

Peacebuilding Actors in the Levels of Decentralization in Iraq After 2003: A Study of Local Actors

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Abstract

Peacebuilding in nations is achieved through the presence of multiple actors that work towards enforcing the law and focusing on constitutional institutions with the necessary authority and powers. If these elements are absent, peacebuilding or societal peace and national reconciliation are destabilized, leading to potential collapse. These actors have a crucial role in regulating the actions of individuals and groups within the state through the proper and impartial application of the law. When this is done correctly, a sense of equal opportunity and fair access to rights develops, where every citizen observes their peers with fairness. However, if balance is lacking, feelings of frustration and a sense of deprivation arise, which indicates that societal peace is experiencing instability and disturbances, negatively affecting the surrounding environment. Instead of progress, destruction occurs, creating an obstacle to achieving the desired peace. The responsibility for achieving peace lies with the governing authorities in the state, classified as local actors, and with international actors, represented by international organizations that work to spread awareness, education, and cultural practices. These practices emphasize individuals and encourage a culture of tolerance and citizenship. The discussion on local actors in peacebuilding post-2003 will follow.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Legislative authority, Council of Representatives, Citizenship, National integration.*

1. Introduction

Achieving and building peace is not isolated from social reality but is strongly interconnected with it. The more a society enjoys well-being, the lower the levels of violence, and the more issues a society faces, the higher the levels of violence. Based on this, peacebuilding in Iraq cannot be the sole responsibility of one party, but rather all roles must integrate to create sustainable peace founded on respecting and prioritizing individual security and safety. Therefore, it is essential to study the local actors in peacebuilding in Iraq in two dimensions: official and unofficial. The article is based on a set of questions, which are as follows:

1. How do official local actors contribute to peacebuilding through administrative decentralization?
2. What are the mechanisms of local actors for peacebuilding?
3. Do these actors face challenges in building peace?

While the Article hypothesis: Local actors contribute to peacebuilding through the administrative decentralization they enjoy at very high levels, both in the administrative and financial fields. Therefore, we find them following a set of mechanisms for peacebuilding within their own geographical area and according to what is available to them constitutionally and legally, but they face several different challenges in that process.

The article will be divided into an introduction, two requirements, a conclusion, and a list of sources, as follows: the Official local actors for peacebuilding in Iraq, and unofficial local actors for peacebuilding in Iraq.

2. Official Local Actors For Peacebuilding In Iraq.

Government institutions play an essential role in building peace and community peace. They carry out various activities in line with the community's need for such peace, and they are divided as follows:

First: The role of the legislative authority in consolidating the concept of peacebuilding

The primary role of parliament in any country is to enact legislation, exercise oversight over the government, and approve the country's general budget. However, this role can extend beyond that by participating in the peacebuilding process through national reconciliation and consolidating national peace. This is evident through the work of the legislative authority, as parliament is an arena for national debate in which various opinions, accusations, and concerns are presented and directed toward finding solutions for the public good. It is similar to a two-way street, one through which the people convey their aspirations and opinions to their representatives, who are keen to inform their voters of the results of the parliament's sessions in terms of discussions, and the other is to make parliament a national platform for exchanging opinions freely, and this in itself is very important in the process of peace-building and national reconciliation (Mark Verbian, 2005, p. 3).

The role of parliament in building peace comes through building trust in national institutions in order to encourage the parties to the conflict to use this means to reach solutions to the conflict and achieve societal

peace. Restoring trust in “official institutions” comes through “combating corruption” effectively, whether within parliament or in other institutions. Strengthening trust is an important factor in preventing the outbreak of conflicts and taking all necessary measures to achieve this. The task of building and consolidating peace also comes through strengthening national dialogue and giving a voice to marginalized groups. Including these groups in the political process and in the decision-making process is an important and decisive matter capable of addressing new and emerging grievances (United Nations, 2012, p. unspecified, available at the electronic link: www.un.org, date of visit: 11/2/2022).

In addition, the House of Representatives, as an institution emanating from the people, must take all necessary measures available to improve the level of representation of minorities and other components, as well as enact laws that enhance human rights and take into account the rights of the poorest classes when approving the budget in order to improve justice and fairness among all (United Nations, 2012, p. unspecified, available at the electronic link: www.un.org, date of visit: 11/2/2022).

