Sabine Riedel

Iraq as a Battlefield of Foreign Powers

The "Democracy" under the Rule of Islamic Law imported in 2003 has paved the Way [1]

For three months now, Iraqis have been demonstrating for a reform of their political system, which is under the aegis of Islamic law and therefore dominated by religious parties. This model of confessionalism – Taifiya in Arabic – is an Iraqi heritage from the Ottoman Empire and thus from pre-modern times, when clergymen of all religions prescribed secular laws for their believers. The religious elites regarded their believers as subjects and agreed among themselves on a separation of powers in state and society. The fact that such a system was introduced after the fall of Saddam Hussein (2003) under the US interim administration raises many questions. It explains the growing influence of Islamist and pro-Iranian parties in Iraq as well as the silence of the Western democracies to the core demands of the protests. In the West, disappointments about the Arab Spring are spreading, while before their eyes an Iraqi revolution may be unfolding. Especially the youth from the Shiite-oriented south are demanding a united and sovereign state. They want to live together with Sunnis and Kurds in a democracy in which religious and cultural diversity is respected.

German media rarely reported on the events in Iraq before the beginning of the military confrontation between the USA and Iran at the turn of the year 2019/20. However, protests have been shaking this country since October 1, 2019. They are directed against the political system of a factual separation of powers between the two Islamic religious communities, the Shiites and Sunnis. This state model, imported by the USA in 2003, has contributed to the disintegration of central state institutions and exposed them to corruption by foreign forces. The demonstrators are now demanding the restoration of Iraq's political unity, which would only be possible through a strict separation between political offices and religious institutions.

Because the protesters were challenging the legitimacy of the ruling elites, the state security forces proceeded with the utmost severity. Within two months 390 people were killed and more than 15,000 injured (DPA, FAZ, 29.11.2019). The brutal actions of Shiite militias contributed to the fact that criticism of the government under the Shiite Adil Abd al-Mahdi became louder. Only after a speech of the highest Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah as-Sistani, he resigned on 29.11.2019. Since then, the confessionally opposed parties have been unable to agree on a successor, while the number of deaths has now risen to about 500. President Barham Salih, who as a Kurd has a mediating role, rejects the appointment of a Shiite successor, which further weakens the Iraqi state. (AFP, Hürriyet, 26.12.2019). [2]

---

[1] This article is a translation: Sabine Riedel, Der Irak als Schlachtfeld externer Kriegsherren. Die 2003 importierte „Demokratie" unter der Herrschaft islamischen Rechts hat den Weg geebnet, in: Forschungshorizonte Politik und Kultur (FPK), Vol. 4, No. 1 (2020 Jan 21), 8 pages.

[2] Update of this publication: On 1.2.2020, the Iraqi President nominated Mohammed Allawi as the new Prime Minister. He has to form a new government within one month (BBC, 1.2.2020). He was Minister of Communications under the former government of Adil Abd al-Mahdi, but resigned from office early. Since then he published articles on Iraqi political affairs in Iraqi media and on his blog (Mohammed Tawfik Allawi). He is a cousin of Ayad Allawi, the interim Iraqi prime minister (2004-2005) and founder of the Iraki National Alliance (see p. 5).

2020 Feb 5
Prof. Dr. Sabine Riedel, associated Professor of Political Science, University of Magdeburg,
Senior Researcher, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, sabine.riedel@swp-berlin.org

From the beginning, Iraq was under foreign influence

Foreign states have exerted influence on Iraq since its foundation in 1920. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire due to its military defeat against the colonial powers, British Mandate rule on the Euphrates and Tigris initially installed a constitutional monarchy. They showed no consideration for the population, neither for those who demanded a modern secular legal system, nor for the Shiites, who were already in the majority at that time. Instead, Britain enthroned a Sunni king from the house of the Hashemites, who until then had administered the holy sites of Sunni Islam on the Arabian Peninsula. The relationship of the Shiite population to the Iraqi state therefore remained divided.

