

4-1-2016

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Recommended Citation

Filipau, Aliaksandr Ph.D. (2016) "Ismael, T. Y., & Jacqueline S. Ismael. Iraq in the Twenty-First Century: Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State. New York: Routledge, 2015.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss2/14>

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Ismael, T. Y., & Jacqueline S. Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century: Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Development of the post-Saddam Iraq belongs to the sphere of academic and analytical interests of many scholars and experts across all over the world. One of the reasons for such discussions is not only the influence of Iraqi affairs on the security situation in the whole Middle East and far beyond, but also an evaluation of U.S. policy in the contemporary world.

The book *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century: Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State* by Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael belongs to this kind of research, and using an example of the modern Iraq the authors make an attempt to analyze the United States and its allies' policy in the Middle East and in the whole world.

The book consists of an Introduction, two parts (with eight chapters), an epilogue (devoted mainly to the emergence of ISIS and its development), and three appendices (Declaration of the Shia of Iraq, Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period, and Iraqi Constitution of 2005).

The first part, titled "Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the State," considers the issues of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq and peculiarities of establishing the new state apparatus and public policy in the post-Saddam Iraq. The authors emphasize the Iraqi perspective of these processes, while the majority of the previous research focused on the American perspective and legacy of the 2003 invasion. Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael consider the illegal character of the war and point out the absence of any solid evidence demonstrating Iraq's possession of nuclear weapons or support of international terrorism.

The authors trace the Iraqi history from the establishment of the British mandate in 1920 to the present day. In their opinion, the project of the Iraqi state had in many aspects an artificial nature and suffered from the lack of stability during the whole period of independence. While the British and Ba'ath projects were relatively successful for the development of the Iraqi state but in any case failed, the U.S.-led project has become the less successful and effective one, transforming Iraq into a failed state.

The authors argue that three main reasons resulted in such an outcome. The first one is sectarianism of the Iraqi policy and contradictions between the main (Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds) and minor ethno-sectarian groups, accompanied with a large extent of foreign intervention (United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc.) into the Iraqi affairs via the support of this or that ethno-sectarian group. The second reason is found in the specific nature of the current Iraqi political elites. Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael characterize them as "carpetbaggers" and emphasize the lack of legitimacy and indigenous support, particularly for those public officials who spent three or four decades prior to the war of 2003 in exile. The all-encompassing corruption, which led to collapse of the normal public administration agencies, civic and citizenship norms, as well as to further promotion of sectarian conflicts, makes the third main reason for Iraq to become a failed state.

The chapter contains a great number of interesting facts, particularly in presenting various examples of corruption among the Iraqi political elite, and illustrates the authors' deep knowledge of the country's affairs, including the hidden mechanisms of the functioning of the Iraqi public administration system. However, the interpretation of these facts is dubious. It seems that the authors exaggerate the role of the United States in making Iraq a failed state and turn not enough attention to the internal contradictions and weakness of the Iraqi society and state. For instance, corruption in Iraq comes in the form of redistribution of oil revenues in order to consolidate sectarian elites on the national level. The Ba'ath ideology promoted the superiority of a national identity over a sectarian one, but in the real politics the party admitted sectarian conflicts and conducted thorough redistribution of public tenures in

order to provide balance between sectarian groups. In any case, such a system in Iraq and Syria appeared to be fragile and was established after a long period of internal confrontation. Thus, it would be difficult even for the United States to institute an effective public administration system after the complete destruction of the previous regime, i.e. the weakness of the Iraqi state to a large extent lies in the internal nature of the country, rather than in the policy of foreign agents. The question is the proportion of these influences. The authors' focus on the external factors seems rather dubious and in some aspects politically motivated.

The second part "People in the quagmire" deals with social issues of the new Iraq, particularly with the impact of conflicts and occupation on children and women. The part provides numerous statistical data, illustrating the situation of these vulnerable groups since the year 1980, i.e. from the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war through the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, sanctions regime of the 1990s, Anglo-American invasion of 2003 and internal confrontation in the present-day Iraq.

In spite of a solid fact-based approach, this part suffers from the above mentioned deficiency. For instance, in some cases the authors replace their narrative on children and women with long speculations on sufferings of ordinary Iraqis because of the sanctions, wars and internal conflicts. The main idea of this section resolves into the concept of neo-feudalism and tribalism in the social affairs and policy in Iraq. The authors' attempts to find "equivalents" for the United States and United Nations in the realities of medieval feudalism (United Nations – the Church, the United States – the presumed vassal) seem to be artificial. It seems that negative consequences of long-lasting military conflicts and international sanctions can be clear without such dubious theoretical constructions.

It is impossible to deny a rebirth or strengthening of the traditional social institutes, some of which have a clear tribal origin, but the question arises in the proportion of tribal, Islamic, secular and foreign influence in shaping the social picture of the present-day Iraq. No doubt, it is a great challenge for a researcher and the authors will continue their studies on these issues.

The epilogue along with the last chapter of the second part represent a particular interest, since they are devoted to prospects of the Iraqi statehood, emergence of ISIS and further expansion of chaos in Iraq. Characterizing the "new" power structure in post-invasion Iraq as sectarian in composition, divisive in intent and thoroughly corrupt in its practice, Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael have a rather negative view on the future of Iraq and its statehood. In particular, the authors consider ISIS as a natural outcome both of the U.S. policy in the region and the erasure of state authority in Iraq and Syria. Thus, the authors conclude that it is not ISIS that represents the main danger and problem for the region, but the vacuum of effective public administration and public policy, lack of ideology and legitimacy of the present state apparatus, and the general "Lebanization" of the Iraqi political landscape, as well as an enduring ethno-sectarian identity which highlights the internal weakness of the Iraqi state, the future of which remains the subject of discussion for experts and scholars.

While the previous remarks may have a disputable nature, the book contains some apparent mistakes. The Abbasid Caliphate was founded in Kufa, not in Baghdad (p. 13). Page 28 mentions *Kurkuk* instead of *Kirkuk*. The summary of Shia doctrine (p. 80) seems rather strange, in particular the statement that the quest for social justice is one of the main features, which distinguish it from Sunni Islam (social justice is one of the central subjects for all Islamic schools). On Page 114 there is *Iraqz* instead of *Iraq*. The phrase "... without genuine liberation of Women ..." (p. 180) also contains an apparent misprint.

There is not any unified system of transliteration of Arabic proper names, which is a flaw *per se*, but sometimes it results in such strange transliterations as "Ta Dilatuhu" (p. 177, 178) instead of "ta'dilātuḥu," Qanun Da awi instead of Qānūn Da'āwī, etc.

The book contains numerous mentions of “leaked information,” which looks a little bit strange for academic research. Such references alongside such phrases as “Hasan Suhail al-Tamīmī, a British spy, was working as a peddler selling thorn and thistle bundles in the street. The British rewarded him with enough land to elevate him to one of the wealthiest in the country” (p. 83; a reader should expect a more clear explanation for this generosity, for example, that he was a representative of a powerful Banū Tamīm tribe and one of his tribe’s leaders in the war against the British) infuses a scent of conspiracy theory, which is not the best decision for a piece of academic research.

Despite these shortcomings of the work it is necessary to commend the courage of Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael and their brilliant academic skills for coming out with a book on complicated internal affairs of the post-Saddam Iraq. It will definitely complement other existing literature on the problem of state-building in the present-day Iraq, as well as on the perspectives of this country in the future. A reader would find good and relevant information and a solid analysis of many of the important political, economic and social processes which have been occurring in Iraq.

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