Moreover, parliaments do work that builds peace, playing a key role in making reforms that individually or collectively help advance issues of “democracy, peace” and reconciliation. Whether parliament is drafting a constitution, ensuring the participation of women and minorities in the “legislature,” ensuring that treaties are incorporated into domestic law, or enacting laws that prohibit incitement to hatred, parliaments are in a unique position to chart a course for the future (Mark Verbian, 2005, p. 19).

Second: The role of the executive authority in building peace:

Political studies confirm the existence of a relationship between the performance of political institutions and the nature of civil life and peaceful coexistence, at least in theory. Democratic systems, whether “liberal democracy or consensual-participatory democracy,” work to achieve political and social integration. Liberal systems, on the other hand, work to organize ethnic societies or those in which there are internal sub-identities by associations with diverse connections, and their political elites are integrated into the structure of the comprehensive public authority in a way that aims to achieve civil peace and an integrated civil society. The same is the case in consensual-participatory systems that aim for the same purpose above and achieve political integration through the path of participation of all the various internal parties in power in a way that ensures the achievement of that integration and merger (Montaser Majeed Hamid, 2018, p. 205).

As a result, the government should work to prepare and draw up general policies at all levels, aiming to achieve social justice, especially in areas that have witnessed occupation by terrorist organizations. Iraq, as a country, has experienced various forms of internal conflicts that have threatened its entity. It needs a broad and large process to achieve internal stability, and this is done through mechanisms that aim to achieve sustainable peace, the most prominent of which can be stated in the following (Bassem Ali Khorsan, 2018, p. 147):

a) Promoting citizenship values:

The values of citizenship are embodied in a set of issues, namely strengthening the bond of belonging between the citizen and the state and transforming it from a formal bond into an effective bond between them by instilling a spirit of care and responsibility, as well as devoting political awareness among members of society and informing them of their rights and duties, in addition to qualifying them politically through their influential role in political practices such as elections and referendums (Muhammad Al-Janabi, 2019, p. 126).

b) Addressing critical issues:

By addressing the issues of conflict and its motives considering the absence of agreement on a few non-agreed upon issues, especially regarding power and wealth, as there is still disagreement on several topics, including the oil and gas law, as well as the disputed areas and other controversial issues on which no initial agreement has been reached.

c) Development of state institutions:

Peace can be achieved by developing state institutions and moving society from a state of society that is owned by personality to an (institutional-legal) state. This transformation contributes to transforming state institutions from structures that practice tyranny and domination over individuals in society, which has created a state of mistrust and estrangement between the individual and the state, to an institutional relationship based on containing everyone, which is positively reflected in society (Bassem Ali Khorsan, 2018, p. 147).

d) National integration policy:

The policy of national integration is achieved by linking national and religious groups in a national crucible by finding a means of harmony between them and establishing a strong authority capable of extending its influence over everyone, and then finding an agreement between the “political elites” on the values necessary to maintain the existing system, and working to achieve equality among all members of society in rights and duties and working to unify the general direction of education and make them institutions that develop mechanisms of social control based on the values of freedom and respect (Muhammad Al-Janabi, 2019, p. 125).

e) Unification of "political discourse:

Unifying the political discourse of the political elites, especially among the active political blocs that adopted the democratic project by transcending the past decade and thinking about Iraq’s present and future and focusing on building a civilized civil society in which the “national identity” is elevated at the expense of “sub-identities” (Ahmed Fadhel Jassim, 2018, p. 239).

From the above, it can be said that despite the fact that many studies and articles have confirmed the importance of building lasting peace and have identified many points and indicators that can be used, the successive governments that have ruled Iraq have worked to bring one group closer at the expense of another, which has led to a state of disharmony and instability in society and a slide into civil wars that have claimed the lives of the sons of Iraqi society. Therefore, what Iraq needs most is the term civil peace or peaceful coexistence to ensure that events do not recur again.

Third: The role of the judiciary

Democratic systems are distinguished from non-democratic systems by the distribution of power, aiming to prevent its monopolization by a particular entity and to curb tendencies towards authoritarianism and human rights violations. This distribution of power is embodied in the establishment of three institutions, each responsible for a specific branch of power (legislative, executive, and judicial). This contributes to building an institutional state. While the roles of the legislative and executive branches are important in establishing a stable institutional state, the role of the judiciary is no less significant; in fact, it may be the fundamental pillar in maintaining it.

