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Iraqi Diaspora Mobilization and the Future Development of Iraq

MARCH 2021 DR. OULA KADHUM

Introduction

The 2003 intervention, and subsequent occupation of Iraq was a historic moment. Not only did it end more than thirty years of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial rule, but it also meant that millions of Iraqis living in the diaspora could return to Iraq, see family members for the first time in decades, and contribute to the rebuilding of the country. Many were previously exiled due to political opposition against the regime, or fled due to political and social repression, as well as the deteriorating economic context.

Armed with skills, expertise, and Western degrees and qualifications, many wanted to put these to good use and help rebuild the country. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of regime change, the ethno-sectarian political system put in place, and the violence and corruption that subsequently ensued, many were deterred from returning.

Yet, since 2017 and the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)—and despite the violence faced by protestors during the October 2019 revolution—there has been relative peace in the country. This presents an enormous opportunity for members of the diaspora to help their country of origin thrive and support their fellow co-nationals through their experiences, expertise, and skills gained abroad. The potential for training, mentoring, and investing in many currently ailing sectors is huge. This is an opportunity not to be missed. It is an occasion that can help drive Iraq's stagnant economy and society forward, if the government engages with it strategically and institutionally—something that has not yet been done.

This paper explores Iraqi diaspora mobilization before and after the 2003 intervention. It looks at the ways members of the diaspora sought to help in the rebuilding of their country of origin, at both the elite and grassroots levels, as well as investigating changes over time. Importantly, it also analyses the obstacles that have hindered diaspora mobilization since 2003, beyond the ethno-sectarian system. These include, the security context, insider/outsider dynamics, change in culture and society, educational opportunities for families, gender and minority rights, and funding and professional experience.

The paper argues that the Iraqi diaspora is a valuable, yet largely untapped, resource for Iraq. It is now time for Iraq and Iraqis abroad to access this potential in a structured and institutional way, so that real change and development

The Atlantic Council's Iraq Initiative provides transatlantic and regional policy makers with unique perspectives and analysis on the ongoing challenges and opportunities facing Iraq as the country tries to build an inclusive political system, attract economic investment, and encourage a vibrant civil society.



Ahmad Chalabi in discussion with Paul Bremer and US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/54mf8297>

can occur on the ground. The paper highlights five ways in which the diaspora can contribute more sustainably to Iraq, whether through government outreach or collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other sector institutions with the expertise and capacity to sustain diasporic engagement, including online.

The paper is founded on research conducted mainly in the United Kingdom, but also draws on research carried out in Sweden and Germany. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in London, Stockholm, and Berlin from 2013 through the present. It also draws on various diaspora events attended during this time period, many informal conversations, and secondary literature.

Diaspora Mobilization pre-2003

Like many diasporic communities around the world dispersed due to conflict, political persecution, or economic instability, many from within the Iraqi diaspora in 2003 were eager to return to their native homeland and help build a society different from the one they'd left decades ago. Many returned and became involved in political parties, government ministries, and Iraq's civil service. Meanwhile, others worked at a grassroots level to help local communities or disenfranchised groups neglected by the former and current political system.

Yet, the story of the Iraqi diaspora's political involvement in Iraq starts years earlier, in the 1980s. An Iraqi opposition operating predominantly from Iran, Syria, and London was heavily involved in trying to bring regime change to Iraq through underground movements and activities. Many were persecuted in Iraq for their involvement in political activities and soon made their way to London, Europe's Arab hub and soon to be the Iraqi opposition capital.

The main diasporic political actors involved were: Islamic religious families such as the al-Hakim and al-Khoei families; later, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Islamic Dawa Party; and the Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). There were also many other liberal groups and individuals including Arab nationalists, socialists, and communists.¹

Following Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait in 1990–1991, and an international shift in policy toward the Baathist regime, the Iraqi opposition in London saw an opportunity to influence policymakers in London and Washington and push for regime change. One of the leading figures of the opposition movement from London was Ahmed Chalabi, a prominent figure within Iraqi oppositional circles who came from a historically wealthy merchant family. In order to unite the opposition parties and lobby effectively for regime change, Chalabi established the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an umbrella organization to represent the full spectrum of Iraqi oppositional groups. Another group led by Ayad Allawi, the Iraqi National Accord (INA), also worked with the US and UK governments during this time to similarly appeal for regime change.

