

Iraq in the Eye of Terror Storm

Mr. Anshumali Shukla

Research Scholar,
Department of Geography,
Punjabi University,
Patiala-(Punjab)- 147001, India

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ABSTRACT: The ancient name of Iraq is Mesopotamia. The word Mesopotamia is a combination of two words 'Meso' & 'Potamia'. The Word 'Meso' refers to 'between or middle while 'Potamia' refers to 'Water body or river. Therefore it is a land between two rivers and these two rivers were Tigris and Euphrates. The middle location can be sometimes useful while other times it may be a destructive. Iraq's geographical middle location has been responsible for rise and fall of many civilizations since ancient times. But in the present paper a discussion has been made on the present i.e. in 21st century Iraq. Presently, Iraq is trapped, firstly, between two sectarian ideologies of Islam, one is the 'Sunni sect' whose philosophy and ideology is supported by Saudi Arabia and other one is 'Shia or Shiite sect' supported by Iran. Iraq is also caught between the rivalries of U.S.A. and Russia. For both also a stable Iraq is not favorable because both supply arms and ammunition to Iraqi army. The result is in front of us, a terror off shoot of Al-Qaida known as ISIS (Islamic state of Iraq and Syria /Levant) has captured a large swath of area in the north as well as west of Iraq and capital Baghdad is under the threat of their attacks. In the present paper an attempt has been made to known exactly what are the causes behind this sectarian evil war in Iraq its geopolitical effects and some possible remedies for the solution of the current problem in Iraq have also suggested.

KEYWORDS: Mesopotamia, Location, Trapped, Rivalries and Swath.

INTRODUCTION

Iraq is an important Middle East Asian country. It shares its international borders with Turkey in north, Iran in east, Kuwait in south-east, Saudi Arabia in south, Jordan in south-west and Syria to the west. Its capital is Baghdad and 97% of its population is Muslim. Among Muslims are Shias, Sunnis, Kurds and Turkmen are important while non-muslims account for only 3% of total population of the country. About 65% of Iraqi population is Shia.

Iraq's modern borders were demarcated in 1920 AD by the League of Nations when the Ottoman Empire was divided by 'Treaty of Sevres'. After the fall of Ottoman Empire, Iraq was placed under the authority of United Kingdom as 'British Mandate of Mesopotamia'. A monarchy was established in it in 1920AD. Later on this kingdom got independence from UK in 1932. In AD 1958 there was fall of monarchy and 'Republic of Iraq' was created. Iraq remained under the control of 'Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party' from 1968 to 2003 AD. But after the fall of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath party by an invasion led by United States and its allied countries' a multi party democracy was established in the country. But Iraqi insurgency is still Continue after the departure of United States and its allied nations' forces in 2011, in form of 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Levent' (ISIS) fighting against present democratic government and having an aim of establishing Caliphate over entire Iraq and its surrounding areas.

OBJECTIVES

Following are the main objectives of this study:

- (I) To study the causes behind events that led to this struggle between government and ISIS terrorist forces.
- (II) To study geopolitical impacts of this sectarian civil war.
- (III) To study role of regional as well as global super powers behind present conditions in Iraq.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper has used information obtained from various sources including articles from newspapers, magazines, internet and numerous books and research papers.

AREA OF STUDY

The country of Iraq is situated in Middle East Asia. It is also known as 'Mesopotamia'. It has a hot arid climate with sub-tropical influences. It has vast reserves of mineral oil on which the heartbeat of modern day industrial world runs. In the present paper an attempt has been made to study causes and effects of present day violent conditions prevailing in the country.



