Change in Iraqi Politics: From Ethnic-Sectarian Lines to Centralization Question

*Serhat ERKMEN**

Abstract

After the invasion of Iraq, politics in Iraq was rebuilt in accordance with ethnic and religious lines and the political alliances have been reshaped over these lines. However, the withdrawal of US troops and internal differences of Iraqi parties triggered new political balances which cannot be limited into only ethnic and sectarian bases. Today, because of the political and strategic effects of Arab Spring and internal power struggles among the main Iraqi political groupings Iraq has entered in a new phase in politics which centralization issue will be the focus.

Keywords: Iraqi politics, centralization, Arab Spring and Iraq, Withdrawal of US troops

Irak Siyasetinde Değişim: Etnik-Mezhepçi Çizgilerden Merkeziyetçilik Sorununa

Özet

Irak'ın işgalinden sonra Irak siyaseti etnik ve dini çizgiler doğrultusunda yeniden yapılandırıldı ve siyasi ittifaklar bu çizgiler üzerinden yeniden şekillendirildi. Ancak ABD güçlerinin ülkeden geri çekilmesi ve Irak partilerinin içindeki farklılıklar yalnızca etnik ve mezhebi temellerle sınırlandırılamayacak yeni siyasi dengelerin oluşumunu tetiklemiştir. Bugün Arap Baharı'nın siyasi ve stratejik etkileri ile Irak'taki temel siyasi yapılanmalar arasında içerde yaşanan güç mücadeleleri yüzünden Irak, siyasette merkeziyetçilik konusunun odak noktası olacağı yeni bir safhaya girmiş bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Irak siyaseti, merkeziyetçilik, Arap Baharı ve Irak, ABD güçlerinin geri çekilmesi

* Assos. Prof. Ahi Evran University, Department of International Relations, and Middle East Advisor of ORSAM

التغيرات السياسية في العراق: والتحول من المشاكل الطائفية والعرقية الى مشكلة المركزية

مخلص

بعد غزو العراق تم تشكيل السياسة العراقية على اساس ديني وعرقي. وتماشيا مع هذه الخطوط تمت التحالفات السياسية.
ولكن بعد انسحاب القوات الامريكية من العراق لم تبقى الاختلافات بين الاحزاب السياسية مقتصرة على اساس مذهبي وعرقي بل ادت الى تشكيل توزنات سياسية جديدة. الربيع العربي بما له من تاثيرات السياسية والاستراتيجية مع وجود الصراعات في الهياكل السياسية على السلطة في داخل العراق، مما اصبحت السياسة المركزية هي المرحلة الجديدة في العراق التي يتم التركيز عليها.

الكلمات الدالة: السياسة العراقية، المركزية، الربيع العربي والعراق، الانسحاب الامريكي من العراق

According to the author, there are two main reasons that explain the change in the political balances and policy making in Iraq. The first reason is that the United States have started to lose gradually their role both in military and political aspects in Iraq after 2010. Decrease in military power of the US in Iraq in a way that cannot be compared with previous years (even though all the combat troops have retreated, it will not be considered as a complete withdrawal since there are still American troops in Iraq under the name of military advisors) has created great impacts both in the fields of security and the fields of policy and this phenomenon has enlarged the maneuver room of the Iraqi political parties. Second reason states that the domestic policy of Iraq has developed great affiliation with foreign dynamics as a result of the efforts that have been made by the other countries in the region in order to fill the vacuum which was left by the US. This does not mean that the domestic policy in Iraq is completely determined by the other countries in the region. In fact, it can be said that the vacuum which the US created has increased the power struggle among Iraqi political parties and this struggle has become more complicated as a concept based on local, national and international interests beyond mostly ethnic and sectarian basis that the government which was in power after the invasion produced. Therefore, in this article, the transformation of the politics in Iraq and the political crises which were experienced one after another will be explained in the light of new dynamics.

Political Struggle after the Election and the First Signs of Change in Dynamics

As a result of the fact that none of the political parties could gain enough votes to form the government alone and because of the pressure which was imposed by other countries about forming a "national union government" so as to maintain the political sustainability, not only foundation of a new government was delayed but also the beginning point of new political dynamics was shaped.[1] The Iraqi Shiites who entered the election with two different lists were united shortly after the announcement of the election results and they became the largest group in the Iraqi parliament.[2] This process which was introduced by Shiite Arabs in order to prevent Sunni Arabs or secular nationalists from gaining the power in government can be thought as a movement which has shown that in the early part of 2010, the policy was still determined in the framework of religious and ethnic priorities. In this way, Sunni Arab coalition that pulled the largest amount of votes was not able to be in power. However, the integration of Al Iraqiya (Sunni Arabs) into the system and the bargains about the distribution of seats in the government are not the only reasons that explain longtime delay in the formation of the government. The greatest opposition to the reelection of Nuri Maliki as prime minister came from Sadr Trend that became the second major power in the Shiite Block according to the election results.[3] After the Sadr Trend which started a power struggle with Maliki since 2006 resisted for monthsand as a result of large compensation and external pressure, the abovementioned movement announced that their members would support the government of Maliki. At the same period, another problem occurred about the reelection of Celal Talabani into the position of presidency. While some of the Shiite Arabs supported Iraqiya as president-to-be, Kurds stood out against this idea. Even the presidency of Iyad Allawi as balancing power of Prime Minister Maliki became a subject of discussion. However, as a consequence of the demands of Shiite Arabs who were not willing to

---

1   For the results and the detailed evaluations about the election results in Iraq, see.*7 Mart 2010 Irak Parlamento Seçim Sonuçlarının ve Yeni Siyasal Denklemin Değerlendirilmesi,*ORSAM Report, No 17, April 2010, http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/2011126_orsamreportt_17_tr.pdf

2   "Iraqi merger forms new Shia bloc, the National Alliance*,"* *BBC News*, 11 June 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10294271.