It is hard to underestimate the influence of figures such as Ahmed Chalabi and Ayad Allawi, who lobbied endlessly to shape US and UK foreign policies toward Iraq. By the late 1990s, both were successful in pushing through the agenda for regime change, which was eventually written into US law through the Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998. This act would institutionalize the role of certain Iraqi diasporic groups, which were now on the US State Department payroll as part of their drive toward toppling Hussein's rule.

As the 2003 Iraq war became imminent, opposition groups were independently courting the US-led coalition in anticipation of forming part of the government once intervention took place. By that point, the opposition under the INC

¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

had fragmented as each group lobbied for its own interests and vision of a post-Hussein Iraqi state. The divisions and unaligned interests within the opposition during this time were a precursor for events that would take place in the aftermath of 2003.

It is also important to note that the political parties in opposition in no way represented the diverse opinions toward intervention and regime change within the eclectic Iraqi diaspora in London. Even within individual households, divergent opinions were held, as some were against the intervention and marched in the historic anti-war demonstration of February 2003, while others encouraged it unapologetically.

Iraqi diasporic civil society in the UK, meanwhile, had been supporting the Iraqi population since the 1990s—especially during the oppressive sanctions regime that lasted from 1990–2003. World Wide Welfare and other now-defunct organizations used channels through Iraqi Kurdistan, which at the time was protected under the no-fly zone based on a 1991 United Nations (UN) agreement, to provide humanitarian relief. This gave the Kurds a certain level of autonomy and protection from Baghdad, and provided a backdoor for entering Iraq. Donations and funds raised in the diaspora paid for medicine and medical tools, school equipment, clothes, and many other items, which were smuggled into Iraq through the Kurdish borders.²

Post-2003 Mobilizations

Once the US-led coalition entered Iraq in 2003 and toppled the Baathist regime, exiled Iraqis were able to return to Iraq and help in the rebuilding efforts. There were two broad categories of help toward this endeavor during the occupation and beyond. First, there was elite mobilization, which centered on governance, institution building, and state formation through diasporic parties and political entrepreneurs. Second, there was a bottom-up approach in which the diaspora mobilized through civil society to effect change.³

Elite Mobilization

Elite mobilization by diasporic opposition parties and figures defined Iraqi transnational mobilization in the early years of occupation. By that point, the diasporic opposition parties, which had been working for years with state officials in Washington and London, had access to the country and a chance to shape the new corridors of power.

With each political development—from the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council to administering governorates, to Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law—Iraqi diasporic party members and opposition figures were recruited by the coalition to fill political positions. As a result, the Dawa Party, the SCIRI, the INC, the INA, the Iraqi Communist Party, and many other individuals from the diaspora were now reaching into their transnational social networks in London to fill administrative positions. A transnational recruiting channel between Iraq and London was consequently established, which continues to this day. Indeed, five of Iraq's prime ministers formerly resided in the diaspora, including, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, Ayad Allawi, Nouri al-Maliki, Haider al-Abadi, and Mustafa al-Kadhimi (four of whom resided in the UK). Many more Iraqis returning from diaspora work as ministers or in Iraq's bloated civil service.

Many of the elite returnees had qualifications in business, economics, finance, antiquities, architecture, and communications, and used their skills to help rebuild the country in their positions as ministers, members of parliament (MPs), and governors. However, with the institutionalization of an ethno-sectarian system in Iraq, which demographically worked in favor of the largest sectarian and ethnic groups in the country (the Shia and Kurds), party loyalty and allegiance to consolidated Islamist Shia parties and the Kurdish duopoly (the KDP and the PUK) trumped technocratic ability or any semblance of meritocracy. Consequently, the governance of 2003 Iraq commenced with further nepotism and patrimonialism, more akin to than a departure from Iraq's turbulent past.