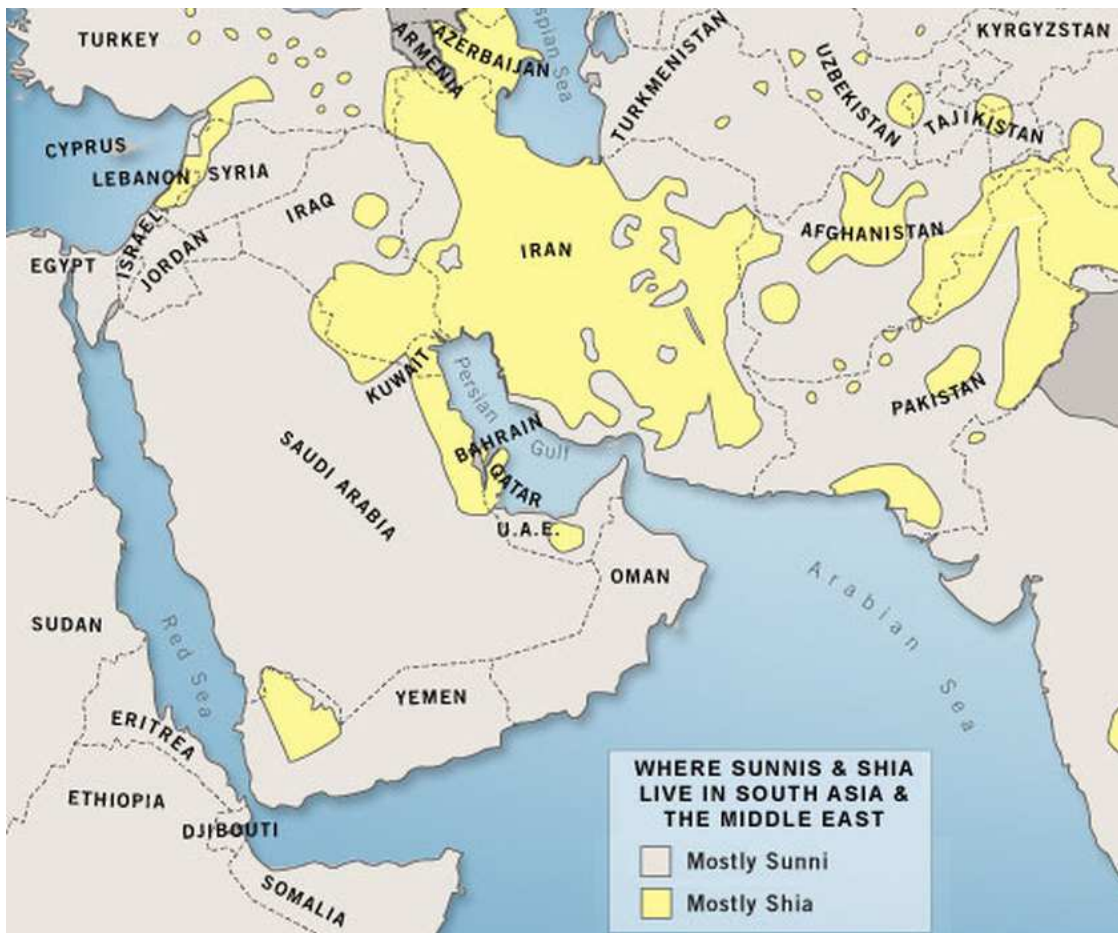
BACKGROUND

Following the withdrawal of United States and its allied troops in 2011, the insurgency continued and a political instability in the country started emerging. The influence of 'Arab Spring' also failed to topple the present government in Iraq. In 2012 and 2013 the level of violence in Iraq increased and civil war in Syria also gave it much needed strength. In December 2012, mainly Sunni Arabs protested against the present Nouri-Al-Maliki's Shiite dominated government for marginalizing them. Thus a sectarian fight started and a large number of people belonging to Sunni and Shia sects started attacking each other. In 2014, an Al-Qaida splinter ISIL or sometimes ISIS (Islamic state of Iraq & Levent/Syria) a terror group, which also comprise

many fighters who were earlier loyal to Saddam Hussein, seized control of several major Iraqi cities including Tikrit, Faluja and Mosul. This capture of important cities has led to thousands of internally displaced persons and thousands have been killed due to fighting between government forces and terrorist forces.

The sectarian civil war in Iraq has a number of causes behind its existence. Some important causes are as follows:

1. SHIA-SUNNI SCHISM: This is the most Important cause of present day conditions in Iraq. The rift between two great denominations of Islam is the oldest one. Out of total world’s Muslim population, Shias comprise about 10% to 20% of the total Muslim population of the world. In most of the countries they are in minority. But in Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and Azerbaijan they out number their co-religionists.



