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## Consequences of Iraq's security conflicts in the west of Iran with emphasis placed on the refugee crisis

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### ABSTRACT

Iran's proximity with countries most of which faced with insecurity, strife and wars due to internal conflicts or by means of regional and international crises has caused our country to be affected by such consequences. One of the most prominent of these adverse impacts has been the occurrence of refugee crisis and the often entrance of refugees fleeing from wars and crises in Iraq into the Iranian soil. This country, due to several decades of despotism and dictatorship of the Baath Party, existence of various religious and ethnic gaps, and existence of a failed government lacking a true nation-state has been considered one of the hotspots for crises in the region, thus causing a huge number of people to enter its neighboring countries including Iran. The presence of Iraqi refugees in Iran, though administered in most cases by relevant officials and institutions quite systematically, the unwanted side-effects as well as resulting problematic outcomes cannot be ignored. Given the history of this phenomenon during the past decades and a review of the partitioned, non-homogenous and turbulent situation of Iraq, we can certainly ascertain that despite existence of apparent changes within the political arena and governance in Iraq, little changes have occurred in the unstable nature and turbulent structure of this country. This means that the risk of occurrence of refugee crisis in the west of country still exists.

**Keywords:** Refugee crisis, Security conflicts, Failed state

## **INTRODUCTION**

The country of Iraq, during past years until now has been one of the most turbulent neighbors of Iran and will be turbulent for an unknown future. Examining differences and conflicts and even wars existing in the Middle East region for the past two decades clearly indicates that the country of Iraq has been one of the most important players with a negative role in most scenarios. Certainly, the origin and root cause of this negative role in the region needs to be sought in the internal issues of that country. Various and repeated religious, ethnic gaps and loss of a nation-state have led to denial of the feeling of being we (weness) as a single and united country among people of Iraq. This issue has always led to religious and ethnic conflicts, thus paving the way for stand offs over power balance. Iran's neighborhood with Iraq has engendered consequences to be imposed on our country, where one of the most prominent of these adverse impacts has been the occurrence of refugee crisis and the often and on entrance of Iraqi nationals fleeing from wars and crises in Iraq into the western parts and provinces.

After the fallout of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the start of democracy trend in this country, it was supposed that the crisis of security in Iraq and emergence of various crises, including refugee crisis had ended. However, in this article we seek to examine Iraqi issues and explain the realities of this country by stating this truth that the today Iraq is also prone to the emergence of new crises and in the horizon, no sign of a stable integrated nation-state in the short term future is seen. This issue is important for the Islamic Republic of Iran in that it will be determined that the grounds for the emergence of new refugee crisis in Iraq still exist and also necessary preventive predictions and measures need to be considered in this area while determining macro strategies towards Iraq.

## **INTERRELATEDNESS OF TWO CONCEPTS**

If we desire to have a proper understanding of the refugee crisis situation in the west of Iran, particularly Iraqi asylum seekers during the past decades, two concepts need to be at first clarified and briefly explained. Two concepts of failed state and refugee, though lacking a conceptual and semantic relatedness, definition and understating of these concepts well, their direct relationship together, specially regarding the subject matter in this article, i.e. Iraqi asylum seekers will be illustrated.

### *1. Failed State*

Failure of a state means that the state has failed in various directions and instead of supporting citizens, havoc and often internal wars are prevalent. There is no law and in case such laws are enacted, they won't be implemented and no order is ever established. There is no central political authority or it is so much ineffective. In most cases, the economic system is also met with failure and cannot provide the most primary needs of welfare for the people. Failure of the state will occur for states which have been previously fragile and weak. Compared to the state being fragile, failure also enjoys more intensity and the problems of the fragile state will be aggravated. Therefore, to understand a failed state, the fragile and weak state from which failure comes out needs to be identified. Fragile states are ineffective in several directions. The first major problem for these states is the economy. In fact, an integrated national economy which is able to preserve the primary level of welfare for the

people does not exist. The second problem with the fragile and weak states is the political problem and this goes back to state entities and their legitimacy before people. Effective states perform various activities which are deemed evident by citizens: guaranteeing the security of citizens against internal and foreign threats, establishing order and justice as meaning effective rule of laws and maintain individual freedom including primary civil and political rights.

