



# The Iraqi and Syrian Crises: A Strategic Definition

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### Brief Analysis

**P**olitical conflict in the Islamic world began between two schools headed by the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. A bloody fight for power led to a conflict that still persists today in the form of the Sunni-Shia divide and the Turkish-Arab-Iranian conflict. Defining the current conflict in Iraq and Syria as sectarian is superficial and naïve. The reality of the conflict is one of two different forms that have taken on the cover of sectarianism in propaganda and political marketing. The reality of these two forms is: a clash between the schools of Baathist Nazism and Islamist Fascism, and class-based strife. Both forms justify their struggle in sectarian terms in the media to manipulate and mobilize the masses.

In Iraq during 2003 and afterward, Sunni-Shia Islamist parties participated in a unified election to design a new political process with the primary aim of obtaining political posts. The first elected Iraqi government was formed by Shia and Sunni Islamists, with the former attaining many key positions, including Prime Minister and other important security positions. Sunni Islamists attained significant ministerial appointments, including Deputy Prime Minister. Hence, Shia and Sunni Islamists have actually considered allies in forming a government rather than enemies. There is competition between them, but not opposition or conflict. Reality proved that they were allies when they formed several Iraqi governments after 2003. Their common enemy is the Baathists or the Nazi Baathist school. The de-Baathification law created by the Sunni and Shia to combat the Baathists is a manifestation of this conflict between the two Islamist schools, the Sunni and Shia fascists and the Baathist Nazis in Iraq, rather than between Sunnis and Shiites as is promoted in the media.

The Iraqi conflict has been marked by class struggle. The Baathists created a highly educated, high-income class of government employees resulting from their rule of Iraq for more than forty years. Sunni and Shia Islamists were targeted by the Baath Party. They were excluded from jobs and scientific degrees, which created two social classes in Iraq: a Baathist upper class with high incomes and education levels, and a lower class consisting of Islamists. The same components of this conflict are found in Syria, but in reverse. The first form of the conflict is characterized by the fascist school of Sunni Islamists who are concentrated in the Syrian countryside that revolted against the Assad

regime, which represents the Baathist Nazi school in the city. The Syrian revolution, which transformed into a regional and then international conflict is essentially a struggle between the same two reactionary schools of thought as in Iraq, Islamism, and Baathism.

In terms of class, the Islamist revolutionaries make up the low-income rural areas, in contrast to the influence and power of the Shia Alawites, who represent the educated upper class in Damascus and other major Syrian cities. This explains the support of the Sunni elites of Damascus for the Assad regime and their opposition to the rural Sunnis from a different class. Thus, the Syrian Revolution is also a battle between the rural and upper classes of society led by Assad.

Neither Baathist or Islamic thought has collapsed in Syria in the same way that communism collapsed after it failed. This is because Baathism and Islamism are not just political ideologies. Both have their own behaviors, represent communities, and are connected to one another. Sometimes they take political forms, but are communities before parties or ideologies, and will continue to struggle through various violent forms. These societies are divided into upper, middle, and lower social classes. Thus, the conflict has taken on two forms: a social manifestation enveloped in the Islamist and Baathist schools, and a class conflict between the upper and lower classes. No force can eliminate them, as this would completely eliminate the Iraqi and Syrian societies. However, the conflict can be ended by understanding the problem.

The solution to the Iraqi and Syrian crises lies in understanding the nature of the conflict, which is not a Sunni-Shia schism in its essence, even though this is what the propaganda says. Rather, it is a conflict between two traditional and backward political schools, which do not represent ideologies as much as social communities and traditions between Islamic and secular types.

Both are characterized by fanaticism and violence. The conflict can be solved through three steps. The first step is reconciliation between the fanatic Baathist community in Iraq and the Sunni-Shia Islamist political system. Liberal thought must also be supported in both countries to support the gradual decline of Baathist and Islamist fanaticism, especially given their failure during the process of change. There is also a need for continued United States support for both countries to achieve the desired reconciliation, which will work to support stability and peace. ❖



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