

Briefing on the Republic of Iraq's National Security Strategy¹

Abstract

Iraq faces a number of challenges: how to defeat the ISIS Army of Occupation without destroying the social fabric of Iraq; how to prevent polarization that already exists from being externally influenced into further internal conflict; how to diversify the economy; and how to reintegrate the Sunni, negotiate a new arrangement with the Kurdish Region of Iraq, and balance competing internal Shiite political-blocs. These are not small issues. Each is subject to conflicting agendas, narratives and audiences, and taken collectively, they represent a complex and complicated challenge to the Government of Iraq. To promote an inclusive consensus on the ways, ends and means for progressively solving these challenges, the Iraqi Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) has managed a cross-ministerial process to produce a National Security Strategy (NSS). This Strategy is presented along seven lines of strategic operation, each of which requires the conduct of a number of tasks. The implementation of the NSS, including the means for cross-ministerial direction, agreement, coordination and resourcing, is the next challenge for ONSA. (March 21, 2016)

In late 2012 Iraq's National Security Council formed a Joint Inter-Ministerial Team and I had the honour to be named its National Coordinator. The Team produced a final draft of the National Security Strategy in June 2015 and the National Security Council approved it in October 2015. Earlier this month, the Government of Iraq's Council of Ministers approved the strategy.

We used the following methodology to identify and articulate the national core problem:

The legacy of the former regime, the rapid transition from dictatorship towards democracy, and changes in the strategic environment characterised by violent political conflict, corruption, the outbreak of sectarian violence, terrorism and crime, collectively served to weaken Iraq's social structure, which accelerated insecurity and instability.

We then analysed the symptoms of this core problem and identified their root causes. While recognising their interdependency, we classified the root causes into eight thematic clusters for further analysis: security, political, diplomatic-geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic, governance, communications and cyber information, and energy and natural resources. Threats and risks were analysed within the context of internal and external environments in order to assess their relative impact on our national security.

The NSS's introduction posits that Iraq is at a critical and sensitive stage of its transition from a totalitarian regime to a democracy. As a result, Iraq faces many

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challenges. The transition process has been complicated by the presence of foreign forces, regional polarization which amplifies Iraq's internal political divisions and conflicts, a poor security situation with increasing threats posed by terrorist groups, and a fragile economic base. Furthermore, regional and international disputes create an unfavorable environment that impacts negatively on Iraq's democratic transition.

National Security in a Changing Strategic Environment

As in many countries that have gone through a similar transition from dictatorship to democracy, ethnic and sectarian divisions have hampered our political development and state building efforts. There has also been disagreement among the political blocs over the minimum qualifications required for making senior appointments to state institutions, as well as significant institutional weaknesses resulting from past authoritarian rule. This situation is further exacerbated by the emergence of terrorist and subversive activities; national corruption; organised crime; weak state institutions; and counter-productive policies pursued by our neighbors that fear the spread of Iraq's democratic transition, as well as the presence of foreign forces.

Political polarisation in Baghdad has markedly influenced Iraq's foreign policy. Since 2003, Iraq's foreign policy has focused on meeting its international obligations, lifting the Chapter VII sanctions regime and, through diplomatic engagement, enhancing bilateral relations with all countries based on common interests.

The absence of national unity, a shared identity, and a positive relationship between the people and the democratic government that it should represent have become casualties of polarization. The employment of sectarian and ideological tools, such as building political parties based on sectarian loyalty rather than national principles, have hardened political divisions and continue to hinder political progress. Most seriously, sectarianism has distorted concepts of national identity and citizenship, contributing to the fragmentation of the State and society. Sectarianism is used as a pretext to secure government jobs via political quota systems absent competency-based recruitment criteria to the detriment of our state institutions. Predictably, this has weakened both our institutions and their democratic oversight and accountability.