This trend in diasporic transnational recruitment continues unabated to the present day. Nonetheless, in more recent years, this has steadily declined as many of the former exiles have served their time in Iraq and returned to their di-

2 Oula Kadhum, *Diasporic Interventions: State-Building in Iraq Following the 2003 Iraq War* (Coventry, Warwick University, 2017).

3 Oula Kadhum, "Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism," *Global Networks*, December 12, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12222>; Oula Kadhum, "Assessing Co-Development Projects for Civil Society Building in Iraq: The Case of the Iraqi Diaspora and Swedish Institutions Following the 2003 Intervention in Iraq," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 0, 0, February 15, 2019, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1569302>.



Iraqi's celebrate in Mississauga, Canada. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Singing_%26_Dancing_\(4655033640\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Singing_%26_Dancing_(4655033640).jpg)

asporic lives, continuing an existence of circular migration between London and Iraq.

Diaspora Grassroots Mobilization

Diasporic involvement in the homeland since 2003 has not been restricted to elite mobilization. It has also worked on the grassroots level to support a new civil society in Iraq, one distinct from the state-sanctioned and monitored civil society of the previous regime. Many individuals and organizations in the diaspora have taken it upon themselves to address community needs on issues related to mental health, women's rights, education, health services, welfare and provision

for Iraqi widows and orphans, democracy building, election training, the preservation of Iraqi heritage, and many more translocal initiatives serving local needs.

Examples include a roaming medical doctor to support Iraqis living in remote areas, mental-health professionals supporting the professionalization and development of Iraq's mental-health services and training of mental-health staff, the provision of university books and textbooks for Baghdad University in partnership with US universities, and sanitation initiatives to provide public toilets.⁴ More recently, there has been a revival of Iraq's cultural heritage, including arts and crafts, reed boats that serve the southern marshes, and many other examples.⁵

4 Author interview with mental health professional in London, October 2019; Kadhum, "Diasporic Interventions: State-Building in Iraq Following the 2003 Iraq War."

5 See work by Nahrein Network <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein/> and Safina Projects <https://www.safinaprojects.org/>

Some of the projects carried out were effective in delivering necessary resources and filling the void of the Iraqi state's public services for several disenfranchised groups and communities. Meanwhile, others were met with hostility and violence due to the instability, culture of corruption, and sectarianism that have prevented many outside the structures of power from successfully contributing inside the country. This trend reflects the reality of post-2003 Iraq, where sectarian politics and corruption have permeated all features of Iraqi society and life.

Other diasporic mobilization has been directed toward lobbying governmental institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the UK parliament, as well as non-governmental organizations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Lobbying has addressed the important issues of violence, land grabs, and religious discrimination faced by Iraq's minorities such as the Yazidis, the Mandeans, Iraqi Christians, and Turkmen. Equally, the issues of women's rights, the personal-status law, and gender-based violence have also been raised by two prominent diasporic organizations—the Iraqi Women's League and the Iraqi Democratic Movement—across their diasporic branches in Europe.

Diaspora Mobilization over Time

Once an ethno-sectarian political system was institutionalized in Iraq, diaspora mobilization was very much shaped by homeland political dynamics.⁶ This had implications for who was able to form part of the government and its civil service, with those connected to the dominant political parties having easier access than those outside of those elite circles. As such, elite mobilization since 2005 has largely revolved around the Shia Islamic parties, the Kurdish parties, and those connected to minority parties (who have a certain quota within Iraq's electoral system).

Thus, a transnational corridor between those in power and their diasporic communities was established, serving as a recruiting ground for political and bureaucratic positions as needed. This pattern in elite mobilization continues to the present, with ministers and members of parliament hiring family members and friends, creating what can only be

described as a diasporic bubble at the heart of Baghdad's state apparatus.

