

## **The Challenges of Nation- State Building in the Islamic World (Case Study: Iraq)**

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### **Abstract**

Undoubtedly, the process of nation-state building has been one of the most significant challenges faced by many countries across the world, particularly in Islamic nations, over the past century. This issue is so critical that it can be argued that the primary root of insecurity and instability in many of these countries lies in the weakness and ongoing crisis of nation-state building, especially in states that function as quasi-states or post-colonial entities. In such circumstances, the inability of these states to provide the basic functions of statehood has paved the way for insecurity, instability, and both internal and international conflicts. Iraq stands as a prime example of a failed state, struggling to transition through the process of nation-state building, and as a result, it has faced multiple domestic and foreign challenges. This paper seeks to evaluate the complexities and obstacles of nation-state building in Islamic countries, with a particular focus on Iraq. The analysis highlights several major challenges hindering the successful establishment of a cohesive nation-state in Iraq, including the historical roots and barriers preventing the formation of a unified national identity, the deep ethnic and sectarian divisions, external interventions, and the failure of governance, particularly in the post-Saddam era of consociational democracy.

### **Keywords:**

Nation-State Building, Islamic World, Middle East, Iraq.

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## **Introduction**

The modern states in today's international system are products of the Westphalian order, which emerged in 1648. Initially, this state model developed in Europe and, through the expansion of Western powers, spread to other parts of the world. However, the Islamic world, particularly the Middle East—which had been under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire for seven decades—only began to witness the transition to modern nation-state building in the 20th century, especially after the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate system. Consequently, for the states in this region, the process of nation-state building has been a relatively new phenomenon, accompanied by numerous challenges.

Among the countries facing the greatest difficulties in this transition is Iraq, a state with a highly diverse political, ethnic, religious, and racial composition. The imposition of a top-down, colonial state-building process—embodied by agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement—exacerbated these challenges (Bakhshi, 2021: 10-12). In the absence of a unified national identity, authoritarian-military regimes took control of these countries, with Iraq experiencing repeated coups, political party rivalries, and additional complications that hindered its progress toward nation-state building. Moreover, external interventions further compounded the obstacles to achieving a functional state with the characteristics of good governance. These interventions, combined with internal divisions, prevented the emergence of stable and cohesive states in the region.

This article aims to examine the process of nation-state building in Iraq, focusing on the key challenges that have hindered the successful realization of this process. It explores why the efforts made—particularly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the establishment of a consensual government under Iraq's new constitution—have not led to the creation of a stable nation-state. Instead, these efforts have contributed to the rise of terrorist movements such as ISIS, ongoing internal instability and insecurity, widespread public dissatisfaction with successive governments, and continued foreign interventions. The research methodology employed in this study is descriptive-analytical, with data collected from library sources and online research. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that have impeded Iraq's transition to nation-state building and highlight the broader implications for governance and stability in the region.

### **1. Conceptual framework**

In the political science and international relations literature, the concept of the state, alongside the concept of power, is considered a fundamental and

primary notion within these fields. Hence, the process of state-building is of critical importance. Although various forms of state-building exist, for the success of new states, it is essential that they derive legitimacy from the national identity of their inhabitants and possess the requisite political legitimacy. In other words, the process of state-building must coincide with nation-building to be valid. Nevertheless, questions such as how to achieve an optimal nation-state building and effective governance based on good governance, or whether state-building or nation-building should precede the other, or whether both can be realized simultaneously, remain debated among scholars of political science and international relations.

