

# The Establishment of a Sunni Arab Region in Iraq and its Consequences for the Kurdistan Regional Government





Kurdistan conflict and Crisis Research Center



# The Establishment of a Sunni Arab Region in Iraq and its Consequences for the Kurdistan Regional Government

**Dr. Nahwi Saeed and Dr. Jalal Hasan Mistaffa**

This article is an edited translation of the original in Kurdish. Translated by Shkow Sherzad Abdul-Hafiz



**Kurdistan conflict and Crisis Research Center**

**All Rights Reserved for:**


**Kurdistan Conflict and Crisis Research Center** ©

---

 [www.kurdistancc.com](http://www.kurdistancc.com)

 [kurdistan.kccrc@gmail.com](mailto:kurdistan.kccrc@gmail.com)

 [facebook.com/kurdistanccrc](https://facebook.com/kurdistanccrc)

 053 - 318 2929

 @KCCRC1

**October 2018**

# The Establishment of a Sunni Arab Region in Iraq and its Consequences for the Kurdistan Regional Government

Dr. Nahwi Saeed and  
Dr. Jalal Hasan Mistaffa

## Introduction

The Sunni population of Iraq makes up 20% of the country's population. They governed Iraq for almost eighty years until they were ousted from power in 2003. Since then, the areas that Iraq's Sunni community resides have been continuously unstable and have witnessed conflict and violence. In 2014 much of the Sunni territory fell into the hands of the Islamic State. After 2003 some in the Sunni Community were distanced from the country's political process, while other members of the community took part in it. However, those in Iraq's Sunni community that took part in the political process were suppressed politically, especially in the period of Nuri al-Maliki premiership. One of the mechanisms often discussed to secure stability in Iraq is the splitting up of Iraq into three distinct regions, a Kurdish one, a Sunni Arab one, and a Shia Arab one. With the Mosul offensive and the subsequent liberation of the area from the Islamic State fast approaching, this mechanism for solving the issue of stability in Iraq is once again being discussed amongst

scholars, politicians and the international community. Some believe that dividing up Iraq is the only solution to the problems of the country, while others think that the creation of an autonomous Sunni region in Iraq, especially post-Islamic State is incredibly tricky. This article will analyse the consequences of the establishment of a Sunni region of Iraq for the Kurdistan Regional Government.

## The State of the Sunni Arabs After the Collapse of the Iraqi Baathist Regime

### First Phase: 2003-2010

The collapse of the Iraqi Ba'athist Regime was the achievement of an unbelievable dream for Iraq's Kurds and Shi'a Arabs. However, for Iraq's Sunni Arabs it was the beginnings of a period of anxiety and disaster. Initially, the Sunni Arab community did not accept their new position in the Iraqi state, so they boycotted the Iraqi political process. Compounding this boycott was, the new Iraqi political and legal system, which implemented 'de-Ba'athification' to prevent any member of the Sunni community, who was previously a member of the Iraqi Ba'ath party, from taking part in Iraq's political

process. Furthermore, on the religious level, the Sunni Arab boycott was reinforced when Harip al-Jari, the head of Iraq's Islamic intelligence group issued a fatwa demanding that the Sunni community does not participate in the new Iraqi political process and instead should retaliate against the United States. This boycott ultimately resulted in the Sunni communities boycott of the 2005 election, wherein a Sunni province, such as Anbar, the 2005 election turn out was only 2% (1). What is more, given that, unlike Iraq's Shia Arabs and Kurds, the Sunni community did not play a significant role in the writing of the new Iraqi Constitution they generally rejected the draft 2005 constitution.

Regarding federalism in Iraq, the Sunni communities were at first against the idea, as they believed it was a system that would ultimately break up Iraq. The Shi'a community on the other, who looked set to play the leading role in Iraq going forward, supported the idea wholeheartedly. In this period both of these positions seemed to be taken in shock at the new Iraqi reality. The Sunni community was unable to comprehend that they had permanently lost power and status in Iraq and the Shi'a community was still in fear that the Sunni Arabs and the Ba'ath party would find their way back into power. However, after thirteen years this shock seems to have worn off. The Iraqi Sunni community appears to have come to terms with their new relegated status in Iraq and now demand and support a federal model for Iraq, while the Shi'a

Arabs have now come to understand their new position of power in Iraq and are, via the Iraqi Federal Government, shying away from the implementation of federalism in Iraq.

