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The Iranian Interventionist Policies in Iraq between 2003 to 2020

Master of Arts Thesis by

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Amerika'nın Irak'ı işgalinden neredeyse yirmi yıl sonra, ülke hala siyasi kargaşa içinde. Etnik ve mezhepsel bölünme, Irak'ı dış müdahale ve manipülasyona açtı. Komşu ülkeler, diğer bölgesel ve siyasi aktörler Irak'ın günlük meselelerinde bile rol oynuyor. Bu nedenle Irak'taki siyasi ortamı anlamak zor görünüyor. 1988'deki sekiz yıl süren İran-Irak savaşının İran'ın kararlı bir rakibi olduğunu kanıtlamasının ardından, Irak 2003'teki ABD işgalinin ardından kademeli olarak İran'ın doğrudan etkisi altına girdi

Bu araştırma, İran dış politikasını ve İran'ın ABD işgalinin ardından Irak üzerinde neredeyse tam kontrol sağlamak için kullandığı araçları incelemektedir.

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Abstract

Almost twenty years after the American invasion to Iraq, the country is still in political turmoil. Ethnic and sectarian division opened Iraq to foreign intervention and manipulation. Neighboring countries, other regional and political actors play role in even Iraqi daily affairs. For this reason, the political scene in Iraq seems to be difficult to understand. After the eight year long Iran-Iraq war in 1988 proved a resolved competitor of Iran, Iraq gradually came under the direct influence of Iran, following the US invasion in 2003.

This research examines the Iranian foreign policy and the tools Iran had utilized to achieve near complete control over Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the thesis

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DCAF	Democratic Control of Armed Forces
DNI	Directorate of National Intelligence of the US
DW	Deutsche Welle
EIA	Energy Information Administration
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GICJ	Geneva International Center of Justice
IRGC	Islamic Guards Corps Revolution
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KUP	Kurdistan Union Party
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs/UN
PMF	Popular Mobilization forces
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party
UN	United Nations

Introduction

Iraq, as a state, had been one of the first countries to be formed after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the twenties of the past century. Despite being recognized early on by Iran, the relations among the two countries had fluctuated between periods of political cooperation and periods of escalated tensions. This relationship marred by competition and confrontation throughout the subsequent decades. The competitiveness between the two neighbors had taken a new dimension after the 1958 coup d'état in Iraq, when the old monarchy had been replaced by a socialist republic. As expected in Cold War years, the new Iraqi regime had strengthened its relationships with the Soviet Union, therefore increasing the tensions with neighboring Iran, a monarchy dependent on its relations with the United States.

The strained relations between Iraq and Iran, although heightened by the cold war, never reached the point of armed conflict during 1970s. All this changed with the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, where the Pahlavi monarchy had been replaced by an Islamic republic putting Ayatollah Khomeini at the helm. Less than a year later, the longest war of the century erupted between the two, the Iran-Iraq war (1980 - 1988), an eight-year war with a casualty toll of more than one million between soldiers and civilians. Regardless of the true reasons of the conflict, the Iranian propaganda during the war revolved around exporting the principles of its Islamic revolution to Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's secular regime. After the war ended with Iran's failure to achieve its declared goals, the Iranians began to eye international political developments for a chance to advance their agenda. These Iranian aspirations saw an opportunity to materialize with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the execution of Saddam Hussein shortly after.

Some might assume that the Iranian intervention in the weak and defeated Iraq after 2003 had been with the intention of establishing an Islamic state similar to the Iranian model, as one would expect from countries led by revolutionary ideologies such as Iran. But the reality was far from that. The Iranian foreign policy in Iraq had been pragmatic in all aspects, with well thought actions to achieve premeditated goals. Instead of helping to mimic the Iranian model in Iraq, Iran supported a parliamentary

government with a constitution that grants special perks to parties loyal to Iran. At the same time, the Iranian regime emboldened, if not directly established, a wide array of political and militant organizations loyal first and foremost to Iran, to where the Iranian leadership had become the most influential player in Iraqi affairs.

