



IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ:AN ANALYSIS OF THREE WARS BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Iran-Iraq relations have shifted from conflict to cooperation in the last fifteen years. Two neighbors who were fighting with each other between 1980 and 1988 are in strategic cooperation today. Iran is regarded as one of the most dominant external actor in Iraqi politics. Toppling of the Saddam regime by the American intervention in 2003 and the establishment of a Shiite-dominated administration backed by Iran in the center of Iraq contributed to that process. Analyzes on Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq are generally grouped under two headings. The first view argues that Iran has been an ideological state since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and that the fundamental element of its policy towards Iraq is the Shiite groups in Iraq. The second view reveals that Iran is pursuing realist policies, prioritizing security concerns and national interests. In this article, Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq is examined during three wars namely; the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the Iraq War (2003). The study reveals that there are both realist and ideological elements in Iran's policy towards Iraq in each period examined, but their weight varies according to the period studied. In this context, it is considered that the foundations of religious based policy used in Iran's policy towards Iraq is not only ideological, but it also serves as a means of preserving its strategic and national interests.

Keywords: Iran, Iraq, foreign policy, ideology, realism

İRAN'IN İRAK'A YÖNELİK DİŞ POLİTİKASI:İDEOLOJİ VE REALİZM ARASINDA ÜÇ SAVAŞIN ANALİZİ

ÖZ

İran-İrak ilişkileri son on beş yılda çatışmadan iş birliğine doğru bir değişim yaşamıştır. 1980-1988 yılları arasında birbiriyle savaşan iki komşu ülke, bugün stratejik iş birliği içerisinde. İran, Irak siyasetindeki en önemli dış aktörlerden birisi olarak görülmektedir. Bu durumda, 2003 yılında ABD işgaliyle Saddam rejiminin devrilmesi ve Irak'ın merkezinde İran tarafından desteklenen Şii ağırlıklı bir yönetimin kurulması etkili olmuştur. İran'ın Irak'a yönelik dış politikasına dair değerlendirmeler genel olarak iki başlık altında toplanmaktadır. Birinci görüş, İran'ın, 1979 İslam Devrimi'nden bu yana ideolojik bir devlet olduğunu ve Irak'a yönelik politikasının temel unsurunu da Irak'taki Şii grupların oluşturduğunu savunmaktadır. İkinci görüş ise, İran'ın güvenlik kaygılarını ve ulusal çıkarlarını ön planda tutarak realist politikalar izlediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu makale, İran'ın Irak'a yönelik politikasını, İran-İrak Savaşı (1980-1988), Körfez Savaşı (1990-1991) ve Irak Savaşı (2003) dönemlerinde incelemektedir. Çalışma, incelenen her dönemde, İran'ın Irak'la olan ilişkisinde gerek realist gerekse ideolojik unsurlar olduğunu, ancak bunların ağırlığının analiz edilen döneme göre değiştiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, İran'ın Irak'a yönelik politikasında kullandığı dini motifli politikanın temellerinin sadece ideolojik olmadığı, stratejik ve ulusal çıkarlarını muhafaza etmede bir araç olarak kullanıldığı değerlendirilmektedir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Irak, dış politika, ideoloji, realizm

Introduction

Since its independence in 1932, Iraq has been a major foreign policy concern for Iran. The first reason for that is the long common border between Iran and Iraq that extends for 1300 kilometers which make Iran vulnerable to social, political and economic developments in Iraq. Another important factor that places Iraq at the centre of Iranian attention is the sectarian ties. As in Iran, the majority of the population of Iraq is composed of Shiite Muslims which increase the significance of Iraq in the eyes of the Iranian politicians and clerics. There is an understanding that since the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the main determinant of Iranian foreign policy is religious ideology. However, there are some others arguing that Iran pursues a pragmatic foreign policy shaped by realist considerations. Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq is an important case for analyzing the balance between religious ideology and realism which is argued to be persisted throughout the Iranian history (Ramazani 2006: 169). This article will focus on the balance of ideology and realism in the making of Iranian foreign policy decisions towards Iraq through mainly analyzing three wars namely; the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the Iraq War (2003). Within this framework, Iran's policy towards Iraq and the factors that determine this policy will be examined in three wars. It is argued that although Iran uses strong ideological tools in its foreign policy towards Iraq, it is primarily motivated by geopolitical and security interests.

Theoretical Background

Realism and Foreign Policy

Understanding the factors that shape the foreign policy decisions of countries leads the researchers to focus on a theoretical approach. There are mainly two approaches in the analysis of the foreign policy determinants. The first approach is from the viewpoint of realists. For a long time, there has been no connection between theories of International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) appeared as a field of study in the early 1960s. Realists at first challenged FPA's focus on the state level and human decision making which is considered as a sub-discipline of Political Science rather than International Relations. However over time, they tried to harmonize the two areas. They have started to use FPA as a tool in their analyses of state motivations (Rynning and Guzzini, 2001, p.1).

