

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



Report Summary

A Perspective on the Designation of the National Day

Firas Tariq Makkiya

الله أكبر

Publications of Al-Baidar Center for Studies and Planning

The National Day in the modern state serves as a primary symbol of national identity, unifying the diverse segments of society around the symbolism of a pivotal historical moment within the collective memory. This occasion evokes the core of a shared history that binds these components together, establishing a foundation for a common future and destiny. Indeed, a shared future constitutes the vital essence of national identity, yet it remains unsustainable unless anchored in a collective history embodied by the National Day. Therefore, the selection of this day must be executed with precision to facilitate the construction of a unified narrative that defines the state's identity. Accordingly, the selection process must adhere to specific fundamental criteria.

1. It must represent a “shared” pivotal moment in the collective history of all the foundational components of the people.
2. The pivotal moment must be “present” within the collective consciousness of all these components.
3. The pivotal moment must be suitable as a foundation for constructing a narrative that outlines a “future of shared interests.”

It is customary in many countries for the National Day to coincide with Independence Day (from former foreign occupation), as it symbolizes the “birth” of the modern state, whether a historical entity existed prior to the occupation or emerged thereafter in accordance with international and regional balances. This choice, in fact, ideally aligns with the aforementioned National Day criteria. In other cases, earlier historical occasions may be adopted as a national holiday if they represent a moment of consensus within the collective narrative or popular consciousness. However, the philosophy of National Day diverges in other nations;

in some monarchies, the National Day is the day of the King's coronation, where the state and the people are reduced to the persona of the monarch in one of the clearest manifestations of extreme autocracy. Similarly, in some republican systems—particularly during the second half of the twentieth century characterized by the prevalence of military coups—the day of the coup is designated as the National Day in an attempt to bestow legitimacy upon militaristic regimes, thereby transforming the “National Day of the State” into the “National Day of the Regime.” These deviations began to recede with the emergence of the latest wave of democracy that swept the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the last decade of the previous century, which championed freedom of expression, the “will of the nation,” and the recourse to majority rule while safeguarding minority rights.

The blessed birth of the modern Iraqi state, and the subsequent political equation established by the British occupation—which allowed certain elites to monopolize power based on sectarian and ethnic discrimination—played a significant role in the failure to present a unifying national identity. Even the opposing political and cultural elites failed, in turn, to crystallize such an identity. Consequently, the National Day of the Iraqi state fluctuated from the King's coronation day (which changed with each monarch) during the monarchy, to the day of the July 14 coup (or revolution) and the proclamation of the Republic, and later to the July 17 coup. The Iraqi state, which had been effectively collapsing since the disaster of the Kuwait occupation, eventually fell with the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime on April 9, 2003. Since then, both political and cultural elites have again failed to reach a genuine agreement on Iraq's identity. This failure has been evident throughout two decades of change, specifically in the inability to agree on a national flag, emblem, anthem, or National Day. This persists despite early

attempts by the Governing Council, which faced violent resistance from entities opposing the establishment of the new Iraqi state. These entities succeeded in their efforts due to the controversial choices adopted by the Governing Council, such as selecting the day of liberation from Saddam Hussein's regime as the National Day; a significant and justified choice, as liberation from one of the most brutal totalitarian and oppressive regimes represented the spirit of the new state.

However, it is impossible to overlook the fact that this liberation was achieved at the hands of a foreign occupation, a factor that mars the celebration of such a day. Following the transfer of sovereignty, the election of the Constituent Assembly, and the ratification of the Permanent Constitution, a draft law for official holidays was submitted during the first session of the Council of Representatives in February 2008 to complete the constitutional sovereign manifestations. Nevertheless, sectarian and ethnic disputes, along with attempts to assert influence within the political power balance amidst the absence of a shared national identity, hindered the law's passage throughout various parliamentary sessions until its recent enactment under exceptional circumstances on May 23, 2024. During this prolonged period, Iraq remained without an official National Day, even though the "stalled" draft law included a proposal to adopt October 3, 1932—the day of Iraq's admission to the defunct League of Nations—as the National Day. This proposal sparked debates regarding the validity of this choice, with calls for alternative dates such as the Great Iraqi Revolution "Thawrat al-Ishreen" which ignited on June 30, 1920, the Sha'ban Uprising on March 1, 1991, or the Day of Victory over ISIS on December 10, 2018, the latter of which was adopted by the government in a 2018 amendment to the draft law.

