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CHALLENGES OF IRAQI INTELLIGENCE IN POST-SADDAM ERA

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Abstract: In the majority of post-war Middle Eastern countries, marked by authoritarianism, frozen political systems, constant destabilizing attempts and revolutions against official order, intelligence services have become pillars for power preservation, constantly transgressing their specific objectives in order to become control and repression instruments against both internal and external threatening elements. Ba'athist Iraq comes as a classic example, since the new elites led by Saddam Hussein develop and extend security and intelligence services (Mukhabarat, Istikhbarat, al-Amn al-Amm, al-Amn al-Khas etc.), transforming them into systems with multiple tentacles, modelled by interests at the level of tribes, clans, regions, sects, through which the regime controls an entire political and social structure, and diffuse information throughout the complicated Middle East and internationally. After the military campaign from 2003, all intelligence services are dissolved by new installed Iraqi government following an advice from US officials, in order to establish new structures. In the entire post-Saddam era however, the structures faced an infinitely complex system of threats to national security, deriving from terrorism, insurgency, organized crime and generalized violence, from competition and rivalry between them, and from representation of competing interests at political or confession level: Shi'a, Kurdish, Sunni actors, as well as the ones between US and Iran. Taking into account the increasing authority of Nuri al-Maliki and the projection of Iraq's destiny in a regional conflict with multiple actors, e.g. Iran, Saudi Arabia, US, Turkey, the new Iraqi intelligence services are permanently constrained to rethink their operational strategies and fidelity both at national and international scale.

Keywords: Iraq, intelligence, Saddam Hussein, Nuri al-Maliki, Mukhabarat, Istikhbarat, Sunni, Shi'a

1. BETWEEN NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENDING THE REGIME: INTELLIGENCE SERVICES DURING SADDAM ERA

Development and extension of intelligence services and security structures are closely related to Iraq's specifics, as a country situated at the confluence of multiple internal (political, ethnic, sectarian, tribal) threats and external tensions, conflicts at regional and international levels. After modern Middle East's formation, First World War and then decolonization, the majority of newly created states faced serious problems in defining a stable political and security structure, confronting coups, revolutions, political instability, continuous interference from

external powers, social and economic crises, and community challenges and so on. This entire collection of factors will determine the characteristics of an environment subjected to permanent insecurity, rivalry and conflict, imposing the development of a highly competent intelligence system capable to defend both national interests and ruling regimes. Similar to Ba'athist Syria, Iraq offers after 1968 a clear example of state in which security and intelligence services become a pillar supporting authoritarianism and repression as well as control of both government and society. Modern and contemporary Iraq inherits a history of fierce violence and in order to better understand its background and consequences on internal and external stability, one must consider the fundamental role that intelligence services played and will play in limiting or, on contrary, developing conflict and disequilibrium. Until its fall in 2003, Saddam regime built a complex security and intelligence services, whose main role was to defend the regime and its main leader especially [2]. Due to a continuous competition and mutual control, their tasks were overlapping considerably. Both, were led by members of president's family or clan and doubled by professionals chosen through rotation from elites, in order to balance interests around Saddam and to avoid an eventual excessive influence and power within mentioned services.

The first Iraqi intelligence service, General Security Service (*Mudiriyat al-Amn al-Amm*), was created in 1921 during British mandate. Since then, it permanently served as an institution dedicated to internal security control, an instrument used by different regimes to preserve order and prevent internal threats. After Ba'ath Party's rise in 1968, *al-Amn al-Amm* is quickly transformed into a repressing force used against inside and outside groups considered rivals (communist movement, Shi'a and Kurdish movements), as the party was incorporating factions yet not trusty to clan's president, Muhammad Ahmed al-Bakr or to Saddam Hussein. The second Iraqi intelligence service, *al-Istikhbarat al-'Askariyya* (Military Intelligence Directorate -

MID), was created once Iraq released itself from British mandate and gained independence. Until the 8th decade, it was coordinated by Defence Ministry in order to, later, enter under direct supervision of the president, like all other services. Main MID functions covered both internal affairs (monitoring military officers, protecting military objectives, counterinsurgency, infiltrating Shi'a and Kurdish movements, supporting terrorist or militant foreign movements) and external collecting intelligence and other operations (aiming Jordan, Gaza, Syria, Iran, Gulf States mainly).