Realists analyze foreign policy in terms of power politics. Foreign policy has been explained from a rational actor perspective. According to the rational actor assumption, governments and political leaders think and act in a rational manner (Rosati, 1995: 50). Realists assume that states are the main actors in the foreign policy and the state elites are in the search of maximizing the security and the national interests of the state. The main feature of the international system is anarchy which creates deep insecurity and a struggle for power.

Realism is a top-down approach for understanding foreign policy. Realists focus on the importance of international conditions for national foreign policy making. In order to understand foreign policy, an understanding of the fundamental features of the

international system is needed. The international system is characterized by “recurrence” and “repetition” which produces uniform patterns of behavior (Wight, 1960). The balance of power serves a starting point for analyzing foreign policy since states have a tendency to balance in the international system. However defensive and the offensive realist differ on that topic as defensive realists expect states to pursue balancing policies (Waltz, 1979) whereas offensive realists argue that states are in the search of imbalance of balance favoring themselves (Mearsheimer, 1990).

Realists tend to view foreign policy as extremely important for the security and the survival of the state. Bad foreign policy decision might have serious consequences for the states. They recognize that interests are driven by material factors such as military power and economic gains. According to that understanding, communal identities of populations do not shape the policies of states, as states maximize power or security. In brief, states cannot base their foreign policy on ideology or culture; if so, they would put their state’s security at risk.

Identity and Foreign Policy

Second approach in is constructivism. Introduced for the first time by constructivist theorists in International Relations, identity has clearly been used in foreign policy studies since the 1990s. Constructivism is considered as one of the main schools which deals with perception and identity in IR with its roots in sociology. The theory of identity has become an increasingly popular topic for international scholars. Constructivism challenges neorealism’s main assumptions. According to constructivists, foreign policy can be a product of socialization between different states rather than an output of international conditions. For constructivists, identities and interests are the main sources of foreign policy as oppose to the neo-realist understanding that material interests drive foreign policy (Wendt, 1992). Constructivism also challenges realism’s rational actor model through positing that states are social actors and the concept of human consciousness is the start point of everything. Realists’ understanding of anarchy which is the main feature of the international system is not also accepted by the constructivists. According to Wendt (1992), the significance of anarchy is dependent on how states perceive it as he states “anarchy is what states make of it”.

According to some scholars, constructivism is an important tool in the foreign policy analysis of Middle East states. Although accepting the strengths of realist theory in foreign policy analysis, Hinnebusch (2002:1) states that since the state system is still in consolidation in the Middle East, the explanatory power of system level on state behavior is less decisive than realists expected. There are sub-state (sectarianism, tribalism) and supra-state (Arabism, Islamism) identities which are in competition with state identity. Constructivists dealing with the Middle East region have recognized that identity can be a source of the state’s national interests and they focus on identity as “invented” rather than innate (Telhami and Barnett 1992). Constructivism posits that “social structures are alloyed with normative and material elements, that social structures constitute actors’ identities and interests” (Telhami and Barnett 19: 4). One of the important contributions of the constructivist theory is Saideman’s (2002: 169) analysis on four possible impacts of identity on foreign policy. He introduces four possible impacts of identity on foreign policy as; identity does not matter; identity

constrains foreign policy behavior; identity serves to construct the reality; identity influences the ethno-political strategies of rational politicians. In Iranian case, it is hard to say that "identity does not matter", Iran's identity constructs its foreign policy conceptions and influences the strategies of politicians, albeit that national interests are taken into consideration. In Iran's foreign policy, identity in general and Shiite ideology in particular has an important impact. In addition to the Islamist ideology, nationalism and anti-imperialism are listed as the predominant elements of Iran's identity (Maloney 2002: 94).

Balance of Realism and Ideology in Iranian Foreign Policy

We can briefly define ideology as a system of normative values and beliefs that are necessary for an ideal society (Levi, 1970:4). Scholars differ over the impact of ideology on foreign policy making. As is it analyzed under the Realism section above, structuralists emphasizing power and national interests in foreign policy like Waltz and Mearsheimer suggest that ideologies are ineffective in foreign policy making (Waltz, 1979 and Mearsheimer, 2001). According to that view there is no place for ideologies in FPA. On the contrary, constructivists who focus on the identities, perceptions and ideas in international relations posits that ideologies are contributing to the foreign policy making (Wendt, 1999).

There is a third way in the analysis of the role of ideology and the non-material factors in the making of foreign policy which this study also adopts. According to Levi, although ideologies are not very effective in decision-making, it is an instrument frequently used by states to justify their decisions (Levi, 1970: 5).

Iran's foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution has often been analyzed through the prism of religion which is considered to be the most effective component of Iranian identity. The idea of exporting the revolution to the other countries made Iran's foreign policy actions suspicious and interpreted as a threat to the other regional countries which have Shiite populations. The Islamic Revolution has added an Islamic identity to the Iranian nationalism and an understanding of dividing the world as oppressors and oppressed (El Berni, 2018: 117). Briefly, the main elements of Iranian identity are Shiite Islam, Iranian nationalism and anti-imperialism. The scholars are divided into two on the major determinants of Iranian foreign policy. According to some, Shiite Islam is the major component of Iranian foreign policy making whereas some others suggest that strategic interests guides Iranian foreign policy. In this discussion, this article chooses a middle way and claims that ideological and strategic elements coexist in Iran's foreign policy. Their weight changes from time to time. While ideology was at the forefront during the Iran-Iraq war, a foreign policy based on national interests was pursued in the 2003 Iraq War. Secondly, it is considered that the role of identity is to legitimize foreign policy moves based on national interest, and that identity is not a goal but a tool.

