I. **About the Advisory Panel:**

This is the smallest component of the United Nations and consists of experts who are well researched on a nation, organization or in limited circumstances an individual who is intrinsically involved with the issue. The format of the debate is similar to the Security Council although there are minor differences in the rules and procedures. Unlike the Security Council, all members on the Advisory Panel have equal voting rights on all the clauses submitted, but only the Security Council approves the report as a whole.

Since participants are recognized as experts, the advisors are expected to know every detail about a certain topic that is decided by the forum President. Advisors are to develop a well-rounded insight into all aspects of the question. The experts write a policy statement describing their country’s or organization’s stance on the different areas of the topic.

The United Nations Advisory Panel has been designed by the UN Secretary General. The UN Advisory Panel is comprised of some of the highest level representatives to provide as well as monitor operations in various political and social matters concerning the United Nations. The UN Advisory Panel also advises and contributes to UN projects by funding specific activities. Moreover, the Advisory Panel can comprise with members between ten to twenty members.
II. **Brief Background Information on Sectarian Violence in Iraq:**

Sunnis and Shias differ in doctrine, ritual, law, theology and religious organization. It is the largest and oldest history in the division of Islam. Sunnis are the majority sect in the Muslim world, but Shias today form as much as 60% of Iraq’s population, whereas Sunnis make up 37%. Traditionally the Sunni population was always classified as elite. They were always prominently involved in politics and by 1958 they overthrew the British-appointed monarchy in Iraq. Increasingly disenfranchised and concerned by the growth of secular parties supported by the government, Shias mobilized around prominent clerics and began to campaign for a return to Islamic principles in government and social justice.

In 1979, the Islamic revolution in Iran – where Shias constitute 89% of the population, galvanized Shia opposition to the Baath party and made Saddam Hussein increasingly fearful of a similar revolution in Iraq. When Iraq declared war on its Shia neighbours –Iran, Saddam’s government intensified its brutal crackdown. Thousands of Shias were expelled to Iran or imprisoned, tortured and killed. Religious practices were restricted and pilgrimages to holy shrines were curtailed.

Iraq’s internal conflicts remained largely unknown until the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. While the United States intervened based on their assumption on the President possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Shiites saw this as an opportunity to fix the existing imbalance in Iraq’s political structure and provide hope to the Shia majority. With US presence only extending overtime, and security conditions remaining poor, violent groups and militias only find it easy to go on their own personal agendas and vendettas to ‘liberate’ the county of all ill-will. Tensions continue as it nears 10 years of the US intervention, and the country only finds itself in further turmoil. Positive changes such as increased oil production (which passed that of Iran’s) give people hope for a better and safer tomorrow. However, in a country where a strong representation from both sides of the Islamic sects exists, reaching a common seems to be a far stretched notion and also the only option on the table.
III. Recent Events:

During June 2013, the United Nations released a report covering death tolls from the 1\textsuperscript{st} of July to the 31\textsuperscript{st} of December 2012. With over 3200 civilians killed and more 10,000 injured, the UN recommended that the Iraqi Government should implement measures in a range of areas including: police training and women’s and children’s rights. The report also warned that in the upturn of violence, there is a need for greater civilian protection and for the strengthening of human rights institutions in the country. The report was produced by the Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and stressed that more needed to be done to ensure financial, medical and other forms of support reach victims of violence. The report also made recommendations regarding women’s and children’s rights, freedom of opinion and expression and addresses discrimination against ethnic minorities, among other topics.

On September 2013, twenty people were killed in violence south of Baghdad, including 10 members of the same family. Gunmen in Latifiya, stormed the home of Shiite family at dawn and opened fire which killed two mothers, two fathers and their children. A day earlier, gunmen stormed the house of a Sunni family and killed 5 family members in their sleep. The Sunni – Shia frictions escalated since the Hawija incident in April. That’s where Iraqi security forces raided a site used by Sunni protesters to demonstrate against the Shiite-led government. In addition, police forces reported three attacks in Mosul. The deadliest involved a suicide bomber who blew himself up at a police station and killed five police officers. More than 800 Iraqis were killed and another 2030 wounded in violence and acts of terrorism in the month of July. July was the deadliest month in Iraq since the peak of sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007. According to UN figures, as of August 2013, 1057 Iraqis were killed and another 2362 were wounded in July (Salaheddin).

