy of Salafist current in Iraq was based on the creation of a full-fledged war between Shiite and Sunni groups. In the same vein, efforts were made to provoke Sunnis and Shiites against each other to create the Civil War.^[15] Of course, their organized effort was largely successful.^[16] Moreover, they were able to turn religious conflicts into the first and foremost issue of Muslims and elites of the Muslim world. Indeed, following the historical trend of the Salafist current to the contemporary period, it is important to note that the presence of this movement, especially its extreme branch, is mostly a phenomenon imposed by Iraq but after 2003 has a greater capacity for impact.

THE MOST IMPORTANT SALAFIST-TAKFIRI GROUPS OF IRAQ

Ansar-ul-Islam

After the end of the imposed Iraqi war against Iran and the stabilization of the region, a Salafist jihadi nucleus gradually was removed. In 2001, the Ansar ul-Islam group in Kurdistan joined the unity of groups like Jondalus al-Islam, and reformation population was formed including Hamas Kurdish movement and al-Tawhid movement. The founder of this community is Najm al-Din Faraj, titled “Molakerikar.” Ansar ul-Islam is a rival of Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant

(ISIL) and its main areas of influence and activity are Nineveh provinces, in particular, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din, and are among the active group of Ansar ul-Islam in Pakistan. The group enforced strict sharia laws in their dominated villages in northern Halabja near the Iranian border. The members of this group are Kurds who fought in Afghanistan and were under the cover of al-Qaeda. After the US invasion of Iraq, the congregation had bases in the villages of the western Aurahanat area. This group is operating under the name Ansar al-Sunna in Kurdistan. The group also agrees with ISIL's general goal of establishing a caliphate but opposes the claims of the caliphate by ISIL leaders and recognizes them as just a group of groups of claimants. Recently, Arab, Uzbek, and Pakistani fighters joined the Ansar al-Islam group and sent Ansari Slash to Syria.

Al Qaeda of Iraq (Congregation of Tawhid and Jihad)

In 2004, Zarqawi founded "al-Qa'ida al-Fallad al-Rafidain" organization in Iraq. He believed in the struggle against the universal forces of disbelief and injustice, especially the United States and Israel, and did not accept the views of bin Laden on the Shi'a and the Saudi regime since they disbelieved the Shiites. Altogether, Zarqawi's goal was to establish a military campaign to dismiss US occupation forces, overthrow the Shi'a government, and the formation of the Islamic caliphate in Iraq and spread to other Islamic countries.

Jish Al-Mujahidin

The group's history dates back to 2003 and occupies Iraq. Its aim is to overthrow the central government of Iraq and has a strong anti-Shiite tendency. Evidence suggests that, in a contest against ISIL's reinstatement, the group has established close ties with the Ansar al-Islam group. Jaishm al-Mujahedin also has a special interest in working with local tribes and has an active presence in Anbar province.

Ba'ath Party Terrorist Groups

This group is one of the most prominent groups that support ISIL and is consistent with it. Most members of this party will take their orders away from dignity. The main purpose of these groups is to disrupt the political process in Iraq. Many former Iraqi army officers and the Presidential Guards and Ba'athist intelligence also support the ISIL group.

Jajes Rijal Route (Naqshbandiya)

An age-old and nationalist group is affiliated with Abraham's dignity, which consists of supporters of Saddam Hussein and members of the Ba'ath regime and is seeking to defend the rights of the Sunni minority in Iraq against the Shi'a majority of its religion.

Takfiri - ISIL Terrorist Group

The so-called Islamic State of ISIL is a militant terrorist group with a Salafi-jihadi thought and style, and its members have

chosen to establish Islamic caliphate and the implementation of sharia in Iraq and Syria. The ISIL group is the third largest terrorist group in the world and one of the most powerful Salafi and Takfiri groups with extremist beliefs.^[17] The beginning of the formation of ISIL dates back to the war and its occupation by the United States. With the US invasion of Iraq, about 100 Sunni jihadi groups were established in Iraq, many of which were independent and self-sufficient [Table 1]. The collapse of the Iraqi state and the presence of internal crises (identity crisis, legitimate crisis, military weakness, and class contradiction) led some of the jihadist groups to close and become al-Qaeda. In December 2004, with the addition of some Jihadist groups to Zarqawi and his allegiance to bin Laden, the al-Qaeda branch in Iraq, called al-Qaeda al-Fahdaid, was formally established. Bin Laden introduced Zarqawi as his official representative in Iraq.^[18]

