

A Weak and Divided Iraq Is Stumbling Towards an Unbalanced Future

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The US, Iran and Saudi Arabia have each sent their respective representatives to Iraq to support the re-election of Haidar al-Abadi. This aim, far from achieving a stable Iraq, will rather keep the country weak and politically divided between the biggest dominating groups.

Moreover, the parliament's decision to annul the votes overseas from displaced Iraqis, to cancel over 954 ballots covering 10 provinces, and to manually recount the 12 May elections will create a backfire, particularly by the movement led by Moqtada al-Sadr. Al-Sadr, apparently holding the largest number of MPs (54 seats although unofficial), will consider this to be a move directed mainly against him particularly when this same group is accused, among other things, of being responsible for major fraud in Baghdad and in the south of Iraq.

The US representative in Iraq, Ambassador Bret McGurk, the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and the Saudi unofficial envoy known as Yahya are visiting all parties and groups to promote Haidar Abadi as the future Prime Minister. Although each one has a fundamentally different agenda, they will all achieve one aim: Iraq will remain weak and politically divided, and this under a non-harmonious government and a Prime Minister who will certainly be unable to use force to take the country out of its present pitiful state.

Iraq has fought against and defeated one of the most challenging and dangerous terrorist groups of all time, Islamic State, known as ISIS. It continues to oppose them. ISIS's main presence was almost entirely in Sunni-dominated provinces in the north. These provinces suffered tremendous destruction which forced tens of thousands of Iraqis to be internally displaced. Moreover, the war against ISIS caused serious damage to the infrastructure, already suffering since the US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and up till now due to the corruption which is rife among the political leadership of the country. The war also emptied the Iraqi central bank's coffers and increased the foreign loan deficit.