Traditionally, nation-state building has been viewed as a unified and definitive process, treated as an integrated action. However, the application of the concept of the nation-state, as seen in Western states, is not feasible for many actors in the global south. This is due to several reasons: first, the clear distinction between state and nation is often absent, and second, many states are underdeveloped, while the concept of nationhood is incomplete, due to identity fragmentation and divisions along ethnic, religious, and racial lines. Consequently, the state-building and nation-building processes can be defined conceptually in two parts: it is possible that state-building is more advanced than nation-building in some countries, or vice versa. Nevertheless, these processes are closely interrelated, and one cannot function effectively without the other. Historically, two primary models of nation-state building have emerged:

- **The Bottom-Up Model:** This model emerged from the experience of European societies, where a nation is first formed, and then, based on that, a state is established. In this model nation-state building is seen as a natural historical process. Liberal theories emphasize this model, suggesting that nation-state building is achieved through democratization or social democracy. This method also emphasizes the importance of consensus among different ethnic and religious groups within a country. This model can be further divided into two sub-models: the Anglo-American model of democracy, based on a two-party system, which is considered relatively stable and efficient; and the European model of nation-state building, which focuses on multi-party systems and coalition governments. Although the latter is perceived as less stable and efficient due to frequent changes in governance, it was deemed necessary in societies emerging from decolonization with significant ethnic and religious diversity. In these context, a nation-state building process based on force could lead to the suppression of minority rights and foster separatist tendencies.

- The Top-Down Model: Contrary to the European experience, in the top-down model, which is often associated with the American context, the state precedes the formation of the nation. Initially, European advances in state systems and institutions were imported into the United States, leading to significant state-building progress. Habermas asserts that nations did not create governments and nationalism; rather, the reverse is true. In this model, a strong state with developing institutions gradually unifies a highly heterogeneous population using tools such as nationalism and the growth of civil rights, eventually forming a cohesive nation. The state acts as the primary architect of the nation-building process. This model has often been imposed on many countries in the global south through authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, where power is consolidated by suppressing the demands of ethnic or religious groups. This approach was frequently applied to countries under colonial domination, where rulers were chosen with external influence and control.

In the 1980s, following the failure of liberal nation-building in newly independent states and the prioritization of economic development over political development, some Western scholars re-emphasized the necessity of authoritarian state-driven nation-building in these societies, lauding bureaucratic authoritarian regimes. This approach persisted until the end of the Cold War. With the emergence of Central Asian and Caucasian nations, there was renewed interest in liberal nation-state building. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent occupation of Iraq brought the issue of nation-state building back to the forefront, particularly in the context of American neo-conservatism. While the initial political project failed, a liberal nation-state building process was initiated in Iraq, which spurred broader political transformations in the country and the Middle East region.

In this process, state-building is understood as the establishment of judicial, executive, legislative institutions, as well as the creation of a military and security force, with stability being the primary focus. Nation-building refers to the creation of a social space wherein its members live and work together. This involves historical continuity and a territorial foundation that guides a nation within a shared framework. The integration of these two concepts, whether from top-down or bottom-up, leads to the formation of modern statehood based on political nationalism and national identity. Nationalism signifies the aspiration for a state that aligns with the nation's characteristics, distinguishing it from other countries, while national identity refers to the symbolic and cultural system through which a nation defines itself. (wolf, 2011). In nationalism, the legitimacy of the political order is

the primary concern, while in national identity, the focus shifts to the legitimacy of the social order or social cohesion. Nationalism is more closely tied to the authority of the state, whereas national identity pertains to the authority and unity of the nation. This does not imply that these two concepts should be separate or distinct from each other; rather, they operate on different levels and must work in harmony. A lack of alignment between nationalism and national identity can lead to negative outcomes, as seen in Iraq, where many of the challenges in nation-state building stemmed from a failure to understand this dynamic. In fact, The discord between the state's political order and the nation's social cohesion exacerbated the difficulties in forming a stable and inclusive national framework. In this context, good governance has never fully materialized in Iraq. After the fall of Saddam, the country lacked a strong central government, and until 2004, direct governance was under the control of coalition forces. Even after 2004, when power was transferred to the Iraqis, a fragile government emerged once again, one that lacked public support and was incapable of fulfilling essential public functions. This was especially true in Iraq's deeply divided ethnic, linguistic, and religious landscape, fraught with entrenched conflicts. Such a fragile state could not establish effective and efficient governance. Good governance, particularly in political, security, economic, and social realms, requires a comprehensive national government. According to the definition, "this government should be capable of ensuring security and providing services to citizens across various sectors, while fostering mutual trust and agreement between citizens and the government. All these factors are prerequisites that have not existed in Iraq" (Azar Edward, 2000). Thus, the absence of these essential preconditions has been a key factor in Iraq's inability to achieve good governance.

