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MOSUL AND BASRA AFTER THE PROTESTS: THE ROOTS OF GOVERNMENT FAILURE & POPULAR DISCONTENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The protest movement has increasingly become a force in Iraqi politics, proving resilient even in the midst of violent crackdowns. The 2011 demonstrations in Basra, Baghdad and Mosul were met with water cannons and harsh police tactics, leading to 10 deaths and numerous wounded nationwide. Slogans and chants called for jobs, services, and an end to corruption. The demonstrations between 2015 and 2018 were not only larger in scale but also more ambitious and absolute in their objectives. Protestors called for better services and jobs as well as a more fundamental overturning of the entire political order in place since 2003. This turn



Razed government building following the 2018 Basra protests

towards the more maximalist language of revolution appeared once again in the demonstrations of October 2019, as protestors demanded the wholesale removal of the political class.

The response of the existing political elite to this repeated challenge from below has become increasingly chaotic and violent. The armed wings of the Shia political parties effectively detained or killed the leadership of the 2018 Basra protest movement. The protests of October 2019 in Baghdad were met with live ammunition on the part of armed security forces, leaving over 100 dead and thousands wounded. It remains unclear which branch of the security forces were responsible for the massacre; however, all signs point to the backing of powerful political actors.

As the death toll following the October 2019 protests mounted, Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi released a series of statements promising reforms. The government would distribute land, housing units, monthly stipends, and jobs to the most vulnerable members of society. These promises were understandably met with widespread skepticism among both the protestors and the population at large. After all, this is not the first time the government has made such proclamations in the aftermath of demonstrations. Following the mass Basra protests during the summer of 2018, the government issued a number of policy reforms and initiatives addressing housing, unemployment, and services. The Prime Minister responded similarly when unrest broke out in Mosul following the infamous ferry incident of March 2019.

Our interviews in Basra and Mosul revealed a widespread perception that reconstruction and service delivery have not seen notable improvements despite the repeated commitments of the government over the past year, and there is no reason to believe that the response to the October 2019 protests will be any different. Statements such as “it’s all lies, there’s no government, they’re all thieves” were common refrains in our interviews with locals and civil society actors. Such expressions of disgust towards the entire political class fed the broad ambitions of the protestors. They desired an uprooting of the post-2003 political and governmental system, not merely incremental fixes.



West Mosul, June 2019

Understanding the root causes of citizens' dissatisfaction with government is no simple matter. In part, the analytical challenge stems from the fact that the very terms we use to diagnose the causes of Iraq's governmental chaos are too abstract and general to shed meaningful light on the situation. 'Corruption,' 'state capture' and the 'quota-based system' (*muhassasab*) are some of the most commonly mentioned sources of government dysfunction and corresponding citizen distrust; however, rarely do we see a sufficiently detailed explanation of what is concretely meant by these terms, and how they function in specific contexts.

One key reason why these terms remain abstract and divorced from concrete realities is that analysts too often take Iraq as a whole as the departure point for investigation. Understanding governmental failure across Iraq's vastly different regions is too massive a task to generate illuminating analysis. In an effort to demonstrate the merits of a more targeted methodology, this study examines governmental dysfunction and the breakdown of state-society relations in specific local contexts. We have chosen the cases of Mosul and Basra both due to the immense political-economic importance of Iraq's second and third largest cities,

and due to the centrality of both places in driving successive waves of popular unrest.¹

Overview of Findings

Based on 50 interviews with key figures in Basra and Mosul's government, private sector, and civil society (conducted by the authors during March–September 2019) as well as an extensive desk review of media and government sources, this study aims to understand the breakdown of the relationship between state and citizen at the local level between 2003 and the present. (The present report represents the third and final of a 3-paper series.) The research found that the core driver of government failure was a systemic dynamic of struggles over power and resources between rivaling political factions. This endemic and destructive factionalism is not a natural nor inevitable state of affairs. Specific political and military blunders in both Mosul and Basra, largely on the part of the Coalition from 2003 onward, introduced and ingrained fraught power dynamics among local actors. These localized competitions – mediated through transactional exchanges and violence – have created fragmented and dysfunctional governmental apparatuses which are structurally incapable of delivering services, coordinating reconstruction, and implementing a reform agenda.

For Basra, government failure cannot be divorced from the longstanding, violent competition among the Shia political blocs over the province's immense resources and wealth. This competition emerged during the instability of the British-led occupation and administration of the city following the 2003 invasion. Similarly in Mosul, the stalled reconstruction process cannot be understood apart from a post-2003 political order defined by rivalries between many different actors, including Sunni Arab political factions, the two main Kurdish blocs, the Americans and Coalition, the Prime Minister's Office, the Iraqi Security Forces, and most recently, the Popular Mobilization Forces and their political proxies. The local factions in

¹ While the territorial focus of the study is limited to these two areas, all the major national-level Baghdad-based parties and actors figure prominently in the case studies of Basra and Mosul. In other words, local spaces provide a window into national politics and the broader breakdown of trust between citizens and government driving the protest movement.

both contexts have sought to capture state institutions and governmental contracts towards extending patronage networks, securing control over the means of violence, and building personal wealth for leaders.

Though one should not minimize the importance of elections in shaping the relative influence of the various factions from one year to the next, this competition over power is mediated largely through transactional exchanges and threats of violence, generating not only insecurity but also governmental dysfunction at every level. Any successful reform effort would thus have to be crafted with an eye towards protecting the core needs of the populace (reconstruction projects, basic services, and security) from becoming prized assets in the political marketplace.

At present, however, the opposite trend is underway. In both Mosul and Basra, local forces are positioning themselves for the upcoming provincial elections in April 2020. In Basra, Governor Aydani's newfound enthusiasm for infrastructure projects is viewed by most local observers as a cynical gambit to extend contracts to powerful allies who can guarantee votes and shore up support. Meanwhile in Mosul, the main Shia blocs are working to consolidate the support of the Sunni Arab establishment through a mix of material benefits and rhetoric, and all the while actual progress on reconstruction remains neglected. The forthcoming case studies will contextualize the endemic factionalism of the present moment as a part of a gradual deterioration of public authority at the local level since 2003.

II. CASE STUDY: MOSUL

On March 21, 2019, the city of Mosul witnessed the sinking of a tour boat that claimed the lives of more than 100 people. While the ship was run by a private enterprise, the incident unleashed mass public expressions of discontent against local and national political actors. Protestors threatened the convoys of both the governor and the Iraqi president during their official visits to the site of the disaster. Soon the governor Nofal Agub was forced to step down on charges of corruption and the misappropriation of reconstruction funds. Transpiring 1.5 years after the end of the ISIS campaign, the unrest following the sinking episode

highlighted the degree of local dissatisfaction with the performance of the government, and its failure to deliver on its promises to reconstruct the city.

What explains this outpouring of discontent against the government? Certainly one major factor is the present material condition of the city and province in the aftermath of ISIS. In Mosul city alone, there were 19,888 affected structures, 4773 of which were destroyed. More than 300,000 residents of Mosul are still displaced, with no homes to go back to two years since the liberation of the city from the Islamic State. While UNDP claims to have made considerable progress towards its reconstruction goals, the broader picture remains bleak, especially in West Mosul where most buildings remain gutted, crumbling shells.



West Mosul, June 2019

Moreover, regardless of whatever steps UNDP and other international organizations have made, this does not mean that the local or national government has necessarily played any substantive role. In fact, most UNDP officials have called attention to the obstructionist action of the government in stalling or

blocking projects rather than facilitating them. Or, when projects are completed (e.g., a rebuilt school), the government often does not staff and operate them.

Importantly, the failure of the government is not understood by the people of Mosul (known as *Maslani*) as a function of technical or budgetary gaps. Nor is it a result of what many analysts call inadequate ‘Sunni representation’ in positions of influence. More than the identity of the group or groups occupying the seat of power, the core problem has always been one of how that power is obtained and utilized at the expense of others, and in neglect of governmental performance.

