

Analysis and Assessment for Iraqi Communication Technology Development

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Received: June 20, 2015

Accepted: August 21, 2015

Online Published: September 1, 2015

Abstract: The communications in Iraq has been fluctuated for decades. In fact, this fluctuation constitutes a reality that the country has been facing such as the security issues, the economic blockade imposed on the previous regime, and all the exceptional circumstances. This paper illustrates the nature and reality of communication in Iraq after 2003. While the sophisticated technology works very well all around the world, Iraq still does not keep the work up to improve its communications. This paper tackles the most important communication problems in Iraq after 2003, and the possibility to process good services to customers, either by developing the governmental combinations, or/and by enforcing telecommunication companies to provide their best services to their customers. This paper answers the following the questions: Are the telecom/communication companies serve good qualities to the customers? If not, why? Who is the responsible? Are these companies at least doing their best to serve good qualities? Or are they just profitable companies? Why have these companies not started using the optical fiber cables instead of the copper one? Is the government seeking to compel such companies to serve good services? Whether the Iraqi government plans to develop the landlines services so it would compete with the telecom companies? What is the role of the Communication and Media Commission (CMC)?

Keywords: Telecommunications Companies, Landlines development, Optical Fiber Cables, Copper Cables, Communication and Media Commission, Costumers Services.

1. The Reality of the Telecommunication Sector Before 2003

Telecommunications sector was one of the productive sectors in the period that proceeded the fall of the former regime. This sector had been funding the Government by its revenues, even funding the Ministry of Defense with around (20%) of its revenues. These sector revenues came out from several sources, including:

- a) Internal communications by landlines inside Iraq.
- b) External communications by landlines to outside of Iraq.
- c) Postal services revenues.

During that period of time, there was no Ministry called the Ministry of Communications, only a company named general post and Telecommunications Company in which dependent to the Ministry of Transport, and another competent company ran the Internet services.

2. The Telecommunications Sector After 2003

After the fall of the regime, The Ministry of Communications in Iraq has been composed of two distinct sectors, General Company for Post & Telecommunications and Internet Services Company. Service has

been stopped the external communications by land phones to outside of Iraq for a long time, the number of calls outside Iraq in the year 2001(7430 call) while in 2003 (zero call) (The Central Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). One of the issues is the Communication and Media commission CMC has opened the floodgates to open offices all over the Internet in Iraq without regulation or disciplines. That led abandoned the role of the Internet Services Company. Also, open floodgates for (DHL) offices, which marginalized the role of the postal services and descended its revenues to the minimum, according to data of the Central Bureau of Statistics a postal items in 2001 reached to (2,856,836), while after the fall of the former regime, the number fell in the year 2007 up to (12390), which means (230 times less) than it was in 2001.

3. The Telecommunication Improvement

The Internet Services Company that belongs to the Ministry of Communications provides a bad service that does not compete with what has been provided by private Internet offices. According to statistics by the Central Bureau of Statistics the number of private internet offices reached to 358 in 2006 with profits of more than 10 billion dinars, while the number of offices of Internet Services Company was around 22 and with a profit of less than one million dinars.

The graphic below illustrates the variation of cell phone service in Iraq before and after 2003. Obviously, and as mentioned before, there were no telecom operators in Iraq pre 2003 because telecom service was prohibited during Saddam's regime. This graph also demonstrates the huge change between 2003 and 2006 which happened for two reasons: first, the Coalition Provisional Authority had made authorized three of the telecom operators to work in Iraq, one in the north, one in the center, and the last one in the south, which made those companies monopolize the area of work. Second: the rules and conditions on those three providers were not in required level, thus enable those providers to make their own conditions on the consumers.

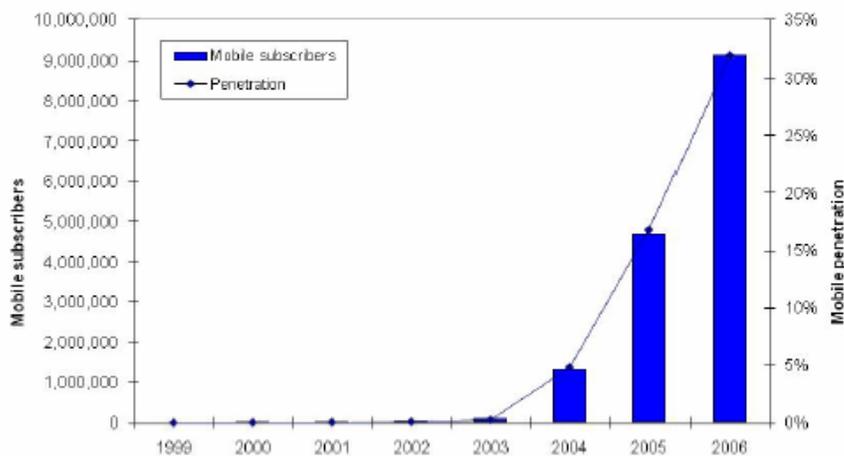


Figure 1. An Example Mobile Service Variation. Reprinted from a report released by the Communication and Media Commission in 2006. n.d Retrieved July 20, 2014, from

<http://www.cmc.gov.iq/public-html/doc/communicationiniraq2006book.pdf>. Copyright 2006 by Communications and Media Commission. Reprinted with permission.

