

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



## Report Summary

# Study of Opportunities, Constraints, and Influential Factors in Iranian–Iraqi Relations

A Group of Researchers



## **Abstract**

Iraq is a neighboring and strategically important country for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Over the past centuries, particularly since the beginning of the twentieth century, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Iraqi government, Iraq has acquired a special and distinct status in Iranian foreign policy due to its intertwined history, culture, religion, and even ethnicity. On the other hand, the shared border between Iran and Iraq extends for more than 1,400 kilometers, making it the widest border Iran has with any neighbor. As history shows, Iraq has always had an impact on Iran's national security and interests. For this reason, Iraq holds a special and distinguished place in Iran's foreign policy system under all circumstances. Considering Iraq's geographical location relative to Iran, it serves as the eastern gateway to the Arab world. One of the tools of Iranian foreign policy is to invest in and export its cultural capacities, particularly to the Arab world, for communication and cultural exchange. Another factor that gives Iraq a special status in Iranian foreign policy is the direct impact of Iranian-Iraqi relations on the regional standing of the Islamic Republic of Iran, given Iraq's potential to become a force affecting Iranian security and economic interests in the region. The last decades of the previous century, both before and after the Islamic Revolution, have witnessed clear examples of this. Iraq can also play a synergistic and allied role with Iran in economic fields such as oil, legal issues, and international forums. This study examines the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that influence Iranian-Iraqi relations.

## **Introduction**

One of the key issues for national development in Iran and Iraq, particularly in the economic and commercial sectors, which hold a special status, is the topic of tourism. Today, in most developed countries, alongside the economic growth of both nations, we also witness significant tourism growth, which leads us to believe that these two sectors are mutually essential for each other. In today's world, tourism has become one of the primary sources of foreign currency income for many countries facing hard currency shortages.

## **Background of the Study**

The topic of religious tourism and visits to holy sites has garnered the attention of researchers from various perspectives, both within and outside Iran. Regarding the Arbaeen pilgrimage, materials have been written in diary form on multiple websites. Below, we mention some research close to this article and highlight what distinguishes this study:

- Pourhamoud Babli, Ali (1999), in his thesis "A Study of Strategies for Attracting Foreign Investment in Iranian Tourism: Advantages and Obstacles," states that tourism today is an activity of the future. According to global statistics, tourism accounts for more than 10% of the world's gross product, and this share is increasing. He notes that Iran, with its numerous tourist attractions and thousands of years of history, has many facilities that could make it competitive in the tourism sector. This research employed audience measurement methods and distributed questionnaires to investigate the results, ultimately identifying obstacles, goals, and recommendations relevant to the subject.
- In the article "Strategic Planning for Tourism Development, Focusing on the Return of Religious Tourism to Qom," Ebrahimzadeh Isa and colleagues

(2011) analyze the priority of strategies for planning religious tourism in Qom by examining internal and external factors affecting tourism, studying the potential of spiritual tourism, and the ability to use religious, historical, and cultural attractions alongside economic growth and development.

- Nader Jafari, in the sixth chapter of his book “Tourism Management and National Image in the Islamic Republic” (2011), under the heading “Policy Determination and Tourism,” discusses how countries plan and program tourism at the national level, political considerations of tourism, its structural planning, comparative studies of national tourism, and the results achieved in tourism planning, some of which have inspired this study.
- The book “Collection of Arbaeen Articles,” prepared by several writers in 2015 by the Iranian Hajj and Pilgrimage Research Institute, contains in its first part twelve articles from journals and the second part twenty-two articles about the Arbaeen pilgrimage published in selected newspapers. The Arba’een pilgrimage is also independently described in this collection.
- The book “Iranian-Iraqi Economic Relations: Prospects and Opportunities,” by Adel Ghorbani and Mir Farhad Sayigh Amadi, provides an in-depth analysis of Iraq’s economic, social, and political situation, its commercial and economic environment, and the opportunities and challenges in the economic field, as well as the relationship between Iran and Iraq. This book considers these relations only from a financial perspective, with a brief section discussing the economic impact of Iranian visits to Iraq.

