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# Limiting Corruption Opportunities in Iraq

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### Brief Analysis

As popular demonstrations in the south escalate further each summer, the next Iraqi government should address the root causes of this unrest. Otherwise, it risks the existence of the post-2003 system. One such cause is corruption, which could be addressed by adopting several anti-corruption measures, such as e-governance, one-stop-shops, encouragement of civil society participation, and random inspections, all of which have been successfully utilized in other countries. Although the unique circumstances in Iraq may present a challenge to the implementation of these tested measures, such tools may nonetheless prove to be necessary for reviving public-trust and facilitating the provision of basic services.

### E-governance

E-governance, the first of the aforementioned measures, is defined as the use of communication technology (ICT) by government and private organizations to create effective management. E-governance is a useful mechanism for fighting corruption because it reduces interactions with officials, speeds up decision-making, and reduces human error.

Although E-governance may have high front-end costs, in the long run it will save money while ensuring transparency. For example, after Slovakia utilized online auctions to obtain certain goods and services, the cost of collecting garbage fell by a full third of its initial price from 900,000 EUR in 2008 to 600,000 EUR, as empirical studies found that online auctions increase number of submitted bids and a decrease in the costs. Slovakia also enacted legislation requiring governmental institutions to publish contracts and their financial returns online, thus dramatically increasing bureaucratic transparency.

In Iraq's case, a lot could be gained from implementing e-governance practices. Indeed, by easing bureaucratic procedures, ensuring transparent public procurement, and establishing a transparent taxation system, the Iraqi Government could draw more foreign investors and as a result accelerate reconstruction and improve service delivery.

It should be noted that it may be difficult for Iraq to adopt the practice of E-governance. As of 2018, the country does not even have an effective mailing system, which is a prerequisite for online transactions and a reliable banking sector. As such, a technological upgrade cannot be completed overnight. Nonetheless, Iraq can overcome this specific gap in capacity by requiring every individual in the process of opening a bank account to rent a mailbox, which should be available for no more than \$20 per year. When opening a bank account, customers can also be provided with instructional manuals containing information on how to partake in online services. All of this is to say that, although it would not be easy to launch an e-governance apparatus in Iraq, the challenge would not be insurmountable.

### **One-Stop-Shop (OSS)**

The term “One-Stop-Shop” refers to a system in which representatives from separate government institutions responsible for providing different aspects of the same type of public service (i.e. Municipal Administration, Tax administration, and Real Estate Department together administer the trading of housing units) are concentrated in one physical location that citizens can visit to receive that service. Corrupt networks usually exploit the complexities of bureaucratic procedures to amass bribes from citizens or/and businessmen, therefore, relying on OSS, which proved to be capable of speeding up service delivery, reducing costs, and minimizing the need to verify information and documentation, will definitely limit opportunities for corruption, especially if OSS centers were coupled with electronic registration to pressure employees to address applicants’ request orderly.

In Iraq, the National Commission of Investment, which was founded by the government in 2007, operates as an OSS. However, due to lack of coordination between national and provincial entities, foreign companies still struggle with the process of investment in Iraq, given the involvement of multiple players and the time-consuming process to get their approval. Therefore, for more effective results, it might be wise for Iraq to follow the UAE’s model for implementing an OSS system, which includes the **following stages**: first, the services adapted to the OSS system cannot be selected randomly. Instead, they should be services that have been provided in a manner that led to many complaints; services that are in high demand; or services that are crucial for investment. Second, after the services offered in OSS centers have been selected, the government should prioritize each service based on its contribution to the economy and determine the specifics, i.e. the number of participating government institutions and stakeholders involved. Third, to set up an OSS, the government should create an action plan that establishes flowcharts for the services and defines the responsibilities of each participating agency to prevent conflict and overlap. Fourth, the government should decide the institutional design and the dynamics between agencies involved (approach). Fifth, asking the involved agencies for assessing the proposed institutional design, flow charts, and expected costs, as they possess practical knowledge. Sixth, government should prepare properly by detailing required staff, training them, and publicizing OSS centers adequately. Eventually, the government should keep overseeing the activity of OSS centers and ensure that its performance is satisfactory.

### **Encouraging Civil Society Participation**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) could be highly useful in the fight against corruption: evidence shows that CSOs are effective in monitoring and evaluating anti-corruption efforts, exposing corrupt practices, executing regional and international initiatives against corruption, and building alliances to support anti-corruption measures.

Unfortunately, although there are more than 3000 registered CSOs in Iraq, these organizations have thus far struggled to join forces. As a matter of fact, even CSOs that share objectives and expertise seem to have difficulties coordinating their efforts. Nonetheless, if the government can figure out a way to incentivize Iraqi CSOs to work together, these organizations may be able to form broad-based alliances that could positively impact policy making processes.

Moreover, while it is true that some CSOs in Iraq are established to promote personal and partisan interests and are sometimes even used to facilitate illegal activities, by thoroughly considering the background of CSOs, the government could recruit certain organizations and solicit their help in the war on corruption.

### Random Inspections

Ubiquitous in the United States, random inspection is very effective because it increases the likelihood of detecting corrupt practices, especially when the institutional capacity to detect such practices is weak and when the opportunities to act in a corrupt manner are abundant. Random inspections have been adopted in Iraq to some extent. For example, in 2017, the Commission of Integrity (COI) has conducted 87 inspections. However, given the fact that Iraq has 41 government sectors whose staff includes more than 5000 senior officials, 87 inspections are not even close to being sufficient. Indeed, the effectiveness of random inspections depends on available resources and a clear legal framework that facilitates frequent visits to each site. Thus, in light of Iraq's limited resources, the government should concentrate its efforts around the Security Sector Reform (SSR) in order to tackle corrupt practices that enable terrorism, such as racketeering, extortion, etc by sending secret policy with hidden camera to assess officers' adherence to laws and regulations, especially this has proved to be effective in the case of Georgia.

In conclusion, the Iraqi government should use the protests as an opportunity to adopt and institutionalize anti-corruption tools. To reap the full potential benefits of the anti-corruption measures mentioned in this article, the government must define and work towards specific, measurable goals. ❖



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