When the CMC took position from the CPA and started running the communication in 2004, it has established new rules that organize the system of telecommunication in Iraq. The CMC has authorized the three companies to work all over the country, which make a competition among the telecom operators. By the end of 2005, 15% of the people were using the cellphone service, which means a huge accomplishment in the view of CMC. The number has increased to reach more than 35% by the end of 2006 (Communication and Media Commission, 2006).

4. The Role of Communication and Media Commission

On March 20, 2004 the Communication and Media Commission (CMC) was established under The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which issued the Order 65, by Paul Bremer, the U.S. Civil Administrator for Iraq. The CPA controlled the media and communication in Iraq, CPA had been licensing and giving frequencies to the media outlets. The order of establishing the CMC has designed based on international conventions and current best practice. In its preamble, it says: “regulations in this context should provide for the fullest exercise of freedom of expression as defined by international Convention, must encourage pluralism and diverse political debate and must empower rather than restrain independent and impartial commentary” (Communication and Media Commission, 2006).

5. Facts about Licensing Telecom Companies and Wireless

Licenses telecom companies has been given in 2007 to three companies for \$ (3.75 billion dollars), equivalent to (1.25 billion dollars) for each company, there was no information declared the value of licenses for companies that were operating before that date, nor permits to landlines companies (wireless).

GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) is one of the techniques of second generation (2G) communications but has been disposed in many countries and most of the neighbored countries have started the third generation (3.5G) so-called (CDMA2000) and others have started working on the fourth generation technology (4 G) so-called (WIMAX) and in many developed countries preparations have started for the fifth-generation technology.

Need to be mentioned that with some of these companies (Zain, for example) operates with sophisticated and evolved techniques in other countries, in which raise up the question, why such techniques are not used in Iraq? Why these telecom companies use copper cables in Iraq which does not reach that long distance and don't use the optical fiber cables. I have to mention in here that there are many great advantages of using the optical fiber cables than the copper one, such as, greater distance, security, immunity and reliability, costs (Damico, 2011).

The issue of contract duration between the telecom companies and the Government is controversial as well. The Iraqi Government has signed a 15 years contract with the telecommunication companies. The communication sector is one of the fastest growing and advanced sectors in the world. Within a period of

less than five years two generations of communication techniques has been figured, so how could the Government or (CMC) would be sure that the companies will improve its service and provides the customers with new techniques, especially these companies are certainly keen to get benefits than to develop the communication techniques.

There is another issue regarding to the contracts; the details of these contracts are undeclared yet, and kept ambiguous. No one knows exactly what the conditions of these contracts are and whether there was a condition to develop their systems and technologies to provide the best services to customers.

6. Why This Ambiguity and Who Could Be the Beneficiary out of This Game?

It seems that what is happening is a process of destruction to telecommunications sector in which has involved a lot of powerful characters that have interests with the owners of telecom companies. These companies argue that the security issue is the main reason of not improving the (GSM) in Iraq, or in other words the security issue is main reason of not using the 3G or 4G system. This answer could not be reasonable, simply because we assume there is a contract and that contract must somehow include providing the best quality to the customers.

7. Solutions for the Telecommunications and Communication Sector in Iraq

- A. Licensing and issuing communication frequencies should involve the Ministry of Communications technically and financially.
- B. Increasing the Ministry of Communications budget, thus lead to projects development.
- C. Binding telecom companies to improve its techniques, so it would cope with the prevailing development in the world. Such as providing the 3G or 4G service.
- D. Reducing call rates and messages rates, and bind these companies to charge based on seconds system.
- E. Developing the landlines so it could compete with the mobile system and improve the quality of services such as Digital subscriber line (DSL).
- F. Develop the internet by increasing the number of offices.
- G. Set up rules and regulation to controls the private internet offices binding such offices to provide better services. A study shows that the benefit of these offices rose up in to more than 50 billion Iraqi dinars in 2010.
- H. Improve the governmental postal service, thus people would be attracted to use the service and get the benefit of it.
- I. Set up the regulations of the private postal offices and it should be controlled.

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