After 2006 the Iraqi Sunni Arabs gradually concluded that they had to accept the new Iraqi system and chose to participate seriously in the Iraqi political process. At the end of 2007 through to 2010, the United States assisted the Iraqi Sunni community to form a new military force called the 'Sahwa' that could be utilised to counter the presence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The force was successful and managed to expel Al-Qaeda from its territory. On the political level, the Iraqi Sunni community was also able to secure substantial gains in the 2009 Provincial Council elections, and the 2010 elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives. In the 2010 elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives the majority of the Sunni political parties united under the 'Al-Iraqia' list led by Ayad Alawi. The Sunni list was able to secure 91 seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives beating the Nuri al-Maliki led 'State of Law' list by two seats.

### **Second Phase: 2010-2014**

This period began with the second Prime Ministerial term of Nuri al-Maliki. During this phase, the Sunni community faced harassment, expulsion, stalking, marginalisation, and suppression from Maliki's administration. Maliki's second term as Prime Minister was marked by his determination to

centralise the Iraqi state once again, disregarding Kurdish and Sunni Arab wishes for federalism to take hold in Iraq, and his harsh treatment of the Iraqi Sunni Arabs. Maliki expelled some Sunni Arabs from Baghdad and detained numerous others. This culture culminated in 2011 in Nuri al-Maliki forcing then Iraqi Vice-President and prominent Sunni politician Tariq al-Hashimi to leave Iraq, and later the then Sunni Iraqi Finance Minister was forced to resign. Hence, during this period Nuri al-Maliki was able to use suppression and privilege to force the collapse of the 'Al-Iraqia' list. However, his policies resulted in the political disenfranchisement of the Iraqi Sunni population more widely.

This episode recoiled against Maliki when in 2011, in synchronicity with the more extensive Arab Spring protests in the region; the Iraqi Sunni community also rose up in protest against Nuri al-Maliki. However, Maliki responded to the protestors harshly accusing them of being former Ba'athists and terrorists and was able to suppress the protests by using force against them. With this, Maliki was able to contain the Iraqi Sunni Arab politicians and its civilian population. Moreover, during his premiership, Maliki centralised many of the Iraqi state institutions and brought them under his control. Once he had control over these institutions, Maliki used them as a tool to scare and confront his rivals; in particular the Iraqi Sunni community by utilised old Iraqi laws from the Iraqi Ba'athist period against them. These actions by Nuri

al-Maliki ultimately created a wedge between Iraq's Sunni Arab community and the Iraqi Federal Government. What is more, Nuri al-Maliki also opposed the holding of a referendum in the Iraqi Sunni Province of Salahadin to create an autonomous Sunni Federal region in Iraq. In short, the suppression and relegation of the Sunni community marked this phase.

### **Third Phase: 2014 Until Present**

In 2014, the Islamic State took over Mosul and large swathes of the Sunni Arab territories in northern and central Iraq. Maliki's policies against the Sunni community are widely considered to be the primary reasons behind the collapse of the Iraqi army in the face of the Islamic States onslaught. It wasn't long after this that Maliki was forced to resign from his post, and was replaced by Heider al-Abadi. Once in post Abadi issued some executive orders designed to reform the Iraqi state institutions and rectify Maliki's errors. While Abadi began his premiership by trying to satisfy the Iraqi Sunni community, the Islamic State's onslaught into northern Iraq and the Iraqi State recognition and funding for the Iraqi Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces became new obstacles between the Iraqi Sunni Arabs and the Iraqi state. What is more, the presence of both the Iranian General Qasim Sulaimani and numerous Iranian back Shia militia forces on the battlefields against Islamic state became a cause for fear, concern and mistrust for the Sunni Arabs towards

the intentions of the Iraqi Federal Government.

In the post-Maliki period, the anti-Sunni state of the Iraqi Government continued. For example, in 2015 the former Iraqi Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi, who was also a prominent Sunni politician, was sentenced to seven years in prison. The fact that most of the prisoners in the Iraqi jails were from the Iraqi Sunni community underlines the extent of the Iraqi Federal Government's crackdown of the Iraq Sunni Arab community. Moreover, while the Islamic State's arrival in Iraq forced the displacement of thousands in the Sunni provinces of Iraq, the population was also blamed for assisting the terrorist organisation. Now that many of the territories that were previously controlled by the Islamic State have been brought back under the Iraqi government's control, there are reports that the Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces and other Shi'a militias operating in those regions are treating the displaced Iraqi Sunni community poorly. Reports reveal that, in recent weeks, these forces have engaged in the arbitrary arrests and killing of hundreds of Sunni Arab civilians (2).