The rift between these two sects goes right back to the beginning. After the death of Prophet Mohammad in 7th century the question of succeeding him arose. A majority of Prophet Mohammad’s followers were of view that Prophet Mohammad’s close associate ‘Abu Bakr’ should be the leader. So they became Sunnis. But a minority of followers believed that Prophet Mohammad’s son-in-Law and nephew ‘Ali’ should succeed. Shia is an abbreviation of ‘Shia Ali’ which means ‘The Party of Ali’.

Later on Ali was killed and his son Hussein was also killed. This has led to a widening of rift as well as seeds of civil war had also been sown. Their mutual hatred has led to brutal and genocidal persecution of Shias in many parts of the world.

2. SELFISH INTERESTS OF WESTERN POWERS: Among western world powers first of all Britain in order to strengthen its position in Iraq utilized first the Shia-Sunni rift just like in India they use ‘divide and rule’ policy against Hindus and Muslims which led the division India and Pakistan on the basis of religion. Similarly due of fear of a severe Shia rebellion, Britain used an elite of Sunni army officers to crush the revolt.

After World War II the geopolitical situation of the world changed and now United States of America (U.S.A) and Russia become dominant players on international arena.

Both of these countries have their own interest in this region. U.S.A. is very much interested in this region due to vast reserves of crude oil in this region. Had the government in Iraq been strong, U.S.A. will not be able to obtain oil at cheaper rates but due to fragile political conditions, particularly after the fall of Saddam Hussein, U.S.A. has used the oil reserves of this country at its own will and also at the cost of preserving her own oil reserves. By maintaining strong position in Iraq, it can also keep eye on the movements of its cold war opponent Russia. Thus, for this U.S.A. has also used the fragile political nature of Iraq for its own benefits and now when there is a real need of American help to crush the forward movement of ISIS militant forces, it is showing lesser interest while to counter U.S. influence by providing fighter aircrafts to Iraq, Russia is using the situation for her own interest.

3. RIVALRIES OF REGIONAL POWERS:- In this Middle East Asia region, on the basis of religious sects Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia from a long time are fighting a proxy war against each other to gain roots as well as influence over Iraq. Saudi Arabia is indirectly helping the Sunni insurgents in Iraq whereas Iran's support to Shiite government in Iraq has also contributed to sectarian civil war.

4. RAMPANT CORRUPTION: - Iraq is suffering from this problem especially when the Americans told Iraqi army to outsource food and other supplies in 2005. A battalion commander was paid for a unit of 600 men but they generally had 200 to 300 men, the money for extra soldiers who do not exist in reality goes in to the pockets of the high officers. To some retired army officer, army has become a source of corruption for senior officer. Same is the condition of normal public administration. Youth has no jobs. As a result they got attracted towards these terrorist agencies which pay a hefty sum of money to its recruits.

ROLE OF SUPER POWERS

Two most important super powers U.S.A and Russia have their own interests in this region even after the end of cold war still U.S.A wants to keep an eye on its rival Russia who has the boundaries touching in this region. U.S.A. is mainly interested in the vast oil reserves of Iraq. Therefore in this region U.S. has always supported those governments who are the puppets of U.S.A. or pro-Western governments be it 'The Shah of Iran' who was later on toppled by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran or the rulers of Saudi Arabia who have always enjoyed the patronage of U.S.A. Contrary to this, anti-American rulers like Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Bashar-al-Asad of Syria suffered the anger of U.S.A. Saddam Hussein was deliberately put to death by U.S.A.

There were very little evidences of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But most probably due to 9/11 tragedy, oil reserve control, to eliminate Saddam Hussein and establishing a weak democratic pro-western government, U.S. attacked Iraq.

Moreover to show its military superiority U.S. invaded Iraq. Due to this reason U.S. and its allies did not bother about a majority of other nations who were not in the favor of invasion of Iraq.