After a failed coup in 1973, attempted by General Security Service chief, Nadhim Kazar, intelligence services are profoundly restructured; the event underlines Saddam's complete domination together with his trusty group [14]. Asking KGB's help, he starts modernizing *al-Amn al-Amm* and transfers some of its responsibilities to a new created general intelligence service, *Mukhabarat*. General Security Service remained under Defence Ministry until the 8th decade, when it would be transformed into an autonomous agency reporting directly to Presidential council. Along with other services, *al-Amn al-Amm,* was led during Saddam by his clan members or trusted characters, recruited from Tikrit area or surrounding Sunni regions. Its last director, Rafi Latif Tilfah al-Takriti, was installed in 1997, and after regime's fall in 2003 remained free, being considered after 2004 an organizer of Iraqi resistance in the Sunni triangle.

In 1973, Saddam founded another new security and intelligence structure, the General Intelligence Department (GID) - *Da'irat al-Mukhabarat al-'Amma*. It represented the institutionalization of his personal security system dated back in 1964 (*al-Jihaz al-Khas* – The Special Apparatus, becoming in 1968, *al-Jihaz al-Hanin* – The Yearning Apparatus), inside Ba'ath Party [1]. Anchored both in political and president's private life, GID is the first service to defend his clan's interests and concomitantly coordinate foreign intelligence. Led by president's family members or elites from Tikrit, it coordinated internal action of other services (monitoring Ba'ath, population's

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surveillance, combating Shi'a and Kurdish opposition, monitoring foreign embassies and foreign visitors, counter-espionage) as well as external (collecting intelligence, sabotage and terrorist acts against neighbouring countries, supporting groups hostile to competing regimes).

The most influential agency was Special Security (*al-Amn al-Khas*) – officially denominated as Special Security Directorate (*Mudiriyyat al-Amn al-Khas*), Special Security Apparatus (*Jihaz al-Amn al-Khas*) or Presidential Intelligence Apparatus (*Jihaz Mukhabarat al-Ra'isa*). It was founded in 1982, due to war against Iran and a failed kill attempt against Saddam, firstly as an organisation securing the president and his group by selecting loyal members of General Security, *Mukhabarat* and *Istikhbarat*. After 1984 it extended, becoming an autonomous service; most of the members came from Tikrit, Huwayja, Samarra, as exclusive Sunni regions. Special Security was in its first years linked to Kamil brothers, president's cousins and sons-in-law: Hussein Kamil, back then Minister for Military Industrialisation as the official to recruit first forces from the other intelligence services and which together with Saddam Kamil managed the service until their getaway in 1995. After 1992 however, Saddam Hussein's son, Qussay [5], supervises the service. Special Security quickly became, directly or indirectly, a super-service meant to serve as superior intelligence processing centre, controlling other intelligence services and the two major para-military structures the Special Republican Guard (*al-Harras al-Jamhuri al-Khas*) and Saddam's Fedayeen [6: 44-52]. The fidelity of this praetorian security service was well reward: according to time's records, the salary of a Special Security section chief was ten times higher than one's from Military Intelligence and five times higher than one's in a similar intelligence position at other services. Similarly, *al-Amn al-Khas* was directly involved in managing unconventional arming programs as well as complicated relations with UNSCOM inspection commissions, successfully camouflaging documents and objectives.

