

Iran's New Iraq Policy After Saddam: From Sociological Dynamics to Political Realities

İsmail Sari*

Abstract

Relations between Tehran and Baghdad, from the Baath Party's coup in 1968 to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, were neither neighborly nor normal. Therefore, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein can be considered as one of the turning points in the course of Iran-Iraq relations. With the invasion of Iraq by the US, Iran got rid of an enemy like Saddam, while Iraq quickly entered Iran's influence area. However, the US presence in Iraq has also caused serious security concerns for Iran. During this period, while Iran accelerated its nuclear program due to security concerns, it also maintained its priority of ending the US occupation in Iraq and withdrawing its troops. The new political environment that emerged in post-Saddam Iraq brought risks as well as opportunities for Iran. In addition to the historical and sectarian ties between the Iraqi Shiites and Iran, the search for external support in the power struggle in the country caused the Shiites to get closer to Tehran, while Iran's relations with the Kurds, with whom Iran had cooperated against Baghdad for many years, deteriorated relatively during this new period. While this study analyzes Iran's relations with Shiites and Kurds, which are the main parameters of its policies towards Iraq, it also claims that Iran has increased its effectiveness in Iraq with the Shiite population's increasing presence in the Iraqi administration, though local and regional dynamics will prevent Iran from continuing this activity for a longer period of time. Consequently, Iran's policies towards post-Saddam Iraq are analyzed in this context.

Keywords: Iran, Iraq, Shiites, Kurds, Middle East.

* Assist. Prof., Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Sociology, Ankara, Turkey, ismail.sari@hbv.edu.tr , ORCID: 0000-0003-2623-2494

Saddam Sonrası İran'ın Yeni Irak Politikası: Sosyolojik Dinamiklerden Politik Gerçeklere

İsmail Sarı*

Öz

Tahran ile Bağdat arasındaki ilişkiler Baas Partisi'nin 1968'deki darbesinden 2003'de ABD'nin Irak işgaline kadar, hiçbir zaman iyi komşuluğa dayanmadığı gibi normal de olmamıştır. Dolayısıyla İran-Irak ilişkilerinin seyri açısından Saddam Hüseyin'in devrilmesi dönüm noktalarından biri olarak kabul edilebilir. Zira 2003 yılında ABD'nin Irak'ı işgaliyle İran, Saddam gibi bir düşmanından kurtulurken, Irak ise kısa süre içinde İran'ın nüfuz alanı haline gelmiştir. Ancak bununla birlikte Irak'taki ABD varlığı İran için ciddi güvenlik endişelerine de neden olmuştur. Bu dönemde İran güvenlik kaygılarıyla nükleer programına hız verirken, Irak'taki ABD işgalinin sona ermesi ve askerlerinin çekilmesi önceliğini de korumuştur. Saddam sonrası Irak'ta oluşan yeni siyasi ortam, İran için fırsatlarla birlikte riskleri de getirmiştir. Irak Şiiileri ile İran arasındaki tarihi ve mezhepsel bağların yanı sıra ülkedeki iktidar mücadelesinde dış destek arayışı Şiiilerin İran'a yakınlaşmasına neden olurken, İran'ın uzun yıllar ortak düşman Bağdat'a karşı işbirliği geliştirdiği Kürtler ile ilişkileri ise bu yeni dönemde görece bozulmuştur. Bu çalışma İran'ın Irak'a yönelik politikalarının temel parametreleri olan Şiiiler ve Kürtler ile ilişkilerini analiz ederken, İran'ın, Irak'ta Şii nüfusun yönetimde söz sahibi olmasıyla bu ülkede etkinliğini arttırdığını ancak yerel ve bölgesel dinamiklerin İran'ın daha uzun süre bu etkinliği devam ettirmesine engel olacağını iddia etmektedir. Bu bağlamda Saddam sonrası dönemde İran'ın Irak'a yönelik politikaları analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Irak, Şiiiler, Kürtler, Ortadoğu.

* Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü, Ankara, Türkiye, ismail.sari@hbu.edu.tr , ORCID: 0000-0003-2623-2494

1. Introduction

For states like Iraq, which could relatively be classified as a “*weak/failed state*” after the collapse of government and the subsequent anarchical environment, the establishment of national security is also not possible due to the weakness of the government’s institutional presence (Newman, 2007, 2009). Local actors tend to come into prominence during these circumstances, as a democratic and strong constitutional structure cannot be established. In this political atmosphere, new actors, instead of reforming the government, try to strengthen their own sects (Salihi, 2017, p.17). In this respect, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein the sudden chaos in Iraq and the unstable situation in Iraqi politics made it possible for local/ethnic/sectarian movements promising security to flourish, because the ordeals several communities have gone through in the past brought together those who are going through the same experiences and triggered the emergence of ethnic nationalism (Salihi, 2017, p.18).

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein also affected Iran-Iraq relations. When we look back at the historical context, border problems, ethnic tensions, and regional geopolitical transformations have largely been decisive in both countries relations. While the two countries took part together in the Baghdad Pact against the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, relations began to regress with the change of government in Baghdad in 1958. During this period, the new Baghdad government became an ally of the Soviet Union. At this stage, unresolved issues such as border uncertainty, access to the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and ethnic tensions were exacerbated. Another factor that has overwhelmingly affected Iran-Iraq relations is the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Although the revolution in Iran overthrew Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, one of Baghdad’s strongest rivals in the Gulf and one of the West’s strongest regional allies, Iraq’s reaction to the developments was not positive. Revolutionary Iran, which turned to revisionist policies in the region, was perceived as a threat by Arab nationalist-secular Iraq, where the majority of Shiites but Sunnis dominate. While Iraq attacked Iran to turn the uncertainty in Iran into an opportunity, the Gulf countries and the US, which united against the Iranian threat, supported Iraq. The Gulf countries, which benefited from the containment of Iran, thought that with such a war, they would get rid of the effects of the Khomeini regime on their countries. The eight-year war (1980-89) between Iran and

Iraq and the geopolitical changes that followed and the ongoing rivalry increased the hostility between Iran's revolutionary regime and Saddam's government (Ehteshami. 2003, pp.115-117). While the global and regional developments after the September 11 attacks have also deeply affected relations between the two countries, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was a turning point in relations.

After the 9/11 terror attacks, the Washington administration, with the justification of being threatened by some governments and organizations, followed a new strategy called "*preemptive strike*" (Dumbrell, 2010). For this reason, after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the US invaded Iraq in 2003, on the grounds that the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was in the possession of weapons of mass destruction. The invasion of Iraq by the US revolutionized the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf. The relations between Iran and Iraq were among those that were radically changed by this move from the US (Takeyh, 2006). Iran, which eliminated its arch enemies in the east and west (The Taliban and Saddam Hussein) thanks to the US, on the other hand, was alarmed by the US's settlement in the region.

