

<https://www.doi.org/10.31918/twejer.2033.25>

e-ISSN (2617-0752)

p-ISSN (2617-0744)



The Iranian Foreign Policy towards Kurdistan Region–Iraq 2003-2018

DASKO HASAN SOFI

Dr. AZAD OTHMAN SALIH

Faculty of Law-

Assistant Professor of Political Science

Political Science and Management Salahaddin University - Erbil

Department of Political Science

dasko.sofi@gmail.com

salih.azad@gmail.com

Abstract:

After the US invasion of Iraq and the fall of Ba'ath-regime in 2003, the Kurdistan Region-Iraq became one of the main issues in Iranian foreign policy in the region. Although there have been several changes in Iranian foreign policy respecting its relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government at various times, there has been no change in its strategy towards the region regarding its political independence and the right to self-determination of its people. The significant historical, cultural, and neighbourly relations that exist between Iran and the Kurdistan Region could become the basis for relations between the two parties for the sake of common interests and benefits and to establish peace and stability in the region. The main objective of this research is as follows: to clarify Iranian foreign policy towards the Kurdistan Region-Iraq and to explain the future horizon of the relations between the two parties in light of the current reality and based on the vital interests of the two parties in general.

Keywords: Iran, Kurdistan Region, Foreign Policy, Ba'ath Regime, Shi'ism.

The Iranian Foreign Policy towards

Kurdistan Region–Iraq

2003-2018

Introduction

Iranian foreign policy towards the Kurdistan Region-Iraq (KRI) was established many years ago. After 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) supported both the main Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), against the Ba'ath regime in Iraq. Many of the politicians currently in the Iraqi government and the KRI spent time in Iran and were supported by the Iranian government. This experience has led to Iranian influence in Iraq and northern Iraq. In the war between Iraq (1980-1988), and Iran, the Kurdish opposition also cooperated extensively with Iran against the Iraqi Ba'ath-regime.

In 1990, two years after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi government ordered the occupation of Kuwait and, as a result, Iraq entered a war against the Coalition forces. Iraq lost the war, and the Kurds obtained a “safe haven”, elected their regional Parliament, and established the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992. The Kurdistan Region is geopolitically and strategically essential because any political developments in this region affect the neighbouring countries, in which Kurds are also striving for their basic rights in the light of the right to self-determination. Iran's foreign policy towards the KRI is a function of its broader foreign policy towards Iraq.

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 was an opportunity for Iran to reframe its regional influence. However, the IRI faced many militaries, political, and security challenges in terms of Iraq's internal and foreign aspects. At the internal level, the challenge was the presence of US forces in Iraq, which was deemed by Iranian officials and politicians to be an effort to change the regime in Iran as well. Iran also had concerns about the possibility of the division of Iraq and the emergence of a Kurdish state. In other words, the freedom of the KRG and the emergence of a Kurdish state would lead to an increase in Kurdish nationalism and would have a significant impact on the unity of Iranian lands.

The main objective of this article is to conduct an academic evaluation and analysis of Iran's foreign policy attitude towards the KRI. The hypothesis of this research is as follows: Since 2003, Iranian foreign policy has adopted a policy of the unity and indivisibility of Iraqi lands towards the Kurdistan Region by supporting the pro-Iranian ruling forces in Iraq. This was done through support for Shiite Arab political groups and movements to strengthen their presence in high positions and to use them against the idea of freedom for the KRI. The researcher pursued a descriptive-analytical method in this research to deliver its aims and objectives and, in obtaining and analyzing information and data regarding historical incidents and events, followed a historical documentary method. Furthermore, to comply with the academic framework of the thesis, the researcher employed a critical approach to evaluating the topics.

As a result of the trends in Iranian foreign policy regarding the security and situation of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 has deeply influenced the political structure of Iraq-Iran relations and the Kurdistan Region in

particular. Throughout history, Iran has enjoyed direct and indirect political, economic, and even cultural influence on the four parts of Kurdistan generally and particularly on the KRI. However, there has not been any academic research or studies in this regard, even though Iran has been enjoying great influence in the whole region and its foreign policies have had an impact on the KRI. This was the main reason for the researcher to identify and analyze Iran influences and impacts on the political and economic life of the Kurdistan Region for the period from the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003 to 2018.

Definitions

Foreign Policy

Former US Secretary of State (1973-1977) Henry Kissinger believed that, since the Vienna Convention, countries' foreign policies and relations have been linked together, which led to the emergence of the term "international relations" (Kissinger, 2004: 570). The Polish-American political scientist George Modelski defined foreign policy as "The system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment" (Modelski, 1962: 18).

Another definition is that foreign policy is a plan or strategy that is drafted by a state to organize its relations with the international community, without which it would be unable to practice its foreign political activities. That is, foreign policy involves identifying and performing several national objectives and interests that states try to obtain at the international level (Moghtader, 1979: 131-132).

Foreign policy is a strategy or a group of actions that are decided by the state's decision-makers to achieve certain goals in the nation's interests at the international level (Fahmy, 2010: 19). States try, in general, through their foreign policies, to maintain their national interests, national security, and their intellectual, ideological, and economic goals and objectives (Obaid, 2004: 23-24).

Notwithstanding the above, foreign policy aims to affect the behaviours and actions of other states or the whole of the international system based on national interests and to adjust them within a frame of definite objectives. Thus, a policy is reflected in the analyses of a state's abilities and its strategy of investing its abilities in achieving those goals and objectives (Plano and Olton, 1996: 21).

Valerie Hudson (2005) distinguishes between foreign policy and foreign policy behaviour. She believes that foreign policy is the guidelines or framework of a state towards achieving objectives within its relations with other entities in the international environment, whereas foreign policy behaviour includes the reactions, concepts or special statements that are used to influence others on the international stage, even those spontaneous behaviours that are made without being planned (Hudson, 2005: 14).

The Ideology of Shi'ism in Iran's Foreign Policy

The government of the IRI has always made efforts to utilize religious ideology in the interests of its internal and foreign policy and, for this reason, it has availed itself of the Shiite sect as a tool to expand Iranian influence in the whole region, particularly in

post-Ba'ath Iraq. Linguistically, the term "Shi'a" means follower or supporter. The emergence of this sect is linked to disputes that arose among Muslims about who should succeed the Prophet Mohammed (Shafi'i, 2015: 122-123).

Once the Ba'athist regime fell, many observers began using certain concepts and terms to describe the situation, such as the Shiites' reappearance, Shiites' reemergence, Shiite block, Shiite Empire, etc. (Ghaffari Hashtchin and Heydarkhani, 2015: 247). After the fall of Saddam and the arrival of Shiites at the centres of authority in Iraq, there were ideas about possible unity between the Shiite powers in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, as this would lead to increased Iranian influence and make such an alliance much stronger than the other Arab countries. Even now, Iran has a significant influence in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and parts of Saudi Arabia, as well as Iraq.