The global oil glut of 2015, and corresponding fall in oil prices and government revenue, exposed the fragility of our national economy. This fragility is the result of a number of structural factors. First, Iraq's national infrastructure and economy were already weakened by international sanctions imposed on the previous regime while its wars consumed our national resources. Second, Iraq is a "rentier economy" over-reliant on state-owned, oil-based income. When the

price of oil fell, this legacy of poor national economic performance and financial practices prompted mass demonstrations in Basrah last summer.

Third, post-2003 reconstruction did not meet public expectations in spite of huge budgets allocations made by successive governments. This is primarily due to poor governmental and institutional performance as well as financial and administrative corruption. The fourth factor has been the deliberate attacks on national infrastructure, first by *Al Qaeda* and now *Da'esh*. These terrorist groups have sought to seize control of critical infrastructure, including dams, irrigation systems, power plants, oil fields and exportation pipelines. Oil refineries are threatened, banks are looted, and our historical heritage is being systematically destroyed. The terrorists target the agricultural sector by burning orchards, destroying irrigation projects, seizing farmers' livestock, and taking over irrigation projects to undermine the water security of areas outside their control. Iraq needs a new and more resilient economic model, one that diversifies away from state-owned oil and turns toward a more robust private sector and agricultural sector. In addition, we must improve our educational, professional and vocational training as key goals for enabling our people to meet the demands of economic diversification. And it is essential that we make changes to encourage foreign investment.

Financial and administrative corruption and mismanagement have further weakened the social fabric of Iraq, evidenced by increasing public frustration over the slow pace of political change and administrative reform. Unless we deal positively with this frustration, it could become a source of further instability through popular mobilisation against the Government and Administration.

Overall, the unstable regional and international environment has created a situation of uncertainty that makes it difficult to predict threats and risks and assess their impact. The so-called Arab Spring revolutions have had a major influence on the region as a whole. Despite the fact that these popular demonstrations were originally meant to spur internal reform, the consequences for the region, and globally, have been significant as they foment instability and internal conflicts that have, in turn, weakened the state system and allowed their usurpation by extremism and terrorism. These irruptions have produced an unstable regional power dynamic, creating mistrust and severe conflicts of interest among regional actors. Moreover, extant regional and international mechanisms have failed to resolve conflicts and disputes, as many of these local conflicts, stemming from the Arab Spring revolutions, have metamorphized into regional struggles that provide new opportunities for terrorist groups to expand the scale and scope of their operations and threaten the national security of the region as well as internationally.

The Fall of Mosul in 2014 laid bare the fragility of Iraq's Security Forces (ISF). Perhaps the most serious factor that contributed to the fall of Mosul is the 600

km border with Syria that neither Iraq nor the Syrian regime controls. Additionally, there has been a large and inter-linked host community for terrorist groups in western Iraq and eastern Syria. Furthermore, as a direct result of the Syrian crisis, Da'esh has been able to increase its military capabilities since 2012. Da'esh's economy has flourished following its seizure of oil fields, exportation lines, banks, power plants and other economic facilities.

Iraqi security services were unable to protect the people of Mosul. This failure stem from leadership appointments that were made on the basis of ideological loyalty rather than professional merit, as well as on the debilitating impact of corruption and mismanagement on our institutions. Da'esh seized wide areas in the provinces of Ninawa, Salah-ad-Din, Anbar, Diyala and Kirkuk. In the process, they killed and captured thousands of unarmed citizens, displaced hundreds of thousands of families, destroyed the historical and social heritage of the occupied provinces, and threatened therein to institute retrogressive demographic, structural, social and cultural changes.

Yet, conversely, these events have also shown a more positive side to Iraqi society manifested in the widespread reaction of the people of Iraq against Da'esh terrorism, highlighted by their positive response to the Islamic *Marjiyah* call for volunteers to support ISF against Da'esh. Tens of thousands of citizens from Baghdad and other provinces volunteered to fight and defend the State by organising into the *Hashd Alshabie* (the People's Mobilisation Forces - PMF) to stop Da'esh's advance and even force their retreat in some places. Some tribes also revolted and now support local ISF counter-terrorist efforts. Overall, the extremism and excessive atrocities of Da'esh have created a momentum that has led to a renewed political consensus and a national unity government. An opportunity now exists to resolve problems between the political blocs in a more stable political climate, to unify security efforts through the addition of the PMF and the international coalition, and to confront indiscriminate threats to all Iraqis.

