

Partition Iraq? Imperial Iraq Strategies from Sulᵑiman the Magnificent to Joseph Biden

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The lands of Iraq have been ruled by foreigners for most of their history. Apart from an interlude of real independence between 1958 and 2003, outside forces have always been involved in Iraqi politics as power brokers, constantly concocting new strategies for how to best handle this complex country.

This lecture looks at the imperial strategies pursued by these outsiders, starting with the Ottomans in the 1500s and ending with the Americans after 2003. The main argument is that the partitionist policies currently being propagated by US Democrats (and implemented – albeit unintentionally – by the Bush administration) represent a dramatic break with the policies of America’s imperial predecessors in Iraq. The lecture demonstrates that at no point between 1534 and 1958 did the Ottomans or the British contemplate a sectarian division of Iraq. This lack of historical precedent raises serious questions about the likely durability of the partition models currently under consideration in the US.



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