

The Iraqi youth October 2019 Uprising (Tishreen Intifada): reality and prospects

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Introduction:

In October 2019, massive popular demonstrations swept Baghdad and all southern Iraqi provinces. These demonstrations differed from earlier ones, especially in terms of duration, number of casualties, and excessive methods used to silence them. This paper discusses and analyzes what became known as the Tishreen (October) Uprising, or Intifada, in Iraq, its causes, achievements, and prospects. The uprising, which was yet the most significant peaceful and popular rejection of the occupation, the ensuing governments, the quota system, the sectarian and racial policies applied, corruption, and above all, foreign influence and intervention, mainly by the USA and Iran. As such, this paper will not restrict itself to academic approaches or any traditional hypotheses simply because it concentrates on the development of the events and their effects on Iraqi politics and the Iraqi way of life. The paper will also try to show the uprising's unique characteristics, such as the heavy involvement of young females, the role of the highest religious institution in Najaf (al-Hawza), and the fact that it mainly swept the predominantly Shiite provinces in south Iraq. Finally, the paper will show the successes and failures of the uprising, its future, and the prospects of it flaring again.

Key Words:

Peaceful protests, armed militias, Iraqi women, sectarian policies, Tahrir Square, reforms, foreign influence.

First: The beginning (roots and causes):

It has become a well-known fact that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was based on the false and sinister allegations that the Baath regime owned and/or developed WMD and was collaborating with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization. The invasion itself was illegal, as the UN refused to sanction it. It was carried out in defiance of a huge global public opinion, which took the form of massive public protests demanding the halt of all preparations for the invasion. Millions of people staged unprecedented demonstrations that overwhelmed Washington, London, Rome, Paris, and other European cities. But the planned invasion went on and occupied Iraq in April 2003. To make matters worse, the occupiers (namely the USA and UK) asked the Security Council to consider them as the colonial powers over Iraq, a request the UN approved at once. Yet the occupying

administration did not fulfill the promises given to the Iraqi people, mainly transforming Iraq into (a democratic, prosperous, stable state in which human rights, law, and order were to be respected). The results were chaos, daily killing of innocent people, the propagation of terrorist activities, the spread of unprecedented corruption, lack of essential daily services (electricity, food rations, water supplies, sewage systems, health care, etc.), the domination of conservative-religious-sectarian-ethnic parties and an abhorred quota system in parceling out public posts. After more than two decades, one could reasonably say that the occupation policy in Iraq lends credence to the notion that the real motivations of the invasion were oil and the security of Israel not the prosperity of the Iraqi people. No wonder most Iraqis felt they had replaced a totalitarian, oppressive one-party system with a more oppressive, parochial sectarian-religious, racial, corrupt and incompetent one.

Between 2005 and 2018, Iraq underwent one referendum and four elections (2005, 2010, 2014, and 2018). The US and UK considered that the Iraqis going to elections was democracy itself, never minding the severe rigging of elections or their results manipulated by the ruling parties or affected by external influences. Moreover, they paid no attention to the gradual and significant decline in the number of election participants. According to official figures, participation in the first referendum on the constitution was 63%, yet in the following general elections in 2005, it was 79% (other claims 69.9% - Aljazeera, 2005) of those eligible to vote, 60-62% in 2010 (with claims that the actual figures were lower), and 60% in 2014 which dropped again to 44.5% in 2018, (DW, 2018), and once more to 41% in 2021 (BBC, 2021). However, other sources claimed that the actual percentage of participants in the 2018 elections was below 25% and less than 20% in the 2021 early elections (Alamili 2021).

Refusal to participate in the elections was one of many forms of objection practiced by the Iraqis. Big demonstrations also took to the streets to show widespread disenchantment with the different post-2003 governments, central and regional.

In February 2011, big public protests erupted during what became known (wrongly) as (the Arab Spring). At that time, the demonstrations covered almost all the Iraqi provinces, north to south and east to west. In the northern Iraqi Kurdistan cities were Erbil, Sulaimaniya, and Halabja; in the western Sunni-dominated cities were Anbar and Tikrit, in the eastern provinces were Diyala and Kut, and in all mid and southern cities starting from Baghdad and ending at Basra.