But political mobilisation made under the guise of competing sectarian ideologies has serious implications for the conflict and it poses significant challenges to our communities as well as to national, regional and international powers seeking to counter the threats that these developments pose. Future violence could indeed escalate out of control. There is the potential for more serious region-wide, sectarian-based conflict, although the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran might help reduce tensions within the region.

Also, the liberation of Iraq from Da'esh occupation, and post-war stabilisation and normalisation in this complex security environment, will be adversely affected by Iraq's rentier economy and the sharp decline of international oil prices. The dramatic drop in oil revenue has had a sharp impact on the economies of all oil producing countries. For Iraq, the oil price collapse has

coincided with the costly expansion of military and security operations against Da'esh. The State's resources must be better mobilised to defeat terrorism, address mass displacement, support emergency relief operations, and rebuild destroyed infrastructure in Da'esh-occupied areas. To succeed, reconstruction and community-based reconciliation within liberated areas will require a secure and stable environment. It will demand better co-operation between political parties focusing on national interests.

The Vision

A secure and stable democratic Iraqi nation state where the people live in peace, prosperity and freedom; where cultural and religious differences, and human rights are respected; and the nation contributes to international peace and security.

The Key National Interests of Iraq are the following:

- A sovereign, free and independent Iraqi federal state with territorial integrity that ensures the security of its people.
- A stable democratic system that ensures respect for people's rights and freedoms, and strives for social harmony, prosperity, and the maintenance of the Iraqi culture.
- Functioning and effective state institutions built on principles and standards that seek to achieve justice, equality and the rule of law.
- Multi-resourced and sustainable development through a diversified national economy.
- The security and sustainability of water, energy, other natural resources and their infrastructure.
- An active and positive role for Iraq in the pursuit of national, regional and international interests; security and stability through co-operative bi-lateral and multi-lateral relations; and constructive international alliances.

Strategic Objectives

These have been grouped into the following sectors: security and defence, internal stabilisation, foreign policy, socio-cultural, economic and public administration, cultural communications and information (cyber security), energy and natural resources, in order to achieve these key national interests.

a. Security and Defence Objectives

- Defeat the terrorist group Da'esh: protect critical areas; liberate Da'esh-occupied territories; stabilise and normalise liberated areas, promote conditions that mitigate the risk of Da'esh and other terrorist groups' future attacks.

- Ensure security and intelligence agencies are professional, are subject to the rule of law and respect human rights, are able to combat terrorism and organised crime, and provide effective and responsive security services to all the people of Iraq.
- Establish appropriate and sustainable defence capabilities able to protect the people of Iraq, national sovereignty and Iraqi territory.

b. Internal Stabilisation Objectives

- Achieve political and social stability.
- Ensure that federal, regional and provincial institutions of good governance are reformed and democratic, are able to provide safety, shelter and improved services, and meet the demands of the Iraqi people.
- Strengthen the pillars of national unity and spread the spirit of civil peace and reconciliation.
- Facilitate the return, rehabilitation and reintegration of all IDPs back into society.

c. Foreign Policy Objectives

- Establish strong and stable relations with neighbouring, regional and other countries, on the basis of shared values and interests, and in order to promote Iraq's status within the international community.
- Resolve disputes with neighbouring countries.
- Ensure fair and reasonable access to water from neighbouring countries.
- Respect sovereignty and avoid interference in the affairs of other countries according to the Constitution.
- Maintain a policy of neutrality.

d. Socio-Cultural Objectives

- Enhance national identity, citizenship values and social justice.
- Establish a modernised educational system in terms of curricula, staff and infrastructure.
- Protect the cultural and historical heritage of Iraq.
- Promote and protect the human rights of all citizens, especially vulnerable groups, and promote gender equality.

e. Economic and Public Administration Objectives

- Finalise transition towards a multi-resourced market economy, where the state gradually abandons commercial activity.
- Establish a clear economic and financial vision to budget for decreasing oil revenues and the expenses of the war on terror.