3   Martin Chulov, "Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki Refused Second Term by Sadrists," *Guardian*, 01 August 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/01/iraq-pm-al-maliki-refused.

give any harm to the alliance with Kurds due to the internal balance of Iraqi Kurds and increasing efficiency of Sunni Arabs, the presidency was given to Talabani as it occurred after the election which was held in 2005.[4] The formation of the government took nine months by reason of intensive and long bargains. The developments which were encountered in this period gave the first signs of disintegration in the Shiite, Kurd and Sunni Arab blocks in coming two years and constituted the reason of the abovementioned disintegration. 7 main leaders of Al Iraqiya that gained the victory in the elections and that became the largest coalition in Iraq wanted important positions in the government. For Allawi, the leader of the list, it was decided to form an organization which would balance the authority of Maliki in the prime ministry. Since it was expected that an organization entitled High Council of Strategic Policies would balance the prime minister in terms of power and authority, Maliki made everything in order to delay the foundation of this organization. Apart from Allawi, Osama Nujayfi became speaker, Salih Mutlaq became vice premier minister, Tarıq Al Hashimi was given the position of vice presidency and Rafi Isawi became the Minister of Finance. At that time, since some main Iraqiya leaders who expected to become minister could not gain those positions, they left the Iraqiya as soon as the government was formed and founded White Iraqiya.[5] In addition to this, even though the new organization which would be founded for Allavi caused delay in the formation of the government, at the end, after other leaders in Iraqiya obtained their own positions, they stopped to follow the advancement about High Council of Strategic Policies. This separation in the Iraqiya list had impact on the alliances in the Provincial Councils and the politicians who were members of the same list in the regions where Sunni Arab population predominated such as Salahaddin, Babel, Mosul and Diyala began to cooperate with opponents.

On the other hand, the formation process of the government did not affect only Sunni Arabs. A similar situation can also be observed at the side of Kurds and Shiite Arabs. For instance, the KDP has obtained a much more effective position than the PUK between Kurds. While the PUK haven't had an important ministry in the government, the party was able to make its members the president and the vice president of

---

4   Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, Congressional Research Service, 27 December, 2011, s. 12. http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/180696.pdf

5   Haider Najm, "Mps Defect from Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya List," *Niqash*, 18 March 2011, http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2803

assembly (this position should be evaluated in terms of the balances among Kurds rather than the balances of the Iraqi governments). On the contrary, the KDP was able to get many other important seats in addition to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the position of the vice prime minister and the Ministry of Trade. Besides, 14 of 57 Kurd deputies in the new Iraqi Council were not the members of Kurdistan List. The only reason why Gorran (Change) Movement, the biggest one with 8 deputies, could not take part in the government is the demand of KDP from Maliki about not allowing the party to enter the government.[6] In this process, as a consequence of the fact that the PUK had less seats than expected and that Gorran was left behind outside the government, the worries of these two parties about the enlargement of the abovementioned party increased excessively.

Although the Shiite Arabs were not affected from the formation process of government as negatively as others, some ruptures were seen among them, too. The place where this rupture was more powerful was the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). The conflict between Badr Group that is known as armed branch of the party before and that advocates more rigid policies and ISCI became much more visible at the time of the formation of the government. Thus, while other party officers did not clearly announce their support to the position of Maliki as prime minister, Badr Group gave openly its support. Consequently, this decision offered the group an important ministry. However, the deepest rupture among Shiite Arabs was seen between the Sadr Trend and the Islamic Dawa Party (between Muqtada Sadr and Nuri Maliki). The opposition of the Sadr Trend to the Maliki as prime minister was simply caused by the power struggle among Shiite Arabs. Even though this disintegration broke out before the election, it continued to exist dominantly at the time of the formation of the government and later period.

The Effects of Arab Spring and the Withdrawal of US Troopson Iraqi Politics

Although the failure in the formation of the government after the election held in the early part of 2010 until the end of the year is the most important political dynamics in Iraq, the winds of change which have started to blow in the Middle East at the end of the same year have