Unfortunately, some of those demonstrations chose to raise narrow and factional slogans and demands or were of sectarian and racial features, such as the demands of the Sunni provinces for (fairness to their component). In contrast, the needs of the demonstrators in the Iraqi Kurdistan region concentrated on paying the employees' delayed salaries. In other words, those who were leading or directing the demonstrations did not understand that the sufferings of the whole Iraqi people were the same, and only through the cooperation of all the components of Iraq can common goals be achieved, and the

Iraqis salvaged from their miseries. As early as 2009, Amnesty International report on Iraq stated the following:

“The humanitarian situation remained alarming. According to the UN, at least 4 million Iraqis still did not have enough food, around 40 percent of the population did not have access to clean drinking water, and 30 percent did not have access to adequate health care services. The education system was near collapse, with schools and universities lacking essential materials such as books. Teachers and students were terrorized, and many schools were bombed. The unemployment rate remained extremely high at 50 percent or even higher” (Amnesty International, 2010).

Interestingly, the dominating ruling parties, being in Baghdad or Iraqi Kurdistan, neither investigated the causes of the protests nor blamed their failed policies for causing them. Instead of acknowledging their errors, they attributed the unrest to external foreign elements or a plot to bring the Baath party back to power. Moreover, the Shiite ruling parties claimed that the protests were instigated by those who were hostile to the Shiite regime and endeavored to hand the country back to the Sunnis, especially the old Baath Party. At the same time, charges were brought against foreign embassies for inciting the youth against the government (of course, the reference was clear to the US and UK embassies and Israeli agents working covertly inside them). The reaction of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was no different. It accused the demonstrators of trying to foil the federal experiment that was achieved in 2003. At the same time, the KRG tried to divert public attention, especially that of the demonstrators, by accusing the central (federal) government of withholding the salaries of the region’s employees. Yet nothing was said about the enormous revenues the KRG was collecting from exporting (smuggling) oil through Turkey, or the massive income generated in the border checkpoints or outlets. As for the protesters of the western (predominantly Sunni) provinces were accused of being stooges of the old Baath regime or being collaborators with al-Qaeda or ISIL terrorist organizations.

The demonstrators on their side helped the central and regional authorities suppress their activities because they did not coordinate their activities or present comprehensive national demands. Each component (Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds) continued to put forward its parochial complaints, thus allowing the authorities to divide them by offering privileges to some of their leading figures. The other point of weakness in the 2011 demonstrations was that they were exploited and infiltrated by the dominating ruling parties that pretended to accept the just demands of the demonstrators while they were subverting the whole protesting movement from the inside. In the end, most of the activities were silenced by a combination of sticks and carrots policy, by showering money on some leading figures of the protests, or by intimidation (killing, arrests, or kidnapping)

A Human Rights Watch report issued in 2012, best described the situation before 2019 uprising, which said that the Iraqi authorities waged a crackdown on the freedom of expression and gatherings. It intimidated, beat, and detained the activists and the

journalists. Sarah Leah Whitson, the executive manager of the Middle East Department in Human Rights Watch, said: "Iraq is quickly slipping into authoritarianism, with its security forces routinely abusing protesters, harassing journalists, torturing detainees and intimidating activists), despite US government assurances that it helped create a stable democracy, the reality is that it left behind a budding police state." (Watch 2012, cited in; Al-Assaf, 2012, p.35)

The 2019 Uprising:

The largest and most influential wave of protests to the post-occupation governments was the one that erupted in October 2019 (known as the Tishreen Uprising, Tishreen is the Arabic name for October).

The Tishreen Uprising can fairly be said to be the result of the accumulating failures, shortcomings, and deficiencies, widespread, unprecedented corruption, and unemployment on the part of the post-2003 successive governments and rising frustration on the part of the youth in general (because of unemployment, lack of essential services like electricity, water supplies, health care, food rations and the soaring cost of living).

The first signs of the unrest began following the 2018 inconclusive elections, resulting in a political deadlock. Due to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the electors, which showed low attendance, no party could claim the majority to form a new government. The contradicting US and Iranian influence and interest inside Iraq accentuated the differences between the parties and coalitions taking part in the political process. The two sides disagreed on the forthcoming prime minister.

For months following the announcement of the results of the elections, Brett McGurk, the US presidential envoy to Iraq, and the late Iranian Gen. Qasim Soleimani, commander of the influential Quds Brigade, stayed in Baghdad to supervise and direct the argumentation over who should be the forthcoming premier.

The pro-Iran coalitions refused to renew for Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi (2014-2018) because of his famous declaration in which he said he would (respect the imposed US sanctions on Iran). All his following attempts to retract this statement did not intercede for him. Conversely, the pro-US parties and politicians refused to accept any nominee they regarded as standing for Iran's interests. After four months of haggling, it was agreed by the different parties to nominate the (*independent candidate*) Adil Abdul Mahdi to be the new premier, even though choosing him was unconstitutional.

