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The Unraveling of the Nation-State in the Middle East: Examples of Iraq and Syria

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THE UNRAVELING OF THE NATION-STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST:

EXAMPLES OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

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By

Zachary Kielp

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ABSTRACT

After the carnage of World War One and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire a new form of political organization was brought to the Middle East, the Nation-State. Based on European ideas of Sovereignty and equality between countries; the nation-state was thrust upon these areas that had no history or interest in adopting a foreign form of governance and served the primary purpose of safeguarding the imperial interests of Europe. Compounding their error, the regions of these new nation-states contained populations that had long resented and mistrusted each other. While these countries could be held together by repressive dictatorships for decades, the first decade of the 21st century showed that time was ending for that model of governing. This thesis will show that the glue that held together both Syria and Iraq for decades has frayed and that it will not be put back together. The distrust and hatred between various ethnic groups is so great that there is very little chance that they can ever be brought together in the same country.

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Ilan Berman, JD
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has gone through extraordinary changes in the last 15 years. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 toppled an Iraqi regime that had ruled that country for decades. In 2010 A wave of mass protests changed the political fabric of the Middle East. By 2012 those protests had made their way to Syria, a country that had likewise been ruled with an iron hand by the same family for decades. Both Syria and Iraq today find themselves in the same place; mired in sectarian division that is tearing these countries apart. It is the contention of this thesis that the introduction of the nation-state by European colonial powers after their victory in World War One that has set the stage for this instability in Iraq and Syria.

The nation-state system was created by and for Europe in the mid-17th century to try and halt centuries of constant warfare. Colonial European powers, Britain and France, then exported it to the former holdings of the Vanquished Ottoman Empire. The regions to be included in these new colonial holdings were filled with various ethnic groups, religious minorities and sects. There was little that held these communities together into a cohesive country.

For decades the response to this dilemma has been the imposition of a top-down authoritarianism where political dissent wasn't tolerated, and any rebellion was brutally suppressed. Now, however, because of American led invasion in the case of Iraq or fallout from the Arab Spring in the case of Syria, the old political model is no longer working. The most likely resolution will be boarders roughly based upon ethnic lines. These boarders might be within a larger confederation, as was done in the days of the

Ottoman Empire. Or these areas might attempt formal secession, if it is decided no central government can be trusted.

What is clear is that Syria and Iraq will not be reconstituted as they were before. As top-down authoritarian countries with strong central governments. While that worked previously, too many developments in the intervening years now make that political model unworkable.

Tunisia

The North African country of Tunisia had never been known before as a Geopolitical flashpoint. Under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in power since seizing control of the country in a 1987 coup, Tunisia had been known as a corrupt but stable country.[1] Holding power, as most dictators do, with an active security service, along with a cadre of loyal followers that is kept enriched based on their support for and loyalty to the regime. Ben Ali was able to hold onto power for over twenty years with only minor challenges to his authoritarian rule.

This changed fast in December 2010 when a young Tunisian fruit seller named Mohammed Bouazizi doused himself in paint thinner and set himself on fire. Mr. Bouazizi made a living as a fruit vender, scraping by on a few dollars a day. Street vending is technically illegal in Tunisia, so when a blue uniformed municipal inspector came by Mr. Bouazizi had a choice: pay a bribe, run and leave your merchandise, or pay

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[1] "A Coup Is Reported in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1987, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/07/world/a-coup-is-reported-in-tunisia.html?pagewanted=1.

a fine of 14 dollars, which is the equivalent of several days wages. On this day, Mohammed Bouazizi had his fruit taken away from him in a confrontation with a municipal inspector. He next went to the police station to demand his property back, there he was beaten and had his electronic scale taken away. He went to the governor's office where he was denied a meeting. Later that day he doused himself with paint thinner and set himself ablaze. Mohammed Bouazizi languished for two weeks in the hospital before dying on January 4, 2011. In that time, protests, that at first were about how he was treated had spread all throughout the country and contained grievances about widespread unemployment and corruption.[2]

By the time Mr. Bouazizi succumbed to his injuries, the protests that had started with his self-immolation were growing so large that the position of the current regime was untenable. On January 14, only ten days after the death of the man who had become a symbol of revolution, President Ben Ali fled Tunisia and received asylum in Saudi Arabia. A twenty-four-year reign as an authoritarian ruler was ended in less than a month.[3] Since he fled, Ben Ali has been sentenced to 35 years in prison in absentia for stealing the country's wealth.[4] The former President's net worth is reported to be in excess of $3.5 billion and his family had been in the habit of flaunting their stolen wealth.[5]

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[2] Kareem Fahim, "Slap to a Man's Pride Set off Tumult in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011, sec. World.

[3] "Tunisia: President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali Forced Out," News Service, BBC, January 15, 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12195025.

[4] Jo Adetunji, "Ben Ali Sentenced to 35 Years in Jail," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2011, sec. World, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/20/ben-ali-sentenced-35-years-jail.

[5] Colin Freeman, "Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and His Family's 'Mafia Rule,'" *The Telegraph*, June 16, 2011, sec. World, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/tunisia/8261982/Tunisian-President-Zine-el-Abidine-Ben-Ali-and-his-familys-Mafia-rule.html.

The Protests that took down the regime in Tunisia soon spread to various other countries throughout the Middle East. Fueled by young people sharing their thoughts and experiences on social media and carried on televisions through the reporting of stations like Al Jazeera. The turmoil which had engulfed Tunisia soon spread to Egypt, where President Hosni Mubarak had held onto power with an iron grip since 1981.

Egypt

The long-time President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, had come to power in 1981 due to the assassination of President Anwar Sadat by Egyptian Islamic Jihad, in response to the peace treaty he negotiated recognizing Israel.[6] Following the assassination, Sadat's vice president and career soldier Hosni Mubarak took the reins of power and held onto them until his resignation in February 2011. Unlike in Tunisia, where President Ben Ali ruled in a soft authoritarianism where political repression and coercion, while existing, did not define the state; the security services of Egypt were active and feared during Mubarak's tenure in power. The assassination of Anwar Sadat resulted in a dramatic increase in the repressive organs of the state. A state of emergency was declared in Egypt by Mubarak shortly after assuming the Presidency and it remained in effect for the entirety of his tenure in office.[7]

The wave of protests that engulfed Tunisia and resulted in the end of the Ben Ali regime moved just as quickly through Egypt. Beginning on January 25, 2011 on Egypt's

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[6] Nick Charles, "Anwar Sadat Killed," news Service (UPI, 1981), http://www.upi.com/Archives/Audio/Events-of-1981/Anwar-Sadat-Killed.
[7] "Profile: Hosni Mubarek," News Service, *BBC News*, (March 24, 2017).

Police Day, tens of thousands took to the streets in order to protest against increasing police brutality and repression by the security services. During the weeks of protests that followed the Egyptian capital of Cairo was described as a "war zone".[8] Violent clashes broke out in the port city of Suez and other large urban areas throughout the country. While most international media attention focused on the protests going on in Cairo's Tahrir Square, and the largest of the protests did take place in Egypt's capital city, almost every major populated area in the country saw major unrest. The city of Alexandria, where a man named Khaleed Saeed lived who died while being held in police custody, saw violent clashes between police and protesters. The main city in southern Egypt, Assiut, saw protests as large as 40,000 strong. The cities along the Suez Canal saw more than 100,000 people take to the streets in protest.[9] While the police, military and the entirety of the security services were called upon to deal with these protests, they largely refused to use mass violence against the protesters. By February 11, 2011 Hosni Mubarak, having lost support from the strongest institution in Egypt, the military, was forced to resign and hand over complete control of the country to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forced.

Unrest in the Middle East

In the coming weeks, months and years mass protests spread all throughout the Middle East. Libya, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon all saw mass

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[8] "Protests in Egypt and Unrest in Middle East- as It Happened," The Guardian, *News Blog*, (January 25, 2011).

[9] Paul Schemm and Maggie Michael, "Mubarak Leaves Cairo for Sinai as Protests Spread via AP," *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 11, 2011, http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-mubarak-leaves-cairo-for-sinai-as-protests-spread-2011feb11-story.html.

mobilizations of people speaking out for changes in society. These movements were not a monolith and different grievances were voiced in each country. Various factors have been pointed to in explaining the phenomenon that in the West has come to be known as the Arab Spring. Some have pointed to the fact that demographically, the Middle East is experiencing a youth bulge and the demand for reform stems from this.[10] 65% of the population of the Middle East is under the age of thirty and are faced with stagnant economies with few employment prospects.[11] The youth of this region are living in what scholars have termed waithood. The educational systems in these countries are not adequately training these individuals for employment. The average youth unemployment in these countries is between 20-40%. The average waiting time for someone to enter their first job is measured in years, not months or weeks.[12]

Another factor that has been pointed to is one of the most basic that every person deals with, the price of food. The Middle East imports more of its food than any other region in the world. As a result, when there is a worldwide spike in food prices the Middle East feels it most acutely. This is exactly what happened in the Middle East in the Years immediately preceding the protests of the Arab Spring. In some countries, the price of staple crops doubled from 2007-2010, In Egypt the price of bread, the most important

[10] Stephanie Schwartz, "Youth and the 'Arab Spring'" (United States Institute of Peace, April 28, 2011), https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/04/youth-and-arab-spring.
[11] Navtej Dhillon, "Middle East Youth Buldge: Challenge or Opportunity," Brookings, *On The Record* (blog), May 22, 2008, https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/middle-east-youth-bulge-challenge-or-opportunity/.
[12] Dhillon.

staple for the Egyptian population, rose 37%.[13] By the time, Hosni Mubarak resigned overall food inflation rose almost 19%.[14]

Numerous factors have instigated the wave of unrest that has overtaken the Middle East in recent years. The result being that in some places the Nation-State, entities that have been around for decades are being torn apart by faction, tribe and sect. Nowhere is this phenomenon more acute that in Iraq and Syria. Anchored by cities, Baghdad and Damascus, that have been enormously important within the history of the Middle East for centuries. Today the states of Iraq and Syria are engulfed by civil war and division. These divisions are destroying what unity exists in these states and makes it increasingly unlikely that either state will be brought back together as a unitary whole.

In this thesis, I will show that the import of a foreign creation, the nation-state, to the Middle East after the first world war; and the subsequent creation of states, whereby territories with different tribal, and sectarian histories were forced together by outside powers is being unraveled. From the early 1920's when these states were created until today these artificial creations were held together by external support, strong dictatorships and internal security services that suppressed popular discontent. In the past 15 years, since the US led invasion of Iraq these have been disappearing. In its place, an increasingly fractured region is seeing state lets of regional autonomy appear in its place.

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[13] "Let Them Eat Baklava: Today's Policies Are Recipies for Instability in the Miiddle East," *The Economist*, March 17, 2012, sec. Middle East and Africa, http://www.economist.com/node/21550328.
[14] Rami Zurayk, "Use Your Loaf: Why Food Prices Were Crucial in the Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2011, sec. lifestyle, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jul/17/bread-food-arab-spring.

CREATION OF THE NATION-STATE

The nation-state was borne out of the constant warfare Europe experienced in the 17th century. Known today as the Thirty Years Was, this conflict pitted Protestant against Catholic, peasants against feudal lords, and empires against breakaway provinces. In 1648 two separate treaties were signed, one in Munster and the other in Osnabruk,[15] which put an end to this bloodshed; today these treaties are known as the Peace of Westphalia. This peace established a new system of political order in Europe, currently known as state sovereignty. This new political order was based on co-equal sovereign states; a sovereign state being the supreme authority within its territory with a monopoly over matters such as the use of force and lawmaking.[16]

Eventually a norm would be established whereby other states would refrain from interfering in the internal policies of others. Due to the fact that European influence and colonies have spread across the globe in the past several centuries, the principle of state sovereignty has become integral to international law and the foundation for world order.[17] While the principle of sovereignty may have been established in the 17th century, it did not truly become universally adopted around Europe until the mid-19th century. The years after World War One saw the introduction of the nation-state system into the Middle East by the victorious allies, namely Britain and France.

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[15] Bardo Fassbender, "Westphalia, Peace of (1648)," *Max Planck Encyclopedic of Public and International Law* (Oxford University Press, February 2011), http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e739.
[16] "Principles of the State System" (UNLV, n.d.), https://faculty.unlv.edu/gbrown/westernciv/wc201/wciv2c10/wciv2c10lsec2.html.
[17] Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

Unlike Europe which developed a system of co-equal sovereign states, the Middle East never developed anything of the kind. It was from ancient times until the early twentieth century a land of empires. The earliest written mentions of human civilization occurred in what we today call the Fertile Crescent, modern day Iraq and Syria. The Babylonian empire ruled this area in antiquity followed by the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great's Macedonian Empire, the Roman Empire, then came the empires of Islam.

The Ottoman Middle East

Coming out of the Deserts of Arabia in the 7th century, the Rashidun Caliphate conquered the Middle East and most of North Africa within thirty years. The Umayyad Caliphate continued the conquests, stretching the borders of the empire to Spain in the west and Afghanistan in the east. The Abbasid Caliphate held most of the conquests of the Umayyad dynasty until they were overthrown by the Mameluke Sultanate of Cairo. In 1517, the Mameluke's then lost control of the regions of Iraq and Syria to the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans were a Turkic people who reigned from Anatolia. Begun by Osman I in 1299, the Ottoman empire steadily grew to encompass all of Anatolia. In 1453, the Ottomans laid siege to and captured the city of Constantinople, ending the centuries long reign of the Byzantine empire. It was under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent that the majority of the empires Middle Eastern conquests were made, including the lands that would eventually become Iraq and Syria. The Ottoman empire was a military superpower, eventually threatening western Europe when in 1683 Ottoman armies

threatened the gates of Vienna. Defeated in this battle by a coalition of European states, this moment marked the turning point in Ottoman fortunes.

The next several centuries saw the precipitous decline in strength of the Ottoman empire and the corresponding rise of European states to a preeminent position in world affairs. The Ottomans struggled with internal political turmoil, outdated technology and military defeats. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Ottoman Empire was derisively referred to as the sick man of Europe;[18] due to the fact that it could not effectively control all of its territory and that its weakness frequently upended Europe's balance of power.

The Ottoman Empire's ultimate fate would be decided in the conflagration of World War I. In early August 1914, the Ottoman Empire and Germany formed an alliance stipulating that the Ottoman Empire was to join a war that broke out between Russia and Germany.[19] In late October the Ottomans entered the war by launching a surprise attack on Russia's black sea fleet. Days later the Russians declared war on the Ottoman Empire, days after that they were joined by Britain and France.

It was initially thought that the Ottoman Empire would be the simplest military target of the Central Powers. However, the 1915 Gallipoli campaign shattered those illusions. The Gallipoli peninsula forms the north bank of the Dardanelles strait; the idea behind this campaign was to capture the strait, along with the Ottoman capital of

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[18] "The Sick Man of Europe- 1821-1909," Global Security, November 7, 2011, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/ot-history-4.htm.
[19] "The Treaty of Alliance Between Germany and Turkey" (BYU University Press, May 28, 2009), https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_Alliance_Between_Germany_and_Turkey.

Constantinople. Both a naval attack and amphibious landing were undertaken. The naval attack was repulsed and eight months later the amphibious force was evacuated to Egypt.[20] The Ottoman victory was short-lived as the British soon would attack from Egypt through Palestine and into the Levant region. They were aided in this task by Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Emir of Mecca and his two sons Faisal and Abdullah who launched what came to be known as the Great Arab Revolt.

