Iraq is on the brink of collapse

The situation in Syria, where the violent conflict between the Bashar al-Assad regime and the armed opposition, which is half composed of foreign mercenary terrorists in the pay of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, has significantly overshadowed events in Iraq that may have consequences for the region at least as serious as the outcome of the war in Syria. A Sunni revolution, or at least an intifada (uprising) against Nouri al-Maliki’s Shiite government has in effect begun in Iraq. An acute standoff between Sunnis and Shiites got underway last December when demonstrations demanding al-Maliki’s resignation for usurping power and marginalizing the Sunni community began in Sunni areas throughout the country. On April 23, however, pro-government security forces crossed a line when they used weapons against protesters in the northern village of Huweija near Kirkuk. The killing of nearly 50 civilians made it a powder keg, and riots in which weapons were used broke out all over the country — in the western city of Ramallah, the suburbs of Baghdad, Baiji in the North, etc. More than 250 people were killed and over 400 injured in five days of sectarian violence.

People in Iraq have begun calling this a new civil war on religious grounds like what took place between 2006 and 2009. Shiite soldiers, who make up the majority of the army, and fighters of the pro-government Sunni Sahwa militia have threatened to start a war against the armed rebels who opposed the al-Maliki government. If that happens, it will put Iraq on the brink of collapse, especially since Kurdistan has been autonomous and outside the jurisdiction of Iraq’s central government for a long time, ruled by its own laws and moving steadily and gradually towards proclaiming itself an independent state.

The prime minister himself is largely to blame for the current conflict. His attitude towards Sunnis has led almost all of the Sunnis in his cabinet to resign. In addition, the Kurds stopped participating in it earlier and are unwilling to reconcile. That essentially means the country is being ruled by members of a single faith — Shiites.

The religious and ethnic discord sown by Saddam Hussein can be blamed, of course. He subjected both the Shiites and Kurds to the will of his clan, whose members belonged to the Sunni minority. The previous US administration can also be accused of causing the current problems. After occupying Iraq, it eliminated almost all Sunnis from government bodies and relied exclusively on Shiites and Kurds. However, that is only a partial explanation for what has happened.

Indeed, the current outbreak of hostilities has largely been instigated from outside the country, including foreign intervention by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which are striving to use Sunnis to against Shiites in order to topple the pro-Iran al-Maliki government, which is assisting the legitimate government of Bashar al-Assad against the armed opposition. It has long been open knowledge that Riyadh and Doha are exploiting the dissatisfaction of the Sunnis, who have been discriminated against since Hussein was overthrown. They have been assisting the Sunnis in their fight against the central government in Baghdad, initially with money and then with weapons and fighters. The flow of aid became especially generous after Iraq refused to stop supporting Syria’s legitimate government. Saudi Arabia and Qatar again began raising the bogeyman of a Shiite threat in the Persian Gulf in a form of a Tehran-Shiite Iraq-Alawite Syria axis.

The hatred toward Iran felt in the Persian Gulf monarchies at the state level and by the Wahhabis towards Shiites on religious grounds have so blinded the ruling clans in Riyadh and Doha that they did not foresee that a Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq would only strengthen Kurdish separatism and result in Kurdistan withdrawing from the Arab state that Iraq still is. The Wahhabi analysts, if they can be called such, cannot think that after Iraqi Kurdistan declares...
independence it could be joined by the Kurdish regions of Syria and Turkey, and then a powerful Kurdish state with a population of almost 30 million would be hovering over northern Arabia. And that state would hardly have had friendly feelings towards Arabs, considering the bitter history of recent decades. But a powerful Kurdistan would clearly serve the interests of the United States, which would gain powerful leverage over the Persian Gulf Arabs, the main source of hydrocarbons for the world market. Israel would benefit from a weakening of the Arabs, also, as would Iran. An independent Kurdistan would make a strong ally against the Arabs.

However, things this obvious are unlikely to occur to the policy makers in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Otherwise, Riyadh and Doha would have understood that by undermining Syria they are simultaneously bringing about Iraq’s collapse. They are already taking steps of a financial and disruptive nature within Iraq that can only accelerate the process. Moreover, they are undiscriminating in their choice of allies within the country’s Sunni community — they include former Baathists, fighters belonging to al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia who are entrenched in Western Iraq’s Al Anbar province, and people on the fringes of tribes living off attacks on convoys carrying freight from Baghdad to Jordan and Syria. Still, it is obvious that the next target of the Qatari and Saudi Wahhabis after Syria will be Iraq, not Iran. Iran clearly follows Iraq on the list of the “revolution’s” objectives.

However, I do not want to attribute all of this solely to the incompetence of politicians in Riyadh and Doha. Behind everything is the precise and inconspicuous role played by Washington, which stays below the surface and gives its rich Arab allies in the region the dirtiest and costliest part of the job of redrawing the map of the Middle East. They pay for the wars and the conflicts, supply weapons to the opposition, hire the mercenaries and train the fighters, and pass the Arab League resolutions needed to give their actions the appearance of international legitimacy. But I can’t help wondering — can they really fail to see that the monarchies themselves will be the main ones to suffer the consequences of this shortsighted policy? The conflicts are happening not near the United States or the European Union, but right on the threshold of the Persian Gulf states. The flames of wars and revolutions will spread to them because the younger generation in those countries does not want to follow the tenets of Wahhabism. They want to live in a real, modern Western-style democracy that would simply have no place for the conservative regimes currently in place in Doha and Riyadh. And there simply is not enough money, oil or gas to avoid the turbulent events taking place in the region. That is especially true since, like Iraq, Saudi Arabia itself was formed artificially out of several parts 80 years ago, and it has its own Shiite problem. The legitimacy of the current Qatari Emir’s government is subject to challenge, considering that he seized control in a coup that removed his father from the throne in 1995, and especially since the entire Al Thani clan came to the Qatari peninsula from the sands of South Arabia only 200 years ago. As they say, what goes around comes around. Meanwhile, Doha and Riyadh are only sowing the seeds of war and revolution.

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