A friendly, collaborating Iraq would definitely facilitate Iranian influence, as it could reach both Syria and Lebanon using land routes. The Supreme Leader of the IRI, Ali Khamenei, has deemed the fall of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq to be a golden opportunity and thinks that a good relationship with Iraq will make Iraq itself, Syria and Lebanon strategic allies for a stronger Iran. Based on a report in the Los Angeles Times, Iran has been able, through its Shiite friends, to reach the heart of the Arabian territories in the Gulf (Yazdani and Tuyserkani, 2006: 96), but it is clear that such a foreign policy from Iran is not cheap, as can be seen from the internal political situation in the country. However, today, the Shiite world controls an important geographical line, which starts from the east of China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and goes through Iran and Iraq up to Syria and Lebanon, a line referred to by some scholars as to the Shiite Belt, while King

Abdullah II of Jordan calls it “the Shiite Crescent” (Broning, 2008: 61).

Shi’ism ideology can clearly be seen and is reflected in Iranian foreign policy. The Political and International Analysis Officer at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Kazim Sajadpour, believes that after the fall of the Ba’athist regime in Iraq, no power can mitigate Iranian expansionism and influence in the region (Ghaffari Hashtchin and Heydarkhani, 2015: 260).

Power substitution in Iraq from Sunni Arabs to Shiites by the US-led to changes in the balance of influences in the region towards Iranian interests. This encouraged the Shiites in Bahrain, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia and made Shiite issues of a more political nature, which eventually made them a significant power in the Middle East (Javadi and Toloui, 2014: 789).

Other evidence for Shi’ism being used politically to increase influence by Iranian foreign policymakers can be found in Azerbaijan, where although 75% of the people are Shiites and have the same subsect (Twelver Shiites) as Iranian Shiites, the relationship between the two countries is not good because the Azeri community, due to many national and civilizational factors, is more secular than a pro-Shiite society (Barzegar, 2010: 33-34). At the same time, the Shiites in Yemen and Syria are not followers of Twelver Shi’ism; they have different subsects, but Iran provides all possible support to them.

Another factor is that Iran supports Hamas in Palestine, even though it is a Sunni organization. These facts demonstrate that Shi’ism and Shiites, in the thoughts of Iranian policymakers, are tools for strengthening their geopolitical position and influence in

the Middle East. If in past Iran took the slightest benefit from the Shi'a factor in regulating its foreign policy, it was mostly focused on supporting the political factions and certain groups that opposed regimes that primarily supported radical Arab nationalism, in particular, in Lebanon through Imam Musa Al-Sadr's Shi'a movement and in Iraq by indirectly supporting the Islamic Dawa Party (Fuller and Francke, 2005: 171-172).

The Kurdistan Region - Iraq

After the Ba'ath regime was defeated by the Coalition forces in 1991, the Kurdistan Region emerged as an essential global geopolitical territory. However, despite this, the situation is more complicated if we take a realistic look at a map of the Kurdistan Region. The region is landlocked, surrounded by land on all four sides, each one of which is part of the land of Kurdistan. This can be a weak point for the region in terms of geopolitics for many reasons, including the decision making by Kurdish Government officials when forming policies (Zibakalam, 2011: 61-62), as well as for establishing a free state (Barkey and Laipson, 2005: 66) because there is always the possibility that the neighbouring countries will - geopolitically - show a hostile attitude towards the Kurds. Those neighbouring countries may unite to obstruct the efforts of the creation of a free Kurdish state. This factor is one that the Kurdish political elite is well aware of and is a significant challenge to the creation of a Kurdish state that includes all four parts of Kurdistan (Zibakalam, 2011: 63).

Notwithstanding the above, in terms of geopolitics, the Kurdistan Region is the linking point between Arab, Turk, and Fars nations. This region and its people have been struggling to obtain freedom and create their own free state and have sacrificed many

lives along this path. There are no accurate official statistics for the population of the Kurdistan Region, but the KRG's estimates indicate that the community is around 5.2 million people (Mohammadi, 2003: 59). The inhabitants of the Kurdistan Region comprise 15% to 20% of the population of Iraq, and the Kurds are the second-largest nation in the country. The capital city of the region is Erbil, the Iraqi fourth-largest town, with an area of 14,471 km² (Katzman, 2010: 1; Zibakalam and Abdollahpour, 2011: 61). Many ethnic groups and minorities are living in the Kurdistan Region, including Turks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, and Arabs, as well as religious groups, such as Moslems, Yazidis, and Christians. Around 75% of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, and 15% are Shiite Muslims (McDowall, 2000: 53).

A significant number of Kurds in the Kurdistan Region do not consider themselves as Iraqis (Natali, 2005: 51), and even become frustrated when being called Iraqis, and the majority do not speak Arabic (especially the post-1991 generation). Other than some governmental buildings, such as the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, the Iraqi flag can rarely be seen beside the flag of the Kurdistan Region. One of the most noticeable Iraqi presences inside the Kurdistan Region is the Iraqi dinar; however, people prefer to perform their commercial transactions in US Dollars when the value exceeds a few hundred dollars (Yazdanpanah et al., 2017: 43).

The area of the Kurdistan Region, excluding the disputed territories, is 56,000 km² and 85,000 km² when including the disputed territories (see Table 1). Currently, the KRG rules the Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, and Halabja provinces and parts of the provinces of Nineveh, Diyala, and Kirkuk. Kirkuk Province and significant parts of Nineveh, Diyala, and Salahaddin are considered

disputed territories between the KRG and the Iraqi government, but Kirkuk is deemed the most important as it is an oil-rich area.

1. Relations between the Kurdistan Region and the Islamic Republic of Iran

1.1. Relations between the two Parties during the “September Revolution.”

Relations between Iran and Iraq have always had inverse impacts on the Kurdistan Region. Whenever these two countries had problematic relations, the government of Iran tried to gain a closer relationship with the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan to use the Kurds as leverage over various Iraqi governments. This situation entered a new phase after the coup by General Abdelkarim Qassim on July 15, 1958, and the fall of the monarchy in Iraq because the coup was undertaken by the left; at the same time, Iraq’s withdrawal from the Baghdad Treaty was the main reason for it becoming rivals with one of the most important allies to the west of the country: Iran (Shorsh, 2002: 11-12).

The “September Revolution” (1961-1975) broke out under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani (The leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and President of the KDP). In 1968, after Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakir conducted a coup and was able to bring the Ba’ath Party back to power in Iraq, Iran supported the Kurdish revolution as the Ba’ath Party had extremely anti-Iran thoughts. This eventually led to a deepening of the problematic relations between those two countries, with minor clashes happening between both sides at border points, especially in Mandali, Badra, and Jassen (Shorsh, 2002: 13).

Despite the support that Iran's Shah provided, he had another tactical vision towards the Kurds, as he abandoned them after signing the Algiers Agreement in 1975 in return for obtaining the Shatt Al-Arab River for Iran (which was Iran's real intention). By signing the Treaty in 1975 with Saddam Hussein, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi abandoned the Kurds. In other words, the Shah abandoned those people whom, during the peak of the conflicts with Iraq, he used to call "the Ari Brothers", an abandonment that was the main reason for the failure of the Eylul Revolution (Katzman, 2010: 1).

The interrelations between the KRI and Iran can be divided into three phases:

1.2. Relations during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

Breaking out of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the war between Iran and Iraq during 1980-1988 was a golden opportunity for recovery of the Kurdish armed movement in Iraq through the support of the IRI. During that period, strong ties linked the Iranian government and the Kurdish movement in Iraq, this support provided a unique chance to strengthen the Kurdish movement against the Ba'ath regime (Nikfar, 2018: 90).