Sharif Hussein did not decide to support the allied cause in the war because of any deeply held personal beliefs, but because they seemed to offer the best deal in return for loyalty.[21] The Hussein-McMahon correspondence, conducted between Sharif Hussein and Sir Henry McMahon the British High Commissioner in Egypt between June 1915 and March 1916 implied that after the war land stretching from modern Iraq to a line east of Damascus and Aleppo would be included in an Arab Kingdom.[22] An October 1915 letter from McMahon to Hussein conveyed the message that the British Government agreed to this settlement. Furthermore, that Britain could act without the support of its French ally. This was just one of multiple promises that the British would make with this land.[23]

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[20] Joshua Hammer, "A New View of the Battle of Gallipoli, One of the Bloodiest Conflicts of World War 1," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2015, http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/new-view-battle-gallipoli-one-bloodiest-conflicts-world-war-i-180953975/?page=1.
[21] "Husayn-McMahon Corrrespondents," *Encyclopedia Britanica* (British-Palestinian History: Encyclopedia Britanica Inc., n.d.), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Husayn-McMahon-correspondence.
[22] Roger Spooner, "The Mcmahon Promise to Hussein," The Balfour Project, January 26, 2015, http://www.balfourproject.org/the-mcmahon-promise/.
[23] "The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence," University of Delaware, n.d., http://www1.udel.edu/History-old/figal/Hist104/assets/pdf/readings/13mcmahonhussein.pdf.

Sykes-Picot Agreement

Figure 1. Border Demarcation of Sykes-Picot Agreement

     Great Britain and France would soon enter into an agreement that would completely disregard all promises made in the Hussein McMahon Correspondents. The Sykes-Picot agreement, so named because of the representatives of their respective governments that signed the agreement, Sir Mark Sykes for Great Britain and Francois Georges Picot for France, Figure 1 shows the border demarcation of the Sykes-Picot agreement. If you have ever looked at a map of the Middle East and Wondered why the

borders of the region is so unnaturally straight, the agreement signed between these two men in 1916 is the reason why.[24]

The reason for the agreement was for France and Great Britain to outline and demarcate each nations spheres of influence in the Middle East after the war ended. Any thought of the local inhabitants was quickly superseded by larger geopolitical interests that the two nations had. The British saw it as an imperative to safeguard the route to India; both from the sea through the Suez Canal and from land. Meaning that they wanted to control the land from modern day Israel to central and southern Iraq.[25] Controlling Iraq became a strategically important issue for the British for another reason too. In 1912, the Royal Navy launched its first oil-powered warship. Before long, oil came to be seen as the new dominant form of fuel surpassing coal. Not only would oil be indispensable in powering warships, but it would be able to power the new weapons of war, namely tanks and airplanes. Iraq was thought to contain enormous amounts of oil. The British looked at Iraq and thought it could provide both oil and guaranteed access to what was still the crown jewel of its empire, India.

In the negotiations preceding the agreement France demanded control of Greater Syria, what today would be known as both Syria and most of Lebanon. Just as the British imperial obsession had always been India, the French obsession had always been what they believed was their mission to civilize. France genuinely believed what the crusaders had started, they would finish. They believed this so much that when French General

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[24] M.E McMillan, *From The First World War To The Arab Spring: What's Really Going on in the Middle East*, 1st ed., Middle East Today (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). P. 69
[25] McMillan. p. 71

Henri Gourand came to Damascus in 1920, he went to the tomb of Saladin, whose Arab army had defeated the Crusader army in 1187 and said, "We have Returned".[26] France also had long-standing commercial interests in the region, especially in Syrian silkworms which were needed for the French textile industry. In past years France had invested large sums of money into the region. Controlling Greater Syria was seen as ensuring its economic and commercial interests.[27]

Although France was officially a secular country and espoused its revolutionary republican ideals, the Catholic Church still played a large role in both public and private life. For decades France had seen it as a duty to protect Christian enclaves within the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Since the 1860's they had been protecting the Maronite Christian community surrounding Mt Lebanon. France and the Catholic Church wanted to maintain their contacts to the Christian communities of the Holy Land.[28]

The Sykes-Picot agreement demonstrated that British and French strategic interests would play a far larger role in shaping the political future of this region than any desires of the native populations. The decisions made by Sir Mark Sykes and Francois Picot still have resonance today. In 2012, the leader of Al-Qaida in Iraq urged his followers to overturn "the boarders implemented by the Sykes-Picot [Agreement]" and bring back "The Islamic State, the state that does not recognize artificial boundaries and does not believe in any nationality other that Islam."[29] Two years later that same man,

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[26] Karl Meyer and Shareen Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W Norton & Company, 2008). P. 359
[27] McMillan, *From The First World War To The Arab Spring: What's Really Going on in the Middle East*. P. 72
[28] McMillan.
[29] Paul Danahar, *The New Middle East: The World After The Arab Spring* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). P. 395

Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi would ascend the steps of the Grand Mosque in Mosul to proclaim himself caliph of the new Islamic State.

After the war ended the two nations set about putting their theoretical concepts into action. By meeting at 10 Downing Street this meeting clearly demonstrated how cavalierly both nations believed they could trade away lands and peoples they knew little or nothing about. While the two leaders were in conversations about how exactly the Middle East would be divided, British Prime Minister Lloyd George made a specific demand. The British Government had come to the conclusion that they needed to control the oil rich territory around Mosul. During the conversation which had begun on European matters French President Clemenceau asked Lloyd George what if any changes to French Claims were desired. Lloyd George simply replied "Mosul". "You shall have it," was the reply from Clemenceau.[30] The dispensation of a region of hundreds of thousands of people was settled in five words.

While Britain and France had met, and come to an understanding about what territories both countries would receive; no formal legal agreement existed. That would take place in August of 1920 in the Parisian suburb of Sevres. If Versailles was where the political future of Europe was being decided, the treaty of Sevres decided the political future of the Middle East.

The treaty of Sevres was in actuality just an agreement between Britain and France; the other two members of the council of four, the United States and Italy had withdrawn from the negotiations because of domestic political constraints. The Ottoman

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[30] David Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace: The Fall Of The Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009). P. 375

Empire as the vanquished opponent was not allowed in the negotiations, and in keeping with past precedent representatives of the local inhabitants were not allowed to attend.

The treaty of Sevres called for an independent Kurdistan and the carve up of Anatolia. These provisions caused severe nationalist Turkish sentiments and eventually the Turkish war of Independence. Within three years the Turkish Nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk were victorious and a new treaty was signed, the Treaty of Lausanne. This treaty had almost no impact on the Middle East settlement, however the provision for an independent Kurdistan was dropped.

Technically the British territories in Iraq and Transjordan, as well as French territories if Syria and Lebanon were Mandates from the newly created League of Nations. Officially the British and French were mandated to govern these territories in order to prepare them for independence. In actuality, the two imperial Great Powers had no intention of preparing these states for independence; they were created for the purpose of furthering the imperial and geopolitical interests of Britain and France.
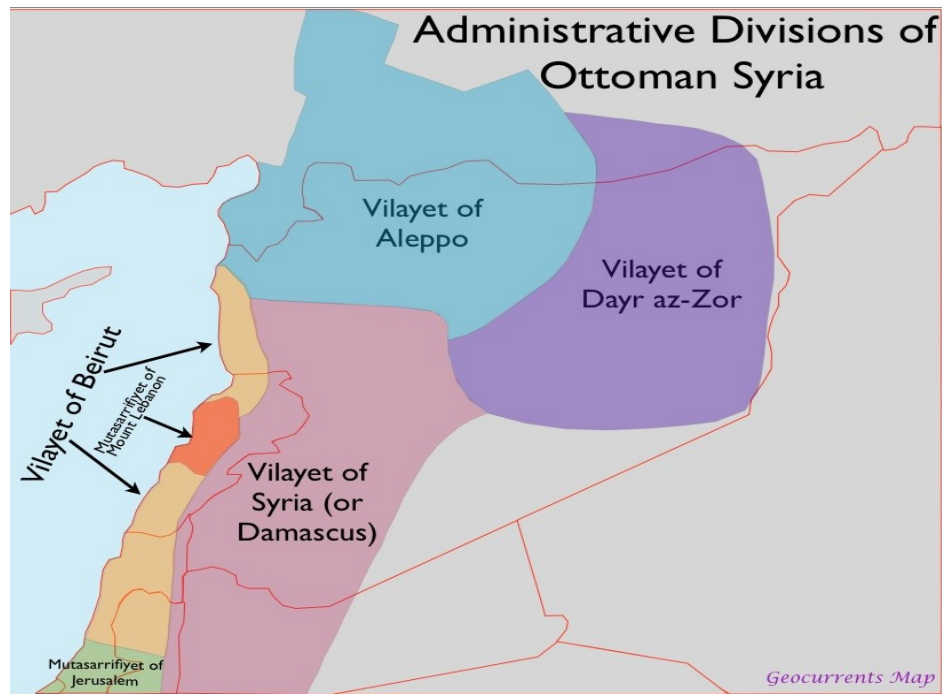
Figure 2. Division of Ottoman Syria

Ottoman Syria

The Ottoman Empire conquered what today is Syria in 1516 from the Mamluk empire which ruled from Cairo. Like all of their colonial conquests the Ottoman Sultans ruled Syria with a light touch, Figure 2 illustrates how the Ottomans divided Syria for administrative purposes. A Pasha, or regional governor, administered this territory in the name of the empire. As long as the Pasha in question-maintained stability, collected taxes and stayed loyal then they were largely left alone to rule the area as they thought best.[31]

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[31] Thomas Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington D.C: Library of Congress, 1987).

The region was then further divided into "Vilayets," or provinces.[32] On the eve of World War One, Syria was divided into three Vilayets: the Vilayet of Aleppo was located in the north-east of the country and included mostly Sunni Muslims along with some Alawites and Kurds, the Vilayet of Syria (or Damascus) included almost entirely Sunni's along with the countries Christian population, the Vilayet of Dayr az Zor was located in the north-east and included the countries Kurdish population. The Vilayet of Beirut included all of coastal Lebanon and most of coastal Syria where the Alawite population mainly resides. Figure 3 shows the ethnic divisions in what is today Syria.
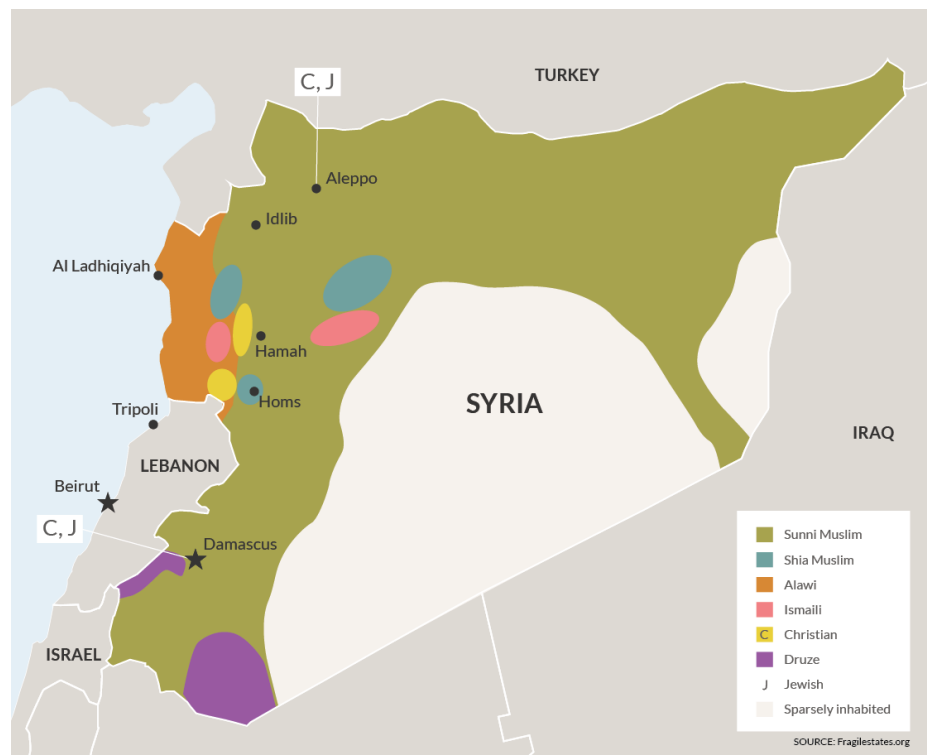
Figure 3. Ethnic divisions in Syria

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[32] Toba Hellerstein, "What Modern Syria Can Learn From the Ottomans," Stratfor, March 6, 2016, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/what-modern-syria-can-learn-ottomans.

The largely decentralized ruling structure that was developed was due to the fact

that demographically, Syria is a rather heterogenous society with multiple religions,

ethnicities and cultural traditions. 90 percent of the population today is Arab; however,

10 percent is Kurdish, Armenian and other ethnic groups.

No census in Syria has asked about religion since 1960, but the country is

estimated to have a Sunni Muslim majority of 74 percent: Alawi, Ismaili, and other Shia

Muslims comprise 13 percent: Christians make up another 10 percent: and 3 percent are

Druze.[33] The boarders of the Vilayets corresponded rather accurately with the

demographic makeup on the ground.

Ottoman administration was further hands off by following patterns of rule

previously established by other empires that governed the region. Each minority religious

community- Shia Muslim, Orthodox Christian, Maronite and Kurd- formed a millet. In

the Ottoman Empire, a millet was a separate court of law which administered areas of

personal status and some civil functions.[34] Despite the fact that these territories were

populated with various ethnic groups, each minority ethnicity had significant autonomy

when governing themselves.

Syria Under France

After their defeat in World War One, the territory of Ottoman Syria was

transferred to France under the 1920 treaty of Sevres. Legally France was given a

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[33] "Syria," *CIA-The World Factbook*, (June 21, 2017), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html.
[34] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.

mandate under the newly formed League of Nations to govern the country while

simultaneously readying the population for independence. In reality, France had no

intention of readying Syria for independence; ideological and strategic concerns formed

the basis of their governing decisions in Syria. For decades France had taken to its core

the idea that they had a `responsibility to civilize' in their colonies. Additionally, French

business interests demanded that they have control over silkworms from this area for

their textile industry and before the war, French companies had invested large sums in

this area.

France would not get Syria without fighting for it though. Insisting that the

promised independent Arab state be honored, son of Sharif Hussein, Faisal declared that

Damascus would be the capital of a newly independent Kingdom of Syria. Despite some

success at attracting some Arab support, French forces successfully kicked Faisal out of

Syria in only a few months culminating in the battle of Maysalun. According to his

secretary the leader of the French military in the region General Gouraud had two

options: "Either build a Syrian nation that does not exist… by smoothing out the rifts

which still divide it" or "cultivate and maintain all the phenomena, which require all the

arbitration that these divisions give." He went on to add that "I must say that only the

second option interests me."[35] That is exactly what France would go on to do in Syria.

It took a full three years to bring all of Syria under French control. In 1924, the

State of Syria was proclaimed: the land was divided into five regions, the State of

Aleppo, the State of Damascus, an Alawite State, the state of Jabal al-Druza and a Sanjak

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[35] James Barr, *A Line In the Sand: The Anglo French Struggle for the Middle East* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

of Alexandretta.[36] It was divided in this way to prevent pan-Arabism from forming by separating the various communities along ethnic lines, figure 4 shows French Syria in 1922. However, one thing that all communities could agree on was that they resented the French presence.