Since the first days of the post-2003 era, reconstruction and overall responsiveness to the local populace have taken a backseat to a chaotic, violent struggle for control over the city between many different actors, including Sunni Arab political factions, the two main Kurdish blocs, the Americans and Coalition, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Iraqi Security Forces, and most recently, the Popular Mobilization Forces and their political proxies. These political/military entities are often internally divided and shift alliances quickly, rendering the basic structure of power and governance unclear even to political insiders. This competition and incoherence since 2003 to the present day has resulted in pervasive insecurity and a depletion of the resources allocated for development, leaving the majority of Mosul’s citizens feeling left out of a high-stakes game.

Understanding the way forward amidst the present instability requires a close look at political and security dynamics during three key stages: (1) The American and Kurdish takeover (2003-2009); (2) The rise and fall of a Sunni Arab coalition (2010 – 2014); (3) The anti-ISIS campaign and the era external political influence (2015 – present). Subsequently the analysis turns to the specific relevance of these periods in the present challenges facing reconstruction.

Invasion and Aftermath: American and Kurdish Dominance

How did the struggle between the various local factions begin? What are the origins of this endemic and often violent factionalism? Analysts of the post-2003 insurgency in Mosul have framed the local uprising against the Americans as

structurally inevitable from the start, pointing to the fact that the Ba'ath party recruited a high concentration of its members and top officers from Mosul. According to such analysis,² not only did Maslawis stand to lose the most in terms of political power from the Occupation, they also had the means and experience to fight back. The present study contends that while the fact of Mosul as a Baathist stronghold is undeniable, the breakdown in the relationship between the population and Coalition forces was not preordained. Decisions made and strategic blunders during the very first weeks and months of the occupation set in motion the conditions for a violent, confused struggle among the city's various political-security interests for years to come.

After the fall of Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Tikrit, Maslawis waited in anticipation for an American invasion.³ But such an attack would never materialize. Local leaders and tribal actors came to a deal with the US Army that there would be no resistance from the population whatsoever. But lacking clearance from the Pentagon, the Americans stalled for several days after the agreement was reached, unable to enter the city. Instead, *peshmerga* eager to extend their influence into a city with a significant Kurdish population arrived in Mosul and took up positions in the governmental center as well as the eastern side,⁴ where a significant number of Kurdish families resided among Sunni Arabs.⁵ Not only did the arrival of Kurdish troops instead of the Americans stoke local rivalries and ethnic tensions, it also left an entire city without any clear political and security framework whatsoever during a time of immense uncertainty. Looting as well as violence among and between Baathists, Kurds, and tribal actors broke out across the city.⁶

When the Americans finally received clearance from their command, they entered a scene of immense instability and collective anxiety. With only a small band of special forces driving in jeeps and no tanks, the US troops were compelled again to rely upon Kurdish forces at the front and rear of their convoy, extending the

² Eric Hamilton, 'The Fight for Mosul', The Institute for the Study of War, (March 23,2008), <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/The%20Fight%20for%20Mosul.pdf>

³ Voanews.com, 'Rumsfeld: Mosul About to Fall to US-Kurdish Forces', (April 11, 2003), <https://www.voanews.com/archive/rumsfeld-mosul-about-fall-us-kurdish-forces-2003-04-11>

⁴ Mark Oliver, 'Kurds celebrate fall of Mosul', The Guardian, (April 11, 2003), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/11/iraq.markoliver1>

⁵ Luke Harding, 'Mosul descends into chaos as even muse is looted', (April 12, 2003)

⁶ Harding, op. cit.

perception among the majority Arab population that their political fortunes had been dissolved overnight. To make matters worse still, top Kurdish politicians from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) accompanied US troops in their first meetings with local representatives from Mosul. A negative, distrustful relationship between the majority of the local population and the American-Kurdish military apparatus was set in motion.

In the coming days and weeks, the American leadership further alienated Arab tribal and political actors through poorly executed negotiations with local leaders, while also failing to contain the continuing entrenchment of the Kurds into the local political and military institutions, particularly the KDP. The KDP pushed for its Kurdish and Arab allies to take leading positions within the local administration.⁷ Soon demonstrators took to the streets of Mosul protesting against the US and Kurdish presence in their city. It was at this point that Ba'athists and former officers increasingly organized themselves as nascent insurgent groups, staging attacks against US forces and their Kurdish allies. Community leaders, protestors, insurgents and clerics used the mosques to call for unity and opposition to the US troop presence in Mosul.⁸

Analysts have observed that the entrance of the well-equipped 101st division of the US Army under General David Petraeus in late March momentarily restored order.⁹ Petraeus sought to return ethnic balance to the city, attempting to empower Sunni Arabs through proportionate representation in the newly created 28-member local council. The council subsequently picked Sunni Arab Ghanim Baso as governor and Khosraw Gorran, a Kurd, as Deputy Governor. Furthermore, Petraeus constrained the activities of the Kurdish forces in Mosul city and limited their presence to the disputed areas of Nineveh where fewer Arabs reside.¹⁰

⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle Over Ninawa', Middle East Report No.9, (September 2009), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/90-iraq-s-new-battlefront-the-struggle-over-ninewa.pdf>, p.3

⁸ Hamilton, *op. cit.*

⁹ ICG, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5. See also: Michael Knights, 'Lessons from Mosul', The Washington Institute, (27/01/2005), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lessons-from-mosul>

¹⁰ Interview with Khosraw Gorran, KDP leader, Erbil. August 20, 2019

This political settlement quickly fell apart under the US policy of de-Baathification. After the forced resignation of Baso on accusations of Baathist party membership, the local council appointed Usama Kashmulla, who was promptly assassinated by the insurgents in June 2004.¹¹ Deputy Governor Khosraw Gorran subsequently managed to secure the appointment of a new Sunni Arab with closer ties to the KDP, Duraid Kashmull. This maneuver on the part of the Kurds resulted in all 12 Sunni Arab members of the council resigning in a boycott. The boycott was the first of many instances in which Sunni Arab Maslawis rejected the imposition of Sunni Arab political figures aligned with adversarial political factions.¹²

In addition to the political turmoil caused by the US policy of de-Baathification in Mosul, a second major blunder of the Americans was to return the local security apparatus to Kurdish dominance. When US troops were relocated away from Mosul in order to combat the Falluja insurgency, the American command subsequently ordered the resumption of Kurdish military control over Mosul's city center to fill the vacuum.¹³ This decision restoked ethnic tensions across the city and emboldened the still nascent insurgency, particularly in Western Mosul.

By the beginning of 2005, Mosul was divided into two parts: the western (insurgent-dominated) and eastern (Kurdish dominated).¹⁴ Politically, the situation was bleaker still. As extremist armed groups gained strength and intimidated the Sunni Arab population into a wholesale boycott of the 2005 elections,¹⁵ the Kurds won the elections by a landslide, securing 31 seats out of the total 41 seats. The Iraq Islamic Party (IIP), the only Sunni Arab party calling for the participation in the post-2003 political process, won only 3 seats.¹⁶ The election results enabled the KDP to dominate the formal governing institutions in Nineveh for the next four years, furthering the despondency and alienation of the Sunni Arabs.

¹¹ ICG, *op. cit.*

¹² Interview with Khosraw Gorran, KDP leader, Erbil. August 20, 2019

¹³ Thanassis Cambanis, 'Kurdish militia helps keep order', *The Boston Globe*, (November 18, 2004), http://archive.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/11/18/in_mosul_kurdish_militia_helps_keep_order/

¹⁴ Hamilton, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ From 2004 and on, multiple insurgent and extremist groups were operating in and around Mosul including: the AQI, Ansar al-Sunna, the Supporters of Islam, the Naqshbandi Army, the Hamas brigade of Iraq, the Islamic Army, the Muhammad Army, and the 1920 Revolution Brigade. Most of the members of the Ba'ath party and officers of the former Iraqi army joined one of these groups and contributed to their activities and designing their strategies. See: NGO Coordination Committee For Iraq (NCCI), 'Ninawa: NCCI Governorate Profile', (December 2010), https://www.ncciraq.org/images/infobygov/NCCI_Ninewa_Governorate_Profile.pdf

¹⁶ Interview with Khosraw Goran, KDP leader, Erbil. August 20, 2019.