In this study, it is evaluated that Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq is the result of internal political calculations and the international environment. Role of identity and realism in Iranian foreign policy and how it affects Iranian state interests will be analyzed in the essay through examining three aforementioned wars. Within this framework, it is suggested that since the Islamic revolution in Iran, identity and ideology

have been prioritized in its relations with Iraq, but the main factor determining relations has been national interests and security.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

The conflict between Iran and Iraq is historically deep-rooted. It dates back to the rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Persian Empire, when Iraq was the province of the Ottoman Empire. After the Safavid chief Shah Ismael had adopted Shiism as the official religion, Safavids considered themselves as the guardians of Shiism and they showed willingness to enter the Shiite holy shrines in Najaf and Karbala in southern Iraq. The Ottomans feared that the Safavids might try to influence their Shiite subjects. The Safavids occupied Iraq for 15 years, from 1623 to 1648. Since the first Safavid-Ottoman War in the sixteenth century which had a Shiite-Sunni character, ideology has played a major role in the conflict between Iran and the neighboring power (Potter 2004: 23). The historical hostility between Iran and Iraq invoked several broad themes "Arab against Persian, Sunni against Shiite and pan-Arabism against pan-Islam" (Potter 2004: 4).

The historical animosity between Iran and Iraq reached its peak after the Iranian Islamic revolution that took place in 1979. The success of the Iranian Islamic Revolution led to the idea to export the revolution to other Muslim countries. Ayatollah Khomeini came up with the slogan to overthrow the tyrannical regimes and then to establish Islamic governments there (Cohen 2018:36). Iraq was one of the targeted countries that the Iranian revolutionaries felt that the oppressed masses in Iraq would raise up against the Baath regime which Iran labeled as "atheistic" or "non-Muslim (Hiro 2001:13). The secular nature of the Baathist regime, the oppression of the Shiite majority and the existence of Shiite holy shrines in Iraq made Iraq the primary target for an Islamic revolution. Iran started the ground for an Islam revolution in Iraq through giving guerilla training to certain Iraqi Shiite groups and then sending back them to Iraq. At this stage, the pervasiveness of ideology in Iranian foreign policy is observed. However, according to some authors, exporting the revolution is also a tool of security strategy to maintain Iran's regional security which was weakened by the revolution (Rubin 2006).

Feeling threatened by Iran's Islamist rhetoric and its support given to the certain Shiite groups in Iraq, Saddam Hussein executed the members of the Shiite Al Da' wa Party and punished the membership to the party by death. Repression of the Shiite militants by the Baath regime led Iraqi Shiite cleric Ayatollah Sadr to issue a religious verdict that the Saddam regime is unIslamic (Hiro 1989:35). The Shiite crisis at home and the fear that Iran would export the revolution to Iraq resulted with the motivation of the Iraqi regime to destroy the Khomeini regime. Finally, Saddam Hussein sent his forces across the border in September 1980 and occupied parts of Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province. For the invasion, Iraq used the Shatt-al Arab dispute as an excuse. Baathist regime had never really accepted the thalweg (mid-point) principle for Shatt al Arab, enshrined in the 1975 Algiers Treaty. Iraq accused Iran of violating the Algiers Treaty by intervening in Iraq's domestic affairs and argued that Iraq regained full sovereignty over Shatt al Arab. In reality, the territorial dispute was just a pretext in the outbreak of war; it could be argued that the dynamics of the Islamic revolution which

threatened the Iraqi regime led to a pre-emptive war against Iranian ambitions. While initiating a war, Saddam Hussein also believed that he could overthrow the Islamic regime in Iran, replace it with a friendly government and enhance its position in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East (Hiro 1989).

For two years, the fighting took place in Iran itself, but after recovering, Iranian forces pushed back the Iraqi forces and in June 1982 had expelled Iraq from Iran. At this point, Iran could have declared a victory, but it decided to take the war into Iraqi territory and the war turned into a war of attrition. This orientation of Iran leads us to ask "Did Iran decide to continue the war to export the Islamic revolution or to defend its security interests?" Scholars are divided into two in making an explanation for Iran's decision to prolong the war. Although it is mainly accepted that the aim of Iran for the prolongation of the war was to export the revolution, from a realist point of view, to continue the war reflects Iran's strategic interests. Post-war statements of the Iranian policy makers including Rafsanjani were focused on the national security interest of Iran, rejecting the ideological purposes. Iranian regime was seen Saddam Hussein as a direct threat and there was a belief that Saddam regime cannot be trusted and he would once again attack Iran (Takeyh: 2010: 372). Iran's relations with the U.S. also reflects pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy during that period. Although, the U.S. officially declared its neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War, it secretly provided arms to Iraq at the initial stage of the war (Hersh, 1992). The attitude of U.S. changed over time and it decided to sell spare parts and rockets to Iran to gain the release of American hostages in Lebanon (Boyd, 1986). This deal between U.S and Iran changed the balance in favor of Iran. Iran also established a tactical relationship with the Kurdish groups in the North which are against Saddam regime (Sönmez, 2012: 318).