In recent years, however, political mobilizations in support of political parties in the diaspora have waned due to the Iraqi diaspora's general disappointment with diasporic elites it supported in 2003. Many contributed to corruption, failed to address Iraq's poor public services, and hardened the sectarian politics that have dogged the country. Party representation and attendance at political events have declined significantly, and mobilization has been oriented more toward non-state actors, civil society, and the charitable sector.⁷

Outside the structures of power, diaspora mobilization for civil society has been hampered by politics, as those connected to political parties and elites have found it far easier to navigate Iraq's nepotistic and corrupt legal system, or, ultimately, find support for their projects. Indeed, many of the diasporic entrepreneurs interviewed for this paper who are unconnected to political parties in Iraq have found it difficult to work in the country due to sectarian politics. Various projects attempted by diaspora individuals and groups have fallen flat, or have remained ad hoc at best. Others have faced outright discrimination. Examples of the former include difficulty in registering charities in Iraq's bureaucratic web. Meanwhile, one diaspora individual interviewed was chased out of the country and accused of being a communist when trying to open a center for victims of torture in post-Hussein Iraq.⁸ Sunni individuals have been particularly ostracized, with many accused of having Baathist affiliations, which has prevented many from returning and contributing their skills and expertise to rebuilding Iraq.

As a result, the majority of transnational organizations operating between Iraq and the wider diaspora have been Shia charitable organizations and initiatives, which have been supported by Shia clerics in Iraq, Shia businessmen or former politicians, or members of Shia Islamist parties. Sectarian politics have also encroached on the humanitarian sector, privileging Shia actors and organizations over more secular organizations that have struggled to drum up financial resources, professionalize, and, therefore, institutionalize within the humanitarian sector.⁹

6 Kadhum, "Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism."

7 Oula Kadhum, "Unpacking the Role of Religion in Political Transnationalism: The Case of the Iraqi Shi'a Diaspora Post 2003," *International Affairs*, 2020.

8 Author interview with female respondent in London, November 14, 2013.

9 Kadhum, "Unpacking the Role of Religion in Political Transnationalism: The Case of the Iraqi Shi'a Diaspora Post 2003."



Iraqi diaspora showing solidarity with Iraqi protesters outside BBC Headquarters, whose reporting of October protests of corruption, unemployment, and inefficient public services. October 2019. Photo by Haidar Hakim. Source: https://twitter.com/rayya_ali/status/1190946144551088128

More recently, following Iraq's October revolution in 2019 (a grassroots movement whose aims were to overhaul the political system in Iraq), there have also been diasporic solidarity campaigns, protests, and awareness campaigns in the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and New Zealand.

Obstacles to Diaspora Mobilization

Beyond sectarian politics, which have indelibly shaped diaspora mobilization toward Iraq, many other obstacles stand in the way of diaspora members contributing to their country of origin.¹⁰ The main areas of concern are issues of security, culture shock, education, and gender dynamics.

Security

One of the biggest impediments to diaspora mobilization has been the unstable security situation, which has dis-

¹⁰ Kadhum, "Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism."

couraged many from returning, or has altogether prevented many from starting or continuing projects. One important example was a collaborative development initiative started between Iraqi-Swedish organizations and Sweden's foreign ministry in 2004. This was significantly impacted by the security situation in Iraq, during a time of heightened sectarian politics and reprisals.¹¹ The initiative's aim was to create links between diaspora organizations and their like in Iraq, in order to develop, support, and democratize their operations and work. Following Sweden's historic democratic tradition, working with civil-society organizations was believed to be a more effective means of supporting Iraq's fledgling democratic state and helping institutionalize more bottom-up democratic practices. Unfortunately, the security context at the time meant that Swedish due diligence could not be carried out, and funds delivered to organizations could not be effectively accounted for. Unable to conform to Western standards of accountability, the project ended in 2008 and was not renewed. Despite helping many communities within Iraq, including women and youth organizations, the projects ultimately failed due to conflict conditions in the country, which threatened the lives of diasporans carrying out the work, and limited the ability of the Swedish development agency to monitor and account for projects and funding.

On an individual level, many interviewed diaspora members in Germany, Sweden, and the UK expressed a desire to return and help professionalize various sectors within Iraq or share their expertise with Iraqi professionals. Prominent among this cohort were diaspora doctors, dentists, and psychiatrists. However, due to the insecurity they felt and the threats to their lives, many were only able to work on an ad-hoc basis, while others were too afraid to risk their lives and preferred to help Iraqis from abroad.