Failed and fragile states perform these functions to small extents or they are totally incapable of performing them. On the one hand, weak states' entities lack competence, resources and ability and on the other hand, power is mostly concentrated in the hands of elite who benefit from their own position for their own sake. For some clear reasons, fragile states lack legitimacy. The public legitimacy is low, because large parts of the people see no reason to support the state and the government lacks such authority, i.e. people do not obey the rules and regulations. The horizontal legitimacy being the same, people's feeling of belonging to a nation is also weak, because the state is controlled by certain groups and the state is not the symbol of all people and hence, fragile states totally lack the ability to create some spiritual correlation (Rothberg, 2004). The concept of a fragile state is an ideal example and in the real world, states approach this example with different degrees. On the other hand, problems and crises resulting from fragile and failed states are not only limited to the national borders and they transfer their own crises to other neighboring countries (Iqbal and Starr, 2008) of which we can refer to the emergence of people called refugees and a crisis named refugee crisis.

## *2. Refugees*

In a general definition, refugee is referred to an individual who has fled his own country for the fear of prosecution, abuse or exposure to the risk directed at his life. From sol long ago, due to the way in which the international community has been organized in form of sovereign states enjoying separate sovereignty, refugees have been considered as problems that need to be addressed. In fact, the continuation and actual crisis of the problems of refugees within the international policy as well as unsuccessful attempts done for this issue could be to some extent attributed to the issue of sources. In the present time and in the current language, there are various terminologies for referring to refuges that would make any discussions regarding this issue as difficult. Refugees are mentioned within various frameworks under titles of economic migrants, illegal migrants, asylum seekers, political asylum seekers and people without states.

However, efforts made for definition refugees date back to strict days against refugees, i.e. the time between the interval of two World Wars when arrangements and legal instruments were regarded for classification of certain groups of people and refugees as a whole. These efforts, finally led to the conclusion of the Convention relating to status of Refugees in 1951 which announces the refugee as an individual who flees his own homeland fearing of been persecuted due to race, religion, nationality and membership in a special social group or due to having a political opinion and turns to the outside of his country and is not able or not inclined to come under the protection and support of such a country due to the fear that surrounds him. The salient point is that the mentioned Convention gives a known international legal status along with some rights to the refugee. The most determining factor of these rights may be provided in article 33 of this Convention which accounts for the principle of non-restoration or prohibition of returning of person to the country in which he risks his life (Feller and Turk, 2003).

*2.1. Restrictions within arrangements relating to refugee crisis in the world*

Today, the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees is the most primary organization active in the area of refugees, of course, strategic preferences and priorities of the Origin states and those hosting the migrants have limited the executive and practical power of this organization. On the other hand, existing conventions and arrangements within the area of refugees have been to large extent limited and unclear. For instance, a definition for refugees cited in the 1951 Convention is to some extent restricting for placing emphasis in prosecution and abuse of the individual as the benchmark for determining the status of the refugee. The existing Convention was drawn during the Cold War, i.e. the time such a criterion was holding true inside the Europe. However, from 1960s onwards, displacement of masses of humans in Africa, for example, has damaged local communities. The 1967 Protocol extended the geographical range of the Convention to the outside of the Europe (Convention and Protocol), but acceptance persecution and abuse of people as the factor defining the status of the refugee is inappropriate. On this basis, efforts have been made in some regional documents so that a more widespread definition is presented for refugees.