The Rise and Fall of a Sunni Arab Coalition

The Sunni Arabs of Mosul would not remain on the side-lines of formal politics forever. The rise of the Hadbaa party in 2009 ended Kurdish dominance over Nineveh and weakened the already embattled insurgency. By the time of Hadbaa's emergence, the insurgency's influence in Mosul was already on the decline. As part of the broader 'surge' campaign, Maliki ordered "Operation Mother of Two Springs" in 2008 aimed at clearing Mosul from non-state armed groups.¹⁷ Not only did the operation bolster the reputation of local and national state security institutions, the positive security developments finally allowed the Sunni Arabs of Mosul to focus energies on political control.¹⁸

Hadbaa was the mechanism through which Sunni Arabs of Mosul would return to electoral significance. Unfortunately, the means of attaining power further stoked ethno-sectarian political turmoil. As a reflection of the Arab-Kurdish tensions of the previous six years, the Hadbaa party led by Athil Nujaifi ran on a firmly Arab nationalist and anti-Kurdish platform.¹⁹ With a large turnout (60%) in Nineveh during the 2009 provincial elections, Hadbaa won the majority of the seats (19) out of the total 37 seats of the provincial council. The Kurdish list only secured 12 seats.²⁰ With the balance of power on the council realigned, Athil Nujaifi would become the first Sunni Arab since 2004 to rise to the governorship without the backing of the Kurdish bloc.

Far from a strictly local dynamic, Hadbaa owed its sudden electoral success in part to a broader set of forces beyond Mosul. At the national level, Nouri al-Maliki was seeking to combat the Kurds' military might in order to bolster his credentials as a

¹⁷ Institute for the Study of War (ISW), 'Operation Mother of Two Springs', (December 2008), <http://www.understandingwar.org/operation/operation-mother-two-springs>

¹⁸ ICG, op. cit., p. 8

¹⁹ In addition to the local political and commercial elite eager to regain power from both the Kurds and the insurgents, Hadbaa gained the support of the major tribes in Nineveh. Among these were the powerful Sunni Arab Shammar tribes and the Zebaris, a Kurdish rival tribe to KDP's leader Masud Barzani. See: Kilaas Gleneinkel, 'The Hadbaa National List', Niqash, (January 28, 2009), <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2368/>, Adel Kamal, 'New Ninawa Governor Rejects Kurdish Alliance', (February 24, 2009), <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2393/>

²⁰ Musings on Iraq, 'Official Iraqi Election Results', (February 19, 2009), <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2009/02/official-iraqi-election-results.html>

nationalist leader. Thus, Maliki found himself in a marriage of convenience with the Sunni Arab nationalist leaders of Hadbaa. Meanwhile, Turkey and the US government supported Hadbaa as a means of restoring a level of ethnic balance to Nineveh.²¹

But Hadbaa's grip over Mosul's politics would begin to wane almost just as quickly as it coalesced. As a first sign of the fragility of Hadbaa alliance, the government formation process following the 2009 election took longer than expected due to disagreements among the main elements of the coalition.²² Furthermore, Nujaifi's refusal to grant the Kurds any position whatsoever in the new government resulted in a wholesale Kurdish boycott of the provincial council. Nineveh became militarily divided into two areas, as Kurdish forces prevented the governor from so much as visiting the disputed territories of Nineveh beyond the perimeter of Mosul city.²³

Hadbaa was also weakened by a fierce and all-consuming rivalry between Nujaifi and Maliki. Maliki gained a foothold into local Mosul politics through several strategic maneuvers,²⁴ the most important of which pertained to the security apparatus. Beginning in 2011, Maliki made changes within the top commandship of Nineveh's Operational Command and put loyalists in charge, consolidating his control over the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the province. With the withdrawal of American forces from the country that year, the Prime Minister sought to secure unfettered military power.²⁵ Nujaifi saw this consolidation as a direct challenge to his authority. After Nujaifi tried and failed to reassert the control of the governorship over the ISF through appeals to the Iraqi Constitution,²⁶ he

²¹ ICG, pp.9-10

²² Interview with Abdelaziz Jarba, civil society activist from Mosul. Sulaymaniyah, September 16, 2019.

²³ Interview with Khosraw Goran, former Deputy Governor of Mosul. Erbil, August 20, 2019. See also: Ramzy Mardini, 'Factors Affecting Stability in Northern Iraq', CTC Sentinel, Vol.2, No.8, (August 2009), <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2010/06/Vol2Iss8-Art6.pdf>

²⁴ Maliki turned the tide of de-Baathification and re-appointed many of the formerly banned political elite into important posts. Furthermore, in 2009, Maliki formed a special federal reconstruction committee for Nineveh and put 120 million USD under its control. The committee carried out several projects (water, electricity, and infrastructure projects) through contracts with local companies. See: Adel Kamal, 'Bureaucratic Conflict Blocks Mosul Reconstruction', Niqash, (March 26, 2009), <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2414/>

²⁵ Michael Knights, 'How to Secure Mosul: Lessons from 2008-2014', The Washington Institute, (October 2016), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-secure-mosul-lessons-from-2008-2014>

²⁶ He cited constitutional provisions suggesting that the governor controls ISF troops within governorate borders. See: Iraqi Government Report Investigating the fall of Mosul, P. 39. The report is available at: <http://almasalah.com/ar/News/139592/سقوطالموصل-الوثيقة-الرسمية-لتنقير-سقوطالموصل>

subsequently encouraged and participated in a local protest movement against the central government and especially the ISF. Inspired both by the region-wide Arab Spring and the national-level movement on the part of several blocs to oust Maliki from power,²⁷ the protestors demanded the release of prisoners held by ISF, an end to arbitrary arrests and torture, and the elimination of de-Baathification. This movement generated anti-ISF slogans such as “Maliki’s army” and “the Safavid army”. The ISF responded by arresting community leaders, religious clerics, and activists,²⁸ further deepening the relationship of opposition between locals and the central government.

The Nujaifi vs. Maliki struggle for control took Hadbaa’s focus away from strengthening security and providing services for Maslawis. Instead of cooperating against insurgent and extremist groups, the ISF and local authorities were embroiled in an intense political rivalry that gave space for local insurgents to re-establish influence. Members of these armed groups were collecting illegal taxes from all types of businesses in the city of Mosul. Grocery stores, private clinics, and contractors implementing development projects all had to pay taxes to insurgents in return for protection.²⁹ It is estimated that such armed groups were extorting 5 million USD per month during this period. Many established contractors left Mosul, leaving the pool of local expertise severely depleted. Services suffered as a result, and Nujaifi lost much of the goodwill that brought him to power in the first place.³⁰

Hadbaa started to grow desperate. Sensing his vulnerability in the rivalry with Maliki, Nujaifi made the fateful step of establishing a political alliance with the Kurds. Based on an agreement with Barzani, Kurds were re-integrated into the local governing institutions, a move that alienated many elements within the

²⁷ The national level power struggle was mainly between Maliki on one hand and his opponents Muqtada Sadr, Masud Barzani, and Usama Nujaiifi on the other. Governor Nujaiifi sided with his brother and used his position as Nineveh's governor to attack Maliki for his authoritarian and centralising tendencies. The Nujaiifi brothers also accused Maliki of suppressing the Sunnis based on their sectarian identity.

²⁸ Aljazeera.net, ‘Curfew in Mosul and threats towards escalating the protests’, (March 8, 2013), <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2013/3/8/الاحتجاج-وتهديد-بتصعيد-الاحتجاج>

²⁹ Iraqi Government Report Investigating the fall of Mosul, op. cit. .

³⁰ Ibid

already fragile Hadbaa coalition.³¹ Hadbaa lost its internal cohesion by the local elections of 2013, as several key Sunni Arab factions broke off and entered the election separately.³²

Unsurprisingly, Hadbaa fared poorly in the elections. The party entered the vote as part of Usama Nujaifi's Mutahidoon alliance and was also joined by the IIP, both of which formed part of a new local bloc called the Nahda coalition. Despite Nahda's backing Nujaifi won only 8 seats, compared to 19 seats just four years earlier. The fragmentation of Hadbaa served the interests of the Kurdish list, which secured 11 seats (PUK 3, and KDP 9). Lacking sufficient seats to control his own destiny, Nujaifi's only pathway to the governorship was to further solidify his controversial agreement with the Kurds. In return for supporting his candidacy, the Kurds gained key positions within the local government including the deputy governor and the head of the provincial council.

