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RISK ANALYSIS FOR IRAQ, 2023. A VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

The present study is limited to efforts to clarify the articulations of risk analysis and to illustrate the fact that the most important element of risk analysis is the identification of risk factors and the identification of their influence on the development of economic, political, social and climatic processes. The risk situation in a country with a difficult to predict future like Iraq is approached as a case study.

Keywords: risk analysis, risk factors, situation, politics, military and security situation

1. Introduction

Risk analysis is the procedure by which the factors that can endanger the progress of a process, the success of a project or the achievement of a goal are identified, individualized, quantified and evaluated (Chavas, 2004; Vose, 2008; Aven, 2015).

The results of a risk analysis play an important role in defining preventive measures to reduce the probability that harmful, toxic factors will act negatively. The results are also decisive for the identification of countermeasures that prevent the occurrence of unfavorable effects on the competitiveness of an organization or the performance of certain actions (Micu et al., 2010; Kraidt et al., 2019; Peterson, 2021; Wang, 2021; Dabrovolskas, 2022). Regardless of how the danger, risk or threat is perceived, the main task of risk analysis is the isolation of risks in the early stages of its production. The sooner the dangers are identified, the greater the chances of acting in a timely manner, with sufficient resources and in an appropriate strategic manner.

2. Iraq – three scenarios

As is known, after 2003, the US even had a governor in Iraq. In 2006, for the first time since the war, an Iraqi government was installed to lead the country for a whole year, amid the escalation of sectarian and factional fighting.

In the years that followed, there were no major changes in Iraq. If the trends have been for the slow consolidation of the Iraqi military capacity by the central government, while influential local personalities will transfer as much as possible from the central authority to the lower levels of regional, provincial, municipal and zonal administrations. Although unforeseen events can change the overall picture of the country, creating scenarios is a useful means of analyzing possible developments. Certain events or combinations of events can be identified and classified according to probability or impact.

Three scenarios are possible after 20 years in 2023.

Current risks

The political situation

The political instability, the sectarian partisanship of the Government, divided between the key factions within the ministries and military units, keeps the power and efficiency of the state institutions significantly reduced.

The low governance capacity determined the decrease of the population's trust in the Government and thus the lack of perceived legitimacy at the level of the state bodies. Ministries are unable to manage their allocated budgets, achieving at a reduced level from their spending plans. At the same time, local power actors increasingly took control over the security sector, utilities and economic growth.

The military and security situation

The number of violent incidents reported, monthly keeps at a high level. The main reason continues to be that the Government does not have a monopoly on the use of force, with trained soldiers and enormous amounts of

weapons being distributed to various militias associated with political parties and regional governments, which are often not included in the ranks of government security forces. Among the main non-governmental actors are the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in the Iraqi Badr Organization; members of the militias associated with the Martyrs of Sadr organization identified as Sadrists; the various local Sunni militias that combine, to some extent, nationalist and Islamist ideologies; Kurdish peshmerga militias and jihadist groups led from outside. In addition, the Sunni-Kurdish populated areas adjacent to the Kurdish-populated area, especially Kirkuk and Mosul, continue to represent a security threat. The government in Baghdad aims to recentralize the military forces by integrating individual members of the militias into the security forces. Cross-sectarian Iraqi armed formations perform well when supported by US forces, while militia-dominated divisions made up of locals from the regions where the units are located are difficult to deploy across the country to end sectarian fighting, proving vulnerable during local factional crises.

Economic situation

In structural terms, the economy continues to be deficient in income diversity and is vulnerable to various types of economic shocks. The revenues from oil exploitation provide about two thirds of the GDP and about 90% of the Government's revenues. The slow process of developing a proper country-wide fuel law, the lack of short-term international interest in Iraq, attacks by insurgent forces on their export infrastructure, and the inability of the Ministry of Petroleum to effectively spend its allocated funds affect the potential of the sector.

The non-oil sector also continues to operate below capacity, particularly areas where jobs can be created, such as industry and agriculture. This fact is a result of the failure of the institutional system - from the Government to the international donor groups. American aid has focused, in particular, on large-scale infrastructure projects, in which foreign entrepreneurs have been trained at the expense of the local non-oil industry in which Iraqis are employed.

The slow payments made by the Iraqi Executive and international funds combined with insecurity, corruption, the absence of foreign investment and the emigration of human capital led to the stagnation of the development of the non-oil sector. The result is that, although a large number of able-bodied Iraqis could be employed, a large proportion of them are unemployed or looking for a second job. The post-war education system suffered serious dysfunctions, which added to the negative effect caused by the lack of investment in this field for more than ten years, thus accentuating the shortage of skilled labor that will probably affect Iraq in the future.

