

Civil Society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting

Armed violence and capacities for peace in Iraq: Actors, causes, impact and EU responses

Background Information

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Civil Society Dialogue Network

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The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016.

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1. Peacebuilding efforts in Iraq – local capacities

What local capacities exist for ending and resisting violence in Iraq? What capacities exist for building peace in the long-term?

- I. There is no recent or up-to-date Cumulative Impact and Needs Assessment (CINA) on peacebuilding efforts in Iraq. The most recent report of this kind, [*Searching for Peace in Iraq \(SfP-Iraq\)*](#), was drafted in 2010-11 by an international and Iraqi research team. Based on 100 interviews with Iraqis from all parts of the country and abroad, and from a wide range of sectors and backgrounds, the report lists and evaluates 24 different types of peacebuilding and peacemaking activities being carried out in Iraq, ranging from mediation and negotiation among political parties, to trauma counselling work for victims conducted by CSOs. Evidence suggests that such activities were often implemented at the local or provincial – rather than the national – level. Their impact was often limited to those people who directly participated in the activities; they frequently lacked strategic planning and adequate funding. Hence their overall, long-term impact was negligible.
- II. Non-military responses to the threat posed by Daesh (ISIS) could be implemented today and could resemble those that reduced sectarian violence after the bloody decade of 2007-2008. Many international analysts wrongly attribute that success to the military surge by the U.S, but in fact many other factors contributed to it, like widespread rejection of sectarian violence by Iraqi actors at different levels (see pages 78-81 of the SfP-Iraq report). They could be replicated today as a way of shifting to a more comprehensive and productive approach leading to long-term and sustainable change.
- III. Notwithstanding the challenges, significant peace-building skills have been developed by a number of political and civil society actors in Iraq since 2003, including policy makers, intellectuals, researchers, and activists. They could play a highly beneficial role in the current crisis. Moreover, religious and tribal leaders have important local knowledge, traditional values, and cultural practices that could be drawn upon to build a new national vision for the future of Iraq – an Iraq that rejects sectarianism and embraces diversity.
- IV. Currently, CSOs and intellectuals have limited capacity to influence the first and second ranks of political leadership in Iraq. There is significant division among the different parties represented in the Iraqi Parliament [the Council of Representatives (CoR)] and the government, most of whose leaders are based inside Iraq. However, among these politicians, key people like the Iraqi president, Fuad Masum, and the spokesperson of the COR, Salim Jaburi, are individuals who could play a role in a national reconciliation process.
- V. There are no, or at best, very weak and limited channels of communication between the parties involved in the political process inside Iraq (i.e. the political parties participating in the government coalition and those represented at the CoR), and the political opposition, much of which is based outside of Iraq, in Jordan, and other countries in the region. Some of these opposition leaders are keen to open reconciliation talks with the current government; however, many have previously been accused of terrorism or other crimes, and dialogue with them has been excluded.

Their voices and perspectives are, nevertheless, vital to true reconciliation; until the circle of dialogue is widened, peace-building efforts are destined to fail. For example, the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq, which is currently based in the United Arab Emirates, has explicitly rejected Daaesh, however they have not been invited to participate in any peace and reconciliation efforts. The senior Sunni cleric, Sheikh Abdul Malik al-Saadi, who is based in Amman, has also sought to engage in reconciliation.

- VI. At the grassroots level, local Iraqi civil society actors have extensive practical knowledge of reconciliation, and thus they have much to contribute to peace building. Examples are given below.

What local actors are involved or could be mobilised to facilitate dialogue as part of reconciliation and peacebuilding processes? (e.g. civil society including religious organisations, academia, think-tanks, NGOs, community activists, etc).

- I. A number of civil society organizations in Baghdad are working on reconciliation and peacebuilding. Following the crises in Mosul, [The Iraqi Social Forum \(ISF\)](#), which was established in 2013, organized a number of coordination meetings and activities on the topics of tolerance and ending hate speech. The ISF can act at grassroots level. It is also very active in social networks, in particular on the [ISF Facebook page](#).
- II. Iraqi workers' unions can also play an important role in promoting national unity. The Solidarity Centre in Baghdad recently received requests from the major Iraqi unions and workers' federations for training on methods to fight sectarianism through awareness events and public activities.
- III. Iraqi women networks and NGOs could be involved and mobilized in the peace process, according to the principles of UN Resolution 1325, giving an active role to women as mediators and facilitators of talks.
- IV. There are number of Iraqi think tanks and independent organizations based in the region – for example in Beirut, Lebanon and Amman, Jordan – that could play a key role, for instance [the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies](#), which has good contacts with Iraqi researchers inside Iraq and throughout the diaspora.
- V. There is an important religious foundation in Iraq that works on reconciliation called [The Humanitarian Dialogue Foundation \(HDF\)](#). Their headquarters is at the Salam House in London but they have offices in Baghdad and in the south of Iraq. This foundation was established after the "People of Iraq Conference", which took place in Baghdad in May 2006, as a response to the increasing sectarian bloodshed. HDF seeks to embody the key tenets of understanding and peaceful coexistence that the conference called for: tolerance among Iraq's various religious and ethnic communities, and rejection of extremism, sectarianism and racism. Its founder, His Eminence Hussein al-Sadr, is a known Shia religious leader and lives in Baghdad.
- VI. In the Kurdish region, the Duhok University's Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution is a new center that carries out research on peacebuilding in the region.
- VII. Media organizations and workers (including bloggers and social media activists) could also be mobilized and strategically involved in peace and reconciliation. They would need training in peace journalism: how to analyse and report on conflict issues

to highlight peacebuilding initiatives and non-violent responses to conflict.