There are also some explanations of the war focusing on the leadership level. It is argued that the war was a struggle between two men, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Saddam Hussein and the rallying cries for of religion and culture were simply tools to convince the citizens (Xavier 1997:5). According to that understanding, identity was just used as a legitimacy tool in order to reach strategic interests. Xavier also (1997: 16-17) suggests that Iran provoked war in order to divert Iranians attention from internal problems. In that sense, Iran-Iraq War contributed to the consolidation of power and to mobilize the masses.

These realist explanations still did not rule out the influence of ideology as Ramazani (2006:556) advocates in his article "*Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy*". He argues that the explanations of Iranian authorities revealed pragmatic consideration of state interests as well as the presence of religious ideology. In a similar way, Takeyh (2010:365) also asserts that "military planning and issues of strategy were cast aside for the sake of martyrdom and sacrifice". The Iran-Iraq War is important in revealing the role of ideology and the intensity of the war propaganda. The war initiated and continued not simply for territorial gain but also for the purpose of overthrowing the regimes. It was a war between the highly ideological Baath regime and an Iranian regime driven by the ideological vision of Islam.

Iran-Iraq War had its own peculiarities which distinguish it from the other wars. First, the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War is the longest conventional war of the twentieth

century. Neither the First World War, nor the Second lasted such a long time. Second, as Hiro (1989:1) states, the other major conflicts of the century were not conventional wars between sovereign states; there was the intervention of other powers. Third, it was the first time the superpowers were on the same side which is labeled as “an anomaly for the Middle East” (Potter and Sick 2004:2). Although both the United States and the Soviet Union expressed their neutrality, they aided Iraq, Soviet Union with arms and United States with economic and political support. Fourth, there was not any winner of the war; neither side had achieved its aims related with the war. Iraq did not able to bring down the Islamic regime in Iran and Iran did not topple the Baathist rule in Iraq. In the end, neither combatant lost much territory on land; nor was there a regime change in either country. Fifth, the war was resulted with more than a million casualties which is one of the bloodiest. It is estimated that 400,000 killed and 700,000 wounded on both sides (Potter and Sick 2004:2). Potter explains Iran Iraq War as follows: “this was a war that should have never been fought... neither side gained a thing, except the saving of its own regime. And neither regime was worth the sacrifice” (Potter 1989: 25).

Although the war was not resulted with a clear victory for both of the sides, it had important consequences. The war enabled Khomeini to mobilize Iranians in the name of defending both Islam and the nation. This rhetoric was successful and it consolidated the Islamic revolution. Iranian leadership viewed the war in relation to the revolution to achieve revolutionary objectives. It provided the regime to create a platform for combining national unity and Islamic revolution. On the other hand, the military conflict militarized the Iraqi society and the ruling party dominated the society. The war led to a stronger sense of national identity and left a legacy of mutual distrust from both sides. Nearly 30 years after its ending, the war with Iraq continues to play a significant role in Iranian identity.

The Gulf War (1990-1991)

After the Iran-Iraq War ended, Iraqi regime decided to adopt political reform including economic liberalization and privatization plans. However, Iraq’s reconstruction plans were in trouble because of the demands of foreign debt servicing and defense expenditure which consumed most of the oil export revenue. At the time that Iraq was economically vulnerable, Kuwait decided to use oil as the lever to pressure Iraq to settle their long-standing border dispute. Kuwait called on the Arab League to settle the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border dispute. Believing that the negotiations with the Kuwaitis were futile, Saddam invaded and occupied Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The UN Security Council condemned Iraq, urging a ceasefire and withdrawal of its troops from Kuwait. It also passed Resolution 661 which imposed mandatory sanctions and embargo on Iraq. Through the invitation of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, President Bush sent 40,000 troops to the Saudi Kingdom (Hiro 2001:30).

Iran’s standing during the Gulf War as the only country that combined its condemnation of both Iraq and US was important. After Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait on August 1990, President Rafsanjani condemned Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. While declaring that Iran would abide by the UN resolutions on Iraq, Tehran regime condemned US military build-up in the Gulf. In spite of the calls from Iran that Iraq must vacate Kuwait, during that time, Iran developed its diplomatic relations with Iraq.