## **Theoretical Framework**

For thousands of years, travel has been an integral part of human recreation. In the past, travel meant simply going elsewhere for enjoyment. Still, with the development of societies and the transformation of travel into the tourism industry, general concepts have given way to various categories, each offering a specific definition of travel. Tourism is one of the global phenomena that well expresses a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors. Within an international framework, tourism is a means of control. Some only view tourism from a financial perspective, regarding it as a product that increases a country's economic income. Other approaches focus on the interplay between supply and demand in tourism, examining how various destinations and tourism elements interact with each other. In tourism marketing, most authors do not distinguish between products and services, referring to the tourism product as a combination of both. It is defined as anything offered to the market to attract attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that may satisfy a need or desire. This includes physical goods, services, places, organizations, and ideas.

Based on Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, this study examines how the Islamic Republic of Iran utilizes soft power influence through the Arbaeen pilgrimage, affecting not only Iraq but also the broader Arab Shia currents in the region.

### **Religious Tourism in Islamic Countries**

What is referred to today as religious tourism has a history as long as the history of revealed religions. From Christian and Jewish believers who traveled long distances to visit their religious sites, to early Muslims who traveled to Mecca each year on horseback or foot, all were among the world's first religious tourists, albeit unknowingly. Over time, with the spread of religious observance among

followers of different religions and the development of holy sites worldwide, visits to these sites have increased annually among adherents of various faiths, and the number of visitors has grown significantly, transforming these journeys into a multi-billion-dollar industry. There are many religions in the world, but based on the number of followers, the five main religions can be identified: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Currently, there are 55 Islamic countries, most of which are in West Asia and Africa. At the same time, most Islamic countries—such as Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Malaysia, Tunisia, Indonesia, and Morocco—are among the most popular and significant tourist destinations.

According to the World Tourism Organization's annual report for 2013, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Morocco ranked highest in attracting foreign tourists among Arab countries in the region. In 2012, the total number of foreign tourists in West Asia was reported to be approximately 52 million, representing a 5% increase in tourist numbers despite tensions and unrest in the region.

### **Religious Tourism in Iran**

With the spread of Islam in Iran, the shrines of Imams, saints, and mystics have historically become pilgrimage sites. Later, with the construction of domes and the development of facilities and services, not only were prominent religious sites and buildings established in various parts of the country, but visits to these sites also became integrated into the social structure of different communities. In Iran's geographical area, in addition to Shiites, followers of other religions and sects, such as Zoroastrians, Armenians, and Jews, also reside, each with essential shrines that attract many visitors. For example, the most important Iranian sites sought by Sunni visitors are the tomb of Sheikh Jam in Khorasan and the Grand Mosque of Sanandaj. Iranian Zoroastrians, mainly residing in Tehran, Yazd,

and Kerman, annually visit historical sites such as Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, Taq-e Bostan, Bisotun, Lake Urmia, Kashmar Tower, and the Azar Goshasb Fire Temple in Takht-e Soleyman for their religious ceremonies. There are also Armenian churches in various places, especially in Isfahan and West Azerbaijan. The purposes of most tourists visiting Iran vary between medical, historical, environmental, and commercial visits. Iran has several factors that significantly impact the development of religious tourism, with both positive and negative effects, some of which are mentioned below.

### **Positive Effects**

1. The existence of many traditional and religious rituals and celebrations: Iran, with its history spanning several millennia and the presence of adherents of various revealed religions, has many religious and traditional celebrations that can be attractive to any tourist, such as festivals or celebrations marking the birthdays of the Imams, and most importantly, the mourning ceremonies for Imam Hussein in the months of Muharram and Safar.
2. Imitated Islamic sites: These reflect Iranian culture, art, and civilization, such as the arts used in constructing the shrines of the infallible Imams and their descendants.
3. Provision of Halal Food: One of the most important considerations for foreign tourists, especially Muslims, is access to halal food throughout Islamic Iran. Additionally, Iran is blessed with mosques that remind one of prayer times, and tourists can easily obtain a copy of the Holy Quran and perform their religious duties.

### **Negative Effects**

1. Lack of timely advertising and information: Iran is very rich in tourist and religious sites, but due to insufficient publicity and appropriate advertising, many people worldwide are unaware of these treasures.
2. Lack of adequate care facilities: Even with sufficient information available and an increase in the number of tourists, there are not enough care facilities, including internationally standardized hotels, to accommodate them, resulting in a significant gap in attracting tourists.
3. Development of transportation infrastructure: Safe, comfortable, and fast transportation, as well as the existence of highways and roads, can be key factors in attracting tourists to the country.
4. Lack of religious tourist guides: Unfortunately, in the field of spiritual tourism in Iran, there are very few tourist guides, and despite some improvements in recent years, more efforts are needed.