## **2. The Background of Nation-State Building in the Middle East**

One of the most significant features of Middle Eastern countries is their relatively recent emergence. Many of these nations, prior to the fall and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and even after World War II, were either part of the Ottoman Empire or under the mandate of major world powers. Their formation was largely influenced by international imperatives. As a result, many of the new states in the Middle East, which were often created with artificial borders imposed by global powers, developed culturally and ethnically heterogeneous structures (). This diversity pushed their political leaders toward authoritarianism in an effort to maintain political unity.



In fact, a form of nation-state building emerged through coercion, relying heavily on ideologies such as nationalism. Consequently, the process of nation-state formation in the Middle East did not follow gradual or logical phases but rather adapted to the exigencies of preserving the survival of states or governments, often resulting in varied forms of governance (Parsadoost, Manouchehr, 1990). Each country and its people, based on their specific social and political forces and the degree of cultural and national homogeneity, experienced unique patterns of state-building and national identity formation. However, in many of these countries, due to cultural, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity, the modern concept of a nation-state—where citizens share common goals and interests, and the state operates beyond ethnic and tribal affiliations, rooted in collective will—has not fully developed. This has exacerbated structural and internal issues, leading to identity and legitimacy crises in the context of globalization, which have become major political, social, and security concerns. Furthermore, external challenges and interventions by foreign powers in the Middle East have intensified the region's crises, activating centrifugal forces, terrorist groups, and political opposition within these countries. These circumstances have rendered the political systems in the region vulnerable to internal shifts, such as revolutions or regime changes, and have led to a reliance on external powers for stability. Consequently, these states have often adopted strategies of preserving the status quo, forming alliances, and even depending on extra-regional powers in their foreign policies (Marger, 1998).

In Iraq case, the process of state-building in Iraq has faced significant challenges, primarily due to the historical role of British colonial influence during the mandate period, the country's reliance on oil revenues, the presence of a rentier state, and military intervention in political matters (Garayag Zandi, 2010: 11-17). These factors have contributed to the inefficiency of Iraq's political system. Moreover, the nation-building process in Iraq has been fraught with difficulties due to the artificial construction of the state, conflicting nationalist ideologies, and the combination of Arab nationalism with ideological movements (Javdani Moqadam, 2009). Iraq, as one of the Arab countries in the Middle East, was artificially created after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Foreign colonial powers, particularly the British, ignored Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious identities, establishing a state without considering these complexities. Today, Iraq is undergoing a challenging phase of transitioning from state-building to nation-building. This process, historically pursued through coercion and suppression, became a political project following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, underpinned by the neoconservative agenda of the U.S. to implement a model liberal democracy

in Iraq as part of the broader Middle East initiative (Phillips, 2005). The role of foreign powers, particularly Britain and other European states, has been instrumental in shaping modern Iraq. The formation of Iraq, without recognizing Britain's involvement or the competition among European powers with the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century, would have been almost impossible. Notable treaties like Sykes-Picot, Sevres, and Lausanne were critical in defining Iraq's territorial boundaries. Kurdish nationalism emerged as a response to the marginalization of Kurdish identity during this period, notably following the Kurdish uprisings led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani (Javdani Moqadam, 2009). At the time of Iraq's independence in 1932, Iraq's demographic was diverse: 53% of the population were Arab Shiites, 21% were Arab Sunnis, 14% were Kurdish Sunnis, and the remaining 12% comprised Christians, Turkmen, and Jews (Fuller, 1999). Despite the Sunni minority, Sunni-dominated governments held power, largely because Britain, in an effort to reduce its military costs, reinforced Iraq's military. This was seen as a necessary step toward building a modern state. However, the Sunni political elite, who inherited the administrative and military apparatus from the Ottoman Empire, continued to suppress non-Sunni groups, creating further divisions and marginalization.