After the Gulf War, a new structure is formed, in 1992, incorporating elements from *Istikhbarat al-'Askariyya*, directly coordinated by the Presidential Palace and from Military Security (*al-Amn al-'Askari*). Its role consisted in supervising and controlling armed forces and officers' loyalty, especially under the circumstances created by coup attempts. It is the case of a tragic attempt, for example, initiated by CIA and supported by the exiled Iraqi general Mohammad Abdullah Shahwani as member of the opposition party National Alliance, and after 2003 director of the newest intelligence service. In June 1996, Mukhabarat discovered the coup d'Etat he initiated and comprised other 200 Iraqi officers: 80 officers are executed, among which two of Shahwani's sons.

The entire net of services not only shared tasks and competence areas, but competed and supervised themselves continuously, by cross-checking intelligence and constantly fuelling suspicion in order to eliminate any possible threat oriented against the regime. Every matter was consequently considered a surveillance and security issue, including not only the society but also its political, military, intelligence and security elites. The closer some persons were to Saddam and his clan, the more control was exerted upon them; regime's survival was ensured on Saddam's capacity to permanently keep key positions for his family or loyal clan members. Starting the 8th decade of last century, intelligence, and security services became personalized and tribalized; parallel, informal ones, under direct supervision of Saddam or his sons [3] double its official structures. Among them, one can

mention: The Special Protection Apparatus (*al-Jihaz al-Himaya al-Khasa*) - designated to protect the president and his residence, the Special Republican Guard (*al-Haris al-Jamhuri al-Khas*) – incorporating 15.000 soldiers, the Special Security Committee (*al-Majlis al-Amn al-Khas*), Saddam's Fedayeen and so on. Totally, the entire system was counting over 150.000-200.000 members. Finally, the National Security Council (*al-Majlis al-Amn al-Qawmi*), also known as the National Security Bureau (*al-Maktab al-Amn al-Qawmi*), served as coordinating entity for the other intelligence and security structures. Far from representing a structure like the others, its role was to control and coordinate operations, complicating the puzzle, and stimulating competitiveness and rivalry. Led Saddam Hussein himself and sometimes delegated to Qussay as in charge for solving directly problems, the Council was formed by representatives of the five important intelligence services as well as members of Presidential Palace's Secretariat, like Abid Hamid Mahmud as Saddam's main collaborator and adviser, with an important coordination role.

2. NOWADAYS CHALLENGES FACED BY IRAQ'S INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM

Saddam's fall in April 2003 led to dissolution of the entire political and security system created by Saddam's old regime, as decided by the American governor of Iraq, Paul Bremen, and Coalition Provisional Authority, in their will to wipe out Ba'athist past and set the basis for a new institutional and political nation building. By CPA no. 2 Decision, dated May 23, 2003, all "entities" are abolished, meaning the entire defence and security system: army, intelligence services, Special Forces, paramilitary troops. Strongly argued afterwards, the decision worsened security conditions in Iraq, not only through abridging the state of its instruments, but by leaving 350.000 officers and soldiers without any professional perspective or earning means, in an increasing economic crisis [12]. A significant part of the intelligence services' members, especially Sunni, will form the

resistance soon after, directed now against foreign forces and new political structures. In June 2003 already, insurgency will encompass a significant part of "Sunni Triangle" in terms of nationalist and Islamic ideology; it is doubled by the emergence of a challenging current from the Shi'a community, led by Muqtada al-Sadr. Consequently, the security perspective worsens rapidly in Iraq: on top of Sunni and Shi'a insurgency, increasing violence reaches social dimensions, determined by poorer living standard and deterioration of socio-economic conditions generally [11].

Multi-national Force troops from Iraq prove themselves insufficient and especially incapable to assume operations for ensuring population's daily security; reinstalling police and security forces is difficult to complete. Therefore, militias arise, grouped around political parties and movements, as well as ethnic and confessional groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Kurdish, and Turkmen) or tribal. Political and administrative live, institution rebuilding, are based on formalizing community logic, favouring the rise of Shi'a and Kurdish actors while bringing the role of Sunnis to periphery. All of these favoured a fast reinstatement of security and intelligence services, meant to limit Sunni and Shi'a insurgency and on larger scale to attenuate the development of Sunni jihadi movements. Finally, the new security and intelligence system had to stop massive foreign destabilizing tendencies exerted by regional powers like Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, which take advantage from the momentary lack of security structures and quickly start to seed influence networks, political clients, and militants [18].