For instance, the 1969 Convention of the Africa Unity Organization recognized the criterion of "homelessness due to foreign aggression, occupation, foreigners' dominance or eventualities which have disrupted the public order in some parts of the country seriously". The 1951 Convention is also restricting in this connection which states, for a person to enjoy a legal status of a refugee, he needs to cut across an international boundary. However, the "problem of refugees" in the contemporary era involves millions of people who have the same status of refugees qualitatively, but they have remained inside their state borders and for this purpose, they are called internal homeless people. Crossing international borders is not always possible for homeless people and most of whom are stranded inside the state borders and have no access to international assistance and contribution. However, in the area of problem solving of refugees, the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugee advocates three solutions which are: return of the refugees to their homeland, renewed resettlement and international; settlement. All of these three solutions could be seen as efforts for getting the refugees "to have a land", i.e. returning the refugee to the normal relationship of the state and citizens which is based on the land. However, such an effort ignores the fact that within the international framework based on territorial states enjoying sovereignty, any sort of solution could be the key temporally and prior to the influx of the later wave of refugees. In fact, the existence of the refugee, not to mention it is an unpredictable result is the outcome of drawing borders between states with territories enjoying sovereignty, particularly states which ignore supporting all the people as citizens under their authority (Hadad, 2003). Of international presumptions we can refer to the fact that states are beneficial to their citizens but sovereignty cannot be permanently performed. In other words, a refugee once appears that the international practice and theory of the states and the sense of sovereignty constituting it do not match.

It appears that we need a more widespread definition of t5teh refugee in comparison to the definition set forth in the 1951 Convention which accounts for the contemporary Refugee paradigms. Such a definition must instead of placing emphasis on people, abused and persecuted and have managed to cross international borders place emphasis on people who have gone out of the Nation-State relationship within the internal political system in reluctance and cannot return to this relationship unless this relationship is once again repaired. International boundaries are symbols of limits of an internal political community, but crossing

international borders is not the necessary condition for converting an individual to a refugee. Once refugees appear when good governance norms are ignored inside of a country and people, inevitable seek to search for support in another country, however the relationship between the state and the citizens could collapse without person's crossing of the borders and hence, the contrast between the refugee and the internal homeless is an incorrect contrast. However, the concept of refugee may not be in the end turn into a universal definition format. It needs to be asked whether a general term for this considerable number of compulsory migrants with such histories and backgrounds as well as colorful experiences right or not. That which is true is that the subject of definition of the refugee is not only a semantic issue rather, for many of people, the fact that who is recognized as a refugee and who is not is the issue of life and death. As understood from the context of the two concepts of failed state and refugee, emergence of an individual called refugee and a crisis called refugee crisis, are in the first glance rooted in the existence of a fragile and a failed state. Absence of capabilities and necessary will of a state from different economic, political and legal aspects have caused the crisis of refugee crisis to appear. These failed states are seen in most regions across the world, specifically in less developed countries like African states or in developing states like Mideast countries. Another common aspect that could be seen in the many of these countries is the existence of various religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic and economic gaps among such people. Now, having said that we deal with the issue that can we explain and justify the role of Iraq in crises of refugee crisis in then west of Iran based on the theory of a failed state

### Is Iraq a failed state?

#### 1. Iraq's refugee crisis crises

Investigating the Iraq's proximity with Iran during the past forty years indicates that degrees of tension, conflicts, wars and stand-offs have governed the two countries more than good proximity as well as peaceful co-existence. For different reasons, from the inside of the Iraq's Baath party some policies have arisen which have led to internal crises in Iraq and the region as a whole. In most of these crises, Iran as the neighbor has been the first country which has been affected by the Iraq's impacts. If we look at the documents relating with refugee crisis in the west of Iran, seven crises could be identified which have directly resulted from internal and regional developments and crises in Iraq. In these seven crises, three western provinces of Iran, namely Western Azerbaijan, Kermanshah and Kurdistan have in various degrees seen huge numbers of Iraqi refugees. In the largest of these asylums seeking crises in the year 1997 and following the First Gulf War, around 1/4 million people fled their country and entered into Iran and took refuge there. Such population was almost a third of the local population of the three mentioned provinces where this issue caused negative impacts on the common lives of the people living there. It cannot be certainly stated that one continued trend could be assumed to be the factor of various refugee crisis in a special country like Iraq.

