

Iraqi Minorities Coalition Delegation (NICHOLS SCHOOL)

Introduction:

Iraq has been in a constant state of turmoil for the past few decades. The country's diversity amongst its citizens proves to be problematic, often affecting the political and social realms of society. Minorities, especially Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, Kurds, Yazidis, and Jews, have found it increasingly difficult to live in Iraq, as they face persecution for their different beliefs. Minorities have two choices; to either fight for representation or leave Iraq altogether.

Seven Democracy and Sectarianism Issues Facing Iraqi Minorities:

- 1) Power struggle between Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims
- 2) Lack of protection for minority groups
- 3) Rapid loss of minority populations
- 4) Persecution by private groups and the government—particularly hate crimes—aimed at minorities
- 5) Limited representation for minority groups in government
- 6) Discrimination against specific minority groups
- 7) Decline of female attendance in schools

Background of Iraq:

Iraq has a long and distinguished history. It was home to one of the earliest known civilizations, the Sumerian civilization, which cultivated Mesopotamia. The region which is now known as modern Iraq changed hands many times in the subsequent years, being conquered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. The Abbasid caliphate was ushered out by a Mongol invasion force which destroyed much of Baghdad. Later, Iraq was controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which was based in Turkey. Because the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers in the First World War, Great Britain invaded the Ottomans' Middle Eastern holdings in World War I and gained control of Iraq. With the victory in World War I and the subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Britain gained Iraq under a mandate from the League of Nations. In 1932, Britain granted independence to Iraq, which operated under a monarchical government. Following multiple coups, the Ba'ath Party gained control of Iraq, first under the leadership of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and then under Saddam Hussein. Hussein initiated an Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980, and the war did not conclude until 1988. Near the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Hussein's government also began a genocidal campaign against Iraqi Kurds.

In 1990, Hussein invaded Kuwait, but he was soon driven out by the United States in the Persian Gulf War by a combination of air strikes and a ground assault. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq, claiming that it possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction. Although the invasion was successful in dethroning Saddam Hussein, the aftermath was a pressure cooker of ethnic and religious sectarian tension. Insurgency in Iraq led to an American troop surge in 2007 to lessen the violence. In 2011, the United States military formally withdrew from Iraq and handed control over to the Iraqi government, which has been governing ever since.

Iraq is a relatively minute country, being a bit more than twice the size of Idaho. It is located in the Middle East and has four main regions; the desert (west of the Euphrates), Upper Mesopotamia (between the upper Tigris and Euphrates rivers), the northern highlands of Iraqi

Kurdistan, and Lower Mesopotamia, the alluvial plain. The mountains, hills and plains of north and northeastern Iraq occupy about 35,550 square miles, a whopping 1/5 of the country. Iraq is bound on the east by Iran, on the north by Turkey, on the west by Syria and Jordan, and on the south by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It has access to the Persian Gulf in the south which helps facilitate trade and interaction. The climate has a wet season lasting from winter to early spring, and a hot dry summer that has temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The annual precipitation of the country is around ten inches per year. Natural disasters that occur most frequently are dust storms, sandstorms, and flooding. Iraq also experiences environmental problems; for example, the draining of marshes of An Nasiriyah which greatly harmed wildlife, erosion, and soil degradation, just to mention a few.

In the past, Iraq's economy has been extremely dependent on their oil exports, and they continue to be dependent on their exports. Exporting a total of 2.1 million barrels of oil per day, this number is weaker than past years, but the oil exchange continues to provide Iraq with 90% of its foreign exchange earnings. Another smaller part of Iraq's economy is their agriculture. Producing wheat, barley, rice, vegetables, dates, and cotton, Iraq's agriculture produces a smaller amount of exports compared to that of the oil exports. In the past, because of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's economy has been set back, but the oil exports, the key part of Iraq's economy, have gradually increased since the war began. In 2014, Iraq looks to boast their oil production by 29% which would be a positive for their economy in the future.

