

**THE RISE OF AUTOMATION IN
JOURNALISM**

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AUIS VOICE

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IRAQ & ITS NEIGHBORS: Towards a new regional order




SULAIMANI FORUM
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FEATURE

AUIS HOSTS SULAIMANI FORUM 2019

By Emily Burlinghaus, Program Officer, Institute of Regional and International Studies

This year's Sulaimani Forum, held under the patronage of H.E. the President of Iraq Dr. Barham Salih and organized by the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), convenes a high-level array of senior officials from Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), delegations from the United States and the European Union, as well as journalists, researchers, and representatives from major international companies and organizations. While past Sulaimani Forums have maintained a balanced focus on challenges and opportunities for a region confronted with conflict, this year's forum entitled, "Iraq and Its Neighbors: Toward a New Regional Order," broadens the conversation to evaluate stabilization and economic growth, in addition to Iraq's evolving ties with surrounding states.

Since the last Sulaimani Forum two years ago, significant changes in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have altered domestic alliances, influenced the engagement of global political and economic actors in the country, and spurred transformative grassroots movements to eliminate corruption. Former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's declaration announcing the defeat of ISIS in late 2017 ushered in a new set of challenges—from pressures to respond to citizen demands in the federal elections to the far-reaching reverberations of the Kurdish independence referendum held in September 2017.

This year, the Sulaimani Forum



will address shifts in political agendas, economic priorities, and social and demographic realities. It will combine main stage plenary sessions with targeted, forward-leaning discussions on private sector reforms, challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship, the reconstruction of Mosul, a former ISIS stronghold, and the future of stabilization amidst a fragmented security landscape.

The two-day event also promises benefits to AUIS students, faculty, and staff. Given IRIS's unique position at the nexus of policy research and academia, students in particular will be able to serve as event volunteers, tour guides and ushers, allowing them to

engage with high-level guests. In addition to plenary sessions and policy roundtables, students with particular academic and professional interests can interact with private sector leaders, officials, and researchers at student-focused networking sessions on both days of the forum. On March 6, students interested in business, entrepreneurship, and IT can attend the Private Sector Networking Session with leaders from local and multinational companies, while students focused on International Studies and related disciplines will have the opportunity to interact with researchers, think tank professionals, and NGO representatives at the Policy Networking Session

on March 7.

Finally, the event also bolsters the local economy by filling Sulaimani-based hospitality establishments with international guests, increasing tourist activity and drawing regional and international media attention to AUIS and the KRI. We hope that students will see themselves as ambassadors of AUIS to the international community. In that vein, they should take full advantage of this opportunity by attending the networking sessions and serving as volunteers. For those who were not able to volunteer this year, please be in touch with IRIS after the Forum to discuss possibilities for greater involvement in the 2020 Forum.

THE SAUDI GORBACHEV

By Dilan Sirwan

If you have been paying close attention to Middle Eastern politics over the course of the past few years, you would surely notice that the Middle East is going through some rapid changes. It has become really hard for us to keep up with every event happening everyday. Saudi Arabia has got its fair share of these changes with the influence of Mohammed Bin Salman, who is more commonly known as MBS.

MBS is the crown prince of Saudi Arabia and is also deputy prime minister of the country. It is no secret that MBS is one of the youngest people to take this po-

sition, and we could also say over the course of the past two years, he has been working towards reform in the Saudi government. We all know that Gorbachev was the man that many extents ended the rule of the long standing communist Soviet Union, and if we look at MBS, we can see that he has been more or less doing the same for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) through his reforms. It is pretty obvious that the rumors and assumptions that revolved around Gorbachev are now revolving around MBS as well, the most common of them being that he is an American puppet. With

the alleged murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2018, MBS has been compared to previous leaders here and there, and the most common of them is Mohammed Reza Shah of Iran. This comparison started after people started thinking that whoever stood against MBS would end up being dead.