Change in Society and Culture

An often-repeated phrase heard throughout research with the Iraqi diaspora in the UK, Sweden, and Germany was the change in society and culture experienced upon their return. Many had left Iraq in the 1960s and 1970s, when political and economic shifts in the country led to more liberal policies, creating more equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace and in political participation.¹² The Iraq they experienced on their return in 2003 was vastly more conservative and religious, and many felt a sense of culture shock

even among family and friends. Many questioned a possible future in the country, and returned to the diaspora and their homes in Western hostlands with an altered image of Iraq, dispelling any mythical return narratives.

Insider/Outsider Dynamics

Another issue raised during interviews with Iraqis who returned concerned the reception they received from the established population. Many were resented for having left the country and not experiencing the tribulations of the Saddam Hussein years. Diasporic returnees were often perceived as returning from a comfortable life only to strip government or bureaucratic jobs from in-country Iraqis. Tensions and stand-offs between insiders and outsiders at various ministries were commonplace in the years following the intervention, which discouraged many from working in Iraq.

Others commented on the professional culture shock, as the working environment presented particular challenges for those used to Western work protocols, ethics, and manners. For many, these hurdles were simply too arduous to overcome.

Educational Opportunities for Families

Another impediment holding families back from returning is Iraq's weak education system. For many families used to Western standards of education for their children, this presents a particular challenge. As a result, many instead live a life of circular migration between their Western hostlands and Iraq, traveling to and fro between the two countries to work and spend time with family. In this respect, holding dual citizenship, where it is permitted, has helped many diaspora returnees to live a transnational life marked by a duality in cultures, customs, and citizenships.

Gender and Minority Rights

Yet, the impediments to returning are not only structural in Iraq, but intersectional. For women and other minority groups, life in Iraq poses significant hurdles. Patriarchal gender norms have obstructed access into the Iraqi workforce and participation in public life for women in the diaspora. Many will have been used to working in Western, democratic, and equal societies in which their participation is expected, encouraged, and respected. In Iraq, mean-

11 Kadhum, "Assessing Co-Development Projects for Civil Society Building in Iraq."

12 Nadjie Sadig al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2007).

while, conservative gender norms have been exacerbated by the 2003 intervention, as women and their bodies have been battlegrounds between Islamist groups and a Western, liberal intervention.¹³

Similarly, for ethnic or sectarian minorities that do not feel represented by the Iraqi government—such as the Mandaean, Turkmen, Yazidi, Shabak, or Christian communities—returning to Iraq poses even more serious problems, as many have faced kidnappings, genocide, land grabs, and attacks against their places of worship. This has undeniably affected their senses of belonging to Iraq and their transnational connections, especially as many ethnic-group populations now largely reside in the diaspora with small populations left in Iraq.¹⁴ As more and more flee Iraq and form part of the Iraqi diaspora, transnational connections to Iraq will likely decrease, with each generation changing the social topography of the country.

Lack of Funding and Professional Experience

While there is no shortage of will and energy in the diaspora, one of the main impediments to diaspora mobilization is a lack of funds and capacity. Many of the organizations that exist are functioning on a voluntary level and depend on community donations. Furthermore, with few funds at their disposal, many of the organizations working to support various communities in Iraq cannot train their staff or build organizational capacity. This vicious cycle has prevented many projects from continuing professionally and developing beyond an ad-hoc basis; at best, they experience short lifespans.

Unlocking the Potential

There is considerable gain from diasporic return, as many case studies from around the globe attest.¹⁵ Indeed, many

developing states have realized the significant potential and power that their diasporic populations can offer their countries of origin financially, institutionally, developmentally, and ideologically. This can take many forms, including remittances, human capital, capital investment, development, tourism, and brain gain.¹⁶ This awareness has led to a diasporic turn as an increasing number of countries have now established policies, institutions, and government departments to incentivize and explicitly deal with their diaspora populations.¹⁷

This paper argues that unlocking the human potential of diasporic mobilization for development requires institutionalizing and professionalizing the transnational channels between the Iraqi diaspora and Iraq, so that more sustainable networks can be maintained between host states and Iraq. This can be achieved with both a top-down and bottom-up approach through five distinct arenas. These include Iraqi government outreach, hostland government co-development initiatives, partnering with established non-governmental organizations, collaboration between likeminded organizations, and online between the home and host countries.

