

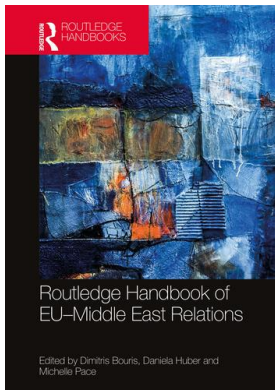
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THE EU IN POST-2003 IRAQ

*Maria Luisa Fantappie***Introduction**

The evolution of the partnership between the European Union (EU) and Iraq reveals the limits and the successes of EU foreign and security policy, perhaps more than any other similar EU partnership. In the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq war, divisions between EU Member States cast doubts on their capacity to agree by consensus in foreign policy matters. While the EU has since overcome prewar divisions on Iraq, Member States' consensus and multilateral cooperation has remained limited to matters of principle. In Iraq as in other areas in conflict, an EU consensus on foreign policy principles is insufficient to make the EU relevant. Such consensus needs to be coupled with joint political action by Member States.

This chapter explores the role of the EU in post-2003 Iraq by relying on scholarly literature on EU–Iraq relations, EU statements, joint communications related to Iraq and interviews with Iraqi and European officials who served in the country. The first part of the chapter discusses EU Member States' divisions in the 2003–2014 period, from the lead-up to the Iraq invasion until the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or Daesh. The second part of the chapter discusses the limited success of EU action in Iraq, despite a newfound consensus, in the 2014–2020 period. The rise of Daesh – which posed a security threat at the periphery of the EU – placed Iraq back on the EU agenda. Yet, the EU response did not help coordination, nor was it conducive to the formation of joint European political action. Member States' military support against Daesh continued to be coordinated by the US, and the post-Daesh reconstruction delegated to UN agencies. This chapter concludes that the EU can claim the most success with its “core-group” initiatives – initiatives led by a few member states working in concert – and with small-scale projects that the EU institutions are able to monitor and claim ownership for in front of beneficiaries.

The EU in Iraq: a troubled beginning (2003–2014)

In the ten years preceding the Iraq invasion, the EU's foreign and security institutions underwent fast-paced development. Since 1970, the foreign ministries of the six Member States of the European Community (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and West Germany) had invested in harmonising their views in international affairs (Crowe, 2003). In 1992,

the Maastricht Treaty formally established the EU and inaugurated its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The novelty of the Treaty was that it formalised the meetings between ambassadors and ministries, and introduced the concept of a common defence policy for the EU (Menon, 2004). The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 marked an additional step in forming the CFSP, introducing the position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This office had the symbolic task of encouraging consultative and consensus-based decision making in foreign policy. The Nice Treaty of 2001 inaugurated the Political and Security Committee (PSC), a platform responsible for day-to-day CSFP management. As the EU refined its foreign policy structures, it also made strides in developing a defence and security policy – the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – and started implementing it in the early 2000s in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war (2001), and to put an end to conflict in the Balkans.

The 2003 Iraq invasion marked an abrupt rupture in the CSFP's steady trajectory and norms-based process for consultative and consensus-based decision making (Lewis, 2009). As Crowe describes, the Iraq crisis “epitomized everything that is wrong with the practice and even the concept of the CFSP” (Crowe, 2003: 534). While France and Germany took uncompromising anti-war stances, Britain, Spain and six other Member States supported it (Lewis, 2009). The pro-war countries published a letter supporting the invasion of Iraq, without consulting High Representative Javier Solana or other Member States – thus completely bypassing both EU institutions and the code of conduct for consensus-based foreign policy. Divisions over the Iraq war also exposed the controversy between French and British positions on relations between the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). While France saw the ESDP as the beginning of a European defence policy able to operate independently from NATO, Britain interpreted the ESDP as a complement to NATO (Menon, 2004). In a major crisis, the pro-war bloc appeared to prioritise US leadership over that of the CFSP; the pro-war countries disregarded the consensus-based policy foundations of the CFSP. The anti-war group of countries, in contrast, believed in a European defence policy independent from the US. Only a month after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, some of them (Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg) put forward the formation of an EU military command centre. The controversy sparked by the Iraq War marked the functional end of the CFSP – at least as far as it formalised mechanisms of foreign policy decision making.

