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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the past record, current condition, and potential of Iraq's higher education sector. Iraqis have traditionally valued intellectual achievement, but the legacy of Baathist rule and the current tide of instability are crippling the universities' ability to function effectively. The future, however, could see those universities playing a leading role in securing long-term peace.

This report argues that if the security environment improves, Iraqi universities could become leading actors in the country's civil society, providing opportunities for faculty and students to resolve social and political conflicts, promote political stability and economic growth, and build an institutional infrastructure able to safeguard human rights. However, if the higher education sector is to play this role, it must first introduce reforms in such areas as curriculum development, faculty education, and administrative procedures.

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**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

SPECIAL REPORT 195

JANUARY 2008

## EDUCATION AND CONFLICT

*Imad Harb*

# Higher Education and the Future of Iraq

## Summary

- Iraq's higher education sector has the potential to play an important role in overcoming the country's widening sectarian divides and fostering long-term peace and stability. As a leading actor within Iraq's civil society, it could offer an institutional venue for resolving the country's political, social, and economic problems while promoting respect for human rights and democratic principles both on campus and in the wider society.
- Iraq's universities flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. However, after the rise of Saddam Hussein to power in 1979, they gradually lost their intellectual dynamism and became increasingly politicized in the service of the regime. UN sanctions imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 helped to isolate and impoverish the higher education sector.
- Universities, many of which were already in poor physical shape, were looted in the chaos that accompanied the invasion of 2003. Hundreds of millions of dollars are needed to rehabilitate campuses, but the budget for higher education is meager and most is earmarked for wages and salaries. Universities have also been hit hard by the violence that has followed the invasion. Hundreds of university professors and administrators have been killed and thousands have fled abroad.
- Meanwhile, sectarianism has begun to cast a dark shadow over student life. Campuses are highly politicized with student organizations vying, sometimes violently, for influence. There also has been an increase in religiosity and in efforts, especially in the south, to enforce veiling of women and separation of the sexes.
- The dismal situation is made worse by the fact that curriculum materials in all fields are in short supply, textbooks are outdated, administrative authority is overcentralized, new students are poorly prepared, and the teaching staff is inadequately trained.

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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- The international community has made a variety of efforts to support the rejuvenation of Iraq's universities by donating funds, providing expertise, and launching cooperative initiatives.
- International assistance has been helpful, but if the higher education sector is to reclaim its earlier dynamism and play a leading role in national reconstruction, it needs a comprehensive program of reform.
- Any package of reforms must emphasize the need to update and expand the curriculum. Universities should embrace new disciplines that will instruct students in conflict resolution, reconciliation, intercommunal tolerance, institution building, civil society development, women's studies, democracy, and human rights.
- Another pressing requirement is to give academics and students access to foreign scholars and publications through a series of international seminars and workshops and via a large-scale program of translating foreign-language books and journals into Arabic. Efforts must also be made to train faculty in new technologies and subjects and to increase the number of faculty who hold doctoral degrees. Foreign donors and governments should also offer scholarships abroad to Iraqi students and professors to help alleviate the burden of training a new class of university personnel.
- Like other public-sector institutions, higher education institutions are overcentralized and need more freedom to determine their own policies, procedures, and curricula.
- Iraqis cannot accomplish these reforms by themselves. They need the sustained support of foreign governments, international bodies, and non-governmental organizations if they are to demonstrate how universities in a divided society can play a leading role in promoting civic peace.

## Introduction

The higher education sector in Iraq should be an essential part of the country's effort to democratize its political system and modernize its society. Iraqi universities have the potential to help resolve the country's social and political conflicts and provide opportunities for faculty and students to work as agents for social change. Despite a legacy of war and authoritarian rule, and despite today dealing with meager resources and severe social and political instability, the higher education sector can play a leading role in securing long-term civic peace in Iraq.

At present, however, the intellectual capital of the Iraqi higher education sector—its professors and administrators—is coming under attack. Hundreds of professors and scientists have been killed since March 2003, thousands have been forced into exile, and the rest are too intimidated to participate in political life, where their expertise and knowledge are badly needed. From September 2006 to September 2007 alone, seventy-eight professors were assassinated.<sup>1</sup> While this report focuses on the various ways in which the higher education sector can contribute to Iraq's reconstruction, it recognizes that little can be accomplished until the security situation improves substantially.

This report has four parts. The first sketches the development of Iraq's higher education sector over the course of a century, paying particular attention to its evolution during the long years of authoritarian rule. The second part analyzes the heavy toll exacted by violence and instability on Iraq's universities in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of March 2003. In the third part, the report examines a variety of international programs—including initiatives launched by the United States Institute of Peace—that have sought to help the country's higher education sector improve its curriculum. The fourth and longest part presents a series of proposals that together create a framework for reforming Iraqi higher education and enabling it to play a leading role in the development of a modern and open society.