Figure 4. French Syria in 1922

As was their pattern in all their colonies, French rule was direct and oppressive. Whereas in British colonies the British installed native leaders to rule in their interest, in French colonies the rule was more direct and almost all aspects of life came under French control. In Syria, the franc became the base currency in the country, and currency

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[36] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.

management was in the hands of French banks concerned with French interests. The French language was the official language of instruction in all French schools and all students were required to sing the French national anthem, the "Marseillaise."[37]

The heavy-handed treatment by French Mandatory officials led to great resentment by the local population. Eventually they led to uprisings against French Rule; an example of this is the 1925 Great Syrian Revolt, also known as the Druze revolt. Starting in the largely Druze populated region of Jabal al-Druze and led by Sultan al-Atrash. Initially the uprising spread throughout the countryside and won military victories against the provincial French army.[38] While today the revolt is known principally as an uprising by the Druze community, other ethnic groups took part. Within the first months most major cities were captured by rebels, however, these uprisings did not share a similar goal and when the French military sent reinforcements the country was soon back in French control.[39]

Once the uprising was put down and order restored the French decided that their idea of dividing the ethnic groups in a divide and conquer strategy was not working. In 1930, in a move that pleased the Syrian Nationalists prevalent in Damascus, the Republic of Syria was established, along with a new constitution that did away with the previous divisions and created a unitary state.[40]

Syrian nationalists kept demanding more political autonomy, and France, because of its debts from the war and because of the depression, was finding that it could no

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[37] Collelo.
[38] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britanica, "Druze Revolt," *Encyclopedia Britanica*, May 1, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/event/Druze-revolt.
[39] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[40] Collelo.

longer afford an empire. In 1936, a treaty was agreed to which stated that France would give Syria its independence after its rule had ended. It also stipulated that there would gradually be given full emancipation, these processes would happen over a twenty-five-year period.[41] Due to subsequent events in Syria and the emergence of Hitler in Germany the French government announced that they would not submit the treaty for ratification.[42]

After the fall of France in 1940 to the Germans, Syria was then controlled by Vichy France until 1941 when it was taken back by a joint Franco-British effort.[43] The leader of the Free French Charles de Gaulle promised the Syrian People eventual independence but gave no indication when that time would be. The new Syrian government decided to take matters into its own hands; as they took over fourteen administrative areas that previously had been done solely by the French including: customs, tax collection and social affairs. Time was limited for French rule; this was illustrated by diplomatic recognition being extended to Syria by both the United States and the Soviet Union in 1944, Britain followed with their own recognition a year later.[44]

Syria Gets Independence

In 1945 Syria announced the formation of its own army and became a founding member of the United Nations. While the writing was clearly on the wall regarding Syrian independence, the French demanded a treaty that would protect their economic

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[41] "French Syria 1919-1946," University, University of Central Arkansas, n.d., http://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/middle-eastnorth-africapersian-gulf-region/french-syria-1919-1946/.

[42] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.

[43] The War Office, "Operations in the Middle East, 5 Jult 1941-31 October 1941," *The London Gazette*, August 20, 1946, https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/37695/page/4215.

[44] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.

and strategic interests before withdrawing their military. Protests erupted in various Syrian cities and again France bombed and attacked the Syrian capital. It was not until Winston Churchill threatened to send British troops to Syria that France agreed to depart. All French troops were off Syrian soil on April 17, 1946; this day is celebrated as a national holiday in Syria.[45]

While there was unanimous happiness to see the French leave Syria, any unity among the populations leaders came to an end. Arabs from the major urban centers of Aleppo and Damascus competed for commercial and political dominance. The other minority groups: the Kurds, Druze and Alawites all pledged loyalty to their own communities. The early years of Syrian independence was marked by a chaotic and weak Syrian political system.[46]

Soon the Arab-Israeli war broke out and Syria sent 5,000 soldiers as part of the Arab army to destroy Israel at the outset. Soon frustration set in at the lack of success against Israel. On March 29, 1949 in the early morning hours' Syrian tanks occupied strategic areas of the capital and arrested the President, the first of 20 coups in the next 40 years had taken place.[47] It was led by Brigadier General Husni as Zaim, the army chief of staff. In his short time in office he gave his approval of numerous public works projects, voiced his approval of a Middle Eastern-North Atlantic Treaty Organization and was the last Arab state to sign an armistice agreement with Israel. His rule was short lived however as he was executed in a countercoup just five months later.[48]

[45] "French Syria 1919-1946."
[46] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[47] Sami Moubayed, "Keeping an Eye on Syria: March 29, 1949," Mideastviews, March 29, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20120303172509/http://www.mideastviews.com/articleview.php?art=387.
[48] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.

Coups and More Coups

Coup and countercoup would exist for the next nine years until the government saw no way of being able to preserve domestic stability. In desperation, they turned to the powerful Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt. Nasser was initially reluctant, but in 1958 it was announced that Egypt and Syria would be joined in the United Arab Republic. To Syria's dismay it soon became apparent that Nasser did not want a federated country as the Syrians hoped, but that the UAR be truly integrated in all areas. This would mean that Syria would eventually be completely subsumed by a larger, more powerful Egypt. On September 28, 1961, another military coup was staged in Syria, and the military government withdrew Syria from the UAR.[49]

The government that resulted from the 1961 coup was extremely unstable and like so many Syrian governments would not last long. On the 8th of March 1963, a group of high ranking Syrian officers staged a coup in Syria. This coup is notable because it brought the Ba'ath party to power in Syria.[50] The Syrian Ba'ath party would go through many variations through the preceding decades, but it still holds power today through the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. The Baathist coup in Syria took place only two months after a similar coup brought the Iraqi Ba'ath party to power.

Three years later another coup would take place. This time the conflict was between the younger members of the Ba'ath party and the party's founders. The major difference between the traditional Ba'athists and the neo-Ba'athists was that the younger

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[49] Elie Podeh, *The Decline of Arab Unity: The Rise and Fall of the United Arab Republic* (London: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).
[50] Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (Routledge, 1988).

generation had dropped the Pan-Arabism that had infused previous versions of the

movement. The majority of the army would throw their support behind the neo-Ba'athists

and the old guard fled the country and would spend the rest of their lives in exile.[51]

Hafez Al-Assad Takes Power

1970 would be the last in the long line of Successful coups that would hit Syria.

On November 13, 1970 Minister of Defense, General Hafez al-Assad took control of the

country from the then leader of Syria Salah Jadid.[52] While Assad had been in de facto

control of Syrian politics since 1969 all top-ranking positions in Syria were still held by

Jadid loyalists. Assad finally decided to take power in a coup when the attempted Syrian

military intervention in the Black September uprisings failed.[53] The Corrective Movement

as the coup is officially called is celebrated as a national holiday in Syria, and has aimed

to improve and sustain the "nationalist socialist" line of thought in Syria.[54]   Despite his

success in the coup, Assad's following in the Ba'ath party was smaller than his

predecessors. As a result, he reached out to some of the old guard Ba'ath party supporters

who had been overthrown years earlier saying, "Let us rebuild together and if we fail our

heads will all be on the chapping block together."[55] However, later in 1970 at a Ba'ath

party meeting his motion to appoint a figurehead over the party was defeated. In the

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[51] Raymond Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*, The Contemporary Middle East (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[52] Patrick Seale, "Hafez Al-Assad," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2000, sec. Obituary.
[53] Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1990).
[54] Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*.
[55] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*.

future Assad would always be forced to cultivate a power base apart from the Ba'ath party.

Economically, Assad shied away from the extreme socialism of his predecessors. In many ways, the coup of Hafez al-Assad represented a tacit alliance between the political elite and the moneyed business classes in Syria.[56]

In foreign policy Assad wanted to portray his rule and Syria's place in the world as one of confrontation with Israel. During the rule of his predecessor Syria had been isolated among Arab nations. Assad was able to foster good relations with both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The rejuvenation of the "Damascus-Egypt-Riyadh axis" allowed for collaboration before the Yom Kippur War and why Arab oil producers embargoed the West after the war's conclusion.[57]

Assad's initial government started with a considerable advantage, the government that he toppled was so hated that anything would be better in the eyes of the people.[58] Assad took a tack considerably at odds with his predecessors, he tried to be seen as a man of the people by going to various villages and hearing complaints from ordinary citizens. In some ways, he relaxed the state's repressive measures on ordinary citizens, he also cut prices of basic foodstuffs by almost 15 percent.[59] While in no ways allowing the country to democratize, he did allow certain freedoms and brought down prices which made him a popular figure.

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[56] Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*.
[57] Robert Freeman, ed., *The Middle East Enters The Twenty-First Century* (Gainesville Florida: University of Florida Press, 2002).
[58] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*.
[59] Seale.

Since Hafez al-Assad could not guarantee on the complete loyalty of the Syrian Ba'ath party he started transforming the Syrian Presidency into an extremely powerful position. Until now the position of "Head of State," had largely been a ceremonial position with little true power. As the presidency became the main of initiative in the government his personality and strengths became decisive for the direction and stability of the state.[60]

The system that was created was one where Assad had the final say on almost everything of consequence, no matter how small that was. Over the years, fidelity to the party or ideology was displaced by loyalty to the leader.[61] During his years in power a cult of personality developed around Assad. He was frequently called the Lion of Syria, playing on the fact that Assad means lion in Arabic. Posters of him doing heroic things could be seen all throughout the country. Schoolchildren were taught to sing songs that glorified Assad, teachers would start each day with the song "Our eternal leader Hafez al-Assad."[62] In all public statements Syrian officials were compelled to call Assad the sanctified one.

When Assad came to power he talked about pan-Arab identity and tried to portray himself as the second coming of Nasser. However, his rule saw an increased sectarianizing of society. Hafez al-Assad is an Alawite, a Muslim sect that is similar to Shi'ism, with a heartland near Syria's coasts. Despite the fact that Alawite's make up less

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[60] Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*.

[61] Hinnebush.

[62] Daniel Pipes, "Syria: Beyond the Peace Process" (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 1995), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PP_40_SyriaBeyondthePeaceProcess.pdf.

than 20 percent of the population, they soon came to hold almost total power in both the armed services and security services.[63] As the coercive apparatus of the state was now entirely under his control, and he could count on them to stay loyal as their commanders all came from the same ethnic group. The historian Raymond Hinnebush states while the Alawites dominated the coercive organs of the state were crucial, because they "were pivotal because as personal kinsmen or clients of the president, they combined privileged access to him with positions in the party and control of the levers of coercion. They were, therefore, in an unrivalled position to act as political brokers and, especially in times of crisis, were uniquely placed to shape outcomes".[64] While members of different ethnic groups did hold positions of power and importance including head of the air force, chief of general intelligence and army chief of staff, none of them had a power base apart from the Alawite elite to act independently.

The Threat to Assad's Rule

The most serious threat to Assad's rule came in the early 1980's in the form an Islamist uprising. The first clashes between the Ba'ath party and Islamist political groups came shortly after the 1963 coup. As a secular party and one that was growing in power, the Ba'ath party and the Muslim Brotherhood (the main Islamist party) were always destined to come into conflict. In 1964, the Brotherhood was outlawed, which pushed them underground and made them more radical.

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[63] Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*.
[64] Hinnebush.

In January 1973, a new constitution was propagated in Syria that instituted a change. No longer was it required for the President of Syria to be Muslim. This led to fierce demonstrations against Assad's rule in cities like Homs and Hama. The Sunni majority was infuriated by this decision with the Muslim Brotherhood labeling Assad as "The Enemy of Allah" and called for a jihad against Assad's rule.[65] Robert Kaplan has described Assad's coming to power to "an untouchable becoming maharaja in India or a Jew becoming Tsar in Russia-an unprecedented development shocking to the Sunni Muslim population which had monopolized power for so many centuries."[66] In these circumstances it was just a matter of time before a full-scale rebellion in Syria took place.

The uprisings began in the late 1970's when members of the Muslim Brotherhood started to assassinate high-ranking members of the Alawite Ba'ath elite.[67] By 1980 the Brotherhood, believing they had the upper hand, started a military campaign against government installations in Aleppo. The success of the uprisings led to other members of society and even members of the Ba'ath party who had been purged start to support the uprising. At the same time, a debate had begun within the party over the proper way to deal with the uprising. Some, led by the President's brother Rifaat, were hardliners who thought further repression would end the uprising. Others, led by a more moderate faction believed that a more conciliatory approach would work best.[68] As time went on and the question of regime survival became more and more pressing concern, the hardliners became more and more prominent. The hardliners finally won out when in 1980 there

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[65] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[66] Robert Kaplan, "Syria: Identity Crisis," *The Atlantic*, February 1993, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/02/syria-identity-crisis/303860/.
[67] Hinnebush, *Syria: Revolution from above*.
[68] Hinnebush.

was an assassination attempt against Assad during a state visit of the President of Mali. A Machine gun salvo nearly missed him; two grenades were thrown towards him, he kicked one of them away and a bodyguard jumped on top of the other.

The uprising came to a head in 1982 in the city of Hama. The history of Hama is one that had always been in opposition to both the Ba'ath party and the Assad regime in particular.[69] In order to finally crush the uprising and end the Islamist militancy in Hama once and for all Hafez al-Assad decided to send around 30,000 soldiers to encircle the city. There were around 15,000 soldiers from the Syrian Arab Army, around 12,000 from the Defense Companies. The Defense Companies we're a paramilitary force that was commanded by the President's brother Rifaat al-Assad. They could accurately be described as a special forces unit but they also had a mission close to a praetorian guard. They were headquartered outside Damascus and were charged with safeguarding the regime against coups. The last 3,000 troops were from the security services and various intelligence agencies.

The battle started early in the morning on 3 October 1982 when a Syrian Army patrol came upon a local guerilla commander. The Syrian patrol was ambushed, later the guerilla commander called for the whole city to rise up. Rooftop snipers killed about 20 additional Syrian soldiers. [70]

Every member of the Syrian military, every party worker and every intelligence operative knew that the Islamist threat had to be removed from Hama.[71] The Syrian

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[69] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*.
[70] Seale.
[71] Seale.

military methodically surrounded the city so that no one could escape. Before moving on the city, the Syrian government ordered the city to surrender, and warned everyone that anyone remaining in the city would be considered a rebel. Civilians were fleeing as the Syrian military was approaching the city's outskirts in order to start the siege. Many civilians also died from shortages of food and water caused by the siege.[72] The fighting for Hama was said to have lasted for three weeks. One week for the Syrian military to take back the city, and two more to hunt down everyone suspected of collaborating.[73]

Initial reports on civilian casualties, even from Western governments, were that around 1,000 were killed.[74] Writers who were on scene soon after the massacre happened and spoke to witnesses put the number at 10,000.[75] Later some human rights groups put the number closer to 40,000. Whatever the exact number, the events in Hama in late 1982 would have long reaching consequences.

After the Hama massacre the uprising was crushed, other groups opposing the regime soon went to ground or in some way made their peace with Assad. The Muslim Brotherhood was abolished and their remnants hunted down. Eventually the Muslim Brotherhood split into two factions; one faction that vowed to continue their violent struggle went to Iraq, another that renounced violence headquartered itself in London. Eventually the radical group would renounce violence and join the internationally recognized group in London.

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[72] Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[73] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*.
[74] Joohn Kifner, "Syrian Troops Are Said To Battle Rebels Encircled in Central City," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1982, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/1982/02/12/world/syrian-troops-are-said-to-battle-rebels-encircled-in-central-city.html.
[75] Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*.

While the armed opposition was destroyed in Hama, the massacre just hardened attitudes towards the Assad regime. The Alawites and the other ethnic minorities of Syria saw the regime as its protector. The majority Sunni population saw the regime as heretics and an oppressive foreign force. Assad himself changed tactics after Hama as well, going forward he would not rely on political maneuvering and instead relied more and more on his base of support in the Alawite community and political repression.[76]

Assad decided to concentrate power even more in the Presidency when there was an attempted coup against him. This time the attempted coup was conducted by Hafez's brother Rifaat. In November 1983 Assad was hospitalized after suffering a heart attack which triggered a succession crisis.[77] When Rifaat visited his brother in the hospital he thought there was no way that his brother would be able to continue his rule. Rifaat did not receive the desired support from his brother's inner circle. When that support was not forthcoming he made extravagant promises to these people, according to the historian Hannah Batatu these promises were "absolutely lavish."[78]

Support was not forthcoming for Rifat for a number of reasons; one of these was because until then Rifaat was the poster child for corruption in the Assad regime in the minds of the Syrian people.[79] There was also a great deal of resentment that was growing towards the Defense Companies which Rifaat was commanding. They were perceived both by the regular military and the nation at large as corrupt, undisciplined and cruel.