To achieve this influential position, Iran followed a concerted plan to consolidate and re-establish its power in Iraq through a plethora of tools. To fulfill its expansionist aspirations in Iraq, the Iranian regime had adopted four essential tools (i.e., political, socio-judicial, military and economic) to subjugate the Iraqi state. Those tools were directed not only to influence the Iraqi decision-making process to Iran's favor, but also to render the whole of Iraq as a clientele state whose main function is to provide all sorts of support to the Iranian state. Within the political tool, the Iranian regime relied on different religio-political institutions to implement its interventionist policies of pro-Iranian agendas, and in similar vein, the military tool was implemented in more or less the same fashion. The Iranian regime has created different political institutions and military entities in Iraq, all of which are promoters of pro-Iranian agendas, in order to divide the Iraqi state into spheres of influence under these political institutions or military entities, and at the same time, their allegiance remains only to the Iranian state. With divided pro-Iranian political or military entities, the Iranian regime would ensure the upper hand over Iraq and would be safely assured, that these pro-Iranian entities are not going to collude against the Iranian superiority. The third tool, the socio-judicial tool, seems to characterize the end result of the Iranian political and military influence. As a result of the Iranian political and military infiltration, the Iranians had successfully managed to rewrite the Iraqi constitution in a way as to conform with the Iranian interest, and to prolong its influence on societal and electoral grounds. The fourth and final tool, the economic tool, came to complement the former tools, to where it helped Iran tighten its control over the Iraqi economy, to benefit economically from its influence, and more importantly, to seek refuge from the international sanctions against Iran. Collectively, the four tools that Iran had implemented in Iraq had proven to be successful and had enabled Iran to subjugate the Iraqi state and the Iraqi people, and render Iraq, more or less, as an Iranian province.

On a final note, while many accuse Iran of instigating conflicts within Iraq, the truth is that Iran has no interest in pushing Iraq over the edge or inflaming the internal conflicts

to the point where it loses control of the situation. Iran has a vested interest in keeping Iraq as a weak state with no hope of it becoming the regional power it once was. All while keeping the United States, Iran's main adversary in the region, busy with the deteriorating Iraqi affairs and in constant need of Iran's help to contain the situation. In essence, the crisis in Iraq hinders the Americans ability to impede the Iranian nuclear and regional ambitions.

In the following discussion, I divided the thesis into six chapters, the first chapter evaluates the mechanics of Iranian foreign policy formation by analyzing the governmental institutions and power centers that collectively constitute the Iranian political system and contribute, to different degrees, in the foreign policy making process, in addition to inspecting the factors that comprise the Iranian national identity and their effect on the Iranian foreign policy. The second chapter sheds light on the Iraqi political scene after the US invasion in 2003, examining the perils threatening Iraq and its stability. The four remaining chapters were retained to expand on the Iranian interventionist tools by dedicating a chapter to each tool.

Research Questions

This research is intended to examine the Iranian interventionist policies in Iraq right after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, and up to the current moment. To understand and analyze these interventionist policies, two research questions have been proposed.

1. What is the nature of the Iranian interventionist policies with respect to the Iranian national identity and how such identity is instilled into the structure of power centers in post-revolution Iran?
2. What are the Iranian interventionist tools in Iraq in terms of political influence, military dominance and economic control?

Hypotheses

There are two hypotheses that direct this investigation. They are as follows:

1. The Iranian interventionist policies in Iraq are somehow related to the Iranian national identity of Shiism and Iranianism patriotism.
2. The Iranian interventionist policies in Iraq rely on political, military and economic tools.

