

## Author



Roma Parhad was interested in researching Iraq and the increasing levels of inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Studying and writing about this topic was especially appealing to her because her family is Assyrian—part of an ethnic and religious minority—from Iraq. Roma’s paper tries to explain the obstacles to a stable and peaceful future for Iraq as the U.S. continued its withdrawal. After graduating from UCI in 2011, Roma hopes to begin graduate school a year later in the field of conflict resolution. In the interim she plans to work with the 2012 presidential campaigns and learn Arabic. Eventually, she would like to work with U.S. foreign policy and diplomatic affairs.

### Key Terms

- ◆ Constitution
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Ethnicity
- ◆ Iraq
- ◆ Pluralism
- ◆ Proselytizing
- ◆ Religion

# Partisan Pitfalls: The Importance of Pluralism for a Stable Iraq

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## Abstract

Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, there has been a significant increase in inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence among Iraqis. This paper seeks to provide an understanding of why this violence is taking place in a country with a relatively strong history of tolerance for its religious and ethnic diversity. The acceptance of ethnic and religious pluralism—the existence of a variety of religious and ethnic groups—is critical for stabilizing Iraq. An overview of the history of Iraq, from Mesopotamia to the post-Saddam era, illustrates a pattern of tolerance turned to violence as a result of both external actors and internal processes following the U.S. Invasion. The literature on pluralism is discussed to demonstrate the role of predominantly Christian faith-based aid organizations as unregulated external actors that were given disproportionate access in Iraq and consequently contributed to the current levels of violence against Iraq’s Christian minority. Internal barriers to upholding pluralism include the ambiguity of the current Iraqi constitution. The mistakes made in Iraq could have been avoided and further illustrate the importance of upholding pluralism at a time when Iraq will no longer be under the supervision of outside forces.

## Faculty Mentor



Roma Parhad's excellent contribution avoids the pitfall of reducing a complex situation to simplistic religious categorizations, arguing that the Iraqi tradition of religious and ethnic tolerance must be re-established and protected. Roma focused on two factors in particular that exacerbate violence in Iraq. First, the role of external actors in supporting sectarian aid groups has worsened the situation for religious minorities in the country. Second, the ongoing debates about a revised constitution indicate the pitfalls for overcoming the fairly rigid religious and ethnic constructions of Iraqi identities. These “partisan pitfalls” need to be resolved for religious and ethnic pluralism in Iraq to be re-established. Roma was a pleasure to advise, since she was more than willing to probe available primary and secondary sources that made her final paper so well-argued.

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## Introduction

“If Iraq’s pain has been great in the modern era,  
so too, has been its betrayed promise”  
(Ajami 2003, 10).

Iraq’s population is extremely diverse, both ethnically and religiously. It is made up of a majority of Arabs (divided between the Shi’ia and Sunni sects of Islam), Kurds (an ethnic group more closely related to Persians), and a small population of religious and ethnic minorities that include Turkomans, Assyrians, and Jews, among others (Byman 2003). Before the Gulf War in 1991, Iraq is estimated to have had the “best educated, most secular, and most progressive population of all of the Arab states” (Byman 2003, 72). However, the cleavages in Iraq’s society have been exacerbated by a 35-year dictatorship, 13 years of suffocating sanctions, two Gulf wars and, as of 2003, an ongoing foreign occupation. Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, there has been a severe increase in the level of violence within Iraq, dividing citizens along ethnic and religious lines. In this paper, I seek to understand why this violence is taking place when, historically, Iraq has a relatively strong tradition of religious and ethnic diversity and tolerance for that diversity.

This paper argues that accepting ethnic and religious pluralism<sup>1</sup> is critical for stabilizing Iraq. Moreover, pluralism needs to be respected both by external actors—including aid groups—and through internal processes that include a revised constitution. I argue that the current level of violence, especially against Iraq’s Christian minority, is in large part a consequence of the disregard for pluralism that was evident in the unilateral U.S. support for Christian faith-based aid groups immediately following the 2003 invasion. As a result, the provisions of the new Iraqi constitution will prove critical for attempts to reduce violence in Iraq. This paper’s thesis and findings differ from arguments that violence in Iraq results from insurmountable conflicts between ethnic and religious groups. Instead, I focus on historical and contemporary content, and external as well as internal factors, to argue that pluralism is possible, show the mistakes that have been made, and point the way to a more stable future.