#### 2. Have grounds for the appearance of the refugee crisis in Iraq ended?

During the last decades, Iraq has always been one of the basic security pillars (or to put it the other way, insecurity pillars) in the region and has served as a threat to security against Iran where the most salient example has been the imposed eight year War declared by the Baath party in the 1980s. However, with the collapse of Baath party and the end of Saddam Hussein's governance in 2003, some perceptions regarding this country directed from

pessimism to optimism in regards to security. This new idea maintained that at least for a foreseeable future, security threats on the Iraq's part will be highly declined. This idea states that with the collapse of Saddam's tenure and creation of a plural structure along with a democratic society in Iraq, the aggressive and threatening characteristics of this country will fall out. However, despite the loss of Iraq's aggressive features within foreign dimension, modern conditions of this country have brought about new threats against Iran where one can refer to expansion of extremism, terrorism, and ethnic and religious tensions in Iraq and the possibility of domino effects to the whole region and also renewed appearance and aggravation of foreign military personnel on the Iranian borders (Vaezi, 2008).

Through this explanation and conduct of a short field study, we can argue that the modern Iraq has no longer the ability to get involved in regional and international adventures. However, on the other hand, Iraq's developments after Saddam Hussein revealed that various gaps that existed prior to this and caused various ethnic and religious crises (UNPO, 2013), still go strong. Even some have stated that these crises had existed in a hidden way; however they have just emerged and play roles in the political and social life of Iraq. Iraq under the tenure of Saddam Hussein, though playing the role of a united nation-state artificially and the Sunni minority of this country was ruling the majority of Shiites and Kurds of this country by repressing the existing gaps in the country, with lapse of over a decade of the fallout of Saddam Hussein, the ethnic groups and religious communities of this country are still fighting over governance of this country and during such crisis, no sign of national Iraqi identity is seen. Voices of independence on the Kurdish part are heard for autonomy where this indicates we are not faced with a united country as such and separatist and divergent groups are growing powerful on daily basis. Experts who are familiar with the Iraq's and Kurds' issues know very well that the idea of a united Kurdistan is not considered as mere abstract idea for Kurdistan and many leaders of them rather it is a serious will that could be promoted by them, (Bilgehan Ozpeck, 2012).

The major concern is that one cannot open an account on the fact that Iraq no longer possesses the aggressive capability and is not thought of a risk for our country. To say appropriately, we can say that the direct aggressive characteristic of Iraq is lost while any internal conflict in this country has the potential to engulf the region including Iran. Because, most of the internal conflicts of this country are not limited to the national borders of that country and they have involved regional and international dimensions. In many of the Iraqi conflicts, the first direct outcome has been an influx of Iraqi refugees where they have targeted the Iranian Soil for seeking asylum. Thus, we cannot be made sure that Iraqi crises could remain within the internal context of this country and will not affect us. The latest example of these crises could be the emergence of Daesh (ISIS) in this country and appearance of internal conflicts among different ethnic groups which will be discussed later in this article.

### 3. Daesh's presence in Iraq and appearance of a failed state

Prior to the occurrence of latest eventualities, few people were interested in considering Iraq as a failed and a fragile state. We were and are interested to consider Iraq as an integrated and a united nation with existing internal conflicts arising from the plots of the internal secessionist and foreign invaders. Though internal and external plots cannot be denied in Iraq, this issue should not deter us from ignoring this reality in this country. Field realities and facts in Iraq with Daesh being in the country and sweeping capturing of parts and territories of this

country as well as major cities of this country tells us this point that the Central Iraqi Government does not have the quality and ability to maintain then territory and support of the citizens.