## A Brief History of Iraqi Higher Education

Iraqis have traditionally placed a high value on education.<sup>2</sup> The country has a long intellectual history dating back to the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, and it enjoyed a period of remarkable accomplishments during the early Arab-Islamic empires of the ninth century. Iraq's modern higher education sector dates back a century, when a college of law was established in Baghdad in 1908. A number of other colleges and academies were established in the city between the 1920s and the 1950s, and in 1960 all were combined and chartered as the University of Baghdad.

The higher education sector flourished in the 1960s and early 1970s. Advances were made in both the arts and the sciences. The Iraqi Academy of Sciences became a nexus for research in language, history, and literature. The University of Baghdad's medicine and science faculties attracted students from throughout the Arab world. Fueled by oil wealth, the universities' research helped support an aggressive import-substitution drive that produced household items, construction materials, and agricultural machinery.

Sadly, political changes undermined the dynamism of Iraqi higher education. As the Baathists gradually came to dominate public life after 1968—especially after Saddam Hussein became president in 1979—the higher education sector became a venue for political correctness, cronyism, corruption, and manipulation of resources to advance the regime's ideology and policies.

The sector was centralized in 1970 under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR), in the process losing any semblance of academic independence. Segments of it remained outside the control of MHESR but only because that arrangement served the militaristic aspirations of the regime. The Ministries of Defense, of Petroleum and Metals, and of Industry and Military Industrialization and the Nuclear Energy Organization each had a claim on the human resources, curricula, and acceptance policies of universities and technical colleges. The higher education sector quickly found itself obliged to dedicate its research and talents to the political agenda of the Baath party.

One of the most damaging ramifications of Baathist control was the brain drain inspired by the persecution, imprisonment, and assassination of faculty members and students. Thousands of university professors left to work in neighboring countries or in the West. Those who remained in Iraq had to contend with a lack of new research materials and a dearth of contacts with the outside world. This situation became especially acute after the imposition of UN sanctions following the first Gulf War in 1991.

Overseas travel was soon denied to most academics except those with close ties to the regime. Meanwhile, retention and advancement of faculty members became more politicized. Those who were close to the regime found lectureships quickly and advanced rapidly. Admissions policies were skewed to favor the children of regime personnel (who were admitted without any restrictions) and members of pro-regime Arab organizations and parties; other would-be students had to meet stringent entrance requirements and were pressured to join Baathist organizations. Some universities also received preferential treatment. Most, however, had to cope with poorly maintained facilities and buildings, old and dilapidated equipment, a lack of technology, outdated journals and books, and low faculty salaries. Corruption and isolation affected morale, further damaging performance at all levels of education.

Just as Saddam Hussein expropriated public space for grandiose schemes such as bridges, monuments, and mosques, he also tried to expropriate Iraqi intellectual history. Hussein and his son Uday created a parallel academic system. Uday founded journals and institutions, such as the Mother of All Battles Research Center, that competed with established ones and promoted the regime's agenda. In political science and history textbooks, Saddam was portrayed as a father figure, a leader, and a hero. Iraqi history was manipulated to make it appear that Iraq had not been receptive to Arab nationalist thought before the Baathists took power, even though the contrary was the case. Folklore

*During the Saddam years, the higher education sector became a venue for political correctness, cronyism, corruption, and manipulation of resources to advance the regime's ideology and policies.*

### ***Higher Education in the North***

While the 1990s saw the repression of academic freedom in most of Iraq, in the north of the country the same decade brought intellectual liberation. As the three Iraqi northern Kurdish provinces gained an autonomous status after the first Gulf War and the imposition of a no-fly zone in 1991, the universities of Irbil and Sulaimaniyya acquired the independence from the MHESR in Baghdad they had sought since their establishment in 1968 and 1981, respectively. The Kurdistan Regional Government established the University of Dahuk in 1992 and the University of Koya in 2004.

Today, the Iraqi Kurdish region boasts a system of higher education that educates twenty-two thousand students and offers a modern education influenced by contacts with the West and conducted in a liberal, mostly apolitical atmosphere. Universities in the north have been able to capitalize on a host of assistance programs from American and European governments and universities. Academic exchanges, curriculum materials, information services, teacher-training programs, and other programs have all contributed to creating a thriving higher education sector.

***The unchecked looting of state institutions, after the invasion exacerbated the dire conditions of the higher education sector.***

was appropriated in an ideological drive to make it look more distinctly Iraqi/Mesopotamian and easier for Saddam to manipulate for his own ends.

Saddam's manipulative and repressive policies did not, however, significantly dent Iraqis' appetite for education. On the eve of the invasion of 2003, Iraq had twenty universities and forty-seven technical institutes under the general management of the MHESR.