People often forget to look at this side of the argument and see the positive steps he has taken. If we are being realistic, MBS has changed many things in Saudi Arabia, since he was appointed as crown prince; He has been

working towards more equality between men and women, and has been working really hard towards westernizing Saudi Arabia, which is what both Ataturk and Mohammed Reza Shah did in their countries. But on the downside, MBS is more of a Reza Shah than Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when it comes to abiding by the will of the United States and the West. The real question here is how will MBS's reform end? Is he going to make Saudi Arabia a super power in the Middle East, or will he just take the country down the same road Reza Shah took Iran, towards destruction?

OPINION

AUIS COURSES IGNORES PATRONAGE DIMENSION

By Saman Ihsan Fuadi

The courses provided by the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) ignore the basis of the political economy of the whole of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq: patronage. AUIS needs to have classes or readings as part of the core curriculum that addresses this rather sensitive topic. Perhaps one of the most frequently used words you hear in the region is “wasta”. This word, which has Arabic origins, roughly translated means a broker or mediator through which jobs can be done and is integral to the concept of patronage. Yet for all the lessons about microeconomics and International Relations, we seem to read little if any on a word like wasta and the concept it falls under: patronage.

So, what is patronage? It is illegitimate relations based on doing someone a favor in return for favors or votes and is made in the society to circumvent the judicial and legal systems that rule the society. It is done by powerful leaders at the top and trickles down to the minions that carry out the jobs for them. Finally, it occurs, as professor Leezenberg of Amsterdam University points out, “where the formal institutional structure of society is weak and unable to deliver a sufficiently steady supply of goods and services”.

AUIS professes to prepare us for the real job market out there and how to “step out of the box”. However, preparation requires dealing with harsh realities and if one is to step out of a box then at least borders must be delineated. The reality is that most jobs, especially

government jobs, are tied to how close you are to the patronage network of the region. Furthermore, even if you were to start a private venture of your own, you constantly run into barriers such as license approval, registration, lease approval, and security checks which more than often requires you to know someone to file the paperwork faster, and actually get the business going.

The departments that should give significant attention to this phenomenon are Business Administration, International Relations and if it opens up, the Law Department. In business classes, we are taught how goods are distributed through supply and demand, and how certain fiscal and monetary policies govern the cash-flow of a country. Yet these concepts are foreign to the way our region and country are run. Supply and demand are only important in relation to how supply is limited or rather controlled; and how demand is bought and sold in this case. To make my point clear: The ruling parties in KRG, on one hand, have controlled the supply of goods coming into the country. On the other hand, the parties in the region have engaged in this patronage-building practice where the “loyalty of specific parts of the population was bought with the promise of financial support and the like,” as stated by Leezenburg again; hence also buying and selling the demand.

In International Relations, where this topic is even more closely at heart there, really does not seem to be much emphasis on patronage as on public



policy and running this region like the neoliberal United States. Indeed it is fruitful to study the developments that happened in the US over the past century. Yet, there is a big emphasis on applying the model and progression that happened there over in our region. The most vital and clear policy implication is, of course, that of moving slowly towards neoliberal privatization. This also quite conveniently fits AUIS's agenda of producing more students for the private market while also expanding it. Yet, as professor Leezenburg concludes that while conventional wisdom proposes that economic liberalization leads to a more democratic state, “this certainly does not apply in the case of Iraq.” In fact, the privatization that we saw happen in Iraq during the 1980s did not make a strong middle class but a crony-capitalism that narrow elite

members along with their relatives “being the prime beneficiaries of the economic restructuring.”

In relation to this basic and integral concept, our classes do not seem to cover any significant ground. It is not that the people in charge of the curriculum are not privy to the information I have unveiled, but rather that there is a certain apathy to address such topics. Perhaps it's also the sensitivity of the topic. But a university that claims to prepare its students must equip them with the right analytical tools to do so. To that end, AUIS should have whole courses dedicated to the topic or at the very least include readings in core classes that explain and clear out such an essential topic. It is only then that our graduate-students will see our region and country through the right lens and act out their plans accordingly.