The Iraqi government recognized the critical nature of continuing without an official National Day; consequently, the government of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi

submitted the “National Day Law of the Republic of Iraq” on September 1, 2020, as a separate legislation from the Official Holidays Law, which at that time showed no signs of being passed. This draft law adopted the date of Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations as the chosen option, likely for political or ideological reasons, under a government that was itself a subject of profound constitutional and political controversy. This led to the postponement of the first reading of the draft law from September 27, 2020, to July 1, 2021, and subsequently to October 11, 2022, when the Iraqi Council of Representatives finally concluded the first reading. The second reading was completed on November 8, 2022, in a session marked by intense objections. These disputes ultimately resulted in a parliamentary motion signed by 70 members to postpone the vote on the draft law on May 6, 2023. The opposing members demanded instead that the date of the issuance of the “Sufficiency Jihad Fatwa” be designated as the National Day, thereby adding a new date to the list of “national options.” In the following section, we will briefly discuss this list of options in light of the aforementioned criteria.

The coronation of King Faisal I on August 23, 1921, represents the traditional choice for the founding of the state; however, its direct association with the occupation authorities and the High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, compromised its independence and national integrity. This is the same dilemma that faced April 9, 2003, despite it being a pivotal moment for defining the identity of the new state. Consequently, the selection of the date of Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations emerged as a clever maneuver to bypass the “occupation complex,” as it signifies international recognition of Iraq’s independence and the completion of its sovereign statehood pillars.

However, this “maneuver” involves a degree of circumvention and “falsification” of history; for Iraq’s independence on October 3, 1932, was, as

is widely known, purely formal. Iraq's admission to the League of Nations was achieved through a deal with the British occupation in exchange for signing the 1930 Treaty, which stands as the most prominent treaty branding the history of Monarchy-era Iraq with the stamp of dependency on British influence or "occupation." This mirrors the earlier deal to approve the British Mandate via the 1922 Treaty in exchange for preventing the annexation of the Mosul Vilayet to the Turkish Republic. The 1930 Treaty mandated full dependency on the British Empire in the realm of foreign policy, completely isolating Iraq from its Arab surroundings—amidst the Arab nations' struggle for independence from French occupation and the beginnings of the Zionist occupation of Palestine. Furthermore, it granted unrestricted access to Iraqi territories, including land and water routes, railways, ports, airports, and the entirety of Shatt al-Arab. Practically, this granted British forces unconditional access and solidified British military bases on Iraqi soil, resulting in either a masked or overt occupation. It also established the Iraqi army's absolute dependency on the British military for armament and training, while entrenching judicial immunities, privileges, and tax exemptions for British forces. These oppressive conditions shackled Iraq for 25 years, supplemented by treaty annexes that codified absolute British hegemony over the management of railways and ports.

Admittedly, it cannot be denied that this policy stemmed from the vision of a specific Iraqi political elite who sought to gradually dismantle the British occupation, believing that immediate independence was unattainable. However, this approach did not reflect the aspirations or visions of the general public, the cultural elites, or other opposing political factions. To this day, this elite group remains a subject of historical debate, with persistent skepticism regarding their national integrity, their perceived "subservience" to British occupation, and widespread allegations of political and often financial corruption. Consequently,