Abdul Mahdi, a long-time member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, (founded in Iran in 1982), and appointed vice president and minister of oil and finance (2004 and 2016), claimed that he abandoned the Council in 2016. He did not take part in the elections of 2018 and so did not have a seat in parliament. His nomination was against Article 76 of the constitution, which stipulated that the prime minister should be a member of the biggest coalition inside the parliament (For details, look at Hussain, 2023).

Following his nomination, Abdul Mahdi declared that he would accept the assignment on certain conditions, paramount among them was that he should be left free to choose his cabinet and that the different parties should not interfere with his policymaking. He also pledged to combat corruption and only to include efficient, merited, and good reputation ministers in his team. However, he did not live up to any of his promises. First, he waited for over a month to receive nominees from the different parties for the cabinet. Eventually, he ended up appointing ministers previously indicted for corruption. One of them was imprisoned and freed (after paying a fine), according to a controversial general amnesty issued by the parliament. Worse, he accepted nominations from politicians with tarnished reputations, who had many files of corruption in their names in courts. However, these shortcomings did not anger the US, (or the USA did not regard it as a breach of his promises), what angered the US was Abdul Mahdi's conduct after becoming prime minister. First, he chose to have closer relations with Tehran and not respecting the sanctions imposed by the US. Second, and more important, was his attempt to strengthen Iraq's economic relations with China. He visited China and struck an agreement to carry out projects his government agreed to pay for by Chinese companies with crude Iraqi oil.

The Iraqi youth, however, had other profound reasons to be discontented with Abdul Mahdi: first, the high level of unemployment, which escalated dramatically among the youths,

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Unemployment In percentage%	17.22	16.96	17.22	17.2	17.27	16.99	16.84	16.6	16.39	16.12
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	18	19.92	21.2	22.44	25.27	29.56	33.99	36.84 (40)	35.6	34.59

(Table information cited in; O'Neill, 2023)

Second, the increasing level of corruption in his administration (the Transparency Organization report for 2022 on corruption ranked Iraq 157 out of 180 countries). Third, the mushrooming of uncontrolled armed militias (being legal ones under the name of the Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF, [al-Hashd al-Shaabi] or illegal belonging to the different ruling parties) and finally the increasing Iranian influence in all walks of life inside Iraq, to name but few reasons.

The direct cause that triggered the 2019 Tishreen Uprising was the harsh official clampdown on peaceful protests started by disenfranchised and deprived university graduates and holders of higher degrees outside Baghdad's higher education, health, and electricity ministries. A mixture of male and female youth staged peaceful sit-ins to decry the lack of employment opportunities. Riot police hosed the graduates with dirty water cannons, and later live ammunition was used to disperse them. Then, excessive measures

were employed by the security forces and militias affiliated to the ruling parties (Shiite and Kurdish). Soon, the protesters were joined by individuals from diverse social, educational, and ideological backgrounds and groups, such as unions, syndicates, students, and women's organizations. Dozens were killed and injured in the first two or three days. The number of casualties rose sharply in the following weeks until it reached over 700 assassinated and around 30,000 injured or maimed by government and paramilitary groups using live ammunition, machine guns, stun grenades, anti-riot tanks, and military-grade tear gas. An unknown number of protesters had disappeared through kidnapping by unknown militias. The victims were all youth, aged between 18 and 25, of both sexes, sometimes younger. These heavy-handed measures further outraged the protesters and enticed them to use social media channels calling for a major action against the government, hence media, internet, and telecommunication blackouts, as well as the government-imposed curfews.

The initial complaints or demands for jobs raised, included the call to combat the unprecedented corruption, putting an end to the quota system, and holding to account those responsible for the killing of the protesters. The motto of the uprising was a hashtag spread over social media that said (nazil akhuth Haqi نازل أخذ حقي) Descending [into the streets] to claim my right, and (أنريد وطن) (I want a country (or a nation)). Within days the demonstrations made the center of Baghdad (Sahat al-Tahrir ساحة التحرير, [Liberation Square] as its headquarters, and spread to the entire southern, all-Shiite provinces to become the largest in post-2003 Iraq. Despite all the harsh and excessive methods used, the overwhelming demonstrations and sit-ins continued and finally succeeded in unseating Adil Abdul Mahdi's government and forcing the parliament to adopt a new electoral law.