Zarqawi was killed on June 7, 2006 in an attack on the US forces near Baqubah in Iraq. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, killing Zarqawi, received the greatest damage from the United States and the Iraqi government from the beginning. A few months after Zarqawi's death, the Mojahedin Council issued a statement claiming to limit the attacks on Iraqi troops and reduce their threat to the Shi'a. In October 2006, the MKO announced by its spokesman officially issued a statement announcing the formation of "Dula al-Islamiyya al-Iraqi" led by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and in this statement, with the unification of jihadi groups, the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq in Baghdad, Diyala Anbar, Kirkuk, Nineveh, Salah al-Din, and a small part of Babylon and individuals were introduced as Islamic government ministers, and Baquba, the site of the death of Zarqawi, was declared the governor's capital. Abu Amr Baghdadi stated in his official statement that the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq was as follows: "With the occupation of Iraq by American forces, ethnic and religious differences in Iraq increased, and the Kurds, in northern Iraq and Shiites in the center of Iraq, became powerful. Each of them has supporters from foreign countries as well as an independent army, but Sunni people were oppressed. The purpose of this government is to recognize the right of the Sunni.^[19] Following the death of Abu Amr Baghdadi on April 19, 2010, Abu Bakr Baghdadi was selected as a leader in a military operation.^[20]

Baghdadi began his activities with propaganda and training, and then, he turned to military work.^[21] He began working with the slogan "Sunnis in Syria" at the onset of the crisis in Syria, and for two years, he was with Syrian opposition forces. In April 2013, Baghdadi announced the merger of the Jabhat al-Nusra section with the Islamic State of Iraq in the name of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant."^[17] Baghdadi's excesses in taking power while an Iraqi were faced with the reaction of Syrian members of the Nusra Front and its leadership, Abu Muhammad Golani. He opposed any merger and emphasized

Table 1: Major Takfiri groups in Iraq

Name	School of thought	Founder	Goals	Strategies
ISIS	Jihadi Salafi	Abu Bakir Baqdad	Revival of Islamic Caliphate	Anti-soviet, anti-government, anti-American
Ansar ul-Islam	Salafi	Mullah Krykar	Revival of the Islamic government, the implementation of strict Sharia law	Anti-government
Baath Party	Islamism	Ezzat Ibrahim	Disturb the Iraqi political process	Anti-government
Jish al-rejal	Islamism	Ezzat Ibrahim Dowri	Overthrow of Shiite rule in Iraq	Anti-Shiite, anti-government
Iraqi al-Qaeda	Salafi-Wahhabi	Abu Musab Zarqawi	Formation of Islamic Caliphate in Iraq	Anti-Westernism, anti-Shiite

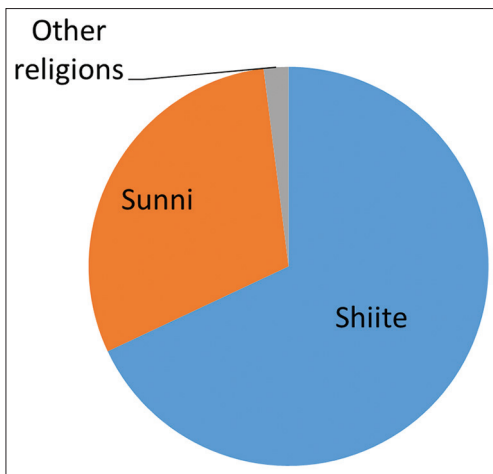


Figure 1: Distribution of Iraqi religions

an allegiance to al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, led by Zawahiri. Following the upsurge of disagreements, Baghdadi announced the only solution to return to Iraq and continue its Takfiri actions in the country and was stationed in eastern Iraq in the winter of 2013 along the border with Syria and launched its military operation in Syria [Figure 1]. Provinces of Nineveh, Anbar, and Salah al-Din began the Iraqi Shiite government. The re-entry in Iraq, which was accompanied by the weakness of the central government of Iraq and the lack of attention by the Shiite government to these areas, provided enabling environments to intensify the activities of the ISIS group and increased Baghdadi’s military power using this opportunity. In mid-2014, the group, with its consolidation in the captured territories and in the absence of an agreement with the Taliban and Al-Nusra, removed the name “Sham” in a new move and announced its reexistence with the same name as the Islamic State of Iraq.^[22]

