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Domestic power, external projection
and Saddam Hussein. Lessons
against a mirage of stability

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Abstract:

Iraq is home to an ethnoreligious and cultural diversity that represents a unique patrimony, yet its discursive and practical instrumentalisation, in the specific Iraqi context, can easily bolster mobilization and contribute with legitimizing premises on behalf of conflict. The mapping of local, tribal or clan identities, together with others more institutionalized such as belonging to a political party or the army, are key components to understand the relative –and ephemeral– Iraqi success under the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party and Saddam Hussein. The relevance of the topic stems from Iraq being a historical model of how a fragile and unstable state, with a heterogeneous and fractured social compost, consolidates its internal authority and develops resources and capabilities resorting to international leadership under a regime driven by the concentration of the structures and means of power, in a pervasive though effervescent process once the crucial figures for the reproduction of the system are gone. The second arguments relates to the former, as domestic and regional politics interact with the geopolitical strategy during the superpowers’ context. Today, we assist to an Iraqi state overwhelmed by an array of internal and exogenous actors, but that searches for a balance on the brink to collapse.

Keywords:

Iraq, Saddam Hussein, 1968-1988, personalization of politics, structure of fear, Middle East, Cold War, lessons for the present.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense

Introduction

Any powerful actor in Iraq must be aware of its spatial condition as “one of the big geographical-historical crossroads in the world with an exceptional geopolitical location”¹. Being a strategic nexus among three continental masses (Asia, Europe and Africa) and two maritime regions (Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea), the Iraqi state’s international projection poses an amalgam of challenges and opportunities, coupled with the economic influx derived from hydrocarbons which, as professor Roger Owen² suggested, embodies crucial vector for growth on some occasions, and a ‘curse’ on others.

Iraq is home to an ethnic, religious and cultural diversity that represents a unique patrimony, yet its discursive and practical instrumentalisation can easily bolster mobilization and contribute with legitimizing premises on behalf of social and political conflict. During the Ba’ath party’s rules, according to Ullrich³, the majority of Iraqi Muslim population qualified as Sunni, whereas a 40% would belong to the Shia sect, perhaps this balance due to some citizens’ intention to avoid hostility and discrimination from the Sunni-centered government –in spite of a nominally secular doctrine–. If that was the case, the relative figures would have reverted, since nowadays Shia population in Iraq sums for approximately 60%⁴. From an ethnic perspective, the contours among Arab, Kurd, Iranian and Turkmen communities are another decisive factor in the perceptions towards threats and both domestic and regional equilibriums. Moreover, the mapping of local, tribal or clan identities, together with others publicly institutionalized such as belonging to a political party or the army, are key components to understand the relative –and ephemeral– Iraqi success under the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party (BP) and Saddam Hussein. Lastly, Cold War structures and dynamics at global scale play an explanatory role in Iraq’s political evolution.

The relevance of the topic stems from Iraq being a historical model of how a fragile and

¹ ULLRICH, J.M., “La expansión iraquí hacia el Golfo”, *Política Exterior*, 4 (17), p.130, 2008. Disponible en: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i20643000>

² OWEN, E., “One Hundred Years of Middle Eastern Oil”, *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, Brandeis University, 24, 2008. Disponible en: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB24.pdf>

³ ULLRICH, J.M., “La expansión iraquí...” op.cit.

⁴ ESPINOSA, A., “La difusa división de las minorías en Irak”, *El País*, 2014. Disponible en: https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/08/16/actualidad/1408220095_570100.html

unstable state, with a heterogeneous and fractured social composition, consolidates its internal authority and develops resources and capabilities resorting to international leadership under a regime driven by the concentration of the structures and means of power towards a monolithic totalitarianism. That is to say, in a pervasive though effervescent process once the crucial figures for the reproduction of the system are gone. My research question aims at illustrating how the intimate interplay between domestic and international politics outstands as a characteristic trait at the Persian Gulf region, examining Iraq's case study for the period between end of 70s until closing 80s. The *diversionary theory of conflict* paradigm will appear to be a verifiable framework in the aforementioned interplay, given that it asserts that "those (leaders) facing non-electoral changes of government will need to distract those who can assist them in perpetuating their power or accelerate their replacement"⁵.