Are there examples of where communities have managed to maintain peaceful relations or resist extremism?

Though few and quite limited in scope, there are some examples of successful civil and political resistance to violent conflict:

- I. In the City of Kirkuk, thanks to the work of civil society and local actors, including the governor and minority leaders, effective mediation between different ethnic groups has prevented war inside the city. Kirkuk also has experience with long-term peace and reconciliation projects that have involved international support: for example, the [Iraq Helsinki Project](#) led to "The Helsinki Agreement and the Future of Kirkuk" conference held in Baghdad 2008. It was hosted by the Speaker of the Iraq Council of Representatives, and brought together political parties with the goal of accelerating implementation of the Helsinki Principles and Mechanisms for reconciliation and dialogue. International experts from Northern Ireland and South Africa were important contributors to this effort. Projects like this could be strengthened through greater involvement of Iraqi civil society actors.
- II. Some activities in Basra, led by religious leaders from the Sunni community together with local actors, succeeded in reducing hate and decreasing the number of attacks on minorities. Today, there are still minorities living peacefully within Basra, including Christians, Mandaee and Sunnis.
- III. From 2006-2009, the work of the national network La'Onf (a group of nonviolence CSOs in Iraq) worked to promote peace and reconciliation in Baghdad and throughout the country. At its height, La'Onf included over 150 organizations, which were in all 18 of Iraq's governorates. It had a democratically elected leadership, with two representatives (one female and one male) from each governorate. La'Onf activists also worked to promote nonviolence as a tool for resistance. They published books, manuals, and newspaper articles on the topic of nonviolence. They held public meetings and hosted radio programs in Kurdistan and even in Sadr City, Baghdad, against militarism and in support of nonviolent struggle. The network still exists, but is now weak because of the difficulties of coordinating national networks in recent years. Many former La'Onf activists are in contact with the Iraqi Social Forum (mentioned above); their skills and experience could be tapped in reconciliation efforts involving civil society.

2. Peacebuilding efforts in Iraq – the role of external actors

Which countries and organisations are supporting peacemaking and reconciliation in Iraq, including inter-tribal peace-making? Which actors and methods are most effective?

Actors:

- I. One country that could play an important role is Jordan insofar as it has links with the political actors opposing current sectarian practices in Iraq. Jordan, to a certain extent, also has good relations with the Iraqi government and with Sunni leaders inside and outside Iraq.
- II. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) could play a vital role in

relations with the government.

- III. The Holy See plays an important mediating role in protecting Christian communities and assuring peaceful coexistence in areas where many Christians live. So far, it is primarily the Kurdistan Regional Government which listens regularly to its recommendations.
- IV. International civil society organizations have mobilized important action at the local, grassroots level, with their local partners. Important actors currently include:
 - [The international and Iraqi coalition ICSSI](#) , for whom the Italian NGO Un ponte per... is the focal point
 - [Pax , Netherlands](#)
 - [NOVACT Spain](#)
 - [Mennonite Central Committee in Iraq](#), U.S.
 - [Christian Peacemaker Teams](#), U.S.

Methods:

- I. External intervention should be carefully assessed, making sure it is wanted locally and well informed about local needs and perceptions, using a do-no-harm approach.
- II. Adequate funding for peacebuilding actions and processes is a priority; this should include support for strategic planning, designing programs for maximum impact, and systematic evaluation of outcomes.
- III. For high-level political leadership and opposition, mediation and indirect negotiation remain the best methods to start with, and in which credible international facilitators need to play a major role.
- IV. At a grassroots level, all possible support and visibility should be given to public events such “sports against violence”, art exhibits, poetry readings, and literature tables, to promote and inspire widespread discussion of the potential for reconciliation. Political support from external actors is needed for the organization of national campaigns focused on issues that citizens share in common, such as water (see [Save the Tigris Campaign](#)), workers’ rights, freedom of expression, and women’s rights (see [Shahrazad -Campaign](#) against al-Jaafari law, which would legalize child marriage), to promote shared goals and vision across broad segments of Iraqi civil society.

Are there any current opportunities for external support to peace efforts that should be grasped?