### **Religious Tourism in Qur'anic and Narrative Studies**

The Quran was revealed as guidance for humanity and emphasizes travel in many verses, urging people to travel and explore the world under various titles (Rahimpour and Sayyed Hosseini, 1999: 13). The Holy Quran commands travel on earth using the word “travel” in multiple forms, either directly (e.g., Surah Al-Ankabut: 20, Surah Ar-Rum: 42, Surah An-Nahl: 36, Surah An-Naml: 69, Surah Al-An'am: 11, Surah Al-Imran: 137) or indirectly, as in Surah Yusuf: 109, Surah Ar-Rum: 9, Surah Fatir: 44, Surah Ghafir: 21, and Surah Muhammad: 10.

The goals and benefits of tourism mentioned in the Quran include: seeing



the traces of past peoples and learning lessons, gratitude to God, knowledge of God, understanding the nature of creation, wisdom from the world of creation, reflection on various matters, knowing the conditions of past peoples and taking heed, engaging in commercial activities through travel, tourism and capital circulation, active economy, spreading culture, science, and civilization (learning about the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and civilizational diversity of others; transferring language, culture, society, and sciences to others and benefiting from their knowledge and transferring it back to one's people and region). On the other hand, the Imams (peace be upon them) emphasized travel and tourism, pointing out various benefits, including physical and spiritual health, acquiring knowledge, meeting great personalities, learning about the customs and traditions of other nations, taking advice and lessons, relieving sorrow and pain, securing a livelihood and employment, contemplating God's blessings, healthy recreation, and spending leisure time. Religious tourism has been associated with the benefits and results mentioned in religious literature, such as the blessings of travel, which are also referenced in narrations and hadiths.

### **The Concept of Soft Power According to Joseph Nye's Theory**

Power or authority is a central topic in political science, discussed in both domestic and foreign policy in line with implementing programs, policies, agendas, and achieving national goals (Jamali, 2000, p. 250). In a 1990 Atlantic publication, Joseph Nye first proposed the concept of soft power. According to his proposal, power is like the weather—everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it. Nye's definition of power is three-dimensional: military power, economic power, and soft power. While military and financial powers are inherently complex, soft power differs in that it is based on the ability to shape what others prefer. This capacity generates attraction and results in compliance.

Economic capabilities may sometimes serve as sources of hard or soft power. Success in global politics, from his perspective, requires the effective use of both soft power and hard power. Nye considers power as the ability to get others to do what one wants. In his view, influential and decision-making countries in the information age are those whose culture and ideas become global standards. Thus, culture, accepted internal and external policies, and possession of communication tools are components of the new form of power (soft power).

Nye also believes that elements such as national cohesion, global culture, and international institutions are of great importance under the influence of global developments. He defines soft power as the ability to attract, which often leads to satisfaction (Askari, 2010, p. 64). Unlike hard power, which relies mainly on force, threats, or rewards, a state achieves its desired outcome through soft power by means that are indirect. According to Nye's theory, the nature of soft power depends on shaping what others prefer, achieved through intangible means using cultural, value-based, and political institutional factors. Soft power is distinct from influence, which may rely on hard power, threats, or rewards, whereas soft power is the ability to attract based on satisfaction (Askari, 2010, p. 67).

### **Factors Influencing Iranian-Iraqi Relations**

Iraq's history has witnessed many fluctuations and changes due to its social arena's ethnic and religious diversity on one hand, and political divisions and differences on the other. Throughout its history, Iraq has always suffered from ethnic diversity and the dominance of one nation or religion, whether Arab, Kurdish, Sunni, or Shia. These groups and parties play significant roles in Iraq's foreign policy, especially regarding Iran. The structure of government in Iraq consists of a legislative assembly that elects the executive and judicial authorities, as well as a federal government with autonomous provinces. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime and the establishment of a new political system in

2003, Iraq's first democratic constitution was approved on October 15, 2005. In this parliamentary democratic system, the prime minister is the strongest among the three branches. The people elect parliamentary representatives by direct vote, and the parliament is obliged to elect and approve the president and prime minister. It should be noted that in all countries, including Iraq, certain conditions can be a factor of weakness and a threat to the country, as well as a factor of strength. Here, we first highlight Iraq's strengths, followed by its shortcomings.