Methodology

The research will adopt the framework of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to understand and analyze the Iranian interventionist policies in Iraq from 2003 till 2020. FPA is a theoretical framework that perceives political analysis through the distribution of power centers within particular countries. Based on the principle that critical decision-makings are vested into different governmental institutions, FPA targets the governmental institutions that are responsible for foreign policy decision-making within the countries concerned (OĞUZLU, 2018, pp. 103-118). FPA seems to be a reasonable theoretical approach to employ in this research to understand the Iranian

foreign policy towards Iraq. There are good reasons to adopt this approach rather than others. First, the Iranian identity is woven across the Iranian ethnicity and Shiism, both of which fall under the investigation of FPA. Shiism and Iranianism, the two components of the Iranian identity, are playing an important role in Iranian foreign policy in the region and in Iraq in particular. Second, Iran's internal political structure is divided across different institutions and its foreign policies are determined within these institutions. For example, the revolutionary guards, the supreme leadership, and the presidency are three crucial institutions that determine the foreign policy of Iran. FPA will be used to highlight these power centers of Iran, examine the political weight of each individual institution and evaluate the interactions and dynamics of these institutions and their implications in the Iranian foreign policy in Iraq. To analyze the Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq, I, using FPA, will divide the discussion across two major sections: Iranian Identity and Iranian centres of power. Within the Iranian Identity, discussions will proceed to explain how the Iranian identity is a combination of two elements and their consequences on the Iranian foreign policy, Shiism and Iranianism, and how each one of these elements supports and complements the other. Within the Iranian centers of power, the researcher is going to explain how the decision-making process is carried out among these institutions (Karimifard, 2011, pp. 239-241), and how they are integrated and represented into the Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq. The researcher will examine the Iranian influence through the three major power centers, in order to be able to investigate the sectarian, political, economic, and military tools that were used to subjugate Iraq.

Chapter one

1. Foreign Policy making in Iran

The Iranian foreign policy seems to be contradictory and unintelligible to the inexperienced observer, which leaves many to wonder about the nature of the Iranian Foreign policy, is it ideological or is it pragmatic? According to Hadžikadunić, there are many Western scholars who consider the Iranian foreign policies as incomprehensible and unfathomable given the complexity of the decision-making process and the paradoxicality of the Iranian political activities (Hadžikadunić, 2014, p. 4). Others, especially in the US, perceive the Iranian foreign policy as being deeply influenced by an aggressive ideological agenda which could destabilize the peace and the security of the world (Elizabeth C. Boyer, May 2020, p. 1). Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the consecutive American administrations and policy makers began to pay special attention to the Iranian growing influence and its potential in challenging the status quo in the region. A report submitted by the Directorate of National Intelligence of the US (DNI), cautioned that the Iranian foreign activities in the next few years will be aggressive and threatening to American interests (Coats, 2019, pp. 29-30) and other allies in the region. The report reads “Iran’s regional ambitions and improved military capabilities almost certainly will threaten US interests in the coming years, driven by Tehran’s perception of increasing US, Saudi, and Israel’s influence in the region, as well as continuing border insecurity, and the influence of hardliners” (Katzman,2019, pp.1).

The Iranian foreign policies towards the world and the region appears at best to be conflictual and contradictory in terms of the proclaimed official statements versus the actual political behaviors which began to be clearly observable during the Khatami’s

presidency in 1997 onwards (Katzman, 2019, p. 1). The statements and positions of some Iranian officials can sometimes carry signals of threat and intimidation to many Middle Eastern and Western countries. On the other hand, one can find other Iranian officials calling for cooperation and collaboration between the countries of the region and between Iran and the Western world, to achieve peace and development for all parties (Ansari and Tabriz, 2016, p. 3). For example, when the Iranian president had called for the Dialogue of Civilization initiative which was directed towards western countries and was warmly welcomed by the west, the Supreme Guide of the Iranian Republic, Ali Khamenei, continued to promote and propagate antagonistic and belligerent sentiments towards the West and the Americans. This contradictory behavior of Iran is heightened when examining its policy in Iraq. As Iran's proclaimed policy, the United States stands as the greatest evil to the Muslim world and plays a destabilizing factor in the Middle East, including Iran itself. However, despite these allegations of espousing Muslim solidarity and the ostensible animosity towards the Americans, such confessed policy of 'Islamic Idealism' did not prevent Iran from colluding and collaborating with the Americans during the occupation of another Muslim country, Iraq in 2003 (Gomari-Luksch, 2018, pp. 13-14).