Iraq currently has a parliamentary government. There is a population of 31,858,481 people in Iraq. The Iraqi population is divided into 18 governorates, of which the capital is Baghdad. The legal system currently consists of both civil and Islamic law, and the people of Iraq have the right to vote at the age of 18 and above. The flag of Iraq is three equal and horizontal stripes in the order of red, white, and black. The national symbol of Iraq is a golden eagle. Military services in Iraq are split into multiple branches, three of which are the Iraqi army, the Iraqi Navy, and the Iraqi Air Force. Currently in Iraq, one can be either male or female to serve in the military, and military service is completely voluntary. In Iraq the average age for a man or woman serving in the Iraq military is 18-40 years of age. Many government-related things are bound to change in Iraq due to the current problems.

Spaces for children in schools are filled quickly in Iraq, and minority groups have been finding that their children are not the priority. As of 2009, there were over ten thousand Kurdish children not in school. Basic educational opportunities for Kurdish children and children of other minorities are not available or are difficult to come by. Only within the past four years have schools started to changing their textbooks in order to represent the minorities in Iraq. Lack of education is a major problem for many minority groups. Many groups have high poverty rates, and thus cannot afford the expenses that come with an education or do not have access to an education. Others lack funding from the Ministry of Education. Other groups often do not have the proper documentation necessary to send their children to school. The Bedouin people are seen as nomadic people with no permanent residence, and the government does not provide them with the proper documentation for school. And, as in the case with many Kurdish people, there is no room in schools for minority groups.

Since the 1960's, Iraq has been involved with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. In the 1970's, Saddam Hussein began nuclear weapon production. After the Gulf War during the 1990's, Iraq's nuclear weapon program was examined by the International Atomic Energy Agency. After Operation Iraqi Freedom in the early 2000's, it was said that Saddam Hussein had most of Iraq's nuclear weapon program stopped. As of today, Iraq has taken a stance to create a

safer nuclear program. Biological weapons in Iraq were originally developed in the 1970's and were used in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980's. Facilities would utilize toxins such as aflatoxin, ricin, hemorrhagic conjunctivitis virus, and anthrax. During Operation Desert Storm, bombs and missiles were made containing some of the toxins used in biological weapons. It was reported by the Iraq Survey Group in 2004 that Iraq's biological weapon production had been shut down.

Chemical weapons were also used in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980's. Chemicals such as sarin, cyclosarin, and blister agent mustard were produced. Chemical weapons are still present in Iraq to this day. Besides nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon production in Iraq, Iraqis have also been known for their missile production as well. Beginning in the 1970's, Iraq began to buy short-range missiles from the then Soviet Union. In the years following, Iraq developed their own missiles. In 1997, Iraq negotiated receiving missile technology from Russia and North Korea. Since 1997, it has been revealed that Iraqis showed interest in improving both their ballistic missile and cruise missile capabilities. However, in 2011, Iraq joined The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation and has not showed as much interest in expanding missile production.

Committee on Federalism and Autonomy:

The current form of government in Iraq is a federalist system. In a federalist system, federal states are bound to a national constitution; however, as in the case of the Iraqi government, federal regions are responsible for budgeting, taxation, education, minimum wage, law enforcement institution, etc. In the Iraqi system, the majority of people in power are Shi'a Muslims. One of the main problems of federalism in Iraq is that the country is split up into geographical regions. Even so, issues center on ethnicity and religion. There are disputed territories in Iraq where minorities, such as Kurds, do not get along with other minorities, such as the Sunni Muslims. Depending on who is in power, either the Kurdish people or the Sunni people are content, but the groups find it difficult to agree on certain topics.