So, Britain's approach to building Iraq based on territorial identification rather than people led to the establishment of an authoritarian regime. This rejected Britain's claim to introduce a modern state, as Iraq remained controlled by a Sunni elite, with the army and political institutions dominated by former Ottoman officials. This centralization of power and exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Shiites and Kurds, further destabilized the country. The fall of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent U.S. occupation led to significant political shifts. The U.S. pursued de-Baathification, which dismantled the existing political and military structure, further complicating Iraq's state-building process. The country's attempt to transition from authoritarianism to a liberal democracy has faced resistance, not only from traditional power structures within Iraq but also from neighboring countries and regional dynamics. The broader Middle East has seen a similar struggle with nation-building, with countries facing crises of identity, legitimacy, and governance. These crises are often exacerbated by attempts to modernize politically and economically while maintaining strong nationalist ideologies and authoritarian governance (Soltaninejad, 2005). The inherent difficulties in Iraq's nation-state building process are rooted in the artificiality of the country's formation, conflicts among different nationalist ideologies, and the ideological nature of Arab nationalism. Iraq's two major internal divisions—ethnic (Arabs and Kurds)

and sectarian (Shiites and Sunnis)—have historically made it difficult to achieve national unity. For example, Kurdish-Arab relations highlight the ethnic divide, while the Sunni-Shiite conflict underscores the sectarian rift. These deep divisions are not just ideological but are also reinforced by historical grievances and political marginalization.

Furthermore, Iraq's state-building efforts have failed to foster common ground or expand a sense of collective national identity. This situation is not unique to Iraq but is emblematic of many Middle Eastern countries that were artificially constructed and ruled through suppression and nationalism. For instance, Faisal I, Iraq's first king under British rule, and his successors relied heavily on military power to suppress Kurdish and Shiite uprisings, thereby preventing Iraq's disintegration. The situation in Iraq remained unresolved until the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, culminating in the US-led invasion and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam's Baathist government. This invasion marked the beginning of profound shifts in Iraq's political, security, and social structures, leading to significant consequences both within Iraq and across the broader Middle East region (Al-Abadi, 2017: 123-125 ). One of the most important outcomes of the US invasion was undoubtedly the initiation of the nation-state building process in Iraq. This process unfolded through two primary frameworks: the project of state-building and the broader process of nation-building. These efforts left a deep impact on the structure of power and politics in Iraq, as well as on the security and political dynamics of the Middle East. In the following sections, we will explore the key challenges Iraq faced during its transition toward nation-state building.

### **3. The Challenges of Nation- State Building in Iraq**

As previously mentioned, the incomplete process of nation-state building is arguably the most significant challenge facing the Iraqi state today. This issue has effectively led to numerous political, economic, social, and security problems both domestically and internationally. The following sections will examine the specific challenges encountered during Iraq's transition towards nation-state building:

#### **3.1. Historical Challenges and Obstacles to Nation-State Building**

Although Iraq can be considered the cradle of Mesopotamian civilization, historical developments, particularly during the Ottoman period and especially in its aftermath, have posed significant barriers to the formation of a modern state. The artificial establishment of a state, driven by the interests of Britain and France, without considering the diverse identities of the



inhabitants, and based on political calculations, played a pivotal role in preventing Iraq's transition to modern statehood. This artificial formation contributed to deepening internal divisions, conflicts, and even regional tensions.