The traces of such paradoxical behavior dates back to the 1980s, when the incident of Iran-Contra occurred, which attracted the attention of many political observers. During the Iran-Iraq war between 1980-1988, Iran secretly imported weapons from the United State through Israel, which mounted up to 80% of the Iranian imported arms in the first two years of the war (Smith, 2016, p. 28). Moreover, despite the continuous belligerent rhetoric against Israel and its illegitimacy as a state in the Middle East, Iran imported weapons directly from Israel at the end of the first year of the war which mounted up to 28 million USD (Central Intelligence Agency, 1982, pp. 18-19).

The conflictual aspects of the Iranian foreign policies, as represented between the proclaimed anti-western sentiments and Islamic solidarity on one hand, and the actual collusion and collaboration with the Americans and the Israelis on the other, are not only reflected in its policies towards Iraq, but also, they are apparent in its policies towards other neighboring countries.

During the Russian-Chechen war in 1999 Iran defied conventional wisdom. Instead of siding with and supporting the Chechens who are all Muslims, Iran continued to strengthen its relations with Russia both economically and politically (Ray Takeyh, 2012, p. 57) Despite the fact that the Iranian revolutionary constitution adopts the defending of oppressed Muslims regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, the death toll of the Muslim Chechens kept increasing without raising any serious concerns from the Islamic Republic. It might be understandable that establishing good relations with the Russians is a priority to the Iranian government but voicing criticism or condemnation of the Russian ferocious crimes against Chechen Muslims would not contaminate the relationship. But, then again, Iran did not do that either. Furthermore, Iran dismissed the matter as an internal issue of the Russian Federation, under the excuse that Iran refuses to interfere with the internal affairs of other countries (Ray Takeyh, 2012, p. 58).

Additionally, more or less the same paradox recurs. In 1990, in the South Caucasus region, Armenia, a state of Christian majority, occupied around 20% of Azerbaijan, a state of 80% of Shia Muslims. If we take into consideration the ideology of the Iranian state as belonging to the Shiite Islamic jurisprudence and the large Azerbaijani minority in Iran, which exceeds 15% of the population of Iran, the expected conclusion is that Iran will side with Azerbaijan. However, the surprising truth was that Iran took a neutral position that favored Armenia (Cornell, 2001, p. 308). Even in the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, Iran had taken a position that was not far from its previous stance in the 1990 war. Contrary to its pro-Islamic rhetoric and propaganda, the Iranians' consistency of supporting Armenia, a Christian majority country, against a more likely conventional ally like Azerbaijan, is quite intriguing if not incomprehensible even among top Shiite officials (Murat Sofuoglu, 2020). Such a position stands with stark violations of the Iranian revolutionary ideology and the Iranian constitution, which in principle, should support the oppressed Muslims wherever they are. However, the answer to this contradiction may be hinted at in a conversation that occurred between Sbuhi Al-Tufayli, the former Secretary General of the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the reason for Tehran's stance and its support for Armenia. The Iranian minister indicated that

Armenia's victory would stand as a barrier in the face of "Turkey's expansionist aspirations" in the South Caucasus region (Arabic Post Report, 2020).

The Iranian foreign policies are claimed to be anti-colonialist and anti-hegemonic of the Western powers. Those policies are claimed to be encapsulated into the pro-Islamic rhetoric and propaganda after the 1979 revolution, whose main function was to support the victims of the imperialist powers and their allies. Nonetheless, apart from these sentiments and their potential attraction and appeal among many ordinary Muslims and other sympathizers, the foreign policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran seem to be inconsistent and largely contradictory to its actual political behavior in the Arab region, especially in Iraq after 2003. The difference between what is said and what is done is incomprehensible, which rendered some scholars, in describing the Iranian foreign policy, to call it a complex of idealism and pragmatic policy at best to the extent which could lead to contradictions (Luksch, 2018, p. 13). Others perceive the Iranian foreign policy as purely pragmatic with the primary principles of the Islamic revolution functioning as a disguise for its expansionist aspirations in the region (El Berni, 2018, p. 115). For example, the famous scholar of Iranian foreign policy Trita Parsi stated "Increasingly it was becoming clear that Iran's rhetoric against Israel did not match its actual policy. At the same time that Iran was secretly dealing with the government of Israel" (Trita Parsi, 2007, p. 95).