The EU's limited engagement in Iraq

In the aftermath of the invasion, the EU was able to preserve, to some extent, a consensus-based decision-making process by reinterpreting the CSFP as consensus on common foreign policy principles (promotion of multilateralism, long-term stability, rule of law and human rights) rather than consensus on common foreign policy positions (Lewis, 2009).

The difficult transition towards a new, legitimate Iraqi government offered an opportunity for the EU to put aside political divergences, and refocus its engagement in Iraq on reconstruction and humanitarian assistance (Young, 2004). At the European Council of June 2003, the EU stated readiness to participate in the Madrid's Donors' Conference and contribute to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI), which gathered contributions for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq (European Commission, 2003a, 2003b).

In 2004, Solana redirected Member States' efforts towards drafting the European Security Strategy (ESS), a document reuniting Member States in a common approach towards global threats. In the same year, the European Commission published its first “strategy for Iraq”, reiterating its support for the stable and democratic political transition of the newly empowered Iraqi interim government, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1546 (European

Commission, 2004; United Nations Security Council, 2004). Although the Iraq strategy offered guidelines for EU action in Iraq, its subsequent implementation has demonstrated how the legacy of divergences on the invasion has continued to shape Europeans' bilateral engagement with Iraq. Supporters of the war overwhelmingly invested in bilateral support to Iraq, both as members of the Multi-National Force in Iraq (for police and security personnel training), and as contributors to the IRFFI. Those who had opposed the invasion were more cautious in disbursing funds for humanitarian aid, because they felt that EU taxpayers should not be asked to pay for a war they did not want. Burke highlights the stark contrast between the UK and Italy – both of which had been part of the pro-war bloc – and their conspicuous engagement in post-invasion military and training operations, and France's more cautious engagement in Iraq (Burke, 2009).

As a former European diplomat put it:

On Iraq there was no political will to be together. Member States were unwilling to engage in Iraq and preferred to finance the UN and NGOs for the implementation of EU projects rather than carrying out the project themselves. The result was that, unlike the Americans, we didn't have much to offer Iraq, nor did we have much with which to threaten it. We had no leverage.¹

The EU engagement in Iraq evolved at a very slow pace, even in areas where Member States shared a common approach. In 2004, Solana visited Baghdad and a year later, the European Commission opened a delegation to implement the Iraq strategy. But as security in Iraq remained fragile, much of the European Commission's offices continued to operate from Amman, Jordan. Moreover, the EU funds to support political transition, reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid were largely channeled to subcontracting agencies. Burke reports that between 2003 and 2008, the EU's reconstruction and humanitarian assistance amounted to €920 million. Of this, €265 million was handed over to the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) for democracy and governance projects. More than €300 – nearly half of the remainder – was provided as reconstruction funds for other UN agencies and the World Bank (Burke, 2009). In February 2005, the EU Council launched the “EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq” (EUJUST-LEX), a capacity-building mission aimed at improving skills in the field of criminal investigation by providing training to Iraqi judges, investigating magistrates, senior police and penitentiary officers (White, 2008). Established under the premises of the ESDP, the mission's training was still largely remotely run from Brussels. As of 2010, the mission claimed to have trained over 800 judges, 1700 police officers and nearly 80% of the Iraqi correctional service. Beyond the reported number of individual trainings, the impact of the mission on reforming the judiciary remains limited (Council of the European Union, 2010). Despite that, the EU Council renewed the mission's mandate for nine consecutive years (2005–2014). The mission's renewal was, to a certain extent, a way to promote a common EU project in Iraq without confronting Member States' divergences on their engagement in Iraq.

The privileged partnership between the US and Iraq

The EU's limited engagement in Iraq ended up backfiring on the EU's own security. Despite the EU's preference for UNAMI – rather than the US – to accompany Iraq's political transition, the US administration's investment in shaping Iraq's political system in the post-invasion period remained unparalleled. Much of Iraq's privileged partnership with the US emerged as a result of a marriage of interests between the US presidential administration and the newly

empowered Iraqi leadership. The US administration – having led America into a controversial war – needed to show success in Iraq in order to ensure its reelection for a second term. In turn, the Iraqi leadership – returning to Baghdad after years of exile – needed international support to consolidate support and credibility inside the country. The result of this US–Iraqi marriage of interest was a hasty handover of sovereignty that affected the transparency of the nascent political system, and caused long-term instability for both Iraq and the EU.