During this period, US President Bush described Iran as being a part of the "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea. With the start of the military operation against Iraq that the US included in the axis of evil, there was a widespread concern in these countries that the turn would come to Syria and Iran. In addition, Bush accused the Tehran administration of concealing some nuclear materials in the Natanz and Arak regions. These allegations that Iran is hiding nuclear materials started a new crisis in Iran-US relations (Ercan & Bilgin, 2012, p.4).

While Iran accelerated its nuclear program due to security concerns, it also gave top priority to the matters of ending the American occupation in Iraq, and the departure of American soldiers from the country. However, in this new situation, the fact that Iraq's Shiite majority, about 60 percent of the country's population, is the ruling majority has also created new opportunities for Iran at the domestic, regional, and international levels (Barzegar, 2008, p.96). In the following pages, Iran's new policy towards Iraq in the post-Saddam era and its relations with Shiites and Kurds will be analyzed. In addition, after the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the expansion of Daesh in Iraq, Iran's relations with the Baghdad government and their military cooperation will be discussed. Finally, the challenges

faced by Iran in Iraq and Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq's prime minister, seeking a new equilibrium in the relationship with Iran will be deliberated.

2. Iran's New Iraq Strategy

In Iran's regional strategy, Iraq is hugely important geopolitically. Iraq provides Iran with a land connection to its Syrian and Lebanese allies as Iran's western neighbor and Syria's eastern neighbor. This ground connection has allowed Iranian-backed militias to readily move between the three countries against perceived challenges to the Iranian-led "axis of resistance" in the area, particularly since the start of the Syrian war in 2011 and the expansion of Daesh in 2014. At the same time, because of Iraq's geopolitical importance, Iran is extremely sensitive to competing forces' presence and actions in Iraq. In addition, Tehran sees Iraq as a potential market for Iranian goods, as well as power and gas exports. It also uses Iraq's geographic location to establish transit links with Iran, Syria, the Mediterranean, and eventually Europe. Finally, in the social field, Iran tried to provide a social and ideological basis to expand its influence in Iraq by gaining the support of the Iraqi people, especially the Shiites (Azizi, 2021).

After the overthrow of Saddam, the influence of the Shiite and Kurdish political-religious elites in Iraq, who spent most of their lives in exile in Iran during the Saddam era is one important reason for increasing Iran's influence in Iraqi politics. Iran supported the Iraqi Shiites both during the Baath regime and during the process of transition to the democratic system, where they could turn their crowds into political influence. Furthermore, the rise in sectarian tensions in Iraq, as well as the discomfort of the Arab countries regarding Shiites getting more powerful, pushed Shiites closer to Iran. In other words, the positive attitude of the Shiites towards Iran is a result of the historical and sectarian ties between the parties, as well as the asking for external support in the power struggle in Iraq (Sinkaya, 2013, p.10).

In Iraq, which was restructured after 2003, the establishment of an administrative system based on an ethnic (Kurdistan Regional Government) federal structure and the relative progress of this region in terms of security, stability and economy, compared to other regions, led other segments of society to create an ethnic (Arab-Kurdish) or a sectarian-based (Shiite-

Sunni) federal region. The central government in Baghdad, on the other hand, is weak, unable to withstand terrorist attacks, incapable of providing basic services to citizens and is susceptible to corruption. Sectarian strife, one of the most prominent features of this political process, has become a chronic problem in Iraq and has been the main reason for the endless political and security crises in the country since 2003 (Abbas, 2017, p.82). In the new political atmosphere, Iran tried to improve its relations with different actors in its new Iraq strategy. Iran has strong relations with the Iraqi Kurds like it has historical relations with the Iraqi Shiites.

2.1. Iran's Relations with Iraqi Shiites

Iran has always supported Shiite groups in Iraq that have a positive view of Iran as opposed to Sunni, nationalist, or pan-Arab groups that traditionally do not have a positive view of Iran. In this respect, in the new post-Saddam era, Shiite groups have become Iran's main allies in Iraq, even if they cannot fully and sustainably dominate the Iraqi government.

Three families come forward among the Shiites of which Iran has assumed patronage in Iraq: Sadr, al-Hakim and Shirazi. These families became important representatives of Shia Islam in Iraq. However, the relations between these families and Iran change over time. The Sadr family is the most well-known Shiite group in Iraq (Rezaei, 2019). The Sadr family in Najaf was specifically targeted in Saddam's operations following the Shiite uprising attempts that failed in 1991. During Saddam's hegemony (1980-2003), the leading figures of the family were killed. Currently, the leader of the al-Sadr group is Muqtada al-Sadr, son of Grand Ayatollah Muhammed Sadiq al-Sadr, who was killed in 1999 and the nephew and son-in-law of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was executed by Saddam in 1981 (Arı, 2004, p.524). Sadr has put a strong emphasis on "Iraqiness" and "Arab identity". Following the overthrow of the Baath regime, the Sadr group and its militia, the Mahdi Army, emerged as an effective force in street politics. Although the Sadr group, which has never left Iraq, was initially quite distant from both Iran and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Dawa Party, both of which were thought to be under Iranian influence. But this group relatively approached Iran as the coalition and government forces increased pressure on the Sadr group in 2007 (Sinkaya, 2013, p.12). In the following period, Sadr returned to his distanced stance from Iran.

Firstly Sadr increased his influence in the 2018 elections, gaining the most votes and 54 seats in the parliament. As a populist leader, Sadr, unlike some other Shiite leaders, opposes Iranian influence in the country. Sadr, who follows a “nationalist” policy, argues that foreign countries, including the US, should not interfere with Iraq’s decision-making mechanisms. According to the results, Sadr’s party became first in the Iraqi parliamentary elections held on October 10, 2021. Sadr promised to establish a nationalist government independent of foreign intervention in his victory speech (BBC, 2021).

The political movement closest to Iran among Iraqi Shiites is the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), which was founded by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim in 1982. SCIRI (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), the precursor of ISCI was established by the Shiite politicians who took refuge in Iran, under the auspices of the Iranian administration and under the leadership of al-Hakim. With the support of Iran, it started armed attacks against the Baathist government. The Revolutionary Guards were effective in terms of the establishment, training, and organization of the Badr Brigade as a militia force, affiliated with SCIRI. SCIRI, which was directly under the influence of Iran, with its adherence to the “Velayat-i Faqih” principle of the Iranian regime, and the Badr Brigade’s participation in the Iranian-Iraq war, taking the sides of Iran, caused the organization to be seen as an agent used by Iran to expand its sphere of influence. Aiming to establish a state based on religious principles in Iraq, as in the case of Iran, the group tried to achieve a good position in the restructuring process of Iraq without having too many problems with the United States during the occupation process (Ari, 2004, p.525). This group is in intense competition with the Sadr group. While al-Muwatin coalition, backed the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq led by Ammar al-Hakim, which is seen as the political continuation of the al-Hakim tradition, won 19 seats in the 2018 elections, it won only 4 seats in the 2021 elections by making an electoral alliance with the former prime minister Haider al-Abadi. Thus, the al-Hakim Group was among the losers of the 2021 election (Reuters, 2021).