[76] Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "U.S Relations with Syria," Government, State Department, March 20, 2014, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm.
[77] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[78] Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasentry, the Descendents of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[79] Batatu.

The military was resentful of its own prisons, intelligence services and higher salaries than regular soldiers.[80]

Soon posters in Damascus picturing Hafez al-Assad were taken down and replaced with posters of Rifaat. The Defense Companies were confronted by units loyal to the President and soon skirmishes erupted and gunfire erupted near the presidential palace.[81] Soon all of Rifaat's loyalists in senior positions were removed from their posts. Soon Rifaat was named one of three Vice Presidents, but this was nothing more than a ceremonial role as Rifaat was forced to give up command of the Defense Companies to a loyalist of his brother.[82] However, soon Rifaat would try to assume power again just a few weeks later. He ordered troops loyal to him to block the roads leading out of Damascus. Rifaat did not have enough support in the military however, and forces outside Damascus surrounded the Defense Companies forces and soon the attempted coup fell apart.[83]

As a consequence of the attempted coup against his brother Rifaat was forced to flee Syria. Originally, he was sent to the Soviet Union on an open-ended trip, then to France. Although he has been allowed to return to Syria at times in the years since he has mainly been exiled to Western Europe, mainly France and Spain.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, supporters of Rifaat were systematically purged from the military, security services and party. Some were sent

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[80] Batatu.
[81] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[82] Batatu, *Syria's Peasentry, the Descendents of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*.
[83] Batatu.

abroad in exile, others within the military were transferred to administrative tasks and others were imprisoned or killed.[84] The Defense Companies were immediately reduced greatly in size and eventually disbanded altogether with their function being absorbed by other units.[85]

After the failed coup attempt Assad moved to correct the public misperception that he was a figurehead president by appearing at universities and party events. In an attempt to protect his rule Assad also started to cultivate a cult of personality for the first time. The media began to heap praise on him and his regime calling him the "New Saladin."[86]

Succession in Syria

Due to his health problems, Assad began planning for succession during this time. His son Bassel began appearing frequently in the media for the first time which led to speculation (correctly) that he was favored by his father.[87] Bassel al-Assad was born in 1962 in Damascus, he was sent to the Soviet Union for military training where he would receive a Ph.D. in military sciences. He would rise rapidly through the ranks commanding a brigade in the elite Republican Guard.[88] After his father's health crisis and the attempted coup, he began to be seen more and more with his father, while the press

[84] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[85] Batatu, *Syria's Peasentry, the Descendents of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*.
[86] Collelo, *Syria: A Country Study*.
[87] Collelo.
[88] Eyal Zisser, "The Succession Struggle in Damascus," *The Middle East Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (September 1995), http://www.meforum.org/264/the-succession-struggle-in-damascus.

started to call him the "Golden Knight."[89] Soon he would be appointed to be the head of the president's security.[90] In late January 1994 Bassel Assad was killed in a car accident in Damascus.[91]

With Bassel Assad's death, the succession question was reopened again; Hafez then turned to his other son Bashar and began grooming him almost immediately for rule.[92] Due to the fact that as the younger son he was not expected to rule, Bashar did not have a career in the military and instead had studied to become a doctor.

Many high-ranking officials in Syria opposed a dynastic succession; some for the reason that it was against Ba'ath party ideology and others because it would further the Alawites strangle hold on power. Between 1998 and 2000 as Hafez al-Assad's health steadily deteriorated many high-ranking officials were purged from the party. Not because Hafez questioned their loyalty to him but because he questioned their loyalty to his son.[93]

Bashar Al-Assad Takes Power

In June 2000 Hafez, al-Assad died at the age of 69 of a heart attack; Bashar al-Assad took power at the age of 34. Soon after taking office there were some cautious

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[89] Robert Fisk, "Syria Mourns Death of a `golden Son': Basil Assad's Fatil Car Crash Throws Open the Question of Who Will Succeed the President," *Independent*, January 22, 1994, sec. World, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/syria-mourns-death-of-a-golden-son-basil-assads-fatal-car-crash-throws-open-the-question-of-who-will-1408555.html.
[90] Pipes, "Syria: Beyond the Peace Process."
[91] Fisk, "Syria Mourns Death of a `golden Son': Basil Assad's Fatil Car Crash Throws Open the Question of Who Will Succeed the President."
[92] Pipes, "Syria: Beyond the Peace Process."
[93] Zisser Eyal, *Assad's Legacy* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

steps towards reform; including shutting the infamous Mezzeh Prison and releasing some political prisoners with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.[94] However, reforms were stopped within a year and political repression continued.

For almost his entire rule Bashar al-Assad has promised both his people and the world reforms to Syria; including release of political prisoners, free municipal elections and the endorsement of a market economy. These promises have all been reneged on in subsequent years.[95][96] Under Bashar al-Assad, Syria continued on largely unchanged from what had occurred under his father.

By 2011 the fervor that had engulfed the entire Middle East had now come to Syria. In March of that year fifteen schoolchildren were arrested and subsequently tortured by Police in the southern Syrian city of Dera'a. They were arrested for spray-painting on a wall "the people want the overthrow of the regime. A few days later when the children's parents went to demand their return, the security services responded with force and four people ended up dying. The same thing happened at the funerals and the entire city rose in revolt. Again, the government tried to use force to crush it, they failed. Uprisings then started in Homs, Hama and Damascus.[97]

From the start, Assad said that the regime was fighting an opposition filled with violent jihadists. While that was not the case at the start, Assad did everything to make it

[94] Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial By Fire*, First (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).
[95] David Lesch, Assad Biographer: After Initial Hopes of Reform, Syrian Ruler Has Succumbed to Delusions of Power, Tv Show: Democracy Now, July 19, 2012, https://www.democracynow.org/2012/7/19/assad_biographer_after_initial_hopes_of.
[96] Anthony Shadid, "Syria Heralds Reforms, But Many Have Doubts," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2005, sec. World, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/17/AR2005051701426.html.
[97] Danahar, *The New Middle East: The World After The Arab Spring*.

come true; under the cover of an amnesty for political prisoners Assad released hundreds of extremists.[98] The spark that ignited the uprising in Syria was nonviolent, however, today after 465,000 people have been killed according to the Syrian Observatory for human rights, finding any kind of force that has any desire to make a deal with the opposition is almost nonexistent.

Sectarianism in Syria

Syrian society has been increasingly associated with sectarianism for decades. Alawite's have played a disproportionate role in the military since the creation of the state of Syria. In 1955, around 65 percent of Non-commissioned officers in the Syrian military were Alawite. This happened because the Alawite population was generally poorer, also because going back to the French Mandate ethnic minorities were favored in the security services.[99] The idea was that ethnic minorities in the security services would be more willing to use force if they were a minority facing a hostile majority.

Another feature that plays up the sectarian nature of Syria is the national identity card. Looking at the card, it contains all the data one would expect; the holders name, address, date of birth, and ID number. Additionally, it contains two more lines of data;

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[98] Maria Abi-Habib, "Assad Policies Aided Rise of Islamic State Militant Group," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2014, sec. World, https://www.wsj.com/articles/assad-policies-aided-rise-of-islamic-state-militant-group-1408739733.
[99] Peter Sluglett, "Deadly Implications: The Rise of Sectarianism in Syria," in *The Levant In Turmoil*, The Modern Muslim World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

security directorate and place of registration. Besides giving an indication of what region, someone is from, it gives an official information about ethnicity.[100]

The place of registration will never change regardless of whether the holder moves. It many times does not correspond to the holder's place of birth, but rather to their father or grandfather's village of origin. This piece is most useful to police officers or other members of the security services. An officer can judge if a person `belongs' in a certain region and if they do not have a good reason for being there they are subjected to increased scrutiny.[101]

The outside forces who have provided men, money and material for the fight have also increased sectarianism. From the time this uprising turned into a full-fledged civil war, the outside powers supporting various factions have supported the most extreme elements. On the side of the Sunni resistance are states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. While these states are giving to various militias that fight the Assad regime, the militias that pursue the hardest line sectarian message have been the most effective on the battlefield.[102] On the side of the Assad regime, the fighters on the ground come from what is left of the Syrian military, (Who are almost all Alawite or another ethnic minority) the Shi'a terrorist group Hezbollah or the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Outside intervention has been the main reason that the Assad regime has remained in power and will remain in control for the foreseeable future. In the first few years of the

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[100] Kheder Khaddour, "The Struggle for Syria's Region's" (Middle East Research and Information Project, n.d.), www.merip.org/mer/mer269/struggle-syrias-regions.
[101] Khaddour.
[102] Elizabeth Dickinson, "Follow the Money: How Syrian Salifis Are Funded from the Gulf" (Carnegie Middle East Center, December 23, 2013), http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/54011.

civil war when the Assad regime was on the defensive and rebel forces were claiming several victories, it was the direct, on the ground intervention of armed groups like Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards that turned the tide.[103]

The starkest example of the effect that foreign intervention has had in the Syrian Civil War can be seen in the fighting that has occurred over control over the city of Aleppo. In mid-July 2012 rebel forces began an assault on the city with an offensive in Aleppo's Salaheddine district. By the end of the year rebels controlled most of the eastern and southwestern portions of the city.[104] Subsequent government counterattacks resulted in each side controlling roughly half of the city's territory. Throughout 2014 and 2015 a war of attrition developed with each side not being strong enough to retake the entire city while being able to control the territory they had secured.

In 2016 the situation shifted dramatically in the favor of the Assad regime and its allies, now including airpower from Russia. Early in the year regime forces along with its allies broke a rebel siege on two Shi'a towns north of Aleppo, cutting off a major supply route from Turkey.[105] Subsequent rebel attacks on regime controlled areas of the city failed. The final offensive on Aleppo began on November 15, 2016 with airstrikes by

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[103] Nicole Blanford, "Hezbollah Marks Major Triumph as Qusayr Tips Back into Assad Camp," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 5, 2013, sec. World, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0605/Hezbollah-marks-major-triumph-as-Qusayr-tips-back-into-Assad-camp.

[104] Kim Sengupta, "Ambushes and Air Strikes as Syrian Regime Fight Rebels Street-Bystreet to Gain Possession of Aleppo," *The Independent*, July 31, 2012, sec. World, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/ambushes-and-air-strikes-as-syrian-regime-fight-rebels-street-by-street-to-gain-possession-of-aleppo-7994450.html.

[105] Laila Bassam, "Syrian Army and Allies Breaks Rebel Siege of Shi'ite Town:army," News Service, Reuters, February 3, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo/syrian-army-and-allies-breaks-rebel-siege-of-shiite-towns-army-idUSKCN0VC1VQ.

Russian aircraft.[106] After days of heavy bombardment, Syrian troops and allied forces moved to recapture all of Aleppo. By December 22 The Syrian army announced that it had regained complete control of the city.[107]

The battle for control of Aleppo illustrates how foreign troops have intensified both the fighting and the sectarian tensions within Syria. Shortly after the battle concluded reports started to come out detailing summary executions and other atrocities. The UN's humanitarian advisor in Syria Jan England reported "massacres of unarmed civilians, of young men, of women, children, health workers," saying that an Iraqi Shi'a militia was responsible.[108] Atrocities were carried out on both sides during this Battle. Before evacuating the city, rebel soldiers summarily executed over 100 Syrian Arab Army soldiers they had captured during the four years of fighting in Aleppo.[109]

Most of the atrocities carried out in the battle for Aleppo and during the entire civil war were carried out by extremist groups that have a strictly sectarian ideology. The fighting has moved beyond a battle between Syrians to one that brings extremists in from both sides. Bashar al-Assad's allies on the ground are foreign fighters from Hezbollah and Iranian backed Shi'a militias: while the mainly Sunni opposition has been taken over by jihadist groups like Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) and ISIS.

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[106] Emma Graham-Harrison, "Aleppo Airstrikes Restart as Russia Announces Major Syria Offensive," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2016, sec. World, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/15/aleppo-airstrikes-resume-as-russia-announces-major-syria-offensive.

[107] Ellen Francis, "Syrian Army Announces Victory in Aleppo in Boost for Assad," News Service, Reuters, December 22, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/syrian-army-announces-victory-in-aleppo-in-boost-for-assad-idUSKBN14B1NQ.

[108] "Aleppo Battle Ends as Syria Rebel Deal Reached," News Service, BBC, December 13, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38308883.

[109] Leith Fadel, "Rebels Massacre over 100 Hostages before Leaving East Aleppo," *Al Masdar News*, December 23, 2016, sec. Syria, https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/graphic-18-rebels-massacre-100-hostages-leaving-east-aleppo/.

Initially, the uprising in Syria was searching for long-promised reforms of the political and economic system of the country and was fairly nonsectarian as illustrated by the fact that a frequent chant heard at anti-regime demonstrations was "the Syrian people are one".[110] However, using sectarian mistrust and hatred to divide opponents had been a part of Assad regime strategy for decades. The years of warfare and the fact that hundreds of thousands have died in the fighting just makes it an almost certainty that moderation can't take hold now, for as the author Paul Danahar said about this war "Too much blood has been shed for words to matter anymore, even though it was words in the mouths of babes that brought the conflict to life."[111]

Syria was an artificial creation that had been held together by an iron fist since its inception. From its creation in the Sykes-Picot agreement, to its independence from France in the 1940's to the forty plus year rule of the Assad family Syria has always been a state held together by political repression, counting on the security services and military to maintain order. This is evidenced by the numerous coups and attempted coups that have taken place throughout Syria's history.