---

6   "Maliki: Barzani asked me not to involve the Change Movement in government," 15 May 2012, *KIU,* http://www.kurdiu.org/en/hawal/index.php?pageid=102518 ;

shown their impacts on the policy of Iraq in a very short time. Even though it has been considered that the Arab Spring has not affected Iraq as much as other Middle Eastern countries, this is not true. Demands for change and democracy in the Middle East have largely influenced the policy of Iraq in two aspects. One of these aspects is that the demands for democracy have increased the power struggle of the ethnical and denominational groups among themselves. In spite of the fact that the first large scale demonstration was organized in many parts of the country under the name of "Day of Anger" on January 25, 2011, the first serious impact of the demands for democratization and change has occurred among Iraqi Kurds. The main theme of the demonstrations which were realized in the city of Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, on behalf of change, on February 17, 2011, is not so different from the ones in other important cities in the Middle East at that time. The demonstrations which were made for several days by the Gorran Movement which was separated from the PUK and the Islamic parties that have moved for the reason that the political structure in the KRG started to retrograde long time ago and has become anti-democratic, witnessed acts of violence via provocation and the riots were violently suppressed by the security forces.[7]These events which was observed afterwards have rendered the conflicts among the KDP, PUK, Gorran and Kurdistan İslamic Union deeper. This situation has especially become much more visible in the internal balance of the KRG. Therefore, in the process of formation of the new regional government in the early part of 2012, except the KDP and the PUK, other influential parties have decided to continue on working at the side of opposition in spite of many offers. However, the distinction which has been growing up among Kurd parties has not stayed limited in the KRG, it has also influenced the policy in Baghdad. Thus, one of the main reasons why the Gorran movement has refused the call of Iraqi Kurds about creating only one sound in Baghdad in the last governmental crisis when the vote of confidence was taken back from the Prime Minister, Nuri Maliki, is the events that have been occurred since February 2011. To sum up, it can be said that the distinction in the KRG that has increased with the influence of Arab Spring is one of the reasons which has constituted an obstacle to the efforts that were made by the Kurds in order to follow a common political behavior throughout Iraq.

---

7   Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Teenager dies, 39 hurt in fresh clashes in Iraq's Kurdistan" *CNN*, 21 February 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/02/21/iraq.protests/index.html

The second impact of Arab Spring is its influence on regionalization of the disintegration between Sunnis and Shiites. The effects of this change process on Syria and Bahrain have strengthened the importance of secterian struggle, which has been seen as a local problem in Iraq, in terms of regional balances. It is known that Iraqi Shiites have played an important role on the well-known support of Iran to its ally in Syria by benefiting from the strategic position of Iraq. By this way, while the internal dynamics which took their sources from Iraq have been weakening ethnic and secterian alliances among political groups in the country and have been reaching a new dimension where the centralization- decentralization have gained strength by their local interests, regional power struggle which was created by the change process in the Middle East has made the Shiite government in Iraq more important for Iran.

The year 2011 has witnessed another important progress in the way of Iraqi policy. This progress can be defined as the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. In addition to the problems which occurred in the field of security after the retreat of soldiers from Iraq, the above-mentioned withdraw has also affected the political field. As of 2009, process of handing over partially the responsibilities about security to the Iraqi forces gained acceleration. In this period, Prime Minister, Maliki, who had the control of security institutions, was using his power in order to increase his efficiency in Iraq. The fact that the US accelerated the devolution of authority in 2010 and drew back its soldiers in 2011 gave more power to Maliki. Especially, by directly taking the control of the institutions in the framework of internal affairs, defense and intelligence in the new government, Maliki filled the gap created by the US.

Another result of the retreat of the US was the loss of political influence in parallel with deficiency in the field of security. Even though the US, whose political power in Iraq was based on its military presence after the invasion, founded the largest embassy of the world in Baghdad, this country lost influence in the policy of Iraq. The US, which was the only power decided the fate of Iraq in mid 2000s, left a power vacuum after its withdrawal and regional forces tried to fill the gap. In this period, some countries such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia competed against each other and this competence was carried on over their supporters in Iraq. However, this relationship was established by strengthening the relations of certain important figures or political parties with some countries rather than the decision of one ethnic or sectarian

group in favor of establishing close relationship with a specific country. For instance, while Iran was enhancing its connections some parties such as PUK, Dawa Party, Sadr Movement and ISCI, Turkey refreshed its friendship with other parties such as KDP, Iraqiyyun and Vifaq. Of course, it is not possible to identify these relations by ignoring or not noticing ethnical and denominational identities. Nevertheless, the relationships between Iran and Shiite Arabs; Turkey and Kurds; Saudi Arabia, other Arab countries and Sunni Arabs are a complex complement of relations in which local and international balances intertwined rather than a complete form of connection in ethnical and denominational dimensions.

Transition Process between Old and New Political Balances

The process which was summarized above caused a change in political balances which were shaped in political structure between 2003 and 2009 in Iraq. In order to understand this political change, basic factors which created old balance will be briefly brought into focus in the first place.

Between 2003 and 2009, there were three main sources which fed this platform that highly influenced the political structure of Iraq. These were the role of ethnical and sectarian factors in restructuring process of the policy and in reconstitution of the state; civil war which was widely experienced between 2005 and 2008; problems in determining the concept of identity of the society after the occupation and weakness of the notion of being Iraqi as a result of conflict dynamics.

While each of these three factors was inducing the political dynamics in favor of conflict, following fourconcepts emerged as a result of the abovementioned factor: the pattern of political groups which were organized according to main line of new and loose political structure was seen among political parties and coalitions as long as there weren't strong governments. Ongoing occupation made the US the only and ultimate decision maker. All countries in the region, especially Iran, were closely staying in touch with Iraqi groups, but the impact of other countries in the system was continuing to deteriorate the situation or to create limited influence area. While the Iraqi identity was being restructured, different factors emerged from the past. In time, political structure started to become more natural and to return main contradiction since its foundation in Iraq: decentralization vs. centralization; local interests vs. national interests.