### **A) Strengths**

1. **Geopolitical location:** Iraq's geographical location, its proximity to critical neighboring countries, especially Iran, and its possession of underground natural resources, such as oil and minerals, are among its key strengths and features that contribute to its growth and development. Iraq's proximity to important countries in West Asia is a point of strength, affecting its economic and political relations. Underground resources are the most critical factor, especially for Iraq's economic development and achieving appropriate reforms and progress.
2. **Ethnic and religious diversity:** Religion and ethnicity can be a source of strength in any country, and if well-managed, Iraq can leverage its diversity to foster internal alliances and strengthen relations with neighboring and even non-neighboring countries.
3. **The role of religious authority:** The religious authority in Iraq has been more effective in guiding the people, as both Sunni and Shia Muslims consider the religious authority an essential pillar in determining their country's fate.
4. **The formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces:** Iraq has witnessed a general mobilization of its people in times of crisis and hardship.

## **B) Weaknesses**

1. A lack of a strong state will: Throughout its history, Iraq has been a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society, and the absence of strong state management has led to insecurity and political instability, as well as providing grounds for foreign influence.
2. Kurdish separatism: The Kurdish issue is a recurring one in Iraq's history. For many years, the Kurds have sought separation and independence, so, naturally, there is ethnic tension, in addition to weakening the central government and the support of any internal or external entity seeking to achieve Kurdish self-rule, sometimes with the help of influential countries, despite this being against Iraqi national interests.
3. Poor economic situation: Youth unemployment, low income levels, and illiteracy in Iraq have contributed to crises such as joining terrorist groups as a source of income.
4. Formation of different currents due to ethnic and religious differences: This is a significant factor in undermining Iraq's security, identity, and economy, causing chaos. Iraq's ethnic, national, and spiritual composition, in addition to its weak government, has led to various security puzzles, which can be considered one of Iraq's main weaknesses (Rostami and Safidi, 2016).
5. Geopolitical situation and ethnic diversity: While this could be an opportunity for Iraq's development, in most cases, it has led to insecurity and instability. A prominent example is the activity of terrorist groups, which can cause border crises with neighboring countries and disrupt Iraq's security.

### **Economic Situation in Iraq**

As one of the most important neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq holds a special status in various fields. The Iraqi economy relies heavily on oil, with about 95% of the country's total imports coming from oil sales. Iraq's numerous wars and prolonged international sanctions have caused its economy to lag. In 2012, Iraq's economic growth was projected at 4.8%, with an expected increase to 7.8% by 2014. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein and the end of Baathist rule, Iraq has consistently increased its oil production and become one of the largest oil exporters, with over 50% of the global oil supply increase attributed to Iraq. In 2012, Iraq produced an average of 3 million barrels of oil per day, the highest in the past thirty years. In the 1980s, Iraq had one of the strongest economies among Arab countries and a suitable economic infrastructure. However, the Iran-Iraq war, the American invasion and occupation, the Gulf War, and thirteen years of UN-imposed economic sanctions have all contributed to Iraq's current economic decline.

Additionally, the interruption of Iraqi oil exports and the country's heavy reliance on oil revenue have led to the deterioration of most of Iraq's economic and industrial facilities. With the outbreak of the Second Gulf War and the American occupation, Iraq's financial situation worsened, and its primary source of foreign currency income fell under American control. As a result, Iraq's economy faces numerous challenges, including widespread unemployment, economic devastation, loss of investment capacity, and the suspension of state institutions.

## **Cultural Situation in Iraq**

Given that Iraq is home to diverse ethnicities, nationalities, and religions, it can be considered one of the most ethnically diverse countries, with unique characteristics, where each group can follow its path. At the same time, this leads to complex internal problems and significant obstacles to resolving them. Therefore, regarding Iraq, decisions must be made with great precision and care, as adopting ideological, extremist, or unilateral solutions can have catastrophic consequences.