Rafsanjani accepted Saddam Hussein's call to abide by the 1975 Algiers Accord, withdraw troops from the occupied Iranian territory, and undertake an exchange of prisoners. This decision put an end on the demarcation of the fluvial boundary of the two countries. On August 21, two years after the UN ceasefire that ended the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq vacated all of the Iranian territory that it had been occupying. When the relations improved, Iraq proposed a resumption of full diplomatic relations broken off and Iran agreed. However, Iran did not respond to Iraq's offer for establishing an Iran-Iraq Economic Cooperation Council. It continued to strictly obey UN embargo against Iraq. (Hiro 2001:31). Through adopting a two track policy of demanding unconditional Iraqi evacuation of Kuwait and condemning US military build up in the Gulf, Iran also remained diplomatically active. Iran prepared a peace plan to make Iraq withdraw from Kuwait and to persuade the Coalition forces to pull out of the region. Although the plan took seriously, it was not adopted. (Los Angeles Times 1991).

Iran's policy towards the US was motivated by realist assumptions that the American use of force might pave way against the Iranian regime. On the other hand, hostility towards US did not lead Iran to support Iraq. This can be explained both through realist and constructivist approaches. First, from a realist perspective, Iranian regime did not want to defy the UN economic sanctions and suffer the consequences through siding with Iraq in the war. Second, from a constructivist perspective, it could be argued that public memories of Baghdad's aggression against Iran and the deep psychological wounds left by the war were fresh which prevented Iran to embrace Iraq (Taremi 2005:32). In spite of the calls of Hojatalislam Ali Akbar Mohtashami to join the jihad with Iraq against the infidel forces of America and Israel, it was rejected by chairman of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Ali Meshkini as "do not connect this war with Islam...it is a war between dictators (Saddam and the Kuwaiti Emir)" (Hiro 2001:32).

Iran's actions during the Gulf War reflects realist elements in Iranian foreign policy. At that stage, realism prevails over ideology. Iran openly condemned the invasion of Kuwait and voted for the UN decision that Iraq should immediately withdraw from Kuwait. Iran followed a policy of neutrality but did not oppose the international intervention under the leadership of U.S. Gulf War. This policy had created positive results for Iran. Primarily, Iraq which is considered to be a direct threat for Iranian national security became weaker and isolated in the international arena. On the other hand, Iran recovered its image in a positive way in the Middle East, getting stronger and turned the regional balance in its favor. Secondly, during the war, Saddam regime approved the provisions of Algiers Treaty which is the reason of the outbreak of Iran-Iraq war without any condition. After Iraqi troops had withdrawn from Kuwait and the war ended, Iranian regime pleased to see Iraq defeated although it did not express this feeling officially. Iran had benefited both from its "neutral status" in the war and from the high oil prices. Its non-alignment during the war prepared a ground for Iran to attack both the US and the regional Arab leaders as Khamenei did through describing them as "cowards and sheepish for inviting Washington to crush a Muslim nation" (Hiro 2001:32).

After the war ended, a Shiite uprising was started in the south of Iraq. It began in Nasiriyeh, and spread rapidly to the other Shiite-majority towns and cities. During the

early days of the insurgency, it was considered to be a purely Iraqi phenomenon. The initial uprising was an expression of hatred against the regime and was aimed to overthrow the Saddam regime. However, Rafsanjani's oral expressions supporting the insurgency and the reports that thousands of armed men had crossed into Iraq from Iran changed this view. These included the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Tehran based Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) led by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al Hakim, a Shiite cleric against the Iraqi regime. Iran's open intervention alarmed Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and United States. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were worried about a destabilized and fragmented Iraq, whereas USA, did not want to see a regime change in Iraq replaced by a under the control of Iran. At the end, Iraqi regime managed to control the Shiite uprising in the south and turned its attention to the Kurdish insurgency in the north. Through giving support to the insurgency, Iran tried to increase its influence in Iraq however Iran's interference was rejected by most of the insurgents who joined the uprisings to gain democratic freedoms on the ground that the aim of the Iranian leaders was to create an Islamic state in Iraq based on the Iranian model. At this stage, we again see the presence of ideology in Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq in order to increase its involvement in the country.

Iraq War (2003)

The question "why Iran firmly opposed to the US decision to invade Iraq in 2003, although it was hostile to the Iraqi regime?" is critical for formulating the main argument of this paper. In 2002, when the first signs of US decision to invade Iraq were given, Iran firmly opposed the invasion and it opted for diplomacy. Taremi (2005) in his article "*Iranian Foreign Policy towards Occupied Iraq, 2003-2005*" focuses on two reasons for Iran's opposition. He argues that one of the main reasons for this opposition was the Iranian perception that the invasion of Iraq was the prelude to an offensive war against Iran. Ehteshami (2003: 123) also questions "Why should Iran help overthrow Saddam when rapid success may have facilitated US efforts to overturn the regime in Tehran?" He suggests that Iran feared that the United States would install a pro-American regime in Iraq as it did in Afghanistan. Bargezar focuses on an historical trauma in Iran through arguing that Iranians have always been sensitive to the presence on foreign armies on their borders since Qajar dynasty had defeated by the Tsarist army at the end of nineteenth century (Bargezar 2010:174)

In spite of just feeling threatened by a possible invasion of Iraq, Iran prepared itself for the war and adopted a "nuanced policy". In parallel with diplomacy, Iran tried to consolidate its influence in Iraq. In order to strengthen its position in Iraq, Iran had invested in certain Shiite groups in Iraq, mainly the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) which was highly active in Iraq. Iran's policy to support and deploy certain Shiite groups in Iraq reflects the general tendency in Iranian policy which is composed of elements both from ideology and realism. In fact, at this stage, Iran's decision to give support to Shiite groups in order to consolidate itself in Iraq could be regarded as using ideology in order to secure its national interests.