The first section of this paper uses historical accounts and secondary sources to provide an overview of Iraq’s history of ethnic and religious pluralism from ancient Mesopotamia to present-day Iraq. The second section draws on primary

and secondary sources as well as symposium reports from the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University from 2007–2010 to analyze the involvement of external aid groups in Iraq and the consequences this has had, especially for the local Christian population. The third section breaks down the internal issues—including elections and the ambiguity of the current Iraqi constitution—that are barriers to a pluralistic and democratic society in Iraq. This section focuses primarily on scholarly articles and the Berkeley Center symposium reports.

## Historical Iraq

### *Mesopotamia and the Ottoman Empire*

Iraq has a very rich and ancient history. This section describes ancient Iraq, the Ottoman Empire’s collapse, Iraq under Saddam Hussein’s rule, and post-2003 Iraq in order to compare relative levels of tolerance.

Present day Iraq was known as Mesopotamia for hundreds of years. It was considered the cradle of civilization where the ancient empires of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria flourished. Ancient Mesopotamia produced many firsts, including the first written code of law and the first city-state as well as the first advanced social, political, and economic institutions (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 610). This area later became part of the Persian, Greek and then Roman empires until the 7th century when Baghdad, the capital of present day Iraq, became integral to the Islamic world, beginning with the Abbasid caliphate (“Iraq” Britannica). The Ottoman Empire was the last empire to rule the region, from the 16th until the early 20th centuries.

Present day Iraq was carved out of the crumbling Ottoman Empire by the British in 1921. It included the regions of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul (Ismael and Ismael 2005) and included a plurality of religious and ethnic groups. However, Ottoman Iraq also had a history of religious and ethnic diversity and, more importantly, tolerance for that diversity. Non-Muslims under the Ottoman Empire were allowed to retain their religious practices in return for paying higher taxes. Known as the millet system, this structure provided protected religious minorities (dhimmis)—which included Christians and Jews—with social, economic, and cultural freedom but not political opportunities (Nakhleh 2009).

The history of Iraq under Ottoman rule was one of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. This is why commentators such as Radwan Masmoudi state that “belief in freedom

1. Pluralism, for our purposes, refers to the existence of a variety of religious and ethnic groups.

of religion is very strong in the Muslim conscience and in Muslim theology” and that the “Quran does support religious freedom, freedom to disbelieve, and the right to change one’s belief” (Masmoudi 2008, 18). Indeed, many analysts argue that there were significantly higher levels of religious tolerance for that diversity at the height of the Ottoman Empire than during the same time in Europe.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century, however, brought a power struggle to the region for the first time in several hundred years.

### *After the Ottoman Empire*

Present day Iraq is an externally constructed state lacking a unifying identity. The south is dominated by the Shi’ia Arabs, the center by the Sunni Arabs, and the north by the non-Arab Kurds and a mix of the remaining religious and ethnic minorities (Dawisha 1999). From 1921 until 1958 Iraq was ruled, with the help of the British, by the Hashemite monarchy, which adopted a parliamentary system similar to that of the British (Dawisha and Dawisha 2003). The 1920 League of Nations mandate stipulated that Iraq’s minorities, particularly the Assyrians and Kurds, should be protected; additionally, the British specified social and economic aid for these minorities (Rayburn 2006).

However, in Britain’s hurry to leave Iraq in the late 1920s, it failed to include the protection of minorities in the 1926 Anglo-Iraqi treaty (Rayburn 2006). By 1958 there was unrest among a portion of Iraq’s population. Tired of limited Iraqi sovereignty and the British use of Iraq’s oil, a military coup ended the royal regime and Iraq became a republic (Ismael and Ismael 2005). Because the country included Arabs, Kurds, Sunnis, Shi’ias, Turkmen, Assyrians, Jews, and Chaldeans problems increased when the minority Sunni Arabs came to power. As the British withdrew, the Sunni factions took control and quickly suppressed Iraq’s Kurds, Assyrians, and Shi’ias in an attempt to consolidate their rule (Rayburn 2006). The Ba’athist party came to power in 1963 and by 1979 Saddam Hussein was in control of a decidedly secularist Iraq.<sup>3</sup> However, prior to Saddam’s rule Iraq was one of the most advanced countries in the Islamic world, with a comparatively well educated and affluent population (including women); it was also reasonably tolerant towards some minority groups (Inglehart et al. 2006, 501–502). It is surprising that a county with this background could experi-

2. The height of the Ottoman Empire, commonly viewed as the 16th century, was the period that included the brutal conquest of the Americas, bloody religious wars in Europe and forced religious conversions and persecution under the Spanish Inquisition.