## **Population Distribution by Ethnicity in Iraq**

- **Arabs:** Arabs constitute the majority of Iraq's population, accounting for about 75–80% (both Shia and Sunni). Most Sunni Arabs reside in Baghdad and the Euphrates region, while the majority of Shia Arabs live in southern provinces such as Basra, Karbala, and Najaf.
- **Kurds:** Kurds comprise 19% of Iraq's population and are the largest minority group after Arabs, primarily residing in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Kirkuk provinces.
- **Turkmen:** Turkmen are divided into Shia and Sunni groups. Geographically, they are primarily found in Mosul, Kirkuk, and south of the Kurdistan region, making up about 2% of Iraq's population.

## **Background of Iranian-Iraqi Relations**

Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Iraqi government, the policies of Iraqi politicians have often posed a threat to Iran's internal security, and there have been few instances of friendly relations. Examples include regional and border disputes, religious issues such as discrimination against Shia in Iraq, ethnic and national issues like Arab-Persian conflicts, the

presence of Kurds on both sides of the border, and Baghdad's rulers' ambitions for territorial expansion—all major factors leading to tension. However, relations were not always tense, and there are positive aspects to be found in their history.

From the British mandate in Iraq in 1920 until the end of the monarchy in 1958, due to British influence and the existence of monarchies in both countries, relations were generally friendly, as evidenced by the Saadabad Pact and the Baghdad Pact, which were formed to counter communist threats.

Although this period also saw occasional border disputes, they were usually resolved without significant conflict. Generally, the starting point of Iranian-Iraqi relations can be considered 1929, when the King of Iraq sent a delegation to Iran to demonstrate goodwill and establish political ties.

During this period, Iraq was under British mandate. In 1931, Iraq sent protest notes to Iran, accusing Iranian customs and naval officers of violating Iraqi sovereignty in the Shatt al-Arab waters. Iraq complained to the League of Nations in 1934. After the League's intervention, an agreement was signed in 1937 granting Iraq navigation rights in the Shatt al-Arab, except for a five-kilometer strip of Abadan waters, which were ceded to Iraq up to the 'Thaloq'. In general, these relations can be divided into three periods:

#### **First Period: The Era of Competition (Pre-Iranian Islamic Revolution)**

Key issues during this period include:

1. Border and water disputes from the Shatt al-Arab to northern Kurdistan.
2. Trade and economic matters, as well as the situation of Iranians living in Iraq.
3. Religious seminaries and holy sites, as well as claims of protection and support for Iraqi Shia.

4. Control over border tribes and nomads residing on both sides of the border.
5. International and regional cooperation, such as the Baghdad Pact.

With Britain's withdrawal and the rise of the Baath Party, relations entered a new phase of conflict and competition. From 1971 to 1973, tensions peaked, resulting in a cold war between the two countries. After Iran reclaimed the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa in December 1971, Iraq cut diplomatic relations with Iran, claiming the islands belonged to Arabs. The fierce competition for control of the Gulf led to increased conflict, and Iraq signed a 15-year political, economic, and military cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union, prompting Iran to regard Iraq as its most significant security threat.

#### **Second Period: The Era of Conflict and Hostility (From the Islamic Revolution to Saddam's Fall)**

The primary reason for Iraqi hostility during this period was the norms established by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The constitution guided Iran's policies during this period, as did statements from Imam Khomeini and other leaders, as well as popular slogans raised during Friday prayers and revolutionary marches. Regional countries, including Iraq and Saudi Arabia, were concerned that the Iranian Revolution would spread to their countries and incite their peoples against their governments. They saw the solution in suppressing the Iranian Revolution at its outset. Iraq, on behalf of all governments opposed to the revolution in the Gulf, launched a comprehensive war to destroy the nascent revolution and Iran (Haji Yousef, 2004, p. 204).



### **Third Period: The Era of Peaceful Coexistence (After Saddam and the Post-2003 Government)**

During this period, Iran welcomed the fall of the Baath regime, called for the rapid withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq, and sought to expand relations. Iran was the first country to recognize and support the Iraqi transitional government. The trial and execution of Saddam by the Iraqi judiciary and the issuance of a statement recognizing the 1975 Algiers Agreement by the new Iraqi government were among the factors that changed Iran's diplomatic stance. In addition to political alignment, historical contexts also brought Iranian and Iraqi Shia closer. The holy Shia cities in Iraq and the Najaf seminary received wide attention from Iranians. Factors further improving bilateral relations included cooperation in receiving Iranian pilgrims to Iraqi holy sites, Iraqi visitors to Imam Reza's shrine in Iran, bilateral economic cooperation, including energy, connecting oil pipelines between Basra and Abadan, transit, technology, and collaboration in combating Takfiri terrorists (Dehghani, 2009, pp. 132–138).