With the fracturing and weakening of the Sunni Arab bloc, by the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014 the influence of insurgents such as the Islamic State widened to levels not seen since before Operation Mother of Two Springs in 2008. The Naqshbandi army and ISIS were well aware of the local political turmoil, and they successfully took advantage of the factionalism in the city.³³ Furthermore, they exploited the years of anti-ISF rhetoric, which in part had been propagated by Nujaifi himself. The continuing reports of abuses of the ISF against Sunni Arab residents further strengthened the sway of the wholesale anti-government

³¹ When Athil allied with the Kurds in 2012, he angered and alienated many of his allies within Hadbaa including the heads of tribal blocks who hold positions within the local government (Abdullah al-Yawar, from the Shammar Tribes and Dildar Zebari, from the Zebari Kurdish tribe) and other local figures such as Nineveh's former Governor al-Baso. Maliki approached these groups and personalities and eventually co-opted some of them. See: Ahmed Ali, 'Iraq's Provincial Elections and Their National Implications', Institute for the Study of War, (March 19, 2013), <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq%E2%80%99s-provincial-elections-and-their-national-implications>

³² The United Nineveh Alliance (UNA), led by Abdullah Yawar, The Iraq Construction and Justice Party (ICJP), led by Dildar Zebari, and Loyalty to Nineveh Alliance (LNA), led by Ghanim Baso withdrew from Hadbaa and participated in the election separately. The UNA and ICJP won 3 seats respectively. Both rejected Hadbaa because of Nujaifi's alliance with the Kurds. The LNA won 4 seats and had the backings of outside Nineveh Sunni parties such as Salih Mutlag's National Dialogue Party and Jamal Karbuli's al-Hal Party. The coalition received indirect support from Maliki.

³³ Iraqi Government Report Investigating the fall of Mosul, op. cit. , p.60

discourse of the Islamic State. The extremists simultaneously consolidated economic power, demanding rents of up to 15% across the city.³⁴

By the summer of 2014, the political and economic conditions were set for a broader and more complete takeover of the city. Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, fell to the Islamic State in June 2014. While it is indisputable that the ISF folded in the face of the advance, this was a catastrophe that reflected the province's ongoing political factionalism as much as it pointed to blatant security failures.

The anti-ISIS campaign and the era of external political influence

The campaign to retake Nineveh from ISIS was never solely about restoring security and stability to the province. The campaign had far-reaching political implications from the start, as the various electoral blocs within and outside the province sought to secure post-liberation spoils. The fight with ISIS radically shifted the balance of power in Mosul in favor of the powerful national Shia blocs and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), dealing a severe and perhaps permanent blow to the traditional local Sunni Arab power brokers such as the Nujafis. Post-ISIS Mosul has become a battleground for control among new local and national actors, furthering the dynamic of systemic neglect and hindering the reconstruction of the city.

The struggle over the position of Nineveh's governor during the ISIS period was a key mechanism through which external political parties divided and conquered the local Sunni blocs. Upon then Prime Minister Hayder Abadi's request in May 2015, the Iraqi parliament voted Athil Nujafi out of Nineveh's governorship position for his alleged role in the fall of Mosul to the hands of ISIS.³⁵ Nofal Agub was then appointed as Nineveh's governor by a fragmented provincial council in May

³⁴ Nawzat Shamdeen, 'Al Qaeda's Secrets blackmailing the government in Mosul', Niqash, (January 25, 2012), <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2915/>

³⁵ Aljazeera.net, 'Iraqi Parliament removes Ninewa's governor Athil Nujafiy from his position', (May 28, 2015), <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/5/28/البرلمان-العراقي-يقيل-محافظ-نينوى-أثيل-النجيفي>

2015,³⁶ a move that solidified an already growing split between Nujaifi supporters and detractors in Mosul.



Church in West Mosul, June 2019

But Agub soon proved to be a profoundly flawed governor. As early as 2016, he lost the backing of nearly half of the members of the Nahda coalition. By October 2017, three months after the liberation of Mosul, the provincial council voted to remove the governor on allegations of incompetence, failure to address the IDP crisis, rampant corruption, and the abuse of public funds allocated for reconstruction.³⁷ As a sign of the growing influence of the Shia blocs in Baghdad – who had already formed a strategic alliance with Agub – his dismissal was

³⁶ Agub was a provincial council member from al-Nahdha coalition, which again was originally formed by Athil Nujaifi in 2013. Nahda removed Athil from its party leadership in November 2014, five months after the politically catastrophic fall of Mosul. After Nujaifi was then forced from the governorship in 2015, Nahda in alliance with the Kurds succeeded in mobilising enough vote for Agub, appointing him as Nineveh's governor over and against the objections of Athil's supporters. See: Alhayat.com, 'Struggle inside Nineveh provincial council intensifies', (June 06, 2017), <http://www.alhayat.com/article/873481/سياسة/مكة-المكرمة/احتدام-الصراع-داخل-مجلس-محافظة-نينوى>

³⁷ Awajelpress.com, 'An MP from Nineveh: the Nahdha coalition nominates Walid Juhaisy for the post of Nineveh's governor', (13/11/2017), <http://awajelpress.com/نانب-عن-نينوى-كتلة-النهضة-ترشح-وليد-ال/>

summarily rejected by the administrative court in the national capital. (The court justified this decision on the rather dubious grounds that the provincial council had held the removal proceeding in the town of Qosh, rather than in the council headquarters located in Mosul city.)³⁸

Agub thus maintained the governorship, and now he was even further incentivized to align with the Shia parties and the ascendant PMF-backed groups. Reports alleged that he either kept a blind eye or actively supported the extra-legal economic activities of the PMF-linked groups as well as the local economic offices of powerful Shia parties.³⁹ Agub evidently sought not only political security but also personal enrichment. He allegedly empowered his own brother to operate as the “governor in the shadows,” demanding kickbacks from reconstruction contractors.⁴⁰ Sources within UNDP indicated that Agub regularly refused to sign off on development projects, forcing the UN to create bureaucratic workarounds via the federal directorates and/or the Prime Minister’s Office.⁴¹

Despite damning findings from a parliamentary fact-finding commission that discovered widespread corruption in the city in connection to Agub and the PMFs, Agub maintained his position through strong backing from Baghdad-based political forces.⁴² Paradoxically, it was likely Agub’s immense lack of popularity locally that secured him support from Baghdad parties, who did not want to see the rise of another local Nujaifi-like figure in the run up to the 2018 national elections. Abadi and his Nasr coalition saw Mosul as a significant voting bloc, and he framed the liberation of the city from ISIS as the cornerstone of the campaign platform. Indeed, many Sunni figures and politicians from Nineveh joined Nasr.

It was not until after the elections and the now infamous March 21, 2019 ferry incident that Baghdad was forced to respond to local political pressures clamoring for Agub’s ouster. On March 24, 2019 Iraq’s Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi

³⁸ Rwdaw.net, ‘Federal court returns Agub to his position as Nineveh’s governor’, (November 29, 2017), <https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/291120176>

³⁹ The final report of the fact finding committee-Iraqi parliament, (January 2019), <https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/263485/السومرية-نيوز-تنشر-تقرير-لجنة-تقصي-الحقائق-بشأن-ني-الار>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Interview with a UNDP official. Erbil, June 19, 2019.