The British therefore relied on continuity: Sunni Islam remained the state religion under the Hashemites, as it had been under the Ottomans, and thus the most important link in the newly created Iraqi nation. For this model of an Iraqi confessional nation had the advantage that it held together the different language communities, the Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish-speaking population groups. However, all non-Muslim or non-denominational Iraqis remained outsiders and subject to discrimination. Another factor that weakened this model of a nation was the ruling house's attempt to Islamize state institutions in favour of the Sunni faith. Today this is seen as oppression of the Shiite population group.

The Iraqi revolution in 1958 put an end to the monarchy and thus also to direct British influence. However, with the change of the political system from a monarchy to a republic, Iraq gradually opened up to the ideology of pan-Arabism. With its new constitution, it claims "full sovereignty" (Article 1), while at the same time professing membership in the Arab League (Constitution 1958, Article 2). Only a substantial constitutional reform defined the Iraqi nation as part of an Arab nation that extends far beyond the country's borders. This has now marginalised a further population group: Alongside the Shiites, who feared a predominance of the Sunni Arab world, the Kurdish-speaking population fell into a minority position. They were assigned the role of a national minority according to this cultural model (Constitution 1971, Article 5).

The Kurdish independence movement interpreted this constitutional article not as a protective provision, but as a political marginalization, so that it resisted violently. From then on, the Persian Shah regime supported them with weapons because it was afraid of exporting the Iraqi revolution. Moreover, Iran was an ally of the Western world, which feared a growing influence of the Soviet Union on Iraq behind the strengthened Communist Party. Through the Kurdish question, they could influence the political changes there. Iraq "retaliated" by offering asylum to opponents from Iran. Probably the best-known critic of the regime was Ruhollah Khomeini, who found refuge in Najaf, about 100 km south of Baghdad, from 1965. Together with Karbala, this place is home to the most important places of worship of Shiite Islam. It was for him an ideal exile for preparing the Islamic Revolution on 1 February 1979.

Four years earlier, Iraq and Iran had declared the "inviolability of the frontiers of the two States and strict respect for their territorial integrity" (1975 Algiers Agreement, Art. 5). This finally led to the expulsion of Khomeini from Iraq to France, from where he returned to Iran, with the support of the international press and politics. The hope of Western states to be able to control the Islamic revolution after the overthrow of the Persian Shah proved to be mistaken. Since the hostage taking at the US Embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979, diplomatic relations between the two sides have been interrupted (Bösch 2015: 334).

Just one year later, the First Gulf War began, in which the Iraqi head of state Saddam Hussein was armed by Western states against Iran. The Iraqi-Iranian agreement with its mutual commitment to territorial integrity was a dead letter. Western Europe and the USA should definitely have supported this course. After all, they signed the Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE in 1975, together with the Soviet Union and the other Eastern Bloc countries, and in it they committed themselves to the same principles.

The turn 1990: From embargo to the destruction of the Iraqi state

After the end of the East-West conflict (1989) the Western world decided to drop Saddam Hussein as an ally. Overnight, Iraq went from „pampered child to villain" (Handelsblatt, 17.10.2005). In the 1980s, the US government had still provided Iraq with 40 US billion dollars to finance the Gulf War. In addition to fighter planes, France sold a nuclear reactor and thus nuclear technology to Baghdad (NZZ, 7.3.2003).The supply of chemical substances from West Germany for the production of poison gas finally led to UN inspections, so that the cruel human rights violations during the war became public.