3. This shift in power coincided with the 1960s pan-Arab nationalist movement that began with Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and swept secular nationalism across the Middle East; making Iraq a “contested zone of Arab nationalist and cold war politics” (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 611).

ence the levels of xenophobia, sexism and religiosity present in Iraq today (Inglehart et al. 2006, 501–502), but much of this can be explained by the manipulation of identity during Saddam Hussein’s rule, exacerbated by serious mistakes during and after the 2003 U.S. invasion.

### *Saddam’s Iraq*

After Saddam Hussein came to power under the Ba’athist ticket of secularism (the separation of religion and state) in 1979 he used “ruthless coercion, financial co-optation and a complex web of security agencies spying on the population and on each other” to subdue the Iraqi population (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 612). However, it was his use of identity manipulation that cemented his rule and became a prominent factor in Iraq’s ethnic and religious violence today. Saddam’s manipulation involved emphasizing, first, a nationalist identity, and then a religious identity to further his political aspirations at different periods of time (Dawisha 1999). During the Iran-Iraq war, for example, Saddam proclaimed an Arabist identity for Iraq because it was fighting the non-Arab Iranians (Dawisha 1999). At home, however, the policy of “Arabization” resulted in the forced relocation of ethnic groups like the Kurds, Assyrians and Turkmens, while financial incentives were given to Arabs to settle in their place (Byman 2003, 68).

During the first Gulf war, after his forces invaded and occupied Kuwait, Saddam discarded this (until then) steadfast secularism in favor of an Islamic identity, which he believed would unite Iraqis against the United States (Dawisha 1999). According to Dawisha, “Saddam had become almost totally reliant on the country’s Islamic identity, a cornerstone of which was to emphasize the ‘Christian’ identity of the ‘other’—those who were dropping bombs on Iraq” (1999, 561–562). The crippling sanctions imposed by the international community alienated the urban and westernized middle classes and made Saddam focus especially on “tribalism” (strong in-group association) to muster a support base (Dawisha 1999, 563). In addition to tribalism he exacerbated ethnic and personal differences to maintain power (Byman 2003). Dawisha quotes a member of the Ba’ath party as saying “secessionism, sectarianism and tribalism...are tearing the unity of society to pieces” (1999, 554). While Saddam attempted to cross the Sunni-Shi’ia divide by calling on an Arabist identity, he excluded the non-Arab Kurds and the remaining minorities (Dawisha 1999). His failure to build on an all-encompassing Iraqi national identity alienated different cadres of Iraqi society throughout his rule.

Saddam used a heavy hand to keep a strained and inconsistent peace. His violent suppression of opposition groups,

or groups that might become oppositional, meant that Iraq stayed united. Still, he made a major mistake: to unite through force and not through a common, lasting, Iraqi identity. These issues of conflicting ethnic and religious identities left permanent scars on the country's past and created problems for its future. As Daniel Byman argues, Saddam's refusals to create any power-sharing arrangements, coupled with the violence employed by his regime to suppress dissent, might have destroyed collective memories of tolerance and power sharing (Byman 2003, 69). As a result, Iraq today has "no civil society, and few robust institutions, on which to build its democracy" and it further "lacks a Charles de Gaulle, a Nelson Mandela, or even a Corazon Aquino who can serve as a symbol of unity for a new democratic government" (2003, 69). These scars from Iraq's recent past are barriers to building a peaceful and cohesive Iraqi state, as becomes evident when looking at the conflicts arising in Iraq's post-Saddam era.

#### *Post-2003 Iraq*

In the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, "the first step was not 'legitimation' or 'constituency building,' it was dropping bombs" (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 619). The invasion added to the list of issues blocking the creation of a stable and sustainable Iraq. The destruction of historical artifacts along with sudden and devastating unemployment were significant factors that contributed to the widespread anger and resentment toward the occupying coalition. The U.S. government's favoritism towards Christian aid groups worsened the situation and enabled the sectarian violence against Christians seen today.

Immediately following the 2003 invasion, the U.S. media downplayed the significance of the looting of Iraq's museums. However, Ismael and Ismael argue that this destruction "symbolised an intentional policy of cultural cleansing" that was especially painful for Iraqis, who were proud of their unique history (2005, 616). "The cultural connection to their locale extended far beyond the Baghdadi Caliphate into the very origins of 'civilisation' itself," explain Ismael and Ismael (2005, 616). The American forces protected the Ministry of Oil but "watched the burning and looting of Baghdad indifferently" and did not intervene when requested to do so by the Iraqis (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 616). This lack of cultural sensitivity contributed to the ongoing idea that the U.S. was not actually in Iraq to help Iraqis.