The Sunnis also want their own federal region. In 2010, 22 of 35 members from Basra councils signed a petition demanding that the capital, Baghdad, let residents decide if they either want to remain under Baghdad's government, or if they want to form their own, autonomous government instead. Baghdad ignored this petition. In 2013, local authorities in Basra threatened to break from the central government because they wanted to take new legal steps by forming a council of representatives from all parts of Basra. The Kurdish people wanted Article 140 of the constitution enforced. This article is based off of Article 58 from the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period, in which the government agreed to take actions to remedy injustices. These included compensation for deported or expelled residents, compensation for people new to specific regions, new employment opportunities for citizens, and permission for citizens to have their own national identity and ethnic affiliations. There will not be a permanent resolution of the disputed territories until the problems are fixed. In Article 140, executive authority assures the citizens of Iraq that it will take the necessary steps to complete the issues raised in Article 58.

Committee on Security:

The lack of security for Iraqi minorities has forcibly shaped the lives of many citizens. Discrimination towards minorities is a major problem and is based largely on one's personal religions views and practices. The Iraqi government's hatred against Iraqi minorities has shown, as the government has taken steps to revoke minorities' rights to obtain documents for marriage,

receive a proper education, travel, and collect food rations. The government's refusal to accept difference sets a negative precedent for the people of Iraq. In the past years, hate crimes toward Iraqi minorities has increased, causing an overall decrease in Iraq's population. For example, 10 years ago there were over 150,000 Jewish Iraqis living in the country; now, there are less than 10 individuals left. These people live in undisclosed areas of Baghdad. Hate crimes such as anti-religious rioting, public execution, kidnapping, and murder are all documented. These hate crimes are carried out by private groups, but the Iraqi government has also played a part in the persecution of Iraqi minorities.

Committee on 2014 Elections:

Following extensive internal and external conflict throughout the early 2000's, the first credible elections in Iraq were held in January of 2005. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, otherwise known as the UNAMI, helps assist the Iraqi government in their election process, along with aiding the Independent High Electoral Commission, who helps with the election process in Iraq as well. The UNAMI was created in 2003 by Iraqi request and helped the Iraqi people draft a new constitution, as well as attempt to fix boundary disputes. The Independent High Electoral Commission—IHEC—was started in 2007 and replaced the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq. The Iraq Council of Representatives is responsible for nominating the IHEC Board of Commissioners. The Integrated Electoral Assistance Team—IEAT—is responsible for many areas revolving around elections in Iraq, such as logistics, data management, and field coordination.

In the 2013 Kurdistan Parliament Election, there were 11 component seats set aside for minorities; one for an Armenian, five for Turkmen, and five for Chaldeans, Syrians, and Assyrians. There was also the availability of general seats and the law that 30% of the seats belonged to females. Voters have to be an Iraq citizen, at least 18 years old, and of sound mind and not convicted of a crime. Persons running for a government position have to be an Iraq citizen, at least 30 years old, have been to at least secondary school, and not convicted of a crime. On Election Day, voters are assigned to a certain polling center based off of voter data collected during voter registration. Despite these major steps toward order and authority, there are many issues still surrounding Iraqi elections. Many minorities, especially Christians, are targeted and threatened each election. Even with the UNAMI's help, minorities are still fleeing the country in order to find safety. For the 2014 National Parliamentary Election, laws concerning Election Day conduct have yet to be passed, assisting in minorities gaining possible representative advantages.

Committee on Religion and Sectarianism:

Religion has been a divisive factor in Iraq for years, dating back to the first century when the Prophet Muhammad's successor was debated. The resulting Sunni-Shi'a split has been the source of much violence for hundreds of years. Iraq is 97% Muslim, and as a result, Sunni and Shi'as wrestle for control of power within the state. Because of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Shi'as have dominated the government, brewing extreme ill-will towards Sunnis who do not want to lose political power and relevance. One example of the brutal violence conceived from this hatred is the 2004 Sunni Iraq Ashura bombings which, aimed at Shi'as, killed 178 people and injured about 500 others.