The actual turning point was marked by the Iraqi attack on neighbouring Kuwait in August 1990. As a result, a military alliance against Iraq was formed, in which 34 states led by the USA participated in order to liberate Kuwait. At the same time, a UN resolution supported the resistance of the Iraqi Kurds and Shiites by dividing Iraqi airspace into two no-fly zones and sustainably restricting the sovereign rights of the country (FAZ, 24.2.2001). However, like all other Iraqis, they became victims of economic sanctions, which remained in force beyond the end of the war until 2003 (AlSammawi 2006: 83f.). While Saddam Hussein remained in power, his people suffered: In these 13 years Iraq lost "97 percent of all imports and 90 percent of all exports" (Welt.de, 22.9.2010). The collapse of the Iraqi economy led to famine and disease, which cost the lives of up to 880,000 children alone.

A new phase of Iraq policy began with the attacks of 11 September 2001, after which the US government accused Saddam Hussein of complicity by linking him to the terrorist network Al Qaeda. Five years later, an investigative report by the US Senate confirmed that this assumption was as false as the claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (FAZ, 11.9.2006). This was the formal justification for a military intervention by a "coalition of the willing" led by the USA and Great Britain at the end of March 2003. Reliable studies estimate the number of war victims at about half a million people (SZ, 16.10.2013). However, the war damage was even more devastating than in the years of the embargo. Large parts of the infrastructure for water and electricity supply were destroyed within two months. As a result of fires, looting and numerous acts of terrorism, Iraq gradually got out of control (Feichtinger 2003: 20).

Nevertheless, a resolution of the UN Security Council at the request of the USA and Great Britain placed the sovereignty of Iraq in their hands for about a year. Under the promise to respect international law, the occupying powers formed an administrative Authority whose tasks included "to restore and establish national and local institutions for representative governance" (Resolution 1483, 2003 Article 8c). Thus, the USA in particular shares a large part of the responsibility for all further developments.

Their dealings with their war opponents, the members of the Iraqi army, had many consequences. While Saddam Hussein was put on trial and executed in late 2006, many officers spent some time in American prisons until they were set free again at the end of the American occupation

in 2011. Some joined Islamist groups, which since then have gained more and more influence and were able to escape the control of the Iraqi security forces. In mid-2014, the Arab branch of al-Qaida established a separate caliphate in north-western Iraq under the name Islamic State (IS), which in the meantime spread towards Syria, but has been successively pushed back since 2017.

At the end of 2018, US President Donald Trump considered the IS defeated and even considered withdrawing the remaining 5,200 American soldiers from Iraq (Spiegel, 15.2.2019). It seems to be no coincidence that relations between the USA and Iran since then become worse again. Because in the fight against the IS, both states were military allies despite their conflicting interests, which required concessions from both sides. This was probably one of the reasons for the Obama administration to conclude a

Figure 1:

Iraq's Constitution of 2005

Article 1

The Republic of Iraq is a single federal, independent and fully sovereign state in which the system of government is republican, representative, parliamentary, and democratic, and this Constitution is a guarantor of the unity of Iraq

Article 2

First

Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation:

a) **No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam**
b) No law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy.
c) No law may be enacted that contradicts the right and basic freedoms stipulated in this Constitution.

Second

This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandean Sabeans.

Article 3

Iraq is a country of multiple nationalities, religions, and sects. It is a founding and active member in the Arab League and is committed to its charter, and it is part of the Islamic world.

Source: Iraq's Constitution of 2005, PDF generated: 25 Nov 2019, Highlighting in green letters: S.R.

nuclear agreement with Iran in mid-2015. Three years later, US President Trump resigned it and reintroduced the sanctions (NZZ, 7.8.2018).

A pre-modern system: religious law determines the separation of powers

A very tragic misguided development, which was started by the interim administration in Iraq in 2003, concerns the political system. A democratic re-start was to be initiated, substituting the one-party rule of the Baath Party and giving way to a pluralist model. This regime change was in the hands of US diplomat Paul Bremer. Not only the dissolution of the Iraqi army can be traced back to him, but also the banning of the Baath Party. It is not without relevance that it came to power in 1963 with the support of Western secret services. After her coup against the then government under Abd al-Karim Qasim, she was able to hold on to power for forty years, since 1979 under the leadership of Saddam Hussein.