THE KRG NEEDS TO PRIVATISE THE ECONOMY

By Shad Honer

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is constantly at the end of an onslaught of criticism by its citizens and its opposition. Too often the government is criticized for economic failures in sectors where they ought not to be. Too often are excuses of failures in the economy addressed in the wrong direction by those accountable. Our government has its hands in too many sectors to comprehend. Politicians are therefore too focused in their attempt to excuse themselves of a failed economic system by blaming oil prices, and Baghdad, rather than the system in which it operates. Oil is significant, of course. Oil has given the KRG the means to expand its public sector with open arms to anywhere

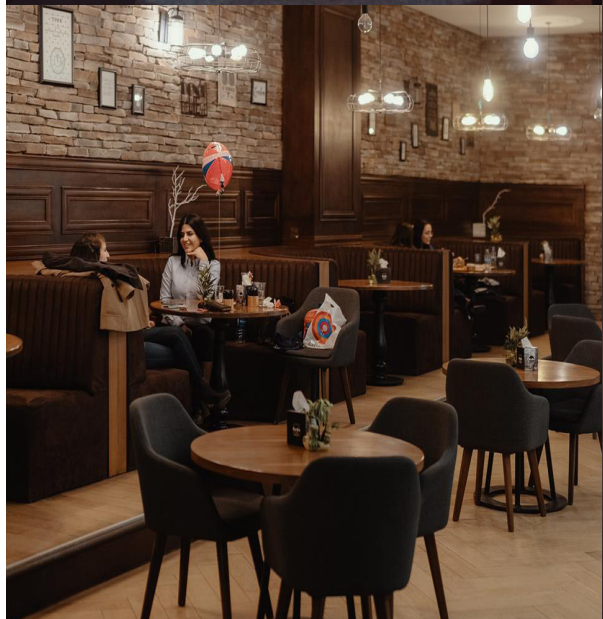
and anything it can get its hands on. The private sector is the only thing that's keeping the economy alive and independent from oil. According to the Heritage Foundation, Iraq's economy is increasing government spending, giving more responsibility to an institution that expands rapidly but operates so terribly. This is a slippery slope. Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman once said, “Nothing is more permanent than a temporary government program”. No politician wants to introduce the topic of privatisation, nobody wants to threaten the bureaucratic black hole of the KRG. Before the recession, KRG had allocated \$850 million to public wages. Since the inevitable downfall, public workers' wages have

significantly dropped. The recession has geared these employees towards the private sector. So why can't we start talking about shrinking the public sector?

With a GDP of under \$200 billion, the KRG has 19 ministries. Compare that to a country like Switzerland with a GDP of \$670 billion, which has 8 ministries. Thirty-nine percent of the GDP is controlled and distributed by the government. Policy makers need to realise that socialist policies of the government are the root causes of the slow growth in the economy. To free our economy from the shackles of a fluctuating oil price, we must give incentive to entrepreneurs by eliminating the regulations that are put in front of them. It is pre-

cisely these rules and regulations that are giving political parties and ministers power. The power in our system lies at the hands of the government, neither the people nor private industry. This is where the corruption and nepotism begin.

What incentive does an entrepreneur have knowing that eventually they'll need to please the bureaucrats? Why aren't we looking at why there is corruption rather than who is guilty of corruption? Privatisation significantly reduces the likelihood of corruption by giving power back to the people while the contrary gives power to government officials to dictate who can and can't thrive in the economy.



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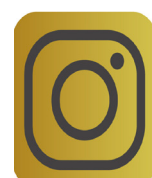
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OPINION

IS SULIMANI FORUM A BURDEN OR A BENEFIT?

By AUIS Voice

The 6th annual Sulaimani Forum which takes place at AUIS campus on March 6th and 7th, brings different opinions to the table about the forum's cost and benefit to AUIS.

Under the name "Iraq and its Neighbors: Toward a New Regional Order," the AUIS-based Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) holds the 6th annual Suli Forum, bringing together national and international pundits, business people, and experts to discuss major challenges facing Iraq and the region.