Four concepts that were given above can be explained this way: lack of powerful government or parties was able to create weak alliances rather than a political struggle among political actors. As of 2003, governments and political parties didn't have an importance for a long time in Iraq. Even though many political parties were founded, most of them did not possess an organizational structure, ideology, leadership, power, source or base.[8] Instead of parties, leaders came to the forefront. The power of the leaders used close relationship with the US. as a source. For this reason, first administrations (Executive Council and Interim Governing Council) and governments had problems about legitimacy. Since it was known that there was the US behind the curtain, people could not rely on the governments or respect them. Moreover, most of the parties were especially weak. The fact that there was not a strong opposition under the authority of Saddam influenced the political structure. As most of the parties knew each other in the period when they were opponents, distrust became more and more powerful. Personal friendship that was shaped at the time of opposition among members of Hekim's family, Iyad Allavi, Mesud Barzani and Celal Talabani was not seen enough to build trust. Leaders (Maliki, Sadr, Caferi etc.), parties and favorite components of the new policy did not have the close relationship of other group.

All of the parties encountered some problems in reconstitution. Less impact was seen on the KDP and the PUK than others. However even those parties lost strength. Others enlarged quickly because they did not have a productive party base. This enlargement showed negative effects after a while. For example, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq had to change both its organization and its discourse. In spite of the victory in the elections in 2005, the party had to give positions to many people who did not come from the traditional base of the party in order to fill the seats that were obtained in the Provincial Councils. Involvement of most of those people in corruption inflicted heavy damage to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. Close relationships of the aforesaid party with Iran and corruptions in local administrations caused inescapable fall of the party in the next elections. A similar situation was also experienced by the Sadr Trend. Especially at the moment of civil war between 2005 and 2008, certain groups which claimed that

---

8   At this point, Dawa Party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (previously known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), the KDP and the PUK should be discussed in a different way than others.

they were part of the Sadr Trend realized such brutal and bloody actions that even Muqtada Sadr tried to clean them out from his own organization.[9]

In addition to the organizational problems of the parties, even the assembly confronted a great problem. Although the parties or the coalitions had numerical majority and authority in the parliament, parliament could do nothing in front of the fact that making an important law in the assembly would affect the political balance throughout the country. The constitution which was issued with great deficiencies at the end of 2005 and which was supposed to be regulated as a result of the promise made by the US to the Sunni Arabs could not be changed in spite of the authority that the assembly had. Requirement of referendum in order to change the constitution and the disposition in which it was explained that the aforesaid referendum could be refused with 2/3 of the votes in three provinces imposed a great obstacle in political system. The entity of the parties and the coalitions in the assembly remained limited within the framework of the laws given and the gaps in the constitution. Above all, not a single political decision was able to be made about critical issues because of worries about transformation of the political conflict into secessionism, dissolution of the country and inevitability of civil war. Not a single legal regulation was able to be realized on certain matters such as oil law, the definition of federalism, disputed areas and the status of Kirkuk. As a result, the assembly and the government started to become a means which was used to distribute the sources and whose function was not beyond this point. While Kurds were trying to change the parliament in Baghdad into an organization which would obstruct the decisions against them and where they would protect their acquisitions, especially the budget; Shiite Arabs preserved their relations as a reflection of the political struggle among themselves. Sunni Arabs were not represented properly in the first period already. After 2010, sharing of the sources and positions reached a point which was beyond everything else for the leaders.

Only one exception of this process was that Maliki took over the control of many resources in his two terms as Prime Minister and obtained a great power in the state by benefiting from the large authorities of the

---

9   *Iraq's Civil War, The Sadrists and The Surge*, International Crisis Gorup Report, Middle East Report No. 72, 7 February 2008, pp. 8-10 http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/72_iraq_s_civil_war_the_sadrists_and_the_surge.ashx

Prime Minister which were determined by the US for Allavi. At that time, Maliki created his own militant group and imposed a great influence in the bureaucracy, notably about security forces, energy and jurisdiction. Even though the assembly and the government were weak, he became a leader who was prone to the strong authority as it was seen in many previous examples in political history of Iraq. This process constituted the base of the dispute about centralization and authoritarianism which will be discussed later on.

The second phenomenon which was mentioned above is decisiveness of the impacts of the US's occupation in Iraq. The influence of the US on the administration in the period of its existence in Iraq and its authorities within the country differentiated from each other in time. While the government was officially and virtually in the hand of the military and civil officers who were directly assigned by the US in Iraq between 2003-2004, the government was at least officially handed over to the Iraqi people between 2004-2010. However, the US was virtually influential in Iraq as it was seen more obviously between 2004 and 2009. The ambassador of the US in Baghdad and the military commanders of the occupation forces had virtual power. Challenging the US along with its soldiers whose numbers reached over 100.000 in Iraq was physically impossible. It was known that the constitution was prepared by the US.[10] Even though the US allowed the power struggle among parties at a certain level, it did not permit that this struggle turned the situation in the country against itself. Moreover, although the members of the ancient regime lost their power, the politicians of the new era took mostly their strength from the US while Kurds considered the US as a guaranty for their profits, Shiite Arab parties that had close relationship with Iran was using the US as a shield against Sunni Arabs and the countries which supported the political organization of the Sunnis. Neither prime ministers like Maliki and Jafaari nor the Sadr Trend –even though it had armed militia such as Mahdi Army and Badr Brigade nor the efforts of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq could overcome the situation on their own. At the time when the resistance was most powerful, the force which protected the government of the Shiites against the armed groups that challenged the new political system in Baghdad and in its vicinity (Arab tribes, old Baathists, partisans of al-Qaida, nationalist groups and even some Shiite armed groups) was neither their

