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Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



Report Summary

The Aware Elites In Iraq

A Reading in Concept and Responsibility

Ghazwan Al-Manhalawi

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Introduction

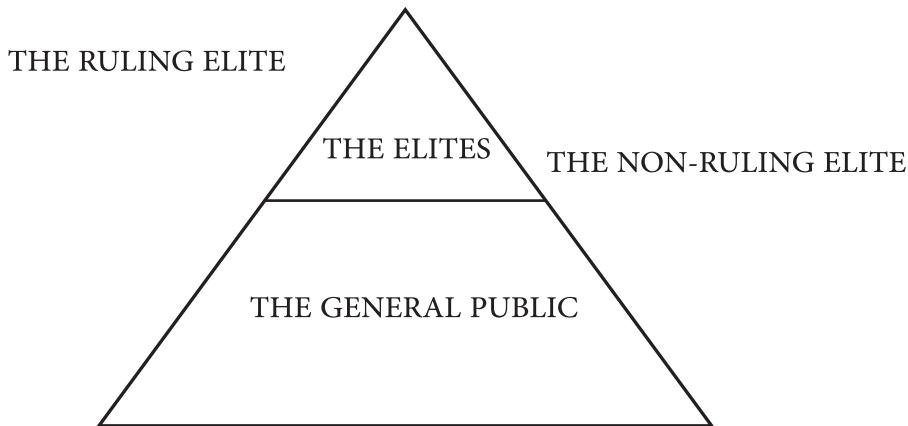
The topic of elites is one of the frequently discussed topics in the political, social and even religious field, because the elite is one of the important keys to change or reform in the field of governance and society, and that societies that have active elites have been able to achieve high levels of development for their societies as well as achieve societal stability, the state of elite fragmentation suffered by the Iraqi situation deserves consideration and reflection on the concept of elites, and perhaps the statements of the Supreme reference in Najaf regarding the Iraqi elites are very important topic.

The supreme authority addressed the elites for the first time in late 2019 in a Friday sermon and demanded what she described as intellectual elites wishing to work politically from entering the elections to reform the state of the cautery. In late 2024, the Supreme Authority once again addressed the elites during the meeting of His Eminence Sayyid Al-Sistani with Dr. Mohammed Hassan, the Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of its mission in Iraq (UNAMI), and the accompanying delegation. But this time, the authority described them as the enlightened elites aiming to reform the situation according to scientific plans, learning lessons from previous experiences. Through our review of the speeches of the highest religious authority in Najaf al-Ashraf, we found that they choose their words very carefully and place them in their positions according to calculated considerations.

The progression in this discourse from intellectual elites to the aware elites has its reasons. Therefore, in this paper, we will first attempt to establish the concept of the elite, then clarify the types of elites, particularly the aware elites, and then move on to outlining the traits (characteristics) that aware elites should possess, and relate this to the Iraqi context, considering it the focus of the paper.

The Concept of Elites

The word 'elite' means the essence or the select. There are several definitions of the elite, and various theories have been proposed to explain the elite from multiple perspectives. Some have categorized it in terms of social class within the society from an economic standpoint, or from a political perspective regarding its possession of sources of power to control governance and the religious elite for their influence on governance, and this can be summarized in that society consists of two main sections: the elite who are connected to leading society and the broad base of society which does not have a direct role in leadership except through elections if the system is based on election, or through protest demands or other methods of public influence on governance. The elite connected to leading society is divided into two parts. The first part is the ruling elite who have a direct role in managing the affairs of government, known as the political elite. The second part is the non-ruling elite, who indirectly influence the management of governance affairs, such as religious leaders, businessmen, military personnel, experts, or influencers in other communities like professional communities, such as the community of artists, farmers, and other professions, as well as any other groups in society united by common interests, known as the social elite. These leaders or communities may at times be non-influential due to their abstention from interfering in public affairs, but their potential to influence remains whenever they choose. Non-ruling elites have influence in two directions. The first concerns influencing the ruling elite through its role in guiding the decisions made by the ruling elites, and the second is influencing society through its role in convincing the general public to adopt or reject a certain idea.