designating the day of Iraq's admission to the League of Nations as a National Day serves as a tribute to the efforts of these controversial politicians under equally controversial circumstances. While it marks a significant moment in the history of the Iraqi state, it does not represent a "popular" milestone; rather, it was the outcome of political negotiations that ran contrary to the people's desires. Furthermore, this moment was entirely absent from the popular collective consciousness at the time—remaining a formal celebration restricted to the governmental political elite—and it continues to be absent from contemporary public awareness. The vast, if not absolute, majority of the Iraqi people remain uninformed about this day, let alone possessing a sense of pride or emotional attachment to it that would allow it to serve as a symbol for strengthening their national belonging. In contrast to the date of Iraq's admission to the League of Nations stands the day of the Great Iraqi Revolution (June 30, 1920), which granted Iraq its political entity for the first time in the modern era. It compelled the British occupation to recognize the necessity of establishing an Iraqi state—even if granted a formal independence under a government subject to its hegemony—as an alternative to annexing it as a colony under the British Crown, or specifically under the British Raj in India. This revolution was the culmination of the Iraqi people's political and military struggle, forever altering the course of Iraq's history. Moreover, the Great Iraqi Revolution represents one of those rare, pivotal historical moments in Iraq's history where the majority of the people's foundational components unified without exception. It remains present in the collective consciousness of all these components and is a subject of unanimous pride, making it a viable foundation for an Iraqi state that encompasses these diverse groups. This day fulfills all the criteria for a National Day; although it occurred in a relatively distant historical moment, it represents an excellent choice among the available options.

Given the historical distance and total obscurity of October 3, 1932, in the

popular imagination, a more resonant option has recently been proposed: the day of the “Sufficiency Jihad Fatwa” on June 13, 2014. This was truly a pivotal moment in the history of the modern Iraqi state, as it rescued it from certain and total collapse at the hands of ISIS, halting the horrific and brutal violations perpetrated by this terrorist organization—acts that have rarely been paralleled in human history. Furthermore, it represented a rare popular epic in the history of the Iraqi people, whose heroism continues to evoke astonishment. This collective uprising of all social groups in response to the blessed fatwa marks a decisive historical moment that is profoundly present in the collective consciousness, with a resonance far exceeding that of any other historical milestone.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the ISIS offensive, in all its brutality, was a manifestation of civil strife; it exploited sectarian polarizations and conflicts over power distribution within the new regime—tensions that undeniably remain latent beneath the surface. At the time, the organization succeeded, albeit to a limited extent, in counter-sectarianizing the fatwa. Furthermore, certain groups exploited the fatwa in ways that diverged from its original intent of strengthening the national state army. Ultimately, it remains a fatwa issued by a Shiite cleric, regardless of the consensus on his national integrity or the patriotic nature of the fatwa itself. Consequently, it is difficult for such an event to serve as a historical moment with an equal degree of belonging across all societal components, even though it undeniably liberated all groups without exception from the occupation of ISIS or protected them from falling under its yoke. Therefore, this moment the Fatwa may not be sufficiently “shared” or could be subject to contestation. Conversely, one of the direct outcomes of this event which is also a “pivotal” and sufficiently “shared” historical moment that cannot be challenged by any party is the official declaration of victory over ISIS. This moment, which culminated the efforts of all volunteers, fighters, and martyrs on December 10, 2018, possesses all

the necessary elements of a National Day. It is arguably more present especially among the younger generations—than the moment of the Great Iraqi Revolution (1920), although the latter holds a more potent symbolism. However, since no single option can be deemed perfect in every aspect, a preference must be established among these choices based on the proposed criteria. Perhaps the most ideal approach is to involve the people all the people in choosing their National Day, ensuring it becomes a true day for the State rather than the Regime, and avoiding the monopoly of a limited political elite over this decision. This can be practically achieved through a “digital” popular referendum using modern mobile technologies on a specific day, preceded by an intensive government media campaign to present the suitable options that meet the criteria. Such a process does not necessarily have to be a constitutional referendum, as there is no legal obligation requiring the government to adhere to the strict constitutional conditions for referendums in Iraq rather, it would be closer to a public opinion survey. This would ensure the emotional involvement of the people in determining one of their historical symbols, making them feel if only for once a true sense of belonging to the state they founded with their own blood.

Research Identity

Researcher Name: Firas Tariq Makkiya / Political Affairs Researcher.

Title of Research: A Perspective on the Designation of the National Day.

Date of Publication: October 2025.

Note: The opinions expressed in this research do not necessarily reflect the views of the center, but only the opinions of its 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.

All rights reserved to Al-Baydar Center for Studies and Planning

www.baidarcenter.org

info@baidarcenter.org