Although the Terrorist Group of Daesh enjoys more human force capability, as well as more financial backing compared to other terrorist groups in the region and in the international arena and is backed by some states in the region, this issue cannot be a justification for the weak, disrupted and purposeless performance of the state of Iraq and its military forces against ISIS attacks. The existing differences between the central government and the internal local powers like the Kurdistan semi-autonomous territory in regards to how to deal with the Daesh and retreat of some of the ethnic groups in the initial stages of dealing with Daesh and the lack of dominance of the central state over its own military personnel for containing then crisis have all led to high number of casualties, refugees of many Iraqi citizens including women and children and also an influx of Iraqi refugees seeing for safe places. This could be a sign of the absence of a nation-state in Iraq. Three major groups in Iraq, i.e. Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis claim special geographical regions, special interest and unique beliefs, different demands a d political, economic and social identifies for themselves (Wimmer, 2003). These different demands and wills are so powerful among people who are preferred over top the macro national interest among religious and ethnic groups in so far as they are not united against the enemy and seek their own interest. This is a situation up to now, Iraqis have been struggling to obtain and different political groups in Iraq have not yet managed to reach a united and single position I fighting terrorists and each of which has been separately seeking their own goals. This gap is so huge that in the initial weeks of the crisis in Iraq, Masoud Barzani decided to conduct a referendum for independence over Kurdistan (Tabnak News Agency, 2014); a decision remained silent according to regional and international pressures. Certainly, one has to expect for more such calls in the future in Iraq and these words are not sentimental and emotional. In this connection, assistance and presence of regional and international powers in fight against Daesh (ISIS) have to some extent managed to reverse the progress of this group. The reality is that dependency and reliance of the state on foreign powers for maintain its own national sovereignty and interest cannot be interpreted except for a failed state of Iraq. It is also for the same reason that according to the latest ranking of states in 2014, Iraq was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> among 178 states and among t6he most fragile states in line with Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria with high warning levels (Fragile State Index, 2014).

#### Past experiences- Future possibilities

##### 1. Impacts of refugee crisis over Iran

As stated previously, seven crises of refugee crisis with Iraq being the origin have been known to us who have followed major and considerable impacts on border provinces on the one hand, and for the refugees themselves on the other hand. Some which are briefly explained in thus section.

##### 1.1. Political and security impacts and consequences

The presence of any foreign national in a strange country could entail security outcomes and impacts for him and the country as a whole. Now, should these people are present in form of high number refugees in a society, the problems will be deeper and catastrophic. Increase

of social insecurity, robbery, and delinquency, illegal trafficking from international borders and emergence of conflicts, infiltration of terrorism group's members under the cover of refugees to the community and a change in the demographic structure are among examines which have been raised during the last years in the western parts of the country. On the other hand, the community of refugees, due to severance of citizenship with their own respective governance is deprived of social and political rights like participation in the elections.

#### 1.2. Cultural and social consequences and impacts

Certainly, the most important part of refugee crisis related outcomes for the two sides could be sought in the social and cultural areas. Emergence of modern social phenomena in dealing with the local society culture and the culture of the refugees are among the major side effects of those unwanted encountering. Cultural and religious conflicts, marriages between refugees and the hosting society people and their resulting cultural outcomes as well as other examples have always been seen in different ears of refugees' presence in Iran. The crisis of providing for educational needs of the refugees is among the examples which have created problems for the hosting society.

However, necessity of security financial costs, nonattendance to education of these people and their younger generation has paved the way for various security and economic problems in the country. Growth of the population of the refugees which has always been a crisis have added top all these worries.

#### 1.3. Economic impacts and consequence

With the presence of the first refugee in ay country, the first need is financial resources and providing general needs for him. Providing skyrocketing costs of refugees in Iran has been the first economic problem resulting from their presence in our country. However, economic crises resulting from refugee crisis in the west of Iran have exceeded current costs. Due to lack of access and permission for this group of refugees to enter into the official labor market, the unofficial labor markets as well as black markets have been reinforced and the internal market has been occupied by the refugees. On the other hand, long borders between Iran and Iraq as well as attractively of the two sides in the area of goods trafficking and smuggling of gold and currency by refugees and their relations with smugglers and traffickers internally and externally have led to negative impacts on the national economy.

#### 1.4. Legal impacts and consequences

The most prevalent outcome of refugee crisis in the west of Iran has been legal outcomes for the refugees themselves and the local people. Presence of people without nationality or dual nationality, people lacking identity cards which make working in supportive, political, security and legal entities difficult, emergence of problems relating to personal status like marriage, birth, death and legal lawsuits in the foreign country and the way they are investigated have been among issue that existed up to now. Marriage of the refugees with local people has been one of the instances that has repeated frequently, thus resulting in more complex legal and judicial issue for their children.