On the other hand, when the invasion became a reality, Tehran regime no longer objected to US actions and developed a dialogue between the leaders of Iraqi US-backed opposition groups like Ahmed Chalabi (Iraqi National Congress). It is also

argued that Iranian leaders secretly met with Saddam's son, Qusay Hussein, in 2002 for security and military discussions that Iran would side with Iraq in its counterstrategy against the United States (Ehteshami 2003:123). Iran had adopted an "accommodating policy" through having direct talks with the United States and expanding its cooperation with the Arab world (Bargezar 2010: 173).

Invasion of Iraq by the U.S. created suspicions in the Iranian administration that Iran would be the next target of the U.S. as a part of its "war on terror" strategy in which Iran was shown as a member of "axis of evil". Although, Iran was cooperative in its relations with the U.S. in the post 9/11 period, particularly in the Afghanistan intervention through helping the U.S. in opening up its eastern airports and seaports and assisting with intelligence support, invasion of Iraq created unrest in Iran. This made Iranian administration reluctant at first but over time Iran diverted to a pragmatic foreign policy. Iran adopted a policy of accommodation with the U.S. in order not to be excluded from the process of restructuring Iraq. Iran had certain advantages in Iraq as having larger intelligence and influence especially among the Shiite community. Iran offered humanitarian assistance to Iraq and also pushed its Shiite allies in Iraq to cooperate with the U.S. administration (Ansari, 2016: 197). Iran's policy of pressing the Shiites for collaboration provided certain benefits for Iran. Shiite dominated central governments were established in the post-intervention period having closer links with the Iranian regime. Through staying in the process, Iran also followed the developments in the Kurdish region and defended the integrity of Iraq. Although, it supported certain Kurdish factions, Iran was highly against the division of Iraq. The principles of Iran's policy in the Iraq war, which will be elaborated in the paragraphs under three points are based on national security concerns. According to Zimmermann, Iran's policy during the Iraqi invasion of 2003 can be best labelled as "active neutrality". Although, Iran did not directly engage in a conflict, it penetrated into Iraq's newly consolidated administration through taking the advantage of the regime change and maintained its influence in Iraq (Zimmermann, 2007: 21).

Iran's policy towards Iraq and its influence in the country has been one of the most debated issues after the US invasion. After US invaded Iraq in March 2003, Iraq determined its new policy towards the occupied Iraq and mainly pursued certain goals. The starting point for understanding Iran's role in Iraq must be a critical examination of its interests. Iran's interest in Iraq is beyond dispute. Although, there are different views about Iran's policy towards Iraq, Tehran's interest in Iraq can be summed up in three points. First is to prevent Iraq from re-emerging as a threat in terms of military, politics and ideology. Second is to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity through supporting the establishment of a central government. Third is to avert a possible US attack against Iran.

In order to secure its interests related with Iraq listed above, Iran adopted a complex strategy. The first was to prevent the US from establishing a client regime which would be in competition with Iran. Iran feared that the United States would install a client regime in Baghdad to increase its control over Iraq as it did in Afghanistan. Iranian regime also felt that if a client regime will be established, it could pull out of OPEC and utilize its oil reserves in consistent with US interests. From the clerical regime's perspective, a pro-American government would also weaken the anti-Israeli

front in the Middle East. (Taremi 2005: 34). In order to prevent this possibility, Iran supported holding of elections, which it believed would produce a government dominated by the Shiite majority. Iranian leaders thought that such a government would inevitably align itself with Iran. Iran's opposition to Sadr's uprising in 2004 on the ground that the movement would prevent the democratic gains of the Shiites might be considered as a proof that Iran follows a realist policy on this issue through supporting the elections (Taremi 2005: 34).

Secondly, Iran has an effort to keep Iraq united. Iran with other Iraqi neighbors has an interest in preventing the country's fragmentation and supporting the formation of a central government. Although it is generally argued that Iran would be benefited from a Shiite federal state established in Iraq, Iranian authorities make emphasis on the unity of Iraq through stating that Iran has reason to fear from the chaos in Iraq. Iran's president Mahmud Ahmedinejad expresses his support for a "united" Iraq in every occasion as he believes that "a united and independent Iraq will be beneficial to security and progress of the region" (CNN 2006). One of the main reasons for Iran's fear for a fragmented Iraq is stems from the structure of Iran's population that is ethnically and religiously mixed. The disintegration of Iraq could strengthen ethnic movements against the central Iranian state and would likely trigger an Iranian response aimed at securing its interests. The threat that is perceived by Iran related with fragmentation could be listed in three points: a Shiite- Sunni civil war, the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq and the establishment of a rival Shiite clerical government (Kemp 2005). A Shiite- Sunni war as a result of Iraq's break up will automatically affect Shiite Iran. In such a case, Iran would be regarded as the guardian of the Shiites in Iraq and would confront with Saudi Arabia which declared that it would intervene in Iraq in the case of a civil war to support the Sunnis (Amerikanın Sesi 2006). Iran also perceives threat from Iraqi Kurdish moves towards independence which could make common cause with Iranian Kurds. Since Iranian regime has fears of the potential impact of an independent Kurdish state on its own Kurdish population, it has an effort to keep Iraq united. Although it is mainly argued that the intention of Iran is to establish an Islamic Republic in Iraq modeled on Iran, Iranian leaders reject this argument as a senior Iranian diplomat suggests "it is in Iran's vested interest not to have an Islamic Republic in Iraq" (International Crisis Group 2005:11). This is related with Iran's ambition to prevent the emergence of an independent religious leadership in the holy Shiite cities of Iraq competing with the Iranian city of Qum in the case of an establishment of a federal or an independent Shiite state in Iraq.