Another Shiite group that has an influence on Iraq is the Islamic Dawa Party. The group, established in 1959, has been carrying out all its activities from abroad or undercover in recent years. Mohammad Nasiri, the leader

of the group, returned to Iraq after the US invasion in order to seek support. The group, which did not attend the first meetings chaired by the United States, later became involved in the process. Dawa leaders stated that they wish to have a pluralistic government in power based on democracy and human rights (Ari, 2004, p.527). Compared to the Islamic Council of Iraq, the Dawa Party has been less close to Iran. Some of the members of the Dawa Party who immigrated to Iran in the early 1980s due to the Baath regime's anti-Dawa approach were uncomfortable by Iran's unification of the Iraqi opposition under the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq in 1982 and therefore, went to Syria. After, the Dawa was divided into three parts, namely the London branch, the Damascus branch, and the Iranian branch, which was under the influence of Iran. The Iranian-influenced branch of the Dawa founded the Tanzim al-Iraq under the leadership of Abdulkarim al-Anazi and Shirwan al-Waili just before the invasion. Tanzim al-Iraq was one of the first political parties to return to Baghdad after the fall of the Baath regime. After other members of Dawa returned to Iraq, the party was reorganized in the entire country and attained an influential position in Iraqi politics (Keynoush, 2016).

The party's leaders Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and Nouri al-Maliki, were elected as Prime Ministers of Iraq in April 2005 and May 2006, respectively. Along with the changes within the Dawa Party, Jaafari lost support in sectarian tensions and increasing violence in the country. Therefore in April 2007, Maliki was elected as the General Secretary of the Islamic Dawa Party (Sinkaya, 2013, p.11). On August 11, 2014, Iraqi President Fuad Masum nominated Haider al-Abadi, who previously served as the Dawa Party's political bureau chief and spokesperson, as well as vice president of the assembly. Al-Abadi was Iraq's Prime Minister from September 2014 to October 2018. Former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, a senior leader Dawa, heads the State of Law coalition which won 25 seats in 2018. Maliki is widely blamed for fuelling corruption and anti-Sunni sectarianism that helped Islamic State gain followers. The Dawa Party of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, known to be close to Tehran, was the third biggest winner and took more seats than it had in the previous parliament in the 2021 election (Atlantic Council, 2021).

In addition, Iran has given significant support to Shiite militias in their struggle against American forces. Among the militias supported by Iran is

the Jaish al-Mahdi (the Mahdi Army), which started the anti-US uprising in April 2004. Two other powerful Iranian-backed militias - Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq - also came to the fore as active members of the anti-US front since 2006. When the US government officially announced the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011, Iran's influence in Iraq reached its highest level in recent history (Azizi, 2021). Thus after the 2014-2017 War with Daesh, some components of Hashd al-Shaabi politicized and decided to enter the 2018 elections, and they received support from Iran. This initiative entered the 2018 elections as the Fatah Coalition and came in second by receiving 13.16% of the vote. Hadi al-Amiri is the leader of the coalition. In this coalition, there were groups that left the Sadr Group and were close to Iran, especially Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asaib Ehli-l Haq. The Iran-backed Fatah Coalition, which won 48 seats in the 2018 elections, was defeated when it lost more than two-thirds of its seats in the 2021 elections (Reuters, 2021).

It cannot be said that Iran has good relations with all Shiite groups in Iraq. In particular, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most influential Shiite religious leader, in Iraq, has a distant stance towards Iran. In addition, he does not share the idea of "Velayat-i Faqih", which is the basic idea of the Iranian regime. Ayatollah Sistani gave fatwas urging the country to get along well not only with Iran but also with Arab states in the region (Mustafa, 2016). The cold rivalry between the Kum and Najaf schools, which has lasted for many years, is a situation that requires attention in this regard. So much so that, for the first time in his lifetime, Sistani met with an Iranian President who is Hassan Rouhani on March 13, 2019, and He warned Iran not to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs in the meeting (Daragahi, 2019). Ayatollah Sistani held a meeting with the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy to Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert on September 13, 2020, requested that the parliamentary elections in Iraq be held under the supervision of UN representatives. Sistani's invitation of UN observers to the Iraqi elections caused tension in Iran-Sistani relations. Hossein Shariatmadari, Editor-in-Chief of Kayhan Newspaper published in Iran and affiliated with Supreme leader Ali Khamenei, criticized Sistani's call (Kayhan, 2020). Shariatmadari's criticism of Sistani in the Kayhan newspaper brought up two prominent issues regarding Iran-Iraq relations again. The first is Iran's intervention in Iraq's internal affairs, and the second is the Qom-Najaf conflict in the Shiite world.

2.2 Iran's Relations with the Iraqi Kurds

After the US invasion of Iraq and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the balance of regional power and strategic alliances in the Middle East has once again changed dramatically. Therefore Iraqi Kurds have achieved the most autonomous structure since World War I. (Entessar, 2010). Moreover, when the US invaded Iraq in 2003, a new era opened for the Kurds. After the invasion, the Iraqi Kurds were playing an increasing role in Baghdad. The US government relied on Kurds to serve their interests in Baghdad, to become advocates for internal talks in Iraq, and to make decisions about Iraq's relations with the United States. The Kurds constantly supported the US in Baghdad and thus played an important role in rebuilding Iraq (Shareef, 2014). For the first time in Iraq's history, a Kurdish president was elected in January 2005. Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were also Kurdish.

Although Iran is uncomfortable with the good relations between the Kurds and the US, it attempted to preserve its good relations with the Kurds, as it had done before the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. Thus, having an influence on the Iraqi Kurds, it has regarded the Kurds as an important actor in Iraqi policy, considering them as an indispensable balancing element both in preserving its own border security and in maintaining its interests in Baghdad. It is well acknowledged that Iran used the Kurds to create instability in Iraq. But, after the overthrow of Saddam It saw Kurds as a balancing factor against the Arab nationalism in Iraq (Power, 2007).

Looking back over the previous century, it is seen that Iran and Iraqi Kurds were allied against their mutual enemy, Baghdad. Despite occasional tensions between Iraqi Kurds and Iran, Iran supported Kurdish uprisings against Baghdad in 1961, 1963, and 1965 until the 1975 Algiers Agreement. However, the 1975 Algiers Agreement signed for the settlement of the problems between Iran and Iraq also stipulated that Tehran cut off support to the Kurds in Iraq (Yıldız, 2004, pp.23-24). While Iran withdrew its support for the Kurds upon this agreement, the Baghdad government succeed in suppressing the Kurds who were deprived of Iran's support. Following the Iranian Revolution, however, it re-established contact with the Kurds after the war with Iraq in 1980, and the two anti-Baghdad actors conducted joint operations against Iraqi forces in this process. Furthermore, while Iran welcomed Kurdish refugees during the war, it also permitted political-

military elites from groups such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) to settle in Iran (McDowail, 1996, pp.287-367). In order, not to strengthen Iran, the US chose to overlook Saddam Hussein's massacres against the Kurds. On March 16, 1988, the Baghdad administration used chemical gas in Halabja against the Kurds who had cooperated with Iran. The US believed that the conflict between Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini was beneficial to its interest (Power, 2007).