Cult of personality and monopoly of power: the structure of fear

In John Devlin's words⁶, Saddam Hussein is accountable for the Ba'ath's political system transformation into tyranny. However, it is fundamental to nuance and acknowledge the country's sociopolitical climate had been deteriorating almost uninterruptedly since the establishment of the Republic, gradually laying the foundations for higher levels of despotism and power accumulation at a time. Robert Putnam interprets so when he identified a proportional association between civil societies with developed social capital and the promotion of democratic institutions⁷. Being growing totalitarianism the logical –but not inevitable– contingency, we should not overlook the responsibility of the hoarding agents and their means, entailing the combination of the massive access to state employment and the neutralization of public participation but governmental obedience and violence.

In the end of 1970s, "*who confronts*" –etymological meaning of Saddam's name– had deployed the tools for supporting his formal rise to power: wide financial cooptation,

⁵ POWELL, J., "Regime Vulnerability and the Diversionary Threat of Force", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58 (1), pp. 169-196, 2012. Disponible en:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022002712467938?journalCode=jcrb>

⁶ DEVLIN, J., "The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis", *The American Historical Review*, 96 (5), pp. 1396-1407, 1991.

⁷ HOWARD, T., "Failed States and the Origins of Violence", *Ashgate Publishing Limited*, Vermont, 2014.

coercion through various methods and a quasi-omniscient security apparatus⁸. The Iraqi Communist Party (IPC), Ba'ath's major rival, was the first political formation to be neutralized. In the previous days before the National Front's rupture, Zaki Khair, IPC member, publicly denounced the arrest of 15.000 communists by the government⁹. Later on, through cover operations and fabricated accusations, the national closest to Moscow was relentlessly suppressed from the political arena.

Intraparty competition was the next step, as for making sure none with sufficient influence or charisma may question Saddam's authority. In July 1979, the purge against key figures within BP's apex culminated in Hassan al-Bakr's resignation, allegedly due to health problems. Earlier that year, differences between the party's tandem had come to be visible: for instance, it is believed Bakr preferred higher moderation vis-à-vis Iran in the revolution's aftermath¹⁰. In any case, Saddam Hussein turned to hold the highest posts at both party and state. The transition from a one-party regime to a personal feud was completed¹¹.

From now on, Saddam's figure "became synonymous of the Iraqi state"¹². The ba'athification process throughout public institutions and the irruption and control over civil society had opened the opportunity for exploiting the party in terms of "façade and propaganda channel"¹³, thus installing the conditions for a novel cult of personality. In fact, Saddam's own psychological profile, who often referred to Joseph Stalin, leaned to distorted attitudes blending together reality and what he wished to be true¹⁴.

The new personalist conception around the state materialized in the pseudo doctrine of *Saddamiyya*, self-defined as a Ba'ath Iraqi nationalist variant combining panarabist ideas, clearly pointing at displacing the Nasserist regional footprint. At the same time, at

⁸ ISMAEL, T, ISMAEL, J.S., y PERRY, G.E., "Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East: Continuity and Change", *Routledge*, New York, 2016.

⁹ ZERAOUI, Z., "Iraq: ¿una nueva potencia regional?". En MUSALEM, D. y ZERAOUI, Z., "Irán-Iraq: guerra, política y sociedad", p.98, Editorial Nueva Imagen, México D.F.

¹⁰ GHAREEB, A., y DOUGHERTY, B., "Historical Dictionary of Iraq", *Scarecrow Press*, Lanham, 2004.

¹¹ GAUSE, G., "The International Relations of the Persian Gulf", Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010.

¹² NALEPKA, E., "Saddam is Iraq and Iraq is Saddam: Saddam Hussein's Cult of Personality and the Perception of his Life and Legacy", p.7, McGill University, 2014. Disponible en: https://www.academia.edu/8222863/Saddam_is_Iraq_Iraq_is_Saddam_Saddam_Hussein_s_Cult_of_Personality_and_the_Perception_of_his_Life_and_Legacy

¹³ DEVLIN, J., "The Baath Party..." op.cit. p.12.

¹⁴ WOODS, K.M., MURRAY, W. y HOLADAY, T. "Saddam's War: an Iraqi Military Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War", p. 17. Institute for National Strategic Studies of the National Defense University, Washington D.C., 2009.

the national level, amid a non-existent organized opposition and controlling diffusion and indoctrination means, Saddam was able to project paternalist and charismatic narratives which, having coercion and patrimonial relations as mattress, seemed to foster his legitimate authority. In this way, “thousands of portraits, banners, statues, murals were placed in his honor”¹⁵.

