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Can the world fix Iraq?

It is time the world became more serious about stopping the slide towards chaos in Iraq

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In his last routine briefing on Iraq to the Security Council earlier this month, UN representative for Iraq Jan Kubis provided a surprisingly harsh critique of the beleaguered country's leadership.

The Slovak diplomat, who is special representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), chose to be less than diplomatic in his report and decided to call a spade a spade.

Kubis put the blame for the country's lingering dilemmas squarely on the "failure of Iraq's government and [its] political class."

Point by point in his 6 May speech, he took issue with the failure of Iraqi leaders to "overhaul the political process," to "enact genuine reforms," to "get rid of a powerful patronage system" and to "break [free] from past legacies of poor governance and corruption".

Criticism of the corrupt and ineffectual Iraqi political elite is not uncommon, but it is highly unusual for such a senior international diplomat to make such an avowedly negative assessment of the Iraqi leadership.

His remarks also raise questions about what the international community is up to as Iraq plunges deeper into political chaos as its government tries to drive the Islamic State (IS) terror group from the territories it has occupied.

Two days before Kubis' address to the Security Council, the European Union voiced similar concerns and said there was a need to "urgently resolve the political crisis in the country."

"All Iraqi politicians should contribute to the urgent implementation of overdue reforms and the fight against corruption called for by the Iraqi people," said a statement by Patrick Simonnet, head of the EU delegation to Iraq.

Iraq's political crisis deepened after angry demonstrators protesting against government corruption and inefficiency stormed the parliament last month, prompting many blocs to boycott the legislature and the cabinet.

The Iraqi parliament had earlier failed to approve a cabinet proposed by embattled Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi to carry out the reforms demanded by the protesters.

For weeks Kubis has been shuttling to meetings with Iraq's political, religious, tribal and even militia leaders in an attempt to push the feuding factions into resolving the conflicts in the country in a peaceful fashion.

EU envoys to Iraq have made similar endeavours.

The UN's and EU's increasing frustration with Iraq's politicians has come hard on the heels of revamped US efforts to right the ship in Iraq.

Washington fears that the political upheaval will jeopardise the US-backed campaign to retake the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, which is the main tactical objective of the Obama administration in the country for the rest of Obama's term in office which ends in January.

US Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones has been carrying out intensive contacts to try to press the Iraqi factions to end their boycott of the parliament and the government and focus on fighting IS.

Iran has also been in contact with Iraq's political leaders in a bid to prevent the collapse of the government, which is led by its Shia allies.

Leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, together with Egypt and Jordan, who fear a regional backlash if Iraq breaks up, recently gave Al-Abadi assurances of their support and of the stability and unity of Iraq.

The question is whether the world has now finally decided to have a proper global conversation to end the quagmire in Iraq, or whether this is just another public-relations exercise by the international and regional powers to hide their true agendas in the country.

There have been no signs that the world and regional powers have a coherent and functional strategy to tackle the Iraqi crisis, at least they do not have one yet.

For the United States, the priority is taking back Mosul from IS militants. US President Barack Obama, who has admitted that "we don't yet have a complete strategy" to defeat the group, has been focusing on solving short-term problems and leaving the Iraqi quagmire to the next US president.

This myopic policy of the Obama administration has only seemed to perpetuate Iraq's political chaos and create serious consequences for regional stability.

This month alone, hundreds of people were killed in Baghdad in a series of attacks by IS militants, highlighting the vulnerability of the country's security forces and the need to defend the Iraqi capital against IS assaults.

Meanwhile, Iran, which wields enormous influence in Iraq, seems to be playing a behind-the-scenes role to defuse the government crisis in the country and to stabilise the situation in Baghdad.

Last week Tehran sent its influential Intelligence Minister Sayed Mahmoud Alavi to Baghdad in a bid to convince the feuding Iraqi factions to resume their cooperation in the partnership government.

But Tehran also seems to be lacking a comprehensive plan to save Iraq from sliding towards chaos, and its efforts to bring the political blocs together are part of a short-term focus on ending the government impasse.

Iran's main goal in Iraq remains to support the bid by its Shia allies to stay in power. There has also been no change in the position of Iraq's Sunni neighbours, which look at the situation in Iraq from a narrow sectarian perspective.

Some international and regional powers are probably using the wrong yardstick when trying to help the Iraqis to come together.

A meeting of mostly Sunni opponents of the Baghdad government is scheduled to be held in Paris later this month in order to establish an opposition movement, triggering an angry reaction from Baghdad.

Though the French government has distanced itself from the meeting, Baghdad considers that the meeting, believed to be supported by some Sunni Arab governments, will provide an anti-government platform for loyalists to former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

The Saudi-owned Al-Hayat newspaper reported last Friday that Turkey and Qatar were making similar efforts to unify Iraqi Sunnis behind a larger political bloc to represent the community.

All these efforts cut to the core of what is perhaps the greatest question posed to both the Iraqis and the international community: is it still possible for an international coalition to get things on track in Iraq where the Iraqis themselves have failed?

Iraqi politicians and religious leaders seem to have exhausted all possible venues to resolve Iraq's conflicts amicably.

On 13 May, grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the country's most prestigious Shia cleric who helped to bring the Shia political groups to power, acknowledged that he had become "helpless" to end the crisis in the country.

"It's futile. They are deaf and mute. We have complained about them to God," Al-Sistani said in a sermon delivered on his behalf in the holy Shia city of Karbala.

In February, Al-Sistani stopped delivering regular weekly sermons about political affairs in the country in protest against politicians' reluctance to take steps to reform the government and fight corruption.

All this is relevant to the question of whether the international community can help in ending Iraq's turmoil and misery. The starting point should be to diagnose Iraq's real problems and to think about offering proper remedies.

Kubis' pointing to the failure of the government and the Iraqi political class makes perfect sense, and it should be the beginning of the therapy.

Most of Iraq's problems are caused by misrule and the corruption of its ethno-sectarian-minded ruling cliques. Mismanagement, government inefficiency and the plunder of the country's wealth have produced communal divisions and power struggles.

Recent pro-reform protests have underlined public frustration at the ruling cliques that have demonstrated incompetence and greed and opened the door to IS militants.

Iraq's political class is part of the problem and not part of the solution, as the UNAMI chief has rightly declared. As the recent government crisis has showed, it has resisted change and reform and by resorting to dirty tricks has plunged the country deeper into mayhem.

The solution to the conflict in Iraq should start with a new transition that will pave the way for a new generation of Iraqis that has not been stained by corruption, sectarianism and blood and that can start from scratch in building a new political system.

This transition should be a UN-sponsored process that includes drafting a new constitution and electing a new parliament and a new government that excludes all those from the present ruling cliques that have been responsible for turning Iraq into a failed and miserable state.

The first step should be forming a transitional government that will prepare for new elections and the drafting of a new constitution to determine a new political structure for the country.