There had been a two-way interaction between Iranian Kurds and Iraqi Kurds until the fall of Saddam Hussein. While the Iranian government backed the Iraqi Kurds, the Baghdad government backed the Iranian Kurds as well. In addition, there were Iraqi Kurds who immigrated to Iran as a result of unsuccessful rebellions, and after the Second World War, following the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's subversion in 1947 of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, which was established in 1946 within the border of Iran through the support of the Soviet Union, many Iranian Kurds also immigrated to Iraq. The Kurds migrating to Iraq were reorganized with the support of the Iraqi government and entered the struggle against the Shah in the 1960s. The headquarters of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and KOMALA, which became stronger with the support of Baghdad, have been in Iraq since then (Keskin, 2015).

The KDPI is a political party established after World War II. Its first leader, Ghazi Mohammed, led an armed struggle against the Iranian government for years, backed by tens of thousands of peshmerga. Others followed in his footsteps after he was executed by the Iranian government. Their second important leader, Doctor Qasim, was also executed by Iranian government. Problems occurred between Iranian Kurds and the Tehran government following these executions, particularly after the 1979 revolution. For years, the Kurdish opposition in Iran carried out clandestine operations against Tehran. However, Iran did not respond positively to any of the Kurdish demands for rights. Thousands of people died in armed conflicts in the country. The KDPI's armed struggle lasted until 1996. Realizing the fact that no achievements were obtained with the help of weapons, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani invited the KDPI to Northern Iraq. Thereupon, most of the party members came and settled in the camps allocated for them in Northern Iraq.

After the Gulf War II, the cooperation relation between Iran and Iraqi Kurds against a mutual enemy, which had grown organically with the intense migrations experienced in the 1980s and had a historical continuity as described above, began to change. Finally, after the US invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the US has taken over the traditional patronage role of the Iraqi Kurds from Iran. Additionally, Iran no longer needed the Kurds to weaken Baghdad, the establishment of a Shiite-dominated and Iran-friendly government in Baghdad has become a contradictory aspect of the relationship between Iran and the Kurds. From the perspective of the Kurds, the US factor became an important parameter of the current relations with Iran (Gunter, 2011b, 2011c, 2011a). Because Kurds have good relations with the US. The Kurds did not want to take sides in the Iran-US conflict. After the American invasion of Iraq, the cooperation relation between Tehran and Erbil against Baghdad, which is the mutual enemy, has left its place to the Tehran-Baghdad alliance, and the Iraqi Kurds have become the opposite party in this equation. According to Iran, Iraq should protect its territorial integrity, support democratic pluralism, and strengthen the central government while weakening the federal structure (Takeyh, 2008, p.27).

After the 2010 Arab Spring, Iran increased its influence in the Middle East over Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, which alarmed the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as well as other regional Sunni governments; the KRG began to seek new ways to counter Iran's struggle for hegemony in the region through Shiism (Sinkaya, 2014). Barzani's visits to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in December 2015 are important in this respect. Sources close to Barzani stated that during this visit, there were no conditions for living together in Iraq due to the negative attitude of the federal government and for this reason, they followed it with concern along with Arab countries, especially with Saudi Arabia that Barzani felt the pulse for an independent Kurdistan, and, Iran had taken steps towards becoming a regional power by increasing its influence in the region and its influence in the governments in Syria and Iraq (Azad, 2015)

Following Barzani's visit, numerous developments took place in the region that drew Tehran's attention. Several Kurdish organizations, delegations, and religious functionaries visited Saudi Arabia by Tehran was likewise suspicious of the operations of the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Erbil (Ali,

2017). In addition, after the KDPI resumed actions in Iran at the end of 2016, Iranian authorities made statements accusing Riyadh and Erbil. In this direction, the Tehran government expressed its discomfort with the attacks of the KDPI, which was headquartered in Erbil, and demanded that the KDPI's Peshmerga members be barred from crossing through Kurdish-controlled border gates and that the attacks in the Iranian Kurdistan Region be halted (Aslan, 2016). Iran continues to make similar demands and conduct similar military operations in the region today (September 2021).

The independence of Northern Iraq since the establishment of a semi-independent Kurdish region in the north of Iraq in the second wave of the Gulf War has been intensively discussed by Tehran, and the negative consequences of such a situation in the region have been voiced. However, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraqi Kurdish leaders increased their dominance in the north under the protective roof of the US, as well as the tension between Erbil and Baghdad, especially in terms of sharing resources and controlling oil fields and disputed regions, Kurdish rulers openly state that their ultimate goal is independence (Nader, Hanauer, Allen, & Scotten, 2016).

While the Kurdistan Regional Government declared in June 2017 that it had decided to hold the independence referendum on September 25, the referendum was held this time, despite prior independence referendum decisions being postponed numerous times (Reuters, 2017). On the other hand, the Baghdad government opposed the referendum but was unable to stop it from taking place. Of course, this referendum was about more than Iraqi internal politics between the Erbil regional government and the Baghdad central government. Despite the fact that the referendum did not result in a direct declaration of independence, it had a considerable impact on regional dynamics.

The Northern Iraq Independence Referendum was cause the self-determination principle, which is considered one of the most controversial issues of the 20th century, to come to the fore again in the Middle East. In this context, Iran is the country that has the most problems in terms of territorial integrity and political integrity in the region and has the highest level of sensitivity in this sense (Uzman & Balci, 2017). The most important

factor shaping Iran's perspective on Iraqi Kurds is the separatist potential¹ of the Kurdish minority in its own country. Due to the multi-ethnic structure of Iranian society and as the legitimate rights of these ethnic groups are generally ignored by the Tehran government, Kurdish, Arab, Baluch and Turkmen minorities have not embraced the official Iranian identity. Azeri Turks, who constitute the majority of the minority in Iran, have different problems. Given that more than half of Iran's population is based on non-Persian ethnic elements and ethnic nationalism is on the rise in the country, the Tehran government is able to foresee the domino effect of the Northern Iraq referendum and its independence as the next stage (Barzegar, 2014).

As expected, Iranian Kurds were not indifferent to the referendum decision of the Kurdistan Regional Government. The KDPI and KOMALA, which have offices in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, have announced that they support the KRG's referendum decision. Mustafa Hijri, Secretary-General of KDPI, and Abdullah Muhtedi, First Secretary of KOMALA, stated that the result of the referendum would increase the self-confidence of the Iranian Kurds and set a precedent for them. In addition, it is known that the Dawat and Islah Community, which is one of the leading Sunni Kurdish groups in Iran, and the Mekteb-i Qur'an Movement, have positive opinions about the referendum and these groups have close relations with the Iraqi Kurdistan Islamic Union Party (İttihad-ı İslam), which supports the referendum (Koç, 2017). In this respect, it is not possible for Tehran to have a positive view of an independent Kurdish state in the region. These formations are both internal and external security threats for Iran.