The Characteristics of the Tishreen Uprising:

Right from the beginning, the Tishreen Intifada differed from the earlier protests and demonstrations. It lived longer and spread wider, yet its organizers had fully committed themselves to non-violent civil disobedience despite the massive amount of violence used against them. Ubiquitous tuk-tuk drivers from lower class aided the protesters. They were the heroes of the uprising, carrying the wounded to hospitals and driving the protesters from one point to another to get around the roadblocks. Their ranks also included many young men who fought ISIS in Mosul and came back after the fighting to grind poverty and joblessness, as one of them said "I prefer to die in Tahrir [Square] than from poverty and despair". (Ali, 2019)

The protesters were not only asking for change but also enacting it and living it, proposing new codes of conduct and building an inclusive sense of coexistence. Above all, they were noticeably clear in rejecting and discarding sectarianism and religious and racial differences. They spoke about themselves as Iraqis who abhorred the division of the society and the country along sectarian lines (Shiites and Sunnis). To incarnate social and national unity, the protesters called upon Iraqis from all walks of life to join them. In

a concise while, Tahrir Square was overwhelmed by representatives of all professions. They joined the sit-ins and installed their tents in the Square to indicate their willingness to stay with the youth as long as it takes. Thus, there were tents for teachers and university professors, actors, writers and journalists, women's organizations, artists etc. In all the squares all over the southern provinces the example was repeated, mainly al-Haboubi Square in Nassiriyah, Sahat al-Bahriya in Basrah, and Sahat al-Sadrain (the two Sadrs) in Najaf. The irony was that the protesters were performing their activities in the square that was named after Moqtada al-Sadr's father in respect of his memory and role in defying the old regime.

Due to oppressive and intimidating methods used by militias loyal to the central and regional governments, Sunni and Kurdish-majority provinces did not join the protests even though the youth there shared similar grievances as their Shiite counterparts. Sunni-majority areas were and are still reeling from the destructive aftermath of the war against ISIS (Daesh) and fear any confrontation with the PMF militias dominating their areas. Any peaceful activity could end in their arrest due to often overbroad accusations of affiliation with ISIS or Baathists. Still, some mobilized remotely. During internet outages, activists with internet access in Iraq's Kurdistan Region uploaded videos online for the world to see. Some Sunni youth in Anbar said they tried to travel to Baghdad to join the protests, but the roads were closed in the city. Instead, Anbar and Mosul youth called their friends in Baghdad to say they could not join but assured them of their full support from afar (Bobseine, 2014). The ready-made accusation of the authorities to the demonstrators that they were (Baathists) could not stand as most of the activists were in their twenties or even under, which meant that they were either infants or not even born when the Baath regime was overthrown in 2003.

In the end, the Uprising succeeded in unseating the government of Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi, who handled the high number of casualties. Indeed, he was primarily responsible for the high number of casualties.

Tishreen Uprising could be fair to say had its special features and characteristics:

First: One of the main features or characteristics of the Tishreen Uprising was the unprecedented, extraordinary, and massive participation of women, mainly young ones. This was not strange as Iraqi women's general situation, and young females, particularly, were more problematic since 2003. On the one hand, they suffered from the general situation due to of the occupation (insecurity, chaos, daily killings, encroachments of the ruling religious parties on their civil rights, and so on). On the other hand, they suffered from the spreading of the masculinity phenomenon or culture. Those who believed in this culture gave the male the right to control females in all aspects, while in their opinion, the only duty of women in life is to be at home nurturing the children and taking care of their husbands (al-Assaf, 2012). However, this monotonous picture of male domination of Iraqi society after 2003 was broken by the distinctive participation of females of all ages in the Uprising, and on many occasions leading them in the Uprising

of 2019, and most of the time leading role, of the female participation. Their participation confirmed the fact that they were sharing the same concerns and the same sufferings. Not only that, but they also had their share of the oppression and torture at the hands of the militias or the security forces (al-Assaf, 2021).

Women taking part in the Uprising were diverse: they included the uneducated middle-aged mother in her black 'abaya (veil) cooking for the protesters as well as the sophisticated middle-class student leading debates on the reform of the electoral law, young women from conservative families and those who challenge the dominant dress code, they all share a common space, elaborate strategies and organize the weekly protests. They chanted together, "No, no, no, do not say it is shameful, a woman's voice is a revolution" (Ali, 2020). Some of the banners they lifted characterized the confrontation between the young protesters and heavily armed militias and the excessive methods used, and they said Brutality versus Peaceful means (وحشية مقابل سلمية).

(For fanatic Islamists, the voice of women is Awrah (literally parts of the body which must be covered by clothing). Awrah [عورة] for women in fanatic Islamic literature is all her body, including her voice).