The cult of personality was not only feasible, but rather successful, because profits of patronage stemming from the statalization process, although allocated to those selected or allowed by Saddam, were overlapped with a security and surveillance macro system that legitimately enforced a huge array of policies of fear. If mediatic show trials was the performance needed by the BP to consolidate its rule in 1968, from now on the objective would be to construct a sense of omniscience in regard to the state’s power, hence most coercitive and antisubversive actions were transferred to clandestinity.

The regime-sponsored terror directly involved the average citizen in terms of perpetration and accountability, as repressive organizations grew, so did the number of individuals linked to the BP and the state. In 1980, 1/5 of Iraq’s labor force was participant to institutional violence in time of peace in one way or another¹⁶. This radicalizing symbiosis is probably what the autocrat was appealing to during the discourse for the 13th anniversary of 1968 coup d’état, when he outlined “even more and more (the people) is realizing that people and revolution are the same body”¹⁷.

The outcome was a society dominated by, on one hand, an aggressor component leading to a predisposition for asserting a continuous grip and control over itself, therefore turning to the quasi institution of *taquir* (report) when deemed necessary. On the other, a victim component, which led the civil collective to accept positively the prospect of being tortured under certain circumstances¹⁸. Both extremes would feed the ultimate establishment of fear and its role in preserving authority.

Since the new institutional design tried to secure none was strong enough for threatening the president¹⁹, the same rationale took over the armed forces, historically the most

¹⁵ NALEPKA, E. “Saddam is Iraq...” op.cit. p.6.

¹⁶ MAKIYA, K., “Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq”, p.38. *University of California Press*, Berkeley, 1998.

¹⁷ HUSSEIN, S. “President Saddam Hussein’s Speech on National Day, 1981: The Thirteenth anniversary of the 17-30 July 1968 Revolution,” p. 8. Dar al-Ma’mun for Translation and Publishing, Bagdad, 1981.

¹⁸ MAKIYA, K., “The Republic...”op.cit.p.67.

¹⁹ AL-MARASHI, I., “Iraq’s Security and Intelligence Network: A Guide and Analysis.”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 6 (3), pp.1-13, 2002. Disponible en:

determinant power in Iraq. Waves of purges and a rampant depolitization process preceded the installment of BP and Saddam's hegemony over the former. In addition, and taking advantage of oil wealth, military troops counted from 180.000 in 1980 to 900.000 in 1990²⁰. This did not pose a threat anymore since the army had already been ideologized under the president's doctrine, plus the disciplinary code of "death for failure"²¹ was extremely effective.

Furthermore, the 'Leader' organized a strongly ideological popular militia, with clear instructions to counteract in case any subservive uprising may take place. In 1984, it counted approximately 450.000 members²². Despite that, Saddam Hussein was reluctant to return the army to its long-standing internal repression role, particularly seen when addressing the Kurdish issue. According to José María Ullrich²³, that constitutes one of the main reasons why since Saddam seized the government he insisted on limiting military deployment to external actions, something which, as a matter of fact, coincided with a favorable regional juncture for hegemonic ambitions.

Iraq and the aspiration for geopolitical leadership

A set of domestic and international realities converged with Iraq's aspirations in regard to the Arab world and the Gulf region, thus a substantial shift of foreign policy strategy to address those realities was introduced: 1) the new president of the Republic had destroyed his most menacing adversaries²⁴; 2) national oil income was translating into a buoyant economy; 3) Submissive to the regime, the military branch had never been so big and well-equipped; 4) Iraqi international relations were highly diversified and denoting optimistic prospects; 5) the dramatic expulsion of Egypt at the forefront of the Arab states; 6) a window of opportunity for filling the geopolitical vacuum left by the collapse of the Shah's rule²⁵. The last factor came to pull the trigger for Iraq to decide to stand for regional hegemony once and for all. Consequently, the relative *détente* 1975 –Algiers

https://www.academia.edu/560309/Iraqs_Security_and_Intelligence_Network_A_Guide_and_Analysis?auto=download

²⁰ FEDERATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETIES (FAS), "Iraqi Army", 1998. Disponible en: <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/iraq/agency/army.htm>

²¹ BRODER, J.M. y JEHL, D., "Iraqi Army: World's 5th Largest but Full of Vital Weaknesses", Los Angeles Times, p.1, 1990. Disponible en: http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-13/news/mn-465_1_iraqi-army/3

²² MAKIYA, K., "Republic of Fear...", op.cit. p. 32.

²³ ULLRICH, J.M., "La expansión iraquí...", op.cit.

²⁴ TRIPP, C., "Historia de Iraq", p.297, *Cambridge University Press*, Madrid, 2003.