1.1. Foreign Policy Objectives vs. Rhetoric

The researcher is attempting to explore the motives behind the Iranian foreign policy and to expose the huge gap between the Iranian rhetorical speech and the actual policies implemented by Iran towards its neighbors. To achieve this, the researcher has to consider the rhetorical speech as merely a part or a tool of the Iranian foreign policy, and not as the philosophy behind the foreign policy as is normally the case with other countries. One arrives at this conclusion from studying the actual foreign policies undertaken by Iran when compared to the propaganda broadcasted by its political elite. On the one hand, the Iranian political system advocates for an Islamic revolutionary ideology such as the brotherhood between all Muslims and how Muslims should stand

against international imperialism, especially the United States, and for the deposing of secular regimes in countries with predominant Muslim populations. On the other hand, the actions of the Iranian foreign policy differ substantially from this rhetoric to the point that the rhetoric itself becomes just a part of the foreign policy process. For example, when Iran was trying to depose Saddam Hussein and get rid of his secular regime, it was buying American armaments to fuel its war against Iraq (1980-1988). During the same time period, Iran established a strategic relationship with al-Assad's regime in Syria, a regime that is secular and adopts the same Baath social ideology as its Iraqi counterpart (John F. Devlin, 1991, pp. 1397-1407). From this and many other examples which will be elaborated upon in the following chapters, the researcher notices that Iran's strategic and geopolitical interests are the true motives behind its adopted foreign policies. Therefore, the true goals of the Iranian foreign policies are not to live up to Iran's revolutionary propaganda, but to protect the Iranian regime and guarantee its continuance, to maintain Iran as a regional power and as a unified country, to achieve economic prosperity for the Iranian state and to secure Iran's dominance on the region's natural resources including the precious oil (El Berni, 2018, pp. 118-125).

1.2. Foreign Policy-Making institutions

There are four main foreign policy-making institutions in Iran. They are the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, the Leadership of the Supreme Guide, the Iranian Presidency, and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, IRGC. All of these religious, political, and military institutions coordinate their efforts and collaborations to decide about the country's foreign policy. In the following, each one of these institutions is discussed, and its role in relation with the other decision-making institutions is explained.

1.2.1. The Power Centers of Iran

After the Islamic revolution, the power centres of Iran had changed in favour of the religious establishments, as the Iranian Shiite theocracy had been strengthened and

empowered. Moving from dictatorial tyranny of superficially implemented secularism towards the Shiite theocracy of Velayet-i-Faqih, the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, the patriotism of the Iranians was to be unfolded not only into the Iranian socio-political lives but also reflected into the Iranian foreign policies. Among the changes that the Iranian revolution had brought into the political scene was the complex structure of power centres which tipped the balance of power in favour of the religious establishments and consolidated their influence (Tuğba Bayar, 2019, pp. 41-42).

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, there are nine political institutions that share power and decision-making processes in Iran (Kurun, 2017, p. 119). These institutions are as follows: (1) the Assembly of Experts, (2) the Iranian Parliament, (3) the Supreme Leadership, (4) the Guardian Council, (5) the Presidency, (6) the Council of Ministers, (7) the Expediency Council, (8) the Judiciary Institution, (9) the Revolutionary Guards. The missions and functions of these power institutions will be briefly discussed with more emphasis given to the Supreme Leadership, Presidency, and the Revolutionary Guards, due to their direct involvement in shaping and determining the foreign policies of the Iranian state.