External relations

While the regional situation undermines the stability of Iraq, to a certain extent, states and international organizations have supported and helped the formation of the Iraqi Government. However, although Iraq's internal insecurity has allowed regional actors to undermine the country's external security, more and more states and international organizations have tried to counter this trend.

The social situation

The extent of sectarian and political violence is the result of ethnic and religious divisions, considering that approximately 20% of the population is Kurdish, 77% is Arab, over 62% is Shiite and less than 35% is Sunni.

In the context where political influence is concentrated at the local level, larger political blocks - national, regional, provincial - are affected by the centrifugal forces of rivalry between factions and sects (Meyer et al., 2005; Dhumad et al., 2020; Abramov et al., 2022).

In parallel with the extremely low social cohesion, crime and risks to the health of the population continue to increase. Despite high death rates, Iraq has a young and rapidly growing population. It is unlikely that these demographic trends will change in the future, increasing the unemployment rate in the next two decades (Leezenberg, 2006; Yousif, 2007; Niblock, 2021).

Country risk

The methodology for assessing the risks associated with future scenarios measures the stability of a state at any given time and the projected stability if certain factors change.

To measure the stability of a country, 24 factors affecting security are used, from the political to the military, from the environmental to the social. Each factor is divided into sub-factors that together allow a precise assessment of their level, classified into 5 distinct groups: political, social, economic, military and internal and external security. These groups are given a numerical score, used to represent state risk on a scale of one to seven, shown below.

The level of risk

- critical - the threat to the government, the population or the political system is severe and immediate;
- very high - the threat to the government, the population or the political system is serious in the short and medium term; .

- high - there is a substantial threat to the government, the population or the political system;
- significant - the threat to the government, the population or the political system exists, but is unlikely to generate immediate instability;
- moderate - the government, the population or the political system maintain a fragile order;
- low - the government, the population or the political system are secure and enjoy stability;
- minimal - the government, the population or the political system do not face any threat, and any form of instability is unlikely.

The assessment of each factor within the group and each group within the overall stability rating is determined by country and scenario.

The political situation - The political factors evaluated are the clarity of the government system, the state's adherence to the government system, the legitimacy of the state bodies, their consolidation, the presence of non-military interests in the status quo, the support of the army.

The military/security situation - The military and security factors evaluated are: state control over security factors, the professionalism of the security forces, their ethics, challenges from non-state armed groups and criminal groups, the proliferation of conventional weapons.

The economic situation - The economic factors assessed: labor force and unemployment rate, economic policy, stability of the economy, infrastructure, resource assurance.

The external situation - The external factors evaluated: involvement in multilateral institutions, regional relations, geostrategic vulnerability, international alliances.

Social situation - Social factors evaluated: social cohesion, crime, health, demographic stability.

Currently, the risk factors have a significant level (political, economic, external, social and country risk), and the security risk is high.

The scenario for 2023

From Iraq's current precarious position, three scenarios seem possible when forecasting for the year 2023. The main variable that changes between each scenario is the degree to which the central government strengthens or weakens compared to the previous year. Many other variables are significant for Iraq's near future, but none is central to the development of key trends. If the government consolidates its authority, the first scenario, many, if not all, aspects of Iraq's stability will improve. If the government loses relevance, the second scenario, there will be a substantial reduction in stability. If the government falls, the third scenario, there will be negative implications for the future stability of Iraq. This third scenario foresees a violent and sudden generation from the darkest perspective.

Scenario 1: a homogeneous Iraq

Low probability

The scenario approaches the perspective according to which, in 2023, the Government regains, to a certain extent, its centralized authority. Among the possible mechanisms is the development of a stronger cross-sectarian Iraqi army with reduced US aid and commanded by the federal government.

At the same time, it is foreseen to increase the capacity of the Executive at the level of the entire country. The achievement of this scenario depends on the successful completion of the set of important objectives that the Government has committed to achieve. However, these goals are likely to be far too ambitious and would require near-perfect political conditions without undermining events such as the 2022 bombings. Less significant operational failures are possible. government, as well as large-scale sectarian attacks.

Moreover, although the process of strengthening the Iraqi army continues, unlike that of the Iraqi Police Service, this has been made possible by the fact that it has taken place at a slow and steady pace. It can be observed that the most effective formations of the Iraqi army are those that have been formed over a long period of time (Dolores Lezameta de Salas, 2021; Mărănduc et al., 2022; Vlad, 2022). However, if this scenario were to materialize, the main effect would be a significant improvement in stability, but with the persistence of problems such as corruption, crime and health. The increase in the Government's authority would not represent a signal of the development and operation of a new ambitious economic policy. instead, the Government could build its local and international credibility through a series of successes in the field of national reconciliation and security sector reform.