Characteristics Of The Aware Elites

After clarifying the concept of elites and after researching and reflecting on the most important characteristics of aware elites and their approach to practical reality, we identified the key characteristics that aware elites should possess which include:

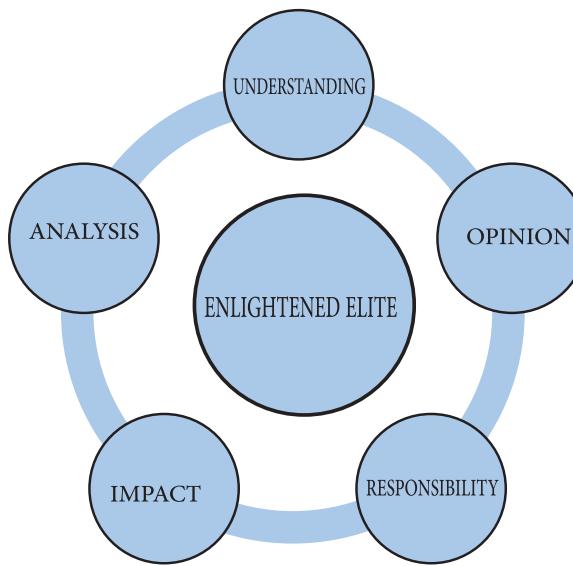
1. Understanding reality: Understanding reality is one of the most important traits that aware elites should possess, as it provides the space from which these elites can form a correct perception of the main issues, enabling them to judge them accurately without doubt or speculation, especially since reality contains a large scope of uncertainty in forming perceptions, which allows elites to detect real problems before they become apparent to the public.
2. Analytical ability (systemic thinking): It is an important and essential skill to enable the aware elites to identify problems, break them down, determine their main roots, and understand their causes especially the fundamental issues in the state that require the ability to view them from a multi-angled and multi-dimensional perspective. Systemic thinking is characterized as a comprehensive

approach to analyzing complex problems, focusing on how different parts within the system interact and affect each other over the long term, while taking into account the larger context of the system. It differs from linear thinking, which focuses on direct cause and effect.

3. Creativity and Innovation. One of the most important characteristics that distinguish the aware elites is their ability to find innovative (non-conventional) solutions beyond the general framework of proposed solutions, addressing problems and issues that are identified or brought to the discussion table. They also possess the capability to establish practical mechanisms that ensure the proper implementation of these solutions, which constitutes a form of independent effort that sets aware elites apart from other elites.

4. Influence: elites have two areas of influence with opposite directions. The first direction is represented in decision-making circles, and the second is represented in the general communities. Having just one of these spaces is sufficient for expressing the visions of the aware elites in reform, determining the correct path, or providing public criticism of any issue facing society. These elites must have the courage to express their opinions even if they contradict general trends, provided they have the proper approach to promote their ideas.

5. Social Responsibility (The Moral Dimension): What distinguishes conscious elites from other elites is that they are socially responsible toward society. Their primary concern is to protect this society from dangers or threats in all fields, whether political, economic, or social. The elite should have the ability to prioritize the public interest over private interests, as well as understand their duty toward the nation.



The Reality of Elites in Iraq

After defining the traits and characteristics of conscious elites, it is now possible to look at the Iraqi reality and identify the types of elites present, which can be summarized as follows.

1. False elites: These are groups who involve themselves in public affairs, either by directly taking charge of governance or influencing it and directing the general public in a certain direction. However, they lack the ability to accurately diagnose issues or the social responsibility to protect society from risks or challenges it faces, whether internal or external. The goal of these elites is to have a role in public affairs or to gain certain privileges. The weak representation of the aware elites in the Iraqi arena has allowed false elites to emerge.
2. The pessimistic elites: This is a group of people who tried to reform the situation, but their efforts failed or were restrained, leaving them frustrated due

to the general state of affairs, and they have become hopeless about reform. These elites may possess many qualities that qualify them to be conscious leaders, but frustration and pessimism have dominated their mindset, making it difficult to revive them and return them to public affairs except with the occurrence of a change that alters the course of events.