One of the first casualties of the Intifada Teshrin was Sara (24). She was assassinated with her husband Hussein Adil al-Madani (cartoonist and fine artist) in Basra. Sara was known for her role in supplying first aid to the demonstrators and later for leading the protests. Another casualty was Riham Yaqoub (30), who was known for her stimulating chants that motivated the demonstrators. Riham chants were in the form of a question to the other demonstrators like (I am loyal to the homeland; who are you? [Ana walai' liwatani, Inta mino? أنت منو؟، أنا ولائي لوطني، انت منو؟]) The rest repeat (who are you [inta mino]). The pro-Iranian militias took the phrase "who are you" as a belittling referral to them and was the cause of her assassination.

Women protesters were heavily attacked on social media due to the conservative nature of the ruling parties. The hashtag #بناتك_ياوطن "Your Young daughters Oh Country" launched for the women's protest was turned into #عاهراتك_ياوطن "Your Whores Oh Country" by media affiliated with the Islamist parties. On the wall of the tunnel leading to Tahrir Square and on signs held by young women during the protests, the following sentence can be read "Women of the October Revolution are Revolutionaries, not Whores". "أريد حقي اعطني وطني،"، and we are the "Protests' Icon أيقونة الاحتجاجات". Other young females supporting the demonstrations and demanding the government for reformatations did not go to al-Tahrir Square due to fear of oppression. They expressed moral support for these activities by creating electronic websites and calling for documenting the demonstrations and protests on these websites. They collected the declarations, video clips, and photographs and published them on social media to encourage others to participate in the Uprising. (Al-Assaf, 2021). The involvement of women of all ages in the Uprising could also be seen as a refusal by this category to accept the encroachment of the Islamic political parties on their rights, such as the marriage of underage (minor) girls' زواج القاصرات, and imposing

the wearing of hijab (veil). They insisted that Islam is innocent of these restrictions or disavows them. It is also important to mention that women's participation in Uprising emphasizes that Iraqi women moved away from any political participation. However, most of their focus was on economic and reforming demands that concerned the whole society (Al-Assaf, 2021).

Noteworthy, women politicians or those belonging to the ruling parties did not participate in the Uprising or supported it in any way. This was not surprising, as that category of women was keen to satisfy the leaders of their parties. They were not ready to forfeit the political and financial privileges they were gaining.

In the end, brutality, terror, and intimidation prevailed. Young females were the first to abandon the squares of protests. Family and social pressures also played an influential role in decreasing female participation.

Second: It seemed that the Tishreen demonstrators had fully absorbed earlier experiences and were aware of the shortcomings of the 2011-2015 ones. This time the organizers endeavored to present their action as a comprehensive national and popular Iraqi one, i.e., not restricting their goals to limited or narrow ones, such as employment or salary increase. Their demands were for the government to end corruption, the malicious quota system and restore daily and essential services, such as electricity, clean water supply and enough food rations. In other words, the Uprising was more socially based and economically predicted than politically driven (Dabashi, 2012, p.248). When the number of casualties increased, they demanded that those responsible for the killing be held accountable for their crimes.

Third: The demonstrators refused to be exploited or deceived by the ruling parties. All attempts by leaders of those parties to join the Uprising were blocked. It was significant that movements like the Sadrists (followers of the religious leader Moqtada al-Sadr) and the Iraqi Communist Party, who always claimed that they were (on the side of the people and against the corrupt governments), issued communiqués condemning the demonstrations because they were not able to exploit them. Some of Sadr's militias as said, quelled the demonstrations in some southern provinces. Some analysts attributed the reaction of the Sadrists to Iranian pressure. This may be partly true, but it is more likely that their reaction stemmed from the fear of losing their domination and influence among the youth. In the end, the demonstrators preserved their (independence). But unfortunately, this was not for long. In the middle of the road, the ruling parties succeeded in entirely using the stick-and-carrot method. They lured and bribed some of the leaders of the Uprising and intimidated the rest. These policies proved successful as the Uprising embers died down, especially in Baghdad and Basra.

Fourth: The massive amount of excessive force used to silence these activities, despite the peaceful nature of the protests. PM Adil Abdul Mahdi insisted on quashing the uprising by all methods available, no matter how extreme and drastic they were.

When the demonstrations erupted, Abdul Mahdi was outside Iraq. The man who initially ordered excessive methods was the director of his office, Mohammad al-Hashimi, known as Abu Jihad al-Hashimi. He was said to hold Iranian citizenship and Iran imposed him for this post (Jawad, 2022, p.105).

The armed forces had only a tiny role in quelling the demonstrators, but the armed militias of the ruling parties carried out the dirty job (especially the Shiite and the Kurdish ones). Hence, there was a high number of casualties and kidnapping. The Tishreen Uprising can be fair to say will go down in the history of modern Iraq as the deadliest event that scored the highest number of casualties in a short period, between 700 assassinated, unspecified number kidnapped and disappeared, and between 25.000 and 27.000 injured, (Al-Basim, 2020). Yet not a single person was indicted or held to account for these crimes.