Although the intensity of the actions of the insurgent forces is unlikely to decrease significantly, the development of an Iraqi army could gradually strengthen government control, probably focusing on the slow reduction of violence in Baghdad. The only potential risk of such a policy would be the dynamic role of the military

at the center of Iraqi politics, which could lead to a possible intervention in the political process (Ogah & Abutu, 2021; Negrea, 2021; Kováčová & Drahotský, 2022).

Risk factors - a united Iraq

Political risk - significant

Security risk - high

Economic risk - significant

External risk - significant

Social risk - high

Total country risk - significant

Scenario 2: de facto split

Probability - significant

In essence, a gradual deterioration of the social, political and security structure of the country is expected. The Kurdish north is attacked by both Turkey and Iran. By the end of 2023, the Iraqi army could be stronger to properly control the entire territory of the state. Important structural economic problems will experience a slower improvement in the context in which all attention will be focused on initiatives related to national security and reconciliation (Orzeață, 2021; Kürtül, 2022; Akib et al., 2022). Many of Iraq's neighboring states would not interfere in internal affairs and would focus on their own defense efforts in the area of border security, while undertaking a series of covert initiatives aimed at achieving American demands (Goodyear, 2009; Chatelard, 2012; Shafaat et al., 2021).

In the field of security, the Government is likely to regain control, despite the development of the Iraqi army. Key developments concern the various sub-state armed groups (Abaas, 2018; Williams, 2022; Stănescu, 2022). As local dynamics unfold, the Government will continue to function periodically as an arbitrator, but will not have the ability to intervene decisively in the multiple conflicts, and the struggle for power will take place simultaneously in Risk factors - de facto split

Political risk - high

Security risk - very high

Economic risk – significant

External risk - significant

Social risk - high

Total country risk - high

Scenario 3: the collapse of the Government

Likelihood - Low

The third scenario envisages a catastrophic and sudden collapse of the Executive, which implies an unprecedented worsening of relations between the three major ethnic and religious groups - Shias, Sunnis and Kurds. Another situation could be represented by the irreconcilable break between the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution and the Sadrist factions. A more plausible precursor to the collapse of the Government could be an advance of Kurdish paramilitary forces in Kirkuk.

Given such an event, Iraq's risk level would probably become very high, close to critical. The Kurdish scenario would be the most destabilizing, because it would generate a series of violent clashes between the army and the Sunni Arabs of Iraq and lead, simultaneously, to a deterioration of relations between the allied Shiite and Kurdish blocs in the Parliament. The Iraqi army could disintegrate, with its largest component - the Kurds - withdrawing, and with little possibility of getting the Sunni Arabs to fight alongside the remaining Kurds. Fierce fighting in Kirkuk and the Sunni cities of the southeast, plus Mosul and other multi-ethnic regions, would lead to a worsening of the security situation. Such a scenario would drastically reduce local and international trust in the Government and encourage the illegal formation of other regional governments or miniature states. It is possible that the key Executives that would get involved militarily would be those of Turkey and Iran, each of which has an interest in preventing the creation of a Kurdish state on its borders (Căpățîna et al.; Cristescu et al., 2022). A multi-factional civil war aggravated by regional powers could break out. The extreme risks presented by this scenario are offset by the low probability of its realization. Although there will be frequent fighting between Kurdish officials and Shiites, the chances of Kurdish action or an irreconcilable break between Shiites appear slim, given that, despite pressure from Kurdish leaders, the commitment to an increasingly counter-Arabization policy remains (Abduljabbar & Breesam, 2022; Ciupercă et al., 2022).

Risk factors – Collapse

Political risk - very high
 Security risk - critical
 Economic risk – high
 Extreme risk – significant
 Social risk - very high
 Total country risk - very high

3. Conclusions

According to the forecast for 2023, the Government will achieve a small part of its reconciliation and security objectives. The situation in Iraq will be much more violent as a result of the sectarian fights and, in particular, those between the factions, in the context in which the Iraqis exploit the security vacuum to define a hierarchy at the local and regional level.

The Iraqi public and the international community will continue to lose confidence in the Iraqi leadership and increasingly turn to influential figures at the municipal, provincial and regional levels as the main decision makers in Iraq.

The official division of the country could become increasingly irrelevant as local insurgents make their own territorial arrangements among themselves and with foreign powers. Iraq will have to weaken its federal structure in order to survive as a single nation when the security situation allows it.

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