²⁵ ISMAEL, T., ISMAEL, J.S. y PERRY, G.E., "Government and Politics..."op.cit. p.242.

Agreement— had brought about came to an end, thus disrupting the limits these countries had established for promoting their differences²⁶.

Saddam's domestic monopoly started to be forged a decade ago and settled after he took over the presidency. Having eliminated the internal quarrels endangering his permanence, "*who confronts*" could focus on building the status of major figure in the Arab world²⁷.

The geopolitical value of hydrocarbon had become evident in the 1973 crisis. Rentier economic policies became the guarantor of Iraqi stability. Oil dependence immediately proved to have both positive and negative effects, although perceived economic strength incentivized growing political assertiveness. "An ambitious development program that dramatically reformed the health and education systems [...], as well as the army, becoming one of the most powerful throughout the region and began to develop a nuclear program"²⁸. Iraqi military might had reached to gross figures, a technological capacity and a corporative cohesion under a central mandate without precedent.

The army could call to service a total of 1.7 million troops by 1987, distributed in seven corps, five armored divisions and three mechanized ones²⁹. Nevertheless, the combination of hierarchical rigidity, political obedience —whether for being internally promoted or the mere conservation of one's own life—, the centralization of decision-making and Saddam Hussein's military inexperience hindered any remarkable progress in regard to the armed forces professionalism. Consequently, it is not surprising that, in practice, Iraq behaved as "the neighborhood bully slower than the rest but too big for suffering damage from the hits"³⁰.

Gamal Abdel Nasser's sudden death and the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel entailed a critical swing on the panarabist paradigm. However, the ouster from the leadership left a vacuum that Iraq was willing to supplant, given Saudi Arabia did not have the capabilities nor the determination to project a hegemonic ambition by then. Saddam, in fact, led the voice pushing Egypt out of the Arab League, confined to

²⁶ BAKHASH, S., "The Troubled Relationship: Iran and Iraq, 1930-1980". En POTTER, L.G. y SICK G.G. (eds.) "Iran, Iraq and the Legacies of War", p.12. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004.

²⁷ ZERAOUI, Z., "Iraq: ¿nueva potencia...", op.cit. p.100.

²⁸ ÁLVAREZ-OSORIO, I., "El tirano de Tikrit", *El Comercio*, 2006. Disponible en: http://www.elcomercio.es/prensa/20061231/internacional/tirano-tikrit_20061231.html

²⁹ FAS, "Iraqi Army..." op.cit.

³⁰ BRODER, J.M. y JEHL, D., "Iraqi Army: World's 5th..." op.cit. p.3.

ostracism. In doing so, Baghdad became the continuator of the Nasserist unifying endeavor³¹, while making sure that short-lived vision would be in accordance to its own terms.

Finally, the ayatollahs' take over opened a window of opportunity for demonstrating in favor of whom the regional balance was revolving from now on. The groundbreaking, revolutionary chaos in Iran had installed "an unpredictable and aggressive regime, but it seemed weak too"³². The country's lack of organization and fatigue appeared to prelude an easy victory for Iraq, something that in Saddam's geopolitical imaginary, would equally boost his symbolic rise as protector on behalf of the traditional Persian enemy. Moreover, the new ruling class had explicitly claimed its desire for the revolutionary export, not only embodying a novel threat for the regional order but, in the Iraqi case, a factor for social effervescence involving the national Shia community. More than anything, the Islamic Revolution turned to be a source of legitimacy for the belligerent and police state of Iraq. After all, the 'Leader's mindset was convinced of the threat over his regime and, above everything, an invisible brake sabotaged Baghdad's aspiration towards the Arab world and the Gulf energy resources³³. Indeed, the creation of enemies had turned a fundamental practice for the reproduction of the political body's fear.

Within the superpowers' context, the Iranian singularity implied a rough remodeling of the geopolitical map, as the new official discourse foresaw a polluting and destabilizing effect³⁴. Through U.S. lenses, the so called 'twin pillars policy' turned invalid, thus an alternative strategy was needed. Iraq hardly was a trustworthy option and the Saudi Kingdom missed any sufficiently serious external behavior. Therefore, the commonly known Carter doctrine prevailed in the U.S. Middle Eastern policy. In general terms, this framework envisaged a further, more direct military role at the Gulf³⁵. Under this logic, a security umbrella was fostered through the opening of new regional bases and a growing manpower deployment.

³¹ ZERAOUI, Z., "Iraq: ¿una nueva..." op.cit. p.97.