During the eighth decade of the last century, the two main Kurdish parties, the KDP, and the PUK conflicted with each other, in addition to fighting against Saddam's regime. However, in the middle of that decade, the two parties, who had fought each other many times and even had a civil war, were forced to set aside their differences and work side by side with other Iraqi opposition entities (including the Higher Islamic Revolution Council in Iraq

and the Badr Corps) as Iran was trying to start a new front in the north (Karami, 1999: 12-13).

By the Iraqi opposition and the main role of the Kurds, Iran achieved a victory over Iraq during 1986 and 1987. This victory, which was obtained through the support of the Peshmerga forces, prompted the Iraqi regime to commit many anti-humanitarian crimes, including accelerating the Anfal Campaign and the chemical bombardment of Halabja in 1988 (Bruinessen, 2008: 308).

Despite anti-humanitarian crimes that killed 182 thousand Kurds and demolished 4,800 Kurdish villages, as well as the Arabizing campaigns in Kirkuk and Mosul, the war between Iraq and Iran was an opportunity for the Kurdish movement in Iraq to gain a new spirit and be resurrected through the support of Iran and another backup from Syria. During those times, the relations of the Kurdish parties, particularly the KDP, were at their best with Iran and remained at this level until the fall of the Ba'ath regime after the US-led Coalition force operations in Iraq in 2003 (Walling, 2008: 60).

1.3. Relations in the 1990s

The end of the war between Iraq and Iran (1988) brought a new political environment to the region. The most significant phenomenon of this new environment was the military development of Iraq after an eight-year-long war. An important aspect of this was the empowerment of the Iraqi army, particularly in terms of the acquisition of a large reserve of chemical and biological weapons and steps taken towards producing nuclear weapons (Shorsh, 2002: 58).

The new environment encouraged Iraq to begin a military attack on Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and to invade the country within a short period of time. In response, the Coalition forces started operations to liberate Kuwait on January 16, 1991, and ended operations on February 27 of the same year. This caused a significant breakdown of the Iraqi army, which was forced to withdraw quickly from Kuwait. As a result, there were two uprisings: in Kurdistan and southern Iraq (Shorsh, 2002: 60-61). Iraq's withdrawal from Kurdish territories and the UN Resolution to put the Iraqi government under blockade created an opportunity for the Kurds in south Kurdistan (McDowell, 2007: 579).

Some analysts regard those uprisings as being confronted by the Iraqi regime's army upon consent from the US and Coalition forces, resulting in a mass exodus of millions of people towards Iran, Turkey, and Europe. The UNSC, through Resolution 688, which was based upon proposals from France, Iran, and Turkey, considered the threats to the civilian population and asked countries to provide aid to the Iraqi people. The Resolution allowed the US, Britain, and France to recognize north and south Iraq as no-fly zones to build a safe haven in those locations. After these efforts, the Kurds conducted an election in 1992 to establish their own Parliament; the election was carried out in the three provinces of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Dohuk - the territories that were deemed "Autonomous" as per the agreement of March 11 1970. Moreover, in meetings held in Damascus, Vienna, and Salahaddin, the "Federal Democratic Iraq" option won the consent of the Iraqi opposition forces, an issue that paved the way to and became the source of the rights of the Kurds to have autonomy (Karami, 1996: 20).

Since that time, Kurds have often declared that their intention is not to divide Iraq; they would rather stay as a federal government within a democratic Iraq. Later, the two ruling parties (KDP and PUK) started an armed confrontation which led to civil war, during which even the Parliament was under attack. This conflict, in addition to the problematic background between the two parties, there was also an attempt to control the largest possible areas to obtain income from customs (Katzman, 2010: 1-2).

The conflicts worsened after the city of Erbil (the governing centre of the Kurdish autonomous government and the base of the Kurdistan Parliament) by the PUK. After many negotiations between the two parties under the sponsorship of Iran, European countries, and the US, a ceasefire was announced. In August 1996, however, the war resumed and finally the PDK, after acquiring support from the Iraqi army, was able to expel the PUK from all parts of Kurdistan. Later, the PUK took back Sulaymaniyah Province with support from the Iranian Army (Katzman, 2010: 2). In 1998, after a series of negotiations under the supervision of Washington and several regional countries, the two parties were able to sign a strategic, sustainable peace agreement; an agreement that provided great progress for the Kurds in 2003.

1.4. Relations between the KRI and Iran after 2003

Operations by US and Coalition forces, concerning Iraq in 2003, resulted in a change from the defunct oppressive ruling system into a federal republic, through which the Sunni Arab rulers were dismissed, and Shiite and Kurd politicians came to power. This change, especially for the Kurds, is considered a historical turning point and since then the federal democratic system of Iraq is stated in the Iraqi Constitution, as agreed upon by the Iraqi

opposition parties before and after the fall of the Ba'ath regime. The new system in Iraq provided the Kurds with the opportunity to strengthen their position in the Kurdistan Region on the one hand, and to come to peak power, side by side with the Iraqi Shiites, on the other (Walling, 2008: 63-64).

The IRI's policy towards Iraq since 1990 has been to enforce and strengthen Shiite influences through the Marja' and to keep the unity of Iraqi lands (in other words, to be open in opposing freedom for the Kurdistan Region). Thus, after the fall of Saddam's regime, Iran became the most influential country to interfere in Iraqi affairs, as the Kurd and Shiite allies of Iran had fought the Ba'ath Army during the war. They became rulers and controlled the political and economic power in Iraq. Although it can be considered that, in terms of foreign policy, the Iraqi Shiites have more importance to Iran than the Kurds, at the same time; Iran has also tried to strengthen its ties with the Kurds. For example, the IRI was the first country to open its consulate offices in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, which was a progressive diplomatic step for the Kurdistan Region (Najafi et al., 2017: 104-105).

The level of commercial and cultural exchange between the Kurdistan Region and Iran has also increased, but despite this, serious challenges remain to improve such relations. The most significant challenge is the security issue of Iran's western border, as well as a lack of will among Iranian officials to settle the Kurdish case in the country peacefully and fairly. The only way to mitigate the concerns of both sides (i.e. the Iranian government and the Kurds in Iran) is by understanding and dialogue. In which case, the Kurdistan Region will be able to become a mediator between both parties to guarantee the stability of the Iranian borders on the

one hand and to strengthen its ties with its important neighbour, Iran, on the other.

Oil transportation lines are among the most critical factors regarding oil product exportation, to the extent that this is sometimes called pipeline geopolitics. The Kurdistan Region has always faced problems due to its geographical location and poor access to the open water necessary for oil export and has been forced to obtain approval from neighbouring countries, especially Turkey and Iran, to export its products. Permission has been granted, provided that the majority of the goods and needs for the Kurdistan Region are imported through the customs of those countries' borders (Stansfield, 2003: 27).

Furthermore, as the KRI is located between Iran, Turkey, and Syria, any political or economic success. It experiences will also affect the Kurds in those parts and have an impact on the situation in those countries. Also, selling oil is not solely an internal economic matter, but also provides more independence from Iraq and mitigates the effects of the pressures from Iraq - and even the neighbouring countries - which give it an international dimension in the region. Thus, it is not only Iraq that has concerns regarding the region's ability to trade its oil products; the other neighbouring countries also have the same concerns (Qorbani and Qadimi, 2012: 60).