In the face of these developments, Iran gave a message to the Kurdistan government clearly in signing the defense cooperation agreement with Iraq on July 23, 2017. In the meeting, Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehgan with Iraqi Defense Minister Arfan al-Hayali emphasized that national unity

¹ Although the precise population of Kurds in Iran is unknown, it is estimated to be between 5 and 7 million. Shiites make up 30 percent of the population, while Sunni Kurds make up 70 percent. Sunni Kurds are the majority of those who adopt Kurdish nationalism. Shiite Kurds, on the other hand, have been integrated into the system within Iran. It can be said that the nationalist Kurds have been working to establish an "autonomous Kurdistan" within the border of Iran from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. For this purpose, Iranian Kurds carried out armed actions against both the Shah and Khomeini governments. This conflict has kept the Kurdish issue on the agenda in Iran and the ethnic issue in Iran has been identified with the "Kurdish question" (Keskin, 2015).

and integrity in Iraq guarantees stability, security and the interests of all ethnic groups in the country. The defense cooperation agreement gained more meaning in this context. Thus, on the one hand, Iran demonstrated its full support for Baghdad; on the other hand, it sent a message to the Erbil government. Also on these dates, Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran (SNSC) especially emphasized the territorial integrity of Iraq in his meeting with the Iraqi minister. Referring to the independence referendum of Northern Iraq, Shamkhani stated that all kinds of separatist tendencies in Iraq will lead this country to instability and insecurity. General al-Hayali, Iraq's Defense Minister, stated that separatist tendencies would put Iraq in jeopardy, and that the Iraqi Army would not tolerate any sedition or illegal attempt to divide the country (Sahebkhavar, 2017). SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani also touched upon this issue during his meeting with Abdullah Rasul Ali, Deputy Secretary-General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, held in Tehran on 17 July. Shamkhani asserted during the meeting that the IKRG's independence referendum decision never corresponded to the actual needs and priorities of the Iraqi people, and that it was a colonial power's plan to weaken Iraq.

The Tehran government also expressed its opposition to the referendum from the highest authority. During the meeting between the Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in 20 June, Khamenei said that Iran was against the independence referendum that envisaged the separation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government from Iraq (BBC Persian, 2017). Iran put some embargoes and closed the border gates with Northern Iraq, but gave up on them soon after. Although Iran-KRG relations deteriorated for a short time after the referendum held in 2017, Iran took steps to quickly restore relations to limit Turkey's influence here. However, bilateral relations could not return to before the 2017 referendum.

3. Iran-Iraq Relations After 2011

The period that started with the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and ended with the US retreating in 2011 left three significant legacies. Accordingly, the south of Iraq was homogenized in the axis of the Shiite population, the northern Iraq region was severely separated from the central government

in Baghdad, and the terrorist actions that started during the occupation period turned into the main dynamic of the country's politics. While the first of these main dynamics drew Baghdad closer to Iran's axis, the second drew Erbil closer to Turkey, and the third, centered on the Daesh axis, drastically altered regional politics (Balci, 2016). In this context, the exclusion of Sunnis from Iraqi politics with the support of Iran has had negative consequences both in Iraq and in terms of finding an area for an organization like Daesh to develop. But Iran's considerable military assistance to Iraq in the fight against Daesh cleared the path for greater military collaboration between the two countries in the process that started with Daesh's attack on some cities in Iraq in 2014. Therefore, security threats against Iraq have led to the increase of Iran's influence in Iraq and the deepening of strategic relations between the two countries. While the rise of Daesh as a threat in Iraq caused alarm bells to ring in Tehran, on the other hand, it was considered as an opportunity to improve relations between Iran and Iraq in the field of defense (Tamer, 2016, p. 109). In other words, since the power gaps in international politics would be filled by other actors in a short time, Iran also attempted to fill the power gaps created by Daesh in Iraq in its own way.

Hashd al-Shaabi also played a key role in the victory Iran achieved in Iraq in the fight against Daesh (Kardas, 2017). In the process of Daesh's actions and establishing control of a large territory, the Iraqi army and security forces proved unsuccessful. After the Iraqi army could not stop the progress of the organization, following the jihad call of Ayatollah Ali es-Sistani, the largest Shiite religious authority in Iraq, thousands of Iraqi Shiites formed the "Hashd al-Shaabi", known as the "Popular Mobilization Forces", under the leadership of militia groups (Duman, 2016). However, Hashd al-Shaabi, which was established as reinforcement to the Iraqi security forces, has evolved into a regular army over time and joined the Iraqi army. In this respect, Iran is also de facto effective within the Iraqi army. The fact that Hashd al-Shaabi was so closely linked to the Iraqi army and that Iran gained an area of influence on this occasion also attracted the attention of the US government. However, the fact that the fight against Daesh is at the top of the priority list, as well as the idea that this fight cannot be won without Iran, has permitted the United States to shut its eyes to the situation (Tabatabai & Esfandiary, 2017, p.133).

Daesh, which is actually a continuation of al-Qaeda in Iraq, emerged as a new global terrorist organization with the effect of the authority gap after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the chaos caused by the developments after the Arab Spring. Daesh had a chance to strengthen its authority in the region by using the retreating of US troops from Iraq in 2011, the pressure imposed by the Shiite government in Baghdad on Iraq's Sunni groups, and the gap left by the popular uprising in Syria devolving into a civil war. While the chaotic environment in the region increased the influence of Daesh, it also enabled Iran, which introduced itself as the antidote to the Wahhabi thought that produces terror like Daesh, to expand its area of influence. While Iran found the opportunity to expand its influence in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen in the Arab Spring, the Obama administration moved closer to Iran's policies at the expense of its traditional allies in the Middle East. On the other hand, with the nuclear agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries in 2015, the American government allowed Iran to play a more active role in the region, especially as a counterweight to Sunni states and groups. In this respect, the Iranian threat has brought Israel and many regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia, closer, created a regional bloc and increased the tension in the Middle East. It also prepared the path for the Trump administration to construct an anti-Iranian axis (Saudi Arabia- UAE-Israel) in the region (Tajbakhsh, 2019).

Especially in May 2018, the Trump administration's withdrawal of the United States from the nuclear agreement and the start of the containment policies of Iran signaled the beginning of a new era for Iraq as well as for Iran. In this process, Iraq has become an area of conflict between US and Iran. The pro-Iranian Shiite militias' attack on the US K1 Military Base in Kirkuk on December 27, 2019, sparked a fresh round of tension between Washington and Tehran over Iraq. This tension, which culminated in the killing of Qasem Soleimani, the Commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Vice President of the pro-Iranian Hashd al-Shaabi organization, in a missile attack on the airport in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, on January 3, 2020, turned into a hot conflict between the pro-Iranian Shiite militias and the US with the attacks on the Taji Camp in Iraq on March 11, 2020 (The New York Times, 2020). Since the killing of Soleimani, pro-Iranian groups in Iraq have continued their intermittent attacks on US missions and military bases. Despite the fact that the intensity of these attacks has diminished as

a result of the relative decrease in US-Iranian animosity since Joe Biden's election as US president in 2020, it is nevertheless utilized as a message to Iran in nuclear discussions from time to time. However, Iran does not allow large-scale attacks that will adversely affect the nuclear discussions. In addition, the airstrikes on June 28, 2021, targeting the operation bases and weapons storage facilities of the US Iranian forces at two points in Syria and one in Iraq, have shown once again that the US will continue to target Iran's presence in the region.