The pressing need for a local intelligence structure, capable to support MNF-Iraq's efforts, determined CIA and MI 6 to gradually recruit members of the ex-structures, especially the ones covering anti-Iran and anti-Syria intelligence, whose professionalism was vital. This nucleus, comprising mainly Sunni officers, did not interfere initially with the temporary Iraqi government Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), dominated by Shi'a and Kurdish influences. It becomes official in April 2004, once the new integrated security

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and intelligence structure is operational: National Security Council (*Majlis al-Amn al-Watani*). The latter, led by Paul Bremen initially and then set under the authority of Iyad Allawi as Iraqi PM, rapidly became a confrontation reason between different political forces from IGC, as Allawi was confronting already Shi'a Islamic parties. Shi'a camp will support Mowaffak al-Rubaie as national security adviser. As an *al-Da'wa* member, in close relations with 2005 elected Iraqi Ibrahim al-Jaafari, al-Rubaie was suspected to pro-Iranian sympathies. In response, Iyad Allawi as secular Shi'a exhibiting pro-American opinions will form a new rival structure surrounding prime minister's institution: Ministry of State for National Security Affairs (*Wizarat al-Dawla li-Shuoun al-Amn al-Watani*). In the following period, especially under Nuri al-Maliki, it is to become the main interface and instrument situated between political power and intelligence services [15].

As first acknowledged intelligence service after Saddam's regime, in April 2004 it was denominated as Iraqi National Intelligence Service (*Jihaz al-Mukhabarat al-Watani*) – INIS, and placed under the supervision of Muhammad Abdallah al-Shahwani, the ex-leader of failed coup back in 1996. With Sunni and Turkmen roots, married to a Shi'a wife and elected as deputy on Kurdish lists, the CIA client al-Shahwani was in the eyes of his American protectors the perfect reflection of a system exhibiting national, trans-ethnic and trans-sectarian inclinations, meant to ensure a local intelligence interface, sustaining Coalition's efforts to pacify the country, stop insurgency and set the basis for a new, stable political and security order [7]. However, since its very beginnings, INIS did not enjoy a privileged position and had to successively face opposition exerted by interest groups coagulated around new political actors or Shi'a

groups. As CIA creation, trained and financially sustained with over USD 1 billion until 2007, INIS followed two main directions: infiltrating jihadi movements and limiting Iran's influence. It tried to overpass the logics of community partisans which affected the formation of new military forces and police and to keep a national dimension, massively recruiting members (from Sunni camp predominantly and ex-members of the Ba'ath services) that will be trained in Jordan and Egypt [13].

Situated under Interior Ministry, INIS does not the right to perform interrogation or arrest according to its status, the main task being par excellence intelligence collection. Its double role, e.g. counterinsurgency and blocking Iranian activities (Teheran's initiatives for supporting and training militias and Shi'a groups), exposed it quickly to retaliation. Starting 2004, INIS officers have become targets for Shi'a death squads. Furthermore, service's autonomy, US support, the relative increased number of Sunni members and anti-Iranian actions would raise anger among the new Iraqi political authorities, installed after January and December 2005. Along with his assignment as prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki tried to found parallel structures in order to completely control military, police and the entire ruling structures. Consequently, Al-Maliki will grant a large support to Ministry of State for National Security Affairs (MSNS) and its director, Sherwan al-Waili, in order to form his own parallel intelligence structure as an alternative to INIS and its influence. In fact, the tacit conflict between intelligence services is the expression of an Iranian-American battle, carried out on Iraqi soil between two systems serving as proxy for foreign interests. MSNS has built a service comprising more than 5000 officers, serving primarily al-Maliki's interests rather than national interests, being equivalent to Special Security Service

(*al-Amn al-Khas*) under Saddam. Without a proper legal status, MSNS is dominated by Shi'a camp and serves as a surveillance instrument for internal politics, oriented towards al-Maliki's opponents and Sunni representatives.