2. Iran's Fears of the Kurdistan Region's Ambition

The Kurdistan Region has considered universal values, such as empowering civil society, obtaining democracy, human rights, free trade, economic development, freedom of speech, freedom of journalism, building good relations with neighbouring countries,

attracting foreign capital for investment, a free economy, and cooperation with international organizations, providing a proper grounding for obtaining freedom, provided that the Kurdish efforts and preparations for announcing a Kurdish state are obvious. This has made Iran more sensitive towards the Kurdistan Region and to devoting its foreign policy efforts to maintaining the unity of Iraqi lands (Natali, 2005: 183).

As a consequence of the technological boom at the beginning of the 20th century, political borders no longer influence the sense of identity of the different nations of the world (Fokuhi and Amosi, 2009: 56-74). Concerning a national identity, the Kurdistan Region has made enormous efforts to familiarize the Kurds in the area with their history, culture, and traditions through programs aired on satellite TV channels, the publication of books, and magazines, and many other methods. Each of these methods has contributed to improving the sense of nationalism in the other parts of Kurdistan.

Concerning Kurdistan's freedom and Iraqi Kurds' influence on the Kurds in neighbouring countries, Washington Times journalist Julia Duin believes that "Kurdistan is an unofficial nation-state encompassing at least 25 million people in the 74,000-square-mile mountainous region encompassing chunks of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It is the world's largest ethnic group without a country of its own" (Duin, 2004: 18).

As an example, after recognizing federalism in Iraq through the constitution, the Kurdish political parties in Iranian Kurdistan proposed federalism for Iran as well, and some other Kurdish parties went further and asked the Kurds to boycott the elections (Ghafari and Kaviani, 2014: 100-104). Suppose the Iranian authorities intend to have a multinational Iran that lives in a stable,

peace, coexistence, and sustainability. In that case, the best way is federalism, just as in any stable and developed country in the world, including Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia, and India.

Besides, some factors in the new Iraq may represent potential future threats to Iran, including economic, political, security, and sectarian elements. Economically, there is a competition between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and oil products in the regional markets. In political and security terms, there is the ability to maintain security in the Persian Gulf and the possibility of cooperation with countries in the region and other countries. From the sectarian aspect, there is a competition between the Najaf and Qum religious schools (Hawza), who both compete to become the leader of the Shiites in the world. Furthermore, continuing crises and problems in Iraq may lead to threats to the Iranian interests in the country and may result in an anti-Iraq political group coming to power (Vaezi, 2008: 28) or in using Iranian opposition parties, such as the Kurdish parties or the People's Mujahidin Organization of Iran (Mujahedin-e Khalq) against Iran (Irvani, 2007: 177).

3. The Referendum on the Independence of the Kurdistan Region

The following parties have representatives in the KRI Parliament: KDP, PUK, Movement for Change, Kurdistan Islamic Union, Islamic Group in Kurdistan, Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK), Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, Kurdistan Communist Party - Iraq, Turkmen Development List, Erbil Turkmen, Turkmen Change and Renewal, Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), Assyrian Democratic Movement, Chaldean Syriac Assyrian

Popular Council, and the Rafidain List. The main disputes that exist are between the three largest parties: the KDP, the PUK, and the Movement for Change (Nikfar, 2018: 90).

The KDP in Iraq is headed by Masoud Barzani. As the head of the ruling party and the President of the Kurdistan Region, Barzani was the most significant advocate of proceeding with a referendum for the independence of the KRI. The KDP headed the High Referendum Council, which included representatives from almost all the Kurdish political parties, except for the Movement for Change (the second-largest party) and the Islamic Group. Despite supporting the right to self-determination, the Movement for Change stood against conducting a referendum in this form, and this situation (Nikfar, 2018: 96).

The PUK, headed by its late leader Jalal Talabani, had different internal attitudes regarding the referendum. After Talabani became ill, many thoughts were developed within the party. A group within the party supported the idea of a referendum and actively participated in the campaign to support a referendum on September 17 2017.

The Islamic Union of Kurdistan backed the Movement for Change at the beginning and stood against conducting the referendum in this situation. However, after many negotiations with the KDP, it agreed to support the process. The Islamic Group also opposed conducting the referendum until the last hours before the process.

The IMK, another Islamic party in Kurdistan, backed the referendum. Both leftist parties, the Kurdistan Socialist Party and the Communist Party, supported the referendum. Ethnic and

religious minorities in Kurdistan, except the ITF, all supported the referendum. The Turkmen Front in Kirkuk strongly opposed the referendum and asked for a retreat from this decision (Nikfar, 2018: 96-97).

The referendum, which was conducted on September 25, 2017, in the Kurdistan Region and the separate territories outside the region's administration, resulted in a significant victory for the "Yes for secession from Iraq" votes. The President of the Kurdistan Region announced on September 26, 2017, that the objectives of the referendum were not to impose a de facto or to determine the borders and further expressed Kurdistan's readiness to conduct serious negotiations with the Iraqi government and ask neighbouring countries to play a positive role between Erbil and Baghdad for this purpose. However, the Iraqi government, Turkey, and Iran rejected these calls (Khabat Publications, 2017: 301).

The most significant dispute between the KRG and the Iraqi government was their different interpretations of the authorities stated in the permanent Iraqi constitution. An example of this is that the Arabs refer to the "Republic of Iraq", whereas the Kurds use the term "Federal Republic of Iraq". Those who use the Republic of Iraq mean a strong central government and Iraq are described as "A Democratic, Federal Government" in the Constitution. Broadly speaking, the disputes are based on four major aspects: not implementing article 140 and the lack of any decision about the disputed territories, Peshmerga issues, oil and gas, and the budget for the KRI. These aspects are discussed below:

a. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution

Despite cooperation and alliance between the Kurds and Shiites in building a new state and establishing a new governance system in Iraq, disputes arose during the very early days. Of the disputes that are rooted in history, the most significant one was deciding the fate of the disputed territories. To settle this issue, the political actors of Iraq set article 58 in the provisional constitution and then article 140 in the permanent constitution. Despite this article - for which the deadline for implementation was only two years - in the constitution, the Council of Representatives not only set it aside but also created many challenges against its implementation and the Iraqi government did not perform its functions in this regard (Salih, 2013: 125).

The said article clearly states that it must be implemented within two years to settle the dispute in those territories through three phases, the final stage of which is to conduct a referendum. The constitution stipulates a normalization process, meaning the restoration of property and nationality, economic resurgence, resettlement, and appointment of a neutral arbitrator to make recommendations on boundaries, followed by a national census and a referendum on the status of Kirkuk and other territories (Houlihan, 2018).

After more than a decade had passed on the deadline (which was decided to be on December 31 2007), the Iraqi government still had not taken any serious steps towards meeting it, and the political border between the Kurdistan Region and federal Iraq remained unresolved. Implementation of this article is linked to the settlement of Kirkuk and other separated Kurdish territories, which are referred to as “disputed territories” for the demarcation of KRI

borders. In other words, the current political borders between the Kurdistan Region and other territories of the state of Iraq shall remain unstable and unconstitutional unless article 140 is fully implemented.