---

10   Herbert Docena, "Iraq's Neoliberal Constitution," 2 September 2005, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, http://www.fpif.org/reports/iraqs_neoliberal_constitution

own armed forces nor Iran, but it was the American soldiers. For this reason, the Kurds and the Shiite Arab movements which kept hold of the majority in the parliament had limited elbow room. Civil-military American authorities had directly or indirectly, openly or secretly the last word in military operations, auctions or important political issues. As of the early part of 2008, the Sunni Arabs participated in the groups that were trying to be close to the US and got support from it. By getting on well with the US., the partisans of the Al-Qaida and the actors who were not a part of the ancient regime became dominant in their own regions, gained money and weapons, got a real chance to be represented in the political field and found a balancing power against the Shiite pressure on themselves.[11] While the means such as the Sons of Iraq and Sahwa Organizations played a central role in the resistance of the US against the resisters, this situation had certain influence on the political field. Arab tribes that took up arms by thinking that they were ignored and underestimated chose to make cooperation with the US. in order to become the winning party at first. In this period, some of them regarded Kurds as their main opponents while for some of them, their main rivals were Shiite Arabs. This alliance which began at first among the tribes resulted in organization of disorganized Sunni Arabs with the help of the US and its allies in the Middle East. By this way, with the help of Sunni Arab alliance, the US that was in the process of being prepared to retreat from Iraq tried to balance the instability which was resulted from the excessive power of Kurds and Shiite Arabs. While realizing this process, the US supported Maliki against Sadr and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq which were under the influence of Iran according to the belief of the US (as it can be clearly seen in the operations of Maliki against Mehdi Army in Baghdad and Basra in 2008) and refrained the maximalist demands of Kurds. For example, in that period, not single large oil company of the US conducted activity in the Northern Iraq. While the Kurds were more powerful in 2007, it prevented Kirkuk from joining in the Kurdistan Regional Movement in Iraq.

To sum up, the US had the last word in Iraq until 2009 when it made the decision of full retreat and till the presidency of Obama. As of 2010, the US supported Maliki whom it considered as a balancing power in spite of all his deficiencies while trying to maintain the balance after the

---

11   *Iraq After The Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape*, International Crisis Group, Middle East Report No 74, 30 April 2008.

retreat. 2011 became a year when the US focused on retreating completely and became an external balancing element. In a circumstance in which there was not anymore the US that had the last word, the gap of the US was tried to be filled by other countries in the region.

The third phenomenon was the social transformation in the process of restructuring the identity of being Iraqi and the impact of this transformation on the political field. While the identity of being Iraqi was being restructured, it was seen that some different notions from the old ones came into prominence. Iraqi Kurds left partially their identities of being Iraqi in the political order after the occupation. Although they accepted that Iraq was an Arab and Kurd country as stated in the constitution, they always emphasized that the existing situation was a voluntary union which would not last for a long time and which would end when the conditions became better. For Kurdish people, the concept of being Iraqi was mostly over. It became the name of a compulsory political union rather than a social identity. Moreover, they accused the movements and the initiatives which were against the idea and whose number was limited of betraying the national behavior of Kurds. Therefore, day by day, the notion of being Iraqi was regarded as being Arab. Cultural disintegration between Kurds and Arabs was much larger. Kurds were separated from the remaining part of Iraq at a great extent in terms of educational and commercial relations. The concept of not learning Arabic which was seen in the generation maybe because of obligation after 1990 became completely a voluntary action. Kurd youth and the political approaches which were produced by them focused on the Kurdistan Regional Government not on Baghdad. The conflict between the KDP and the PUK or different versions of this conflict (conflict between Gorran and the KDP or between Gorran and the PUK) which the people who were observing the Kurdistan Regional Government from outside thought to be true became popular among the new generation not among the old peshmargas or politicians who were fighting with each other for many years. The fact which determined the political relations in the Kurdistan Regional Government was not the developments that were observed in Mosul and Diyala or the events that were experienced between Baghdad and Erbil; this fact was composed of conflict between Erbil and Suleymaniyah, corruption, nepotism, freedom of press and economic problems. Moreover, in early 2012, when the tension between MesutBarzani and Nuri Maliki was at its highest point, the targets of the medias that supported the KDP and the PUK in their daily headlines were each other. In brief,

while new political order was being shaped in Iraq, the trilogy of Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shiite Arabs started to give their places to the new process apart from those factors.