Syrian Democratic Forces

The outside intervention on behalf of the Assad regime, especially by Russian military and diplomatic power, mean that the Assad regime has been stabilized and is now and will be for the foreseeable future the dominant power in Syria. However, even with outside intervention that has proved militarily decisive for the Assad regime, large

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[110] Khaddour, "The Struggle for Syria's Region's."
[111] Danahar, *The New Middle East: The World After The Arab Spring*.

areas of Syria remain outside of governmental control. The largely Kurdish Syrian

Democratic Forces (SDF) control much of northern Syria and have done so for most of

the civil war. Due to their battlefield successes, the SDF has been the group that has

received the largest amount of US military aid and training.[112] The SDF has gradually

expanded from its all-Kurdish origins to include members of Arab, Turkmen and

Assyrian tribes. In October 2017 the SDF captured the ISIS held city of Raqqa, and the

capital of its self-proclaimed Caliphate.[113]

The growing strength of the Kurdish dominated SDF and the US support it has

received has drawn the country of Turkey further into the civil war. While Turkey is not

supportive of the Assad regime and has called for Bashar al-Assad to step down, Turkey

also fears a powerful and unified Kurdish organization. Turkey, which has a long history

of violent Kurdish nationalism within its own territory does not want to see a powerful

Kurdish group take hold in Syria. In an attempt to prevent this from occurring in late

August 2016 the Turkish military announced Operation Euphrates Shield.[114] A military

incursion in northwestern Syria that secured a pocket of territory as far south as the town

of Al Bab, west to the town of Azaz and east to the town of Jarabulus. The Turkish

Minister of Defense said that Turkey would prevent the unification of these areas under

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[112] Carla Babb, "US Supplies First Armored Vehicles to Syrian Fighters," News Service, VOA News, February 1, 2017, https://www.voanews.com/a/us-provides-syrian-democratic-forces-with-guardian-armored-vehicles/3702817.html.
[113] Anne Barnard and Hwaida Saad, "Raqqa, ISIS `Capital,' Is Catured, U.S.-Backed Forces Say," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2017, sec. Middle East, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/world/middleeast/isis-syria-raqqa.html?_r=0.
[114] "IS Conflict: Turkey-Backed Syrian Rebels Take Jarablus," News Service, BBC News, August 24, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37171995.

the control under the SDF.[115] Turkey refers to the SDF as the YPG, a Kurdish group that

Turkey claims to be the Syrian branch of the Turkish PKK, a terrorist organization. While

the Turkish military intervention has been successful in some respects, such as

establishing area of 1925 square kilometers under its control, the northern Syrian city of

Manbij remains under the control of the SDF along with the overwhelming majority of

northern Syria.[116]

The Kurdish forces that have secured these territories have established

governmental institutions to administer the territories under their control. The Democratic

Federation of Northern Syria, commonly known as Rojava, is the politically autonomous

region in northern Syria separated into three cantons: Afrin, Kobane and Jazira.[117] The

economy of the Rojava has been estimated to contribute up to 55% of the GDP of

Syria.[118] Most of this economic activity is organized through communes and cooperatives

established by the local government. Rather than levying taxes on their population to gain

revenue, the government imposes tariffs and sells natural resources such as oil in order to

raise money. While Turkey has closed the border with the region and does not let

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[115] "Defense Minister Isik: Turkey Will Prevent Unification of PYD Cantons at All Costs," *Daily Sabah*, March 6, 2017, sec. War On Terror, https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/03/07/defence-minister-isik-turkey-will-prevent-unification-of-pyd-cantons-at-all-costs.
[116] Reuters Staff, "Manbij Is Turkey's next Step in Syria Operation, Erdogan Says," News Service, Reuters, February 28, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey/manbij-is-turkeys-next-step-in-syria-operation-erdogan-says-idUSKBN1670YC.
[117] Mahmut Bozarslan, "Kurdish Cantons in Northern Syria Already Linked," News Service, Al-Monitor, June 2, 2017, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/06/turkey-syria-kurds-are-cantons-already-linked.html.
[118] Sardar Drwish Mlla, "Will Syria's Kurds Succeed at Self-Sufficiency?," News Service, Al-Monitor, May 3, 2016, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/04/kurdish-areas-norther-syria-economy-self-sufficiency.html.

businesspeople or goods into its territory, the Rojava has external trade relations with

Iraqi Kurdistan.[119]

Besides the economic development of their regions, the Rojava government has

also worked to establish its own independent, judiciary, police force, school system and

independent media.

Syrian civil laws are valid in the Rojava as long come into conflict with the

Rojava constitution. A notable example of one that isn't is the Syrian personal status law

which is based on Sharia. The Rojava, being a secular government, does not recognize

religiously based laws.

Under Ba'ath Party rule, public school education solely consisted of instruction in

Arabic. In Rojava controlled areas school is taught in the primary language (either Arabic

or Kurdish) and bilingual education in either Arabic or Kurdish is mandatory.[120] At the

outbreak of the Syrian Civil War no institution of higher education existed in the Rojava.

Today, there are four universities located in Rojava Territory: The Mesopotamian Social

Sciences Academy, the University of Afrin, the University of Rojava and part of the

campus of Al-Furat University.

The Asayish is the police force within the Rojava cantons. Established in 2012, it,

like other police forces is charged with keeping public order and security. It does this

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[119] Hisham Arafat, "Business Booming in Rojava after Outlet Opened with Kurdistan Region," News Service, Kurdistan 24, April 22, 2017, http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/economy/1b332ce0-5791-4ca1-9bc1-1603fb830879/Business-booming-in-Rojava-after-outlet-opened-with-Kurdistan-Region.

[120] Massoud Hamed, "After 52-Year Ban, Syrian Kurds Now Taught Kurdish in Schools," News Service, Al-Monitor, November 6, 2015, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/syria-kurdistan-self-governance-teach-kurdish-language.html.

through six main directorates: The Checkpoints Administration, Anti-Terror Forces Command, Intelligence Directorate, Organized Crime Directorate, Traffic Directorate and Treasury Directorate.[121] In 2013 the Asayish only had 4,000 members, but by 2017 their ranks had swelled to 15,000.[122]

The mainly Kurdish population of the Rojava has been experimenting with, and in some ways succeeding at self-government since shortly after the start of the civil war. As the SDF has expanded the territory under its control, the governmental institutions of the Rojava have followed behind. With its ideology of Pan-Arabism, Ba'ath Party led Syria tried to extinguish or significantly reduce Kurdish Identity by outlawing the teaching of the Kurdish language and focusing on a policy of `arabization'. The Kurdish population in Syria has a de facto autonomous state already complete with its own constitution, economic and cultural institutions and police force to maintain law and order.

Turkey, along with the countries of Iraq and Iran (countries with sizeable Kurdish populations), do not support a self-governing Kurdish territory because of fears that their own Kurdish populations will seek autonomy or even independence. While these countries look at a Kurdish autonomous region unfavorably and will continue to do so; the Kurdish as well as other communities in this region have used the chaos of the civil war to expand and secure territory under its control.

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[121] Beritan Jindar Sarya-Cilo, "Rojsvs Asayish: Security Institution Not above but within the Society," News Service, ANF News, June 6, 2016, https://anfenglish.com/features/rojava-asayish-security-institution-not-above-but-within-the-society-15170.

[122] Fehim Tastekin, "Does Syria Really Want to Reconcile with Kurds?," News Service, Al-Monitor, January 30, 2017, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-syria-kurds-are-working-to-build-a-state.html.

There have been attempts by outside countries, notably Turkey, to eliminate the capability of the SDF. However, the Turkish military incursion into Syria, while successful in capturing some territory, was not able to capture the northern Syrian city of Manbij despite previous vows to do so.[123] The SDF in the Rojava cantons have been able to consolidate their holdings enough so that they can withstand pressure from a modern state. The fact that weapons shipments to the SDF from the US may soon end, as the threat from ISIS dissipates, would have a negative impact on the SDF.[124] However, considering the US started directly arming this group only in May 2017 the effect will probably not be catastrophic.[125]

That the SDF has proved so formidable in the years since the Syrian Civil War broke out is a testament to their battlefield effectiveness, organization and zeal to break away from what has long been a domineering central government in Damascus. While no Kurdish leader in Syria has called for an independent state, Kurdish leaders have called for a federated Syria and an autonomous political zone for the Kurdish population.[126]

Future of Syria

Syria, as it has been constructed since its creation has always been a state of differing ethnic groups that did not have a common history. Unlike other situations

[123] "Turkey to Strike YPG Unless It Leaves Manbij: FM Casvusoglu," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 2, 2017, sec. World, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-strike-ypg-unless-it-leaves-manbij-fm-cavusoglu-110363.

[124] Phil Stewart, "U.S. Starts Providing Weapons to Syrian Kurds," News Service, Reuters, May 30, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-usa-kurds/u-s-starts-providing-weapons-to-syrian-kurds-idUSKBN18Q2AL.

[125] Seth Frantzman, "Turkey Claims US Will Cut Arms Flow To Syrian Kurds," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 26, 2017, sec. Middle East, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkey-claims-US-will-cut-arms-flow-to-Syrian-Kurds-515195.

[126] Tastekin, "Does Syria Really Want to Reconcile with Kurds?"

throughout world history these separate communities did not decide to come together through the determination of the population. They came together because it served the need of a foreign power who decided that ownership of this territory met its strategic interests of both protecting the Christian community in the area and because its financial interests were served by ownership. The previous empire that had conquered this land had separated these communities into different provinces with institutions developed to accommodate each ethnic group. When there was an uprising or social disturbance in Syria, the French wasted little time in using the military to crush the uprising.

After Syria gained its independence it, like most other Arab states of the time, relied on the security services and the military to preserve domestic order. The fact that so many coups and attempted coups have taken place illustrates how fragile the bonds are that hold the society together. From 1949 until 1970 six successful coups took place in Syria and many more had been attempted. In 1970 Hafez al-Assad came together and political stability was at least maintained. He was able to do this by being charismatic, having a coherent, somewhat well-liked ideology but most importantly was his complete control over the repressive organs of the state and willingness to use them while developing a cult of personality that worshiped him as the indispensable, benevolent father of the nation.

Even with all of these advantages he could not prevent challenges to his rule from developing. First it was the Sunni majority of his country that had grown tired of a heavy-handed central government that did not respond to the needs of the majority of its citizens. The most active of the groups that opposed Assad's rule was the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead of meeting with this group, or trying to grant some of

their requests, Hafez Assad decides to use the Syrian Military to both destroy the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and make a clear statement that any popular uprising would be brutally crushed.

Next, his brother, attempted to use Hafez Assad's poor health as a pretext to engineer a coup that would see himself installed as the ruler of Syria.

His son and successor, Bashar al-Assad, had little to no charisma, was not expected to succeed his father so did not spend his life preparing for leadership. Made some, fleeting attempts at political reform but in all cases reversed course soon after. Being unable to craft in his own right, an image of being indispensable to the nation, rebellion against his rule can be seen as only a matter of time. The right confluence of events was needed for a widespread revolt to occur, and the political turmoil in the Middle East in the years of 2010 onwards provided the correct environment.

While officially under the Ba'ath party, Syria, was a nonsectarian state where anyone, regardless of ethnic background could ascend into positions of responsibility, in reality, life was far different. While the Alawite population of Syria comprises less than 15 percent of the population they make up a disproportionate proportion of the security services and military. The national identification cards which Syrian's must carry on them at all times have a piece of identification unusual with most ID cards. The place of registration, it will never change even if the holder moves. Also, it is probable that the place of registration will not even be that person's birthplace, but rather the birthplace of a father or grandfather. This will tell an agent of the state if the person they have stopped is in the `right' area or should be subjected to further scrutiny.

Since 2011 the state of Syria has been actively cannibalizing itself in a civil war. While it may have started as a broad-based movement demanding political reforms, it has been turned into a sectarian conflict. As each year passes the chance that there will be any kind of negotiated settlement decreases. As the London based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has reported, 465,000 people have lost their lives in this war; this is out of a prewar population of 23 million. If this had occurred in the United States the figure would be over 6.5 million. With those statistics, it is no wonder there is no group coming forward that would like a negotiated settlement.

As each year of this civil war passes, the battlefield becomes dominated even more by outside groups that seek to use the political situation in Syria to push forward their political and ideological agendas. The forces favoring Assad have become increasingly dominated by groups like Hezbollah and Iranian backed Shia militias; while the rebels become dominated by jihadist groups. As the destruction caused by war continues to build, extremist positions and politics increasingly take hold.

While Assad has the clear military advantage, largely thanks to the intervention of outside forces such as Russia, Hezbollah and Iran; 40% of Syrian territory remains outside of the control of the Assad regime.[127] This includes the oil fields in north-eastern Syria and the cities of Deir e-Zor and Raqqa recently recaptured from ISIS by the Kurdish dominated SDF.

Due to the years of civil war, historical ethnic tensions and outside intervention, it is doubtful that the Assad regime will ever regain the iron clad control over Syria that it

[127] Sekkarie Sanna, *Sirya Situation Report: September 14-27*, n.d., Syria Direct, n.d., http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syria%20SITREP%2014%20-%2027%20SEP.pdf.

has exercised since 1970. It is likely that the Assad family or some other Alawite family will maintain control over the areas in which they, and other ethnic minorities predominate, on the coast and west to Damascus and Aleppo. The organized opposition, at this point, is mainly led by the Kurdish SDF group and control much of the north and east of the country.

What we today call Iraq has been at the crossroads of civilizations for millennia. Located in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Fertile Crescent has been fought over for generations, and has been the seat of empires from the Babylonians, to the Persians, Ayyubids, Ottomans, the British Mandate, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. After the US invasion in 2003 the territorial integrity of Iraq became strained with various ethnic groups all vying for their share of power. While former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki seemed to bring stability and security back to Iraq it was purely cosmetic, concealing deep divisions that were widening under his increasing authoritarian rule. The rapid advance of ISIS made this fact plain to see which was made possible because of the divide among ethnic groups, particularly Sunni and Shia. While Iraqi Security Forces and tribal militias are succeeding in pushing ISIS out of Iraqi Territory the divide among Iraqi ethnic groups is stark and faith in the central government is low to nonexistent. Figure 5 shows the administrative divisions of Ottoman Iraq

Figure 5. division of Ottoman Iraq

Ottoman Iraq

For Centuries, the Ottoman Empire ruled over what today is Iraq, from 1534-1704 and again from 1831-1920 when the Ottoman Empire was dissolved. Saying that the Ottoman Empire ruled Iraq is a bit of a misnomer as the Ottoman Empire gave Iraq a great deal of autonomy over its affairs.[128]

The central government decided to divide Iraq into three Vilayet's or Provinces: Basra Baghdad, and Mosul. These three provinces roughly corresponded to the locations of the countries three main ethnic groups: Shia's, Sunnis, and Kurds.[129]

After the carnage of World War One the Ottoman Empire lay in ruins. The 1916 Sykes Picot agreement divided Ottoman holdings in the Middle East between France and Great Britain (Imperial Russia was included but ultimately excluded after the communist revolution).[130] While Sykes Picot is the agreement most remembered for producing the map of the Middle East of today, it is actually the short-lived Treaty of Sevres of 1920 that institutionalized that control. Concluded to appropriate all Ottoman holdings among the victors of World War One; the treaty met fierce resistance from Turkish nationalists, among them Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. While most of the territorial transfers failed, this

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[128] Helen Metz, "The Ottoman Period, 1534-1918," Country Studies, 1988, http://countrystudies.us/iraq/18.htm.
[129] Derek Hopwood, "Iraq, Conflict in Context," News Service, BBC, September 18, 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/iraq/britain_iraq_01.shtml.
[130] Encyclopedia Britanica, "Sykes Picot Agreement," *Encyclopedia Britanica*, May 31, 2016, https://www.britannica.com/event/Sykes-Picot-Agreement.

treaty cemented Britain's hold over the territories that would become Iraq.[131] Figure 6 shows British Iraq in the 1920's
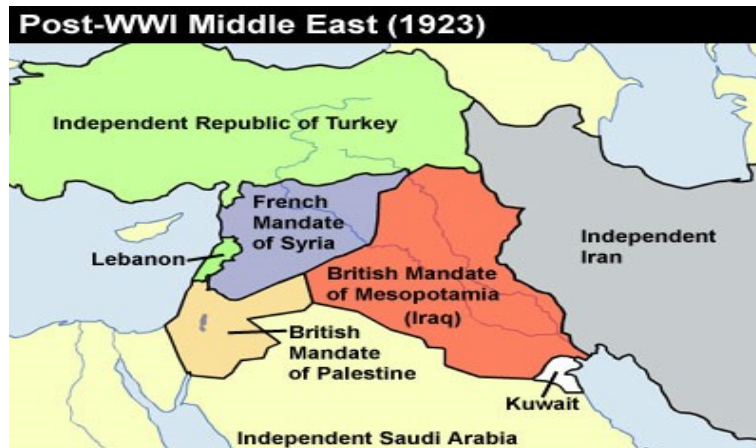

Figure 6. British Iraq

British Iraq

The British took the Ottoman Provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, put them together in order to create the British Kingdom of Iraq. Upon hearing the news of a British controlled Mandate in Iraq, nationalists took up arms against the British. While the revolt was eventually suppressed the British realized that an Arab ruler was needed for this restive territory. In 1921 the British installed Faisal bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi (Faisal I) as the nominal ruler of the Kingdom of Iraq. Faisal had been instrumental in the Arab revolt that had defeated the Ottoman Empire. Installed as King

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[131] Nick Danforth, "Forget Sykey Picot. It's the Treaty of Sevres That Explains the Modern Middle East," Foreign Policy, August 10, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/sykes-picot-treaty-of-sevres-modern-turkey-middle-east-borders-turkey/.