### **Post-Islamic State: The Iraqi Sunni Community and a Federal Region**

As mentioned above, one of the pressing issues for the Iraqi Sunni community is the poor state of its relationship with the Iraqi Federal Government in Baghdad. It is possible that in the post-Islamic State period the Iraqi

Sunni community will demand the establishment of an autonomous Sunni Arab controlled federal region in Iraq. However, achieving this objective is far from easy, especially if the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces who played a pivotal role in the rescuing of the Sunni Iraqi territories from the Islamic State (where the Sunni community played a weak position in those military operations) feel that the Iraqi Sunni Arab community does not deserve to be compensated. Nevertheless, if the Sunni Arab community's demand for an autonomous Sunni federal region is accepted, then there are three options facing the Iraqi Sunni Arab community. First, they can choose to create a federal region out of one of the predominantly Sunni Arab Iraqi provinces (Anbar, Mosul and Salahadin). Second, they can choose to create one federal region out of all the Sunni majority Iraqi provinces just like the Kurds did with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Third, they can choose to create a federal region out of the Iraqi provinces that are predominantly Sunni. (Below each of these options are discussed in more detail and evaluated). These options are all provided for in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, and therefore, is theoretically a fundamental right of the Iraqi Sunni Community. However, as mentioned above the Iraqi Sunni community has been denied their legal rights for the past 13 years. Since April 2016, Asil Nujefi and Rafie al-Issawi have established a representative office in Washington to protect

the interests of the Iraqi Sunni community and to secure international support in their efforts to achieve their constitutional rights. This move is considered the Iraqi Sunni community's first step to achieving their objective of a Sunni federal region (3).

### **Iraqi Sunni Arab Community and Internal Conflict**

The Iraqi Sunni community lacks unity and has failed to agree on a single solution to their problem going forward. Sunni Arab politicians, such as Asil Nujefi, the former governor of Mosul, support the formation of a single Iraqi Sunni Region. However, among Iraq's Sunni Arab politicians it is only Nujefi who endorses the idea of forming a single region out of the three predominantly Sunni provinces of Iraq. Some of Iraq's other Sunni politician's are demanding that once the Islamic State is defeated the current Sunni provinces and any possible new Sunni Arab provinces that may establish in the future, be autonomously administered (4). However, a handful of other Sunni Arab politicians regard the issue of the establishment of an autonomous Sunni Arab region in Iraq to be a threat to the territorial unity and integrity of Iraq and may lead to the breakup of the country. The 'Al-Iraqia' list, which was previously Iraq's biggest list and encompassed the vast majority of the Iraqi Sunni Arab population, was against the establishment of an autonomous Sunni Arab region of Iraq.

Moreover, the displacement of many

Sunni Arab families following the Islamic State's arrival, internal boundary disputes and those of Iraq's disputed territories, the lack of wealth generation and lack of natural resources in the Iraqi Sunni Arab areas are all obstacles confronting the establishment of an autonomous Sunni region in Iraq. Compounding these obstacles is also the issue of the Sunni Arab tribes of Anbar who have recently requested that Abadi split their province into two so that they can distance themselves from the Iraqi town of Fallujah, a town in eastern Anbar that is continuously at the centre of trouble. Another issue facing the Sunni Arab project in Iraq is the fact that their power has weakened considerably in the Iraqi province of Diyala, a town once considered majority Sunni Arab. After the Shia militias rescued the province from the clutches of the Islamic State, the province became a Shi'a province (5).

To date, there have been numerous attempts to socially and politically reunite the Sunni Arab community in Iraq, and also to restore the group's relationship with the Iraq Federal Government. For example, three meetings and conferences were held between the different components of the Iraqi Sunni community. First, in August 2014, where 150 representatives of the Iraqi Sunni Arab community (Sunni Tribes, Islamists and former Ba'athists) met in Amman, Jordan. The meeting resulted in the formation of a coalition between the groups to work to remove the then Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki (6). Second, in September 2015 another



er meeting was held, this time in Doha, Qatar with the aim of restoring relations between the different components of the Iraqi Sunni Arabs. The former Ba'athists in Iraq and the Sunni Arabs that were part of the then Iraqi political process took part. Salim Jabouri, the then head of the Iraqi Council of Representatives was one such politician who took part in the meeting. Third, a conference was held in April 2016 in Paris, France for a group of Sunni Arab politicians.