On the other hand Russia wants to counter the influence as well as U.S. interference in this region because it may have an impact on its Chechnya, Georgia and other southern states. A pro- US government in Middle East usually lends support to the Jihadists fighting in the above mentioned parts of Russia. Russia recently has succeeded in side tracking the U.S. efforts to dethrone Bashar-Al-Asad in Syria by providing a solution to destroy the chemical as well as weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, due to reluctance of U.S. and other western powers to directly help militarily to Iraq and refusal to U.S.A. to provide air force help to ground based Iraqi military has given the Russia an opportunity to increase her influence in the region. Therefore for the said purpose Russia has given Iraq second hand Sukhoi fighter aircrafts as well as its ammunition to launch an all out attack on ISIS terror force.

Moreover Middle East Asia is also a testing ground for new weapons. Therefore, both of these countries have used this area to test their new weapons in one or the other part of the present history.

ROLE OF REGIONAL POWERS

There are three major regional powers who have a great role in shaping events in Iraq. These regional powers are Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Israel is also an important actor of this region. First of all we must understand the role of Iran in present problem of Iraq. Iran's relations, since the written history begins, have seen ups and downs with Iraq. But being a Shia Muslim population majority country, Iran has always kept a soft corner for Iraq. Though their relation went to lowest ebb during the reign of Saddam Hussein, a Sunni dictator ruler of Iraq and both countries fought war against each other. But during this time too, Iran housed a number of anti- Saddam Shiite organizations.

But after post- Saddam era, there relations have been improved and now Iran is Iraq's largest trade partner. A Shiite government in Iraq, according to some geopolitical scholars will always be favorable for Iran because being a strong country, good relations with Shia dominant countries may help Iran to represent itself as a 'Protector of Shias' in the world. This feeling is also working behind the ideology of Iran to develop nuclear arsenal to which U.S.A. and its allies in the west are opposed because this will make Iran very strong in the region against Saudis and Israel, all these are important allies of US in this region.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has uneasy ties with present government of Iraq because of its close ties with Iran and marginalization Sunnis of Iraq. Saudi Arabia has blamed only Iraq for its present condition. We know that Saudi Arabia is Sunni majority country. It wants to counter the Shia Islamic influence in Iraq. Therefore, it has always supported financially the Sunni jihadist terror fighters in Iraq. Saudi Wahhabis have always helped and financed these terror group Iraq. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Levent) is a beneficiary of Saudi Wahhabis. Moreover, Saudis also have divergent views with Iraq regarding oil production and exports. Saudis want to keep Iran in isolation and also indirectly supporting instability in Iraq so that a so called 'Shia Axis' including Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon may not emerge against them and Saudis may remain an influential power in this region.

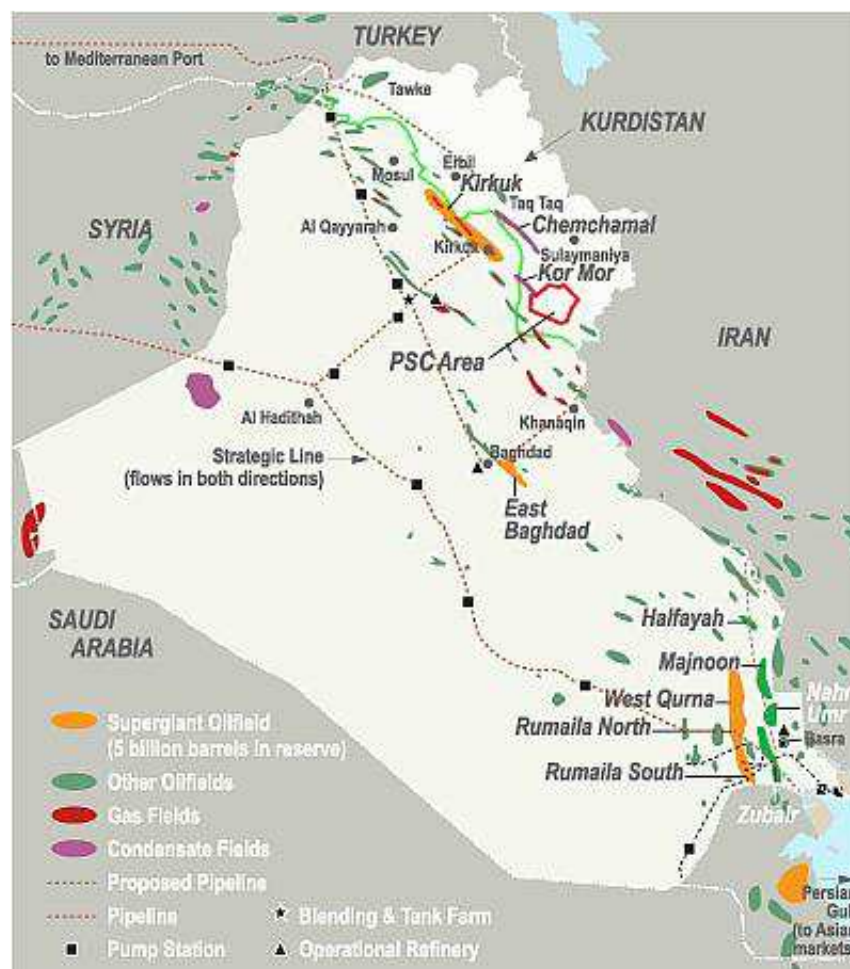
Egypt another Sunni Islamic power of this region is absent from the scene because of its domestic political upheavals.