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the US governing body in Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority, eager to show a successful transition from the regime of Saddam Hussein, purged the state institutions and security forces of medium-level and senior ranking members of the Ba’ath Party (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003a). Members of the newly empowered political leadership and former opposition to Saddam Hussein resorted to these so-called de-Baathification policies to dismiss their political rivals and staff the ranks of the state bureaucracy with loyalists. Many of those who were purged remobilised and organised the insurgency and jihadi movements, such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, which launched in 2005, and Daesh, which emerged in 2014 (International Crisis Group, 2014a, 2014b).

After Hussein’s fall, both the US and Iraq sought to speed up the handover of sovereignty, ratify a constitution, organise elections and install a new Iraqi government that could be considered sovereign. Al-Ali reports that, in spite of UNAMI’s warnings, US officials’ pressure on Iraq’s Constitutional Committee resulted in speeding up the drafting and ratification of the constitution – a document that today remains contested (Al-Ali, 2014). The government of Ibrahim al-Jaafari (Prime minister 2005–2006) as well as the governments of his successor, Nouri al-Maliki (prime minister 2006–2014) entrenched the ethno-sectarian system of representation and a rentier-based economy. Political parties divided control over the state institutions, employing public sector employees on the basis of party affiliation and communal belonging, undermining the effectiveness of already dysfunctional institutions and the prospect for genuine political representation.

By 2010, the relative stability of Iraq and the drawdown of American combat units paved the ground for a stepped-up EU and Member States bilateral engagement in Iraq. In this spirit, in 2012, the EU and the Iraqi government concluded negotiations over the Partnership Cooperation Agreement, a “comprehensive platform” ranging from “political matters such as countering terrorism and promoting human rights, to trade and investment in key areas such as energy and services” (Council of the European Union, 2012).

Yet, the shortcomings of Iraq’s political transition have posed a threat for the stability and security of the EU. By 2014, Daesh had seized important portions of territory across Iraq and Syria. The movement’s declaration of an “Islamic state” across Syria and Iraq was not only a concern for the stability of the two countries, but also a threat to the security of other countries and regions, including the EU. Unlike its predecessor al-Qaeda in Iraq, Daesh had seized large portions of Iraq and Syria’s territory, established governance structures and imposed an ideological agenda on large portions of the local population (Boutin and Chauzal, 2016). By August 2014, more than 2000 EU passport holders – mostly from Belgium, France, Germany and the UK – had traveled to Iraq and Syria to join the extremist organisation. By 2016, the number of foreign fighters who were EU passport holders had nearly doubled to more than 4000 individuals (European Parliament, 2018). The surge of Daesh and ramification of the Syrian conflict provoked a massive migration of largely young population towards the borders of the EU. Between 2015 and 2016, more than a million refugees, including approximately 100,000 Iraqis, arrived in Europe through the eastern Mediterranean route (Reach Initiative, 2017). Meanwhile, a Daesh-inspired series of attacks struck at the heart of Europe. Daesh claimed responsibility for coordinated attacks in Brussels in May 2014 and in Paris in November 2015;

the Brussels' airport bombing in May 2016; and the Nice truck attack in July 2016 (Dworkin, 2016). Instability in Iraq and Syria sparked a massive migration wave into Europe.

A new season of EU engagement in Iraq (2014–2020)

Daesh's surge forced EU Member States to move past earlier divisions, and brought Iraq back onto the EU agenda. In 2015 the EU Council issued the "EU's strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as ISIL/Daesh's threat" (Council of the European Union, 2015). The fight against Daesh progressed in parallel to important strides in European foreign and security policy. In April 2016, the day after the Brexit vote in the UK, the EU Council voted and approved the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) (Council of the European Union, 2016). Envisioned as an evolution of the ESS, the strategy reaffirmed the EU's commitment to a common vision and principles in foreign affairs, a common approach to conflict and crisis management, and support for a cooperative regional order. The strategy proposed an external policy based on an "integrated approach" of soft-power tools for multilateral action in crisis management. These tools included security sector reform, trade, development, humanitarian assistance and diplomacy (Tocci, 2016).