#### **Iranian-Iraqi Relations from the Perspective of Religious Tourism**

Among the primary objectives of religious tourism are spiritual growth and a closer connection to God. Thus, one of the philosophies of travel, according to Imam Ali (peace be upon him), is to take steps towards reforming the hereafter. Other motives for religious tourism include alleviating pain, fears, and threats. Among the places visited by religious tourists seeking closeness to God are Mecca, Medina, Karbala, Najaf in Iraq, Jerusalem in Palestine, Fatima in Portugal, and the Vatican in Rome.

## **Study of the Principles of Iraqi Foreign Policy**

A country's foreign policy refers to its efforts to achieve its objectives within the international community and in its relations with other societies, governments, and countries. This type of policy differs from country to country and changes over time. As one of the western neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq plays a vital role in securing Iran's national interests or, conversely, creating threats, as Iraq's strategic position represents, for Iran, a link to regional power balances in West Asia and, at the same time, a perpetual competitor in the Gulf. In terms of regional and global security issues and security policy-making, Iraq's demographic diversity and ethnic divisions have always been a source of concern for Iran. The foreign policy of this country is, on the one hand, based on the general orientations of the Iraqi government within its regional strategic environment, which suffers from shortcomings that affect Iraq's security and stability. The neutral stance adopted by this country's foreign policy fosters a positive perception of Iraq's continued exclusion from the circle of successive regional crises and conflicts. On the other hand, it is not easy for Iraq to stay outside the framework of regional political interactions, especially as it now seeks to play its role by gaining the trust of influential powers in the regional environment. To study Iraq's foreign policy, we must examine essential factors, including the development of the political structure, the mindset of the elites, social class divisions, and the country's geographical location, in two distinct periods: before and after the fall of the Baath Party.

## **Study of the Principles of Iraqi Foreign Policy Before the Fall of the Baath Party**

The Ba'ath Party was founded in Syria in the early 1940s by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. Unlike its central structure, the Iraqi branch of this party, established in 1955, was relatively small, with a temporary organization and a small number of members, numbering no more than 300 people. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr led one of the groups within the party, and by the mid-1960s, his group had taken control of the Baath Party's main base. Saddam Hussein was his assistant and confidant in resolving organizational problems. Regional disputes between Iraq and its neighbors, the desire to play a more effective role in the Arab world, and strategic orientations for maintaining a presence in the Gulf were among the most significant foreign policy issues that emerged during this period. There were two highly significant events during the Ba'ath Party government, indicating the characteristics of their foreign policy. The first was the Iran-Iraq war, and the second was the temporary annexation of Kuwait to Iraq and the results of the Gulf War, which revealed issues such as: instability of the Iraqi government, the personal traits of its elites, adopting an aggressive approach to conflict resolution, dissatisfaction with the country's geopolitical situation, and short-term political realism. However, the most critical aspect of Iraq's foreign policy was the personal characteristics of the Iraqi elites; in such political systems, it is the elites who make the main decisions. During this period, Saddam Hussein played a pivotal and decisive role in shaping Iraq's internal and external policies. This means that, through his perceptions, conclusions, and needs, he shaped Iraq's aggressive foreign policy. For example, two cases can be mentioned in this regard. In 1974, Saddam decided to assassinate Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Iraq. Still, by signing a friendship and cooperation agreement with Moscow and in agreement with the Iraqi Communist Party, he succeeded

in ending the Kurdish Democratic Party's alliance with the Soviet Union and the Iraqi Communist Party. In 1975, Saddam, as the principal architect of Iraq's foreign policy, decided to increase the benefits of oil exports and improve the country's relations with neighboring states (Sari' al-Qalam, 1374:386).