³² TRIPP, C., "Historia de Iraq..." op.cit. p. 297.

³³ ULLRICH, J.M., "La expansión iraquí...", op.cit. p.9.

³⁴ FUNDACIÓ SOLIDARITAT, "Análisis de Iraq: Aproximación histórica del conflicto". Disponible en: <http://www.solidaritat.ub.edu/observatori/esp/Irak/analisi/historia.htm>

³⁵ GAUSE, G., "The International...", op.cit. p.57.

Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988)

The Iraq-Iran War is an illustrative case for observing how political distortion and ill-founded fervor can trigger an incoherent military campaign, in terms of the enemy's and own capabilities, and lacking defined operational objectives. From Saddam's vision, a fast and overwhelming victory over Iran would secure the Arab leadership, cut short the revolutionary spillover and lead to the abolition of the Treaty of Algiers in favor of an advantageous norm for the Shatt al-Arab.

Nevertheless, the extensive politization of the army, in the aftermath of a successful purging campaign, discouraged the strategists from formulating honest and rigorous assessments on the scenario³⁶. Even less surprisingly, Saddam's self-made inferences were systematically biased and erratic. It was not until the unexpected defeat in the al-Faw Peninsula when the command and control centralization came into question and Saddam started to realize he could not be his own intelligence chief³⁷. Regarding the troops' effectiveness, given their high level of ideologization, there was a tendency to prioritize criteria related to morale and spirit, at the expense of values like coordination and organizational rigor.

Other crucial mistake was assuming the Iranian society was actually as fractured and paralyzed as the image reaching to the outside suggested. According to Guillermo Almeyra³⁸, the Iranian political culture gives preference to any exogenous attack by stressing religious nationalism at the expense of its internal social struggle. Furthermore, the conflict materialized an ideal chance for gathering popular support around the new establishment, while the political opposition could be vehemently labelled as "enemies of Islam, and traitors to the nation"³⁹. To some extent, and without undermining the absence of a relation of forces based on a technological gap that would have probably reduced the number of deaths, the need for the perpetuation of the state of fear

³⁶ WOODS, K.M., MURRAY, W. y HOLADAY, T., "Saddam's War..." op.cit. pp.6.

³⁷ MANOSEVITZ, J.U., "Review: The Iran-Iraq War, a Military and Strategic History", 2015. Disponible en: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-59-no-2/iran-iraq-war-military-strategic-history.html>

³⁸ ALMEYRA, G., "Las bases de la guerra". En MUSALEM, D. y ZERAOUI, Z. (eds.) "Irán-Iraq: guerra, política y sociedad", pp. 23-36, 1982. Editorial Nueva imagen, México D.F

³⁹ GAUSE, G., "The International..." op.cit. p.66.

explained the conflict's long duration and the several Iran's rejections to the ceasefire petitions by the Iraqi government.

In any case, what was planned to be a *blitzkrieg* victory became a war of attrition. From 1982 hereafter, as Iranian offensive waves advanced into Iraqi territory, Saddam Hussein was forced to mobilize the national masses⁴⁰ and the factor of international alliances entered the game, ultimately leading to the Iraqi Pyrrhic victory. The Islamic revolutionary ideal fell out the Cold War geopolitical imaginary, thus there was an unspoken consensus that "whether in the region or outside, an Iranian military win would destabilize the Middle East in a way not resorting benefits neither for the East nor the West"⁴¹.

Consequently, the dominant answer –with the exceptions of Syria and Oman- was alignment with Iraq: Saudi Arabia, UAE and the majority of Gulf dynasties relinquished a relative, cautious Iraqi standup since the beginning of the conflict –in spite of the GCC original foundations pointed at a diplomatic estrangement–, who became recipient of economic, logistical and intelligence assistance in its ephemeral rise as the guardian of Arabism⁴².

Between 1982 and the first half of 1987, the Islamic regime seemed to set the pace for the course of the war, however, the only quotable triumph was that of al-Faw, which mainly stemmed from excessive confidence and poor command among the Iraqi forces. From 1984, the latter had deployed in the same battlefield as much as 1.000 tanks and 1.000 artillery pieces⁴³, yet its technological superiority remained without meaningful success.