Along with these meeting, the Iraqi Sunni Arabs have also held numerous gatherings in Erbil and Turkey; however, none have resulted in an official agreement that would unite the Sunni Arabs of Iraq. What is more, some of the meeting and conferences played a more significant role in further distancing the Sunni Arabs from one another; instead of working to united them as each side (those who are part of the Iraqi establishment and those who are not) tried to marginalise the other in those meetings. Therefore, trust between the different groups was further eroded. It is important also to remember that even when the Sunni Arabs had presented a united front in Iraq, they were faced with other obstacles in Baghdad, as Iran and numerous extreme Shi'a groups in Iraq have been unwilling to accept the Iraqi Sunni Arabs as equal partners in the Iraqi government.

### **The Question of Regionalization in Iraqi Law**

Legally, the question of establishing

new regions in Iraq has been settled in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution (Article 112, Section 2). The 2005 Iraqi constitution allows for any Iraqi Province that is not already part of an Iraqi region (referring to the provinces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq) may independently or as part of a collective of provinces establish a new Iraqi region. The only province excluded from this right was Baghdad, the Iraqi capital. Furthermore, the manner in which such regions can be formed based on the constitutional provisions is laid out clearly in 2007's Law Number 23. According to Article 119 of the Iraqi Constitution "one or more Iraqi provinces shall have the right to organize into a region based on a request to be voted on in a referendum submitted in one of the following two methods: First: A request by one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region. Second: A request by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region." Article two and three of the 2007 'Law for Establishing Regions in Iraq' explain that an Iraqi province can submit a request to join an existing region if the request achieves one-third of votes in the province's provincial council and has also been accepted by one-third of the respective region's parliament.

The Possibility for the Regionalization of the Iraqi Sunni Arab Territories

There are three potential possibilities for the regionalisation of the Iraqi Sunni Arab territories:

First: All the regions that host majority Sunni Arab populations (Mosul, Anbar, Salahadin) become an autonomous region (7). Kirkuk also has a significant Sunni Arab community. Those provinces that have majority Sunni Arab populations make up almost half of Iraq's total geographic area. However, regarding population size they only make up 20-25% of Iraq's total population. While some Iraqi Sunni Arab Nationalist believe the regionalization of the Iraqi Sunni Arab territories to be a threat to the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq, the idea does have immense weight, especially as there are reports that the concept, and the principles such a region would be established upon, are currently being debated in secret between the different components of the Iraqi Sunni community in states outside of Iraq. Having said this, practically the establishment of a region that can encompass the entirety of the Sunni Arab population as the community is not the majority population in some Iraqi provinces, such as Kirkuk and Diyala, and are few in others like Basra.

Second: Each of the Sunni Arab provinces becoming autonomous regions independent of one another (8). Currently, numerous entities are engaging seriously in efforts to establish Mosul as an autonomous Iraqi region. What is more, while the efforts to make Salahadin Province an autonomous Iraqi region has been ongoing since 2011, the Sunni Arab politicians of Anbar province have also recently begun discussions for the regionalisation of their

province. This scenario has strong credentials as it has the backing of local elites in each province and may find it easier to gain the support Sunni Arab nationalist elites. However, in regards to the provinces of Kirkuk and Diyala, it will be difficult for the Sunni Arabs to regionalise them as each of these provinces also have significant Kurdish and Turkmen populations.

Third: Two or More of the Sunni Arab Provinces come together to establish an autonomous region. It may be possible for two Sunni Arab provinces, such as Mosul and Anbar, Anbar and Salahadin or Mosul and Salahadin, to establish a new Iraqi region. Alternatively, three of the provinces can come together to form a region, such as Anbar, Salahadin and Mosul. However, this third scenario may not be as strong as the first and second scenarios given that it is not discussed much in Sunni Arab circles. Of course, an apparent weakness of this scenario is that if two of the Sunni Arab provinces come together to form a region, then the other Sunni Arab provinces would be excluded from this region, thereby dividing the Sunni Arab community in Iraq. So, while the first and second scenario does seem most likely, technically speaking any of the three scenarios is possible.