Fifth: Most indicative was the massive demonstrations swept the southern provinces, which were predominantly Shiite areas. This was a clear sign that the Uprising belied the claims of the successive Shiite-dominated coalitions that they came to relieve the Shiites of their sufferings, or an indication of the failure of the false claim of the successive sectarian post-2003 governments which said that they aimed to end the (oppression, marginalization, and misery) subjected by those provinces under the Baath regime. Noteworthy, following their domination of power, the ruling Shiite parties heavily depended on the support of the inhabitants of the southern Shiite provinces and later their votes to dominate the parliament. They regarded those areas as their incubating environment. Yet the Uprising proved that those provinces were the most neglected. Their inhabitants were the poorest and exceedingly deprived of all sorts of services (especially proper schools instead of the mud ones, health care, municipal services, etc)

Sixth: The demonstrators were keen to make their opinion known about foreign influence in Iraq. They were very vocal in condemning the infiltration of the USA and Iran in Iraq. Yet due to the harmful role of the pro-Iran armed militias in confronting the demonstrators and Iran's direct role in covering up the corruption of the parties and their affiliated militias, the yells and calls for Iran to quit Iraq were more assertive and louder, especially in the predominated Shiite areas in the south. The main slogan was (Anal Abu Iran yabu America - a curse on Iran and America), and shame on their followers, the hypocrites and flatterers.

At a later stage, and when the number of casualties jumped up, some demonstrators attacked Iranian consulates in the south together with the headquarters of some parties loyal to Iran.

Seventh: Students from both sexes, especially university ones, took to the streets in solidarity with the victims of violence during the protests. Despite the harsh measures of the Ministry of Higher Education to forbid students from joining the Intifada, they stood their ground to keep the momentum, risking their educational future. The ministry had announced that it would fire those who did not satisfy the attendance records of lectures (Saadoun, 2019), but this did not deter most of them. Indeed, the students of all levels, both sexes, were the core of the Uprising.

Eighth: Perhaps the most shocking news for the government, especially the dominating Shiite parties, was the support the protesters received from the top Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Sayid Sistani made it clear in a Friday sermon following the eruption of the demonstrations, usually delivered by his representative, the right of the youth to protest, warning the ruling parties against ignoring the calls for reform. He even branded the protests as an honorable path taken by the youth.

This was a new and rare position taken by the head of Iraq's most respected religious institution, al-Najaf Hawza. The Hawza's more significant effect was that it encouraged the students of seminaries to join the protests, especially in the Shiite's most holy cities, Najaf and Karbala (Saadoun, 2019).

Ninth, the young demonstrators fully benefited from social media. The first call for a popular gathering to protest met with great turn outs. Through this facility the youth exposed how the security and the militias affiliated with the ruling parties dealt with peaceful demonstrators. Similarly, the hashtags and mottos of the uprising within minutes spread in all the centers of gatherings in the different provinces. This media enabled the protesters to reach the youth everywhere in the country within a brief time. Unfortunately, this feature was not effectively used to create a unified leadership for the uprising.

Prospects:

Despite all the achievements of the Tishreen Uprising, especially its success in obliging Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi to resign and the parliament to draft a new electoral law, the flame of the demonstrations began to extinguish. It is a well-known fact that revolutions in general, continue to ignite through their participants, and their sparks tend to extinguish and break down through the infiltration of opportunists and those who ride the wave for personal benefits. This was what exactly happened to the Uprising. The resignation of Abdul Mahdi (approved by parliament December 1, 2019) gave the youth protesters a false sense of victory. Nobody realized that Abdul Mahdi remained in power as a caretaker premier for four months, exercising his same oppressive policies against the youth protesters. In fact, during those four months, the indicator (level) of corruption in Abdul Mahdi's government enormously increased, without any monitoring, on the ground that it was an outgoing administration. Abdul Mahdi also exploited that period to cover the crimes committed by the militias upon his orders (Alaraby, 2020).

