

Federalism Does Not Mean Dividing Iraq

Federation of Iraq

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USPA NEWS - Federalism, by definition, does not equate to dividing Iraq. In fact, it represents a higher form of governance that fosters coexistence among diverse groups, promoting peace, security, and respect for individual rights within a framework of shared governance. Countries adopting federal systems typically have citizens living in harmony, with freedoms guaranteed by a social contract established by the people themselves. This allows for the protection of minority views, religions, and cultures.

Iraqi leaders, however, have often misunderstood federalism, confusing it with confederation, which could indeed lead to fragmentation. Federalism, unlike confederation, works through a unified central government that maintains control over military and foreign policies while ensuring regional autonomy in non-central matters. It is a framework that maintains national unity, allowing regions to manage their own affairs, yet ensuring that certain aspects, like defense, foreign relations, and judiciary, remain centralized.

Federalism should not be viewed as a mere commodity; it is a dynamic system that evolves, improving over time. Countries with federal systems typically experience faster development, as they are able to efficiently invest regional resources, achieving high levels of growth and fostering democratic, free societies.

Federal systems allow for greater individual and group freedoms, encouraging regions to coexist peacefully while also maintaining unity on critical national issues such as defense and foreign policy.

However, transitioning to federalism is not straightforward, especially for nations like Iraq, which has endured long periods of oppression under authoritarian regimes. In such contexts, the concept of federalism can be unclear, and the populations may not fully understand its benefits.

A shift toward federalism requires a profound understanding of democratic principles, freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and the recognition of citizenship and national unity.

Key Conditions for Establishing a Federal System:

1. International Cooperation and Support:

For federalism to succeed in Iraq, it is essential that major international powers recognize and support the project. This support can range from diplomatic endorsement to economic and military assistance in transitioning toward federalism. Iraq's regional challenges, including its complex relations with neighboring countries, necessitate international collaboration to ensure federalism does not further escalate conflicts or divisions.

2. Central Authority and Control:

A strong central government is crucial in federal systems. Iraq's federalism must be based on a central authority capable of maintaining control over military forces and foreign relations, ensuring that the nation remains united. The government should be independent of external influences, particularly the three occupations (American, Iranian, and Turkish) that currently impact Iraq's sovereignty. The federal system must be built on a foundation of national unity, with a firm commitment to preserving Iraq's territorial integrity.

3. Constitutional Clarity:

One of the most critical aspects of implementing federalism in Iraq is the creation of a clear and inclusive constitution. The current draft constitution acknowledges the Kurdistan region but allows for other regions to form, which can create challenges due to Iraq's lack of clearly defined cultural or geographical boundaries. This needs careful consideration to ensure that the federal model is inclusive and does not inadvertently lead to further fragmentation.

Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Federalism:

- **Internal Division and Sectarian Challenges:** Iraq's social fabric is deeply interwoven with sectarian and ethnic complexities. While regions like Kurdistan have a clear ethnic identity, much of the rest of Iraq is ethnically and sectarian diverse. Establishing regions based on these differences without fostering greater division could lead to further conflict and undermine national unity. The concept of a sectarian-based federalism, such as in Iraq, faces substantial risks, especially in mixed regions with large Sunni and Shia

populations.

- The Swiss and Belgian Models:

While the Swiss and Belgian models of federalism are often cited, they do not fully apply to Iraq's unique context. Switzerland's cantonal model was formed between largely homogeneous and geographically distinct groups, while Iraq's Arab population is significantly mixed. Drawing comparisons between these models and Iraq's situation is misleading, as federalism in Iraq could easily exacerbate tensions, especially without addressing the underlying sectarian divides.

Conclusion:

Federalism in Iraq can be a powerful tool for managing diversity and fostering unity if applied correctly. However, the transition must be handled with care, ensuring that it does not inadvertently deepen divisions. Iraq must take a cautious approach, ensuring that its federal system strengthens the central government, fosters inclusive development, and maintains national unity, all while embracing the freedoms and responsibilities that federalism offers.

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