Just like the British Mandate at the beginning of the 20th century, the interim administration in 2003 had a distrust of the population. They obviously considered them incapable of turning Iraq into a modern democracy based on a multi-party system and the rule of law. This would have meant picking up where the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 left off and continuing its legacy. Instead, Bremer oriented himself to the preceding monarchical tradition by again assigning Islam a leading role in state and society. This fundamental attitude was expressed on 11 July 2003 by the appointment of predominantly religious leaders to a new Iraqi Governing Council, which stood by his side: „Of the 25 people on the list, 13 are Shiite Muslims, a crucial concession to the religious group that makes up 60 percent of Iraq's roughly 24 million people. Five are Kurds and five are Sunni Muslims, […]." (New York Times, 13.7.2003)

After a small change in personnel, the Iraqi Governing Council, dominated by Shiite representatives, was urged to nominate ministers for a transitional government and monitor its work. Finally, Bremer mandated him to work out a new Iraqi constitution. Therefore, it is not surprising that Islam as state religion is fixed until today. This principle applied without interruption since the rule of the Ottomans until today. Even in the first republican Constitution of 1958 (see Article 4) and under the rule of the Baath Party (see Constitution of 1971, Article 4) it was not in question. Completely new, however, is the statement that the 2005 Constitution explicitly "guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people" (Article 2, Second, Figure 1).

However, the real crux is the provision: "Islam […] is a foundation source of legislation: A. No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam." (2005 Constitution, Artikle 2, First a) Figure 1) With these sentences, the relationship between secular and religious law was turned upside down: The Iraqi constitution of 1958 had already broken with the centuries-old tradition that exclusively religious courts are responsible for civil and family law. Since then it has been subordinated to public law. This allows, for example, marriages between members of different religious communities or the change of religious affiliation. However, the constitution of 2005 does not take back this reform. For the first time in Iraqi history Islamic law determines its legislation.

This dominance of Islam has thrown the whole judicial system back into pre-modern times. Even the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire, under the influence of the French Revolution in 1869, had introduced a civil code that laid the foundation for the first supra-confessional reform constitution (1876). Therefore, Article 2 of the new Iraqi constitution contains great potential for conflict if democratic standards are applied. It justifies discrimination against non-Muslim and non-confessional Iraqis. They must follow a secular legislation, which from now on is subordinated to Islamic Sharia law (AsiaNews, 20.10.2009). Furthermore, Muslims whose religious beliefs contradict the "established provisions of Islam" are also discriminated. Even they have to accept interpretations of Islam of which they may not be convinced. As a result, hardly any Iraqi politician today dares to publicly contradict fatwas by respected clergymen.

The increase in power of the religious Self-governing bodies (Divans)

This leads to the question who decides which "provisions of Islam" are established and which are not. It is finally concerned with religious self-government and its relationship to secular power. Under the constitutional monarchy, Islam cultivated a symbiotic relationship with the Hashemite royal dynasty. The Sunni clergy legitimized the monarch's authority as the will of God and in return were able to preserve the self-government of their institutions. Even if Sunni Islam thus enjoyed a privileged position, the ruling system guaranteed the " Freedom to practise the rites; of the different sects of that religion" (Article 13, Constitution 1925) and thus also that of the Shiites.