Israel, another important country in region and an ally of U.S.A is also in favour of not involving Iran in internal matters of Iraq. Israelis' are of the view that good relations of Iran & Iraq will not be in favour of Israel as both Iran and Israel are the emerging powers of this region.

GEOPOLITICAL IMPACTS OF IRAQI CIVIL WAR

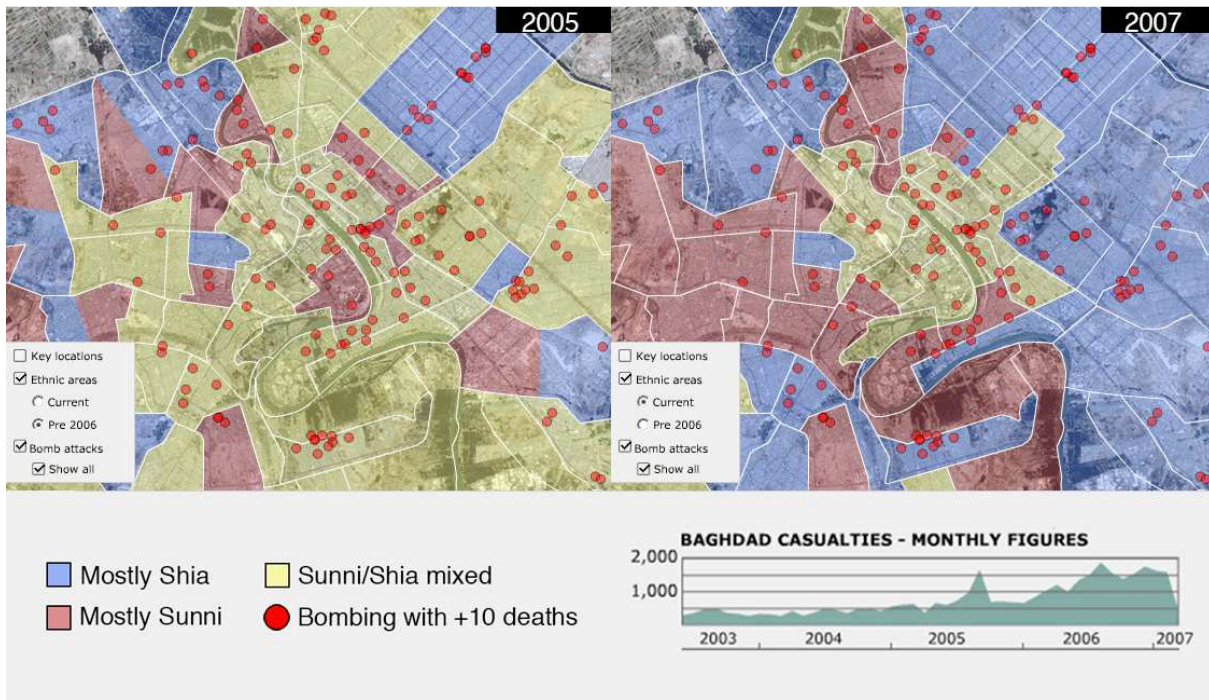
They are as follows:

- 1. RISE IN GLOBAL OIL PRICE:** Iraq has fifth largest proven reserves of mineral oil in the world. This oil is mainly concentrated in Shia dominated south and Kurdish north. The Sunni dominated western region of the country lacks this mineral wealth. Therefore, the ISIS has captured the oil refineries of the country. This may result in rise in global crude oil prices. Moreover, they can purchase much needed material for war to continue their struggle against the legitimate government in Baghdad.



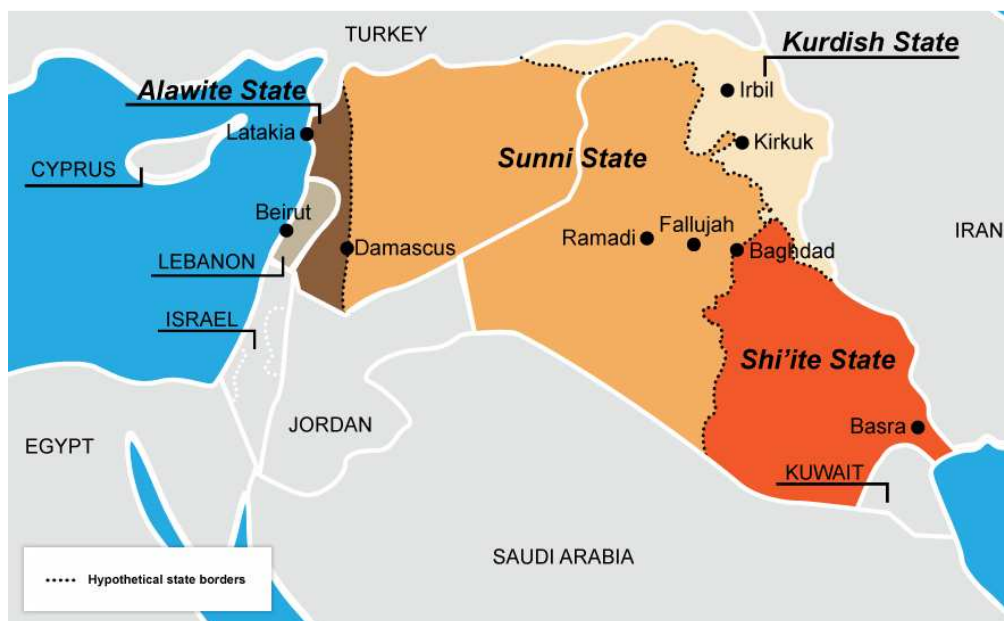
(See major oil production centers of Iraq in Map)

2. **ETHNIC CLEANSING OF IRAQ:** The present nationwide sectarian civil war may lead to ethnic cleansing of one sect in the dominated areas of other sects. (see the map below of Baghdad city & religious make up in 2005 Mixed neighborhoods, then the norm are in yellow. The map on right shows what it looked like by 2007, after two awful years of Shia-Sunni killing, bombings (shown with red dots), death squads and militias. The forced evictions and thousands of deaths effectively cleansed neighborhoods, to be mostly Shia (blue) or mostly Sunni (red).