Another part of the restructuring process of Iraqi identity entered a transformation. Becoming Iraqi started not to be considered as Sunnism or Baathism as it was under the authority of Saddam Hussein. It was not a correct action to limit the concept of being Iraqi with the abovementioned definitions in the past, too. However, when it was elaborated in terms of political identity, the notion was mostly indicating these two references before 2003. Nevertheless, after the occupation, this concept evoked a strong Arab population whose religious/denominational beliefs were strong. In fact, religion and policy was always considered together in political history of Iraq. It cannot be said that there was a complete distinction in the relationship between religion and policy in the period when the Baathists were in power. Surely this did not occur in the same way from the point of Sunni Arabs and Shiite Arabs. Especially Shiite Arabs became the cornerstone of many movements which were not originated from a religious source in the past. Many important names of communist, Baathist and liberal movements in Iraq after the Second World War had Shiite origin. Nevertheless, the Shiite Arabs political movements or parties were started to be labeled as pro-Dawa, Sadrist, Hakim supporters, even though it cannot be denied that there are a secular nationalist group and large tribe organizations which defined their interests at local level, this situation does not change the reality which shows that most of the political movements of Iraqi Shiites consist of Islamic parties.

In addition to this, Sunni Arabs divided into two groups in the context of identity: Sunni Arabs who are against Kurds and Sunni Arabs who are against Shiites. This definition of identity differs at a great extent according to the geography where Sunni Arabs live and their local interests. Sometimes, most of the Sunni Arabs considered the partnership between Shiite Arabs and Kurds as a main political danger. However, a new era in which the danger that was felt most closely for the groups in the reshaping process of sociopolitical identity took precedence over others began. Only realistic attitude by which this community who hung on only this concept could define themselves was a definition of terrestrial identity over Iraq. For this reason, the political discourse of the Sunni Arabs that were born against the occupation, its institutions, the impacts of foreign countries on Iraq, ethnical

and denominational policy making and even decentralization was tried to be conducted on the concept of being Iraqi. (At this point, the name of the Sunni Arab Bloc, Al Iraqiya, does make sense). However, while the fact that it was a large scale movement which included the approaches listed above made them winner in their first serious attempt for coalition, after it experienced first and most serious fractures after the election, it was seen that they were fragile. The problems which the Sunni Arabs encountered in the definition of the identity and their failure in solving their own problems constituted the base of their political fracture.

These three aspects triggered the fourth one can be said. The main axe of the political atmosphere in Iraq in between 2003 and 2010 can be seen as the most important reason of emerging the phenomena which we are going to mention. After the invasion, all conflicts and power struggles which were created by political order in all level started to push political structures for facing main climate of previous structures anachronicly. The dilemma is that the main problematic of Iraq political system is the rivalry between centralism and decentralism or "national" benefits and local benefits. The problem started with establishing state including Mosul, Bagdad and Basra and after that it emerged again with the most known examples such as Shite rebels against British invasion and Kurdish upheaval against Baghdad. This dilemma had never lost its importance after the 1958 Revolution and it has never been overcome. Moreover, it entered to new phase with collapsing of centralized management. As stated above, when the governments were weak and so long as a powerful party or leader do not try to get control of Iraq, after the invasion the main characteristic of Iraq political system that was organizing politics around ethnic and religious sects prevented to resurgence of centralized government or tendencies which destroyed when U.S. occupied Baghdad. In fact, with becoming clear of the centralist and holding of majority's support Shite leader (already it is Nuri Maliki) the winds have changed in the struggle between centralization and decentralization. When we consider that how and why Maliki became powerful, the transformation period can be understood more easily. The restorative reasons of Maliki were focusing to do the right thing at the right time, trying to win locally powerful figures, getting free of other struggling powers using his weak situation at the beginning, the advantages of state-controlled in the Petroleum-based economy and controlling the bureaucracy very well.

Strengthening of Maliki had causality relationship with moving the struggle in Iraq to centralization and decentralization dilemma. For example, the list or alliance which grounded on centralization concept predominated Provincial Council Election in 2009 and Parliamentary Election in 2010. The tendency carried with the two discussions from the mid-2008. Who wants to centralization and does Maliki become authoritarian? After Maliki came to power, he increased his power in the system slowly whereas he could take the chair of Prime Minister because of his weakness. The basic desire of Maliki can be summarized in one sentence: bring all Iraq under the control. Maliki has been ready to using all kind of tools for achieving this goal and we have been witnessed it again and again.

When Maliki came to power in 2006, the state authority was collapsed; the security problem reached at the peak, production of petroleum reduced, and revenue gap could not control. Because of different reasons both regional actors and also most of actors in Iraq (except Kurds and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) supported the policy which would be increased the centralization in the chaotic atmosphere. Even the Kurds who had the most powerful opposition potential did not display an important opposition to Maliki unless Maliki tend towards them and damaged their acquisitions.

However, because of employing all kind of his methods and transition period in the Middle East, both countries in the region and Iraqi actors changed their look radically to Maliki. Maliki used these methods to strengthening central government: give permission to United States to make ineffective all anti-government armed groups and used extensive violence to Sunni and Shi indiscriminately when they rebelled against state authority. For example, he supported Sons of Iraq and Sahwa but get rid of to Al Qaida, Baathist groups and the Mahdi Army. He also tried to get support of religious institutions.When he could not get support, he acted practically and did not involve clashes with them. He tried to dominate production of petroleum and did not give up Sehristani. He made an agreement with everyone and against everyone periodically and he tried to find an alliance inside the rivalry between other actors. He gave promises to everyone and broke all promises. His vitiation to other parties inside the government was successful and he controlled to critical points. In parallel with the leaving U.S. forces to Iraq he monopolized all security units and created a network countrywide. He turned to account disputes in the local politics. He created con-

flict between the sides using his control over national budget. When needed, he decreased the tension. He gets support both U.S. and Iran at the same time and also remained in the same distance to two these competing powers.