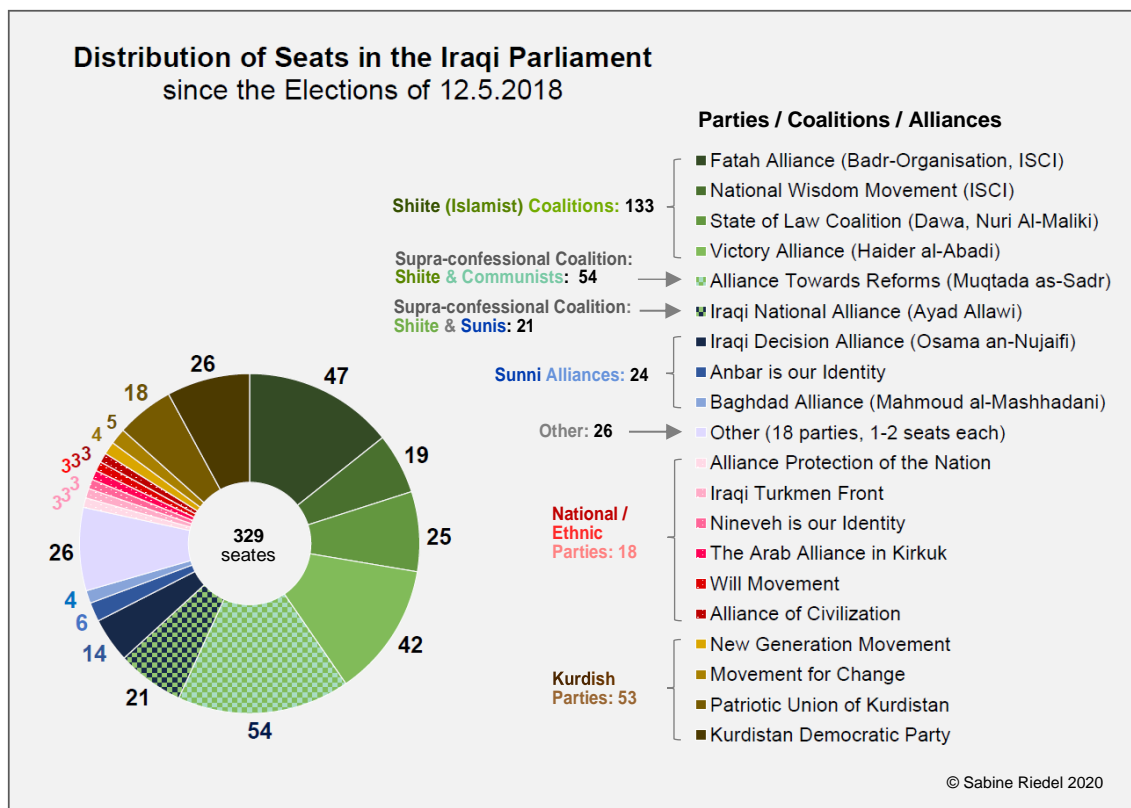Under the rule of the Baath Party, this freedom of religion was violated and all Islamic institutions

were brought under state control. This was done by establishing a Ministry of Religious Affairs (Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, AWQAF), which controlled Iraqi Islam and managed its endowment property. Having become a symbol of the suppression of religious freedom, it was dissolved by the interim administration in October 2003. Three new religious institutions were established instead, so-called divans, which are supported by public funding. These are the Sunni Divan (OSW, ar. ديوان الأوقاف والشؤون الإسلامية), the Shiite Divan (OSHE, ar. ديوان الوقف الشيعي) and for non-Muslims, the Divan for Christians, Yazidi, Sabians and Mandeans (CESE, vgl. ar. ديــوان اوقاف الديانات المسيحية والايزيدية والصابئة المندائية). The Autonomous Region of Kurdistan did not follow this approach, so that today a Kurdish Ministry of Religion is responsible for all faiths and supervises them (Riedel 2017: 16).

With the founding of the divans, a bitter dispute began among the religious communities over the return of endowment property into the hands of their self-governing bodies. Even before the appearance of the Islamic State (IS), violent conflicts and destruction of houses of God occurred. The weakened Iraqi state could no longer act as a mediator because the constitution has made Islam the benchmark for civil legislation. The Christian communities have been particularly hard affected, whose official number has dropped from 1.4 million to 250,000 since 2003 (The Atlantic, 23.5.2019). But also among Muslims numerous violent conflicts erupted. This was not only about property rights and financial interests (Carnegie, 29.3.2019), but also about their respective religious authority and their influence on the parties represented in parliament.