The second issue was the resentment and desperation that was present in Iraq as a result of skyrocketing unemployment. Paul Bremer, the top U.S. civil administrator in Iraq until 2004, put in place economic policies that rapidly result-

ed in half a million jobless people and made "resistance to U.S. occupation the only viable alternative to unemployment" (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 617). Furthering this was the involvement of U.S. corporations and foreign workers that exacerbated the position of the 67% of Iraqis who were unemployed and threatened small businesses, leading them in turn to fund "armed resistance for self protection" (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 617). In addition to these issues, the risk of death after the invasion increased to 58 times higher than it was before the war (Ismael and Ismael 2005, 616). Inglehart, Moaddel and Tessler argue that it is this existential insecurity that led to xenophobia and strong in-group solidarity (Inglehart et al. 2006), further dividing Iraqi society.

## External Actors and Religious Pluralism in Iraq

### *The Importance of Pluralism*

One of the main problems for religious pluralism in Iraq after the U.S. invasion of 2003 has been the confusion of tolerance with American ideas about religious freedom. In an attempt to codify principles of religious freedom, the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1998 to defend groups around the world from persecution for their religious beliefs. The IRFA also created a separate commission on international religious freedom. However, several concerns have been raised about the IRFA, including the idea that having a "bureaucracy designed to promote religious freedom...suggests a hierarchy of freedoms, with religious freedom placed above others." As a result, Philip Gordon argues it is important to question why religious freedom is considered more important than press freedom, women's rights, minority rights, free speech and the like (2008, 16). Gordon also suggests that a second and more disconcerting problem with the IRF policy is that it "runs the risk of reinforcing the stereotype of a hectoring, moralistic, and even imperialistic U.S., which casts itself as the arbiter of fairness around the world" (2008, 17).

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to William Galston, does not "suggest that religious freedom implies the unfettered right of foreign missionaries to cross international borders for proselytizing purposes" (2008, 23). Additionally, Galston agrees with Jose Casanova's argument that the "uninformed enthusiasm of American missionaries has often backfired, driving indigenous religious forces into a tighter alliance with repressive regimes" (2008, 23). Galston adds that just because "every human being is guaranteed the right to change his religion

does not imply that citizens of other countries enjoy an equally fundamental right to persuade him to do so” (2008, 23). Imam Mohamed Magid argues that “international law should not allow missionary groups from any faith to take advantage of the needy” and that “conversion or proselytism should not be connected to a political agenda” (2010, 6).

Because the IRFA also emphasized the importance of respect for differences of religion, it was disconcerting to see that the 2003 U.S. invasion paid little attention to the values it had agreed to uphold in 1998. The role that external actors have played in shaping the conflicts in Iraq is significant. Aid organizations, faith-based organizations, and the U.S. government have contributed a considerable amount of time and money and have taken political risks in Iraq. However, it is important to look at the overall role of external actors in situations like these and understand the advantages and disadvantages they pose; in this case it is especially important to analyze the role of faith-based organizations in order to appreciate the importance of religious pluralism. This is why Abdolkarim Soroush advises against exporting religious freedom, explaining it has done more harm than good in the past. “Exporting democracy, religious freedom, [and] human rights” where the Middle East is concerned, argues Soroush, “must be at the abstract level” because if “you export and impose it, it will produce the opposite effect” (2008, 21). Jennifer Bryson also suggests that the best way to promote liberal political theology is to implement the “affirmation and protection of peaceful pluralism and spreading a ‘do unto others as you would have done unto you’ culture of religious freedom” (2009, 32).

*Example: Iraq’s Christians and the Lack of Oversight*

The case of the Christians in Iraq is an example of the violence that occurs when religious and ethnic pluralism are not respected. Since the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, violence against the minority Christian population has been escalating. There were approximately 1.4 million Christians in Iraq before the U.S. invasion and now only about half remain. Most have left for neighboring countries like Syria and Jordan to find safety. The violence has come from non-state actors, roving bands of Shi’ias and Sunnis that are not only fighting each other for power but have been persecuting the Christian minority as well. However, looking at Iraq’s history of tolerance and the literature on religious freedom and pluralism, I assert that this violence against Christians is not an inherent part of Iraq’s history; rather, it is a backlash against particular mistakes associated with foreign intervention.