### **The Effect of a Sunni Arab Region on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

To discuss the effects of each of the above scenarios on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, each scenario must be an-

alysed separately. This article discusses the impact of the Sunni Arab region comprising of all of the Sunni Arab provinces on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Such a Sunni Arab Region could have the following consequences for the Kurdistan region of Iraq

### **First: The Weakening of the Iraqi Federal Government**

The establishment of a Sunni Arab region would mean that the Iraqi federal government would from then on have to deal with the issues associated with two federal regions rather than just one. The existence of two regions in Iraq would work to strengthen the regions while at the same time weakening the Iraqi Federal Government comparatively. The regions would derive their strength, first, from the fact that they are run by specific ethnic populations (the Kurds running the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Sunni Arabs running the Sunni Arab regional government). Second, they will find strength in the fact that each region will also have representatives in the Iraqi Federal Government, Iraqi parliament, and Iraq's ministries, meaning that when it comes to issues around the regions these two ethnic groups can unite their voices and to further decentralise power in the Iraqi state. Perhaps a microcosm of this relationship can be seen within the Kurdistan Regional of Iraq where the Kurdish political parties are currently internally locked in a Cold War with one another, while in Bagh-

dad they present a united front to protect their shared regional interests. So if a Sunni Arab region is formed, it can set aside any disputes it has with the Kurdistan Regional Government, temporarily, when it is necessary to work together in the Iraqi Federal Government to win further regional authority and power. Third, both the Kurdistan Regional Government and the future Sunni Arab regional government will be entitled to an internal constitution, parliament, local government and institutions, border guards and local police forces, which would take away from the strength of the Iraqi Federal Government.

### **Second: Significantly Reduce the Possibility of a Return to Dictatorship in Iraq:**

A dictatorship often forms when power is accumulated in the hands of a specific party, individual group or nationality. The establishment autonomous regions in Iraq are contrary to the notion of power accumulation. Thus, the more Iraq is regionalised, the less the chance of dictatorship arising as in the scenario of a multi-region Iraq power will be so decentralised that it will be close to impossible for it to be accumulated by a select few. Such a scenario will also promote diversity and democracy in Iraq. If it was the case, that when Iraq was first established it adopted a federal model of government for the governance of the country it would have been improbable for a dictatorship to form in the state, and therefore the Iraqi gov-

ernment with not have engaged in the suppression and persecution of its minority populations, nor would it have committed acts of genocide against them. In the scenario where Iraq is less authoritarian and more democratic the Kurdistan Regional Government benefits.

Having said this, in this regard, it is also possible to put forward a perspective on the issue of the establishment of an autonomous Sunni Arab region. Some may argue that given the Sunni Arab community of Iraq were the protectors of dictatorship in Iraq, so too may their future region be. In a multi-region Iraq, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq may find itself neighbored by a dictatorial or authoritarian Sunni Arab Iraqi region. However, this argument is weak given that the 2005 Iraqi Constitution only allows for its regions to be administered democratically, restricting the space available for the development of a dictatorship. Moreover, the Sunni Arab community of Iraq has since 2003 been involved in Iraqi democracy, and since 2010 they have agreed to abide by the principles enshrined in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. Hence, the possibility of the development of a dictatorship in the future Sunni Arab Region in Iraq is minimal.

There is only one scenario in the establishment of a Sunni Arab region in Iraq that poses a severe threat to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, that is if the Iraqi Baathist party can mount a coup d'état over the regional government and institutions thereby able to gain control of the region. In this event, the Kurdistan

Regional Government needs to ensure that it has the relevant contingencies in place to prevent such an outcome. For this purpose, the Kurdistan Regional Government can rely on the relevant laws and regulations established by the Iraqi Federal Government regarding 'De-Ba'athification'.

### **Third: Provide a Buffer Zone for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq:**

At present Iraqi provinces that are governed directly by the Iraqi Federal Government neighbour the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Iraqi Federal Government issued a new law in 2007 awarding more local power to Iraqi provinces that fall under its direct jurisdiction. However, to date, the law has been amended twice (2010 and 2011) and has yet to be implemented. This current lack of local power in these Iraqi provinces has provided for the Iraqi Federal Government's strong positions within them. Hence, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq currently finds itself bordered by Sunni Arab Iraqi Provinces that are, for the most part, governed centrally from Baghdad.

