



PERSPECTIVES

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How to Prevent a New Wave of Millions of Iraqi Refugees

by Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Mordechai Kedar

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A Shiite effort is already underway to purge Iraq of its majority Sunni population. The result may soon be a new mass exodus of Iraqi refugees, a multiplication of the migrant crisis that could have dire consequences for the rest of the world. One way to avoid this scenario is to turn Iraq into a federation of emirates – a solution that could also be productively applied to the West Bank, Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen.

Syrian President Bashar Assad is regaining power with the help of an Iranian Shiite coalition made up of Iranian fighters joined by Hezbollah as well as Iraqi and Afghan militias. It is possible that in the near future, this coalition will try to rid Syria of the millions of Sunnis who make up the majority of the country's citizens, in order to prevent further rebellions of the type Syria experienced from 1976 to 1982 and over the past six-and-a-half years.

After writing last week about this possibility, I was contacted by Sheikh Walid Azawi, an Iraqi Sunni living in exile in Europe, who heads a party called "The Patriotic 20 Rebellion." He described the situation in Iraq, where he claims that for years now, Tehran has been the real ruler, with its ayatollahs dictating Iraqi government policy and actions.

Iranian hegemony blends in well in Iraq, most of whose citizens are Shiite. Now that the Islamic caliphate established by ISIS in Iraq has disintegrated, the Sunnis there have no armed organization to protect them from Iranian and Iraqi Shiite rage.

The Shiites' attempt to rid the country of its Sunni minority is motivated by a desire for revenge. Since its creation in 1921, Iraq was ruled by the Sunni minority, less than a third the total population, most recently by Saddam

Hussein, who treated the Shiites with terrible cruelty. After his defeat in the 1991 Gulf War, for example, he used artillery to butcher thousands of Shiites who attempted to find safety at the gravesite of Hussein ibn Ali in the city of Najef.

There is an even older feud between the Iranians and Saddam's Sunni regime, dating back to the 1980-88 war, which took the lives of over a million people, both citizens and soldiers, on both sides. The war, during which both sides used chemical weapons, ended in Iran's defeat when the chemical warfare waged against Tehran killed thousands of civilians.

The Iraqi and Iranian Shiite desire for revenge on Saddam is now directed against his entire religious group, the Sunnis, who stand unprotected and unarmed against a strengthening Shiite world. The collective power of Sunni forces – made up of organizations such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, Syrian rebels, and countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Emirates, and Egypt – has been weakening rapidly over the past few months in the face of the growing strength of the Shiite coalition made up of Iran, Hezbollah, and the Iraqi and Afghan militias.

Sheikh Azawi claims that as a result of this enormous shift in the balance of power, the Shiites will do everything they can to expel the Sunnis from Iraq to any country, whether or not the receiving country is willing to accept them. If this does come to pass, about ten million Iraqi refugees will soon be joining the waves of the 15-20 million existing refugees. This new wave can turn Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Africa into economic disaster areas, leading to social unrest and political maelstroms. (Were this stark scenario to materialize, one should thank Iran and all those who strengthened that country over the past few years.)

What is the solution?

I asked the sheikh what solution he and his party propose to save the Iraqi Sunnis and convince them to remain in their homeland. His answer was a surprise: "The Emirate Solution," which he is convinced is the only approach that can save the Iraqi Sunnis from ethnic cleansing.

The Emirate Solution envisages partitioning the country into regional states along the lines of the US, or cantons as in the Swiss model, each with internal autonomy. Iraq would become a federation with a limited central government, while each emirate would run the lives of whatever group resides in its territory. Each emirate would lead its own life and refrain from interfering in the policies of the others. Each would be ruled by the local sheikh who stands at the head of the families within its borders, following the population's social traditions. This plan, claims Sheikh Azawi, should create harmony, stability, and peaceful relations among neighboring emirates for the good of all the citizenry.

The Emirate Solution would also grant self-rule to the Kurds of Northern Iraq, making the establishment of an independent Kurdish state unnecessary and circumventing the violent antagonism of the Iranians, Turks, and Arabs to its existence.

The Kurdish region of northern Iraq is surrounded by states that do not share Kurdish dreams of independence, and it has no corridor to the sea. If the neighboring states were to ally against the Kurdish state, should one be established, they would prevent goods and people from reaching it, and the Kurds would have no way of leading normal lives. How would they export oil and other products? How would they import necessities?

If the Kurds were instead to achieve independence within the framework of the Emirate Solution, ending the struggle that has been going on for decades, where would be the problem? Clearly with Iran, which will not agree to such a plan now that it has taken over Iraq – unless it is forced to do so. The only power capable of forcing Tehran to agree to anything is the US.

Sheikh Azawi is prepared to go to the US at a moment's notice to meet with decision-makers there and explain the logic behind his peace plan for Iraq. The Americans, however, are busy dealing with other issues: North Korea; the domestic battle between the political right and left; who is going to resign or be fired from Trump's staff; and a rapid series of natural disasters. The US Army left Iraq seven years ago with no desire ever to return. It will be no easy task to sustain American interest at a time of so many other serious challenges.

The Emirates Solution in other Middle Eastern states

Afghanistan is another country that gives Washington a blinding headache. The 17 years of American involvement there, the spilled American blood and enormous amounts of money poured into the country, have not yielded any appreciable results – for one main reason.

Washington has been using all its power to preserve the artificial Afghan entity established by the British and the Russians in the 19th century. This is despite the fact that the country is riddled with ethnic strife that prevents the creation of a homogeneous, united nation. The only results so far have been blood, fire, and tears.

If the Americans and their allies were instead to dismantle the illegitimate entity called Afghanistan and turn it into autonomous or independent states based on local familial rule, so that it is governed legitimately by heads of families and tribes, Afghanistan could become a land of peace and tranquility. Its religious, family, and ethnic groups could lead their own lives and allow one another to do the same in peace.

Interestingly, the same Emirate Solution could be applied to the seven cities of the West Bank in addition to the Gazan emirate established a decade ago. I am not a fan of Hamas, but to all intents and purposes Gaza is an effective state, and Israel must find a way to deter the jihadist regime controlling it. Establishing emirates in the West Bank would grant the people there stability, prosperity, and quiet, and would give Israel peace.

The same solution can solve Jordan's problem as well. The kingdom can be divided into a Palestinian emirate, perhaps more than one, and a Bedouin emirate. The king would be a symbolic figure, as is the Queen of England. Sudan has already split into two states, but both should be divided into smaller, more homogenous emirates in order to bring more stability to that blood-soaked country.

Yemen, a completely tribal society, would benefit as well from the Emirate Solution. It would become more governable and stable, certainly in comparison to the failed central government it has at present, which has brought many thousands to the point of hunger, disease, suffering, and death.

Sheikh Azawi's dream, which I share, could become the basic principle employed by the world to solve the Middle East problem. Had it been employed in Syria five years ago, many of its half million dead citizens would be alive today.

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Dr. Mordechai Kedar is a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. He served for 25 years in IDF military intelligence specializing in Syria, Arab political discourse, Arab mass media, Islamic groups, and Israeli Arabs, and is an expert on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups.

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