With the EUGS, Member States agreed on common principles for their action in the context of a crisis such as that in Iraq. In January 2018, the EU Council passed a new Iraq strategy. In line with the EUGS, the Iraq strategy was a testimony to Member States' common approach on Iraq and their investment in soft-power tools, including sustained humanitarian assistance, support for the stabilisation of liberated areas with attention to local and national governance, reform, sustainable economic growth, and support for Iraq's good relations with its neighbours (Council of the European Union, 2018). In November 2017, as the EU Iraq strategy was under discussion, the EU Council launched the Advisory Mission in support of Security Sector Reform in Iraq (EUAM Iraq) as part of its crisis management and efforts to stabilise Iraq post-Daesh. The mission comprised civilian and security personnel and aimed at implementing the civilian aspects of the security sector reform program in Iraq (European External Action Service, 2017). The diplomatic engagement of the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, in post-Daesh reconstruction and support for regional cooperation complemented the EU support for reform. In February 2018, Mogherini co-chaired the Kuwait Conference for Iraq's Reconstruction, aimed at collecting funds for Iraq reconstruction (European External Action Service, 2018). As US–Iran tensions grew in Iraq, the High Representative, together with Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also supported the organisation of an initiative called "Iraq and Its Neighbors"; the initiative includes the foreign ministries of Iraq and of neighbouring countries, and is aimed at attenuating regional tensions by improving regional integration (European External Action Service, 2019).

EU common approach and limited coordination

An EU consensus on a common approach was not sufficient to ensure that Member States coordinated action in their security response against Daesh. Member States agreed in principle on military and economic support to Iraq but the extent and modality of this support was different depending on their foreign policy agendas and national security priorities. As a former EU diplomat put it:

By 2014, Member States felt that they were all in the same boat. But we as the EU don't have a standing army and security bite. There was an understanding about what

to do, but when it came to taking action, Member States opted for bilateral agreements with Baghdad and [Iraq's] Kurdistan Region, rather than a multilateral action.²

The European counter-terrorism response remained driven by Member States' domestic politics considerations more than a strategic approach. French president François Hollande launched a series of military retaliations in response to the 2016 Nice attack (Dworkin, 2016). While France and the UK, Belgium, Netherlands and Denmark joined the US in conducting airstrikes against jihadi positions in Iraq, Italy and Germany did not; instead, they offered weapons and training to Iraqi and Kurdistan security forces (Dworkin, 2016). Also, Member States concluded bilateral agreements with Erbil (the capital of the Kurdistan Region) and Baghdad to provide military assistance. From 2014 to 2017, Germany sent more than 2000 assault rifles and machine guns, as well as the MILAN anti-tank missile to the Kurdistan Region. These weapons were valued at some €90 million (*Deutsche Welle*, 2017). The US-led Global Coalition against Daesh remained the largest umbrella organisation to coordinate Member States' military support. Under the Global Coalition's umbrella, Member States joined efforts to create a joint-command operation for training purposes. For instance, in September 2014, eight European countries (Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, Hungary and Slovenia) established the Kurdistan Training Coordination Center (KTCC) in Erbil, a joint training command for the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

Member States opted for different approach in prosecution, return and repatriation of foreign fighters and their families. "Member States refused to address the 'foreign fighters file' in the framework of the EU institutions", an EU official recounted, adding that each had implemented its own policy. "This file is considered a national security issue. Seven Member States – those who had the highest number of nationals joining Daesh – formed a working group to discuss solutions, but refused coordination, including from the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator".³

The EU and Member States contribution to post-Daesh stabilisation (which has totaled €64 million) was also coordinated under the UN Funding Facility for Stabilisation (FFS). This fund was promoted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) for public infrastructure repairs, grants for small businesses and governance strengthening in areas liberated from Daesh (United Nations Development Program, 2018). The FFS allowed the EU and Member States to delegate project assignment and monitoring to UNDP, but they could not claim ownership for their contribution to Iraq's reconstruction. "Member States and the EU have only limited capacity to monitor and implement reconstruction projects", an EU official said. "It is easier to give a large chunk of money to the UN than to assign, monitor, and assess projects as the EU – even if it would be better to do it on our own".⁴

The limits of the EU "Integrated Approach"