It is vital for Iraqis and for international actors who support them to learn from international best practices in dealing with violent conflict through civil means, for example:

- I. ‘Former combatants’ and ‘survivors’ who have come together to overcome extreme violence and conflict in other settings could be invited to Iraq. This can be done by engaging with the Forgiveness Project, Building Bridges, and Alternatives to Violent Extremism. Key social actors/leaders, former members of violent groups and/or survivors can all be involved.
- II. The Arabic and international trainers that worked on transitional justice in Lebanon for the UN with a wide range of political and civil society actors could be brought to Iraq to train local actors on reconciliation processes and truth commissions, going beyond the examples that are well-known (e.g. South Africa) and drawing on Middle-Eastern traditions and history.

3. State-Society relations

What steps does the central government need to take to support reconciliation of societal groups? How can the central government be more representative of all Iraq's communities?

- I. The current military response of the government to Daesh (ISIS) and to other insurgents needs to stop targeting civilian areas, to limit civilian casualties, to respect humanitarian law and international conventions ratified by Iraq. This would give credibility to any reconciliation effort of the Iraqi government.
- II. Mediation among political factions, also involving representatives of Iraqi minorities, could lead to a local reconciliation process in each governorate/region, then a national reconciliation conference to agree on necessary political reforms. Some of the important political reforms that have been demanded are:
 - Measures to support the independence of the judicial system, including a new law for the federal court;
 - A law on political parties based on the principles of national identity, a secular state and freedom of thought and religion;
 - An end to the policies of De-Ba'athification;
 - Efforts to resolve the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed areas through mediation led by the international community, including but not limited to UNAMI;
 - Reform of the Iraqi army and security forces on a national basis, in order to combat the existence of militias and organized criminal groups;
 - Reform of the Iraqi constitution to reinforce national identity and the principle of a secular state.
- III. A national plan for Transitional Justice needs to be drafted and implemented, based on non-discrimination, openly dealing with past and ongoing human rights violations, and including compensation mechanisms. Principles of restorative justice should be applied and truth commissions could be established involving grassroots and religious organizations.
- IV. An Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) could be built up, including dedicated state capacities for dealing with conflicts, peacebuilding and reconciliation, for building professional capacities among politicians and state officials, and for linking political institutions directly and transparently to CSOs. An I4P could include a National Peace and Security Council or Committee, National Peace Forum, all Party Parliamentary Groups on conflict issues and peacebuilding, Early Warning and Conflict Mitigation Mechanisms.

What Iraqi-led initiatives exist to improve the representativeness and accountability of the government?

- I. The formation of a new government in recent months has been followed by a new ministerial plan prioritizing reforms to tackle sectarian fragmentation, corruption, restructuring of the military, exclusionary policies and human rights abuses. Steps to restore confidence among Iraq's communities included preventing armed forces from hoisting sectarian and political banners or flags, and allowing students to attend schools in their current areas of displacement.
- II. Civil society continues to demand stronger efforts to end sectarianism in state institutions. For example, over 10,000 Iraqi citizens have signed up to the Ministries

Without Quotas Campaign, aiming at abolishing sectarian quotas within government ministries. Many of the demands of Iraqi CSOs can be found in the list of recommendations of civil society to the UN Universal Periodic Review of Iraq (November 3, 2014); their [briefing document](#) includes specific proposals for important reforms on women's rights, minorities, workers' rights, freedom of expression, human rights defenders and so on.

What kind of external support will assist in the development of accountable institutions and improved state-society relations?

- I. Strategic advice should be given to Iraqi policy-maker to strengthen capacity to manage conflict and build peace, and to build an Infrastructure for Peace and prevention of conflict that does not resemble past and current Ministries for Reconciliation or Human Rights, that were perceived as sectarian and likely to threaten, rather than protect, human rights defenders.
- II. Institutions, such as the Iraqi National Library and Archives, which are working on a comprehensive law on access to information, should be supported through sector-specific support.
- III. National and local Iraqi institutions should be encouraged to establish mechanisms and procedures for regular dialogue with Iraqi and Kurdish NGOs on specific topics, and to launch transparent calls for project proposals by CSOs to promote peace and human rights. Last year, the Kurdistan Regional Government launched for the first time a call for proposal for social programs dedicated to Kurdish NGOs. Although it was used to some extent to reinforce the political affiliation of some CSOs, it still represents a step forward.

What role (if any) can the EU and other Europeans play in supporting reform by the government and encouraging it to end sectarianism? What methods and leverage can they use?

- I. European actors should support reforms proposed by civil society (see UPR Briefing Document mentioned above) and CSOs' work on national dialogue.
- II. More EU in country calls for proposals are needed, by-passing UN channels. So far in ten years after the war only limited calls for proposals have been opened by the EU delegation in Baghdad and local NGOs need direct support.
- III. The EU delegation and European Embassies/Consulates should organize regular meetings with activists, also according to the EU guidelines on the protection of Human Rights Defenders. Regular meetings with religious leaders are also encouraged.
- IV. The EU should support comprehensive research on civilian peace, security and reconciliation efforts in Iraq, for example supporting continuation of existing initiatives such as Searching for Peace in Iraq (SfP-Iraq) project.

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