4. Iraq Seeks a New Equilibrium in Relationship with Iran

Iran sees the United States, Arab Gulf States, and Turkey as its main competitors in the race for greater influence in Iraq. The growing influence of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in Iraq further complicates the situation. Since the beginning of 2020, Turkey has increased its activities in Northern Iraq to combat terrorists linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In addition, Turkey has good economic relations with the KRG. According to Iran and its Iraqi allies, Turkey's ultimate goal is to dominate the Iraq-Turkey border region. Furthermore, Iran is concerned about Saudi Arabia's growing ties with the Iraqi government. By establishing close ties with Baghdad, Riyadh appears to be attempting to limit Iran's influence in Iraq's political, security, and economic fields. Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq's prime minister, wants to restore balance to his country's foreign relations by strengthening ties with Riyadh. The Saudis may also be able to assist him in achieving this goal. As a result, Iran faces an environment that challenges Tehran's hitherto overwhelming influence in Iraq (Azizi, 2021).

What further complicates matters for Iran is that some Iraqi politicians, traditionally known to be close to Iran, are also moving away from Tehran. At the top of the list is the influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. According to the results of the early general elections held in Iraq on October 10, 2021, the Sadr Group, affiliated with es-Sadr, became the first party. According to the final election results published by the Iraqi official news agency: "Sadr Group 73 led by Muqtada es-Sadr, Takaddum Party 37 led by Former Parliament Speaker Muhammed Halbusi, State of Law Coalition 33 led by former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Masoud Barzani 31, Fatah Coalition 17 led by

Hadi al-Amiri, the political extension of Hashd al-Shaabi close to Iran, Azim Coalition 14 affiliated with Sunni politician Hamis Hançer, alliance consisting of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Goran 17, New Generation Movement 9, Nasiriyah-based Imtidad Coalition won 9 seats.” As can be seen from the election results, pro-Iranian groups have suffered a great defeat (Reuters, 2021).

The Sadr militias were among the most active Iranian-backed groups fighting American forces in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003. Sadr, on the other hand, has spent the last ten years attempting to portray himself as a pragmatic and nationalist political figure. From time to time, he does not hesitate to openly criticize Iran’s actions in Iraq. This shift in behavior can be attributed to Sadr’s efforts to capture the Iraqi people’s changing attitudes toward Iran. It opposes Iran’s involvement in Iraq. Nouri al-Maliki, the former Iraqi Prime Minister, appears to be moving away from Iran as well. Maliki, who backs Kadhimi’s efforts to control the militia, claims that “the US-Israel-Saudi axis does not allow Iran to intervene in Iraq.” Iran’s power and influence in Iraq are eroding at both the government and political levels. This changing public awareness towards the search for a stronger and more independent government in Iraq is causing this new political situation (Azizi, 2021).

The reason for this drop in Iran’s popularity should be found, first and foremost, in the activities of Iranian-backed militias operating arbitrarily and outside the government’s control in various parts of the country in the political, economic, and security fields. Furthermore, the Iraqi people are aware of Iran’s role in their country due to the inefficiency and weakness of the Iranian-backed governments. Iraqi demonstrators attacked Iranian consulates in Najaf and Karbala, two Shiite-majority cities, during the 2019 protests. Moreover, following the protests, public dissatisfaction and criticism of the Iran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi grew. Overall, criticism of Iran appears to have become a common feature of Iraqi popular and anti-government demonstrations. These protests were the main reason why the Iran-backed government of Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in November 2019 (Azizi, 2021).

The political crisis environment that continued for five months in Iraq following Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi’s resignation on November 29, 2019 as a result of mass protests in the country was overcome on May

6, 2020, when the cabinet chaired by Mustafa Al-Kadhimi received a vote of confidence in the Iraqi Parliament. The failure of Mohammed Tevfik Allavi and Adnan al-Zurfi's attempts to form a government accelerated the political blocs' search for reconciliation, and finally, a consensus was reached in the name of Kadhimi, who was vetoed by the Iran-backed Fatah Alliance after being accused of providing intelligence to the USA in the murder of Soleimani and al-Muhandis, and whose candidacy was blocked.

In stating that *"I urge all political actors to come together around a national program to serve Iraq's interests"* (Anadolu Agency, 2020) Prime Minister Kadhimi has demonstrated in his speech after the vote in parliament that he knows that the biggest challenge in front of him is to convince people who are exhausted with the complicated crises in Iraq, which are facing economic, security, and health problems, that he is acting in the interests of the country, not the interests of any other foreign power such as the USA or Iran. Consequently, Kadhimi follows a policy of balance as a requirement of the fragile political spectrum at home, and also follows a policy of balance between the US and Iran in order to open up space for himself.

In this context, the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership² was held on August 28, 2021. In this way, Kadhimi encourages more actors to play roles in Iraq and wants Iraq to play a mediating role in the region. Iraq has been hosting meetings between Iran and Saudi Arabian delegations since the beginning of 2021. Kadhimi tries to alleviate, through his mediation, the Tehran-Riyadh rivalry, which stretches from the Levant to the Persian Gulf, polarizes the Middle East with the Shiite-Sunni and

² "On August 28, 2021, with the initiative of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and the participation of representatives of nine countries, as well as the Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Abou Gheit, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Yousef al-Othaimeen and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Nayef al-Hajraf, the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership was held. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu attended the conference representing Turkey, while French President Emmanuel Macron, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah, Jordanian King Abdullah II, Vice President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian were also present on behalf of their respective countries." (Duman, 2021)

Arab-Persian divides, and is seen as the most destabilizing and dangerous rivalry in the region (Ahmedian & Mohseni, 2021, p.779). The tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an important factor in determining Baghdad's regional relations (Rezaei, 2019). In this context, it is seen that Iraq concentrates on neighboring countries as a primary priority. It is possible to say that Kadhimy is trying to reorganize its relations with Saudi Arabia, which Iraq has problematic relations with other neighboring countries and seems to be a power to balance Iran, which uses the religion-politics relationship in the region. Thus, it can be said that Kadhimy aimed to balance Iran while re-establishing its relations with the neighboring country in a positive way (Aygün, 2021).

5. Conclusion

As stated from the very beginning of the study, Iran has been the most profitable actor in the region since the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003. The fact that various Shiite groups in Iraq began to take part in Iraqi politics and gained popularity as a result of their success in fighting Daesh prompted Iran to expand its influence in Iraq. However, despite the fact that Iran is expanding its area of influence in Iraq by using sectarian ties, Iran has two major obstacles in Iraq, one at the local level and the other at the regional level. First, there is social discomfort, as demonstrated by the 2019 protests against Iran's influence in Iraq. In addition, the large drop in the votes of parties close to Iran in the 2021 elections is an indicator of this. Moreover, influential religious leaders in Iraq are also disturbed by Iran's increasing intervention in Iraq. In particular, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most influential Shiite religious leader in Iraq, repeatedly warned Iran not to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs.