While AUIS students admire the hosting of the Forum at AUIS, they believe that the Forum should let more students have a seat there since the event is mainly organized by the university's Human Resources office. "I don't believe that the benefits are greater than the resources allocated to the event simply because the Forum does not seem to be for students. There are many high-profile politicians and businessmen coming, and although we appreciate their presence, it seems that the Forum is more about them than us. In other words, we need more student representation," an AUIS student, Saman Fuad, says.

The Dean of Students, Geoffrey Gresk believes that the event has been a great opportunity for students to interact with national and international figures. "I have been an active supporter of the Sulaimani Forum since day one, which was held for the first time in 2013. The Sulaimani Forum is the highlight of every year at AUIS. The organizers have taken steps this year to



allow our students to have even more opportunities to interact with the national and international figures who will visit the campus, and that is great," Gresk tells AUIS Voice.

"At the same time, we need to recognize that AUIS is under pressure to continue providing high-quality services to our students on a reduced budget. While no AUIS funds go directly to the Sulaimani Forum, the Forum represents a cost to AUIS in that it consumes the time of several of our key staff members for weeks in advance and the time of dozens of our students and staff members during the week of the Fo-

rum itself," he continues.

The Director of Research and Policy at IRIS, Mac Skelton agrees with Gresk that the Forum is a great opportunity for the students to meet experts and officials and how this can benefit students. "Expanding the learning and opportunities of AUIS students is one of the main goals of the Sulaimani Forum," Skelton tells AUIS Voice. "Over the course of two days, dozens of students have the opportunity to interact with regional and world leaders. AUIS's educational mission cannot be through classroom learning alone. The university aims to form a well-rounded individ-

ual with diverse experiences, and the Sulaimani Forum is one of those core AUIS experiences."

According to Skelton, the Forum is not much cost to AUIS; rather it is a great link between the university and the corporations who support AUIS. "Scholarships and student support should always be the main focus at AUIS. To that end, the Sulaimani Forum is an essential link between AUIS and the corporations, governments, and the foundations who have and will continue to support the university's core educational mission."

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE LIBERAL COMMUNISTS

By Zhalin I. Khalil

Liberal Communists, as impossible as that term sounds, are modern-day Robin Hoods with a slight twist; they take from the poor, and then, throw them a penny. They play both roles, the rich villain and the selfless hero. The term was first introduced by philosopher Slavoj Zizek describing big time capitalists that wash their hands of their actions by picking and choosing a charity of their choice to give to for humanitarian causes.

Supporting charities is very important and can be life changing, but in order to give wealth you must first "create" wealth. Creation of wealth is often achieved and sustained by exporting production of goods to countries that exploit their working class and work for slave wages. This allows for said company to compete, crush competition when possible, and of course, make more profit.

Liberal Communists have every incentive to protect their wealth and the

means by which they acquire it. They get involved in domestic and international politics for this very purpose. The accumulation of wealth in very few hands undermines democracy since corporate power is being unleashed and is taking over the political system by obvious means such as funding, lobbying and writing legislation. The net effect is making democracy much less functional and that can be witnessed in many democratic institutions. In America, we see Elon Musk giving millions to both major American political parties, though they differ on social issues, they both do serve corporate America. Studies show that the US has a practical oligarchy of the rich and the 0.1% because the working and middle classes are not taken into consideration in policy making.

The ironic part is that these Liberal Communists play the roles of human rights activists and supporters of noble causes. While it is true, they are helping by giving back a portion of the money

they exploited out of workers, it would be much more helpful if they actually made sure that their workers are being treated by the human rights' standards they advocate for. A company like Apple outsources the building of the iPhone to a dozen East Asian countries, before being assembled in China. In most of these countries, workers are being underpaid, overworked and are in horrible conditions. Then, CEO Tim Cook proceeds to support noble causes by giving donations to charity. The fashion industry is another huge industry that isn't only affecting the environment but the lives of workers in developing countries. More than 97% of the clothes sold in the US have been made overseas by workers who earn 2-3 dollars a day and are exposed to dangerous chemicals. In 2013, Rana Plaza, a building in Bangladesh that housed five garment factories, collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people and injuring thousands more. At the time, the tragedy was believed to be a

wake-up call, one that would permanently change the way that the goods we consume are produced. Yet just 17 brands have signed the Apparel and Footwear Supply Chain Transparency Pledge. The same companies that have been ignoring the conditions of those workers then make campaigns about recycling clothes to protect the environment and aiding non-profit organizations.