A common approach was also insufficient to ensure the integration of soft-power tools of crisis management. Member States' contribution to multilateral initiatives in Iraq was driven by different national interests, which were often competing. Member States contributing to EUAM Iraq had, depending on their foreign policy, different attitudes towards EU cooperation with other non-EU partners, such as the Global Coalition and NATO. Denmark prioritised cooperation with the US-led Global Coalition and NATO on security sector reform, while Germany, France and Sweden were more inclined to keep the EU's reform initiative complementary to but distinct from that of the US and US-led initiatives.⁵ Also, Member States' security priorities

to defeat Daesh often competed with the objectives they invested in post-Daesh stabilisation in the framework of the EU. As a former adviser to EUAM Iraq put it:

During the campaign to counter Daesh, Member States' counterterrorism operations have empowered some Iraqi and Kurdish units with weapons, created parallel chains of command. This competed with the EUAM's objective to help defining roles and responsibilities in Iraqi security architecture.⁶

Most importantly, Member States foreign policy differences on Iran remaining unaddressed made it impossible for the EU to seize this opportunity to define its role in Iraq. The EU's contribution to the reform process and financial support to reconstruction could achieve only limited results, as those efforts remained technical uncoupled from political engagement with all relevant players in post-Daesh Iraq. Such players included Iran-backed groups that controlled important swathes of Iraqi territories. Some Member States considered it essential for the EU to engage with political and military forces close to Iran to advance post-Daesh reconstruction and security sector reform. Others staunchly opposed such engagement, seeing it as politically controversial and in conflict with their foreign policy. Multilateral initiatives, such as EUAM Iraq's security sector reform, were an attempt at multilateral cooperation, but had only limited impact in the country. Staffed with former police officers with little knowledge of the Iraqi context, the EUAM mission's strategic advisers could not benefit from the EU delegation's political networks to facilitate their operation in the Iraqi security ministries.

The marginal results of the EU's involvement in Iraq are not only a result of the slow pace of Member States' development of a coherent foreign policy. Iraq's own domestic weaknesses have compounded the EU's own foreign policy limitations. Starting from the 2003 invasion, the US disbursed funds and, in parallel, nourished a political and military engagement with Iraqi officials. The Iraqi political class' transactional approach to partnership with Western countries poses a challenge for the EU, especially when the EU offers Iraqis technical advice rather than direct material support. An Iraqi employee of the Office of the National Security Advisor praised the US for funding the construction of a research centre associated with his agency. He stressed that the office preferred to receive such financial assistance over technical advice, which the EU was more likely to give, sometimes in the form of workshops. He wondered "what the EU had to offer". The EU's nearly exclusive investment in soft-power tools in Iraq required partnership with dysfunctional Iraqi institutions that could not deliver results unless they were under strong political pressure. In this sense, EU Member States' paralysis in engaging in Iraq through collective political action, combined with the dysfunction of Iraq's bureaucracy, have compounded the difficulty of achieving results. EUAM Iraq's counterparts in the Ministry of Interior were mid-level state technocrats who were unable to take any important decision to advance reform in the Ministry of Interior without the consent of their superiors, who were usually political appointees.

"Member States will extend the [EUAM] mission because it is better having an EU mission than having nothing", a former adviser with EUAM Iraq said.

Yet, results are assessed on the number of workshops organised more than on the quality of the outcome. Iraqis will continue to request the continuation of the mission to send their employees to workshops. It is a self-reinforcing dysfunctional machine – both on the Iraqi and on the EU side.⁷

Where the EU can claim success

The EU proved more successful in the coordination and integration of soft-power tools, while engaging in smaller-scale initiatives. Such successful initiatives include small-scale projects for which the EU institutions are able to claim ownership in front of beneficiaries, or core-group initiatives in which several Member States could coordinate their actions and take a common political stance.

Small-scale initiatives involved only a few officials – instead of calling for contributions from all Member States – and could be implemented under the direct supervision of EU institutions, rather than through UN agencies. For instance, starting in 2015, the EU Commission funded through Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) Tansiq (“Cooperation”), a project to support the development of a human-rights-compliant counter-terrorism strategy in Iraq and support cooperation within intelligence agencies. The project’s €7 million budget (for 36 months) was smaller than that of EUAM Iraq (€64.8 million for 18 months), and involved a small team of five advisers supervised by one based in the EU delegation in Baghdad (Instruments Contributing to Stability and Peace, 2020; Council of the European Union, 2018). Embedded with the EU Delegation, the advisers could resort to the delegation’s political contacts in its effort to improve cooperation between agencies. In turn, the project afforded the EU Delegation a better understanding of the technical and institutional obstacles to reform. A former Tansiq adviser reported