### **Iraqi Higher Education since 2003**

According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) survey, in 2004 Iraq's universities housed two hundred colleges with about eight hundred departments and twenty-eight specialized institutes or research centers.<sup>3</sup> Only two governorates, Muthanna and Missan (both sparsely populated), were without a university. Two new universities (one an American-style private university in Sulaimaniyya and the other at Koya) were established subsequent to the overthrow of the Baathist regime. In late 2006, the list of Iraqi public universities included Dahuk, Irbil, Sulaimaniyya, Koya, Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit, Diyala, Anbar, Baghdad, al-Mustansiriyya, Islamic Studies, al-Nahrain, Technology, Qadisiyya, Kufa, Karbala, Thi Qar, Babil, Wasit, and Basra. There also are seven private universities in Baghdad and two in Kurdistan (of which the university in Sulaimaniyya is one).<sup>4</sup>

Some official estimates (published by MHESR after 2003) put the number of students attending classes at universities, community and nonprofit colleges, and technical institutes and colleges in 2003–04 at nearly 400,000;<sup>5</sup> the 2004 UNESCO survey produced a lower figure of approximately 250,000, but this tally included only students enrolled at universities. Other UNESCO findings included the following:

- Males accounted for 58 percent of students and 65 percent of faculty, females for 42 and 35 percent, respectively.
- Nearly 50 percent of all students attended one of Baghdad's five universities (Baghdad, al-Mustansiriyya, al-Nahrain, Technology, and Islamic Studies).
- Thirty-two percent of students studied education; 28 percent, sciences, engineering, and agriculture; 15 percent, law and social sciences; 13 percent, medicine; and 12 percent, humanities.
- The academic teaching staff numbered about 19,000, of whom 36 percent had doctorates, 58 percent had master's degrees, and 6 percent had bachelor's degrees (and were licensed to teach in the technical institutes only).

The relatively rosy picture of post-invasion higher education painted by these data is misleading, however; the vast majority of students had enrolled at universities before Saddam was overthrown, and most of the growth that has occurred since the invasion has been narrow, being concentrated in Baghdad and the north of the country. Moreover, although the U.S.-led invasion of the country in March 2003 ended an authoritarian regime that stifled the freedom of the higher education sector, the U.S. intervention has failed to create a peaceful environment for the sector's renewal. In fact, the situation is in many ways worse today than before the invasion, with preexisting structural problems exacerbated by the disruption, violence, and shortages of the post-invasion years.

The unchecked looting of state institutions, including universities, research centers, museums, and libraries, that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the invasion severely affected a sector that was already in poor shape. In a speech in early 2004, Musa al-Musawi, president of the University of Baghdad, reported that 70 percent of the university and college infrastructure in Baghdad had been destroyed in military operations and subsequent looting.<sup>6</sup> A study published by MHESR after 2003 sketches a bleak picture, with science labs, libraries, computer centers, student cultural and sports clubs, and boarding halls all in dire condition.<sup>7</sup> According to the study, there was an immediate need to finish building projects begun before the war (at a cost of \$356 million) and to start new ones (at a cost of \$592 million). By the beginning of 2006, only 11 projects out of 279 were



said to have been finished while 158 others were in progress. MHESR reports that only \$125 million is approved annually by the central government for infrastructural needs and renovations.<sup>8</sup> Outside of the north of the country, universities suffer from acute shortages of electricity and potable water. Furniture for classrooms, student facilities, and faculty offices is lacking. Two thousand scientific laboratories need refurbishing and lack basic materials. Libraries are desperate for new books and academic journals. University presses are defunct or publish next to nothing. Some classroom textbooks are decades' old. The university system as a whole needs thirty thousand computers (fifteen thousand were looted). There are 110 separate Internet networks, and most people can access them only in Internet cafes. Few universities have functioning Web sites.

The decision by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to purge Baathists from official life had a tremendous and negative impact on the higher education sector. Many university presidents, deans of faculties, and department chairpersons were dismissed, even though their expertise was desperately needed in the postwar period. This act helped sour relations between U.S. forces and some members of the university community. Many Iraqis also interpreted at least some instances of U.S. assistance in educational affairs as interference by occupiers. On a more positive note, the early decision by occupation forces to allow for free elections for college boards and administrative positions was welcomed by Iraqi academics, who were accustomed to outright interference by Baath party apparatchiks. More generally, however, the higher education sector, like all other public-sector institutions, suffered both from the fluid political environment surrounding the Iraqi Governing Council (which was formed by the CPA in early 2004) and from the rise of a different group of political elites associated with the myriad newly established political parties.