Throughout Iraq's history, despite various ideological aspirations to create a unified national identity, these attempts have failed to overcome the political, ethnic, and sectarian considerations that continue to dominate the country. The confrontation between Iraqi, Arab, and ethnic nationalism has not only intensified conflicts but also led to the repression of various groups throughout the country's history. Among these, Arab nationalism has had a stronger influence, particularly due to the internal divisions among Arabs under Ottoman rule (Stansfield, 2007: 10). While the Kurds have also made efforts to establish a state under the principle of "one nation, one state," their endeavors were hindered by their dispersal across several countries, limiting their ability to gain traction with Arab nationalism. The fusion of Arab nationalism with ideological elements in Iraq was initially proposed by Sati' al-Husri, but it was Michel Aflaq, the founder of the Ba'ath Party in the 1940s, who transformed this idea into a strategic movement. Aflaq embraced al-Husri's concept of Arab identity but opposed the notion that Arabness was solely tied to the Arabic language. Instead, he sought to combine Arab nationalism with the ideals of socialism. This movement first gained traction among European-educated intellectuals in Syria, leading to the formation of the Arab Ba'ath Party in 1943. By joining forces with other pan-Arab groups, this movement ultimately paved the way for the creation of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in 1953, which advocated for a united Arab superstate stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf.

However, the Ba'athist vision also proved insufficient for Iraq's nation-building process. Under Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime, all political and religious movements that diverged from Ba'athist ideology were brutally repressed and eliminated from the political landscape. Consequently, after Saddam's fall, the failure of the U.S.-backed top-down nation-state building process, coupled with Sunni dissatisfaction over their diminished role and the Kurds' aspirations for decentralization, led to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. In the absence of a unifying national idea for state-building, and with ongoing divisions, extremist groups gained power, posing significant threats to Iraq's sovereignty. Despite the eventual defeat of ISIS, no consensus emerged on establishing an inclusive government in the post-conflict era. Each political, ethnic, and religious faction remains focused on securing a larger share of power, prioritizing their own interests over a broader national vision for Iraq. Consequently, the idea of pursuing

national interests — rather than the interests of specific political, ethnic, or religious groups — remains largely absent from the political discourse in Iraq.

### **3.2. Demographics of Iraq and the Challenge of Ethnic and Sectarian Divides**

From a sociological perspective, Iraq is home to diverse ethnic and sectarian divisions. The main ethnic divide is between Arabs and Kurds, while the major religious split is between Shia and Sunni Muslims. These two primary lines create three major ethno-religious groups in Iraq: the Kurds, most of whom are Sunni, though a small segment, known as the Feyli Kurds, are Shia and reside in the Kurdistan region; Sunni Arabs; and Shia Arabs. In addition to these key groups, Iraq is also home to other ethnic and religious minorities, including Turkmens, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Yazidis. Furthermore, Iraq, particularly in its rural communities, has a long-standing tribal structure that has persisted for centuries. This tribal system is more pronounced in remote rural areas in the northwest and the southern regions of the country. Iraq's population, which hovers around 45 million, is notably fragmented along ethnic, religious, and geographical lines, each of which contributes to the distinctive identity of these groups. This fragmentation has led to the formation of various political and militia groups that reflect their respective ethnic and sectarian backgrounds. These groups, in their efforts to secure greater political power or through independent actions, have posed significant challenges to the central government.

The ethnic-sectarian divisions within Iraq, along with the diverging interests and often conflicting goals of Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish groups in the new political and economic frameworks, have posed a substantial obstacle to building legitimate political institutions. Despite the adoption of a new constitution after the fall of the Ba'ath Party and the U.S. military occupation in 2003, the country's ethnic and religious divides have hampered political consensus. The U.S., in its post-invasion strategy, prioritized security-building projects, largely neglecting Iraq's ethnic and sectarian dynamics. This approach was based on lessons from their successful state-building efforts in post-World War II Germany and Japan, but Iraq lacked the democratic institutions and economic stability found in those earlier examples (Bello, 2021). Moreover, unlike Germany and Japan, Iraq was not an ethnically homogenous state. Despite U.S. experience with ethnic issues in places like Kosovo and Haiti, it could not translate these lessons effectively to Iraq.