With Tansiq, we had one concrete objective: train the Iraqi intelligence to create a crisis cell and analyze their sources. You need to invest in projects with a focused objective and measurable results. Iraqis want that too. They want to know how you can concretely contribute.⁸

A similar experience is to be found in the post-Daesh stabilisation. Among the post-Daesh reconstruction initiatives, the EU Commission’s Director-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) financed, together with other Member States, the de-mining project United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Anbar governorates. The project had a limited, precise scope – clearing the area of explosive hazards and improvised explosive devices. The project also had a direct impact on beneficiaries, clearing more than 278 million square metres of sites (Delegation of the European Union to Iraq, 2019) and encouraging the return from camps of internally displaced people. An EU official said that the EU was able to directly monitor implementation of this project – in contrast to EU-funded projects implanted by UNDP. The EU was also able to present the project to beneficiaries as an EU-sponsored initiative.

In addition, Member States’ core-group initiatives, along with increased engagement of the EU Parliament in external affairs, have been effective. Whenever political agreement between EU Member States was difficult to reach, core-group initiatives of small numbers of Member States were also helpful in asserting a stronger EU political position in external affairs. In October 2019, as a popular uprising swept Iraq, the High Representative issued a statement supporting protesters’ right of assembly and condemning violence against demonstrators (Council of the European Union, 2019). While the High Representative’s statement was limited to reaffirming the EU’s defence for the right of assembly, Germany, France and the British ambassador to Baghdad went further, issuing a joint-press communique condemning the killing of demonstrators by paramilitaries (joint press statement, 2019). In the same month, the EU Parliament questioned the High Representative on EUAM Iraq’s partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, which was directly involved in repressing demonstrations (European Parliament, 2019).

Conclusion

The emergence of complex threats in the periphery of the EU along with incoherent US policies in the Middle East, have been opportunities for the EU to agree on common foreign policy principles and refine tools for multilateral cooperation. However, common principles and multilateral cooperation are ineffective in context of crisis such as Iraq if not supported by Member States' joint political action.

Since the US-led invasion of 2003, Iraq has been the mirror of the EU's limitations in shaping a common foreign policy. The EUGS has highlighted the strength of soft power and offered the EU the tools for multilateral cooperation. Yet, if soft power remains disjointed from a common political will, it cannot help Europe to confront global security threats. The EU's investment in political dialogue, stability and security sector reform with Iraq – especially in the context of a growing competition between the US and Iran – has less and less chance to succeed, if not coupled with a political decision of engaging those forces and players that the US is not willing to engage. Similarly, the EU's declaratory policy in protection of human rights and rights of assembly will also need to translate into initiatives of core groups or the EU Parliament, to ensure the protection of civil activists who are the victim of abuses. Failure to do so risks paralysing the EU from advancing any of the objectives stated in its most recent strategy for Iraq and undermine the EU–Iraq partnership. The transition from declaratory policy into political action is an urgent priority more than a long-term objective. The uncertain future of the US in Iraq and Iraqi domestic turmoil could all pose challenges for the EU. Such challenges include, among others, the resurgence of jihadi terrorist threats and a new migration crisis.

Overall, in the context of crisis, the EU has to take a less technical and more political role, if need be through Member States' core-group initiatives or small-scale projects with direct impact on beneficiaries. Through smaller initiatives, EU action can simultaneously engage Iraqi society, the political leadership and Iraq's neighbours. Consumed by US–Iran rivalry, the Iraqi leadership is also calling for a EU joint political action and more concrete initiatives beyond principled statements. It is a sensible request, the fulfillment of which could be the way to save Iraq from becoming a battleground of regional competition and the EU from the new threats at its borders.

Notes

- 1 Phone conversation with a former EU official, 16 January 2020.
- 2 Phone conversation with a former EU diplomat, 18 January 2020.
- 3 Conversation with EU official in Brussels, 28 September 2018.
- 4 Phone conversation with EU official, 17 March 2020.
- 5 Phone conversation with former EUAM adviser, 19 January 2020.
- 6 Phone conversation with former EUAM adviser, 19 January 2020.
- 7 Phone conversation with former EUAM adviser, 19 January 2020.
- 8 Phone conversation with former Tansiq adviser, 8 May 2020.

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