The disputed areas are Mandalay, Khurmatu, Khanaqeen, Sheikhan, Sinjar, Jalawla, Saadiya, and Kirkuk, which are located in the governorates of Diyala, Kirkuk, Salahaddin, and Nineveh. The Kurds claim they have historic rights to these territories. Kirkuk, a city, long contested by the Kurds and the central government, is a prime example of the tension between the two sides (Salih, 2013: 100-103). The Kurds believe that failure to implement article 140 is a sign of the Iraqi central government's breach of the constitution, which is a factor that will weaken democracy and could facilitate sectarian war (Park, 2012: 109-110).

b. The Peshmerga (Kurdistan Region military forces)

The Question of Peshmergas is another source of dispute between the Kurdistan Region and the “federal” government of Iraq. The Kurds insist on the agreements of 2003 and 2005, claiming that although being considered parts of the Iraqi armed forces, Peshmergas should be under the direct command of the President of the Kurdistan Region, whereas the Iraqi government emphasizes that Peshmergas are members of the Iraqi army and must be under the command of the Iraqi Commander-in-Chief, i.e. the Iraqi PM.

The KRG also wishes to undertake security enforcement tasks in the disputed areas instead of the Iraqi forces and, in return, receive a proportion of the Iraqi military budget. However, the Iraqi

government has not provided the Peshmerga forces with adequate support in terms of training, equipment, or financing. This was one of the reasons for Kurdish officials - after the liberation of Mosul - to launch efforts to conduct the referendum (Menati and Hadian, 2019: 154). Furthermore, the success of Peshmerga-Kurdish forces in combating ISIS made them international heroes and increased Kurdistan's leverage on the global stage (Bengio, 2017: 18-19).

c. The Question of Oil and Gas

After the fall of the Iraqi regime, and as oil and gas are deemed national treasures for all Iraqis, the political leadership of the Kurdistan Region started practising its constitutional rights. In particular, the rights stipulated in articles 111, 112, 115, 121, and 141 of the permanent constitution for exploring and producing oil and gas products in the Kurdistan Region. Thus, in the fifth Kurdish Government Cabinet, which was the cabinet of the region's administrative reunion, a Ministry for Natural Resources was installed to take care of the region's oil and gas. After 2006, the KRG's focus was to attract foreign companies and sign contracts with them to explore, extract, and sell oil products (Janati, 2013: 168).

The number of oil reserves estimated so far is that the Kurdistan Region (including the disputed areas) owns 45 billion barrels, resembling one-third of the whole Iraq reserve, as well as 5.7 trillion m³ of natural gas. The federal government tried to take control of the region's oil and gas administration and made an effort to have all foreign companies perform their transactions through Baghdad (Mohandis, 2007: 151).

Foreign companies were discovering new oil wells and the KRG was trying to extract and sell the products autonomously; this was the beginning of most of the disputes and conflicts between the governments of the new Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. In 2012, the KRG was exporting products by lorry daily through Turkey. One year later, and upon agreement between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region, it was resolved to export Kurdistan oil (from Kirkuk, Erbil, and Dohuk wells) through pipelines delivering the products to the Turkish port of Ceyhan and then to the international markets (Dagher, 2009; Deli, 2014).

This agreement between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey worsened the disputes between Iraq and Turkey. The Iraqi government considered the exportation of the Kurdistan Region's oil as a violation of sovereignty and stealth of Iraqi oil, but, in turn, Turkey did not take any steps to suspend this agreement and proceeded with it. One side of this dispute is that the oil and gas issue was misinterpreted and changed from a purely economic factor to a political one. The Iraqi government has always opposed such agreements and considered them illegal. The reason for this attitude is not that it gets less income; it is that it does not wish for the Kurdistan Region to become free.

d. The Budget Issue

During Al-Maliki's second term in office in Iraq, the relations between his government and the KRG worsened and became more complicated, particularly due to the KRG's contiguous processes of oil and gas extraction and independently exporting the products through Turkey without obtaining consent from the Iraqi government. In 2014, these complications were used as a justification to cut the budget proportion of the Kurdistan Region

from the Iraqi budget, which eventually led to the exclusion of the region's civil servants from the Iraqi payroll (Al-Haidari, 2016).

There are two factors behind the disputes regarding the budget. The first is that the Kurds did not regard their portion of the budget as fair and that it did not take into consideration the actual population of the region. Instead, the budget depended on the statistics of the Ba'ath regime, so they claimed a rise in their budget percentage following the population boom of the region. The second factor is that Baghdad had often threatened the Kurdistan Region that it would suspend delivering its budget portion and had tried to lower the percentage to less than 13%, which would mean that the KRG would be unable to comply with its commitments towards the citizens. For example, in 2018, the Iraqi Parliament lowered the region's budget to 12.8% of the general Iraqi budget. In brief, Iraq failed to divide the federal budget fairly and following the Constitution (Menati and Hadian, 2019: 154).

4. The triple Attack of October 16, 2017, against the “Disputed Territories.”

The earliest threats from the new Iraq against Kurdistan Region started with the formation of the so-called, “Dijla Force”. This military unit was formed by PM Nury Al-Maliki, Iraq's Commander-in-Chief, in the autumn of 2012 and justified based on the requirement to provide security in and around Kirkuk to protect Arab and other non-Kurdish societies from Kurdish forces in the area. The establishment of “Dijla Operations Command” involved placing Kirkuk police under its authority. Kurdish leaders responded negatively to this move, calling for the command's dissolution (Fantappie, 2013: 11). These acts by the Iraqi

government in deploying armed forces in the “disputed” areas resulted in protests and condemnation by the Kurdish authorities. Eventually, the President of the Kurdistan Region commanded the preparedness of the Peshmergas to confront those forces.

Peaceful separation is almost impossible. Even internationally, it is a rare phenomenon to see countries separate from each other through peace treaties. Although Czechs and Slovaks separated peacefully in 1993, and Norway separated from Sweden in 1950 following a referendum, generally speaking, separations usually result from conflicts, rather than rational negotiations (Phillips, 2016: 403).

It is worth mentioning that Nouri Al-Maliki asked Iran, during a session at the Iranian Centre for Strategic Research on January 3 2017, to unite with Iraq to prevent any changes in the regional map and to pass another, new Sykes-Picot Agreement. Al-Maliki emphasized that they both (Iraq and Iran) needed to be prepared to prevent the emergent of a Kurdish State (Seifi and Pourhassan, 2018: 55).

As a first step, the Supreme Court of Iraq issued an injunction against referendum planning (Agence France-Presse, 2017) and the Iraqi Parliament rejected the referendum and dismissed the Governor of Kirkuk (Associated Press, 2017). Regional neighbors Turkey and Iran threatened retaliation (Majidyar, 2017; Riva 2017). The US, along with the European Union - Germany, the UK, and others - called for the postponement of the vote and, in some cases, publicly denounced the referendum as a threat to both Iraqi democracy and progress against ISIS throughout the region.

On the night of 15/October 16 2017, the Iraqi armed forces, including the US-trained Counter-Terrorism Service and the Iranian-backed, mainly Shi'i, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF, or Hashd al-Shaabi), equipped with heavy weapons, supported by Turkey and permitted by the US, were, under total silence from the European countries, able to occupy Kirkuk and other disputed territories. As a result, the Kurdish forces lost almost all the disputed areas and no Kurdish party has taken responsibility for these losses (Iraqi Army Retakes Almost All Disputed Areas from Kurds, 2017).