When the Sunni Arab's of Iraq is successful in establishing a federal region in these Iraqi Sunni Arab provinces, they will have the authority to develop judicial, executive, and legislative institutions, which looks set to serve the interests of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in that it will become a barrier between the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Due to the new geopolitical effect, such a

Sunni Region will have on Iraq; the Iraqi Federal Government will find it difficult to directly interfere and cause problems for the affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government. To do so, the Iraq Federal Government would need to rely on the assistance of Iraq's Sunni Arab region. What is more, in such an event the impact of any Iraqi Federal Government would be diluted, as it would first need the political acceptance from the Sunni Arab Iraqi region.

#### **Fourth: Strengthen of the Iraqi Regions**

Any province that becomes a region in Iraq will find that it gains widespread political, legal and economic powers. While Iraq regions have executive, judicial and legislative powers they are also awarded a share of the Iraqi budget to use as they wish. Moreover, regional status also strengthens the legal status of the provinces in the region as they also receive representation in the Iraqi Federal Government. So citizens of the Iraqi Region's have two levels of representation and political participation, one in local government and one in central government. Thus, the representation of the provinces is strengthened when they become regions. In this respect, the Kurds will find it useful to have the voice and vote of a Sunni Arab region added to the Iraqi 'Federal Council'. (The Iraqi Federal Council has yet to establish as the law providing for it had its first reading in 2014). If the proposed 'Federal Council' were

implemented then it would be another factor, similar to the Iraqi Parliament that would strengthen the political power of the Iraqi regions against the political power of the Iraqi executive.

#### **Fifth: Settle the Unresolved Disputed Between the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, such as Article 140:**

To date, there remain unresolved issues between the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, of which Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution regarding the disputed Iraqi territories is most prominent. For over a decade both governments have tussled to resolve the issue of the Iraqi disputed territories as per the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. However, the resolution remains bogged down in the initial phases set out by Article 140. Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution dictates that the issue of the Iraqi disputed territories must be resolved via three stages; Normalization, Census, and Referendum. To date, the implementation of the article by the Iraqi Federal Government has stalled in the initial steps of the Normalization stage. Many of the Iraqi territories that Article 140 refers to, especially Kirkuk and Diyala Provinces, are currently under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government as a result of the war against the Islamic State. While these territories are presently under the de facto control of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, bringing them under the de jure control of the Kurdistan Re-

gional Government will prove far more challenging. To bring these territories under its control legally the Kurdistan Regional Government must begin negotiations with the different Iraqi sides especially the leaders of the Sunni Arab region. It may be possible for the Kurdistan Regional Government to have an easier time negotiating the issue with an Iraqi Sunni region that it has thus far had with the Shi'a dominated Iraqi Federal Government as the Kurdistan Regional Government and a Sunni Arab region may find they have more issues and interests in common that make negotiations on the matter far easier.

However, it may also be that the opposite is exact; the Sunni Arab may make finding a solution to the Iraqi disputed territories far more difficult given their nationalist background. Some of these Sunni Arab nationalists may disagree with Kurdish demands on the disputed territories by arguing that only those territories that fall into the scope of the 1970 negotiations with the Iraqi Ba'athist Party are legitimate for the Kurds to control. Other Sunni Arabs may feel that the Kurdistan Regional Government's expansionism into those territories is a threat to the territorial integrity of Iraq. Therefore, A Sunni Arab region in Iraq may be able to play a positive role for the mediation of the dispute between the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government or they may play a negative role and present more obstacles to the Kirkuk issue. Nevertheless, it will ultimately be the political, military, international force, and the extent of unity

on the Kurdish front that will direct the will of the Sunni Arab region in this regard.

### **Sixth: Dominance of the Sunni identity over the Arab Nation:**

The creation a Sunni Arab region Iraq will become the replacement for the Arab national identity that for many years was forcibly imposed upon the people of Iraq and its Kurdistan Region. Throughout its history, Iraqis have protested the attempts by the Iraqi Sunni Arab governing elites to preserve Iraqi unity and its Arabic identity at all costs. These attempts at the 'Arabization' of Iraq have cost the Iraqi Kurdish population dearly; they have faced campaigns of genocide, persecution, and attempts at erasing their identity. The events that took place after 2003 between Iraq's Sunni Arab and Shi'a Arab populations revealed that the notion that Iraq has one Arab identity was nothing but propaganda that was never rooted in the hearts of the majority of Iraq's Arabs. Hence, after 2003 with the overthrow of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime, and instalment of freedom and democracy in Iraq's political system, Iraq's Arab communities reverted to their age-old sectarian identities. If a Sunni Arab region is established in Iraq, then the Iraqi federal model will by de-facto become a federal model based on ethnic divides. Some scholars that look into federalism believe the more ethnically divided the federal regions of a given states the more likely the state will collapse into its parts.