The second important obstacle is Iran's regional rivals in Iraq. Rivals such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey are increasing their activities in Iraq. In addition, the axis against Iran in the region is taking steps to weaken Iran's regional power. For the first time since the war with Iraq, Iran is faced with such a systematic opposition that can form a bloc against it. Iran, which had the opportunity to expand its area of influence with the US intervention in Iraq, found a camp against Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, this time with Donald Trump's efforts. In this direction, although

it appears unlikely that Iraq will join this camp in the near future, we can predict that Iraq will pursue a more independent policy from Iran during the Kadhimi era. Even though the anti-Iranian axis weakened with the Biden effect, alongside the course of regional developments and Saudi Arabia's efforts in seeking dialogue with Iran, it can be predicted that the Saudi-Iranian rivalry will continue in Iraq.

Disclosure

The article is exempt from the Ethics Committee Decision. There are no participants. The author received no financial support from any institution and there's no conflict of interest. No material subject to copyright is included.

Beyan

Bu makale etik kurul kararından muaftır. Çalışmada katılımcı bulunmamaktadır. Çalışma için herhangi bir kurum veya projeden mali destek alınmamıştır. Çalışmada kişiler ve kurumlar arası çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır. Telif hakkına sebep olacak bir materyal kullanılmamıştır.

References

- Abbas, Z. (2017). Irak'ta mezhepsel çekişmelerin boyutları ve sonuçları. *Aksaray University İİB Journal*, 9(1), 79-86. <http://aksarayıibd.aksaray.edu.tr/en/pub/issue/34899/387012>
- Ahmadian, H.& Mohseni, P. (2021). From detente to containment: the emergence of Iran's new Saudi strategy, *International Affairs*, 97(3), 779-799, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab014>
- Ali, O. (2017). İran ve Barzani: kötüleşen ilişkiler ve kaçınılmaz çatışma riski. *ORSAM*. http://orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/58tr.pdf
- Anadolu Agency. (2020). *Iraqi lawmakers approve Mustafa al-Kadhimi's government* <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iraqi-lawmakers-approve-mustafa-al-kadhimis-government/1831935>
- Arı, T. (2004). *Irak, İran ve ABD: önleyici savaş, petrol ve hegemonya*. Alfa Yayınları.
- Atlantic Council. (2021, December 7). *Iran's allies lost seats in the Iraqi elections. Now Tehran is recalibrating its strategy*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/irans-allies-lost-seats-in-the-iraqi-elections-now-tehran-is-recalibrating-its-strategy>
- Aslan, A. (2016). *Hasan Şerifi: İran-KDP si ile İran arasındaki çatışmalar ne anlama geliyor?* <https://www.demokrathaber.org/iran-kdp039si-ile-iran-arasindaki-catismalar-ne-anlama-geliyor-roportaj,111.html>
- Aygün, F.T.(2021). Al-Kadhimi's quest for balance in foreign policy. *ORSAM*. <https://www.orsam.org.tr/en/al-kadhimis-quest-for-balance-in-foreign-policy/>
- Azad, N. (2015, November 28). *Barzani Körfez ülkelerinde Bağımsız Kürdistan'a destek arıyor*. <https://www.nerinaazad.org/tr/news/kurdistan/bashur/barzani-korfez-ulkelerinde-bagimsiz-kurdistana-destek-ariyor>
- Azizi, H. (2021). challenges to Iran's role in Iraq in the post-Soleimani era, *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/challenges-to-irans-role-in-iraq-in-the-post-soleimani-era>

- Balcı, A. (2016). Türkiye'nin üç Irak siyaseti: 2015 yılına dair bir değerlendirme. *ORSAM*. <http://orsam.org.tr/tr/turkiye-nin-uc-irak-siyaseti-2015-yilina-dair-bir-degerlendirme/>
- Barzani, M. (2017). Exclusive: 'No turning back' on independence vote, Iraqi Kurdish leader tells. *France 24*. <https://www.france24.com/en/f24-interview/20170621-exclusive-interview-independence-referendum-iraq-kurdistan-barzani-mosul>
- Barzegar, J. (2014). Kodamı Kurdistan rehberan-ı İran ra mi tersaned. *BBC Persian*. http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2014/08/140810_120_jb_kurdistan
- Barzegar, K. (2008). Iran, New Iraq and the Persian Gulf Political-Security Architecture. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, 20 (1), 93-110. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/ISI_.pdf
- BBC.(2021, October 12). *Iraq election: Nationalist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr claims victory*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-58881596>
- BBC. (2015, August 18). *Maliki: Musul'un düşmesi Ankara'da planlanan komplo* https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/08/150818_maliki_musul_komplo
- BBC Persian. (2017, June 20). *Ayetullah Hamenei hemaperesi Kürdistanı Irak muhalefet kerd*. <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-40342329>
- Daragahi, B. (2019). *A photo op in Najaf reveals an Iran that could be*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/a-photo-op-in-najaf-reveals-an-iran-that-could-be>
- Duman, B. (2016, October 26). Irak'ın 'dengesini bozan' oluşum: Haşdi Şabi. *ORSAM*. <http://orsam.org.tr/tr/irak-in-dengesini-bozan-olusum-hasdi-sabi/>
- Duman, B. (2021). What does the Baghdad Conference mean for Iraq?. *MENA Affairs*. <https://menaaffairs.com/what-does-the-baghdad-conference-mean-for-iraq/>
- Dumbrell, J. (2010). Bush's Foreign Policy Legacy: Counting the Cost. *Assessing George W. Bush's Legacy*. Palgrave Macmillan

- Ehteshami, A. (2003) 'Iran-Iraq relations after Saddam.', *The Washington Quarterly*, 26(4), 115-129. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/washingtonquarterly/v026/26.4ehteshami.pdf>
- Entessar, N. (2010). *Kurdish politics in the Middle East*. London : Lexington Books.
- Ercan, M., & Bilgin, T. (2012). ABD- İnan ilişkileri: ABD-İnan gerginliđinin Trkiye'ye etkileri. *Akademik Bakıř*, 33(4), 1-14. <https://www.akademikbakis.org/akademikbakis/akademik-bakis-sayi-33-kasim-aralik-2012/>
- Gunter, M. M. (2011a). Arab-Kurdish relations and the future of Iraq. *Third World Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.618649>
- Gunter, M. M. (2011b). The five stages of American foreign policy towards the Kurds, *Insight Turkey*, 13(2), 93–106. <https://www.insightturkey.com/file/671/the-five-stages-of-american-foreign-policy-towards-the-kurds-spring-2011-vol13-no2>
- Gunter, M. M. (2011c). *The Kurds ascending: The evolving solution to the Kurdish problem in Iraq and Turkey*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawramy, F. (2017). *Referendum on independent Kurdistan puts Iran at crossroads*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iran-position-iraqi-kurdistan-independence-referendum.html>
- İnat, K. (2018). Trkiye-İnan ilişkilerinde terr sorunu. *SETA*. <https://www.setav.org/turkiye-irak-iliskilerinde-terror-sorunu/>
- Iran Daily. (2017). *Iran, Iraq sign deal to enhance defense ties*. <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/197170.html?catid=3&title=Iran--Iraq-sign-deal-to-enhance-defense-ties>
- Kardař T. & Yeřiltař M. (2017). *Non-state armed actors in the Middle East*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55287-3>
- Kayhan Newspaper. (2020, November 18). *Berheste ez eradet*, <https://kayhan.ir/fa/news/199321>
- Keskin, A. (2015). İnan'ın Kuzey Irak politikası/İnan ve Iraklı Krtler. *OMRAN*. <http://tr.omrandirasat.org/yay%C4%B1nlar%C4%B1m%C4%B1z/makaleler/iran%E2%80%99in-kuzey-irak-politikasi-iran-ve-irakli-kurtler.html>