This is because the judiciary is responsible for upholding the constitution and law, preventing any entity within the state from violating them. Even if the legislative authority is elected by the people and based on democratic principles, it might still enact laws that contradict the constitution, which necessitates the presence of a constitutional judiciary to prevent such occurrences. Likewise, the executive authority might misuse its power, necessitating the presence of an administrative judiciary to curb such actions. Additionally, the presence of a regular judiciary helps protect individuals and society from any criminal or security threats. According to Basim Ali Khreisan (2020, date of visit: 8/8/2023), the judiciary plays a crucial role in peacebuilding through laws and decisions that contribute to this process.

3. Local Informal Actors in Peacebuilding

Informal actors in governorates that are not organized into a region and within the geographical area play a major role in building peace, especially considering the powers and tasks that these actors enjoy. However, they still face some challenges that may limit their role at times. Therefore, we will talk about these actors, which are as follows:

First: The role of civil society institutions

“Civil society” is defined as a group of free voluntary organizations that fill the public space between the family and the state to achieve the interests of individuals or groups committed to the values and standards of respect, consent, tolerance, and sound management of diversity and disagreement (Qasim Alwan Saeed, 2019, p. 60).

Civil society organizations play an important role in ensuring respect for the constitution and the rights of individuals. They also represent the best method for bringing about peaceful change and national understanding with the authorities in strengthening democracy and raising individuals on its principles and mechanisms. They can elevate the individual and preparing individual and collective efforts to exercise influence on public policies. Therefore, civil society, whether in a state of weakness or under pressure, remains the fundamental role in the ecosystem through which it revives peace (Fahd Jabbar Jalabi, 2014, p. 56).

After the democratic transition that Iraq witnessed post-2003, a wide space was opened for civil society organizations to be established and work towards achieving national reconciliation. The role of civil society organizations in achieving social peace lies in their function as intermediaries between the government and the citizens through mediation. They serve as a communication channel that conveys the citizens' goals and desires to the governmental authorities in an accurate manner, aiming to prompt appropriate actions. The importance of these organizations is linked to the process of "civil peace" through the nature of "political and economic transformations" that necessitate the establishment of a new political, social, and economic structure aligned with the developments caused by the loss of civil peace or social harmony. Thus, "civil society organizations" have become an essential element and an important party in the field of post-conflict reconstruction, development, and other humanitarian fields (Qasim Alwan Saeed, 2019, p. 269).

The role of civil society organizations in building peace is highlighted through the advice they provide on national reconciliation, as well as offering expertise, knowledge, and technical assistance to those engaged in peacebuilding. Being a neutral, non-governmental entity, these organizations can play the role of documenting violations and abuses during and after armed conflicts. They influence conflict movements by highlighting the negative impacts of such conflicts and encourage parties to come to the negotiation table with the aim of reaching a peace agreement (Omar Jumaa Omran, 2018, p. 175).

It can also play or work to play an awareness and cultural role by emphasizing the importance of democracy in determining their political and social destiny and explaining the harm resulting from the lack of political participation through seminars, workshops, issuing bulletins, and emphasizing the importance of the peaceful transfer of power (Abbas Fadhel Mahmoud, 2012, p. 635).

Second: The role of local media

The media in its broad sense is the effective human force for building human thought through the information and clear facts it produces to convey reality as it is, far from destructive effects, and to stay away from everything that incites or establishes a basis for violence within the individual or society, such as a media outlet building an image of the news based on information without a reliable source to avoid the immediate and future

consequences of that news and to pay attention to the aspects of human rights that require staying away from incitement to hatred and working to encourage peace, thus achieving a suitable basis for dealing on the basis of rights and duties in order to reach the desired goal, which is ethical and humane dealing (Hesham Nasr Hussein, 2009, p. 99).

The media played a positive role in building societal peace in Iraq. The media played a positive role in the peacebuilding process in Iraq through several points, such as (Saadi Al-Ibrahim, 2021, p. 1):

A. Focus on national commonalities: There is no doubt that the media has an important role in reminding people of the commonalities that bind them together, such as the homeland, common interest, history, destiny and a common future. This reminder has certainly contributed and continues to contribute to building peace, as through it the conflicting parties feel that the rift between them is temporary, and that the things that unite them are more than those that separate them, and thus they quickly return to their senses and leave the state of conflict among themselves.