Another example is in 2006 when Sunni Islamists bombed the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest Shi'a worship sites. Minority groups in Iraq have taken considerable hits both physically and emotionally. The Yezidis, who inhabit Iraqi-Kurdistan, have been called

devil-worshippers. Extremist imams have even said that it is a duty for morally-correct Muslims to kill all Yezidis. They have been the target of Al-Qaeda persecution. Resulting from the internal conflict and strife of the Iraqi people, childhood education has taken a hit. Dangerous neighborhoods, fear of death, and unstable communities have led to a general decline in attendance. Teachers fear religious extremists and, as a result, are fleeing the country. Girl's education has been notably bleak. The leading factor to a decline in female attendance is due to home life; however, the second leading factor was teacher behavior. It's possible that some teachers, holding traditional views, do not agree with the education of girls. A good deal of the uneducated youth has taken up violence, killing their fellow Iraqis in the omnipresent religious battles.

Committee on Regional Affairs:

At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, Kurds had been relatively neutral, clashing at times with both the regime and the opposition. The regime granted citizenship to Kurds in 2011 in an attempt to neutralize their potential role in the conflict. This worked in the beginning portions of the war, but more recently, Kurds have been siding with the Syrian opposition against Bashar al-Assad. Additionally, Kurds have had conflicts with Islamist groups fighting in Syria. As a result, several refugee camps have been opened in Iraqi Kurdistan to assist those fleeing the Syrian conflict. However, the flood of refugees has the potential to destabilize Iraq further and re-ignite the ethnic Arab-Kurd tensions. As Iran and Saudi Arabia both share a border with Iraq, there is a tug of war involving minorities. There is a Shi'a majority in Iraq, and with Iran being the largest Shi'a country, Iran tends to side with Iraq. However, many minority groups are Sunni, and these groups usually side with Saudi Arabia. If there is a future war, Iraq will be torn in half due to resources and ethnicities.

During The Cold War, the United States sided with Iraq, and Russia sided with Iran. This has continued to cause extreme tension between the two bordering countries. As possible war approaches, attitudes between the two Shi'a groups are becoming milder, with many believing that the Muslim messiah is coming soon. The minorities—Sunnis—have been and will continue to be supported by the United States, who is an enemy of Iran. Whether or not Russia will enter the possible war is not yet confirmed, as they are currently having their own internal and external conflicts. As most minorities in Iraq reside in the North, their bordering countries include Syria, Turkey, and Iran. A substantial amount of oil, Iraq's most important natural resource, is located in minority territory. If war ensues, their oil resources will most likely go to war efforts. There are several major oil pipelines in the North, and if there is a schism, the system will be fragmented and distraught.

Committee on Resources:

Resources are available to the minorities of Iraq. Oil, fertile soil, and gas are all present in Kurdistan. Oil, the most abundant natural resource, is produced in Kurdistan. This past January, Kurds brought the government about \$2,313,334 in oil revenue. Agriculture is the main food source for the Kurds, who have good conditions such as fertile soil, arable land, a conducive climate, and plentiful water. The accessibility to water is shown through Kurdistan's construction of dams. Three of the major dams being built are the Dukan, the Darbandikan, and the Duhok, all three having a water storage capacity of 9.85 billion cubic meters. Also, power in Kurdistan is fueled by gas and diesel turbines.

Committee on Media:

Minorities have limited control over media as the government dominates media input and output. There have been multiple deaths in Kurdistan linked to the media. Recently, a magazine editor was killed for doing research about the corruption in the autonomous Kurdistan region. The editor warned the authorities of the threats against him and sadly, nothing was done to help him. Although the Kurdish North is said to be safer and more respectful of human rights than other regions, they have been harshly criticized for interfering with free speech and press. When it comes to propaganda, fights ensue over petty issues such as which flag shall be raised. Also, DNA has been brought into battle with propaganda; meaning, that one minority group is trying to show they are far greater than the majority of Iraq's population. For example, a video recently aired about Kurds having better DNA ties than Assyrians, and as a result, caused tension between the two groups.

Five Issues in Need of Being Addressed:

- 1) Declining minority population in Iraq
- 2) Minority representation in government
- 3) Minority persecution by majority groups and the government and how it has affected the social sphere of life in Iraq
- 4) Long-standing conflict between Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims
- 5) Abundance of natural resources