We all should ask ourselves if we're guilty of idolizing or being a Liberal Communist. All of us are guilty in one way or another but we should stop caving into the consumerism culture and be more intentional and ethical about our purchases whether it be the new iPhone or a \$5 T-shirt. Remember that we can always turn to policies that favor the distribution of wealth and protect the working and middle class, inside and outside the borders of a state, from exploitation for better world.

OPINION

NUCLEAR WAR MAY BE JUST AROUND THE CORNER

By Hasar Ali

Throughout May to June, 1999, two nuclear armed nations, Pakistan and India, got into a dangerous, unpredictable, conflict over the Kashmir region. Both countries threatened the use of nuclear weapons, but President Clinton stepped in and temporarily diffused the situation.

Again throughout December 2001 to October 2002 conflicts over Kashmir return. The conflict peaks in May 2002, where President Pervesh Musharraf of Pakistan refuses to rule out attacking first with nuclear weapons while India had already ruled it out. The situation is defused, again, by the U.S.

Since February 14th and to this hour, the conflict over Kashmir has emerged once more, this time, more dangerous than ever. For the first time ever, two nuclear-armed states, have ordered airstrikes against each other. The doomsday clock would advance further to midnight as fears of nuclear war resurface. It is highly unlikely, and seen universally as “the wrong thing to do”, for a nuclear-armed state to attack another nuclear-armed state first. But, attacking in retaliation with nuclear weapons seems to be the protocol for virtually all nuclear-armed countries. Here lies the grave concern: unintentionally or mistakenly attacking first, thinking it is in retaliation. Also, when nuclear weapons are on the table, unintended escalations can have catastrophic endings. Close calls to nuclear war are abundant as modern history shows. Here are just a few, handpicked ones. I leave you to draw the horrifying similarities between the historical



and current situation.

October 27, 1962 In the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, also known as the “Black Saturday”, the two world superpowers almost initiate nuclear war several times. Against President Khrushchev’s orders, a junior commander shoots a U.S. U2 spy plane flying over Cuba. The American leaders had a protocol to attack back immediately in any case of shooting of their planes as it was interpreted as escalation by the Soviets. However, despite not knowing Khrushchev’s intentions, fortunately the American leadership acted against their protocol and decided not to attack right away.

More seriously, near Cuba, a Soviet submarine carrying nuclear warheads, of which the U.S. was unaware

of, is being harassed by the U.S. Navy. The Soviet submarine loses communication to Moscow but has authorization to launch the nuclear heads. The commanders inside think that nuclear war had happened. Two of the three officers onboard vote to launch, but Vasili Arkhipov refuses to.

November 2, 1962 Soviet intelligence officer Oleg Penkovsky, working as a double-agent for the CIA and MI6, was caught in Moscow. He was instructed to signal the U.S. and the U.K. in case of a nuclear attack. He would have to make two phone calls, one minute apart, making only three short breaths on each. This signal was made to a MI6 office in Moscow by Penkovsky, but the officer who receives the call does not report it, assuming the

agent has been compromised.

November 9, 1979 General William Odom calls Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s National Security Adviser, at 3 AM to inform him of the 2200 nuclear warheads have been launched towards United States. He adds that President Carter has only 7 minutes to order a retaliation. Odom calls again to say it was a false alarm just before the call is made to the president. January 10, 1984 a nuclear warhead, stationed in Nebraska-Wyoming border, gives off signals that it is about to launch. The Air Force claims that there are many technical safeguards to prevent the launch, but according to the LA Times, an armored vehicle was parked on top of the missile hatch to keep it in place.