Faisal, the British had a local ruler who would administer Iraq on a day to day basis, but British High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox and London would retain ultimate authority.[132]

In 1932 Iraq received Independence from Britain. Although Britain retained heavy influence over Iraq and interfered in Iraq's internal affairs numerous times in the succeeding years, the Hashemite dynasty would rule an Independent Iraq for the next 26 years. In 1958 a military coup overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, and the Republic of Iraq was declared. While this revolution met with virtually no resistance on the streets of Iraq, it did force long-simmering ethnic tensions into the foreground, particularly between Arab and Kurd, and between Sunni and Shia.[133] Numerous military coups took place between 1958 and Saddam Hussein's rise to power. The most noteworthy was in 1968 when Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr took power in a bloodless coup and became the first Ba'athist President of Iraq. Al-Bakr ruled Iraq for eleven years when his downfall led to the rise of the man who would shape so much of Iraqi history Saddam Hussein.

Rule of Saddam

Saddam Hussein served as President of Iraq from 1979 until he was overthrown by the US led invasion in 2003. During this time, he suppressed ethnic tensions with his repressive rule. Often massacring entire villages and populations so that no one would challenge him. An example of this was the 1988 chemical weapons attack on the village of Halabja, in what is now the autonomous region of Kurdistan. On March 16, Iraqi

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[132] Helen Metz, "World War I and the British Mandate," Country Studies, 1988, http://countrystudies.us/iraq/.
[133] Helen Metz, "Republican Iraq," Country Studies, 1988, http://countrystudies.us/iraq/21.htm.

military aircraft and artillery opened fire on the town of Halabja. Instead of releasing shrapnel the shells released mustard gas and the nerve agent Sarin. 5,000 people, mainly women and children- died on that day, and as many as 12,000 died of complications and ensuing diseases due to the gassing.[134]

The Halabja Massacre was just a part of a three year long genocidal campaign called Al-Anfal. At this time, the Iran-Iraq war was reaching its conclusion and Kurdish militias from Northern Iraq had been fighting on the side of the Iranian regime against Saddam. In response, a series of attacks were carried out by the Iraqi army under the command of Ali Hassan al-Majid, later dubbed Chemical Ali. Between February and September 1988 at least 50 and perhaps as many as 100,000 Iraqi Kurds were killed in retaliation for Kurdish support for Iran during the war.[135] The Governments of Sweeden, Norway, and the United Kingdom all recognize the al-Anfal campaign as a genocide. Likewise, the Kurdistan Regional Government has petitioned the central government in Baghdad to recognize al-Anfal as a genocide.[136]

Saddam did not reserve his brutality for the Kurds alone; Iraq's Shia population was also frequently the target of Saddam's wrath. Initially Saddam attempted to accommodate Iraq's Shi'a majority. After the 1979, Iranian Revolution he began to see Iraq's Shia as a threat and systematically purged high ranking Shia from the military and

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[134] Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, "Remembering Halabja Chemical Attack," Al Jazeera, March 3, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/03/remembering-halabja-chemical-attack-160316061221074.html.
[135] Human Rights Watch, "Genocide in Iraq- The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds," Human Rights Watch, August 14, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/14/genocide-iraq-anfal-campaign-against-kurds/report-summary.
[136] Sofia Barbani, "Iraq Kurds Press States to Recognize Genocide," Al Jazeera, April 14, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/04/iraq-kurds-press-states-recognise-genocide-anfal-201441371637191288.html?utm=from_old_mobile.

the Baath party.[137] When the US led coalition decimated Iraq's army in the 1991 Gulf war, large uprisings of mainly Shia Iraqis sprung up in an attempt to topple the regime. These uprisings were encouraged from the outside with President Bush saying, "The Iraqi military and Iraqi people (should) take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside". This was along with coalition aircraft that dropped leaflets urging the Iraqi people and military to "fill the streets and alleys and bring down Saddam Hussein and his aides". After the US declared a ceasefire on February 28 Iraq exploded in rebellion from Basra to Karbala.[138] In the first two weeks of rebellion most major cities fell to the rebels.[139] However, infighting between the rebel groups meant that they could not maintain their hold over the territory. While the Iraqi's were prohibited from using their fixed-wing aircraft their helicopter gunships were used to put down the insurgency. In just over one month the uprisings had been brutally suppressed and between 100,000 and 180,000 Shia's had been killed.[140]

In addition to those killed, over 2 million people were displaced. Most of this number was the forced relocation of the "Marsh Arabs". For generations, the marshlands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers had been home to many Shia.[141] This area was also known to shelter anti-regime figures as its difficult terrain provided security from those not familiar with the territory. During and after the 1991 rebellions the Saddam regime had the marshes drained; thus, removing the threat from anti-regime figures and

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[137] Sean Cleary, "Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East" (Parmenides Foundation, August 2016).
[138] Micah Zenko, "Who Is to Blame for the Doomed Iraqi Uprisings of 1991?," The National Interest, March 7, 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/behind-the-doomed-iraqi-uprisings-1991-15425.
[139] Cleary, "Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East."
[140] Solomon Moore, "2 Mass Graves in Iraq Unearthed," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2006, sec. World, http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jun/05/world/fg-graves5.
[141] Cleary, "Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East."

destroying a way of life for hundreds of thousands of people. After the destruction of their way of life the Marsh Arabs were forced to relocate. Many moved to places adjacent to the drained marshes, some moved to neighboring Iran, and some moved north to the urban slum of Sadr City, a section of Baghdad filled with Shia residents that was historically neglected by the Saddam regime.

After the brutal suppression of 1991, no-fly zones were established in the north and south of Iraq in order to prevent the mass-atrocities of previous years. The no-fly zones were enforced by US, British and French aircraft, and successful in carrying out their stated mission. Iraqi aircraft occasionally attempted to violate the no-fly zones and were shot down by patrolling coalition aircraft.

With the protection of the coalition enforced no-fly zones the Kurdish minority in Iraq established the Kurdistan Regional Government. In the mid 1990's the two main factions of the KRG, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), engulfed the fragile enclave into civil war vying for complete power. The civil war which lasted from 1994 until 1997 involved virtually every regional country including Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. In 1997, a US mediation led to a cease fire which led to a division of power and a division of revenue in Kurdistan. The newly established UN oil-for-food program allowed standards of living in Kurdistan to eclipse that of elsewhere in Iraq.[142] The cease-fire agreement between the two main Kurdish factions led to relative peace and stability in the newly formed KRG.

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[142] Alan Makovsky, "Kurdish Agreement Signals New US Commitment," The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, September 29, 1998, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kurdish-agreement-signals-new-u.s.-commitment.

Life in Iraq had settled into a kind of stasis at this time. Saddam continued his brutal rule, violently suppressing any dissent in Iraq. But his decimated military and the establishment of no-fly zones, along with the comprehensive economic sanctions placed on Iraq after the Gulf War prevented the kinds of mass-reprisals seen in previous years.

Invasion and Occupation of Iraq

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda the US invaded their safe-haven of Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban government. However, in the passions of that time the US soon turned its attention to Iraq and Saddam Hussein. While the US led invasion was ostensibly carried out because of suspicions about Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction programs, it may never be known all of the reasons that informed the US decision to take military action. In March 2003, an army of principally US soldiers invaded Iraq with the goal of toppling Saddam's regime and installing a stable, democratic, and peaceful regime that would align with Western interests. On March 19, 2003 President Bush announced that US forces were in the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom.[143] 192,000 US troops entered Iraq from Kuwait, and just over a month after major combat operations against Iraq had started, they were officially declared over on May 1, 2003.[144]

While the invasion of Iraq was a complete military success, that is not the case for its aftermath. Looting and rioting started almost immediately after the downfall of

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[143] Torreon, "U.S. Periods of War and Dates of Recent Conflict."
[144] "A Timeline of Iraq War, Troop Levels," Associated Press, April 15, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20141023033147/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/07/a-timeline-of-iraq-war-tr_n_95534.html.

Saddam's regime. It soon became clear that the US did not have a plan besides turning the reins of power over to Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress. Chalabi, a man who had lived outside Iraq since the 1950's, was the leader of an influential Iraqi dissident group called the Iraqi National Congress.[145] The belief within much of the US government was that the US could just transfer power to Chalabi and the INC and then leave. However, because Chalabi had lived outside of Iraq for decades he had no legitimacy with the people and his bid for leadership never truly went anywhere.[146] Due to the Brutality of Saddam's rule, especially the atrocities from the Gulf war in 1991 to the invasion, the Shi'a and Kurdish communities had no appetite for moderation and reconciliation. At the same time, it is not a surprise that the Sunni minority in Iraq as well as Iraq's former armed forces would resist changes to the status quo and attempt to hold onto their positions of power.[147]

Additionally, the US compounded mistakes it had already made with decisions taken by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).[148] The CPA was an interim government established by the coalition in order to administer Iraq until a democratic government was formed in. The CPA was headed by Ambassador L Paul Bremmer, while Bremmer was an accomplished foreign service officer, he did not speak Arabic and had no knowledge of the Middle East.

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[145] Loveday Morris and Brian Murphy, "Ahmed Chalabi, Iraqi Exile Who Helped Spur U.S. Invasion, Dies of Heart Attack," *The Washington Post*, November 3, 2016, sec. Middle East, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ahmed-chalabi-iraqi-politician-who-pushed-for-us-invasion-dies-of-heart-attack/2015/11/03/07bd3a99-cd43-4f45-ab0f-5d37c9c6bbb5_story.html?utm_term=.beb01872fe59.
[146] Martin Smith, "America, Iraq and the Legacy of Ahmed Chalabi," Frontline, November 5, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/america-iraq-and-the-legacy-of-ahmad-chalabi/.
[147] Cleary, "Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East."
[148] "The Coalition Provisional Authority," The Coalition Provisional Authority, July 7, 2006, http://www.iraqcoalition.org/.

Days after Bremmer arrived in Iraq the CPA issued two general orders that changed both the war in Iraq and Iraqi society. CPA general order 1 was issued on May 16, 2003, which called for the De-Ba'athification of Iraqi society. This order didn't simply ban the top leadership of the Baath party from positions in the new Iraq, those who had committed crimes against the Iraqi people and helped Saddam stay in power. This order was intended to completely exclude every member of the Baath party and keep them out of the official structures of the new Iraq. The problem with an order of this kind is that in Saddam's Iraq, like many authoritarian regimes, one has to be a member of the ruling party in order to have any interaction with the government, like receiving basic social services. In many cases an Iraqi school teacher had to be a member of the Baath party in order to get employment. Because Baathist Iraq was a socialist command economy this order led many Iraqis with no prospect for employment. In addition, because CPA General Order 1 kicked out of office almost everyone who knew how to administer the country, what resulted was the lack of necessities of everyday life, and a lack of order that makes society possible.[149]

The second major destabilizing decision the CPA made was the issuance of General Order 2 on May 23, 2003.[150] This order disbanded the entire Iraqi military and security services from the government and essentially sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers' home with no prospects of employment and only one marketable skill, fighting.

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[149] L. Paul Bremmer, "Coalition Provisional Order Number 1: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society," Coalition Provisional Authority, May 16, 2003, http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAORD_1_De-Ba_athification_of_Iraqi_Society_.pdf.
[150] L. Paul Bremmer, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2," Coalition Provisional Authority, May 23, 2003, http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030823_CPAORD_2_Dissolution_of_Entities_with_Annex_A.pdf.

This was problematic in two ways: first, the US invaded Iraq with enough forces in order to topple the Saddam regime, but without sufficient troops to establish order in a foreign country that increasingly looked at the US invasion as an occupation by a foreign foe. In addition, the Iraqi military was not just a service that would fight the nations wars. It was a political institution of Iraq, and a power center for the Sunni ethnic group. What this order in essence did was to tell thousands of mainly Sunni soldiers that you were not needed in the new Iraqi state and your hold on power which had been overwhelming for decades was not just being transformed but obliterated. It was soon after the disbanding of the military that the Sunni insurgency began in earnest. Led by many former military officers that were resisting what to them looked like a foreign occupation designed to give all power in Iraq to the more populous Shia ethnic group that had been suppressed under Saddam.

Sectarian Violence

Because of the demographic makeup of Iraq, 51% of Iraq's Muslim population identify as Shia and 42% identify as Sunni, any democratic government would favor the former over the latter.[151] Because of the fact that the Sunni minority held onto power, often through brutal repression for so long, they legitimately feared that a Shia dominated government would then suppress them. The early decisions off the CPA and the interim Iraqi government confirmed this in the minds of many Sunnis and paved the way for the Iraqi insurgency that reached its height in 2006-2007.

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[151] "The World's Muslims."

In the face of mounting sectarian violence, rising numbers of US and coalition military casualties, and an Iraqi civilian death toll that was increasing at the rate of 3,000 a month, US policy makers new a new strategy was needed to quell the violence.[152][153] In January 2007 President Bush announced a new security strategy for Iraq.[154] Known as the surge, approximately 30,000 additional US soldiers would be deployed to Iraq in order to bring down the levels of violence in the country. Along with additional numbers, new tactics of counterinsurgency would be used. Based on the principal of protecting and interacting with the population, this strategy called for working with the local population as a partner in securing their territory.[155] An example of this was the Sons of Iraq program which took Sunni tribal fighters. Who until recently were part of the insurgency, and supplied them with money, arms, and training to fight Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[156] The tribesmen had grown disillusioned with the brutality of AQI, and in exchange for the weapons and training provided by the US fought against AQI, dramatically reducing violence from 2007 onwards.

Overall the troop surge in Iraq achieved remarkable success in reducing the sectarian strife. Despite a spike in violence in the first months following the surge of additional troops, by 2008 the rate of US military and civilian deaths had been reduced

[152] "Documented Civillian Deaths from Violence," Database, Iraq Body Count.org, 2016, https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/.

[153] "Iraq Coalition Casulties: Fatalities by Year," database, icasulties.org, 2016, http://icasualties.org/Iraq/ByYear.aspx.

[154] George W. Bush, "Presidents Address to the Nation," Whitehouse.gov, January 10, 2007, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html.

[155] "Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq," Whitehouse.gov, January 10, 2007, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-3.html.

[156] Mark Wilbanks and Efraim Karsh, "How the 'Sons of Iraq' Stabilized Iraq," *Middle East Quarterly*, no. Fall 2010 (n.d.): 57–70.

significantly.[157] Late 2007 saw US and Iraqi civilian death rates at their lowest levels

since early 2004, and this figure preceded lower in each successive month.[158] The surge

of troops succeeded in reducing the level of violence, but reduction of violence was never

the end goal. It was to create the security situation that would allow the Iraqi political

system to build a society in which everyone could participate. On that measure, the troop

surge can be judged as only partially successful. Internal Iraqi politics and the rise of

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki would turn Iraq into an increasingly Shia dominated

State.

The Rise of Al-Maliki

     Nouri al-Maliki was born in June 1950, by all accounts he was not political until

college when he joined the banned Islamic Da'wa Party. However, he was forced to flee

Iraq after the government discovered that he was a member of the Da'wa party, he spent

from 1979-2003 living in both Tehran and Damascus. While exiled he developed close

ties with both Hezbollah and Iran, aiding in Iran's effort to topple the Saddam regime.[159]

It was not until the US led invasion in 2003 that Maliki was allowed to come back to

Iraq.