Iraq is especially complex because it has had significant outside influence since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, first from the British and then the Americans. As mentioned earlier, Saddam called on Iraq’s Islamic identity during the Gulf War as a reaction to the Christian “other” that was attacking Iraq. This issue is just as relevant today as it was in the early 1990s because it is again a Christian country that has dropped bombs on Iraq, destroyed its infrastructure and economy, and allowed its artifacts and museums to be looted. While preferential treatment for faith-based aid organizations is not the only factor contributing to the violence against Iraq’s Christians, it is an example of the consequences of rejecting pluralism. Faith-based organizations have several benefits including their often immense range, the wide array of issues they cover, and the special relationships they tend to have with local societies (“Decent Shelter for All” 2009, 7). Yet, according to Salam Al-Marayati, Christian missionaries were given “preferential access” to Iraq by the U.S. after the 2003 invasion (2010, 9). Although religious institutions, historically, have provided valuable responses to emergencies like natural disasters, Al-Marayati explains that “perceptions of those Christian groups became a negative, adding tension to Christian-Muslim relations” (2010, 9) after the 2003 invasion.

It is precisely because of situations like these that governments like the U.S. must defend the principle of religious freedom but “must avoid the perception of preferential treatment for Christianity” (Al-Marayati 2010, 10). Gerald Hyman agrees with Al-Marayati that it is “risky and possibly counterproductive to engage on a theological or explicitly religious basis with U.S. government support” precisely because “the U.S. democracy promoters could easily look like official missionaries, and the efforts could easily look like a U.S. government effort at religious conversion” (Hyman 2009, 23). Unfortunately, this is almost exactly what happened immediately following the U.S. invasion.

Shortly after the U.S. invasion in 2003, ABC News reported that faith-based aid groups like Franklin Graham’s Samaritan’s Purse were “‘poised and ready’ to roll into Iraq to provide for the population’s post-war physical and spiritual needs” (Caldwell 1). In Graham’s own words he and his organization were there to “reach out to love them and to save them, and as a Christian [he did] this in the name of Jesus Christ” (Caldwell 1). According to the ABC article, since 1990 the number of missionaries in Islamic countries has quadrupled (Caldwell). Caldwell interviewed Donna Derr, an official for Church World Service, about her disapproval for the work of aid groups like Graham’s. Caldwell, paraphrasing Derr, explains that “the 2,000 year-

old Christian churches in Iraq—whose members are a tiny minority in a vast Muslim population—have worked extraordinarily hard in the last decade to ‘develop their place’ in the community” and that Muslims and Christians were getting along (Caldwell 2). Derr told Caldwell, “I would hate to see the tenuous balance that has been created made unbalanced by the entry into Iraq by peoples who may have less sensitivity” (Caldwell 2). Caldwell pointedly adds that, “our military has created one chasm. We don’t want to see our humanitarian assistance create another” (Caldwell 2). In May 2004, Ariana Eunjung Cha, of the Washington Post, reported that these Christian missionary groups were drawing criticism for “endanger[ing] the lives of secular aid workers and the military because insurgents may associate Christianity with Western domination, or because they disguise their intentions” (Cha 2004, 1). The latter point was an accusation frequently leveled against the aid groups. Missionary work, in places like the Middle East, is closely associated with colonialism and therefore understandably resented.

Aware of the potential repercussions, it is also clear that Iraqi Christians themselves did not seek preferential treatment. CBS’s *60 Minutes*, in a report on Iraq in 2007 titled “Iraq’s Christians in Peril,” interviewed Reverend Andrew White and a member of the U.S. military discussing what life was like for the Christians in Iraq after the U.S. invasion. Rev. White, who had been in Iraq before the U.S. invasion, said “Iraq is clearly worse now [than it was under Saddam]. There is no comparison between Iraq now and then. It’s the most difficult it’s ever been for Christians probably ever in history [in Iraq]” (“Vicar: Dire Times for Iraq’s Christians” 2007). The member of the U.S. military explained that the U.S. was not allowed to protect churches, as part of a “hands off” policy on religion. In addition, he pointed out that Iraqi Christians were aware of the dangers associated with U.S. military protection: “Christians don’t want [the military] to guard the churches openly. They feel if [the military is] overtly protecting the churches, someone underground covertly will come in and murder the Christians because they’re collaborating with the U.S. soldiers” (“Vicar: Dire Times for Iraq’s Christians” 2007). Thus, the U.S. military was apparently not allowed to protect religious sites but the Iraqi Christian community was still afraid of receiving preferential treatment. As a result, the entry of outside Christian groups made the situation more difficult for Iraqi Christians.