Whole process put Maliki such a position; the name of Mailiki amount to the process of centralization of authority. This situation became clear with retreating of U.S. Between 2008 and 2012 Maliki was criticized by all political parties constantly. Ironically, people who try to overthrow him today gave his position at one time. Even he because of the balance or imbalance in Iraq did not make better option possible at least existent balance of parliament; today the aims of the groups against Maliki do not overthrow him solely preventing his actions in the future.

The most successful policy of Maliki at the above-stated period was using a factor reasonable which could be seen easily when looking at the historical dynamics of Iraqi politics. This factor is instigating the dislocation in the opponent movements and to oblige them to resign the central government (i.e. to itself). This is not a trump only used by Nuri Maliki or Islamic Dawa Party but being tried by many of the experienced Iraqi politicians and succeeded. In the current situation, the ones among Sunni Arabs who want to protect their benefits by relying the protection of the central government (the ones who drifted away from Hadba in Mosul, important Sunni Arab clans in Kirkuk, a part of the clans constituting Sahva in Anbar, etc), the ones who try to provide a competitive advantage in the power struggle between Shiites (AsaibAl Haqq against Sadr Trend, BadrOrganization against ISCI)There have not been any important fractions in the Kurds however some parties which disturbed increasing power of KDP in the Kurdistan Regional Government and also Turkmens have good relations and support with Maliki because of the disappointment in the political life. This situation caused that politics changed the axes from the identity-centered or ethnic-denominational politics to centralist or decentralist politics.

Government Crisis as a Physical Indicator of New Political Relations

The most concrete indicators of new political relations can be seen in the discussions between Mesut Barzani and Nuri Maliki and also seen in the effort getting together of the opposition group against Maliki. Barzani who had important role during the forming government

developed an attitude towards Maliki in several months. The origin of the discussion between Barzani and Maliki was the problem between central government and KRG rather than the broken promises during forming government. Barzani tries to create wider side caring political equation in Iraq beside conflicts with Baghdad in the past. As a matter of fact that, the most important benefit of him in addition to Sunni Arabs , he started to meet on a common ground with Sadr who was the most important opponent in the Shi Arabs. Within this framework, hence December of 2011 Sadr supported the criticisms of Mesut Barzani and leaders of Iraqiya against Maliki. Sadr's visit to Erbil was the last chain of Mesut Barzani's effort for overthrowing prime minister of Iraq, Nuri El-Maliki acting in concert with Iraqiya. After the meeting in Erbil, both local and international press underlined this meeting had important steps to overthrow to the government of Maliki and parties agreed that putting pressure on Maliki. Moreover, this agreement could be the basis of more clear political conflicts in long period. Recent explanations and interviews sparked debates on the scenario about that this agreement transformed to changing government with vote of confidence. Within this framework, existent political developments are being analyzed.

There was a differentiation in the political balances in the Iraq between the transition periods which was expressed in the previous chapter. This process can be summarized like that: political alliances took a shape at the end of the 2009 and they became clear position with the general election in 2010. According to this, Shite Arabs divided into National Iraqi Alliance and The State of Law Coalition, and the tribes of Sunni Arabs, Iraqi nationalists, old Baath supporters and Turkmens gathered under the roof of Al Iraqiya. Even Kurds divided several groups, they still protect their main axes with getting together KDP and PUK as part of the Kurdistan Alliance.

A National Union Government was established by the imposition of the election results and the countries in the region (including USA). During this process when Shiteparties which participated the elections separately were uniting under the name of National Union, ruptures started in Al-Iraqiya because of the negotiations about the distribution of the other tasks. There have been serious changes in the Iraq politics since the establishment of the government until today. Al Iraqiya has become the most important actor of this change. The list which formed the largest coalition before the elections and got the first place, started

to disassemble slowly. The schism depending upon the conflicts because of the ministries which were given or not given at the first place created the group named White Iraqiya mentioned above. Although number of deputies of this group is not more than 10, because of arithmetic of the parliament they gained a critical role. However, the main fragmentation has occurred in late 2011 and early 2012. Reasons of this fragmentation are clash of ideas between Iraqiya leaders, increasing number of people who are not satisfied with distribution of works and increasing number of deputies and groups that form alliances with central government in order to meet local expectations. Al-Iraqiya was formed in order to balance authoritarian regime in Iraq but leaders of it cannot provide cohesiveness between themselves. The preparation of the position for Iyad Allavi who was head of the list during government forming process was constantly postponed. On the contrary, other Al-Iraqiya leaders that got the positions such as Finance Minister, Vice Prime Minister, Vice President and Head of Assembly could not give a realistic support to suspensions about Allavi's position. Another example that can be given to inconsistency in Iraqiya leadership is about accusations for Tarıq Hashimi and Salih Mutlaq. Although Al-Iraqiya leaders were opposed to accusations for Tarıq Hashimi about his support for terrorism, government could not use its power efficiently including boycott method. Furthermore, while Al-Iraqiya was boycotting government and parliament, some deputies and ministries of them had broken the boycott. As accusations towards Hashimi continues, there had been occurred a crisis between Mutlak and Maliki, however, it ended after a short time thanks to Mutlaq's silence. In summary, Iraqiya leaders could not stand by each other in crisis times and began to lose their authority over their members and lose members' trust.