Iraqi Government Outreach

Most of the diasporic initiatives carried out in Iraq have been established by entrepreneurial diasporans, and those with the expertise, time, material resources, networks, or will to reach out to health professionals, civil-society leaders, or international organizations to effect change. Consequently, most projects have remained ad hoc and dependent on the available time and funding of volunteers. Meanwhile, many others have failed to take off, or have been halted by vandalism, ethno-sectarian political dynamics, and patriarchal gender norms at different moments in Iraq's post-2003 trajectory.

13 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Islam and Women's Rights," *Third World Quarterly* 28, 3, April 1, 2007, 503–517, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590701192603>; Nadje Sadig al-Ali and Nicola Christine Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2010), <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520265813>.

14 Kadhum, "Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism."

15 Manuel Orozco and Michelle Lapointe, "Mexican Hometown Associations and Development Opportunities," *Journal of International Affairs—Columbia University* 57, 2, 2004, 31–52, https://www.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/Orozco_final.pdf; Devesh Kapur, *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mark Sidel, "Focusing on the State: Government Responses to Diaspora Giving and Implications for Equity," in Barbara J. Merz, Lincoln C. Chen, and Peter F. Geithner, eds., *Diasporas and Development: Studies in Global Equity* (Cambridge, MA: Global Equity Initiative, Asia Center, and Harvard University, 2007); Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Institutional Reform and Diaspora Entrepreneurs: The In-Between Advantage* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

16 Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias and Kathleen Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries* (Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2013), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/developing-road-map-engaging-diasporas-development-handbook-policymakers-and-practitioners>.

17 Alan Gamlen, et al., "WP-78-2013: Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions—Oxford IMI," November 2013, <http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/wp-78>; Francesco Ragazzi, "A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies," *Political Geography*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2013.12.004>.

Iraq had already permitted dual citizenship and extraterritorial voting during election cycles, connecting the diaspora to its country of origin. It could now take this a step further and formalize its relationship with the diaspora by actively seeking its help in the rebuilding and development of Iraq. As such, the first recommendation would be for the Iraqi government to establish an institutional channel to encourage return, circular migration, and the flow of brain gain from the diaspora to Iraq.

A crucial first step to doing this would be to conduct a mapping exercise of where Iraqis in the diaspora reside and create a skills database that the Iraqi government can access for specific jobs and projects. Only then can an appropriate policy or institution be established to deal exclusively with the diaspora. Initially, this could be carried out by the embassies of countries where Iraqis reside.

In taking these steps, the government can begin to build trust and a new relationship with the diaspora—one removed from suspicion and resentment, and instead focused toward seeing its members as long-distance citizens invested in their homeland's future. Furthermore, government enticements, such as tax incentives for returnees, medical and life insurance, and flexible residencies and visa requirements, would also encourage these collaborative efforts.

Additionally, and importantly, campaigns encouraging Iraq's ethnic and sectarian minorities, as well as women, would go a long way in reassuring these discriminated diasporic groups that they, too, belong in Iraq's modern and democratic state. Many in the diaspora are desperate to return and contribute to the growth and success of their communities. Targeted campaigns toward inclusion of these groups and incentives would motivate the return of Iraq's diverse and rich society.

It is also important not to forget Iraq's pioneering history in women's rights and gender equality.¹⁸ Women have a tremendous role to play in the development of Iraq. In such a conservative country, women from the diaspora can also deliver training and mentoring to address the needs of women in various sectors, empowering Iraqi women to lead and take on greater roles in the homeland.

Once a mapping exercise and relationship of trust have been established between the government and the diaspora, a dedicated government department could be established to deal exclusively with the diaspora. This would give the diaspora a channel of direct engagement with the government and the sectors in need of support. Outreach could be conducted via campaigns and events in countries of diasporic residence, as well as online. More durable, professional, and productive relations would then be established with the diaspora, incentivizing the return of both first-generation and second-generation Iraqis, who have much to offer the country both socially and economically.