While this argument is the strong one it can be argued, in the case of the Iraq, that even with the establishment of a Sunni Arab Region and the Kurdish Region the majority (55% - 60%) of Iraqi citizens will not live in an ethnic region, but will instead remain under the direct authority of the Iraqi Federal Government. This reality in the case of Iraq can be used to argue against the notion that the Iraqi state may collapse as a result of a federal system based on ethnicity. Moreover, it is also important to note that given that a Sunni Arab region in Iraq will neighbour the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and both share the Sunni sect of Islam as their official religious persuasion, the possibility of peace between the two sides will increase.

## **Conclusion**

Since 2003 this Sunni Arab community in Iraq has faced numerous forms of persecution. A large part of their misfortune has been to do with the fact that during the establishment phase of the new Iraq in 2003 this Iraqi component group chose to boycott the political process. While at the onset of the new Iraq in 2003 the Iraqi Sunni Arab community was against the notion of the regionalisation of Iraq since 2010 they had u-tuned and seen the idea of regionalism as the best method to protect themselves from further persecution. Currently, the possibility of the establishment of a Sunni Arab Region in Iraq is at its most likely, especially after the ousting of the Islamic State

from Mosul. This article was mainly concerned with the effect and impacts that such a region if it comes to be, would have on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Therefore, this article and the points and arguments raised in it can be utilised by decision-makers in the Kurdistan Region to form a policy towards the issue of a Sunni Arab Region in Iraq.

## Sources:

- 1) Mansour, R. (2016) The Sunni predicament in Iraq. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/03/03/sunni-predicament-in-iraq-pub-62924>
- 2) See: A- <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-massacres-falluja-special-report-idUKKCN10Y1VB> B- <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/iraq-sunni-shia-nasiriyah-prison-hangman-executions-back-and-they-re-becoming-more-efficient-a7208816.html>
- 3) Al-ali, D. (2013) Dividing Iraq: Now is the time to split the country. Available at: <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/5245/Sunni-Politicians-In-Washington-Promote-Idea-of-Sunni-Region-A-Divided-Iraq.htm>
- 4) Natali, D. (2016) The myth of a tripartite Iraq. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/iraq-myth-tripartite-sunni-shia-kurd-stability-isis.html#ix-zz4IGVCvDsV>
- 5) Al-nidawi, O. (2016) The state of Sunni discord. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-state-of-sunni-discord-in-iraq>
- 6) Abuqudairi, A. (2014) Relations sour between Iraq and Jordan. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/relations-sour-between-jordan-iraq-2014831245054736.html>
- 7) See: A- <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/iraq-sunni-region-after-is-sectarianism.html> B- <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraqi-sunnis-plan-use-law-create-autonomous-regions-1074892889> C- <http://rudaw.net/english/interview/21012016>
- 8) پروانه: A-<http://www.faceiraq.com/inews.php?id=4997966> B-<http://almasalah.com/ar/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=32237> C-<http://www.alrashead.net/index.php?prevn&id=7930&typen=2> D-<http://www.ara.shafaaq.com/707>





## Kurdistan conflict and Crisis Research Center

### About KCCRC

The Kurdistan Conflict and Crisis Research Center (KCCRC) is an independent and not-for-profit organisation based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. KCCRC conducts research and produces policy papers regarding Kurdish, Iraqi and related studies. Within this framework, KCCRC focuses its research on the politics and economics of the region at the macro level, and at the micro level, it concentrates on issues surrounding but not limited to the following;

- Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict
- Terrorism
- Islamism, extremism and radicalisation
- Instability
- Internally displaced peoples
- Oil and Gas
- Political Economy
- Ethnic and Sectarian conflict
- International politics

KCCRC delivers for its clients by using its unique geographic position to take advantage of the expertise of local and international scholars to give the most precise picture of Kurdish, Iraqi and Middle Eastern affairs.