The key point of disagreement between Sunnis and Shiites today is their relationship to the military intervention of 2003. The umbrella organization of Iraqi Sunnis, the Association of Muslim Scholars, considers the occupation of Iraq to be illegitimate; after all, they have lost influence since then. In contrast, the military invasion was

Figure 2:

Sources: Own composition, among others: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_الانتخابات_التشريعية_العراقية, http://en.parliament.iq/, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iraq-s-2018-parliamentary-elections/ (21.1.2020)

welcomed by many Shiite Iraqis. Already at the beginning of the Iran–Iraq War, Sayyid Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim had gone into exile in Tehran. From there, he organized the resistance of the Iraqi Shiites against the Baath regime. He founded the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which wanted to introduce a theocratic system in Iraq based on the Iranian model.

Therefore, in August 2002, SCIRI joined five other "democratic opposition organizations" from Iraq, which were invited to Washington by the American government in preparing a regime change (CRS, 10.2.2003: 12). The media even suspected behind the involvement of SCIRI (see The Guardian, 2.7.2003) an anti-Iranian strategy of the Pentagon with the intention of restoring Iraq to the spiritual centre of the 200 million Shiites: "The centre of Shia could return to the Iraqi Najaf, which would be of considerable importance for the fate of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain." (Die Zeit, 11.3.2004) Because only with the Iranian revolution it had shifted from the Iraqi Kerbala to the Iranian Ghom, which today hosts the largest theological university (Arab. hauza) with about 50.000 Shiite clergymen. Thus, there is currently a hidden rivalry between Iran and Iraq over the leadership position in Shiite Islam (see Nakash 1994).

Shiite parties dominate Parliament and Government of Iraq

Since the occupation of Iraq in spring 2003, the Ayatollah al-Hakim, who had returned from Iran, and the highest Shiite cleric of Iraq, the Iranian Ali as-Sistani, have exerted pressure on the interim administration. With fatwas, i.e. Islamic legal opinions, they interfere in public debates and ensure a permanent Islamization of secular legislation. In May 2007 SCIRI changed its name to the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq (ISCI, see ar. المجلس الأعلى الإسلامي العراقي) in order to establish itself as a political party. After all, it was never a religious self-governing body, as its name suggests, but a secular organization founded by clergymen with the aim of introducing their Shiite interpretation of religious law into Iraqi legislation. A party activist summed up this issue in early 2018 by stating that "many Iraqi laws, particularly criminal and civil ones, contradict the principles of true Islam, and this needs to be reconsidered." (annabaa.org, 17.3.2018).

Indeed, the broad Shiite coalition of the United Iraqi Alliance won the first parliamentary elections in 2005. However, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014) did not come from the ranks of the ISCI, but from the Islamic Dawa Party. It was founded in 1957 by Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a comrade of Baqir al-Hakim, who was also supported by Iran, in order to export the theocratic model to Iraq. In the last few years, however, the Dawa Party has lost a large part of its voters. In the recent parliamentary elections (12.5.2018), it won only 25 of a maximum of 329 seats with its State of Law Coalition (Figure 2). This benefited less the ISCI with its National Wisdom Movement, which received only 19 seats. Instead, the Fatah Alliance under the leadership of the Badr Organization got 47 seats. Its success can be explained by the fact that it had been the military arm of the pro-Iranian ISCI and had successfully fought against the Islamic State (IS) before its foundation. Its direct opponent is the Shiite Victory Alliance led by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (2014-2018) with 42 seats.