In the end, not a single person was held accountable for the crimes committed against the demonstrators. As for Abdul Mahdi himself, he justified his actions as (a necessary measure to combat a foreign-designed conspiracy). To him, the Tishreen demonstrations were mere "a plot...[and] an expression of an American and Israeli desire to weaken Iraq when it began to get out, even partially, from the circle of American dictates, and at a time when the resistance forces [to American presence[sic] were getting stronger, so the decision was to weaken the government by creating chaos and igniting Shiite-Shiite strife, it was [also] an attempt at twisting the truth, using the right word for wrong implications" (Murtadha, 2023)

In other words, for him, the Uprising was a malicious foreign conspiracy that deserved to be dealt with with severe and brutal measures. Abdul Mahdi's pernicious idea about the Uprising was not restricted to him alone; it was shared by all the leaders of the parties and coalitions participating with him in power, as well as the leaders of their affiliated militias. For them, ready-made accusations, such as foreign and Baath conspiracy, were always, and still are, ready to brand any opposition,

In April 2020, the different ruling Iraqi coalitions reached a consensus to nominate Mustafa al-Kadhumi as the new premier. The nomination of al-Kadhumi, the head of the intelligence service (al Mukhabarat), was again unconstitutional, for he also did not participate in the elections and was not a member of the biggest bloc in parliament. Kadhumi had other (elusive, devious and indeed treacherous) ideas and methods in dealing with demonstrations and protests. First, to propitiate the demonstrators, he vowed to bring all those responsible for the killings to justice and combat corruption. Soon, his words proved to be void and came to nothing.

Contrary to his first promises, he started his term by publicly praising Abdul Mahdi and his government for (the magnificent work they had done). He added that Abdul Mahdi's government made many achievements but was wronged and blamed by those who could not search for the truth and facts (Al-Kadhimi, 2020).

This televised action, shocked the demonstrators who were demanding to hold Abdul Mahdi and his government accountable for the crimes committed against them and for their vast corruption. To give another example of his inability to do anything against the dominating parties, Kadhumi tried on two occasions to arrest some militia figures widely rumored to have taken part in the quelling of the uprising. In the two incidents, he was threatened by the militias to which the two arrested belonged. Their colleagues surrounded Kadhumi's headquarters and warned him that if he did not free their colleagues, they would storm the Green Zone (The Green Zone is an area in the center of Baghdad that houses the presidential palace, the parliament, and the prime minister's offices).

Kadhumi succumbed and freed the arrested. Moreover, despite Kadhimi's verbal tolerance for peaceful protests, his tenure has been marked by continuous repression and assassinations, often carried out by groups tied to the state acting autonomously (Group

Crisis, 2021) without him stopping them. His second tactic was appointing some of the more vocal leaders of the demonstrations (as *advisers* in his office), thus dividing the demonstrators. Third, and while legal accountability has been woefully inadequate, Kadhum's government started a plan to pay out financial compensation for the families of protesters killed during the demonstrations. Through this deceptive and numbing move, Kadhum used money to silence the victim's families. Over 500 families have received 10 million Iraqi dinars (US\$ 6,850) as a one-off compensation payment from Iraq's Martyrs Foundation. More of these families also receive monthly payments from the National Pension Directorate. See: To Sleep the Law, Human Rights Watch report, November 29, 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This method put an end to many complaints of the afflicted families.

Fourth, he visited some of the sit-ins and promised to find jobs for them inside his administration if they ended their activities; the demonstrators went home and kept waiting, to no avail, for the prime minister to fulfill his promise. The only promise kept by Kadhum was to ensure an early general election. The demonstrators thought that was the best way to end the domination of the existing failed ruling parties. When this promise was carried out (October 2022), not only did Kadhum not keep his position, but also the same clique of parties and coalitions against whom the Tishreen Uprising erupted dominated once more the parliament, of course, by intimidating the voters and rigging the election. More harmful was the fact that the different armed militias of the PMF (which were widely accused of killing demonstrators, succeeded in securing a fair number of seats inside the parliament, thus having a decisive say in choosing prime ministers, governments, judges, ambassadors, and other prominent officials in the administration.

The other disappointing feature of those elections, apart from low attendance, was that even the tiny number of those who claimed to be independent and stood for the Tishreen Uprising who won the elections (around 50) soon joined the larger corrupt coalitions that lured them with money and high positions. In the end, only a very few maintained their loyalty to the objectives of the uprising.

Conclusion:

It has become a given fact that the disastrous invasion of Iraq was the mistake of the 21st century. The US-UK-Israeli coalition's primary success was not in occupying Iraq and destroying it; it was their success in dividing the country along sectarian, religious, and racial lines, applying an abhorred quota system, encouraging corruption, and protecting the politicians with tarnished reputations. As a result, Iraq became a peculiar example of a wealthy country with a monthly income of \$8-10 billion (from oil exports only) and over \$100 billion in reserve, yet 30-40 percent of its inhabitants are living under the line of poverty, 40% of the population is illiterate, a country burdened with large foreign and local debts, its currency is near collapsing, and a significant number of its youth, especially new graduate are unemployed, (not to speak about the lack of essential

services like electricity, pure water supply, health care, etc.). To add to the sufferings of the people was the mushrooming of armed militias affiliated with the ruling parties who usually took the law into their hands, terrorizing the people into submission by assassinating or kidnapping whoever disagreed with them, not to speak of imposing financial ransoms on all businesses official or private.