Alongside the role of elites, competition between various ethnic and religious groups for control over political and economic resources has created a heavily securitized environment. This dynamic has stunted the development of civil society, with all political, social, and economic issues being pursued from a security-oriented perspective (Hameed, 2022: 125). The inability of the government to manage the resulting crises has led to these groups resorting to violence and ethnocentric actions, further exacerbating instability and foreign intervention in the country. Additionally, the political leadership's affiliation with ethnic and sectarian groups, as well as their inefficacy due to irrelevant professional backgrounds, has further diminished the state's ability to tackle these structural challenges. As a result, Iraq's government remains entangled in the complexities of managing its multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society, with significant implications for the country's political stability and social cohesion.

### **3.3. Foreign Interventions and the Failure of Nation- State Building in Iraq**

Undoubtedly, a significant part of Iraq's challenges in nation- state building stems from foreign interventions. This issue dates back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, with Britain's role in creating the Iraqi state during the mandate period, and continues with U.S. and other countries' interventions in the post-Saddam era.

A review of Iraq's geopolitical situation shows that it, like other Arab nations in the Middle East, was artificially constructed by colonial powers after the Ottoman Empire's dissolution. These powers, particularly Britain, did not consider Iraq's ethnic and sectarian diversity when establishing the modern state. As a result, Iraq was a unified country on the map, but it was divided in reality and it remained in the process of nation-state building (Dodge, 2005). Iraq was artificially created by Britain from the very beginning, leaving a lasting legacy of instability. This legacy is characterized by the establishment of a weak state dominated by a Sunni minority, which has led to internal conflicts such as the growth of Shiite and Kurdish movements and the rise of ethnic separatism. This British legacy ensured that Iraq faced two distinct internal movements: one driven by external aspirations of autonomy (the Kurds, who sought to escape central authority), and the other by internal ambitions for control (the Shiites, striving for power within the country). In other words, the political history of Iraq during the British mandate was one of centralization, with attempts to manage and manipulate social divisions to maintain control.

After the fall of Saddam, the direct intervention of the U.S. in Iraq's internal politics, along with the supportive role of some Arab states in backing Sunni factions to weaken the central government, and Israel's support for the Kurds, including backing the Kurdish independence referendum, exacerbated Iraq's internal power struggles. In the meantime, contrary to widespread propaganda against Iran's role in Iraq, Iran's role have always adhered to principles of good neighborliness and respect for Iraq's territorial integrity and cooperating with the central Iraqi government. Iran has also been involved in combating terrorist groups, notably ISIS, at the official request of the Iraqi government, which has resulted in the sacrifice of Iranian forces. Furthermore, Iran has maintained relations with all Iraqi political factions in an effort to preserve Iraq's national unity. However, the weakness of Iran's public diplomacy and the interests of some internal and external actors in damaging Iran-Iraq relations have fueled extensive media campaigns against the Islamic Republic of Iran. These campaigns, especially in Iraqi, Arab, and Western media, require a clear explanation of the realities of Iran's approach and actions in preserving Iraq's territorial integrity, enhancing its national sovereignty, and contributing to the successful transition toward nation-state building. In sum, foreign interventions, whether historical (from Britain) or more recent (from the U.S. and other regional actors), have played a central role in preventing Iraq from successfully building a cohesive, independent nation-state. While Iran's role is often subject to critique, its involvement has focused on maintaining Iraq's territorial unity and supporting its fight against terrorism. Effective public diplomacy is essential for clarifying Iran's role in helping Iraq move toward a more stable and unified nation-state structure.

#### **3.4. Governance Inefficiency: From Military Dictatorship to the New Consensual Democracy in Iraq**

Another crucial factor that has significantly impeded Iraq's transition to effective nation-state building is the inefficiency of governance, both during the era of military dictatorship and under the current framework of a new consensual democracy. Iraq's inability to implement stable and effective governance has been a persistent obstacle in achieving political unity, national cohesion, and long-term stability. The emergence and continuity of states are evaluated in political science theories in two key phases. The first phase involves the formation of a state and the acceptance of its legitimacy and credibility by its citizens. The second phase revolves around the state's efficiency in exerting effective power, meeting the political, economic, and security needs of various societal groups, which is considered the most

critical factor for the stability and longevity of any government. These two phases can also be applied to assess the Iraqi state. The contemporary Iraqi state is an inheritor of both structural and supra-structural issues tied to the creation of modern Iraq.