### **Study of the Principles of Iraqi Foreign Policy After the Fall of the Baath Party**

With the fall of Saddam and the dissolution of the Iraqi Baath Party in 2003, the political system in Iraq, which Sunnis had run, changed, and the Shiites managed to assume power after centuries, based on the principle of majority. At that time, Iraq became a battlefield between Salafi-jihadist forces and the American invaders. These forces carried out terrorist operations against the Shiite government. At the same time, the Baath Party, facing a severe situation after Saddam Hussein's fall and the loss of political power, and with the implementation of the de-Baathification law in the new political system in Iraq, tried to revive its authority by leveraging the capabilities of anti-U.S. and anti-Shiite jihadist groups. With the American attack on Iraq and the fall of Saddam, new conditions emerged in this country. These conditions can be likened to a spring that, after being compressed for a long time, has suddenly been released, resulting in the emergence of different ideas, groups, currents, faces, and personalities, as well as the influence of regional and global actors, rapidly changing the national and international scene of the country. Although the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq reduced existing tensions, the emergence of ISIS in Iraq was like a wound that bled anew—a wound caused by decades of tyranny and occupation, which increased the scale of destruction and existing problems. Iraq's foreign policy during this period was shaped by a complex set of factors with diverse indicators and components, resulting in numerous repercussions and outcomes. After a few years, with the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and

efforts to pave the way for reconstruction and improve the country's situation, Iraq was on the path to expanding comprehensive relations with regional and international states. The issue of fragmentation following the 2018 parliamentary elections, with Adel Abdul Mahdi as Prime Minister, was a significant concern. As a result, in recent years, especially following the defeat of ISIS in Iraq, a certain dynamism has been observed in Iraqi foreign policy. To better understand the framework of Iraq's foreign policy, it is essential to examine the factors that shape it, its key indicators, and the consequences that result. In other words, Iraqi foreign policy can be shaped by a set of factors, each with different indicators and components, and following them leads to various repercussions and outcomes. There are three key factors influencing Iraq's adoption of a balanced foreign policy: the fragility of the Iraqi government, the country's complex geopolitical situation, and the diversity of internal actors.

**A. Fragility of the Iraqi State:** This term refers to the state's inability to provide essential public goods and basic conditions, including security and the capacity to address tensions and conflicts. States are classified as fragile if their index score is 90 or higher. Governments on the verge of being considered fragile have scores ranging from 60 to 90. Normal governments score between 30 and 60, while stable governments score between 0 and 30. According to the 2019 report, Iraq, as in previous years, is among the fragile states with a score of 99.1. The formation of such a government, which has always been a battleground for regional and external powers, is one of the factors shaping the nature of Iraq's foreign policy.

**B. Geopolitical Position:** Another factor, like a country's foreign policy, is its geopolitical situation. Iraq is the third-largest country in West Asia, with a vast land area and meaningful maritime connections through its neighbors. Among the coastal nations in the Gulf, Iraq has the fewest waterways. However, with

more than 140 billion barrels of oil reserves, Iraq provides over 7% of the world's oil, making oil exports the country's primary source of income. Therefore, border communications, the connection of oil pipelines between Basra and Abadan, transit, technology, and cooperation in combating terrorists and extremists are among other joint measures between the two countries aimed at improving bilateral relations (Dehghani, 1388: 132-138).

**C. Diversity of Internal Actors:** In recent years, another factor influencing Iraq's foreign policy has been the diversity of internal actors. Due to its unique religious and ethnic background, Iraq lacks a unified structure or composition, resulting in the emergence of diverse interests and foreign policy orientations among various groups and individuals. In general, the religious authority institution, the prime minister, political factions, and armed groups are the main active parties in Iraq's internal developments. Thus, the logic of Iraq's foreign policy is somewhat influenced by the actions and interactions of these forces. Each of the powers above has different ideas about Iraq's foreign policy, with many commonalities and differences. The religious authority has so far emphasized the importance of supporting positive relations between Iraq and all parties, especially its neighboring countries. Although the spiritual authority in Iraq rejects any external interference in the Iraqi political process and has not wished to meet political officials, the recent meeting of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, the highest religious authority in Iraq, with the President of the Islamic Republic, shows his positive outlook towards this country. Other political forces have different orientations in foreign policy. In recent years, the Sadrist movement has emphasized reducing foreign interventions in Iraq, primarily directed at Iran. Meanwhile, many groups organized within the Popular Mobilization Forces have very close relations with Iran. Such orientations can be observed in the approaches of Haider al-Abadi and Nouri al-Maliki, former Iraqi prime ministers; these relations are evident and stand out in various contexts

(Logic of Iraq's Foreign Policy, Tebyin Strategic Think Tank, p. 10).