Though belated, the most significant reaction to these defaults or irregularities was the youth October-Tishreen Uprising of 2019. The main achievement of the youth uprising of 2019 could be said, is that it successfully dispelled fear by defying the most excessive methods used by the militias of the ruling parties to silence them. Most indicated was that, the Uprising overwhelmed Baghdad and the predominated southern Shiite provinces, only to refute the allegations of the post-invasion regime that it is a Shiite system that came to end the sufferings of this component.

After two decades (2003-2023) it was clear that the Iraqi youth were the hardest-hit segment under the post-occupation governments. Their frustration was of multiple causes. First, was their failure to play any significant role in decision-making or in making their presence felt. Second, was the high unemployment percentage among them. Third, the unprecedented corruption that was wasted the wealth of Iraq. Fourth, the lack of democracy and respect of human rights, lack of law and order as well as the security situation that characterized the country from day one of the occupation. What happened in 2019 was not a sudden eruption of feelings against a deteriorated situation. It was a continuation of a process that started in 2011 and continued to escalate (2015 and 2018) until it reached climax in 2019-2021. The Uprising attracted the participation of people from all walks of life: homemakers, toilers, syndicates, students, artists, professionals, and even members of the middle-class and well-to-do families. However, the most obvious phenomenon was young women's strong and intense participation. They took their share of the killing and kidnapping and sometimes threatened to remain in their homes; otherwise, they and their families would bear dire consequences.

Despite the regime's excessive methods used to silence the protests and sit-ins (which resulted in heavy losses, 1,000 assassinated, 30,000 injured, and an unspecified number of kidnapped and disappeared), the Uprising spread and forced a prime minister to resign, the parliament to issue a new electoral law and the subsequent prime minister to carry an early election. At some stage, there were hopes, especially on the demonstrators' side, that the Iraqi army would interfere at least to stop the haphazard killing they were subjected to by the militias affiliated with the ruling parties, but this did not materialize. The inability (failure) of the Uprising to change the regime, being through forcing the corrupt and failing parties to step aside or through encouraging heavy participation in the election to sideline the coalitions and parties that dominated the governments and parliaments since 2003 does not mean that the uprising has failed.

With the third anniversary of the Uprising approaching (October 1, 2023), the situation seems more ambiguous and precarious than before. The permanence of the significant issues that caused the Uprising, and the failure of the different governments since 2003

to address the mounting people's suffering portend the return of popular demonstrations and protests at any moment.

That should not deprive the Uprising of its achievements, such as transcending sectarian rhetoric and practice, religious fanaticism, and racist-chauvinistic incitement. Throughout the uprising, the talks, mottos, and slogans concentrated on a united Iraq and Iraqis. The youth were also able to provide an example of a successful administrative model, as they provided all the daily requirements for the assembly centers, and they were able, for example, to completely rehabilitate an abandoned building, not to mention the cleaning campaigns that they carried out in the assembly centers.

However, one of the main shortcomings of the uprising is that it needed (lacked) a unified leadership capable of dealing with rapid developments, as well as a clear political project and plan for change. The different centers of the Uprising, especially the major ones (al-Tahrir Square Baghdad; al-Haboubi Square, Nasriyah; Sahat Thawrat al-Ishreen, Najaf; continued to organize their activities separately and without any accurate coordination.

Some observers attributed the regression of the uprising to the fact that the demonstrators were left alone, defenseless and unarmed, facing militias and snipers affiliated with the ruling parties, armed with all kinds of deadly weapons. Members of those parties filled the security institutions, hence their brutality towards the demonstrations. At a particular stage, the youth were hoping to get the support or the protection of the Iraqi army at least to prevent the militias' random killings, but this did not happen. They regarded this attitude on the part of the proper armed forces as an ingrate one, as one of the reasons for their uprising was to protest the unfair decision taken by Abdul Mahdi to retire a high-ranking officer who was instrumental in reorganizing the army to defeat Daesh in the battles to liberate Mosul in 2016-17.

Even though the intensity of the uprising has noticeably subsided or decreased, its circumstances and causes still exist, and its glimmer is still present, threatening to ignite at any moment. This is mainly because all successive governments, since October 2019 until now, have failed, stupidly, intentionally, or due to apathy, to address its causes or do something constructive to improve the conditions that led to its eruption. In fact, in some provinces, like Thi Qar (Nasiriya), the protests continue, albeit at a lower level.

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