Almost immediately, the central state began peeling back Kurdistan's autonomies. The Federal Aviation Authority ordered the closure of Kurdistan's two airports to international travel; third-party states suspended international flights in solidarity (The New Arab, 2017). The Iraqi Parliament presented a thirteen-point resolution authorizing the deployment of the Iraqi army to retake disputed areas, including Kirkuk; the handover of border crossings and airports; and the closure of diplomatic consulates in the region (Bulos, 2017).

The Iraqi army, supported by Iranian-backed militias, proceeded to seize virtually all Kurdish-held territory along the disputed internal boundaries, including Kirkuk, largely with the willing capitulation of the PUK-backed Peshmerga (Morris and DeYoung, 2018; Zucchini, 2017) and the withdrawal of all Peshmerga forces from Kirkuk. The Peshmerga forces of the KDP, however, defended some strategic locations and positions near Altun Kopri and Shela (within these disputed areas). Turkey contemplated a trade ban and Iran closed border crossings (BBC News, 2017; Majidyar 2017).

On the legal front, the Iraqi Supreme Court held the vote and its process unconstitutional and annulled “all the consequences and results of the referendum” (BBC News, 2017). As a precondition to any negotiations on the Iraqi-imposed blockade and the future of Kurdish autonomy, the government demanded that Kurdistan’s declaration of the results of the referendum invalid.

As Iraq seized Kurdish-held territories outside its delineated governorates, a political crisis within the region developed. KRG President Masoud Barzani issued a statement on October 17 2017 stating that members of a certain political party had unilaterally paved the way for the attack on Kirkuk, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Peshmerga forces (Iddon, 2017; Kurdistan Region Presidency, 2017); Barzani resigned (Jalabi and Chmaytelli, 2017).

The PUK, however, attributed this to the results of the September 25 2017 independence referendum in the disputed territories, claiming that the KDP and its leader, Masoud Barzani, were largely responsible for this setback. The diversion of logistical and financial resources to the referendum and the internal political fallout also resulted in the Kurdish elections being delayed by eight months (Reuters, 2017). The elections were rescheduled to take place after the national parliamentary elections in May 2018, which delivered a major shift in the national political landscape.

Concerning budget allocations, the Iraqi Parliament’s 2018 budget law reduced the previous 17% to around 13%. While this was ostensibly based on adjusted population estimates, this change effectively dissolved previous informal agreements (Houlihan, 2018: 33). The Kurdish bloc boycotted the vote and the President

of Iraq, a PUK member, threatened to sue federal agencies after rejecting the bill under his constitutional authority (ibid).

Following President Barzani's resignation, Kurdish PM Nechirvan Barzani and Iraqi PM Al-Abadi negotiated a framework for dialogue (Reuters, 2018; Shafaaq Foundation for Culture and Media, 2018). Ahead of the Kurdish New Year (Newroz) in spring 2018, Al-Abadi declared a national holiday and approved the transfer of \$268 million to Kurdistan to pay Peshmerga and civil servant salaries (Coker, 2018). A delegation of Iraqi finance heads then visited Erbil to finalize arrangements, which were likely to include payroll audits (Goran, 2018), and exports of oil from Kirkuk were resumed through joint agreements (Sulivany, 2018).

Conclusion

Between 2003, after the fall of the Ba'ath regime, and conducting a referendum in 2017, Iranian foreign policy towards the Kurdistan Region has had four main dimensions:

First: Maintaining the unity of Iraqi lands and preventing its division.

Second: Maintaining a certain level of relations with the Kurdistan Region for two reasons: the first is to influence the Kurdistan Region as part of its influence over the whole of Iraq and to prevent - or mitigate - Turkey's influence; the second is to avail itself of the widest possible economic interests, by which it would be able to compete with Turkey, a factor that enables Tehran to keep the Kurdistan Region by its side for any possible regional changes and would affect the end of the Kurdish armed struggle in

Iran. These aims and plans of Iran are made without any effort to work side by side with the Kurdistan Region to take serious steps towards settling the Kurdish issue in Iran peacefully through granting the Kurds their political, cultural, and administrative rights, especially while any armed struggles by the Kurds in Iran would also lead to an advantage for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Third: Preventing Kurdistan from becoming a centre of power for the US and Israel, who would use it to attack Iran. For this reason, Iran could easily win the confidence and trust of the Kurdistan Region by solving the Kurdish issue in Iran in a peaceful way that would lead to strong ties between Erbil and Tehran, especially while the Kurds and Iranians have a long common history as neighbours. It is in both sides' interests to have good relations with each other, similar to the relations between Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

Fourth: Preventing the spread of Pan-Kurdish nationalism in eastern Kurdistan. In this, too, Turkey and Iran are not realistic, as it is only the Kurdistan Region that has a proper ground to claim the establishment of a Kurdish state and openly makes a claim for it. Kurds in other parts claim only their political, cultural, and administrative rights and wish to live like other multi-ethnic and multi-religion democratic countries. Turkey, Iran, and Syria could coordinate with the Kurdistan Region to affix this principle in their countries; in this way, they could address their concerns about the Kurdistan Region's influence over the Kurds of other parts. Kurds are realistic people, they see and know that Germany, despite its significant power, has not been able to gather all the German-language regions within one entity; so, how will the Kurds be able to do that? They know that this is a form of suicide.

Despite the many political, border, and economic differences between Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, they have one unified attitude towards one issue, which is to cooperate to prevent the Kurds in any of their four parts from obtaining freedom. However, if they have learned a lesson from history, they would know that it is impossible to deprive the fourth-largest nation in the Middle East of this right (at least in one of these four parts) and that the Kurds have proven their preparedness to make any sacrifice - including their most valuable: their lives - to achieve their freedom and dignity within their own free state.

In general, Iranian foreign policy towards the KRI is a complex and highly contested topic. According to the Constitution of Iran, the most important foreign policy goal is preserving the survival and ensuring the national security of the country. Iranian foreign policy exerts a significant political influence over the Kurdistan Region. Iran understands that, with Turkey as a key ally and with the prospective support of the Arab states, the deepening identification of the Kurds will survive without Iran's support. Therefore, Iran has, in recent years, been seeking a friendly relationship with the region, and has expressed a desire for more economic interaction with Kurdistan, similar to how Turkey works with the region. More importantly, Iran has no desire to leave the region, or a future Kurdistan state, as a potential springboard for anti-Iran activities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Abdolhosayn, Yasr 2015. Iranian Foreign Policy: The future of politics under President Hassan Rouhani, Publications Company, Baghdad. [In Arabic]
- Duin, Julia, 2005. Losing the Kurds, Ripon, Forum.
- Fahmy, Abdel-Qader Mohamed, 2010. Foreign policy theory, Kurdistan Center for Strategic Studies, Sulaymaniyah. [In Arabic]
- Fantappie, M., 2013. Contested Consolidation of Power in Iraq, Universitäts-und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt.
- Fuller, Graham E. & Rend Rahim Francke, 2005. The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims, translated by Khadijeh Tabrizi, Qom, Shi'a Studies Center Press, Tehran.
- Ghaffari Hashtchin, Zahid & Heydarkhani, Habil, 2015. Iraqi Shiites after Saddam's fall, Islamic Revolution Documentation Center, Tehran. [In Persian]
- Kaplan, Robert D., 1997. The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy, New York.
- Katzman, K., 2010. Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq. Diane Publishing.
- Khabat Publications, 2017. Towards independence: Barzani's meetings with the press, Roxana print, Erbil.