     In December 2005 Iraq held its first free elections to choose a new leader, the man

elected to lead was Ibrahim al-Jaafari of the United Iraqi Alliance, however after

[157] "Text of General Petraeus' Report on Iraq," News Service, NBC News, April 8, 2008, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/24015055/#.WE4CHvkrKM8.

[158] Michael O'Hanlon and Jason Campbell, "The State of Iraq: An Update," Brookings, December 22, 2007, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-state-of-iraq-an-update-12/.

[159] Dan Murphy, "New Iraqi Leader Seeks Unity: The Hard-Line Shiite Premier Now Leads the Wrangling over Another 32 Cabinet Posts," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 24, 2006, sec. Middle East, https://web.archive.org/web/20111125111553/http://www.lebanonwire.com/0604MLN/06042403CSM.asp.

mounting criticism of ineffective leadership and a sectarian bent to his leadership al-Jaafari was forced to resign. In late April of 2006 Nouri al-Maliki was chosen as a compromise candidate to become the new Iraqi Prime Minister. The US favored him because it was believed that of the four main candidates for the premiership, he was the least beholden to Iran. The US ambassador to Iraq was quoted by David Ignatius of the Washington Post as saying, "His reputation is as someone who is independent of Iran," that while he lived in Iran for many years during his exile "he felt he was threatened by them," because of his political independence and so he left.[160] However it was subsequently revealed that Qassim Suleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds force favored his candidacy, and that he brokered a deal between senior Shiite and Kurdish leaders that led to Maliki's election.[161]

Before long there were signs that Maliki was going to behave in an authoritarian and sectarian fashion. In June 2006, the committee to protect Journalists wrote to the Prime Minister to express concern to express concern about how Journalists were being treated in Iraq, telling the Prime Minister that there were examples of prosecutions, jailing's, and physical intimidation of journalists done by Iraqi officials.[162] In 2007 US and Iraqi military officials accused the Maliki government of replacing military commanders in the field that had gone after Shia militias with party loyalists. Furthermore, they accused the Prime Minister of using a newly formed office to overrule

[160] David Ignatius, "In Iraq's Choice, A Chance for Unity," *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2006, sec. Opinions, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/25/AR2006042501650.html.
[161] Filkins, "The Shadow Commander."
[162] "CPJ Sends New Iraqi Prime Minister Press Freedom Recommendations."

the Defense, and Interior ministries and push a sectarian agenda.[163] By late 2008 he began to fire Inspectors General from the ministries after they began reporting on millions of diverted reconstruction money, and even started to use the armed forces to go after his political opponents.[164][165] While Maliki was starting to show some of his authoritarian tendencies, there was a limit to how far he could go due to the fact that US troops were still in the country.

On November 17, 2008 President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki signed a Status of Forces agreement which stipulated that all US troops would leave Iraq by December 31, 2011.[166] It was generally thought that a follow-on agreement would be signed that would allow US forces to stay for years to come. However, in all negotiations that followed Iraqi insisted on striking a provision that would make US soldiers immune from Iraqi law and no new agreement was reached. In addition, Barack Obama had been elected President on a platform calling for an end of US involvement in Iraq. It is in question whether any side truly wanted a residual force of US troops to stay in Iraq but the effect is the same. On December 16, 2011, the last US troops crossed the border and the last troops (besides the embassy guards) had departed Iraq.

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[163] Arwa Damon, "Shadowy Iraq Office Accused of Sectarian Agenda," News, CNN.com, May 1, 2007, http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/05/01/iraq.office/index.html.

[164] James Glanz and Riyadh Mohammed, "Premier of Iraq Is Quietly Firing Fraud Monitors," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2008, sec. Middle East, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/18/world/middleeast/18maliki.html?=&_r=0.

[165] Campbell Robertson and Riyadh Mohammed, "Iraqi Government Raid Threatens to Inflame Province's Tensions," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2016, sec. Africa, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/20/world/africa/20iht-20iraq.15446434.html?_r=0.

[166] "Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq" (The New York Times, November 17, 2008), http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/world/20081119_SOFA_FINAL_AGREED_TEXT.pdf.

Within days of the announcement that US troops would not stay in Iraq past the December 2011 deadline, the Maliki government moved in a major way against Sunni rivals. More than 600 Iraqi's were arrested for their roles in an alleged Ba'athist coup plot. The government claimed that this plot was uncovered and had been revealed to them by the newly formed Libyan government. Maliki denied that these raids had any sectarian motives at all, but they did take place in all Sunni-Majority provinces.[167] A closer examination of the suspect list reveals this to be "the usual suspects," of people who were simply anti-Maliki. Included in these roundups are people whose age or health condition would make it impossible to engage in a coup. Some had left the Baath party before the US invasion in 2003, and some of the Iraqi's were already dead.[168]

This wave of arrests was followed by even more serious ones just days after all US troops departed Iraq in December. Just three days after Prime Minister Maliki met with President Obama in Washington to talk about post-war Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces moved on the most senior Sunni officials in the country. Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Mutlaq, and Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi were either arrested or just escaped arrest. This move sparked a political crisis, the three members Iraqiyah coalition suspended its' almost 90 members' activity in Parliament, and directed its other ministers to boycott meetings of the Iraqi cabinet.[169] Hashimi fled to Iraqi Kurdistan, where he remains today. Meanwhile, Iraqi TV aired "Confessions" from

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[167] Jack Healy, Tim Arango, and Michael Schmidt, "Premier's Actions in Iraq Raise U.S. Concerns," *The New York Times*, December 12, 2016, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/world/middleeast/arrests-in-iraq-raise-concerns-about-maliki.html.
[168] Joel Rayburn, "Rise Of The Maliki Regime," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, n.d., 11/27/16.
[169] Rayburn.

Hashimi's bodyguards who stated that Hashimi had ordered them to carry out

assassinations and attacks for money. These confessions had the air of being coerced, and

later anonymous sources claimed that the bodyguards had been beaten and tortured

before giving the confession.[170] After the US left Iraq Nouri al-Maliki had a free hand to

crush dissent in any way he saw fit. He would replace successful battlefield commanders

with political loyalists, stock the judiciary with his loyalists so that any domestic

constraints he did face were removed, and jail, kill, or force to flee any potential power

center that could rival him.

The Rise of ISIS and Fall of Al-Maliki

Over the next three years the political situation in Iraq deteriorated further with

Maliki increasing his authoritarian hold on power, and repressing those who would

oppose him, especially the Sunnis. Sporadic fighting took place between the government

and tribal fighters in the western Sunni province of al-Anbar. Taking advantage of this

chaos, ISIS started to make advances in this territory, which had been fought over by US

soldiers nearly a decade ago. By June 1, 2014 ISIS controlled 70% of al-Anbar, this

included the cities Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, Ar Rutbah, Al-Qa'im, and over half of

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[170] Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Corruption in Iraq: Your Son Is Being Tortured. He Will Die If You Dont Pay," *The Guardian*, January 15, 2012, sec. Middle East, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/16/corruption-iraq-son-tortured-pay.

Ramadi.[171172173174] This was accomplished with very few ISIS fighters in combat, some estimates have the number at only a few thousand. This compares to over three divisions of the Iraqi army. These gains were taken and consolidated in the amazingly short period of January-June 2014.

In early June 2014 ISIS proceeded to attack north to conquer more territory. The cities of Samarra, and Tikrit quickly fell to the advancing armies of ISIS. The operation which shocked the world was Iraq's second largest city Mosul. In only four days fighting a force of only 1,500 ISIS was able to overcome and defeat an Iraqi force of 30,000 soldiers.[175] This was in addition to thousands of Iraqi Police and IRGC Quds forces that had been sent to reinforce the city.[176] Soon after the city fell video emerged showing Iraqi Security Forces simply throwing down their arms and fleeing Mosul in a panic. In addition to the military defeat of its soldiers, the Iraqi government lost control of 2,500 Humvees, M1 Abrams tanks, and thousands of assault rifles that had been provided to it by the US. Mosul was also home to one of the branches of Iraq's central bank, giving ISIS millions of dollars with which to further fund its war effort. With the complete

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[171] Tina Moore, "Militants Kill 21 Iraqi Leaders, Capture 2 Border Crossings," *NY Daily News*, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/militants-kills-21-leaders-iraq-article-1.1839547.

[172] Bill Roggio, "Islamic State Storms Camp Speicher, Routs Iraqi Forces," Long War Journal, July 19, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/islamic_state_overru.php.

[173] "Iraq's Fallujah Falls to "Qaeda-Linked Militants," *The Daily Star*, January 4, 2014, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Jan-04/243100-fallujah-outside-iraq-government-control-security-official.ashx#axzz2oNa3sbT8.

[174] Chelsea Carter, Hamdi Alkhsali, and Susanna Capelouto, "Kerry Assures Iraqis of US Support If They Unite against ISIS," News, CNN, June 23, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/23/world/meast/iraq-crisis/.

[175] Ziad al-Sinjary, "Mosul Falls to Militants, Iraqi Forces Flee Northern City," News Service, Reuters, June 10, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-idUSKBN0EL1H520140610.

[176] Martin Chulov, "Iran Sends Troops into Iraq to Aid Fight against Isis Militants," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2006, sec. World, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/14/iran-iraq-isis-fight-militants-nouri-maliki?CMP=fb_gu.

disintegration of its armed forces It was clear that a military which had become highly

sectarianized and an instrument of Shia control would not stand and fight for Sunni

dominated territory. By late June Iraq had lost control of all of its border checkpoints

with Jordan and Syria, and the main highway from Baghdad to Mosul was cut, sealing

ISIS's control over the area.[177]

On June 10th Nouri al-Maliki formally asked parliament to declare a state of

emergency in the country which would give him additional powers to combat the crisis.

This request was rebuffed though, many Sunni and Kurdish politicians had been

boycotting Parliament because of Maliki's increasing authoritarian behavior.[178] proving

that even though much of the country was being taken over by a group which just a few

years ago was AQI, the other ethnic groups of Iraq thought they were less of a threat than

the Maliki regime.

ISIS was not done with their advancement into Iraq, in August they again

launched an offensive, attacking local minority populations and even getting within 40km

of Erbil, the capital of the KRG. ISIS took control of many Christian and Yazidi areas of

Iraq demanding that the members of these minority groups either convert to Islam or die.

Figure 7 shows the furthest advance of ISIS in Iraq, in this offensive 50,000 Yazidis were

forced to flee up Mount Sinjar, fleeing advancing ISIS fighters. US, and UK airlifts were

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[177] BBC, "Sunni Militants Seize Iraq's Western Border Crossings," News Service, BBC, June 23, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27966774.

[178] Al Jazeera, "Iraq PM Calls Emergency after Mosul Seized," Al Jazeera, June 10, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/iraq-calls-emergency-after-rebels-seize-mosul-2014610121410596821.html.

Figure 7. Furthest extent of ISIS

able to get humanitarian aid to the stranded population. while Kurdish Peshmerga were able to break through ISIS lines and relieve the beleaguered population.[179] It was not until this time that the US started to provide air support against ISIS positions that had been requested since early June.[180] When ISIS turned its attention on Erbil, and the KRG then the US knew it needed to act. In early august the US started directly arming the Kurdish Peshmerga, and US warplanes began flying hundreds of combat sorties, flying close air support missions for the Kurdish fighters. Emboldened from their newfound support Kurdish units retook towns recently captured by ISIS.[181]

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[179] Steve Hopkins, "Full Horror of the Yazidis Who Didn't Escape Mount Sinjar: UN Confirms 5,000 Men Were Executed and 7,000 Women Are Now Kept as Sex Slaves," *Daily Mail*, October 14, 2014, sec. World News, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2792552/full-horror-yazidis-didn-t-escape-mount-sinjar-confirms-5-000-men-executed-7-000-women-kept-sex-slaves.html.

[180] Al Jazeera, "Iraq PM Calls Emergency after Mosul Seized."

[181] Rod Nordland and Helene Cooper, "Capitalizing on U.S. Bombing, Kurds Retake Iraqi Towns," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2014, sec. Middle East, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/world/middleeast/iraq.html?_r=1&mtrref=en.wikipedia.org&assetType=nyt_now.

ISIS then attempted an offensive south toward Baghdad, but Baghdad being now a mainly Shia city put up fierce resistance. President Obama held off on using airstrikes initially, against ISIS's move to Baghdad, insisting that Prime Minister Maliki must resign first.

Almost all world leaders were now calling on Prime Minister Maliki to resign at this moment, but he refused to concede. When the Iraqi President nominated Haider al-Abadi to replace him Maliki said that this was an unconstitutional power grab and that he would resist in defense of the state. Finally, Maliki did resign on August 14 amid growing calls from his own party and pressure applied from Iran. Nouri al-Maliki went, in a few years from someone amassing more power in Iraq by any one person since Saddam, to ousted from his Premiership with Iraq in shambles. While Nouri Al-Maliki may no longer be Prime Minister he has not left Iraqi Politics. In September 2014, he was elected as one of three Vice Presidents of Iraq and he still commands the support of a well-paid militia.[182]

Popular Mobilization Force

By early 2015 the ISIS advances in Iraq had largely been halted due to stiffening Iraqi and Kurdish resistance and coalition airstrikes. Re-taking the territory lost to ISIS would require a disciplined and effective fighting force that heretofore had not been formed yet. The Popular Mobilization Force or Hashd al-Shaabi is an umbrella group of

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[182] Cleary, "Identity Politics, Sectarian Conflict and Regional Political Rivalry in the Middle East."

mainly Shia militias, but also comprising some Christian, Sunni and Yazidi elements

formed in the wake of ISIS's advances into Iraq. The PMF was initially formed after

Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani issued a Fatwa calling for Muslims to take up arms to defend

Iraqi cities in the face of ISIS aggression.[183] Because Sistani is the supreme Shia religious

authority, hundreds of thousands of mostly Shia young men heeded his call for jihad. In

his fatwa calling for a righteous Jihad Sistani also called on his followers not to seek

revenge and to protect the innocent during war.

While the PMF was initially started by Sistani's Fatwa, it has since become

dominated with the militias of the various political parties in Iraq, many with extreme

sectarian views and directed and funded by the IRGC Quds force. These include the

Mahdi Army of the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the Badr Brigade of Hadi al-Amari.

In some instances, these commanders have been in command of entire operations carried

out by the PMF and Iraqi Security Forces.[184] The PMF has been sanctified by the Iraqi

government and are officially barred from having any political bent, or sectarian motives.

While the Iraqi Security Forces have "official" control over the PMF's they generally

operate in their own chains of command. Also, while they are officially paid by the Iraqi

Interior Ministry, most of that money is supplied by Iran for their weapons and salary.[185]

Some of the PMF units are better equipped and paid than the Iraqi Army, which makes

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[183] Mustafa Al-Kadhami, "Will Sistani Be Able to Control Popular Mobilization Forces?," News Service, Al-Monitor, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iraq-sistani-righteous-jihad-fatwa-popular-mobilization.html.
[184] Loveday Morris and Mustafa Salim, "Iraqi Forces Press to Secure Shiite South ahead of Ashura Religious Celebrations," *The Washington Post*, October 25, 2014, sec. World, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraqi-forces-press-to-secure-shiite-south-ahead-of-religious-festival/2014/10/25/0b6ac5f0-6e1e-47f4-ab8d-a942c3606506_story.html?utm_term=.ed8c979e9a7e.
[185] Global Security.org, "Hashd Al-Shaabi/ Popular Mobilization Units/ People's Mobilization Forces," Global Security.org, accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hashd-al-shaabi.htm.

retention and recruitment harder. The PMF is becoming institutionalized in Iraq in almost the same way as the Revolutionary Guards are in Iran as a power in their own right not beholden to the government.