The turning point resulted from the confluence of several elements. For the first time in the conflict, the U.S. adopts a direct role and intervenes in order to secure the Gulf oil flows. Meanwhile, the Iraqi forces managed to unleash an almost uninterrupted bombing over Tehran and other urban areas, through medium-range missiles. Moreover, since 1987, Iraq had "a four-to-one advantage concerning tanks; four-to-one in armored vehicles; and two-to-one in artillery pieces and anti-aircraft missiles"⁴⁴. Lastly, "firepower,

⁴⁰ WOODS, K.M....op.cit. p.10

⁴¹ TRIPP, C....op.cit. p.306.

⁴² ZERAOUI, Z.,...op.cit. p.101.

⁴³ BRODER, J.M. y JEHL, D...op.cit. p.3.

⁴⁴ FAS...op.cit.

chemical weapons and an eventual superior planning"⁴⁵ allowed to retrieve the al-Faw peninsula in 1988. The existing military capabilities could be accompanied with operational and tactical effectiveness once Saddam loosened its grip of decision-making and introduced a reform of the Revolutionary Guards favoring professionalism. In July that year, Iran accepts an armistice and the validity of UN resolution 538.

In regard to its most important implications, the ceasefire did not translate into any kind of territorial, economic or political reward or tradeoff, apart from approximately 1.7 million casualties on both sides⁴⁶. Yet, in Gregory Gause's analysis⁴⁷, two main features differ from the pre-war period: 1) Iraq had accumulated a weaponry stockpile and an exorbitant economic debt; 2) the U.S. acquired precedent for direct intervention in the region as never before.

Conclusions: Lessons for the present

The pervasively totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein secured a political stability far more based upon the centralization of authority and patronage than his predecessors, yet this process of accumulation of power in gradually smaller units was not alien to those neither.

The risk factor of army interference in public political affairs was a constant since formal independence. Until Saddam's rise to presidency, the top positions of the Republic were hogged by military officers, as well as the changing governments were systematically orchestrated by this stratum. In its very essence, the army as the key institution in the access to power did not vary after 1968, instead, it was its ranks what underwent a full transformation, while survived the rationale of stretching out a link between the political regime and its historical social networks, fundamentally formed by the family cores and tribal webs, which in Saddam's case resorted to Tikrit and the wider northeastern Arab Sunni region of Iraq. In parallel, ideological indoctrination, quasi constant military operations both abroad and home, a system of collusion and loyalty and the intelligence and secret police surveillance safeguarded the army's subordination. Firstly, its depolitization, immediately followed by a re-ideologization process, was a pattern also imbued upon the Iraqi society as a whole, turning the public opposition virtually

⁴⁵ WOODS, K.M....op.cit. p.16.

⁴⁶ ÁLVAREZ-OSORIO, I...op.cit.

⁴⁷ GAUSE, G.,...op.cit.

inexistent. Saddam's monopoly was fulfilled with the incorporation of the civil spaces and socioeconomic opportunities to the state, being the latter equally absorbed by a baathification process. Within the party, the tribalization of the strategic positions solved the internal competition, then leading to the monopolization around Saddam. The embedded fear within the sociopolitical fabric and the hegemony over the armed forces were among the binding elements to the continuity and proliferation of the personalist regime.

As we know, and without undermining the triggering effect of the US campaign, such model of governance had a deadline and abruptly ended up the 'contractual' nexus anchoring the society to the state, in fact, the state itself was neutralized. In the Iraqi juncture, it was not difficult for the sociopolitical processes to turn to other institutions. Today, we assist to an exhausted central government, weak armed forces, partly dependent, partly subjugated to the pressure emanating from the armed groups, among which the Popular Mobilization Units (*Hashd al-Sha'abi*) remain the most notorious umbrella organization; and a national economy begging for reconstruction. And in many aspects, this last term –reconstruction– is the pursued and thrilling dynamic, which also entails the incumbent administration. Prime Minister Abdel-Mahdi's office perseveres in portraying itself as sufficiently independent, in being a meeting point between the U.S. and Iran, or even becoming a bridge between them, as those most idealists would dream to argue. After nearly 30 years, relations with Saudi Arabia, in spite of bore and interruptions –ie. by the end of June, the North-American military intelligence suggests the attacks with drones on May 14th damaging the East-West pipeline was not launched from Yemen, but from Iraqi territory–, are welcomed as a feasible balancer amid Iranian influence and the losses stemming from the newly adopted sanctions on the Islamic Republic. It is virtually impossible the Iraqi state takes back the domestic grip and the expectations of an assertive external projection in the observable horizon. There are too many internal and exogenous actors avoiding its channels. Recovering its institutional weight, in a region where the 'person' matters, is undoubtedly a slacklining exercise.

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