3. Affiliated elites: These are groups that possess some characteristics of the aware elites but have become politically linked to parties or media outlets, or have abandoned their role in exchange for certain privileges. Some of these elites struggle with these affiliations or may regret their membership and opposition due to their experiences.

4. Intellectual Elites: This refers to the group of elites who possess a scientific specialization and are mainly composed of academics, including university professors and specialists. These elites are not necessarily conscious, as scientific expertise alone does not fulfill the requirements for understanding society and exerting a positive influence within it. Only a small number of them possess the characteristics of the aware elite.

In summary, the Iraqi arena contains individuals who have thought and awareness regarding political and social issues and events, and they also possess many traits of an enlightened elite. However, this group operates independently rather than within a clear project to reform the current situation. These figures carry a significant responsibility to awaken themselves through self-initiative by engaging, striving, and formulating a shared national vision and project that targets what the religious authority calls for in reforming reality, addressing its problems, and finding appropriate solutions. Practically, it is difficult for all the characteristics of an enlightened elite to be present in the current elites, but they can exist to some extent; you may find someone with a deep understanding of reality

to a high degree while their influence may be limited, and vice versa. Achieving all of these characteristics at a high level among elites is an ideal situation, and they are realized to varying degrees, which calls for establishing a state of elite integration among these individuals.

Conclusion

The arena of Iraqi elites is one of the complex arenas, and discussing the formation of aware elite in Iraq requires a long time in light of this complexity. Therefore, the religious authority concluded its statement regarding the conscious elites by saying, 'However, it seems that Iraqis have a long path ahead to achieve this. May God help them.' It requires significant individual efforts from members of the aware elite, despite their limited numbers and the great challenges they face in taking a position in the Iraqi political scene and influencing it in the desired way, which would enable them to bring about reform. This is what places a great responsibility on aware individual elites to act and work diligently to form this elite and take the initiative to improve the general situation in a gradual, cumulative manner until a class of the aware elites is formed—a state that is ideal and difficult to achieve in the near future. The aware elites will serve as a barrier against any abuse of power for private interests at the expense of the public interest, and also act as a proper source of guidance for the general public, thereby achieving the roadmap outlined by the higher authority through: preparing scientific and practical plans for managing the country based on the principles of competence and integrity in assuming positions of responsibility, preventing all forms of external interference, enforcing the rule of law, confining weapons to the state, and combating corruption at all levels.

Research Identity

Researcher Name: Ghazwan Al-Manhalawi - A researcher focusing on public policies and government reform in Iraq.

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Note:

The views expressed in this research do not necessarily reflect the perspective of the center. they only represent the views of the author.

About center

Al-Baydar Center for Studies and Planning is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established in 2015 and registered with the NGO directorate in the general secretariat of the council of ministers in Baghdad.

The center seeks to contribute to developing the state and its institutions, by proposing ideas and practical solutions to the main problems and challenges facing the state, including improving public sector management, policies, and strategic planning, using reliable data and best practices. The center engages the relevant authorities in the state with regular meetings to support this objective and utilizes the support of international organizations dedicated to assisting Iraq's development. The center also seeks to support economic reforms, and sustainable development and provide technical assistance to the public and private sectors. The center also seeks to support the development of the private sector to provide job opportunities for citizens through training and upskilling, in a way that reduces dependence on government institutions and contributes to supporting and diversifying the country's economy.

The center aims to utilize the vast amount of potential in Iraq's human resources by organizing programs to prepare and develop promising young people, including leaders capable of proposing, adopting and implementing visions and future plans that advance society and preserve its value-system based on the commitment to a high moral standard and rejection of all types of corruption.

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