- Ensure economic reform, to husband resources, combat corruption, and enhance investments through the elimination of bureaucratic and administrative obstacles.
- Facilitate equal job opportunities, lower unemployment rates, decrease poverty, and enhance living standards.
- Provide better services and do not waste public resources, enhancing the principle of balanced rights and duties.

f. Communications and Information (Cyber Security) Objectives

- Achieve communications and information security.
- Develop the communications and information sector and relevant infrastructure to serve the development and prosperity of society.

g. Energy and Natural Resources Objectives

- Establish an effective system for the comprehensive management and sustained protection of water, energy and natural resources including the requisite infrastructure.

Part Two of the National Security Strategy considers threats to national security that must be addressed in order to protect Iraq's vital national interests. These threats are prioritised according to the magnitude and likelihood of the risk. Threats were categorised into three tiers of risk according to their potential impact on national security and the likelihood of their occurrence. Analysis showed that there is a broad range of threats to security in Iraq.

Tier One: Terrorism, Corruption, Political Instability, Ethno-Sectarian Polarization, Rentier Economy.

Tier Two: Water scarcity, Cyber Attacks Organized Crime, Energy, Critical Infrastructure, Mines and UXO's, Proliferation of WMD, Proliferation of Small Weapons, Poor Education.

Tier Three: Border Disputes, Natural Disasters, Military Conventional Attacks.

Part Three of the National Security Strategy identifies measures needed to meet its objectives and mitigate the threats to national security within a vision that deploys all elements of national capacity, whether political, security, economic or cultural. As part of this vision, the roles and responsibilities of all influential stakeholders are defined in order to protect national interests and achieve the objectives of the NSS, foremost of which are security, stability and prosperity for the Iraqi nation. These stakeholders are detailed in Annex Three of the NSS.

Conclusions: The Government of Iraq is fully aware of the size of the threats and risks to the security of the Iraqi people, especially in light of the setbacks of June 2014. At the time of this writing, Da'esh occupied wide areas, was committing genocide, and causing the forced displacement of civilians. Their control extends to the critical infrastructure of dams, irrigation systems, power plants, oil fields and exportation pipelines. Oil refineries are threatened, banks are looted and the historical heritage of provinces is being destroyed.

Responding to this grave threat, the Iraqi community proved its strength by responding to the *Marjiyah* call in June 2014 for volunteers to fight Da'esh. The Government organised thousands of volunteers within a short period and, thus, was able to stop the expansion of Da'esh.

The advent of a new Government also presents the opportunity to build upon a developing sense of unity amongst Iraqis to counter the extremes of terrorism and to harness the newly emerging international coalition in support of Iraq's own mobilised efforts against the threat of terrorism. Iraq stands ready to cooperate with the international community to support the fight against terrorism.

However, the security sector alone cannot effectively address these threats. Solutions must also be derived from the co-ordinated development and implementation of strategies and plans across all sectors, including diplomatic and geopolitical, economic, political, socio-cultural, energy and natural resources, and cyber security. The integration of such strategies and plans into a workable solution can only occur within an improved climate of trust among Iraqis and between the State and its citizens.

The ability to confront the threats and risks identified in the NSS is dependent upon the Government's success in improving education through the development and training of educational professionals supported by the necessary curricula and infrastructure, which in turn can only be achieved by increasing financial allocations from the federal budget to the education sector.