On the other side currently a new dynamic flourished. This dynamic is inducing of a fragmentation in al-Iraqiya which is caused by the political conflict between central government in north sides of Iraq and KRG. One of the factors that bringing together the al-Iraqiya list is trying to keep in balance Shite Arabrule in Bagdad and the other one is collaborating against KRG in closer regions to them. Thus, this process which became evident with Hadba coalition in Mosul in 2009 was evolved to an alliance under the roof of Iraqiya in parliamentary elections. So, Sunni Arabs in cities of Mosul, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salahaddin formed an alliance against efforts of KRG to gain a political superiority in its cities. Sunni Arabs in these cities made oppositions against authority of KRG in local level. However, a group in Iraqiya began to form alli-

ance with Kurds because of the raising authority of Maliki while some groups which are more interested in local interests began to coming closer to Maliki against Kurds. This new and critical change began to affect the cities mentioned above. Fragmentations began in Mosul central Hadba list which is one of the important components of Iraqiya because of the agreement decision between KRG and Mosul governor Ethil Nujaifi and also head of Iraq parliament Usame Nujaifi in order to solve the problems. In the first few months of 2012, a lot of important names in Hadba list resigned and this caused to losing power of this organism. Most of the politicians who resigned from Hadba began to form alliance with central government as a balancing factor against KRG. So, a critical change process began from power balance in Mosul. In Salahaddin, alliance group in province assembly in which Vifak group that is closer to Iyad Allavi forms the majority began to be fragmented after declaration of this province as a federal region. At that time, 20 members of province assembly out of 24 supported the idea of federal region, however, currently almost half of them against this idea. While people who are closer to Salih Mutlaq are in silence, politicians who are closer to Allavi support White Iraqiya and Maliki. Authority of Maliki is increasing in the province in which it was restricted to two countries in which Shite Arabs form the majority in south side of Salahaddin province. In case of Diyala, clash of Maliki and KRG in Haneqin, a mostly Kurdish populated town in Diyala, began to reproduce new power balances. The last province that must be mentioned is Kirkuk. While in 2010 elections Sunni Arabs supported Iraqiye list, after convergence between Iraqiya and KRG, they began to support Maliki. Muhammed Tamim who became Education Minister while he was a Kirkuk deputy and Omar Jubburi who is still a Kirkuk deputy (both of them are from the most important Arab tribe Jubbur in Kirkuk) developed close relations with Iraq Prime Minister Nuri El Maliki. As derived from their political discourses, most of other important Arab tribes in Kirkuk such as Ubeydi's and Hamdani's also follow the same way. In summary, it is seen that the coalition that forms Iraqiya began to crackle and Maliki uses the groups that were separated as shields both in discourse level and in parliament.

Conclusion

Political transformation in Iraq in recent terms which is mentioned above is not a completed process. It can be seen that there is important changes in alliances although there has been first signs yet.

These changes that will affect all alliances can mean that organizations such as Arab-Kurd or Shite-Sunni are not strong any more. Politics in Iraq will begin to try to normalize and end the clashes. However, as long as realistic solutions will not be found to the structural problems of the country, all meetings will remain inconclusive. As mentioned above, latest crisis to overthrow Maliki's government is a result of a main changing process started after 2010. Although the last attempt failed there could be several attempts in the near future. Probably, this process will cause an early election in Iraq which could trigger some political and security instability. Arithmetic of the parliament is already saving Maliki. However, just saloon games are not enough for overthrowing Maliki government, this change must be realized in centralization and decentralization level.

Bibliography

"Iraqi merger forms new Shia bloc, the National Alliance," BBC News, 11 June 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10294271

"Maliki: Barzani asked me not to involve the Change Movement in government," 15 May 2012, KIU, http://www.kurdiu.org/en/hawal/index.php?pageid=102518 ; 7 Mart 2010 Irak Parlamento Seçim Sonuçlarının ve Yeni Siyasal Denklemin Değerlendirilmesi, ORSAM Report, No 17, April 2010, http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/2011126_orsamreportt_17_tr.pdf

Chulov, Martin, "Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki Refused Second Term by Sadrists," Guardian, 01 August 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/01/iraq-pm-al-maliki-refused

Docena, Herbert, "Iraq's Neoliberal Constitution," 2 September 2005, Foreign Policy in Focus, http://www.fpif.org/reports/iraqs_neoliberal_constitution

Erkmen, Serhat, "2010 Parliamentary Elections and Political Life in Iraq after the Occupation", Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 2, No. 3, July 2010, pp.107-145.

Iraq After The Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape, International Crisis Group, Middle East Report No 74, 30 April 2008

Iraq's Civil War, The Sadrists and The Surge, International Crisis Group Report, Middle East Report No. 72, 7 February 2008,

Katzman, Kenneth, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights, Congressional Research Service, 27 December, 2011, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/180696.pdf

Najm, Haider, "Mps Defect from AyadAllawi'sIraqiya List," Niqash, 18 March 2011, http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2803

Tawfeeq, Mohammed, "Teenager dies, 39 hurt in fresh clashes in Iraq's Kurdistan" CNN, 21 February 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/02/21/iraq.protests/index.html

Visser, Reidar, Sistani, the United States and Politics in Iraq: From Quietism to Machiavellianism?, NUPI Report No 700, 2006.