For decades, Iraq was governed by a centralized and authoritarian military dictatorship, notably under Saddam Hussein. During this period, governance was characterized by the concentration of power within a narrow circle, often centered around the Sunni Arab minority, while other ethnic and religious groups, particularly the Shiites and Kurds, were marginalized or repressed. The governance model under dictatorship relied heavily on coercion, military force, and suppression of dissent, which prevented any organic nation-state building process that could have led to national consensus and inclusivity. The militarized, top-down approach to governance under dictatorship stifled political pluralism, disregarded the country's diverse ethnic and sectarian composition, and exacerbated the sense of alienation among large segments of the population. As a result, the governance framework was inherently unstable, fostering long-term grievances and unrest that persisted even after the fall of the regime.

So, the structural issues surrounding nation-state building in Iraq have deep historical roots. Since Iraq's formation and the dominance of authoritarian regimes, the lack of a successful nation-state building process has naturally imposed fundamental challenges on the country. These are not unique to Iraq but are foundational obstacles that confront many Arab states in the Middle East as they transition from traditional, authoritarian, and tribal governance systems to more democratic and national forms of government. Some of the key challenges facing Iraq's nation-state building process include the constitution that reflects the consensus of all political groups, the equitable distribution of national sovereignty based on the satisfaction of all ethnic and sectarian groups, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the avoidance of the use of force. These issues have been central to Iraq's modern nation-state building struggles.

In addition to Iraq's inherent structural problems, the failure of the U.S.-led nation-state building project in the country has further complicated matters. This project, part of the broader Greater Middle East Initiative, aimed to create a model state in Iraq. However, it encountered significant obstacles. With the rise of Shiite factions and the establishment of a government dominated by Shiite majorities, U.S.-supported political groups found themselves in the minority. Moreover, the expansion of insecurity, the failure of U.S. forces to establish stability, and the emergence of terrorist groups—most notably ISIS—led to long-standing conflicts between the



central government and these violent movements, further undermining the U.S. project. So, the challenges facing nation- state building in Iraq are not limited to its internal structural problems and conflicts. External crises and interventions, driven by regional and international actors with competing goals and interests, have compounded the challenges for Iraq. These interventions, fueled by the divergent and often conflicting interests of external powers, have introduced political, security, and social complexities into Iraq's landscape (Azeez, 2010: 70-73). In sum, Iraq's path from military dictatorship to consensual democracy has not resolved the core issues of governance inefficiency. While the post-Saddam political system was designed to be inclusive, it has instead entrenched divisions and made effective governance elusive. Without addressing these fundamental issues of governance—both the legacies of dictatorship and the limitations of the current power-sharing model—Iraq will continue to face significant challenges in its journey toward nation-state building, political stability, and national unity.

### **Conclusion**

Nation-state building is one of the most critical subjects in the sociology of international relations, as it plays a key role in understanding the current and future prospects for stability, security, and development in countries. This issue holds particular importance for third-world nations, especially Islamic states in the Middle East, which encounter numerous hurdles in their transition towards successful nation-state building. In Iraq's case, an analysis of its nation-state building process reveals that both internal and external factors are crucial in determining the future trajectory of its political, security, economic, and social structures. Iraq's efforts toward nation-building have been hindered by internal challenges, such as ethnic and sectarian divisions, weak governance, and a legacy of authoritarian rule. These internal difficulties are compounded by external factors, including foreign interventions and regional power struggles, which have complicated Iraq's efforts to forge a unified national identity and develop an inclusive and effective government. In summary, this analysis highlights four primary challenges to Iraq's nation-state building: (1) historical obstacles to constructing a unified national identity, (2) ethnic, religious, and racial divisions, (3) external interventions, and (4) the inefficiency of Iraq's ruling governments in establishing good governance and fostering the inclusive participation of all groups in the creation of a unified and national Iraq.

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