The American government, through its support of specifically Christian faith-based organizations—like Graham’s Samaritan’s Purse—made the invasion seem like a Christian

war against Islam. In retaliation, Christian missionaries and aid groups as well as indigenous Iraqi Christians became targets of violence. This violence should be seen through a political lens. If it were exclusively a religious conflict Muslim Arabs would have engaged in violence against Iraqi Christians for hundreds of years. Likewise, if this violence were solely about religious dominance, other religious groups in Iraq, including the Jews, would be facing the same levels of violence. But this is not the case. Iraq was first occupied by the British in the 1920s, attacked by the U.S. in the Gulf War in the early 1990s and is now occupied by an American-led coalition. In each case, the foreign country has been associated with Christianity. The favoritism towards Christian aid groups shown by the U.S. after its 2003 invasion recalled former external interventions and contributed to the polarization of Iraqi society. Moreover, Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Iraq have also been influential in exacerbating tensions, by favoring one sect of Islam over another. In this case, most of the funding comes from the Salafi brand of Sunni Islam found in the Gulf States. This aid disproportionately supports Sunni Muslims (Murphy 2004, 2) and further polarizes Iraq’s religious groups.

While several groups have agreed to limit their proselytizing during aid and relief projects, a significant number of groups have not. Codes of conduct have been established by several prominent faith-based aid groups, including the World Council of Churches,<sup>4</sup> to limit the amount and type of proselytizing that is allowed to accompany aid missions. However, Matthew Richards argues that these “voluntary codes are not designed as substitutes for national or international regulations” and while they might support ideas such as “‘respect,’ ‘courtesy,’ and ‘sensitivity’...they are vague and unenforceable laws” (2010, 9). These are all examples of the paramount importance of governments keeping a watchful eye on faith-based aid and the messages it can send.<sup>5</sup> While the bulk of the issues with disproportionate and unmonitored aid occurred right after the U.S. invasion, there are still cases of disregard for religious pluralism.

A final area of importance regarding the Christians of Iraq—and the need for the U.S. to play an impartial religious role for the safety of all Iraqis—is an amendment that was added to H.R. bill 2601 in 2005. The amendment calls on

4. Several codes of conduct include “Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism” and “The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action.”

5. Groups that claim to be non-profit and non-partisan—such as The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq, The National Democratic Institute, and The International Republican Institute—could provide an alternative to faith-based aid.

“the departments and agencies of the U.S. Government to pay special attention to the welfare of ChaldoAssyrians [Iraq’s Christians]” (Eshoo). Additionally, the amendment calls on “the President and his administration to work with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to dedicate funding for the promotion of welfare and education, as well as the resettlement for these minority groups” (Eshoo 2005). While well intentioned, I believe legislation like this can do more harm than good in the long run. The situation is a tragedy and a grave concern for human rights abuses and religious persecution but granting preferential aid would put the remaining Christians in Iraq in even more danger.

For the U.S. to continue to claim this is not a war of Christianity versus Islam but to attempt to provide protection to the minority Christian section of a war-torn country would only endanger their lives further. The aid would become a repeat of the preferential treatment that was given to Christian aid organizations following the U.S. invasion that has been causing this violent backlash. Military, religious or governmental aid that is targeted at a specific group only sharpens cleavages and jeopardizes the future possibility of peaceful coexistence between neighbors. To now attempt to single out the Christians—in a country with an incredibly high death toll that is affecting all sectors of Iraq’s society—would repeat a tragic error. Kurrild-Klitgaard puts it best:

To grant specific political privileges to various minorities merely on the basis of their religion or ethnicity in a country so relatively heterogeneous as Iraq would surely be a recipe for a disaster, since it will only cement the differences and lock the groups into a zero-sum game. (This in fact is what was tried in Lebanon, where it was one of the most important reasons for the collapse of the country) (2004, 25)

This does not mean Iraq, and Iraq’s Christians, should be left to their own devices. However, the violence that is surrounding Iraq’s Christians cannot be insulated, or indeed halted, by providing them with “welfare and education.” Rather, initiating a plan to bolster Iraq’s economy as a whole and rebuild its infrastructure to contribute to the safety and future of a unified Iraq would go further towards promoting peace and stability within the country.

The problems facing Iraq’s Christians illustrate the dangers that come about if external involvement, particularly through faith-based aid organizations, is not scrutinized and

held to certain standards by the governments supporting them. However, it is not solely external players that present barriers to accepting pluralism. The third section of this paper addresses the internal issues that can prevent or enhance religious and ethnic pluralism in Iraq.

## Internal Barriers

### *Internal Issues*

In addition to the issues that external groups are exacerbating, there are internal aspects of the Iraqi situation that send contradictory messages about the acceptance of religious and ethnic pluralism. The internal issues that are explored in this section include problems with the electoral processes and inconsistencies in the current constitution.