THE RISE OF AUTOMATION IN JOURNALISM

By Bawan Dawood

During my attendance of The World Government Summit, I came across a roundtable about the topic of Automation. More specifically, it was about the Rise of Automation in Journalism and news reporting. At the start of the roundtable, Nathaniel Barling Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief of (Knowhere) a leading News organization in the use of A.I said “Within 5 years, news headlines will be drafted by A.I.”. This immediately brought up a number of questions in my mind. Questions such as, Is A.I going to limit the need for humans in the field of journalism? How can A.I play a role when it comes to opinion pieces? Are News organizations ethically required to tell their readers that an article is generated by a

machine?

Barling went on to explain the uses of A.I in the field of journalism. It seemed to be the case that at least for now, the uses are limited to reporting such as weather and sports but also fact checking. It turns out humans are not that good when it comes to fact checking! Barling really hammered on this point during his speech. To him, the use of A.I is the clear way to eliminate Human biases. So, is A.I the hero that will save the world from FAKE NEWS? Is it really going to revolutionize journalist? To know the answer to these questions we must first answer the questions mentioned at the start. So, is A.I going to take a way job? The truth is the only things we know for sure is that this won’t be an issue anytime soon. The reason is that currently the technology is not advanced

enough and the best uses for it are actually things like automating routine stories and tasks which will not just drive cost down significantly but also let the journalist focus more on important tasks such as investigative reporting and so on.

Another good questions that was asked during the round table is what role will A.I play when it comes to opinion pieces and other tasks that require human emotions, humor, creativity and critical thinking? This is perhaps the hardest shortcoming when it comes to A.I since the technology is nowhere near the level needed to reach such human skills and emotions. So, the need for human skill when it comes to such tasks is absolutely crucial to the media profession.

But to me the most important questions asked during that roundtable

was “Are news organizations ethically required to tell their readers that an article is generated by a machine?” This is quite the dilemma. If we think of news as the reporting of raw facts about worldly events, then why does it matter if the news is machine generated or written by a human?

I personally think that A.I is quite useful and perhaps will revolutionize journalism as much as the introduction of the internet. But I can only see it as useful when it comes to automating routine tasks and articles. The interesting part for me is what will the world look like when we get machines capable of emotions, creatively and critical thinking? Perhaps a robot will be writing an opinion piece not that different from this soon in the future.

Is democracy feasible in Iraq?

By Davar Mohammed

The September 25 Kurdistan referendum has altered the political landscape of Iraq. The fine relations among the political parties of Iraq, particularly the Kurdish and Shi'ite, deteriorated to levels never seen before after the independence referendum. Although, the government evidently succeeded in regaining control of the Kurdish-held disputed territories, the Shi'ite establishment quickly attempted to solidify their leverage by forcing the Kurdish government to give in to their demands, namely on control of borders, airports and oil revenues.

The post-Saddam order was a period where Iraq's Shi'ites, relative to other constituent groups, became the most dominant player in the economic, political and security sectors. The biggest losers from the new order, on the other hand, were the Sunnis. Although, not all the Sunnis were Ba'athists, they were still viewed from the purviews of the Shi'ite-centric state as a defeated component of Iraq. This view led to the political marginalization of the Sunnis that later precipitated Sunni mass demonstrations in their regions against the government, which arguably culminated in the emergence of the Islamic State. Although the so-called inclusive government of Prime Minister Abbadi defeated ISIS, the government shifted its outlook toward the Kurds after the ill-fated independence referendum and the fall of Kirkuk by the Kurdish Peshmerga. The plight of the Sunnis and the Kurds at the hands of the Iraqi state since 2014 has placed inclusive governance and coalition politics – a pillar of the post-2003 order – at peril.

Since 2003, the form of the democracy that has been practiced in Iraq has been the coalition model – or in political science terms, consociational democracy. Before jumping into the argumentation of which form fits Iraq's political system best, a brief introduction is necessary.