Though a Ministry of Migration and Displaced in Iraq exists, it deals largely with internal and externally displaced Iraqis, refugees, and those exiled due to the former regime. The ministry could now extend itself to also managing its relationship with the diaspora, as many countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Israel have done.¹⁹ Alternatively, the government could establish a separate government department, committee, or quasi-governmental organization to direct this relationship. Whatever the chosen platform, if the government is to take advantage of the human and financial power of its diaspora, a formal strategy must be put in place, which locates and identifies the diaspora before creating effective channels of communication and collaboration.

Hostland Co-Development Initiatives

A second approach may be taken up through the hostland governments, as diasporic organizations may be incorporated into the development framework of hostland foreign offices or development departments. This is best exemplified by the case of Sweden, where the diaspora approached the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help Iraq's fledgling democracy.²⁰ The collaboration lasted from 2005 to 2008, and the central idea was for diasporic organizations to support likeminded organizations in Iraq. The collaboration between the Swedish-Iraqi organizations and those of Iraq addressed issues including women's rights, human rights, election training, and supporting journalists, among others.

At the time of the collaboration, the violence that surged during Iraq's sectarian conflict prevented the Swedish gov-

18 Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women*; Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

19 Agunias and Newland, "Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development."

20 Kadhum, "Diasporic Interventions: State-Building in Iraq Following the 2003 Iraq War"; Kadhum, "Assessing Co-Development Projects for Civil Society Building in Iraq."

ernment from performing the necessary auditing required by Swedish accountability standards. This was a major factor in the program's cancellation. However, in times of stability and in regions where peace has been maintained, such a collaborative endeavor between the hostland and existing diaspora organizations can be extremely beneficial for strengthening the organization and capacity of Iraqi organizations.

The recommendation based on this approach would be for hostland development departments to familiarize themselves with diasporic organizations whose values and work resonate with the hostland's development goals and help support these organizations to professionalize through capacity building, funds, and operational support.

Partnering with Non-Governmental Organizations Working in Iraq

Another possible way for the diaspora to mobilize more sustainably is to partner with well-established non-governmental organizations already operating in Iraq. This bottom-up approach would be an effective way to avoid operational costs, as well as strengthen the organization and capacity of diasporic charities that are underfunded and rely on volunteers.

This strategy would also be beneficial for NGOs working in Iraq that may further their reach into specific regions/communities through diasporic interlocutors, as well as collaborate with skilled diasporic entrepreneurs on specific projects. This option would be most effective for diasporic organizations working to provide humanitarian relief where bigger charities—such as Save the Children, Care International, and various United Nations agencies—are already working in the field.

The recommendation for diasporic organizations working toward Iraq's development is to partner with well-established organizations in their field already operating in Iraq. This could present an effective way of creating more sustainable links to the country, as well as having the opportunity to build capacity, professionalize, and, hopefully, expand.

Collaborating Transnationally with Iraqi Organizations and Institutions

Alternatively, for diasporic entrepreneurs and development organizations working toward supporting certain sections of civil society, connecting with likeminded organizations and institutions in Iraq would be the best means to provide for local needs. Some diasporic groups are already managing similar initiatives, such as the Iraqi Women's League and the Iraqi Democratic Movement in London, which have worked with the Iraqi Al-Amal Association to support women's rights, democratic practices, and human rights. Others have worked on an individual level to support minorities in Iraq. For example, a Swedish Iraqi-Turkmen interviewee went back to create an organization to train young Turkmen in accountancy and help with finding employment, while an Iraqi-German doctor mobilized to provide water sanitation and filters to families inside the country.

As helpful as these initiatives are, they have been conducted on an ad-hoc basis, and depend on time, money, and will. There is enormous potential for development if Iraqi and diasporic organizations connect transnationally to cater for community needs. Through a bottom-up approach, Iraqi diasporic organizations could support specific local goals and projects with the expertise and skills available. A successful example is the Nahrein Network, a collaborative project between University College London and Iraqi institutions working to support the "sustainable development of antiquity, cultural heritage and the humanities in Iraq."²¹ Its aims include understanding the situation on the ground while also helping local youth find employment in preserving Iraq's cultural heritage, raising the profile of local expertise, and helping heritage organizations better serve local needs. The project's collaboration with Iraqi academics, universities, museums, and local youth is a perfect example of the possibilities that exist between host states and diasporic homelands to help development, using a local approach that empowers and strengthens communities and their relationship to the land.

