

America Moves a Step Closer to Partitioning Iraq

“The Kurds fight ferociously for Kurdistan. The Shiites have been fighting doggedly for their people. The Sunnis of the Islamic State are killing and dying for their cause. But nobody is willing to fight for Iraq. The problem really is not that Iraq’s army has collapsed. It’s that Iraq has collapsed...Iraq today no longer exists. In 2008, 80 percent of those polled said they were “Iraqi above all.” Today that number is 40 percent.”-- Fareed Zakaria

News:

Last week a number of Sunni tribal sheikhs and tribes in Iraq's Anbar province pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a defection that comes as a major blow to the Iraqi government as it struggles to roll the Sunni insurgents back. The sheikhs and tribal leaders made the pledge in a statement read out by influential Sheikh Ahmed Dara al-Jumaili, The sheikhs’ statement said that the only way peace would come to Anbar province would be if the tribes joined ISIL. They also said they were joining ISIL’s self-declared “caliphate” in order to “fight the infidels, apostates and Shias.” The development is a worrying sign for the government in Baghdad, as it struggles to hold the country together.

Comment:

In the aftermath of the American occupation of Iraq 2003, Washington intentionally spurred the disintegration of the Iraqi army to such a degree that it never recovered again. Added to this combustible situation, America bequeathed Iraq with a sectarian constitution in 2005, which guaranteed the concentration of power in the hands of the Shias and the Kurds with the Sunnis marginalized. Thus, America sowed the seeds of Iraq’s disintegration. Commenting on the constitution at the time, Simon Tisdall of *The Guardian* Newspaper said, “Exacerbating Iraq’s trauma is the deepening divide setting Sunni Arabs against Shias and Kurds.”

Pitting Sunni, against Shias and Kurds was part of a much broader plan. The US think tank Stratfor revealed plans to divide Iraq circa 6 months before America’s invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and stated:

1. The central and largest part of Iraq that is populated by the Sunni Arabs would be joined with Jordan to form one “United Hashemite Kingdom,” which would be ruled by Jordan’s King Abdullah. This area would include Baghdad, which would no longer be the capital.
2. The Kurdish region of northern and northwestern Iraq, including Mosul and the vast Kirkuk oilfields, would become its own autonomous state.
3. The Shia Region in southwestern Iraq, including Basra, would make up the third state, or more likely it would be joined with Kuwait.

Since then, there have been several plans put forward by various people on the same theme—the most notorious of which is the Biden/Gelb plan that the US Senate endorsed in 2007.

Fast-forward today and the introduction of ISIL to the political landscape of Iraq is intended to accentuate sectarian differences and accelerate the dismemberment of the Iraqi state in its present form. In 2014, CNN ran an article entitled “Iraq to split in three: So why not?” which coincided with ISIL’s dramatic rise stated: “Seven years later, the division of Iraq into ethnic regions looks more likely than ever. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) holds much of western and northern Iraq, including the city of Mosul, and the Kurdish leadership is pressing ahead with plans for a referendum as a likely step towards a unilateral declaration of independence.”

What makes the realization of this plan believable is the odd behavior of both ISIS and America. ISIS has hitherto eschewed any direct confrontation with Assad’s regime, the Jewish State and Iran in the favour of fighting other Islamic groups opposed to Assad or carrying out vicious attacks on fellow Iraqis on ethnic lines.

Obama’s strategy to curb Assad and halt the advance of ISIS is deeply suspicious. Assad is still in power despite blatantly violating the “red-lines” set by Obama, and ISIS continues to defy US and allied air strikes to expand its control in both Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, America’s reluctance to give weapons to the Shias but allow Iranian backed militia with Iranian officials at the helm to roam freely to engage ISIS in Sunni area reeks of hypocrisy. Then there is the recent US congress proposal to arm only Sunnis and Kurds to resist ISIS, which just underscores the dubious nature of the strategy, and exacerbates the tenuous situation, is Iraq. US conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer had this to say about Obama’s strategy: “We’re in for 17 months of a fake strategy in which the administration is just hoping that nothing catastrophic happens.”

Unsurprisingly then most Iraqis have been preoccupied by US plans to divide Iraq. Iraqi newspaper headlines such as “Biden’s project (reference to Biden/Gelb plan) has become real and the knife is cutting our limb” and another with a caption showing the map of the country wrapped in a chain symbolizing US dominance and Iraq divided into three nations Shiastan, Sunnistan and Kurdistan have swamped Iraqis.

Muslims of Iraq must realise that their disunity fuelled by nationalism and sectarianism has enabled foreign powers and their surrogates to interfere in Iraq. The only remedy to this situation is for the Muslims of Iraq to abandon their petty differences and unite under the banner Islam. Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءَ فَأَلْفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ﴾

“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided.” [TMQ: Al-Imran: 3]

The practical and political manifestation of this drive for unity is for all factions in Iraq to join hands and work for the re-establishment of the true Khilafah Rashida, which will unite the Muslims and expel foreign forces from all Muslim lands.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Abdul Majeed Bhatti**