In addition to these four Shiite coalitions there is another one, which, however, has a supra-sectarian character. We are talking about the most successful alliance of the last parliamentary elections, the Alliance Towards Reforms (Saairoun Alliance) with 54 seats. It has been joined by the Iraqi Communist Party, although the Sadr Movement is the dominant force there. Their leader, the Shiite cleric Muqtada as-Sadr owes the election successes not only to his origins in the house of Sadr, which sees itself in the descendants of the founder of the religion Mohammad. In the beginning, he commanded Shiite militias that had fought against the foreign military intervention (Steinberg 2016: 3). Moreover, his party has gained popularity among young people because it is active in the social hotspots of Baghdad and Basra.

An alliance that aims to overcome the confessional barriers between Shiites and Sunnis is the Iraqi National Alliance with 21 members of parliament, chaired by Ayad Allawi. He was Prime Minister of Iraq under the interim administration (2004-2005) and temporarily Vice-President of Iraq (most recently 2016-2018). His party supports the reconciliation of the religious communities in Iraq as well as the legal equality of Iraqi women (Ayad Allawi, 8.3.2016). On 10.1.2020, however, Allawi announced his withdrawal as a member of parliament on the grounds that "the parliament has failed to fulfil its legislative and supervisory function and to deal seriously and positively with the demands of the popular and mass movement" (Anadolou Agency, 10.1.2020). This is not a good sign, since his party was the only force that stood unreservedly behind the demonstrators.

Iraqis demonstrate for the unity and sovereignty of their nation

For three months now, they have been campaigning against the political system imported in 2003. The focus of their protest is the confessionalism (or sectarianism, ar. طائفية – ṭāʾifīya), which divides state and society according to religious and ethnic affiliations. But they do not come from the Sunni population, which is disadvantaged, or from the shrinking Christian minority. They fear the accusation that their actions will destabilize the situation and thus indirectly promote the IS. Initiators of the demonstrations are rather Shiite teenagers, who go on the streets with slogans like "Sunnis and Shiites are brothers" (Al-Monitor, 15.10.2019). Iraqi flags were waved in many places, but not as a symbol of a nationalist ideology, but as a sign of belonging together as an Iraqi nation, across all religious and ethnic boundaries.

This is what the slogan "We want a home" stands for. It became the name of a Facebook website that provides current information on events in Iraq (Figure 3). The word وطن – waṭan furthermore has the meanings home country, nation, which gives the slogan an additional political meaning (Riedel 2019). Here reference is made to the model of a will nation with a modern understanding of nationhood or nationality, which has become a matter of course in Europe. Only those

Figure 3:

Source:
Facebook: „We want a home – نريد وطن "

states are able to peacefully resolve their internal social conflicts whose national institutions are non-confessional and not dominated by a religious, linguistic or ethnic community. Even the ethno-religious proportional system in Lebanon, which divides state power " fairly" among the religious communities (power sharing system), contradicts the model of a non-confessional will nation. So it is no coincidence that many people there are also protesting against their political system and calling for a "revolution" (zeit.de, 19.1.2020).

In this sense, the Iraqi demonstrators are calling for a constitutional reform mediated by the United Nations that removes confessionalism from the constitution, a corresponding reform of the electoral law and a reduction of the influence of foreign states (Al-Monitor, 31.10.2019). At the beginning of the protests the demands of the demonstrators bounced off the Iraqi government, because Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi had come to his office through an agreement between the Fatah Alliance and the Alliance Towards Reforms (Saairooun). Changes at the expense of the religious parties endanger their political legitimacy. Since both coalitions are directed by the Shiite clergy Ammar al-Hakim (ISCI) and Ali Al-Sistani, Teheran can also interfere in Iraqi politics. Through diplomatic channels, both religious leaders were asked to stop the demonstrations. Thus, Iran became a target of the protests, especially after the first deaths by Shiite militias. In order not to appear as puppets of Tehran, the Fatah Alliance and the Reform Alliance soon expressed understanding for the revolts. They now blamed the government for the violent escalations and forced it to resign.