The first issue with elections was whether or not to include in politics specific groups that had been seen as undermining democracy, including the clergy, the military, and the Ba’ath party (Dawisha and Dawisha 2003). The second issue is the ethnic and religious makeup of Iraq; in a population of approximately 23 million, Arabs compose 75–80%, Kurds compose approximately 15–20% and Turkmen, Assyrians and additional ethnic minorities make up the remaining few percent (Kurrild-Klitgaard 2004, 16). Religiously, the Shi’as dominate with 50–55% of the population, Sunnis are around 40–42%, Christians 2–3%, and Jews and other groups are less than 1% of the population (Kurrild-Klitgaard 2004, 16). As a result, concerns have risen that, with a democracy in place, the group with the numerical advantage would take control; a tyranny of the majority being a potential issue in any democracy (Byman 2003). Liberal democracies expect a changing majority but when voting groups are tightly-knit, “liberal democracy, in such circumstances, produces illiberal results” (Byman 2003, 52). Thus it is understandable that minorities would be opposed to democracies in situations like this (Byman 2003, 53).

Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard calls on the genius of James Madison and the founding of the United States when he argues that these factions will only help promote democracy (2004, 25). Dawisha and Dawisha agree with Kurrild-Klitgaard that, rather than seeing the cleavages as a barrier to democracy, all of this “antagonism could serve a constructive purpose: having factions zealously check each other’s power could actually promote democracy at the expense of rigid communal particularism” (Dawisha and Dawisha 2003, 37). The complexity of factions in Iraq can contribute to equal protection. Cecelia Lynch adds that “religious identity may relate to other identities in several different ways: it may overtake other identities, compete with them, or take a back

seat to them (and this hierarchy of relationships may change over time)” (4). It is not simply Sunnis versus Shi’ia or Arabs versus Kurds, there are both Sunni and Shi’ia Arabs and Sunni and Shi’ia Kurds for example; this unique mix of ethnic and religious groups makes it feasible for a well balanced democracy to form, given the right circumstances.

In spite of the roughly 300 terrorist attacks that took place on election day in January 2005, an impressive 58% of eligible voters participated (a higher rate of turnout than in most U.S. presidential elections) (Inglehart et al. 2006, 503). Conscious of the presence of ethnic and religious cleavages, the policies supported by the United States have emphasized a significant amount of decentralization and highly federated structure to include “the participation of all of Iraq’s communities in decisionmaking [sic], and binding guarantees of local community rights” (Byman 2003, 54). This proved to be relatively successful, according to Byman, because at local levels “elections have been free and competitive, there is considerable freedom of the press, basic civil liberties are secure, and bureaucracies are responsive to popular concerns and surprisingly accountable” (Byman 2003, 70). For George, the only way for liberal democracy to survive in Iraq is to have a constitution that establishes “fair terms of social and political engagement for all groups, and indeed, all citizens” (2007, 2). The current Iraqi constitution appears to be a badly designed text that leaves much to be wanted in a document that plays a crucial role in bringing about peace.

### *The Current Constitution*

Saunders explains that constitutions can set a “framework for a mutually respectful exchange of views, which hopefully leads to religious reconciliation (or at least peaceful coexistence)” (2007, 4). Muqtadar Khan agrees that “different ethnic and religious groups have succeeded in achieving mutually acceptable or tolerable levels of power sharing in such places and have also succeeded in establishing a durable degree of confidence in each other’s commitment to the social contract and hence are enjoying the fruits of stability” (2007, 4). However, skeptics about the viability of the current Iraqi constitution make several compelling arguments. Intisar Rabb argues it is not a matter of the history of the countries like Iraq but rather the “motives and means of the leaders, and maybe most significantly the outside influences...and civil society,” but that these rely on the presence of physical and economic security that is currently absent in Iraq (2007, 3). Khan cautions that we might be taking these constitutions “more seriously than even the Bush administration that wrote them or the governments whose job it is to apply them” (2007, 12).