B. Contributed to spreading awareness and community education:

Ignorance is the main cause of conflicts that societies go through, including Iraqi society. When reason is absent and superstitions and myths control a person, he will fight his brother for the sake of the past. Each party wants to say that it is the best, and that it has been historically wronged, and this is its golden opportunity to take revenge on the other. Here comes the role of the media, in enlightening people, and helping them fight ignorance and think correctly and logically, so they leave the rebellion to the past or try to prove that their beliefs and ideas are the only correct ones, and they accept each other.

C. The international community showed what the Iraqi citizen is suffering from:

If it weren't for the media, international humanitarian organizations would not have rushed to work in Iraq and contribute to building peace there. Many countries in the world were isolated from what the country was going through, and they knew nothing about what was going on there, and therefore did not think of extending a helping hand to it. However, they learned about the facts of the situation there through the media, so they reconsidered their policies towards it, and provided it with assistance and support.

D. The spotlight was on the foreign hands that tampered with the societal peace.

One of the positive roles of the media is that it exposed the foreign hands behind the violent events, and disgraced them locally, regionally, and globally. This contributed to clearing the people of the country of the accusations and suspicions that were directed at them. It alerted them that most of what was happening was an external conspiracy aimed at undermining national unity in the country.

The success of the Iraqi media experience in building peace and transforming conflict is approaching, based on the existence of realistic strategic plans with clear objectives from official and unofficial media institutions. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations or civil society work to establish the foundation for this societal cohesion, by organizing workshops and training programs in the field of shaping awareness and a sense of national belonging (Muhammad Walid Saleh, 2023, p. not specified, date of visit: 8/8/2023).

Third: The role of youth in building peace

Iraqi youth represent a latent social force, and their impact is highlighted through the roles they play, whether positively or negatively. After 2003, there was increased attention on youth issues, and the state aimed to minimize the negative influence of this group, given that they form a large segment of society, before capitalizing on their positive roles. Consequently, UN reports advocating for youth empowerment followed. The 2014 Human Development Report emphasized the need for government partnership with the private sector to ensure effective infrastructure that provides job opportunities for youth. Achieving Iraq's democratic direction and building peace requires the Iraqi government to adopt a participatory approach with both the private sector and civil society, while also activating community participation by empowering women and youth as effective members of society. Marginalized groups cannot be utilized in any way, and given that youth possess vitality, it is crucial to raise their awareness of the importance of focusing on development. This involves creating and financing programs and projects by the government, thus increasing their success rates, rather than just concentrating on charitable activities which have been surpassed along with traditional roles (United Nations, 2014, p. 116).

The Human Development Report for 2013 identified the work priorities that the state must follow, the most prominent of which were (United Nations, 2014, p. 116):

1. Expanding opportunities for youth participation and ensuring their protection from the dangers of unstable social, economic and security situations.
2. Investing in youth capabilities by opening the way for them to benefit from their experiences and latent capabilities.
3. Activating the national private sector and expanding its scope, as since 2003 there has been a new trend in the framework of opening the way for the business sector, as the necessity of building an institutional framework for the economy is as important as building an institutional framework for governance, and thus its roles are not limited to traditional roles only, but rather go beyond them to various activities that were previously the monopoly of the state.
4. Expanding partnership with the private sector, which is on several levels:
 - Policy level: This is related to issuing a law to regulate government partnership with the private sector.

- Institutional level: This is represented by establishing central units for government partnership with the private sector.
- Capacity building level: This is achieved by ensuring follow-up of implementation and attracting international financing institutions.

Thus, we conclude that youth work is linked to peace building because it is reflected in their tendencies and orientations towards violence, because one of the main causes of violence is poverty or marginalization. Thus, peace can be achieved by eliminating unemployment and poverty among youth.

Fourth: The role of political parties in building peace:

Political parties are among the most important political organizations that directly affect the course and movement of the political system and ensure its continuity and stability. They play an important role in activating political life and have become a fundamental pillar of democratic systems. The performance of parties reflects negatively or positively on the quality of political life and the level of democratic development, political modernization, and the effectiveness of the political system, which reflects the prevailing party system in the state. Political parties play an important role in making and framing public policy, as they are one of the channels of political participation for citizens, as well as one of the channels of organized political communication in society. Political scientists consider them a strong and organized pillar for linking the top and the bottom and as a necessary communication station between citizens and the authorities (Laila Dhar Latif, 2022, p. 2).