### **Indicators of Iraqi Foreign Policy**

Iraq's foreign policy is based on elements and components, some of which can be mentioned:

**A. Positive Balance:** This is one of the most critical indicators of Iraq's foreign policy. In recent years, especially after the relative defeat of ISIS, Iraq has always tried to maintain a positive balance in its foreign relations. This balance is evident in Iraq's regional behavior. The country faces three powers in West Asia: Tehran, Ankara, and Riyadh. Iraq has adopted a policy of dealing with these powers so that none thinks it stands in opposition to any of the others. The economic agreements Iraq has signed with the three countries—Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—in recent years are evidence of the country's efforts to present a balanced image of its foreign policy.

**B. Priority of Domestic Development:** Iraq faces a crisis on several fronts as a result of decades of tyranny, wars, and occupation. The scale of destruction, the weakness of public services in various sectors, high unemployment, and the government's inability to implement major economic projects have led to a general trend among the people and Iraqi officials that priority should be given to reconstruction policies. This idea is the result of many years of spiritual and psychological hardship endured by the Iraqi people, shared by all different groups and parties. Therefore, the principle of domestic development takes precedence over all other issues in the country's dealings with various regional powers. Adopting any policy that turns the country into an arena for conflict, tension, or competition among others is one of the most critical indicators of Iraq's foreign policy. The adoption of any foreign policy has significant consequences. Based

on the policies adopted, the implications and results are determined, whether constructive or destructive. The adoption of indicators related to this country's foreign policy has various outcomes, some of which are:

**A. Limited Capacity for Activity:** Sometimes, countries adopt a balanced foreign policy, but at the same time, they suffer from weaknesses in internal security. Iraq today suffers from this situation. Although officials and some analysts attempt to interpret Iraq's mediation role in West Asian developments as a form of activity and effectiveness for the country, it appears that Iraq lacks the necessary and sufficient components for such activity.

**B. Possibility of Conflict Among Internal and External Actors:** Iraq's adoption of a balanced foreign policy creates the potential for conflict among various groups of actors both within and outside the country. This conflict can occur at two levels: first, among domestic actors, each relying on one of the regional or international powers and having different interests; and second, the possibility of foreign parties becoming involved in Iraq is not far-fetched, especially as Iran has considered Iraq as a means to circumvent sanctions, while Washington views Iraq as a tool to contain Iran.

**C. Implementation of Domestic Development:** The primary concern facing investment in modern Iraq is security issues, which have been exacerbated by developments in recent years, especially after the defeat of ISIS. However, there is no particular international obstacle preventing the country from attracting foreign resources. In this context, many companies are investing in fields such as energy. Unlike some countries, such as Iran, Iraqi oil sales are not restricted by sanctions. Additionally, Iraq sometimes fails to comply with OPEC decisions to limit its oil production, resulting in significant revenue losses from oil sales. Iraq's foreign policy of providing guarantees to neighboring countries that it will



not enter into any conflict against them is a considerable stance in this context. As discussed in this section, policymaking in Iraq is influenced by four factors: political, economic, cultural, and social. Iraq's foreign policy underwent significant changes before and after Saddam's fall, including its altered approach towards the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **Conclusion**

After the fall of the Baath Party regime and the end of Saddam Hussein's rule, visits to Iraq provided significant opportunities in various political, economic, cultural, and social aspects, including:

- **Creating the Necessary Conditions for Forming a Single Islamic Nation:** Muslims across different parts of the world have diverse backgrounds, encompassing various religions, races, nationalities, colors, and ethnicities; yet, they share common characteristics and interconnected factors. Since forming a single Islamic nation is an essential task, the Arbreen processions can serve as a foundation for achieving the ultimate goal of the Islamic nation, namely, the formation of a new Islamic civilization. Therefore, relations among Muslims—Shiites and Sunnis, and various nationalities and races—should be supported on this occasion. These processions provide a valuable opportunity to establish connections with other countries.
- **Iran's Political Experience in Becoming a Regional Power:** In international relations, a regional power is a state that holds authority in a given geographic area. Thus, countries that utilize their power effectively and possess strength in a particular region of the world will enjoy regional superiority. Typically, these regional powers possess significant capabilities in their respective areas, which may not necessarily make them globally superior.

- **Another goal of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this regard is to establish security in the region.** In this way, Iran aims to become the leading power in the area, as stated in its future outlook document. Among the reasons leading to Iran's rise as a regional power is the generalization and redefinition of interests through a policy of regional cooperation and security.

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