In this situation, the targeted killing of the Iranian officer Qasem Soleimani was a momentous decision by American President Donald Trump. It gave the pro-Iranian parties an opportune argument to terminate the stationing of the 5,200 American soldiers. In its decision of 5.1.2020, the Iraqi Parliament condemned this military action as a "political attack" that violated the "sovereignty and security of Iraq" (ar.parliament.iq, 5.1.2020). With only 172 members of parliament in attendance, the Shiite parties were able to push through such a majority decision without difficulty. A withdrawal of foreign troops at this time will consolidate their position and Iran's influence and reduce the chances of an end to confessionalism.

A withdrawal of troops under other circumstances would be desirable for this country. Western democracies should take the demands of the

demonstrators seriously instead of providing military aid, which they do not know who will benefit from this training (BW, Irak). What is needed are diplomatic mediators and experts who can help Iraq find a peaceful way out of its governmental and systemic crisis. This is where the European Union could prove its worth, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Iraq, Dutchwoman Jeanine Plasschaert, who also heads the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), comes from its ranks. To do this however requires more than just appeals to the Iraqi security forces or an exchange of views with the religious leader Ali Al-Sistani (uniraq.org, 14.11.2019).

European politicians are reluctant to admit that the model of confessionalism has failed. Because of its special historical background and social development, Iraq is already a modern country that can only temporarily be thrown back into a medieval theocracy. European states would also have the opportunity to request the Iraqi government to observe human rights standards. They can remind Baghdad of its obligations to the UN. It has signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Anti-Racism Convention and the Women's Rights Convention (Riedel 2017: S. 9f. und 15f.). Otherwise, Europe will lose credibility: Europeans are pursuing a strict policy of anti-discrimination in their countries, but they cannot stand up for their constitutional values such as cultural pluralism and religious tolerance in diplomatic circles.

Sources and related Publikation:

AlSammaw, Faris, 2006, *Die UN-Sanktionen gegen Irak und deren Auswirkungen auf die Bevölkerung von 1990 bis 2003*, Dissertation, Universität Köln, 2006, 243 S.

Harith, Hasan, 2019, Religious Authority and the Politics of Islamic Endowments in Iraq, Carnegie Middle East Center, 29.3.2019.

Nakash, Yitzhak, 1994, 2018, The Shi'is of Iraq, Princeton University Press.

Riedel, Sabine, 2015, The Role of Democratic State in Inter-Religious Relations. Theoretical and Historical Considerations in Respect of Countries in Transition, in Julia Gerlach, Jochen Töpfer (Eds.): The Role of Religion in Eastern Europe Today, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 55-79.

Riedel, Sabine, 2015, Interreligiöse Dialoginitiativen. Zur Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik islamischer Staaten, in: Doron Kiesel, Ronald Lutz (Hg.), *Religion und Politik. Analysen, Kontroversen, Fragen,* Frankfurt/M. 2015, S. 331-356.

Riedel, Sabine, 2017, *Pluralismus im Islam – ein Schlüssel zum Frieden. Erfahrungen aus dem Irak, Syrien, Türkei, Ägypten und Tunesien im Vergleich*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP-Studie, S 14, Juli 2017.

Riedel, Sabine, 2019, Die MENA-Region: Föderalisierung - Autonomien – Dezentralisierung, in: Europäisches Zentrum für Föderalismus-Forschung Tübingen (EZFF, Hg.), *Jahrbuch des Föderalismus 2019. Föderalismus, Subsidiarität und Regionen in Europa,* 2019, S. 187-201, Manuskript online.

Steinberg, Guido, *The Badr Organization. Iran's Most Important Instrument in Iraq*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Comment, C 26, July 2017.

Steinberg, Guido, *Die „Volksmobilisierung" im Irak. Das schiitische Milizenbündnis al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi beschleunigt den Zerfall des Staates*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP-Aktuell, S 52, August 2016.

United Nations Iraq, Secretary-General for Iraq.

Verfassung 2005, *Iraq's Constitution of 2005,* constituteproject.org.

Note: All links were active until 21.1.2020*.*