- Kissinger, Henry, 2004. Diplomacy, translate: Fateme Soltani yekta and Reza Amini, Etela'at, Tehran.
- McDowell, D., 2007. Kurd Contemporary History, Translated by Ibrahim Younes, Publication of Paniz, Tehran.
- Meiselas, S., & M. van Bruinessen, 2008. Kurdistan in the shadow of the history, 2nd ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Modelski, G., 1962. A theory of foreign policy. Praeger for the Centre of International Studies, Princeton University.
- Moghtader, Hushang, 1979. Discussions on international and foreign policy, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences Publications, Tehran. [In Persian]
- Mohandis, Nawzad, 2007. Kurdayati between slogan and reality, Shivan Publication, Sulemani. [In Kurdish]
- Natali, D., 2005. The Kurds and the state: Evolving national identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. Syracuse University Press.
- Obaid, Naif Ali 2004. The foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates: between theory and practice, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut. [In Arabic]
- Phillips, David, 2016. The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East, Translate by: Sirwan Hosein Biyaei, Erbil, Awez Centre.

- Plano, Jack C and Olton, Roy, 1996. International Relations Dictionary, Translated by: Hasan Pasta, Contemporary Culture Publications, Tehran. [In Persian]
- Salih, A, 2012. Detached and Disputed Territories, Sabbatical Leave at the University of Erfurt/Germany).
- Salih, Azad O., 2013. Political Process and Federalism in Iraq, Mukuryani Publications, Erbil.
- Shorsh, Sami, 2002. Iraq and its surroundings: Kurds in this middle, Aras Publisher, Erbil. [In Kurdish]
- Stansfield, G.R. (2003) Iraqi Kurdistan: Political development and emergent democracy, Routledge, London.
- Stein, A., 2015. Turkey's New Foreign Policy: Davutoglu, the AKP and the Pursuit of Regional Order. Routledge.
- Zibakalam, S., 2016. How We Became Us, 27th Edition, Rozaneh Press, Tehran.

Researches and Jornal Articles

- Barkey, H.J. and Laipson, E., 2005. Iraqi Kurds and Iraq's future. Middle East Policy, 12(4), pp.66-76.
- Barkey, H.J., 2010. Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq: Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan, sl: United States Institute of Peace: Special Report 237.

- Barzegar, K., 2010. Regionalism in Iranian Foreign Policy. Islamic Azad University Science and Research of Tehran, 2(5), pp.23-40.
- Bengio, O., 2017. The “Other Iraq” after Mosul: What Future for the Kurdish Region?. After Mosul Re-inventing Iraq, pp.69-90.
- Broning, M., 2008. Don’t Fear the Shiites: The Idea of Teheran-Controlled “Shiite Crescent” over the Greater Middle East Is at Odds with Reality. Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft, pp.60-75.
- Dagher, S., 2009. Kurds Defy Baghdad, Laying Claim to Land and Oil. New York Times, 9.
- Fokuhi, N. and Amosi, M., 2009. National identity and ethnic identity in Kurdistan. Youth Research Journal, Culture and Society, No. 20.
- Ghafari, M. and Kaviani, B.Z., 2014. Evaluation of Kurdistan Citizens’ Participation in 1376-84 presidential election. Geopolitics Quarterly, 7(1).
- Houlihan, E.C., 2018. 2. Referendums on secession and state responses in 2017: Catalonia and Kurdistan. Annual Review of Constitution-Building Processes: 2017, pp.22-54.
- Hudson, V.M., 2005. Foreign policy analysis: Actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations. Foreign policy analysis, pp.1-30.
- Irvani, A., 2007. US operations in Iraq and its impact on Iran. Foreign Policy Quarterly, 1(2), pp.153-183. [In Persian]

- Janati, F., 2013. The Political Equations of Iraqi Kurdistan Region: with focusing on Israel's role in the riddle of Kirkuk. *Journal of Regional Studies*, 47(30), pp.159-188. [In Persian]
- Javadi Arjomand, M. and Toloui, H., 2014. The impact of the US military invasion of Iraq on Iran's intelligent power. *Journal of Politics*, 44(4), pp.777-792. [In Persian]
- Karami, J., 1996. United Nations Security Council and Humanitarian Intervention.
- Karami, Jahangir, 1999. Iran's policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan (comparative review of the 1970s and 1990s). *Journal of Defense Policy*, 9(26), pp.1-17. [In Persian]
- Menati, A. and Hadian N., 2019. The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Iraq from the Perspective of Threat Balance (2003-2018). *Political Sociology of the Islamic World*, 7(15), pp.139-164.
- Najafi, F. and others, 2017. The Role and Position of Shiite Groups in the Political Structure of Iraq after the Collapse (2003-2015). *Studies in the Islamic Revolution*, 14(48), pp.91-108. [In Persian]
- Nikfar, J. Zamani Dadaneh, S. Seyf Abadi, M., 2018. The effect of internal divisions among Kurdish parties on the failure of Iraqi Kurdistan's independence. *Journal of Political Research in the Islamic World*, 8(4), pp.77-109. [In Persian]
- Park, B., 2012. Turkey, the US and the KRG: Moving Parts and the Geopolitical Realities. *Insight Turkey*, 14(3), pp.109-125.

- Qorbani, SA. And Qadimi, A. (2012) A Strategic Study of US Foreign Policy in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Strategy Quarterly*, 21(62), pp.55-82.
- Seifi, Abdolmajid and Pourhassan, Nasser, 2018. ISIS and the emergence of the threat balance in Iran-Iraq relations. *International Relations Studies*, 11 (41), pp.37-63.
- Shafi'i, M., 2015. Shi'a Rationality and Communication Rationality: Reflections on Political Results. *Journal of Political Science*, 10(2), pp.113-144. [In Persian]
- Vaezi, M., 2008. Iran and the United States Interaction in Iraq. *Tehran, Foreign Policy Research*, No. 2.
- Walling, C.B., 2008. The United Nations Security Council and humanitarian intervention: Causal stories about human rights and war. *Walling_Carrie June 2008.pdf*.
- Yazdani, E. and Tuyserkani, M., 2006. Iraq's political transformation and US-Iranian relations. *Economic and Political Information*, No. 226.
- Yazdanpanah, K., Kamran, H., Ranjbari, K., 2017. An analysis of the geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan after the collapse of ISIS, *International Journal of Geographical council of Iran*, No. 53, pp.37-54. [In Persian]
- Zibakalam, S., 2011. The fragile geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan Factor of Iraqi Kurds Convergence with Israel. *Politics Quarterly*, 41(4), pp.59-75. [In Persian]

Websites and Online Sources

- ‘Iraqi Army Retakes Almost All Disputed Areas from Kurds’, The Sun Daily, October 18, 2017, <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/iraqi-army-retakes-almost-all-disputed-areas-kurds>.
- Agence France-Press, ‘Iraq Supreme Court steps in to block Kurdish independence vote’, The Guardian, September 18 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/18/iraqi-supreme-court-steps-in-to-block-kurdish-independence-vote>. Accessed May 19 2017.
- Al-Haidari, Ziyad 2016, Press Conference of the Vice-President of the Republic (Nouri Al-Maliki), Rudaw, viewed November 17 2016, <https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/171120168>. [In Arabic]
- Bahrami, Siamak, 2016, ‘The deviation from the new-Ottomanism and the coup in Turkey’, Strategic Studies Quarterly, No. 73, pp. 31-68. Available at: <https://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/1136477>.
- Bulos, N., ‘Legislators object as Iraqi Kurds vote overwhelmingly to secede’, Los Angeles Times, September 27 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-Kurdish-independence-referendum-20170927-story.html>. It was accessed May 19 2018.
- Coker, M., 2018, ‘After months of acrimony, Baghdad strikes a deal with Kurds’, New York Times, March 22 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/22/world/middleeast/iraq-kurds-agreement.html>. Accessed May 19 2018.