⁴² Interviews with several local politicians, civil society activists, and journalists from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

called upon the Iraqi parliament to dismiss Nineveh's governor, finally bringing the era of Nofal Agub to an end. According to civil society activists and politicians we interviewed, the damage was already done. The preceding two years of political turmoil had created total disarray in the local government, eliminating any chance that the post-ISIS reconstruction and reform process would proceed coherently.⁴³

Name of Coalition	Number of Seats	Number of Votes
Nasr	7	168144
KDP	6	139093
Al- Wataniya	4	103924
Ninawa Hawiyatona	3	83097
Al- Fatih	3	75017
Al- Karar Al- Iraqi	3	67093
Al- Jamaheer Al- Wataniya	2	54111
Al- Nahj Al- Democracy	1	37083
PUK	1	32845
Tamadon	1	28543

Table (1) 2018 election results in Nineveh (only parties with seats listed)

The struggle to secure Agub's replacement brought an even wider array of political actors into the competition for local control, including Sunni parties and factions from other Sunni Arab dominated governorates, such as Jamal Karbuli's Al-Hal party; Muhammed Halboosi, a former governor of Anbar and the current speaker of the Iraqi parliament; Khamis Khanjar's Mashroo' Al-Arabi Party; and Abu Mazin, a former governor of Salahuddin and currently a member of the Iraqi parliament.⁴⁴ These factions saw immense electoral opportunity in the precipitous decline of the Mutahidoon bloc in Mosul following Athil Nujaifi's ouster, in addition to the weakened position of the Kurds following the failed referendum of 2017 and the loss of the disputed territories in Nineveh.⁴⁵

Rather than leading a coherent political movement in Mosul with popular appeal locally, these external Sunni Arab parties have formed fluid alliances with one another based on achieving short-term goals. Furthermore, they have relied on additional alliances with the ascendant Shia blocs. After the May 2018 elections, for instance, Khamees Khanjar's party along with Karbuli's faction allied with the

⁴³ Interviews with several local civil society activists and journalists from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

⁴⁴ Interviews with several Nineveh provincial council members and civil society activists and journalists from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

⁴⁵ Based on interviews with local journalists and political observers from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

Shia-led Binaa party, headed by Hadi Ameri's Fatah alliance and Nouri Maliki's State of Law Alliance. Meanwhile, Usama Nujaifi's Al-Qarar Al-Iraqi Party has allied with the Shia-led Reform and Construction bloc, comprised of Muqtada Sadr's Sayroon coalition, Hayder Abadi's Nasir alliance, and Ammar Al-hakim's Hikma Trend.

These Shia parties were in many respects more powerful and engaged locally than the external Sunni Arab actors. Falih Fayadh, the formal head of the PMF and Iraqi government's National Security Advisor, used his position within the security apparatus to develop ties with powerful Sunni tribes and personalities across Nineveh. Fayadh, a Shia politician and the head of Atta party, was able to secure 6 parliamentary seats during the May 2018 elections in Nineveh. (Fayadh's Atta party entered the elections as part of Abadi's Nasr coalition but departed the alliance shortly after the elections, effectively gutting Nasr of its Mosul presence)

When it came time for the selection of the new governor in the spring of 2019, it would be Fayadh who would win the day with the support of key Sunni Arab allies Khanjar and Abu Mazin.⁴⁶ He outmaneuvered Speaker of the Parliament Muhammed Halboosi, who supported Hussam Abar, a Nineveh council member.⁴⁷ Halboosi's candidate never received the support of Khanjar and Abu Mazin even though the two were members of the same National Front Alliance with Halboosi. Instead, Khanjar and Abu Mazin allied with Fayadh's candidate, Mansour Murid, who also received the backing of the KDP. Khanjar and Abu Mazin, both wealthy individuals, entered into extensive negotiation with provincial council members with the aim of obtaining their loyalties and votes.⁴⁸

In sum, the appointment of Murid as Nineveh's governor was a product of a deal among Fayadh, Khanjar, Abu Mazin, and the KDP at the expense of Halboosi, the Nujaijis, and other local groups.⁴⁹ (Halboosi was so miffed by the loss of the governorship that he threatened the dismissal of Nineveh's provincial council

⁴⁶ Interviews with provincial council members and local journalists from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

⁴⁷ Almadapress.net, '5 leaders support 4 personalities for the position of Nineveh's governor', (April 20, 2019), <https://almadapaper.net/view.php?cat=218028>

⁴⁸ Based on interviews with local journalists and political observers from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

through the powers of the Iraqi parliament. Ultimately he left the National Front Alliance in opposition to Khanjar.)⁵⁰ Positions were doled out accordingly.⁵¹ In return for backing Murid, the KDP secured the position of Nineveh's first deputy governor, restoring the Kurds to a position of considerable influence over the local government.⁵² The deal allowed Khamis Khanjar to appoint one of his affiliates as Nineveh's second deputy governor.⁵³

The Politics of Reconstruction in Mosul

While it is encouraging to hear reports from international development actors and local civil society activists that Mansour is more professional and less corrupt than his predecessor Nofal Agub, still the overall sentiment among Maslawis is one of widespread malaise and confusion about the city's and the wider governorate's future. Instead of substantive reforms and infrastructure projects, interviewees anticipate a huge build-up of rhetoric and competition among the various national and local factions in the months prior to the provincial elections of April 2020. One civil society activist noted: "They'll say 'we promise to release the political prisoners' to show us that they're with the Sunni Arabs, but we know it won't materialize."⁵⁴

Officials, administrators, and civil society leaders across all political persuasions are pessimistic about the future of reconstruction in Mosul. The assignment of blame for this state of affairs depends on political affiliation. For the Kurds, minorities (Christians and Yazidis), and the faction of Sunni Arabs aligned against the PMF, it is widely believed that the new governor is beholden to the very parties that brought him to power. According to a provincial council member, the nexus between parties and private companies would inevitably guide the governor's hand: "Influential people within the dominant parties in Baghdad will shape the policies of the governor and force him to act in ways that allow them to profit from the funds allocated to Nineveh. They will ensure their companies – or the companies

⁵⁰ Alarabiya.net, 'Iraqi parliament requests investigating the election of Nineveh's governor', (May 12, 2019), <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/iraq/2019/05/12/البرلمان-العراقي-يطلب-تحقيقا-في-انتخاب-محافظة-نينوى>

⁵¹ Interview with Ahmed Hussein, political activist from Nineveh. Mosul, August 22, 2019.

⁵² Interview with Sirwan Muhammed, Nineveh's deputy governor. Mosul, August 21, 2019.

⁵³ Interview with Hassan Luhaibi, Nineveh's second deputy governor. Mosul, August 21, 2019.

⁵⁴ Interview with Ahmed Hussein, political activist from Nineveh. Mosul, August 22, 2019.

... tied to them – will receive the contracts to implement reconstruction projects in the province.”⁵⁵ These detractors fear that it is unlikely that members of the provincial council will be able to hold the new governor accountable given that he has the backing of powerful local and national parties. A Sunni Arab council member noted: “The PMF dominates the government administration and offices in Nineveh. The heads and managers of government offices and directorates are supported by the PMF and no one can hold them accountable. As a provincial council member, I cannot request managers and directors in the local administration for questioning. If I do so, the PMF would intervene on their behalf and if I insist on questioning managers and directors in the local government then I would be threatened by the PMF.”⁵⁶



Scrap metal in Mosul (major asset in post-ISIS economy controlled by PMF-backed entities)

Mansour and his allies have attempted to craft a counter-narrative that presents the new governor as non-confrontational, non-sectarian, and professional. Implicitly

⁵⁵ Interview with Sheikh Dawood, member of Nineveh’s provincial council. Mosul, June 06, 2019.

⁵⁶ Interview with Hussam Abar, A Sunni Arab member of Nineveh’s provincial council. Mosul, June 24, 2019

contrasting himself with his predecessor, Mansour has claimed that he would “work hard not to allow for political competition and divisions to influence the reconstruction process and service provision in Nineveh.” Murid has also tried to cast himself as open to assistance from all parties, saying, “there is great support and seriousness from the part of federal government, the international community, and the donor parties in helping us and we will continue with reconstruction and service provision.”⁵⁷

Whether one regards Mansour as collaborative or co-opted, it is undeniable that placing all the blame on his shoulders would be unfair. He has inherited a chaotic reconstruction process characterized by disorder and confusion. Reconstruction funds are controlled by several government agencies that do not coordinate closely with each other. Most of the local government officials and observers stated that the reconstruction agencies including the Reconstruction Fund, the service provision federal ministries, and the governor’s office operate in Mosul without coordinating with each other and with the local provincial council.⁵⁸

A provincial council member from Mosul commented: “Reconstruction effort is fragmented and there is no clear vision and aim among the implementing parties. For instance, the central government ministries implement projects without coordinating with the local government and the local provincial council. This has meant that Baghdad authorities, who are less informed about the needs and the priorities of Nineveh, have determined which projects are prioritized and where.”⁵⁹

Of course the government is not the only actor involved in reconstruction. UNDP officials emphasize that the media’s fixation on government corruption and failure in Mosul has resulted in an overly gloomy narrative towards all reconstruction actors, including those representing the international community. One UNDP official noted that the Mosul city team has rebuilt all the water treatment plants and electrical substations, 3 maternity hospitals, 144 schools, 40 colleges at Mosul

⁵⁷ Alhurra TV, ‘Interview with Mansur Murid, Nineveh’s new governor’, (May 14, 2019),

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogVIm--BrcE&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR01sWYmgk2SliRKz6nRaQR1pVksu89xcffTfQb5vz87hpdE-y6_6GJ66iU

⁵⁸ Interviews with provincial council members and local journalists from Mosul. Mosul, July 20-September 20, 2019.