One of the worst problems facing Iraq's higher education sector is the acute lack of personal security for intellectuals. Estimates of the number of professors, medical doctors, and professionals (pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, journalists, and so forth) killed since the invasion of 2003 range widely, but all run into the hundreds. Iraq's University Professors Association reported in 2006 that 80 percent of assassination attempts on the country's campuses targeted university personnel, that more than half of those killed in these attempts were full or assistant professors, and that half of the assassinations occurred at the University of Baghdad, with the universities of Basra, Mosul, and al-Mustansiriyya also being highly dangerous.<sup>9</sup> A representative of the MHESR told National Public Radio's Ann Garrels in January 2007 that the number of professors killed had reached 550.<sup>10</sup> (The killings have not spared primary and secondary school teachers, three hundred of whom were killed in 2006 alone.<sup>11</sup>) The Brussels tribunal, an antiwar association of intellectuals and artists concerned about the fate of Iraqi academics, reports that there seem to be no specific reasons behind the killings.

Security concerns are prompting an exodus of academics. Although exact figures are unavailable, the number of academics who have fled Iraq since the collapse of the former regime is in the thousands.<sup>12</sup> One professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Baghdad complained in spring 2006 that it was impossible to hold classes because of the presence of militia members who monitor professors' lectures, that professors are leaving the country as soon as they have a chance, and that their places are being filled by MA and PhD students.<sup>13</sup> Since 2006, the government has been trying to recruit about five thousand Iraqi academics from abroad by raising basic salaries and promising more raises in the future.

Poor security is not the only thing disrupting academic life. According to a professor from Mosul University, closed roads and bridges make it very difficult for students to attend class, with only one-third typically showing up for their lessons.<sup>14</sup> Garrels of NPR echoed this figure, reporting that just 30 percent of Iraq's university students attend class. Agence France Presse in February 2007 reported that professors at the University of Baghdad have either given up trying to teach their classes or are arranging for their classes to be held just once a week because of professors' and students' security concerns.<sup>15</sup>

***One of the worst problems facing higher education in Iraq is the continuing assassination and exodus of Iraqi intellectuals and professionals.***

***Politicization of students on campuses is helping to stifle academic freedom and forcing a segregation of the student body.***

In personal communications with the author since summer of 2004, Iraqi academics have complained of numerous problems, not only difficulties posed by the violence and instability that is gripping the country but also long-standing structural problems. These academics' litanies have included bureaucratic inertia and infighting, neglect by feuding political leaders, uncertainty, and personal powerlessness in effecting change. Complaints have also been voiced about the low quality of scientific research, poor training and certification procedures, overcentralization of decision making, inadequate extracurricular activities, and poorly prepared students (only 10 percent of secondary schools students go to college and of these only a small fraction are adequately prepared for higher education). At a UNESCO-sponsored conference on Iraqi higher education held in Paris in February 2005, a delegation of Iraqi administrators and academics from MHESR and a number of universities decried the overall poor quality of the educational enterprise and the lack of support from the international community.<sup>16</sup>

Another concern facing higher education is the politicization of the student body on university campuses. Knowing only Baathist authoritarianism that maintained discipline on campuses, many student friends and foes of the Baath misunderstood the rules of openness introduced in the wake of the invasion and were affected by the swift polarization of society. While student unions on campuses attempt to forge unity among students, the rise of sectarianism has created new and deep fissures between student organizations that identify themselves as either Shiite or Sunni and that see their interests as mutually antagonistic. These organizations plaster university walls with posters, picket each other's meetings, and sometimes engage in violent confrontations with one another.<sup>17</sup> In the increasingly charged atmosphere on campuses throughout the country, students (and teaching staff) have been threatened or even beaten or killed by fellow students. Sunni students, it has been reported, are leaving universities in Baghdad for Mosul (a Sunni city) while Shiite students are fleeing Anbar University (in a Sunni area) for the predominantly Shiite University of Baghdad.<sup>18</sup> Increasing religiosity among students is plain to see, especially in the south of the country, where Shiite religious parties are strong. There have been many reports that the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, the name has lately been changed to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq), the Islamic Da'wa Party, and Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi militia have imposed a religious code on Iraqi universities and society in the south, enforcing veiling for women and separation of the sexes.

One thing on which many Iraqi university students (except for those at universities in the Kurdish north) can agree is their shared opposition to the continued presence of U.S. and other foreign forces. For nationalistic as well as other reasons, many students are skeptical of foreigners' intentions and resentful of their presence in Iraq. The occupation of some university facilities by foreign troops during the first postwar year helped to foster this animosity. Despite generally civil and respectful behavior by foreign soldiers, especially toward female students, Iraqis were uncomfortable with their presence. Now, as then, professors who cooperate with American organizations insist on anonymity because of fears of appearing to be collaborators.