Some Western commentators portray Iraq as a ‘basket case’, condemned to perpetual violence, reflecting something fundamentally wrong with Iraqi culture and society. The violence between Sunni and Shia political factions has generated fears of wider sectarian
conflict across the region, although violence occurs within, as well as between religious groups and its causes are more political than religious. One of the main reasons for the increased violence in Iraq is the spillover and fighting tensions from the civil war in neighboring Syria. There are close links between Syrian and Iraqi families and societies. As the conflict in Syria has become increasingly sectarian and internationalized, fighters from Iraq are now involved on both sides (kinninmont).

The recent split between the Syrian National Council and jihadi groups such as the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria might present an opportunity for Iraq’s government to conceptualize its interests in Syria. Despite their shared alliance with Iran, just a few years ago the Iraqi and Syrian governments were at loggerheads as Iraq suspected Syria of facilitating the entry of Al Qaeda fighters into its own territory (tawfeeq).

IV. **Key Players:**

**Arab Nationalists**

- **Ba’ath Party:**

  An Arab political Party in Syria and Iraq, whose ideological objectives are: secularism, socialism and pan-Arab unionism. Saddam Hussein was a member of the Ba’ath party. However, once his regime toppled the Ba’ath party was outlawed in Iraq.

- **Iraqis:**

  Nationalists who oppose the coalition government.

- **Sunni Islamists:**

  Follow the Wahabi movement and wanted a strict, uncorrupt and Islamic way of governing a state. Greatly support indigenous minorities with various underground cells.

- **Shi’a Islamists:**
Majority of the population in Iraq is Shia. The strong presence of Shia Muslims is because of the holy sites of Najaf and Karbala which is the pilgrimage site for Shias. Shias tended to be less well-off economically and politically. However, they were well equipped with ammunitions from Iran.

• **Badr Organizations:**

An Iraqi political party whose initial aim was to fight against Saddam Hussein’s Baathist regime in Iraq. However, after the 2003 invasion in Iraq members joint the new Iraqi army and became a political organization. They also fought alongside Iran, in the Iran-Iraq War that took place from 1980 – 1988.

**Foreigners:**

• **Syria:**

Efforts to unite Iraq and Syria into one country have existed since the modern states came into existence. Unification efforts were carried out by the Baath Party. However, hostility between the countries initial started out when they were both under Baath ruling.

• **Saudi Arabia:**

Through the late 1960’s Riyadh suspected Baghdad of supporting political movements that were hostile to Saudi Arabia. Saudi tried to contain the spread of Iraqi radicalization by strengthening its ties with Iran, Syria and Kuwait. The kingdom opposed the US plan of invasion fearing that Iraq would fracture along sectarian and political lines.

• **Iran:**
Relations between Iran and Iraq prove to be tense, as a result of the shared border. This tension escalated when Saddam Hussein declared war on Iran over border disputes. The war lasted for eight years and created chaos and the use of chemical weapons against Shia Muslims.

**Human Rights and Democracy:**

In April of 2013, Iraq’s Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) was established. Since then there has been progress on a bill to combat domestic violence, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, agreement of exemplary NGO law by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and growing engagement on women’s rights issues. However, Iraq’s emerging civil including a lack of training, expertise and the difficulties which non-governmental organizations face in obtaining registration.

Iraq increased the use of its death penalty in 2012, causing citizens to face difficulties gaining access to justice due to weak implementation of the law. Iraq’s diminished religious and ethnic minority communities remain vulnerable. In the Kurdistan region, several laws targeting human rights have been passed, but the implementation of these laws have either been slow or delayed.

The UK hopes to work with the UN and other support groups to develop an action plan for implementing a UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The UK will continue to work with the EU and other partners to support the development of the ICHR. They will continue to monitor the progress of legislation that is under consideration by the Council of Representatives including the Freedom of Expression law and the draft Information Crimes Law.

**Questions to consider:**

- Why does Iraq remain a big concern regarding sectarian issues when there are other countries that have a combined Sunni and Shi’a population?
- How were the Christian population in Iraq affected and/or how were their religious affiliations altered following the US invasion of Iraq?
- Does a common distribution of power among all religious sects, such as that in Lebanon, provide a feasible solution to Iraq’s problems or would it further escalate tensions in the country?
- How probable is it for Iraq to get the process of reconstruction going in the post-2003 period and also reaching the democratic setup of the parliament that the United States wished to leave behind?
- Is the ongoing conflict in Syria, where the President comes from the religious minority of the country, portray an exact copy of what Iraq has been facing all these years?
- Will Iraq remain a common news story as a failed state occupied by a Western power or will it join the queue with other nations that have comprised the Arab Spring? How democratic can Iraq become without hurting mutual interests between its two major sects?
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