I. With the change in the political system in Iraq after 2003, party life began to work quickly and diversified in a very different political, social, and cultural environment, which facilitated its work at times and complicated the matter at other times. Therefore, political parties in Iraq after 2003 went through several stages from an organizational perspective in order to reach the real party organization and form a strong party structure based on legal foundations and organizational rules to achieve several goals, including (Mustafa Al-Saray, 2023, pp. 3-4):

- a. Reflecting the democratic image of the political system by ensuring the presence of political parties and political pluralism.
- b. Organizing the work of political parties in a coordinated manner that facilitates their interaction, continuity, and sustainability.
- c. Granting legal legitimacy to the existence of parties and resolving the debate about their legality due to the absence of legislated laws regulating political parties.
- d. Ensuring the continuity of the electoral process, at least partially, through the existence of organized parties that function both before and after elections, rather than just forming election blocs during election periods. Based on this, the Political Parties and Organizations Law No. (36) of 2015 was enacted by the Iraqi Parliament. This law carried many positive provisions, but at the same time, it included many vague and ambiguous articles. Nearly six years after the legislation of the law and the holding of two election cycles under its existence, numerous parties have been formed in accordance with this law.

Political parties in Iraq seek, through their programs, to achieve the goals that lead to building peace. For example, the Communist Party seeks to move away from sectarian polarization in political and electoral programs and their dangers, and then build and achieve peace in Iraq and call for competition between political parties on the basis of political programs that seek to advance Iraqi society and achieve social and economic progress, as its program stipulates following peaceful methods and affirming democracy, all of which work to build peace (Talib Jabbar Hassan, 2022, p. 148).

In addition, Islamic political parties have adopted in their programs and internal regulations an ideology and vision based on religion, aiming to obtain the support of citizens and mobilize them through religious and sectarian identity, and have put forward the idea that Islam and its principles have the fundamental role in the identity of the state and the source of legislation. Therefore, their theoretical programs focus on managing the affairs of the nation, preserving all its interests, and establishing justice and right in the country. If we take the Islamic Dawa Party as an example, we also notice that its political program emphasizes the basic needs for building peace and is based mostly on generalities in the legal, political, social, economic, and security aspects without mentioning the mechanisms that achieve these programs (Talib Jabbar Hassan, 2022, p. 109).

4. Results:

The concept of peacebuilding, which was associated with the Cold War era, is an important and controversial topic, because it expresses the state's interest in providing peace and stability, as an alternative to wars and to reform the post-conflict phase, which led to the intensification and coordination of efforts in order to make this process a success and achieve its desired goals, by addressing the causes of the conflict and the factors that lead to its escalation to avoid falling into it again.

The unnatural structure of the Iraqi state, which was not only the result of the changes after 2003, but some of them date back to before that year, but what happened after 2003 as a result of the American occupation and the dissolution of its institutions and their replacement with others and other reasons that created a problem in the peace-building process at various levels of decentralization, whether political or administrative. Wars, ethnic conflicts, sectarian fighting, and the control of the terrorist organization (ISIS) over part of the country in 2014,

all deepened the problem of peacebuilding in Iraq directly or indirectly, which requires strengthening it with different and diverse mechanisms.

The role of decentralization in building peace and achieving social unity and cohesion has become evident as one of the tools through which the state aims to reach a unifying national identity. It seeks to emphasize the elevation of the "nation-state" identity while considering social identity as the individual's awareness of belonging to a historical group that provides a functional framework to fulfill their psychological security needs and a reference framework to shape a cultural value system that organizes their perceptions of and interactions with the world. This is done without conflicting with their loyalty and belonging to a unifying national identity. In diverse societies, political administration, represented by decentralization, plays an essential role in the peacebuilding process, especially during times of crises and hardships. Decentralized administrations, with the authority granted by the federal administration, perform an effective role in bringing perspectives closer and reducing the intensity of emotions that accompany social groups during their conflicts and differences. This phenomenon has been witnessed in most countries that adopted consociational democracy, where they were able to achieve a degree of harmony, stability, and progress. The conflicting tendencies within social plurality are met with cooperative tendencies at the level of leaders and the constituent groups.

The article believes that informal actors, such as political parties, various types of media, and civil society organizations, play a significant role in the peacebuilding process in Iraq. Although their impact tends to be more theoretical than practical due to the political, economic, social, and cultural challenges surrounding each of these actors in Iraq, they have attempted and continue to strive to be important contributors to peacebuilding through their political programs concerning political parties, as well as their various programs and missions related to media and civil society organizations.

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