



Iraq Partition May Ignite Shia-Sunni War

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Somalia/United Arab Emirates -- Given the abhorrent sectarian strife in Iraq, one might envision federalism as the only reasonable way to stop the bloodshed and pinch down violence to its roots. But dividing the country into oil rich Shiite south and Kurdish north with a Sunni dominated waste land in the West and northwest will be a recipe for a more explosive situation. Oil will fuel a long struggle for survival.

One must also consider the ethnic and religious groups such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians, Persians, Christians and Jews that could lose their identity and political rights within a federal Iraq.

The source of the current violence is unclear. It is hard to believe that citizens of the same country could commit such unprecedented crimes against each just in the name of revenge or in a power struggle. The only plausible explanation is that what is happening in Iraq is a war by proxy of neighboring regional powers. It is known that the rule of Iraq was in the hand of Sunni Arabs since the Umayyad dynasty. The Kurds had also their day in power through the Ayyubids whose rule extended from Iraq through the Levant countries to Egypt.

The Shiites who comprise the majority of the population were oppressed subjects through the history of Iraq. It is therefore quite normal for the Shiites to have their day in the sun particularly as they have been deprived of their oil wealth for so many years. But we know that apart from their claim for their lost power, the Sunni Arabs will not accept being boxed into desolate desert habitats. They will fight to have their share of the wealth. As they had used Arab nationalism in the past to subjugate the Shiites and Kurds, they will also use the Arab card and Sunni fraternity to attract help from Sunni Arab countries.

A divided Iraq therefore will only create satellite states that owe their existence to powerful neighboring rivals. While the Shiites who are themselves split between Al Hakeem and Al Sadr blocs and compete for Iranian favors, could agree on some sort of wealth and power sharing in their areas, and the Kurds could use their oil proceeds to assuage their difference and recreate their Ayyubid glory, it will be only the Sunnis that will be left to dream of fighting their modern day Battle of Qadisiyah, thus ushering in another Middle East wound that could bleed for many years to come; a war between Shia Islam and Sunni Islam. The only way to avoid such historical mistake therefore could be to work out an agreeable power and wealth sharing system that maintains Iraq's unity and national identity.

By Bashir Goth

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