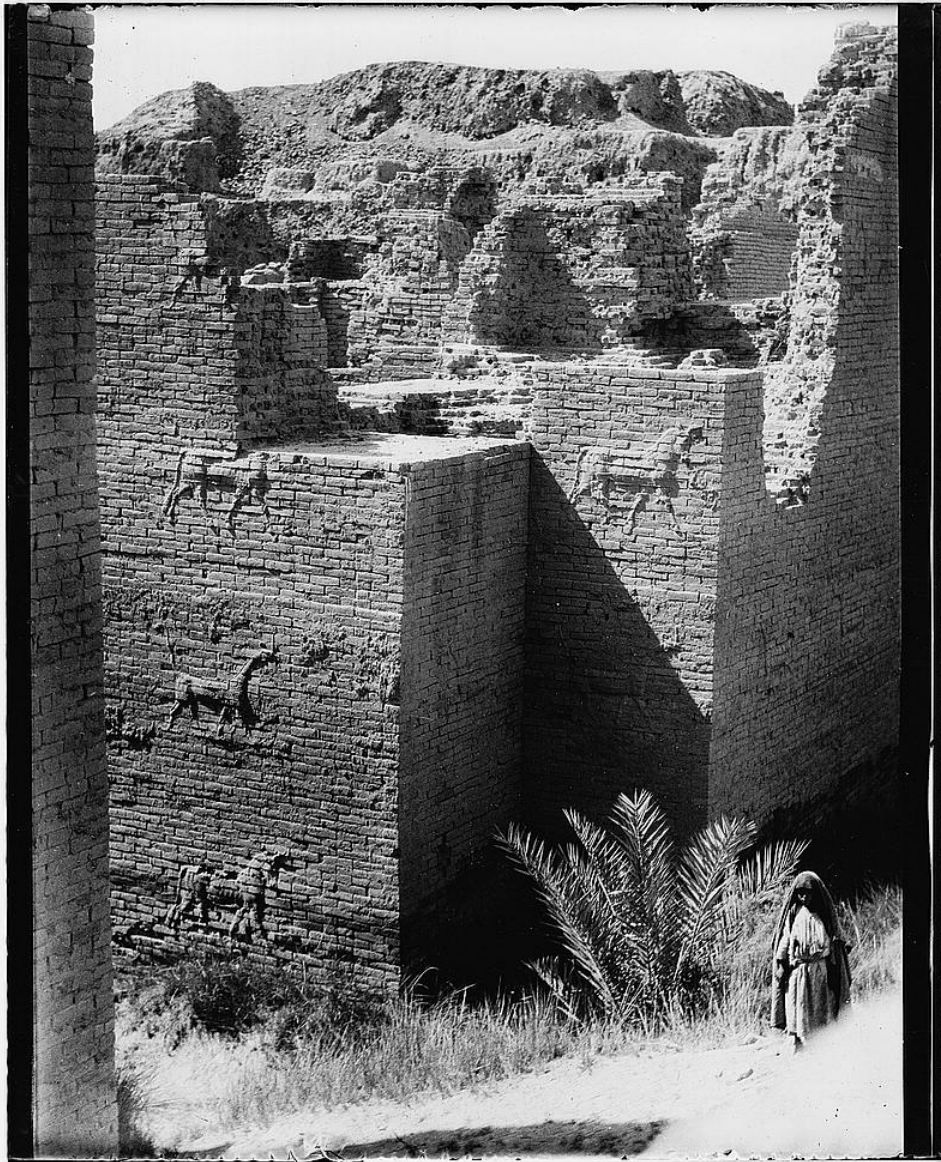


Prime Minister Haidar Abadi – by his nature and personality – seems unable to hold the country with the fist of iron required. He bows to the will of many different political groups, mainly Shia, who have substantial political weight, even bigger than the Da’wa party that Abadi is part of.

Even the Marjaiya in Najaf believes Abadi “should be a prime Minister in a European country but not Iraq, a state in need of determination and the will to stand against corruption and outside interference”. Najaf played an important role in whispering to the population that there is no incentive to vote because “these are the same people returning to power again and again and again”. Actually, even within the same Grand Ayatollah Sistani’s entourage, many said “voting in this election with these candidates is dubious, even from a religious point of view.”.

Despite Parliament’s decision to revoke electronic counting due to fraud in many provinces and abroad, Moqtada al-Sadr signed an agreement of partnership with Sayyed Ammar al-hakim and Ayad Allawi. All of these three groups together do not even form half of the required number of votes (165) even if we consider the seats these groups managed to gather as not void. Therefore, it is going to be very difficult to form a large coalition with the required number within the legal time limit.

In fact, Iraqis disagree on the election results and, by manually counting the votes, Iraq is heading towards the unknown. By the end of this current month of June, the Parliament will be considered dissolved. The constitution doesn’t allow for the parliament to self-renew its mandate. Unless it issues a decree asking the Premier to run new elections within six months or so (my own speculation), the actual government will remain for very long with reduced power and without accountability- and without a legislation entity to control its action. Therefore, in this case, Abadi will remain as a (weak) Prime Minister at the top of a handicapped government.



Moqtada al-Sadr may refuse a new election, he who considers himself to be sitting on the top of the largest group with the biggest number of seats in parliament. Moreover, it seems almost impossible for any coalition to come together and collect more than 165 seats in parliament so as to be able to nominate a prime minister within the time limit. The larger groups are Shia and these are divided among themselves.

It looks like the Iraqi politicians and the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed to keep Iraq weak, each for various reasons:

- Few Iraqi leaders want power for themselves. Haidar Asbadi won't join Moqtada al-Sadr because he fears the Sadrist leader. Moqtada has put in prison in al-Hannana (Moqtada's house in Najaf) the vice Prime Minister, a Sadrist, and there is no guarantee that he would not do the same with Abadi if they joined together in one coalition. Moqtada also asked his group to attack the most guarded "green zone" only to "pull Abadi's ears" and "teach him a lesson". On the other hand, Nouri al-Maliki refused to give up the prime ministership to Abadi who "robbed him of this position with the support of the Grand Ayatollah Sistani and other Shia who conspired against him", as he himself said.



Also, Hadi al-Ameri is convinced enough today to renounce the prime ministership as long as Nouri al Maliki is content. But that doesn't fit with promoting Abadi as a Prime Minister.

- The US doesn't want Iraq to be strong so it can't support the "Axis of the resistance". A strong Iraq, in the US view, is under Iran's control (which is totally wrong).
- A strong Iraq can also represent a menace to Israel and to neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, mainly Saudi Arabia. Iraq should not remain healthy and strong under Shia domination and Iran's influence (in Saudi's eyes): it may be more suitable to have a divided Iraq to prevent it from joining Iran and Syria in one axis against the Saudis.
- Iran also fears the Iraqi politicians who are very prone to jump into US arms, considering specially the presence of a strong current of animosity against Tehran among the Marjaiya, among many politicians and ordinary people. There is already a strong Hashd al-Shabi, capable of defending Iraq against any US hegemony.

Thus, given all these elements, it appears logical to many that Iraq will remain very weak indeed. It seems headed towards a weak government or no election at all. It is already under the control of the militias in parliament and in most key positions, a very suitable scenario that fits most involved foreign players (US, Iran, Saudi Arabia), and is supported by the collaboration of many Iraqis.

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