- Deli, Khurshid 2014, Kurdistan and the oil strategy (Oil Battle), Aljazeera, January 8 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.net/knowledgegate/opinions/2014/1/8/1>.
- Goran, B., ‘Kurdistan’s political parties agree to hold the referendum in Kirkuk’, Kurdistan24, April 24 2017, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/%20e87d9795-de10-4f9d-ac26-2013d2589f50/kurdistan's-%20political-parties-agree-to-hold-referendum-in-kirkuk>.
- Iddon, P., 2017, ‘Iraqi Kurdistan in disarray days after the loss of Kirkuk’, The New Arab, October 19 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/10/19/iraqi-kurdistan-in-disarray-after-the-loss-of-kirkuk>.
- Jalabi, R. & Chmaytelli, M., 2017, ‘Kurdish leader Barzani resigns after independence vote backfires’, 29 October 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-barzani/iraqi-kurdish-leader-barzani-confirms-intention-to-step-down-on-nov-1-idUSKBN1CY0KR>. Accessed May 19 2018.
- Kurdistan Region Presidency, Declaration by the President of the KRG and political parties within Parliament and government, Available at: <http://Presidency.kurd/Kurdish/articledisply.aspx?id=ovrcltbcxg=2017/06/12>.

- Majidyar, A., ‘Iran: consequences of the referendum will be dire for Iraq and region’, Middle East Institute, September 5 2017a, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/iran-consequences-referendum-will-be-dire-iraq-and-region>. Accessed May 10 2018.
- Morris, L. & DeYoung, K., ‘Iraqi forces retake the oil-rich city of Kirkuk in escalating dispute with the Kurds’, The Washington Post, 16 October 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-forces-retake-the-oil-rich-city-of-kirkuk-in-escalating-dispute-with-kurds/2017/10/16/39df8f4a-b294-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.c007d570a3eb. accessed 19 May 2018.
- Reuters, ‘Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament delays presidential elections by eight months’, 24 October 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-elections/iraqi-kurdistan-parliament-delays-presidential-elections-by-eight-months-idUSKBN1CT1KE>. Accessed 19 May 2018.
- Shafaaq Foundation for Culture and Media, ‘Kurdistan accepts Baghdad’s terms for dialogue’, January 2 2018, http://www.shafaaq.com/en/En_NewsReader/ca90e8d6-8d28-4e4f-9bfe-9609cfa01bd8. Accessed May 19 2018.
- Sulaivany, K., ‘Iraqi PM: agreement reached with Kurdistan to resume Kirkuk oil exports’, Kurdistan24, February 27 2018, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/economy/0620b746-ee72-49e3-9125-e1f11ce9539f>. Accessed May 19 2018.

- The New Arab, ‘Foreign airlines suspend Kurdistan flights after Baghdad ban’, September 27 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/News/2017/9/27/Foreign-airlines-suspend-Kurdistan-flights-after-Baghdad-ban>. Accessed May 19 2018.
- Zucchini, D., ‘Iraqi forces retake all oil fields in disputed areas as Kurds retreat’, New York Times, October 17 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/world/middleeast/iraq-kurds-kirkuk.html>. Accessed May 19 2018.

پوخته:

دوای ئه وهی که ولاته یه کگرتو وه کانی ئه مریکا له سالی ۲۰۰۳ عێراقی داگیر کرد و رژیمی به عسی پوو خاند، پرسی ههریمی کوردستان بووه ته یه کیک له پرسه سه ره کییه کانی سیاسه تی ده ره وهی ئیران. هه رچه نده ئیران هاوکاری کوردانی کردوو له کاتی ته نگانه و په یوه ندی بایه خداری له گه له ههریمی کوردستان هه یه، به لام ستراتیجی سیاسه تی حکومه تی ئیران به رامبه ر به ههریمی کوردستان سه باره ت به سه ره به خوی سیاسیی و مافی به خۆ دیار کردنی چاره نووسی گه له که ی نه گۆراوه، له ترسی ئه وهی کورد له ئیران هه مان شتی بویت. په یوه ندیه میژوویی و کولتووری و دروسییه گرنه کانی نیوان ئیران و ههریمی کوردستان ده توان ببنه بناخه ی په یوه ندی هه ردوو لایه نه له گه له یه کدی له پیناو به رژه وه ندی و سوودی هاوبه ش و چه سپاندنی ئاشتی و سه قامگیری له ناوچه که دا. ئامانجی سه ره کی ئه م توێژینه وه یه: پوونکردنه وه ی سیاسه تی ده ره وهی ئیرانه به رامبه ر به ههریمی کوردستان-عێراق و خستنه پووی ئاسۆی دوا پوژی په یوه ندی هه ردوو لایه نه له به ر پووشنایی واقعی ئیستاک و پشتبه ستن به به رژه وه ندی ژیا ری هاوبه شی هه ردوو لایه نه به گشتی.

ووشه کللییه کان: ئیران، ههریمی کوردستان، سیاسه تی ده ره وه، رژیمی به عس، شیعه گه رای.

ملخص:

بعد أن إحتلت الولايات المتحدة الأميركية العراق في عام ٢٠٠٣ وأسقطت النظام البعثي، أصبحت مسألة إقليم كردستان إحدى المسائل الرئيسية في السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية. بالرغم من أن إيران ساعدت الكرد ولها علاقات مهمة مع إقليم كردستان، ولكنه لم يطرأ أي تغيير في استراتيجيتها تجاه الإقليم بشأن الاستقلال السياسي للإقليم وحق تقرير المصير لشعبه. إن العلاقات التاريخية والثقافية والجيرة المهمة المتواجدة بين إيران وإقليم كردستان يمكن أن تصبح أساس العلاقات بين الطرفين من أجل المصالح والمنافع المشتركة وفي سبيل تثبيت السلام والاستقرار في المنطقة. الهدف الرئيسي لهذا البحث هو: توضيح السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية تجاه إقليم كردستان- العراق، وبيان أفق مستقبل العلاقات بين الطرفين في ضوء الواقع الحالي و استناداً الى المصالح الحيوية المشتركة للطرفين عامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيران، إقليم كردستان، السياسة الخارجية، النظام البعثي، الشيعية.