The news is not all bad. Some student unions have been active in promoting peaceful dialogue between students. Of particular importance are two debating societies at the universities of Baghdad and Hilla that also produce two student newsletters (*al-Jami'ah* and *al-Iraqi*, respectively) dedicated to issues that affect student life and promote freedom of expression on campus. Such efforts to lay the foundations for a more peaceful and democratic future may pay rich dividends in the future. At present, however, university life is characterized far more by discord, disruption, and decay than by dialogue.

## **International Assistance**

Iraq's higher education sector is woefully underfunded. After the invasion in 2003, the MHESR estimated its immediate needs at \$1.2 billion, but nothing like that amount was

made available. The Donors Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, held in Madrid in October 2003, allocated no funds for higher education. In the spring of 2004, when the U.S. Congress appropriated \$87 billion for Iraq's reconstruction, the CPA requested \$120 million for higher education but received only \$8 million.<sup>19</sup> For the 2004–05 academic year, total expenditure on higher education was a mere \$225 million, and 65 percent of that was earmarked for wages and salaries.<sup>20</sup>

While the overall economic picture is bleak, there are several bright spots in terms of international assistance for Iraq's higher education sector. The following is a list of what a variety of foreign organizations—both governmental and non-governmental—have donated in funds and in-kind services.

- The United States Agency for International Development announced in 2003 the creation of partnerships between American and Iraqi institutions of higher education totaling almost \$22 million.<sup>21</sup> U.S. institutions involved included the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook, the University of Hawaii, DePaul University, Jackson State University, and the University of Oklahoma. The Fulbright Scholarship Program awarded twenty-six scholarships for Iraqis to study in the United States in 2004. Another thirty-five scholarships were awarded for 2005.
- The U.S. Departments of State and Defense collaborated over two years to produce the Iraqi Virtual Science Library. The library, which came into operation in May 2006, provides access to over seventeen thousand online journals to Iraqi academics, engineers, and students at seven universities, one research institution, and all government ministries.
- Other countries have also made donations and supported various aspects of university life. For instance, the Qatar Foundation, a nonprofit organization led by the First Lady of Qatar, established the International Fund for Higher Education in Iraq managed by UNESCO and donated \$15 million to be used for teaching supplies, laboratory equipment, and textbooks.<sup>22</sup> Further examples include the donation by Saudi Arabia of \$1 million to finance the opening of a Computer Rehabilitation Project at the University of Baghdad; an offer by the British Council to provide administrative expertise and teaching skills training for teachers; and a pledge by the German government to assist in rebuilding university campuses.

The United States Institute of Peace has also been actively involved in supporting Iraq's higher education sector. Since 2003, the Institute has been working in Iraq to reduce interethnic and interreligious violence, to encourage stabilization and democratization, and to lessen the need for a continuing U.S. military presence in the country. The Institute's Education program focuses on curriculum development and teacher education in the areas of conflict resolution and peace education, human rights, and democracy, as well as building connections among Iraqi educators and between them and the global community of academics. The Institute has supported several such projects in the past four years:

- The Institute has helped in the establishment of centers on human rights and conflict resolution based both at universities and outside of campuses.
- In a bid to boost professors' knowledge of the fields of conflict resolution and human rights and relevant teaching methodologies, the Institute has sponsored the translation of a variety of texts and curricula and has organized several faculty workshops for Iraqi academics on human rights and conflict resolution.
- In March 2005, the Institute held a conference on the civic mission of the Iraqi university. Thirty academics from various universities participated in the conference, which produced a plan for enhancing the universities' involvement in their local communities.
- The Institute helped organize thirteen public education meetings at a dozen Iraqi university campuses in September and October 2005 to explain the provisions of

***International governmental and non-governmental assistance has been forthcoming and welcome but more needs to be done.***

a new constitution that was about to be the subject of a nationwide referendum. University presidents, deans, and faculty members lectured on constitutional issues such as federalism, the role of religion in the state, women's rights, Iraqi identity, and economic rights. Local and national newspapers and radio and television stations covered and reported on the meetings, which together attracted some twenty-five hundred participants.

- The new constitution was also one of the subjects addressed by participants in another Institute initiative: an essay-writing project for Iraqi professors and graduate students. In addition to the constitution, essay topics included human rights and democracy, the future Iraqi economy, and the role of universities and other educational institutions in the development of a new Iraqi polity.
- The Institute encouraged an essay contest for secondary school students in Baghdad. Entrants were invited to answer the question, "What do I want from the future Iraq?" One hundred of Baghdad's eight hundred secondary schools were contacted and 120 essays were submitted and judged. The winners received awards in a ceremony—attended by their parents and school principals—held in May 2006 at the University of Baghdad.
- In 2005, the Institute provided a grant to support the creation of newsletters and debating societies at one university in the south.
- Institute-trained facilitators worked in 2004 and 2005 at one university to prevent the spread of sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia students by organizing dialogues between groups of students and then arranging, with the provincial governor's permission, a special broadcast on two local television stations about the students' refusal to countenance sectarian violence.