In political science, democracy has different forms and facilities different types of political systems. The most popular model is widely understood as the majoritarian system, whereby the political entity that obtains an overall majority of the popular vote is eligible to acquire executive authority. The minorities, on the other hand, become the official opposition in the legislature. Usually, this form is practiced in the centralized governments such as the United Kingdom.

In order to practice this model without causing trouble for the political environment, there must be certain criteria. First, this system is present in the contexts in which the people are ethnically or culturally homogeneous. Secondly, the majority political parties are usually those that represent a comprehensive interest and will of the entire country not a single ethnicity or group. Thirdly, the political entities do not have essential differences in terms of their political ideology, such as secularism versus theocracy. If we apply these criteria, none of them can be met in Iraq, due to its diversity in religions, cultures and ethnicities.

The most poignant reason that majoritarian democracy for Iraq is a political fallacy is the role that political memory plays in defining groups views toward the state.



Based on numerical majority, the Shi'ites would obtain executive power at every electoral opportunity. This, combined with the fragility of the Iraqi state, would no doubt precipitate intra-group violence, as evident by the 2007 civil war and most recently the emergence of ISIS. Therefore, although the formation of a consociational government is an arduous process and perhaps hinders the state's decisiveness, it ensures that each group has a formative stake in the central state, which if maintained can reduce justifications for violence.

Hence, in order to have a stable country, this form of democracy should be abandoned in Iraq and maintain the coalition-government model. The most remarkable difference in the coalition form of democracy would be that the minorities that could not win the majority of the votes are not powerless. In other words, being the opposi-

tion is not the only choice on the table. Furthermore, any bills could not be passed without the consent of the minorities. For example, the recent passing of the 2018 budget law without the consent of the Kurdish parliamentary blocs was a clear violation of inclusive governance, leaving the Kurds feeling marginalized and sharpening their view that the central state operates counter to their group's interests. With the spread of those voices arguing for majoritarian rule, especially among some Shi'ite political parties, it must seriously be countered by all constituent groups, especially the other Shi'ite parties. Otherwise, majority rule could destabilize the post-2003 political equilibrium that was established. The writer is a student at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), majoring in International Studies and minoring in the Iraqi Law.

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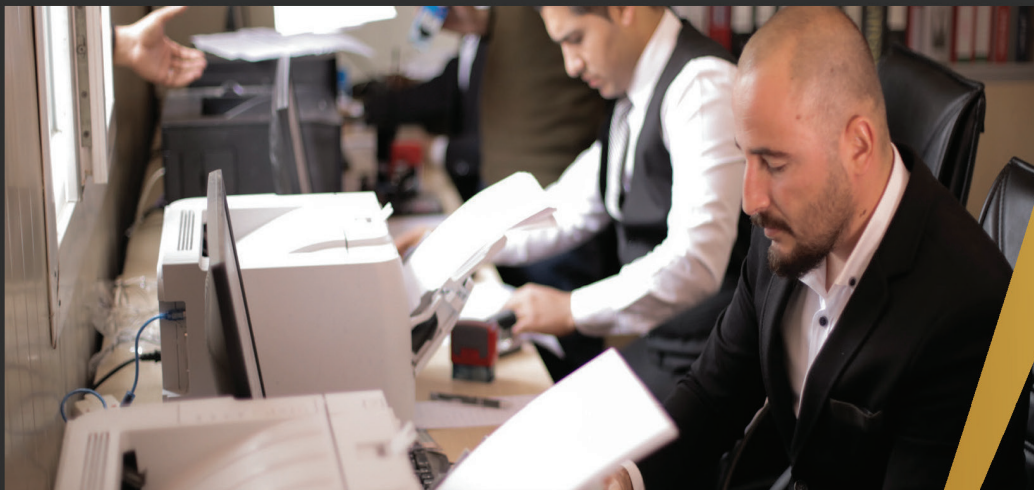
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