⁵⁹ Interview with Owayd Ali al-Juhaishi, member of Nineveh’s provincial council. Mosul, June 24, 2019.

University, and 9 police stations across Mosul “from zero,” including the police headquarters. As for housing they, have completed over 2000 houses, with the aim of completing 15,000 in total.⁶⁰ However, he lamented, “the media is not interested at all in good news stories...So people keep saying that nothing is happening...On the other hand, the media all show up when a mass grave is discovered, or a story about corruption.” In the view of UNDP, one technical reality that drives the perception of non-progress is the geographic distribution of the large reconstruction projects along the edge of the city because, as the same UNDP official noted, “you do not build a water plant in the middle of the city.” Moreover, the structures that are close to the road are often municipal shops. “We do private houses, so you have to get back further [to see the progress on housing].”⁶¹

This is not to say that UNDP and the other major international organizations involved in reconstruction such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) minimize the pervasiveness of politics and corruption and the impact this has on projects, particularly during the period of Nofal Agub. One official noted that Agub and his brother had control or influence over all the PMF-run checkpoints coming in and out of Mosul, such that no product or equipment could enter or exit without their blessing. This enabled them to demand payments and kickbacks from companies who had received contracts from the government and/or international organizations. In addition to this form of extortion, Governor Agub made every effort to obstruct and assert his control over the formal tendering and procurement side of the reconstruction process, often refusing to sign off on projects that had already been specked and approved by both UNDP and the relevant directorates (e.g., directorate of electricity, water, etc.).⁶² This dynamic forced UNDP to seek approvals by other means: “There are a couple of cases when we had at least 30 projects on his desk for months, so we just went to Mahdi Al-Allaq, the chief of staff [in the Prime Minister’s Office], and he just basically signed them for us and sent a letter to Agub saying this is hereby approved.” When the governor finally received formal charges of corruption and was forced to spend time in Baghdad, this period away enabled international actors

⁶⁰ Interviews with 6 senior UNDP and IOM officials, July 19-26, 2019.

⁶¹ Interviews with 6 senior UNDP and IOM officials, July 19-26, 2019.

⁶² Interviews with 6 senior UNDP and IOM officials, July 19-26, 2019.

to push more projects through via agreements with the directorates. But even while away, the governor tried to pressure the local director generals to refuse compliance without his approval.

Concerns over the potential for corruption has injected huge delays in the procurement and implementation processes. UNDP is forced to go through several layers of checks and vetting before a project can be approved. First, a team of UNDP engineers along with engineers from the relevant directorate visit the facility in need of repair (e.g., a water treatment plant) and assess all the parts and equipment required to do a successful rebuild. Then, this results in the directorate composing a bill of quantity (BOQ) listing all the needed items and their quantity. Importantly, the BOQ is unpriced so as to avoid collusion between people in the directorates and potential bidders. Once the BOQ is signed off by the directorate general, it is transferred over to the procurement office at UNDP, which checks and rechecks the specifications. Then bidding begins. The procurement division is required to rigorously vet each company, checking bank details, technical qualifications, and ensuring that there is no connection between the contractor and any political/military entity. Some of the blacklisted companies reapply under new names, adding another layer of complication. The relevant director general finally selects a company and composes a notification letter, which must be signed by the governor. In theory an obstructionist governor can delay the process at this point for as long as he or she likes. If approval is received, the project is formally handed over to the company, and payments are only made when specific benchmarks are achieved, verified by UNDP engineers. Even in the best case scenario in which UNDP prevents any and all corruption from entering into a project, the whole procurement process alone takes 3 months due to the need for all of this vetting.

There was a distinct difference in the level of interference between Mosul city and the surrounding smaller towns and rural areas comprising most of the province's geographic area. The UNDP teams in these areas noted far less interest on the part of the governor, mostly working with the directorates for approvals and secondarily the local mayors. One official analyzed this hands-off approach as a question of scale: "A school we do in the rural areas costs \$30,000 and in Mosul

city it'd be 2 million dollars, so there's less to gain from a corruption scheme."⁶³ The major problem facing reconstruction in the rural areas is the degree of government neglect. Many rebuilt schools, for instance, are standing empty, and the government has shown no signs of re-opening them for students. They also have to contend with the politicization of aid from the international community, particularly the United States, which is often more concerned with directing aid towards minority populations such as the Christians rather than achieving holistic humanitarian development. One official reflected, "This policy of favoritism doesn't help anyone, not even the Christians. Nothing exists in isolation, so if you want to fix a water network, it is going to cut across different areas, and it is like a tree, so you have to start at the bottom to find the root and follow it. So if you say you are only going to work in the Christian towns, you are basically against the technical aspect. They are interconnected. And the same thing goes with the water and the electricity grid."⁶⁴

In Mosul a chaotic, dysfunctional political competition was set in motion from the very first days of the invasion. The current state of governmental failure in the face of post-ISIS destruction is not a new phenomenon but rather the product of a long-standing pattern of political fragmentation. The analysis now turns to the situation in Basra. As this study has already produced two reports on the subject of Basra, the case is abbreviated. Many of the dynamics described above in Mosul apply in the context of Basra; however, the relevant political actors and the nature of the relationship between them are distinct. In comparison to Mosul, the political marketplace in Basra is characterized by a relatively flat playing field among the various Shia parties. No group or set of groups was ever officially de-legitimized or excluded from the political process. This does not mean however that the struggle for power is any less problematic, however.

III. CASE STUDY: BASRA

In the summer of 2018, Basra witnessed demonstrations across the province. Basrawi protestors stormed nearly every significant government and party building.

⁶³ Interviews with 6 senior UNDP and IOM officials, June 19-26, 2019.

⁶⁴ Interviews with 6 senior UNDP and IOM officials, June 19-26, 2019.

Hikma, State of Law, Fadhilla, Badr and Asaib all saw their headquarters come under attack. As the new government coalesced in the subsequent months, many Iraq observers opined that Adil Abdul-Mahdi's administration would likely succeed or fail on the basis of its performance in Basra. In addition to being the country's economic hub (accounting for 80% of the country's oil production), Basra is a major base of Shia electoral support. Abdul-Mahdi simply could not afford to allow tensions to fester in the strategic province. In the aftermath of the protests in the summer of 2018, stakeholders in Baghdad and Basra convened in order to address the political crisis and to prevent a repeat in 2019. These deliberations resulted in the allocation of state money to Basra as well as the empowerment of the governor to sign off on projects without cumbersome committee oversight. At present, however, all signs point to continued disfunction, stalled projects, and low employment.



Shatt al-Arab, Basra, May 2019

As described in detail in the first policy brief in this study,⁶⁵ our contention is that ongoing failures are *not* primarily problems of strategic or technical gaps in the governmental response. Government failure in Basra, and the inability to make meaningful responses to protestors' demands, is first and foremost the result of a longstanding, intense competition among political faction over the province's immense resources and wealth. In Basra no single party or political actor is preeminent. Hikma, Da'awa (State of Law), Sadr, and Fadhilla have all competed for control over the past decade, and increasingly Badr and Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) are on the rise as powerful local blocs. These actors operate on a relatively flat political playing field, vying for control over Basra's strategic assets. Despite the populist rhetoric of the parties and claims to respond to demands for development, in practice the strategically-located and resource-rich province is seen as a major source of revenue. The parties and their affiliated employees stake out control over oil fields, border crossings, ports, gas fields, and government contracts.⁶⁶ Instead of good governance and provision of services, the parties are primarily engaged in directing public resources to the coffers of their institutions, thus furthering their capacity to strengthen local and national patronage networks.