The NSS has focused on the role of Iraqi diplomacy and constructive dialogue to achieve balanced relations both with the countries of the region and on a global level. The Government of Iraq confirms that it will not pose a threat to any other state. The Government of Iraq also acknowledges the strength and validity of a foreign policy that relies on the recognition and respect of mutual interests, non-interference in others' internal affairs, and the promotion of dialogue and dispute resolution with neighbouring countries as regards border issues and water resources.

The NSS also emphasises the importance of building a sustainable, diversified, multi-resourced economy to generate more employment. This requires a clear economic policy that supports the private sector, particularly small and medium

enterprises, and the further development of the governance sector in the building of modern state institutions.

Fundamental to the improvement of security and stability is the need for urgent reform of the whole security sector. The establishment of efficient, professional, responsive and accountable security institutions, in accordance with the Constitution, needs to be based on a security sector reform plan. The defence and security forces within this sector should be defined by their respect for human rights, their integrity and transparency, and their improved relationship with the very citizens whom they have been created to protect. The significant decrease in oil prices resulted in a reduction in national budget revenues. The effects of this reduction have been further compounded by the costs of combating terrorism and responding to the needs of over 3 million IDPs, both of which pose significant threats to Iraq.

The effective management of energy and other natural resources is also key to security and stability. Such management should involve international companies to protect water resources in co-operation with riparian states, and further develop agriculture to increase the number of job opportunities and food security. This is fundamental to ensuring sustainable development and to preserving assets for future generations.

To achieve cyber security, the NSS has indicated the need to develop a cyber security policy and a national strategy, which includes the development of supporting legislation and regulation to meet modern standards.

However, the baseline for all these necessary interventions to address the many threats that Iraq faces, is the implementation of the NSS through a united national political will, the provision of appropriate resources, the enactment of necessary laws along with a system of monitoring and evaluation of the ministries' capacity and progress in the execution of their plans.

Way Forward

The NSS has identified in its Introduction the implementation of necessary measures to achieve the vision for Iraq through immediate, short-, mid- and long-term action.

The country is now at a cross roads. The emergence of Da'esh and the crisis of the summer of 2014, compounded by the decrease in oil prices, have starkly exposed the fragility of the State and the instability of the region. On the other hand, Iraq now has a new Government and a political determination to improve Iraq's national security and address the root causes of instability. The current situation, therefore, provides an opportunity to build on a developing sense of unity amongst Iraqis to counter the extremes of terrorism and to benefit from the increase in international support for Iraq as it combats terrorism. This

support needs to go beyond purely counter terrorist military activities and address the root causes of terrorism.

Simultaneously, the surge in people's anger against corruption and poor state governance has encouraged the Government to initiate urgent and expeditious reforms. These reforms aim to balance the peoples' demands with the need for security and stability; but the fulcrum point remains the need to address corruption and mismanagement. And the ISF must handle public demonstrations while adhering to human rights principles, as enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution.

As an immediate priority, the Government may wish to focus on the short-term actions associated with security sector reform, as recommended in the Conclusion, and begin to lay the foundations for lasting peace and security. Particular attention must be given to reforming the education sector and building state institutions that promote justice, equal opportunity and provide better services. It is also important to deal with risks to water security by improving relations with upstream countries, such as Turkey and Iran. However, there are additional first tier actions which need to be taken, emerging from the current crisis, as follows:

- With regard to Counter Terrorism, in addition to what was stated in Part 3, focus attention on the liberation of Da'esh-controlled territories and their subsequent reconstruction.
- Implement the National Anticorruption Strategy by focusing on corruption within the security sector and other public service sectors.
- Take action to deal with Extremism and Sectarian Polarisation as identified in Part 3, the formation of a new national unity government, and unite Iraqis against common threats which include political instability and foreign interference in our internal affairs.
- With regard to the Economy, activate the role of the private sector in industry and agriculture, reduce government expenditures, increase national savings, and develop investment-friendly legislation. It is also necessary to review the National Energy Strategy, in light of current changes.

Last but not the least, it is our intention to establish a ministerial team to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NSS, propose corrective actions and respond dynamically to changes in the unpredictable regional and international environment.

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