Regarding the most important causes of the emergence of ISIL, there are also circumstances such as the changing environmental conditions caused by the withdrawal of the United States from the country, the lack of attention of the central government to the Sunni areas of Iraq and the emergence of a crisis of influence and authority, the failure of the Sunni in the election Iraqi Mellas, Sunni retardation in

comparison with the Kurdistan region, and behind-the-scenes actions of countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in support of Takfiri and Salafi groups in the region aimed at confronting Iran and its supportive countries.

In sum, ISIS’s strength should not only be assessed based on its military strength in capturing large parts of Syria and Iraq but also on the basis of adequate funding, and more importantly, the attraction and organization of volunteer fighters from the Middle East, North Africa, and around the world. The acquisition of weapons, ammunition, and equipment of the military garrison in Iraq and Syria, as well as the domination of major oil resources in these two countries, along with the vast geographical area in its possession, has put ISIS in a rather unequal position among all the terrorist actors in worldwide. ISIL has achieved tremendous wealth through tax collection, bank robbery, the plundering of artifacts, and the sale of oil. According to some sources, the group’s daily income from the sale of oil is \$ 1 to \$ 2 million, and it sells between 25,000 and 60,000 barrels a day, with a daily income of \$ 1,200,000.^[23] This wealth does not require ISIL from the Arab Gulf financial assistance. The ISIL wealth is estimated at around \$ 2 billion, and the number of loyal troops has been reported to be at least ten thousand, while a large number of supporters from all over the world come to ISIS every week.^[24]

Evidence suggests that ISIS is a cohesive organization, with great maneuverability and extensive financial resources. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have provided ISIS with a massive amount of funding to enable and train trained forces from all over the world. In addition, the experience of Afghan Arab warriors, who are in fact the first generation of Salafist-jihadists, has been accompanied by a history of military operations against members of the group against the Iraqi government and US troops since 2003, and also, such a company in the Syrian civil war has greatly enhanced ISIL’s military, operational, and guerrilla experience. Therefore, Isis can be considered a Salafi-Takfiri group that has been mutated in comparison with its own groups and has been able to become a powerful phenomenon in the Middle East by leaving the shadow of the al-Qaeda organization.

CONCLUSION

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the overthrow of the Ba'ath Party and the transfer of power from Sunnis to the Shi'a majority, as well as a political dissolution in Iraq. This situation provided a good basis for the growth of political, military, and takfiri organizations in Iraq. Abu Musab Zarqawi used this chaos to create a political-military formation. Zarqawi's goal was to launch a military campaign to dismiss US occupation forces, overthrow the Shi'a government, and establish a caliphate in Iraq and expand it to other Islamic countries. Zarqawi gave allegiance to bin Laden to achieve his goals and changed his organization's name to al-Qaeda in Iraq. The discrepancy between Zarqawi and bin Laden led to the separation of the two groups and led Zarqawi's successors to form an independent group called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. After Zarqawi's death, Abu Omar Baghdadi and his successor, Abu Bakr Baghdadi, were elected leader of the group. Since the Abu Bakr leader Baghdadi took over in 2010, the Islamic State has achieved important successes. Over the past 4 years, the organization has been able to clarify the brightness of hope among Sunni people in the Middle East. In general, the successful leadership of Abu Bakir Baghdadi has led to the victory of the organization in the military arena and the sustainability of the so-called Islamic caliphate government. Therefore, until the Iraqi government cannot compensate for its military and political weaknesses, the Islamic State's shadow of the Islamic state will not disappear from the region.

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