It is a sad commentary on the need for conflict resolution programs that the Institute is obliged not to reveal its involvement in most of the activities it sponsors or manages. Were the Institute to make its role publicly known, professors, students, and other participants in Institute initiatives might find themselves the target of violence from groups bitterly opposed to any cooperation between Iraqis and U.S. organizations.

## Recommendations for Reforming Higher Education in Iraq

The efforts by the United States Institute of Peace and other foreign organizations and governments to strengthen particular facets of Iraqi higher education have achieved some success. Professors involved in projects supported by the United States Institute of Peace, for instance, have reported an enthusiastic response from both students and faculty and have noted that supplies of research and reading materials have been quickly incorporated into class syllabi. But if the sector is to reclaim the dynamism it enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s and thereby play a leading role in the country's economic and social reconstruction, a full-scale, multifaceted program of reform must be undertaken.

No effort to reform the higher education system in Iraq will succeed without addressing the dire security situation on campuses. The insecurity bedeviling colleges and universities, however, is a reflection of the sectarianism and instability that have spread to all corners of Iraqi society, and stemming the tide of sectarian violence is obviously not something that Iraq's educational authorities can accomplish by themselves.

Those authorities also have little or no control over the budget they are allocated by the Iraqi government, but they should do what they can to press the case both with their government and with international donors—for a budget large enough to remedy the sector's desperate infrastructural needs. Libraries, laboratories, dormitories, student union halls, and administrative offices need to be repaired or built from scratch. Classrooms and science labs need furniture and equipment. Internet portals and services need to be con-

***The immediate concern for higher education is the improvement of the security situation on campus and in the country at large.***



structed and expanded. University printing presses need to be reactivated to encourage research and publishing.

Even a comprehensive program of infrastructural rehabilitation will fail to revive the sector if it is not accompanied by a program of reforms that will change what is taught at Iraqi universities and how it is taught. This program should emphasize the importance of creating modern curricula, retraining teachers and making sure that more of them have doctorates, rehabilitating administrative procedures, organizing international seminars and workshops, and launching a major effort to translate foreign materials. In all these areas, the educational authorities do have the power to effect significant change.

### ***Developing the Curriculum***

To help develop the human capital of higher education in Iraq, concerted efforts should be made to update and expand university curricula. Textbooks have not changed since the 1950s; international academic journals have been scarce since 1984; methods of teaching are outdated; and the range of disciplines is too narrow. Science departments, for example, need an immediate boost to close the knowledge gap that has existed since the 1980s between Iraqi universities and those in some neighboring countries and in the West.

An expansion of the curricula is required not only to enrich campus life but also, ultimately, to help Iraqi society reach civic peace. Aside from updating the curricula in the traditional disciplines, emphasis needs to be placed on developing curricula in fields such as conflict resolution and reconciliation, institutions and institution building, civil society, rule of law, women's studies, and human and civil rights. The teaching of these subjects—neglected not just in Iraq but in universities throughout the wider region—will help to turn Iraqi universities into centers for civil society development.

Developing these fields requires the involvement of both students and educators, with encouragement from their institutions. Iraqi universities could gradually incorporate these subjects into existing curricula, establish interdisciplinary departments, or simply require students to take elective courses (that would count toward graduation) in those subject areas. Iraqi academics could be encouraged to write and teach about these topics and to translate foreign-language texts into Arabic for wider dissemination to Iraqi universities.

The curriculum should define key issues, discuss how they can best be taught, and provide examples from the distant and near past of countries and communities reaching peaceful resolutions to their conflicts (recent examples, for instance, might include South Africa's transitional process from apartheid to an inclusive democracy).

Changes in the curriculum should contribute to the postwar efforts to address the transgressions of the former regime and its security and intelligence services. While dealing with the legacy of authoritarianism is ultimately a political consideration, Iraqi scholars can assist in that task by developing a vocabulary on the subject of truth and reconciliation that the Iraqi public can use to enable them to cope with the past.

Curriculum changes should also include the addition of courses on the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary from political authority. Iraqi law schools already have a strong repertoire of courses and teachers. Under authoritarian rule, however, all legalism was political except in relation to common criminal activity. A new emphasis on the rule of law will enrich academic life and put academics at the center of a new legal system based on equality, fairness, and transparency. The creation of a new body of literature through writing and translating will assist in this effort.

At present, Iraqi curricula do not include women's studies; to the extent that it is addressed, the role of women is dealt with as part of Islamic or family studies. This situation should be rectified by the addition of independent courses on gender issues and on women's roles in politics, religion, literature, culture, law, and the economy. Given that the new Iraqi constitution reserves 25 percent of parliamentary seats for women, professors and students might well be ready to accept the addition of women's rights as a separate discipline in the curriculum.