In the second policy brief,⁶⁷ we explained the emergence of this competition over the course of three main periods. The initial period (approximately 2003 – 2008) was characterized by a frenzied process of state capture on the part of the political parties. Soon after the invasion, the Sadrists and their affiliate militias of the Mahdi Army became highly influential actors on the ground, engaging in a number of

⁶⁵ Saleem, ZA; Skelton, M. "Basra's Political Marketplace: Understanding Government Failure after the Protests." Konrad Adenauer Stiftung & IRIS (April 2019).

⁶⁶ The Hikma current, for instance, is in control of northern Rumaylah oil fields, the Safwan border crossing with Kuwait, and the port of al-Maqal in Shat al-Arab. Maliki's branch of the Da'awa party controls (60%) of the port of Umm Qasr, the southern Rumaylah oil fields, the Barjisia oil fields, Basra airport, and a petrochemical factory in addition to gas fields in Barjisia. The Sadrists control the sport city, the ministry of electricity departments and stations, Al-Jumhuria hospital, and Shalamcha border crossing with Iran. Badr and the AAH control the western Qurna oil fields, the Abu Fills port, and the companies in charge of screening goods passing through the Shalamcha border crossing. Fadhilla party controls government factories in northern Basra, and a fertilizer plant in the district of Abi Khasib. The party also wields large political and security influence over Basra. Several interviews with members of various Shia parties, administrative figures, provincial council members, and activists in Basra. For further discussion of party-controlled assets, see: Center for International and Strategic Policymaking, 'Basra Turbulences: the protests in the south and its local and regional consequences', (July, 18, 2018), <<https://www.makingpolicies.org/ar/posts/basraaa.php>>

⁶⁷ Skelton, M; Saleem, ZA. "Basra's Protest Movement and Unemployment: Contesting Party Dominance of the Oil Sector." Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and IRIS (June 2019).

illicit economic activities, including oil smuggling.⁶⁸ The Fadhillah party gained control of the post of the governor and the head of the state-owned Southern Oil Company (later renamed Basra Oil Company).⁶⁹ The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) (with Badr Corps as the military wing) and Da'wa party held strong assets and positions as well.⁷⁰ In short, the parties' capture of the state institutions in addition to numerous commercial firms placed the sources of Basra's wealth in their hands. The rapidly growing influence of these diffuse actors in Basra was in part a result of a declining security situation under the British-led occupation, enabling party-affiliated armed groups to impose their demands for additional resources by force. This period of violence came to a head in 2008, when then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki sent troops to Basra in order to quell the security crisis and assert the power of the central government. This offensive, known as Operation Charges of the Knights, temporarily cooled the intensity of the competition between militias (particularly weakening the Mahdi Army).⁷¹

The subsequent period (approximately 2008 – 2014) was characterized by an oil-driven economic boom on the one hand and rising demands on the part of the populace to have a share in the prosperity. With the political and security situation stabilized,⁷² Nouri Maliki moved to secure his national profile as well as Da'wa's position in the governorate by investing in the oil sector.⁷³ As a result of the newfound stability and Maliki's incentivizing policies, several IOCs including ExxonMobil, British Petroleum (BP), LukOil, and China's National Petroleum

⁶⁸ Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, 'Oiling the wheels of war: smuggling becomes the real economy of Iraq', *The Guardian*, (June 9, 2007), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/09/iraq-middleeast>

⁶⁹ Babak Rahimi, 'The Militia Politics of Basra', *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, Vol.5, No.13, (July 6, 2007), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-militia-politics-of-basra/>, Reidar Visser, 'Basra Crude: The Great Game of Iraq's Southern Oil', *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper No. 732*, (2007), https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2395776/WP_nr723_07_Visser.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, 'Where Iraq is Heading? Lessons From Basra', *Middle East Report*, (June 25, 2007), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/where-iraq-heading-lessons-basra>

⁷¹ Martin Chulov and Julian Borger, 'Charges of the Knights tames Lawless Basra', *The Guardian*, (December 10, 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/dec/10/iraq-withdrawal-basra-army-british>

⁷² Saleem al-Wazzan, 'Al-Maliki Emerges Triumphant in Basra', *Niqash*, (February 4, 2009), <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2380/>

⁷³ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'Basra, Southern Iraq and the Gulf: Challenges and Connections', *Research Paper, Kuwait Programme on Development*, Number 21, (February 2012), pp. 14-15, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/55665/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_Kuwait%20Programme_Coates_2012.pdf

Corporation,⁷⁴ in addition to hundreds of international and local subcontractors, started operations in Basra's oilfields.⁷⁵ In 2010, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs anticipated that the deals with foreign oil companies would generate 1.3 million jobs for Iraqis.⁷⁶ With this mass influx of wealth, Basrawis started to demand not only employment but also improved services. When large protests over the lack of electricity broke out in 2009 and again in 2011, the authorities under Maliki's orders invested massively in improving electricity, particularly on transportation and distribution of power in the province.



Basra Oil Company, May 2019

The third period (2015 – present) has been characterized by a growth of the protests into a truly mass movement, finally forcing the government to consider structural reforms. Just as soon as the government began making progress on

⁷⁴ Ahmed Mehdi, 'Iraq Oil: industry evolution and short and medium-term prospects', The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, (October 2018), <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Iraqi-Oil-industry-evolution-and-short-and-medium-term-prospects-WPM-79.pdf>

⁷⁵ References to 'subcontractors' in this paper refer to a wide range of entities, from large international subcontractors such as Schlumberger, Halliburton and Baker Hughes to small local private security companies affiliated with political parties. For information on the larger subcontractors, see Andrew E. Kramer, 'In Rebuilding Iraq's Oil Industry, US subcontractors Hold Sway', New York Times, (June 16, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/17/business/energy-environment/17oil.html>

⁷⁶ Mayada Daood, '12 Million Barrels of Oil Promise to Solve Unemployment Problem', Niqash, (February 12, 2010), <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/economy/2608/>

electricity in response to the 2009 and 2011 demonstrations, the protest movement shifted its discourse to other sets of demands. What Maliki failed to understand is that slogans such as “Give us Electricity” were not only an end in itself but also symbols for a broader sense of dissatisfaction with government. Maliki never made any serious steps towards meaningful structural reforms of the local political structure, and party-run networks remained firmly in control of all the important institutions. As early as 2015, protests were staged in the vicinity of the oilfields demanding jobs and an end to party-dominated nepotism in hiring.⁷⁷ The 2018 protests had a similar discourse but far exceeded the 2015 demonstrations in terms of scale, bring the entire province to a halt. The demonstrations were eventually squelched through a brutal securitized response on the part of the government and political parties; however, they forced the government’s hand into expediting a devolution of budgetary powers to the province with the stated aim of improving efficiencies.

At present, it would appear that the policy of devolution is meeting up against the realities of deeply entrenched institutional fragmentation resulting from 16 years of intense inter-party competition. If anything, the injection of more money into the provincial budget will only heighten the ferocity of this competition among factions rather than dampen it. A local government official noted: “The post of Basra’s governor has received great attention from both national and local political players particularly after the local government attained further powers from the federal government. Now several federal ministries have devolved their powers to the local government and this means that the governor in this very rich province will wield greater influence over the resources of Basra including the border crossings, the ports, and the oil fields. Therefore, it is not a surprise that local and national parties are competing to control the governor’s position in Basra. The governor has control over financial, administrative, and social issues that makes him significant for parties and influential individuals.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Alsumaria.tv, ‘Tens of unemployed young people demonstrate close to an oilfield in Basra demanding employment’, (January 21, 2015), <https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/122516/-عن-العمل-عشرات-الشباب-العاطلين-يتظاهرون>

⁷⁸ Interview with Mujib Hassani, member of Basra’s provincial council. Basra, April 4, 2019.