A recommendation here would be for Iraqi diasporic organizations or entrepreneurs to reach out to Iraqi organizations or individuals inside the country and collaborate through understanding community and local needs. This can be conducted in person or through online platforms, allowing for various forms of support, including mentoring, training, support, or fundraising.

21 The Nahrein Network website, last accessed October 19, 2020, www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein/.

Online Support

While some projects require face-to-face collaboration, many of the skills and expertise needed can also be transferred and maintained online through videoconferencing apps such as Zoom or Skype for Business. The online arena has, thus far, been underutilized by the Iraqi diaspora; there is great potential for supporting organizations and institutions at various levels. This is particularly pertinent for ensuring the continuity and sustainability of projects during times of violence, civil unrest, and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As in the previous recommendation, online support is one of the easiest ways to stay connected to Iraq and Iraqi organizations and groups. Whether through emails, social media platforms such as Facebook groups, or videoconferencing tools, the online sphere offers a cost-effective, sustainable, and simple way for individual diasporans and organizations to connect with and support various sectors through their professional skills and experiences.

Conclusion

Since 2003, Iraqis around the world have returned to Iraq with the intent of helping to rebuild the country and contribute to its future development. As this paper has shown, political transnationalism since 2003 between Iraq and its diaspora has been defined through both elite and grassroots mobilization, both of which continue to this day.

Elite diaspora mobilization dramatically changed the face of Iraq in the years following intervention, as many diasporic party members and individuals who formed part of the opposition returned and took up political posts. Their legacy remains in the political decisions and system that were adopted, including de-Baathification and the disbanding of the army and Iraq's ethnic and sectarian quota system, which have had lasting and tragic consequences for Iraqi politics and society. Indeed, the violence, instability, and sectarian politics these policies engendered have been the biggest impediment to the diaspora playing a bigger role in contributing to both state building and civil society.

Over time, transnationalism between Iraq and the diaspora has evolved in line with homeland politics and temporalities, which have influenced diasporic transnationalism toward Iraq.²² As sectarian politics surged, so did political campaigns and transnational recruitment from the diaspora. Similarly, as other political actors and movements have gained popularity in Iraq—such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Popular Mobilization Forces, and the October Revolution—transnationalism has been motivated by their influence. This trend is likely to continue so long as successive generations feel connected to the homeland in some shape or form, whether spiritually, culturally, or nostalgically.

As outlined above, many challenges present themselves to those in the Iraqi diaspora who wish to return to Iraq and contribute toward its development. As long as Iraq continues to face both domestic and regional security challenges, the danger will continue to prevent many from returning. Similarly, political and social factors, including patriarchal social norms and differences in professional culture, have also discouraged return.

Yet, as this paper has argued, there are multiple ways to encourage and engage in diaspora mobilization toward Iraq and make it a more sustainable path, even in times of instability. The approaches and recommendations outlined in this paper suggest that both top-down and bottom-up mobilization through Iraqi government outreach, hostland government co-development projects, partnering with NGOs and likeminded organisations in Iraq and through online spaces, present numerous opportunities for the Iraqi diaspora to help its co-nationals in the homeland.

Thus far, the full potential of what diaspora Iraqis can offer Iraq has not been fully utilized in any meaningful and professional way. This is a wasted opportunity for a country whose diaspora is well educated and skilled in medicine, psychology, architecture, engineering, business, and the not for profit sector; these are sectors in Iraq that could benefit greatly from partnerships, training, mentoring, and investment opportunities. If Iraq is to take a step toward a more resilient and prosperous future, Iraqis would be wise to take stock and realize the potential their extraterritorial population has to offer.

22 Oula Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet: Shi'a Political Transnationalism over Time and Its Relationship to the Iraqi State," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, September 7, 2020, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1814128>.

Oula Kadhum Biography

Dr. Oula Kadhum is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Birmingham. Her research explores diaspora politics and transnationalism between Europe and the Middle East.

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