As the reconstruction of Iraqi security and military forces was advancing, new intelligence services rises starting 2006. In the frame developed by Interior Ministry, National Information and Investigation Agency (*Wikalat al-Maalumat wa al-Tahqiqat al-Wataniyya*), as a structure similar to FBI, focused on domestic intelligence and empowered to operate arrests as well. Under Ministry of Defense, General Directorate for Intelligence and Security (*Al-Mudiriyat al-Aama lil-Istikhbarat wa al-Amn*) is founded, active both internally and externally. As if not sufficient, Joint Headquarters uniting the three services (Iraqi Army, Iraqi Air Force, Iraqi Navy) founded its own service, M2 - Military Intelligence Directorate (*Mudiriyat al-Istikhbarat al-Askariya*), following DIA model and responsible for collecting and processing military intelligence. Finally, in addition to MSNS, al-Maliki initiated the founding of another intelligence service, under prime-minister's direct authority and reporting only to him: the Office of Information and Security (*Maktab al-Maalumat wa al-Amn*). Led by Abu Ali al-Basri, loyal to al-Maliki, OIS's role and resources are not clearly defined; it serves as a supplementary instrument in facing his rivals [13].

The main disadvantage of all agencies is however the lack of coordination, while, on a larger scale, the rivalry between them reflects the divergent interests of political groups supporting them, both internal and external. Although two institutional structures are created for coordinating intelligence activities, (at inter-Ministry level: National Intelligence Council – *al-Hay'at al-Wataniya li al-Tansiq al-Istikhbari*, at operational level: National Intelligence Cell - *Khaliyat al-Istikhbarat al-Wataniya*), the intelligence proficiency remains low after Saddam era, severely affecting the capacity to limit security risks and threats, coming from both interior and exterior. Their division in factions and partisans eliminates any attempt to assume a coherent and unified strategy, in the context of increasing Sunni insurgency action and jihadi movements, starting with al-Qaeda in Iraq. Deficiencies arise at legislation level, as well as institutional and operational. There are no central data bases, as they are distributed at regional level, preventing the authorities from efficiently tracking terrorists' and militants' displacement across the territory. Each agency has its own intelligence network and sources, information sharing being limited; furthermore, processing is difficult since intelligence analysis capacity and prioritization according to urgency level is limited. Many terrorist act or violent actions are not blocked in time, although their happening is imminent, due to slow decision making and reaction mechanisms. A major cause is represented by lack of professionalism and recruiting based on corrupted criteria favoring ethnic and sectarian selection. If INIS took advantage of the experience ex-Saddam officers had, the intelligence structures created after 2006 comprise members without professional aptitudes or experience, vital for facing a very difficult nowadays Iraq.

The main obstacle in post-Saddam Iraq remains however a rivalry between the two main structures INIS and MSNS [10]. Led by CIA and US, INIS tried to limit the increasing influence Iran exerted upon Iraq, with direct negative consequences upon its officers. According to *Stratfor*, that quotes INIS officials, more than 500 of its officers have been assassinated, mostly by Iranian agents or intelligence forces while more than 700 have been imprisoned by al-Maliki regime [17]. MSNS is meanwhile accused by US and INIS to have served Iranian interests. After al-Waili's run from Iraq, in the '90s, he maintained close relations to Iranian and Syrian intelligence service, partially confirming the allegations. The profound disruption determined by sectarian motivation (INIS is mostly Sunni) and external interests was only partially covered with al-Shahwani's resignation in August 2009, as a protest against al-Maliki's increasing authority and usage of intelligence resources against his rivals. General Zuheir Fadel al-Ghirbawi was