- Keynoush, B. (2016). *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or foes?* Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-58939-2>
- Koç, M. (2017, September 17). *İKBY'nin referandum kararının İran'daki yansımaları*. <https://iramcenter.org/ikbynin-referandum-kararinin-irandaki-yansimalari/>
- KRD News. (2017, October 04). *Goran ve Komel: referandum ertelensin*. <http://www.krdnews.net/news/guney-kurdistan/goran-ve-komel-referandum-ertelensin>
- Kulaksızoglu, B. (2014, June 11). *IŞİD Bağdat'a ilerliyor. Deutch News*. <https://www.dw.com/tr/i%C5%9Fid-ba%C4%9Fdata-ilerliyor/a-17700635>
- McDowail, D. (1996). *A modern history of the Kurds*. I. B. Tauris.
- Muir, J. (2014, August 29). Irak'taki Sünni isyancılar "IŞİD"le savaşmaya hazır". *BBC Türkçe*. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/08/140829_muir_sunni_isid
- Mustafa, H. A. (2016, June 19). Sistani and Saudi Arabia: relations to face sectarianism. *Al-Arabiya*. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2016/06/19/Sistani-and-Saudi-Arabia-Relations-to-face-sectarianism.html>
- Nader, A., Hanauer, L., Allen, B., & Scotten, A. G. (2016). Regional implications of an independent Kurdistan. *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1452.html
- Newman, E. (2007). Weak states, state failure, and terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19 (4). 463-488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701590636>
- Newman, E. (2009). Failed states and international order: Constructing a post-Westphalian world. *Contemporary Security Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260903326479>
- Özcan, M. (2014). İbadi'nin Irak'taki zor görevi. *Al-Jazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/ibadinin-iraktaki-zor-gorevi>
- Power, S. (2007). *A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide*. New York : Harper Perennial.

- Reuters. (2020, June7). *Iraqi Kurds plan independence referendum on Sept. 25*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-idUSKBN18Y284>
- Reuters. (2021, November 30). *Final results confirm Sad 's victory in last month's Iraqi vote*
<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/final-results-show-cleric-sadr-won-iraq-vote-state-media-says-2021-11-30/>
- Rezaei, F. (2019). *Iran's foreign policy after the nuclear agreement: politics of normalizers and traditionalists*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rudaw. (2017, September 17). *İran: bağımsızlık ilanında anlaşmalar iptal olur*. <http://www.rudaw.net/turkish/middleeast/iran/17092017>
- Sabah. (2016, October 21). *İraklıların "Haşdi Şabi" endişesi*. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/10/21/iraklilarin-hasdi-sabi-endisesi>
- Sahebkhavar. (2017). *Veziri defai Irak*. <https://www.kisa.link/PrBX>
- Salihi, E. (2017) *İrak: devletin çöküşü ve çatışma süreci*. Kaknüs Yayınları.
- Salim, M., & El-Ghobashy, T. (2019, March 13). By granting rare audience, Iraq's grand ayatollah sends message to Washington and Tehran. *The Washington Post*. <https://wapo.st/31ZX00v>
- Shareef, M. (2014). *The United States, Iraq and the Kurds, shock, awe and aftermath*. New York : Routledge.
- Sinkaya, B. (2013). Amerikan askerlerinin çekilmesinden sora Irak-İran ilişkileri. *SETA*. http://file.seta.org/Files/Pdf/20130503102336_seta_rapor_9_iran_irak.pdf
- Sinkaya, B. (2014). *Deepening' of strategic partnership between Iraq and Iran*. https://www.academia.edu/11558327/THE_DEEPENING_OF_STRATEGIC_PARTNERSHIP_BETWEEN_IRAQ_AND_IRAN
- SIPRI. (2019). Trends in international arms transfers, *SIPRI*. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/fs_1903_at_2018.pdf
- Sputnik News. (2017). *İKBY muhalefetinden Goran Hareketi: bağımsızlık referandumu gerçekleşmeyecek*. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/ortadogu/201706101028837916-ikby-muhalefeti-goran-bagimsizlik-referandumu-gerceklesmeyecek/>

- Sputnik News. (2017). Kuzey Irak'taki referandum, Ortadoğu haritasını ne şekilde değiştirebilir? <https://tr.sputniknews.com/analiz/201706101028833208-kuzey-irak-referandum-ortadogu-haritasini-ne-sekilde-degistirebilir/>
- Sputniknews. (2018). Sadr: Irak'ın sınırın ötesinden yönetilmesine izin vermeyeceğiz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/ortadogu/201807051034161374-sadr-irak-sinir-otesinden-yonetilmesine-izin-vermeyecegiz/>
- Tabatabai, A., & Esfandiary, D. (2017). Cooperating with Iran to combat ISIS in Iraq. *The Washington Quarterly*, 40(3), 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1370338>
- Tajbakhsh, K. (2019). Getting real about Iran. *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2019-03-19/getting-real-about-iran?utm_campaign=tw_daily_soc&utm_source=twitter_posts&utm_medium=social
- Takeyh, R. (2008). Iran's new Iraq. *Middle East Journal*, 62(1), 13-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25482470>
- Tamer, C. (2016). Türkiye ve İran'ın Irak'ta güç tahkim etme çabası: Başka örneği. *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 3(6), 103-118. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/28527>
- The New York Times. (2020, March 11), Rocket Attack Kills Three U.S. Coalition Members in Iraq. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/world/middleeast/us-troops-killed-iraq-rocket-attack.html>
- Ulutaş, U. (2016). Şii Siyasetinde Sadr Faktörü. *Akşam*. <https://www.aksam.com.tr/ufuk-ulutas/yazarlar/sii-siyasetinde-sadr-faktoru/haber-513556>
- Uzman, H. O., & Balcı, Ç. (2017). Bölgesel açıdan Kuzey Irak bağımsızlık referandumu ve Türkiye. *Turkish Forum*. <https://www.turkishnews.com/tr/content/2017/08/25/bolgesel-acidan-kuzey-irak-bagimsizlik-referandumu-ve-turkiye/>
- Yıldız, K. (2004). *The Kurds in Iraq*. Pluto Press.