The members of the Assembly of Experts are expected to hold a high Shiite religious rank, not less than a mujtahid or an ayatollah elected by the people, and the most important authority of this assembly is to choose the supreme leader of the republic (Iranian Constitution, Article 107). The function of the Iranian Parliament, which is directly elected by the people, is to enact laws and approve the budget (Iranian Constitution, Articles 65, 71). The Supreme Leadership is considered the highest political and religious authority in the Iranian state (Iranian Constitution, Articles 107, 110, 5). The Guardian Council has the right to observe the presidency, the Assembly of Experts, and the parliamentary elections, and has the power to interpret the constitution, and six of its twelve members are appointed by the Supreme Leader of the Republic (Iranian Constitution, Articles 98, 99, 91-1). The presidency or the President of the Republic is the highest political authority who is directly elected by the people and is held accountable by the Supreme Leader of the Republic (Iranian Constitution, Articles 134, 133, 119, 122). Sixth, the council of the Ministers is headed by the Iranian President and is appointed by him with the approval of Parliament (Iranian Constitution, Article 133). Seventh, the main function of the Expediency

Council is to resolve the disagreement between the Parliament and the Guardian Council. Eighth, the Judiciary institution whose head is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader is responsible to propose the remaining six names of members of the Guardian Council (Iranian Constitution, Articles 91, 110-6B). Ninth, the Revolutionary Guards, which are supervised by the Supreme Leader, are tasked with protecting the political system (Iranian constitution, Articles 150, 110-7-6).

As briefly discussed, the distribution of power in the Iranian political system appears to bear traces of modernity and theocracy that are combined together in a way to reflect the Iranian national identity. The combinatory mixture of parliamentary elections with the theocracy of the Supreme Leadership is at best unique and contradictory and has no close resemblance in Western democracies nor in the Middle Eastern dictatorships. It integrates presidential and parliamentary democracies with dictatorial theocracy, which leaves observers to wonder why the Iranian political system is structured the way it was. The answer may not be satisfactory. However, the Iranian national identity might hold the answer for this puzzling question. The development of the Iranian national identity and the components that were added to it might provide a clue towards understanding the Iranian political system. Iranian Shiism, Iranism and colonial-phobia might account for the complexity, and often conflictual nature, of the Iranian political system and the interactions between the Iranian power institutions. In the following discussion, great emphasis will be directed towards three important institutions of the Iranian political system, namely, Supreme Leadership, the Presidency, and the Revolutionary Guards, for they are believed to have the most effective role in implementing the Iranian foreign policies.

1.2.2. The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist

The crucial point of conflict between Shiism and Sunnism is over the system of ruling that each one adopts; that is, the Sunni Caliphate does not require the ruler to be a descendant of Ali (the Prophet's cousin) while the Shiite do. In the Shiite theology, the leader of the Islamic world must solely be assigned and attributed to the descendents of the house of Imam Ali and his offspring, the twelve imams. As a

consequence, the Shiite theologians contend that the Sunnis had unjustly took over the rule from the house of Ali and his grandsons since the Prophet had assigned Ali as his leader of the Islamic world, and as a consequence, the rightly guided Caliphate is always accused of having taken this right from the Shiites (Cemil Hakyemez, 2020, p. 8). Therefore, the whole jurisprudence of the Shiite theology is concerned to restore the leadership of the Islamic rule to the House of Ali, which is presumed to be of Iranian blood, from the Islamic Arabic world. The system of the Velayet-i-Faqih is a political system to actualize the restoration of the Shiite supremacy to the Islamic world including the Arabic Muslim countries, whether they are Sunni or Shiite states (Hakyemez, 2020, p. 10). Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, had developed the idea of the Velayet-i-Faqih, by which the Islamic jurist or the Faqih functions as or represents the hidden Imam who had gone missing. The Twelver Imam, Muhamad Hasan Al-Mahdi who is supposed to provide the necessary jurisprudence and guide the Shiite population, had gone missing. Henceforth, the guardianship of the Islamic jurist can provide a plausible solution where the Faqih or the jurist can function as a deputy Imam who can assume the religious responsibilities, social and political recommendations, and provide the necessary guidance to the people. The Guide or the Supreme Leader, as it is always called in political and religious circles, is considered as the spiritual leader not only for the Iranian Shiites, or other Shiites of different backgrounds, but is assumed to be the leader of the whole Islamic world (Hakyemez, 2020, pp. 9-10).