The importance of a fair, representative and pluralistic constitution is clear but the “trick,” according to Dawisha and Dawisha, is “to work out a constitutional arrangement that makes sense of Iraq’s social and cultural mosaic, transforming diversity into an agent for positive change” (2003, 37–38). However, the current constitution is, at best, vague and contradictory, if not impracticable. Rabb breaks down the three pivotal sections of the constitution and explains their conflicting interests. Three sections—religion and Islamic law, democratic processes, and rights and freedoms—are the first sections of Article 2 of the constitution. Article 2.1 (a) states that “Islam is the official religion of the state and a basic source of legislation. No law can be passed that contradicts settled Islamic (legal) rules.” Article 2.1 (b) states that “no law can be passed that contradicts the principles of democracy,” and Article 2.1 (c) states that “no law can be passed that contradicts the basic rights and freedoms outlined in this constitution” (Rabb 2007, 5). The issue here is not declaring Islam, or indeed any religion, as the official state religion; Rabb gives several examples of modern states that have successfully done this.<sup>6</sup> However, the constitutions of these countries have included “provisions for the equality and rights of their citizens, regardless of religious affiliation” and the state must “ensure that the established religion does not impinge on the freedoms of any of its citizens and that religion will never impede fair democratic processes” (Rabb 2007, 5).

The current structure of the Iraqi constitution is worrisome, therefore, because the three main articles (and several other articles) are in conflict with each other. Khan illustrates these contradictions by arguing that “if the constitution considers Islam and Democracy compatible than A and C are redundant. If Islam and Democracy are not considered compatible, then A and B are contradictory and so are provisions A and C” (Khan 2007, 7). Additionally, Article 14 (guaranteeing religious and gender equality) can contradict Article 2.1 A (Islam) depending on the given interpretation of Islam (Khan 2007, 7). In other words, the relative freedom of Iraqis is based on an unspecified interpretation of Islam that leaves much to be desired in this important document.

However, this does not mean that Islam and democracy are incompatible or should not both be included in the constitution; simply, the constitution needs to enumerate the equal rights of all Iraqi citizens. Stepan’s concept of “twin toleration” offers an option for blending the lines between state and religion. He defines ‘twin toleration’ as:

6. Finland, Greece, and the United Kingdom each have an official state religion, in this case some branch of Christianity (“Islam, Constitutions & Durable Democracy” 2007, 5).

A sufficient degree of autonomy from religion for democracy not to be constrained by theocrats, and a sufficient degree of autonomy of religion from the state for religious citizens and organizations to exercise their religious rights and their rights of expression, not only in their places of worship, but in civil and political society as well (5).

Additionally, the U.S. should “support religious freedom in majority communities...[and] protect religious minorities” (Bryson 2009, 33). This latter point is vital for dealing with the dynamics of Iraq’s various ethnic and religious groups. Iraq’s dwindling Christian population has suffered, and continues to suffer, as a result of the uneven treatment that was given to aid organizations at the onset of the U.S. invasion as well as the careless rhetoric that ignited a fierce but understandable backlash from Iraq’s Muslim population.

As the most ethnically diverse country in the Arab world (Rayburn 2006), Iraq has issues with its religious minorities. Rabb claims that the “particular challenge to most modern Muslim countries had to do with the treatment of religious minorities” (2007, 8). She emphasizes modern Muslim countries because Islam, historically, has been accepting of different faiths, as the millet system showed, but accepting is not the same as allowing equal rights (Rabb 2007, 8). Non-Muslims (specifically Christians and Jews) were allowed to practice their faiths in peace but were not extended equal rights as citizens under the law (Rabb 2007). Because of Iraq’s history of accepting diversity it is imperative and plausible that a constitution fully adapts from the millet system not only the tolerance, but the acceptance, of all members of society.

### Conclusion

Since 2003, there has been a lack of acceptance of the pluralism that has historically existed in Iraq. Both external and internal factors have exacerbated ethnic and religious cleavages in a society that was relatively tolerant of its diversity. Externally, faith-based aid groups were given preferential treatment by the U.S. government following the invasion. I assert that this is a primary cause for the subsequent violence against Iraq’s Christian minority. Religious divisions were solidified through the politics of proselytizing, preferential treatment, and what appeared to be a “Christianity versus Islam” narrative. Internally, the Iraqi constitution is contradictory, vaguely written—leading to confusion about the equal rights of all members of Iraqi society—and needs to be rewritten. As Kurrild-Klitgaard states, “democracy alone will not solve the problems, and in fact democracy all

alone—without any further, deeper institutional reforms—may very well produce the worst of all outcomes” (2004, 18).

This paper builds on the relevant literature regarding the importance of pluralism, the disadvantages to faith-based aid, and the importance of a truly representative constitution. While the factors mentioned here are not the sole sources of turmoil in Iraq, I argue that these mistakes could have been avoided. This paper explores serious obstacles, both external and internal, to the acceptance and support of pluralism in Iraq. It therefore suggests specific ways that aid policy and constitutional reform can help to create a stable country with the possibility of a peaceful future.

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