In order to make realize the third objective which is to avert a possible US attack against the US, Iran has adopted certain strategies. Ehteshami (2003:124) states that "from the perspective that Iran is next, Tehran would sensibly regard Iraq as its first line of defense and thus find ways to prevent the United States from finding time or opportunity to secure decisive control of it". Believing that Iran was next on the US list of countries where regime change is necessary, Iran has conducted a policy to deprive the United States of any pretext for launching an invasion. In order to achieve this goal, it is widely accepted that Iran seems to have pursued a policy of "managed chaos" in Iraq through making it destabilize (International Crisis Group 2005:11). This

strategy is believed to make US preoccupied with Iraq and to prevent a possible invasion against Iran. Secondly, Iran also tried to show US that it play a constructive role in Iraq. Iran demonstrated its good will towards Iraq through taking good measures to help the new Iraqi government and urging the various Shiite political organizations to join the US – sponsored political process. (Taremi 2005: 39).

All of the Iranian interests related with Iraq after the invasion which were listed as to prevent Iraq from re-emerging as a threat in terms of military, politics and ideology, to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity through supporting the establishment of a central government and to avert a possible US attack against Iran resulted with certain strategies. Most of the important objective is to ensure the ascendancy of Iraqi Shiites in the post-war Iraq which could be considered as a highly ideological policy. Acting through realizing this objective, it could be said that Iran played on certain Iraqi Shiite groups through using sect as a common ground. However, it could be argued that the Iraqi Shiites are just a means not an end in Iran's policy towards Iraq. Expressions of Iranian politicians emphasizing that Iran does not have any intention to install a theocratic regime in Iraq confirm this argument.

The primary tools of Iran's influence in the south are the Iraqi parties that returned from exile in Iran after the regime toppled. These include, in particular SCIRI (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) (which became ISCI after dropping the word "revolution" from its name) and Al-Da'wa. SCIRI was founded in Iran in 1982 and its military wings, the Badr Corps, was established and trained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and fought on the Iranian side during the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq's oldest Shiite religiously based political party, Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyah was also returned from exile in Iran and splintered there. Third main Shiite organization is the al Sadr group. At the beginning of the invasion, Muqtada al Sadr, the son of revered cleric Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr (assassinated in Iraq in 1999), was perceived as an Arab nationalist, having no links with Iran. He criticized SCIRI and al Dawa for being under the influence of Iran and Sistani being a Persian (International Crisis Group 2005:18). In the post-war period, Sadr group and its military wings, the Mahdi Army, is said to be financed and controlled by Iran.

Iraqi governments since 2005 were all supported by Iran. Although, Iran had some reservations about Nouri Al-Maliki who was the Prime Minister of Iraq from 2006-2014 and has known to be an Arab nationalist (Sinkaya 2014:4), always supported him because of Maliki's policy to improve strategic relations with Iran. Iran also played a critical role in the formation of Haider Al-Abadi government and Abadi paid his first official visit to Iran in order to thank Iran for their support. In 2018, Abdul Mahdi became the Prime Minister and he became the first leader since 2005 not to be aligned to the Shiite Islamic Al-Da'wa party. Although he has good relations with the US, his appointment was not opposed by Iran (The Guardian 2018).

Iran's close relations with certain Shiite groups in Iraq led to the charges of interference made against Iran especially by the US in the post-intervention period. Although the Iranian government acknowledged its moral and financial support for the Shiite community in Iraq, it strongly denied any interference in Iraqi affairs. However, it

is very well known that Iranian al-Quds Force arms and trains Shiites militias mainly the Badr Corps Although US was intended to establish a professional, non-sectarian and apolitical military and a new police force in Iraq, it did not become successful (Ottaway 2015). In the struggle against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Iran played a critical call. After, ISIS occupied Mosul and a large part of northeastern Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani issued a fatwa to Iraqi people to defend their country. His call also gave legitimacy to the Shiite militias. Militias became a part of Popular Mobilization Forces including the Shiite militias. Iran supported Popular Mobilization Forces and the Iraqi army in their struggle against ISIS through providing arms, munitions, logistical support, military training and intelligence sharing (Sinkaya 2014: 9-11). According to Ottaway (2015:17), the war against ISIS provided an opportunity for Iran to become a dominant player in Iraq.