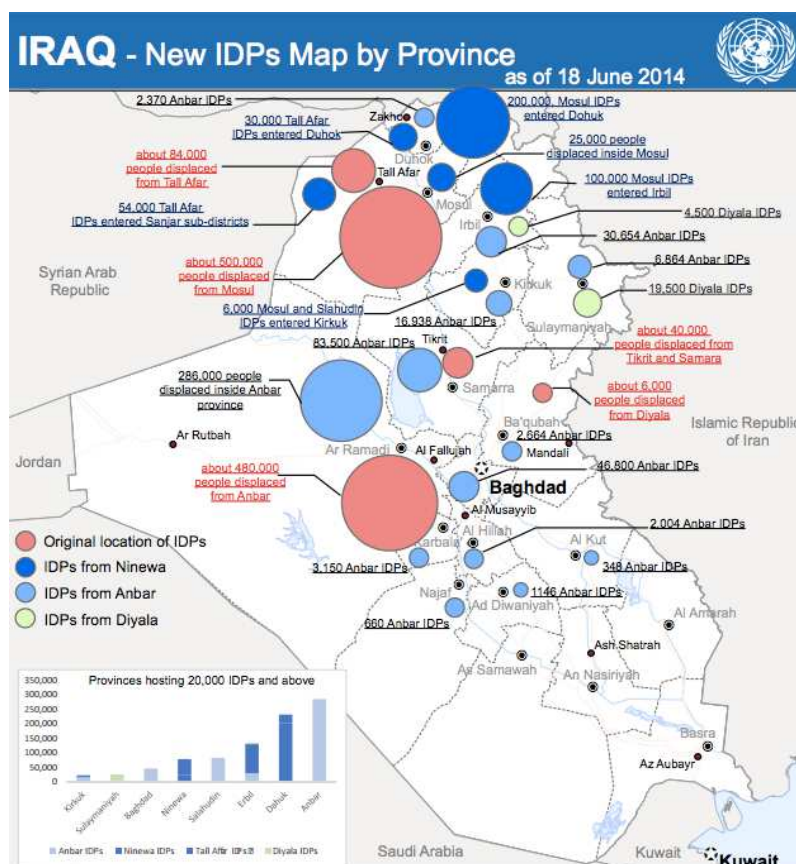


The ethnic violence in Iraq may result in worldwide sectarian violence among Shias & Sunnis particularly in Pakistan, India, and Indonesia etc.

3. **THREAT TO WAR AGAINST TERROR:-** The disintegration of Iraq will give a massive blow to the launched war against terror by U.S.A not only in this region but also in the entire world.
4. **DESTRUCTION OF HERITAGE SITES:-** Many heritage sites in areas under the control of ISIS are either destroyed or may face the danger of their destruction. This may further generate anger among the world community.
5. **THREAT TO INTEGRITY OF THE STATE OF IRAQ:-** ISIS's declaration of their captured areas as independent may result in the disintegration of Iraq into its three major ethnic components such as Kurdistan in north, Sunni dominated western and areas along Syrian borders and Shia dominated southern and eastern. Iraq Now challenge before the present government of Iraq is to unite their people first and then fight against ISIS.



6. IRAQI CIVILIANS DISPLACED BY THE CRISES: This sectarian civil war has resulted in more than one million internally displaced people which are roughly about 3% of country's total population. Their resettlement will be a challenge for the government.



POSSIBLE REMEDIES

There is nothing impossible in this world. The problem of ISIS and ethnic civil war cannot be solved in one day. But certain steps should be taken to achieve a victory over these problems. These are as follows:

- (1) Unity of nation at the time of crisis is first and most important thing. Government of Iraq should ensure a strong feeling of patriotism and defense of their motherland against the marching enemy terror troops among its all population. Terrorist is no one's friend. All sections of society should be united together to fight against ISIS terrorists.
- (2) As Iraqi political leaders failed to select their representative in their parliament who will takeover the reign of country after the exit of Nouri-al-Maliki. They should select such a leader who represents all sections, of Iraqi society without any discrimination.
- (3) Major world powers at this point of time should help militarily to the ground forces of Iraq to capture the lost areas from terrorist's forces.
- (4) United Nations should come forward in solving Iraqi dispute without hurting the territorial integrity of this nation.
- (5) Regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia should also help Iraq in this situation. Only Iran has already declared for full scale help to Iraq. But no such declaration has come from the sides of Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

Iraq also known as 'Mesopotamia' in ancient times today is passing through its one of the most difficult a phase in its history when its survival as a unified state is in danger. Now the time has come that in global fight against terrorism all the sectarian minorities as well as majority people have to forget their personal disputes and fight against the evil of ISIS to save

their country. Because once you loose your motherland, you lose everything. Moreover international community should also come forward in support of present Iraqi government. If no immediate actions are taken then it will be a threat for Iraq as an integrated nation and also a massive blow to international community's war against terror.

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