In Many cases the largest, and most sectarian PMF groups have operated independently, without any governmental oversight at all. This has led to accusations of sectarian reprisals against Sunni inhabitants of newly "liberated" towns and villages. On January 26, 2015 in the majority Sunni province of Diyala 56-70 men were summarily executed in the village of Barwana. Witnesses stated that members of the Badr brigade went house to house telling the men to come out with their identification cards. Witnesses then heard gunfire and then spotted all the men dead, some had their fingers amputated.[186]

This is just one example of a list of abuses carried out by the various PMF units. As PMF units attacked the Iraqi city of Tal Afar with artillery fire, dozens of civilians were killed. Families fleeing the violence inside the city were then abducted by these PMF.[187] Iraqi Security Forces have recently taken back the ISIS held city of Fallujah, in that campaign witnesses and NGO's have testified that the PMF units committed numerous retaliation killings in that city as well.[188]The PMF's have proved to be some of the most effective fighters in the struggle against ISIS, however, their extreme sectarianism may be doing irreparable harm to a future Iraqi state. Whereas civilians once ran from and feared ISIS, the same is becoming true of the PMF, and because these units

[186] Global Security.org.
[187] Middle East Monitor, "Iraq: Shia Militias Abduct Families from Tel Afar," Middle East Monitor, November 24, 2016, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161124-iraq-shia-militias-abduct-families-from-tel-afar/.
[188] Agencies, "Human Rights Watch Urges Transparency in Fallujah Abuses Probe," The New Arab, July 7, 2016, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/7/7/human-rights-watch-urges-transparency-in-fallujah-abuses-probe.

have been sanctified by the government, and in many instances, are better equipped and larger than government forces, these developments pose problems for the future of Iraq once ISIS has been defeated.

Why Federalism Won't Work

With the constant strife and sectarian violence that has been so prevalent in Iraq since a constant policy recommendation has been to federalize Iraq. In this framework, there would be three regions roughly corresponding to the geographic distribution of the main ethnic groups: a Kurdish zone in the north, a Sunni zone in the center, and a Shia zone in the South. The Baghdad government would exist mainly in the realm of foreign policy and national defense, but most of the governing would be done by the federal regions. The idea for a federal Iraq is not new, in a 2006 op-ed in the New York Times then Senator Joe Biden called for de-centralizing Iraq in a fashion that was done almost a decade prior in Bosnia.[189] While this idea may be appealing and seem to make sense on its face, if factions are constantly fighting with each other than separate them. However, there is a major flaw with this argument in that that is how it's supposed to work now.

The 2005 Iraqi constitution expressly allows for regions of the country to petition for federal status. This provision was insisted on by the Kurds who had long been oppressed, excluded, subject to forced assimilation, and even genocide by Arab-led Iraqi regimes. Their autonomous KRG since 1992 would then function within a democratic

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[189] Joseph Biden and Leslie Gelb, "Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2006, sec. OP-ED Contributors, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/opinion/01biden.html.

Iraq.[190] The Sunni Arabs, who had previously ridiculed the federalism argument,

believing that it would lead inexorably to division, changed their minds when the Shia

majority started to amass all the power. Section three of the Iraqi constitution states that

the legislative power of Iraq shall be in the hands of the Council of Representatives and

the Federation Council. The Council of Representatives is the Iraqi Parliament which has

functioned since 2005. The Federation Council was supposed to function akin to the US

Senate. The various regions would send representatives in order to make sure the voice of

the regions was represented in the halls of power. The Federation Council has not, as of

yet, come into existence because no federal region, other than the KRG which existed

beforehand, has been established.[191]

Expanded federalism has been tried in Iraq but hasn't been successful because of

numerous road blocks thrown up by the central government. After the arrests in October

2011 of alleged "Ba'athist coup" plotters, the Sunni-majority provincial governments of

Saladin and Diyala immediately moved to begin the constitutional process of becoming

federal regions.[192] This was done in order to insulate themselves from what they saw as

the overreaching government in Baghdad from dominating and exploiting their

provinces. However, the central government in Baghdad quickly moved to squash any

such aspirations. On the ground, Security forces responded with even more force, issuing

an arrest warrant for the governor of Diyala province and sending troops to Saladin

province to contain the unrest there.[193] At the same time, then Prime Minister Maliki,

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[190] David Romano, "Iraq's Descent Into Civil War: A Constitutional Explanation," *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (October 2014).
[191] Romano.
[192] Rayburn, "Rise Of The Maliki Regime."
[193] Rayburn.

effectively blocked these moves in the courts. Arguing that these provinces were attempting to form a regional government for "Sectarian reasons".[194]

Prime Minister Maliki was willing to use both the Iraqi military and the courts to block his political opponents from getting their own base of power. While Maliki blocked this constitutional effort toward federalism it should not be thought that any future Prime Minister would look favorably on a similar effort. The Shia population know that they constitute the majority of the population. Therefore, they know that they will emerge as the victor in any election, and so do not look favorably on the concept of federalism in Iraq.[195] During the federalism bid of 2011, there were Shia-majority towns in both provinces that denounced the proposals and declared their intention to secede from the provinces if the federalism bids were successful.[196]

If sectarian violence and ethnic fighting are rampant than separating the feuding parties would seem to be the obvious solution. However, the central government has shown no willingness to let federalism, or any other decentralized power structure take hold. In order for a power sharing arrangement to take hold and be effective there would have to be a recognition on the part of the Baghdad government that attempting to monopolize political power through the central government will only lead to continued conflict. Unfortunately, the Iraqi government has shown no willingness to compromise with any of the ethnic minorities of Iraq in an attempt to create a more stable country.

[194] Reidar Visser, "Welcome to Malikistan," blog, *Gulf Analysis* (blog), October 29, 2016, https://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2011/10/29/welcome-to-malikistan/.
[195] Romano, "Iraq's Descent Into Civil War: A Constitutional Explanation."
[196] Joel Wing, "Iraq's Prime Minister Maliki Flexes His Muscles in Diyala Province Again," blog, *Dinar Speculator* (blog), January 26, 2012, http://www.dinarspeculator.com/showthread.php/53714-Iraq%E2%80%99s-Prime-Minister-Maliki-Flexes-His-Muscles-In-Diyala-Province-Again.

A Dictator Won't emerge

Hoping a dictator will emerge to stabilize Iraq and other countries in the Middle East is currently the policy prescription de jour regarding countries experiencing instability and civil strife. The theory is that while these dictators might have been brutal, they prevented the emergence of groups like ISIS and created relative stability in the region. First of all, that theory leaves much to be desired. The forerunner to ISIS was Al-Qaeda, and that organization was formed with the goal of bringing down the regimes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, two of the most repressive regimes in the region. Of the 19 September 11, 2001 hijackers 15 were Saudi nationals. Of the original Al-Qaeda senior leadership many of its members were Egyptian including the original 2nd in command, Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

Regarding Iraq in particular, the main obstacle to a dictator consolidating enough power to dominate all his rivals is the fact that power is now diffused through so many actors. While Nouri al-Maliki has fallen from the office of Prime Minister, he is still Secretary General of the Dawa Party, a party with a sizeable militia of its own and funding from Iran. Then there is firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr; with vast popular support among poor Shia's and the large and well equiped Mahdi army that he controls, he has a large power base to fall back on. Then there is Hadi al-Amri, the leader of the Badr Brigade; the leader of one of the Shia militia most implicated in human rights abuses in the campaign against ISIS has his own loyal followers.

That is simply dealing with the Shia population of Iraq. The Kurdish region is divided into two factions; the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic

Party. Two political factions that have their own loyal, battle hardened and well-trained militaries. The regional autonomy of the KRG is undisputed, despite the fact that Iraqi Security Forces recently took back control of the disputed city of Kirkuk. The history of the Kurdish population that has suffered mightily at the hands of an Iraqi central government suggests that an attempt to reassert central control over the KRG would be met with fierce resistance while ultimately not being successful.

The Sunni population of Iraq has no shortage of powerful factions who have already shown that they will fight against a domineering central government that attempts to centralize authority. The former military leadership of the Iraqi Baath party has used its tactical and strategic knowledge to help both Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Any attempt by the Shia majority to impose top down control on the Sunni controlled areas of Iraq will be resisted; as they have since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein.

Even if the notion were accepted that re-imposing a dictatorship in Iraq was a way to bring stability and order to the country, the fact is that power is now spread throughout the country. Not only does each main ethnic group in Iraq have its own power base; intra-ethnic factionalism prevents and balances against any one faction from asserting to much control.

Future of Iraq

If federalism is unlikely to work and a dictator won't emerge, what will happen? The emergence of a federal Iraq is likely the only way that Iraq will survive as a Unitary

State. However, because of the fact that in the 11 years of complete independence no regional government besides the KRG has emerged, and the fact that in 2011 such a move for federalism was blocked by Prime Minister Maliki, the odds of a federal Iraq forming are unlikely and diminishing as time passes.

A dictator is not likely to emerge that will stabilize the country. This is because of all the competing factions fighting for power in the country, Nouri al-Maliki, Moqtada al-Sadr and Hadi al-Amiri are all powerful figures with their own militias and political bases. That is before talking about any of the Sunnis, who may be a minority but have demonstrated their ability to destabilize Iraq and force increasingly authoritarian governments to fall.

Therefore, the scenario most-likely to happen is a partition of Iraq into three countries. These will roughly correspond with the ethnic demography of each territory: a Sunni nation in the West and Center of Iraq, a Shia nation in the south, and the Kurdish nation where the KRG lies today plus Kirkuk, which they have recently taken in the fight against ISIS. This will not be the optimal outcome, especially for Sunni, as their territory will have few if any natural resources with which to build a modern state. However, with the lack of trust between ethnic groups, and the history of reprisals against each other, the future of a Unitary Iraqi State is low, and the probability is lessening as time passes.

CONCLUSION

The states of both Iraq and Syria are artificial creations, carved from a vanquished empire, defeated in war and formed to serve the whims of their European creators. When the Ottoman Empire ruled these lands, they recognized that the populations of these areas were different and had little in common. As a result, they placed them in different provinces where the governors had significant autonomy to govern as they saw fit.

After World War One and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire these lands were transferred to Britain and France. Neither country showed any respect for the local populations, cultures, histories, or demographics. They made decisions solely based on whether or not the new states would advance their strategic interests. For Britain, the main interest was in securing the sea route to their prized jewel, India, so they demanded land from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Oil was destined to become the energy source of the future and the Royal Navy was making the conversion. The province of Mosul was thought to contain large quantities of oil so they demanded that from the French. The French gave it over in a simple reply "You shall have it," in exchange for British help in Europe.[197] France received the provinces of what would later be Lebanon and Syria. The Provinces that made up these lands were very different but that did not matter to France. There were two issues the French government were largely concerned with: protecting the Christian communities and protecting the French textile business along with other investments in the region.

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[197] Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace: The Fall Of The Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*.

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Just a couple decades later the two European powers were forced to grant these countries their independence. However, new governments were created to rule diverse territories that did not consider themselves as part of one unified country. The recipe for keeping order in both countries was the same, political repression and jailing of political dissidents. If dissent rose up enough in the government or military, a coup would take place and another government would be in place within days.

Today, the old model of a strongman at the top is not working. In the case of Iraq, that dictator was toppled by outside action and the entire power dynamics of the country have been upended. The Shi'a are in control in Baghdad because of demographics. They have used the power of the state and Shi'a militias for payback against the Sunnis for what occurred during Saddam's rule. The Sunni minority has not accepted that they are not in power, which many of them view as their birthright. Whenever the Sunni population has taken steps to trusting the government in Baghdad it has proven to be a mistake. The central government has constantly acted with sectarian motives against the Sunni members of Iraq and prefers the settling of old scores to governing in any kind of inclusive way. The Kurdish population in Iraq has been independent in all but name only since the establishment of the northern no-fly zone after the Gulf War.

In Syria after years of constant coups one family had stabilized and strangled Syrian politics for 40 years. In 2011, Syria became just another country that was rocked by the protests of the Arab Spring. Bashar al-Assad lacked his father's authoritativeness and charisma with which to control and mitigate the uprisings. Time and again he promised political reform, but reneged usually less than a year later when the newfound freedoms were used in ways that unnerved him. When the uprising started in Syria, he

tried the old tried and true tactic of state violence. Not only did it fail, but with the advent of mass communications, massive demonstrations spread to more cities in the country. Currently, Assad has had military success on the ground, due to outside supporters that are willing to put their power behind him. However, the Kurds in Syria have been able to carve out their own enclave in the north of the country. They have been backed by the United States due to them having been the most effective fighters on the ground against ISIS. Sunni opposition despite all the support that Assad has received still hold a not insignificant amount of territory. The Alawite regime holds its own enclave near the coast and has extended further with outside help. However, after the hatred built up after six years of fighting, the fighting is not likely to cease under a unified Syria that we have known for decades. Assad's backer that has meant the most militarily has been Russia and their main goal is to protect the Alawite character of the regime, not necessarily Assad, due to their naval and air base in Tartus and Latakia.

The states that were created by the European Powers after World War One are breaking apart. There have been many reasons for this happening, but it is occurring. There is no use pretending that everything can be put back together as they were decades earlier. The most likely outcome is that the regions split into their own ethnic state lets; an Alawite community would take hold on the Syrian coast. An oil rich Shia state let where the province of Basra used to be. A Sunni heartland that would combine their territories in both Iraq and Syria, and finally a Kurdish state from their areas in both Iraq and Syria. This isn't to say that this will be a good situation, especially for the mainly Sunni state as it would be landlocked with little natural resources. It was only a matter of

time before the artificial creations of the European Powers started to break apart, and so far, the 21st century has been a story of that.

The rapidly declining territory of the terrorist group ISIS provides both opportunities and dangers for the countries of Iraq and Syria. In Iraq the threat that ISIS posed to that country focused the mind of its leaders on uniting to defeat a common threat. However, since the city of Mosul has been recaptured by Iraqi forces and allied militias, the lessened threat has resulted in conflict between the Iraqi government and the KRG.

The KRG captured Kirkuk in 2014 after ISIS swept across much of Iraq and the Iraqi military collapsed. In response Kurdish Peshmerga forces took control of the city, and the oil rich countryside. Areas in and around Kirkuk have been disputed since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, between the KRG and Iraqi governments. Recently the Baghdad government sent troops to retake Kirkuk, paving the way for what could be continued conflict in Iraq.[198]

In Syria, the loss of territory for ISIS along the Euphrates river valley lays the stage between Syria's most powerful forces; the US supported and trained Kurdish forces of the Syrian Democratic Front and the forces of and loyal to the Assad regime. While there are hopes that further conflict can be avoided through compromise, that will be difficult because of the rules of Middle Eastern politics described in Thomas Friedman's

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[198] "Kirkuk: Iraqi Forces Capture Key Sites from Kurds," News Service, BBC News, October 16, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41631697.

book *From Beirut to Jerusalem,* where a leader feels they cannot compromise because they are not winning and later that they are winning so why compromise.[199]

The old model of a strong authoritarian, exercising centralized control while relying on the repressive organs of the state to crush dissent, worked in stabilizing these countries for decades. Now, because of outside invasions and regional turmoil, that model of governance is proving ill-equipped to the challenges of today. The most likely outcome is that boarders will be developed that roughly correspond to the ethnic divisions of these countries. Even if one were to believe that these nations, and the world would be better served if the dictatorships of past years were reestablished, the events of the past two decades make that impractical. Power is now to diffusely spread throughout the region, and due to historical mistrust, ethnic tension and animosity; a compromise or power sharing arrangement is unlikely to materialize.

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[199] Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York: Picador, 2012).

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