2. The future of Iraq and the possibility of the emergence of new refugee crisis

Given the turbulent and a complicated history of Iraq and bitter experiences the people of this country have gone through, now the main question is that how will the future of Iraq look like? The other major question is how the impacts of developments perceived will for Iran be over Iran? Should we expect for another refugee crisis from Iraq? How should the Islamic Republic of Iran prepare itself for dealing with current and future developments of Iraq and with what approaches should the government of Iran need to deal with different possibilities in Iraq?. What are then possibilities we are talking about? We need to at first determine various options for the future of Iraq. Though this article does not have the capacity to address and explain the impacts of the possibilities on Iran, determination of certain indices could be an introduction for alternative strategies for preparation against any new conditions in Iraq. The Islamic Republic of Iran has supported an integrated and unified Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein and has considered the existence of such Iraq as guarantor of stability, security and welfare in Iran and in the region as a whole. In fact, the best picture for Iran and the region is the existence of an integrated Iraqi in line with expectations.

This pattern will certainly reduce many of the internal conflicts of Iraq and the domino effects will be minimized for Iran and the region as a whole. However, this pattern is thought of an ideal example for this country and during the past decade, hopefulness for reaching a strong and authoritative and integrated nation-state has turned insignificant. Currently, the complete fulfillment of such a pattern is far more optimistic and no one can expect it either. By the way, if no such ideal Iraq ever exists, we need to understand this country is in primary steps for creation of a strong nation-state in line with perseverance of its own integration. The new Iraqi government though formed and in the end all the groups agreed over it, there is distance to reach the minimums required for speaking of a real state as such. There is still the possibility for this semi-structured coalition to break apart and to face serious and critical challenges. The national Iraqi state has not yet managed to retain its own reinforcement and effectiveness within a national agreement and prove it to the international community. That which the modern Iraq attempts to gain is a kind of parliamentary system like the Lebanon or in other words a so-called Associative Democracy in which with the formation of parliamentary coalitions and groupings between groups and alliances and different groups for participation within the political life, attempts have been made so that their consent is attracted (Azghandi and Karami, 2007).

However, faced with the most optimistic states for the future of Iraq, there are other options that could be exposed to the political life in the country. In fact, some Iraqi experts are so pessimistic about the future of Iraq that they consider as impossible creation of a democracy being stable (Thompson, 2014). Now, if we remove the return of another dictatorship or dominance of another foreign country over Iraq as not so much possible choices, the other most pessimistic possibility will be the partitioning of Iraq into independent states which will leave different and various impacts on the Iraqi people on one hand and Iran and other countries in the region on the other hand. Although this option lacks enough support among people, some of the measures, speeches and internal policies have mentioned that this issue needs not be taken for granted and it is highly potential. This issue is incompletely being executed in the Iraqi Kurdistan. Such options, if executed fully and completely will have their own various impacts. In fact, each of the mentioned cases needs to be considered as a possibility with various degrees and measures need to be taken for more preparation. Although, in the end it is the people of Iraq who mark their destination, the Islamic Republic

of Iran must have the preparation to face with any fundamental developments in Iraq and not be affected with the measures undertaken.

## **CONCLUSION**

The neighbors of each country are the most important friends or enemies of that country. In this sense, stability, security and welfare of the neighboring state means stability and security of the other neighbor and conversely, tensions and instability of the neighbor means tension and instability of the other neighbor. Unfortunately, Iran has been exposed in the west and east of the country within two unstable and insecure states during last decades; the two neighbors which have forced millions of people to enter into Iran. The similarity point of these two states, i.e. Iraq and Afghanistan is the existence of failed states among them which have surrounded them up to day. Investigating the history and cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds in Iraq indicates that one cannot be optimistic in a short run and the exit of Iraq from the current situation. This means that this country still does have the potential to place burdens arising from their internal conflicts to their neighbors and the last example, i.e. the presence of Daesh in Iraq confirms this reality. With the lapse of over a decade since establishment of fundamental changes within the Iraqi political system, one cannot see a true nation-state in this country and there is no such thing in reality. Having said that, we can argue that the Iraqi country could have the potential to send more refugees towards Iran and any crisis could sparkle that.

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