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designated the new director of INIS but his relation with al-Maliki followed the same route marked by tension and limited collaboration. Iraqi prime-minister together with his loyal group, e.g. MSNS members especially, try to limit INIS's anti-Iranian attitude and control the service from inside, by increasing the number of Shi'a officers in INIS and balance power controlled previously only by Sunnis [16]. Considering the election campaign from 2010 and the incipient revival of a Ba'ath movement, al-Maliki led a strong action for eliminating many of political and sectarian rivals, along with other hundreds of politicians, intelligence officers, accusing them of membership in the old structures [8]. The action was obviously taken against Sunni rivals that might have ran for the elections or support other candidates. From intelligence services other than the ones led by prime-minister's regime (INIS, Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry, M2), 376 officers were dismissed in February 2010, from which 190 belonging to INIS. M2 director, Alaa al-Amiri, tried to resist and was dismissed as well. With no exception, all of them were experienced professionals but Sunni. They are replaced with inexperienced Shi'a officers, members of prime-minister's party *al-Da'wa*, some of them being even ex-refugees in Iran during Saddam regime, sustaining therefore Iran's influence [9].

The process had two major consequences. On one hand al-Maliki increased his personal domination on the entire intelligence field, military and security services, where he delegates own clients. He refuses to appoint ministers for Defense and Internal Ministries, taking over the two portfolios. Consequently, all intelligence services along with state's important institutions are dominated and politicized by al-Maliki, like in Saddam's era, but as Shi'a, not as Sunni any more. On the other hand, Iraqi intelligence and security services weaken and become incapable to approach increasing security issues the country faces for the past 3 years. Lack of coordination and professionalism, influences exerted by US and Iran, officers' politicization and sectarian division, constant political interference in decision making and corruption affect the entire Iraqi intelligence activities. Influenced by the Syrian crisis, Iraq faces after 2012 an increasing Sunni challenge addressed through radical jihadi movements, which united themselves and join the Syrian ones, leaguing new transnational structures like al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In front of these new insurgency movements and large scale terrorist attacks in Baghdad and against Shi'a objectives or official forces, meaning military troops, police, intelligence officers, Iraqi authorities can only admit their incapacity and lack of professional resources now, without any option for limiting negative effects of anterior decisions [4].

The actions presented previously have weakened the operational capacity of al-Maliki's intelligence services. Himself a discrete supporter of the Assad regime, through an almost recognized alliance with Iran, in a total opposition with regional Sunni countries and challenged not only by the Sunni population in his country but by a part of the Shi'a parties, al-Maliki still relies on the authoritarian power system built in the last 8 years, so well-known in Iraq's political culture. Unlike Saddam regime however, current regime's intelligence services are extremely unstable and fragile, fractured by internal fights and incapacity to handle a deteriorating security environment. As proven by the amplitude of last year terrorist attacks, the authorities were unable to control Sunni insurgency in al-Anbar province, al-Qaeda's fierce violence and its attacks in Baghdad (Abu Ghraib prison on July 22, 2013, and liberation of hundreds of jihadists). As a

consequence of political power's failure to build a coherent and unified security system, Iraqi intelligence are bypassed and incapable to handle security related events.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The general chaos at both information and operational levels, within the military security and intelligence institutions, is extremely dangerous in a very tense national context and especially in a volatile regional one, marked by denominational fractures and by an exacerbated violence. In addition, 2014 is an election year, which can mark the disappearance of the power system built with so much attention by al-Maliki for eight years, or can reconfirm it. Both alternatives, contain a strong potential turning point, firstly, due to the lack of political unit that will drive the country toward a crisis, as in 2010, aggravated now by the fractures between Sunnites, Shi'ites, Kurds, and even among themselves as communities; secondly, by the fact that, while in power, al-Maliki will continue the same strategy towards exclusive domination of the field decision-making, thus intensifying the opposition's violence against him. In this complex environment, the role of intelligence services is vital. They have today, more than ever in the Iraq's history, a decisive role not only in facing security threats, using only their own resources in order to defeat any danger against the state, and especially towards population, but also in being attached sufficiently to the national interests in a such way that Iraq will not fall back into civil war, or even more, fracture.

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