***Emphasis needs to be placed on developing curricula in fields such as conflict resolution and reconciliation, institutions and institution building, civil society, rule of law, women's studies, and human and civil rights.***

Iraqi society is diverse and curriculum reform can help to recapture the country's tradition of tolerance. Curriculum development here should include a wide space for Kurdish, Christian, and Turkmen literature; explain the role of the state in fostering interaction and tolerance; and emphasize national cooperation and unity. University personnel can encourage the teaching of the disparate historical narratives of these groups. While no one should pretend that Iraq's history is one of unswerving tolerance of minorities, intellectuals should remind all Iraqis that their country can be proud of a history that features long periods of cooperation between the different communities. Given the recent upsurge in religiosity among students, it may be helpful to draw on religious traditions of peace-making (both Muslim and Christian) in efforts to promote tolerance and civic peace.

Finally, curriculum development should concentrate on making Iraqi universities civil society actors in their own right, so that they can nurture in their graduates an appetite for participation in open political and social debate. To this end, all university personnel must be involved in studying and applying basic codes of human and civil rights; they must also understand and explain to their students that each individual in a democratic and open political culture must exercise civic responsibilities. Universities must not only teach democratic principles but also become exemplars of adherence to those principles. The results would spur the development of democracy within the country as a whole while enhancing the prestige and position of universities within the wider society.

The process of developing curricula for Iraqi higher education after a long period of authoritarianism in which academic activities were limited and channeled toward regime legitimization will require careful monitoring and review. To this end, all curriculum development activities should be constantly evaluated by both faculty and students to ensure that they are appropriate, effective, and necessary. An evaluation and monitoring process could include the appointment by the MHESR of a commission composed of its representatives, representatives from student organizations, and academics from different departments at different universities. This commission could determine the appropriateness of proposed additions to the curricula, promote the adoption of pilot programs (in conflict resolution, for example), recommend that innovations that have been introduced successfully at some universities be standardized throughout the entire higher education system, and monitor the teaching and effectiveness of new subjects over a period of five years. At the same time, however, it is important to let individual universities determine their own curricula and to resist any calls for mandated curriculum development.

***Investing in and training Iraqi academics is an essential task in developing the higher education sector.***

***Improving the Skills and Qualifications of Faculty***

Iraq has almost twenty thousand university faculty members, some of whom were persecuted under Saddam, many of whom were silenced, and all of whom were isolated from their foreign counterparts and deprived of new research materials and connections. Today, they need not only access to foreign contacts and current publications but also various kinds of training in: new techniques and technologies, teaching methods and subjects, and writing for a new and globalized world of education. Iraqis will also need help from foreign scholars to develop the conceptual and substantive understandings of conflict resolution and peacemaking required for curriculum reform.

In addition to encouraging such training, the MHESR is keen to increase the percentage of Iraqi faculty who hold doctorates from foreign universities. Over the past two decades, on average only 36 percent of faculty had doctorates, most of which had been awarded by Iraqi institutions. By contrast, in the 1970s and for much of the 1980s Iraq sent most of its doctoral students to the West, where they acquired a rigorous education and had access to the latest research in their fields. Today, there exists a two-tiered knowledge system: on the top tier are the older university faculty members who received PhDs in countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and France; on the tier below are teachers who graduated from Iraqi universities during the 1990s, a time when international isolation diminished the quality of education available within Iraq. If the quality of faculty is to be

restored to its earlier levels, the MHESR should allocate sufficient resources to cover the cost of sending at least fifty graduate students each year to study in the West. Simultaneously, the MEHSR should strive to enhance the quality of doctoral programs within Iraq itself. If the international community were to provide matching funding, the results of these external and internal efforts to develop better-qualified faculty would, of course, be felt all the more strongly.

### ***Consolidating Academic Freedom***

In most Arab countries, universities and academics are restricted in what they can research, write, teach, and publish; the weight of regime politics is felt heavily on campuses. Iraq under Saddam was no different, with academics opting to avoid current issues or being obliged to repeat government propaganda. The removal of the Baathist regime has given Iraqi academics an opportunity to enjoy far greater academic freedom than their counterparts in neighboring states.

If this freedom is to be consolidated, however, Iraq's professors and instructors need to exercise self-restraint while doing nothing to compromise their newfound independence. Thus, for instance, Iraqi academics should be careful not to inflame sectarian and political tensions with intemperate speeches and writings (in the same way that U.S. academics are careful not to say anything that might be conceived of as homophobic or anti-Semitic). Equally, they—and universities as a whole—should scrupulously maintain their professional independence from political parties and influences and should establish an independent teachers' union or a higher education professional association funded by the academics themselves.