The competition among the various political factions for control over key institutions continues. The Basra Oil Company is one important example. Since the summer of 2018, Hikma's opponents have attempted to direct protestors' anger over employment towards the BOC and by extension to Hikma. Representatives of the Sadrism current,⁷⁹ Maliki's branch of the Da'wa Party,⁸⁰ the Fatah alliance (comprising Badr and Asayib), and Hanan Fatlawi's Al-Erada movement have accused the BOC of corruption, collusion with the IOCs/subcontractors, and overall negligence towards Basrawis' demands for jobs in the oil sector. In November 2018, protestors surrounded the residence of BOC head and Hikma loyalist Ehsan Abduljabar Esmael, accusing him of employing party members and relatives.⁸¹ Hikma's recent announcement of forming the opposition will only formalize the already deeply divided political establishment.

Moreover, the growing influence of the PMF and the Fatah Alliance in Basra has stoked controversy. When Abdul-Mahdi granted Hadi Ameri responsibilities for oversight of Basra reconstruction, some received the initiative with suspicion. An MP from Basra from Sayroon Coalition stated, "Hadi Ameri wants to be given responsibilities and roles in Basra for money. He will direct funds and projects to his allies in the PMF and then they will subcontract projects to others. We will eventually end up with these parties taking funds allocated to Basra without implementing service projects."⁸² An MP from the Fatah coalition countered this view: "Mr. Ameri has intervened and is now part of the solution to Basra's problems. Ameri is going to personally supervise monitoring the implementations of the service projects in the province such as water and electricity projects. Ministers and other government functionaries who control finances and decisions related to Basra's reconstruction would listen to Ameri."⁸³ Ameri's Fatah alliance was able to secure the largest numbers of seats (7 seats) during the May 2018 parliamentary elections. Fatah is now considered the main backer of governor Aydani.

⁷⁹ Interview with Rami Sakini, an MP from the Sadrism current (Sayroon). Baghdad, April 29, 2019.

⁸⁰ Interview with Samad Abdul-Khalaf, an MP from the State of Law coalition. Baghdad, April 29, 2019.

⁸¹ Baghdadtoday.news, 'In photos: tens of protestors surround the house of the head of Basra Oil Company in the middle of the governorate', (November 13, 2018), <https://baghdadtoday.news/news/65281/-باصور--عشرات-المتظاهرين>

⁸² Interview with Rami Sakini, MP from Basra from Sayroon Coalition. Baghdad, April 31, 2019.

⁸³ Interview with Uday Awad, MP from Basra from Fatah alliance. Basra, March 20, 2019.

Name of Coalition	Number of Seats	Number of Votes
Al- Fatih	6	151651
Sayroon	5	121111
Al-Nasr	5	108155
Dawlat Al- Qanoon	4	94584
Al- Hikma	2	57347
Rijal Al- Iraq	1	25835
Irada	1	23909
Al- Wataniya	1	23280

Table (2) 2018 election results in Basra (only those with seats listed)

As for the completion of government projects and furthering reconstruction, the governor's newfound powers would not shield him from the political marketplace even if he had the best of intentions. Though the governor now theoretically has the legal authority to select foreign contractors and initiate projects (though this power is disputed by some parties), his control over the lengthy and technically complex process of implementation is by no means absolute. Infrastructure projects require a reliable transfer of promised government funds from Baghdad, the flow of supplies through ports and across borders, visas for experts and employees, and numerous governmental approvals for contracted companies. All of these processes are routed through a bureaucracy that is co-opted by functionaries beholden to political parties, thereby injecting nearly limitless economically-motivated blockages. No single authority has jurisdiction over the entirety of the implementation chain, allowing different actors to halt projects in exchange for money or political concessions. Consequently, projects have repeatedly failed, giving rise to mass popular dissent and challenges to the political elites.

IV. CONCLUSION

This dysfunctional fragmentation of public authority is too often analyzed as if it were new. During and in the aftermath of the chaotic 2018 elections, analysts suggested that fragmentation of the so-called 'Shia bloc' marked a profound shift in the national political order. No longer, analysts argued, could one speak of a dominant Shia political class as a monolith pitted against Sunni Arab and Kurdish rival blocs. As the above cases show, however, such fragmentation has been part

and parcel of the post-2003 system. The competition over power and resources among Shia parties in Basra, and the various political factions in Mosul, is systemic and has generated governmental neglect and dysfunction for the past 16 years. Any set of meaningful policy solutions to improve reconstruction and reform would have to address the root question of the kind of post-invasion order is desirable and achievable.

In Mosul a chaotic, dysfunctional political competition was set in motion from the very first days of the invasion. Despite talk of consensus among the various local groups, the struggle over power was not an equal one. The military takeover of the city by Kurdish forces and the persistent sidelining of local Sunni Arabs in governance/security (largely due to the US policy of de-Baathification) eroded local trust in government. After years of Kurdish dominance and Sunni Arab neglect, in 2009 the push from Baghdad and the Americans to form a local Sunni Arab bloc led to the rise of Hadbaa under Athil Nujaifi. The newly formed Sunni Arab coalition immediately moved to force the Kurds out of all levels of government, effectively reversing the order of the previous years. Yet, from the beginning Hadbaa was internally fractured and quickly fell apart as soon as Nujaifi found himself isolated by both Maliki on the one hand and the Kurds on the other. The rivalry between Nujaifi and Maliki created an anti-government and anti-army discourse among local residents, a discourse that insurgents and eventually ISIS would capitalize upon in extending influence over the city and province. The ISIS period and aftermath marked a new era in Mosul's politics, as a host of external actors were ushered into the local political arena – both powerful Shia political blocs and external Sunni Arab parties. These external forces are themselves fractured. The disagreements within the Sunni Arab parties over the selection of Mosul's governor in 2019 led to the unraveling of a fragile alliance between Halboosi, Khanjar, and Abu Mazin.

In comparison to Mosul, the political marketplace in Basra is characterized by a relatively flat playing field among the various Shia parties. No group or set of groups was ever officially de-legitimized or excluded from the political process. Instead, the Sadrists, Fadhillah and other groups took up arms and utilized threats of violence to stake claim over local government institutions, contracts, and assets.

For a brief period between 2008 and 2011 the intensity of the violence and turmoil was quelled through the massive military operations of Maliki. Despite these successes, the Prime Minister did nothing to correct the more systemic dynamic of competition over party-dominated governmental institutions, a dysfunctional reality that had left most Basrawis excluded from employment and had left most Basra neighborhoods in a state of disrepair. In 2018, protests increasingly mounted in defiance of the political class, and no political party was spared from the protestors' wrath. Despite the intensity of public anger, there is little to no evidence that the political parties are making efforts towards responding meaningfully to protestor demands for better services, jobs, and infrastructure. Instead today, Sadrists, Fadhillah, Badr, Hikma and Asaib are all engaged in a high-stakes game over the province's vast wealth, including the governmental institutions themselves.

In Basra, the responses of the federal government to this state of affairs has involved a turn towards devolution. Concretely, this has injected immense funds into the local government and provided the governor with authority over distribution. As the local governmental apparatus is itself beholden to political factions, the increases in funding have only served to accelerate the struggle over the province's public institutions. The fact that Adil Abdul-Mahdi moved so quickly towards a policy that would effectively transfer wealth to powerful Shia political blocs should surprise no one. The Prime Minister is himself in a generally very weak position in the capital. Lacking a political bloc of his own, he is unable to enact any policy that contradicts the interests of the Shia blocs who placed him in the premiership as a compromise figure.

In Mosul, the persistence of an enormous IDP crisis, lack of housing, and a destroyed infrastructure has dampened the hopes of Maslawis for post-ISIS development and reconstruction. Local fears over the potential for a return of extremist groups have little to do with doubts towards the security apparatus. Rather it is a matter of governmental neglect of basic needs for housing and services. This neglect is not a unique product of the post-ISIS era. It is a reflection of successive administrations since 2003.

Any announcements of new infrastructure projects, job programs, or reform agendas must be viewed in light of a long-standing pattern of incompleteness. Projects are announced in proximity to elections and/or in response to political unrest but then ultimately fall to the wayside. Regardless of whomever holds the position of governor or controls the directorates, all of these major governmental projects are routed through a local bureaucracy that is co-opted by functionaries beholden to political parties, thereby injecting nearly limitless blockages into the process. A coherent reconstruction program in Mosul and Basra simply cannot be managed under such conditions, and the same holds true across Iraq. The protestors who took to the streets in Baghdad during October of 2019 were all too aware of the structural flaws in the post-2003 governance system, prompting their demands for a new political order.