The policy adopted by Iran during and in the aftermath of Iraqi intervention which is called as “accommodation policy” or “active neutrality” by certain scholars provided Iranian regime with certain benefits as revealed in the previous paragraphs. Despite labelling the U.S. as its arch rival, Iran chose to pursue a conciliatory policy with the US. This provided Iran to penetrate into Iraqi politics through the Shiite political groups which gained the upper hand in the newly established Iraq. Iran pulled the Shiite groups to end the violence against the US. And the Sunnis. Iran also contributed to the stability and the reconstruction of Iraq economically. Iran pledged more than \$1 billion for Iraqi reconstruction and also increased its trade relations with Iraq which Iran benefited economically. The U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq indirectly helped Iran in improving its regional status and influence. American intervention in Afghanistan removed a hostile Taliban regime having links with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and the Iraqi intervention resulted with the fall of Saddam Hussein, an old enemy of Iran. Iranian regime saw the fall of rival regimes in its neighborhood as positive and increased its sphere of influence. The biggest threat to Iranian security became the U.S. which encircled Iran. Although having a limited cooperation with the U.S., there was always the idea in the minds of Iranian policy makers that Iran would be the next target of the U.S. In order to tackle that security dilemma, Tehran pursued a policy of maintaining limited support to the Iraqi insurgency to make the U.S. bogged down with Iraq’s domestic problems. According to this policy, since the US was busy with Iraq, it would not have the capacity to intervene in Iran (Zimmermann: 26).

Conclusion

Iran as a sovereign state considered to be an active player of realpolitik in its foreign relations. However, it is not just in the search of maximizing its power in terms of military strength as classical realism suggests. Rather, it follows political, economic, military and cultural relations with other states and non-state actors to strengthen its international standing. While reaching its foreign policy objectives based on realpolitik considerations, Iran relies on cultural, ideological tools and non-state actors like Shiite groups in the different parts of the Middle East as well as military power. Former President Khatemi explains this orientation in Iranian foreign policy as “Foreign policy does not mean guns and rifles, but utilizing all legitimate means to convince others” (Takeyh, 2006:111) .The ultimate goal of Iran is to strengthen its regional and international position in terms of its national security interests and economic power. In

order to achieve this goal, it is considered that Iran prioritizes the values of revolution, religion and nationalism which constitute the parts of Iranian culture, but does not compromise its national interests in order to protect these values. Although Islamic values are prioritized in discourse, Iranian foreign policy is thought to be quite pragmatic in practice. Otherwise, it would not be possible to explain Iran's secret arms deal with the U.S. during the Iran-Iraq war and its conciliatory policy during the 2003 Iraq War.

In this article, it has been tried to reveal that Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq is formulated by both ideological and realist considerations. The historical rivalry started between Iraq as a province of the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids. It continued with the Shiite dominated Iran and Arab nationalist secular, Sunni dominated Iraq and reached its peak during the Iran-Iraq War. This historical animosity for long years overwhelmingly influenced Iranian-Iraqi relations. Shiite community which is Iran's major tool in its Iraq policy also reveals the existence of ideology in Iran's policy towards Iraq. However, it is hard to argue that historical animosity and ideology is the only determinant in Iran's strategies, intentions and actions towards Iraq. Iran's national interests dictate its policy towards Iraq and history- ideology informs it. In other words, ideological and realist considerations in Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq have not been in competition, but have instead completed each other.

Through examining three different wars, it is seen that the dominance of ideology and realism changes from time to time in Iran's policy towards Iraq. During the Iran-Iraq war, ideology prevailed over realism. The symbols of martyrdom and Persian nationalism were effectively used. Newly established Iranian Islamic Republic even welcomed the war in order to consolidate its power despite the disastrous invasion of the country. Iran started to view Iraq more through the lens of contemporary realpolitik in the aftermath of Iran-Iraq war albeit not separate from ideology. Iran applied for a balanced and realist foreign policy towards Iraq during the Gulf War. Iran both condemned Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the intervention of coalition forces in Iraq. Although, Iran strongly objected to US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and faced with a security dilemma with that invasion, it opted for an "accommodating policy" mainly shaped by pragmatism. Supporting Shiite factions in Iraq is not purely an ideological policy rather it helps Iran to penetrate into Iraqi politics and to tackle with future security challenges.

Iran's attempts in the 1980s were restricted to export the Islamic revolution through funding the Shiite resistance groups. However under current circumstances Iran is seen as most of the dominant actor in Iraq. American intervention in 2003 and the rise of ISIS contributed positively to Iran's position in Iraq. The spreading Iranian influence in Iraq is beyond dispute. The Iranian regime's relationship with Iraq is not just limited to its links with the Shiite political groups. Iran through supporting the idea of "united Iraq" is in dialogue with different political and sectarian groups in the country. Iran also contributed to the reconstruction process of Iraq through funding infrastructure projects, including schools and clinics to win a popular support.

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