***Increasing academic freedom on campus and reforming the bureaucracy will greatly help to enrich academic life and independence.***

### ***Reforming the Bureaucracy***

Educational initiatives will be stillborn if administrative procedures in the MHESR and the individual universities are not refurbished. Centralization under the Baath party has robbed universities of desperately needed independence to develop new policies and courses. Although the current situation is more open and transparent, it is still one of bureaucratic centralization around the ministry and of administrative marginalization for the universities.

A program of decentralization of decision-making authority would give university schools and departments the opportunity to increase the number and variety of courses they offer. It would also promote the development of entirely new institutions, independent centers that could be either interdisciplinary or specialized in nature. Interdisciplinary centers could offer diversified coursework, while specialized outfits could provide opportunities for both teachers and students to concentrate on nontraditional subjects such as conflict resolution. Of course, the establishment of such institutions will depend not only on decentralizing bureaucratic authority but also on the government or external donors providing the funds to build, staff, and operate the new centers. The obvious corollary of this proposition is a concerted effort to provide more funding for new educational initiatives and to enhance the possibilities of outside funding.

### ***Organizing International Seminars and Workshops***

If the proposals outlined above are to be translated into practice, then it is important to organize a broad range of seminars and workshops at which Iraqi faculty members can meet with one another and with foreign academics to discuss exactly what reforms are most needed and how they can best be implemented. These meetings, which could be conducted either in Iraq or—because of the security situation—in a nearby state, could range across a variety of topics such as infrastructural needs, pedagogy, research and publishing, and contacts and exchanges with foreign universities. Numerous teaching issues

also present themselves as subjects for discussion: new teaching methods, research needs, international exchange, and foreign language training.

### ***Sponsoring Translations***

If they are to enrich their academic performance, Iraqi faculty and students need both foreign language training and Arabic translations of materials from all subjects. Translating a large quantity of journals, reports, and papers will require a strong financial commitment from international partners and actors, including the Arab League, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.

## **Conclusion**

***By committing itself as a civil society actor and devoting its energies to renovating its curricula and training its faculties, higher education in Iraq can help lead the way in the quest for democracy and education.***

While all sectors of Iraqi society have a role to play in resolving the country's daunting social, economic, and political problems, the role of the higher education sector is especially important. By committing itself as a civil society actor and devoting its energies to renovating its curricula and training its faculties, higher education in Iraq can help lead the way in the quest for democracy and education. It can also spur the country's economic development, for universities can play a vital role in improving scientific and technological education, business and management training, and public administration.

To be sure, there are formidable obstacles to be overcome, not least the dangerous security situation, the lack of resources, overcentralization of decision making, and the uncertainties of a new political atmosphere. But Iraqi universities possess significant assets that they can employ in the effort to shed the legacy of authoritarianism, restore the dynamism that characterized higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, and create a vibrant, tolerant, and participatory democracy both on campus and in the wider society. Chief among these assets are the strong work ethic and intellectual integrity of Iraqi academics, coupled with their desire to commit themselves to the enterprise of developing a modern and democratic Iraq.

Iraqis cannot accomplish this alone, however. They need the committed support of international actors, including the Arab League, the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, European countries, and international organizations, to assist in securing resources, materials, and expertise for the reform of Iraq's higher education system. In an interdependent world, helping Iraq's universities play a central role in educating Iraqi society and securing social peace will have a positive effect not only in Iraq but also in other countries facing similar challenges.

## Notes

1. The figure was derived from a list of university personnel killed, posted on the Web site of the Brussels Tribunal at [www.brusseltribunal.org.academiclist.html](http://www.brusseltribunal.org.academiclist.html).
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11. Public Broadcasting Service, *The Online Newshour*, "Iraq in Transition," February 12, 2007, [www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth\\_coverage/middle\\_east/iraq/jan-june07/infrastructure\\_02-12.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/middle_east/iraq/jan-june07/infrastructure_02-12.html).
12. Katherine Zoepf, "Iraq's Intellectuals Are Marked for Death, Human-Rights Groups Say," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 29, 2006, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2006/06/2006062904n.htm>. PBS reported on February 12, 2007, that the Brookings Institution estimates that 40 percent of professionals have fled the country. PBS, *The Online Newshour*, "Iraq in Transition."
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15. Michaela Cancela-Kieffer, "Death Batters at the Doors of Iraq's Universities," Agence France Presse, February 27, 2007.
16. The conference was titled "Roundtable on the Revitalization of Higher Education in Iraq," and was held on February 22–23, 2005, at UNESCO Headquarters.
17. Oliver Poole, "Student Extremism Brings Violence and Chaos to Iraqi Universities" *Daily Telegraph* (London), January 9, 2006.
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