1.2.3. The Leadership of the Supreme Guide

The position of the Supreme Leader of the Iranian Republic is considered the highest political position due to the political powers and spiritual nature that are attributed to the holder of this position. Since the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran, only Ayatollah Khomeini (1979 - 1989) and Ali Khamenei (1989 - present) have assumed this position. The Supreme Leadership is the institution that is responsible for the implementation of the Guardian of the Islamic Jurist (Velayet-i-Faqih) (Iranian Constitution, Article 5). The preamble to the Iranian constitution states “the constitution prepares the background for the actualization of leadership by a qualified

jurisprudent who is recognized as the leader...” (Iranian Constitution, preamble). According to the theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, the Supreme Leader or the Guide is the sole representative of the hidden Imam and assumes his responsibilities in social, religious, political and economic matters rather than being assigned to professionals or social scientists (Iranian Constitution, Article 5). The Guide can be considered as a political leader with spiritual nature which is to be believed and followed by all the Shiites in the world; however, the currency and propagation of such arguments were not so dominant among Arab Shiites during Khomeini's time.

The Iranian constitution, in particular Article 110, gives the Supreme Leader, or the Guide, the responsibilities to lay down the country's internal and external policies, and vests him a veto power in all aspects of the state's institutions. For example, the Guide can appoint or dismiss the leaders of the armed forces, the leaders of the Revolutionary Guards, the incumbents of the security services, the intelligence services, the Judiciary, the media, and other state officials. Moreover, among the assigned responsibilities to the Supreme Leader is to approve the appointment of the elected president or to reduce his power (Iranian Constitution, Article 110). For example, the Supreme Leader had disagreed with the President of the Republic, Ahmadinejad, over the appointment of the Minister of Intelligence, and ordered the President to replace the Minister with his nominee or resign (al-Smadi, 2015). Within these responsibilities, the Supreme Leader has the upper hand over the internal and external policies as well as the Council of Ministers, which might indicate that the powers of the president are superficial or at least limited and restricted.

The Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts whose members are elected by the Iranian people (Iranian Constitution, Article 107); nonetheless, he is automatically considered to be assuming the leadership of the Islamic world (Iranian Constitution, Article 109-B), as if the Iranian state is the sole mouthpiece of all Muslims in the world. Such assumption provides the Iranian state the right to be the centre of the Islamic world and the reference point of authority over all Muslims in the world (Wastnidge, 2019, pp. 605-625). A point of consideration should be clarified here. Assuming the leadership of the Islamic world, both Shiites and Sunnis, the Iranian state conflates religiosity and theocracies on one hand with ethnicity and

nationality on the other. The Iranian national interests which are covertly articulated through religious sentiments and rhetoric do not usually conform with, or even contradict, other neighbouring states of similar sects, i.e., Iraq, as will be shown below.

The statements issued by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, on issues of foreign affairs, especially towards Iraq, should be cautiously contemplated given his former political expertise. Ali Khamenei was the one responsible for the coordination and cooperation with the Iraqi opposition during the Iran-Iraq war (1980 - 1988), which included the process of incorporating these opposition forces into the ranks of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, while concurrently raising the cooperation level with Syrian secular regime. For example, before he became the Supreme Leader, Khamenei visited Syria in 1982 and met with senior Iraqi opposition figures, who escaped earlier to reside in Syria, and succeeded in bringing a large number of them into Iran to join the fight against the Iraqi army (Rezaei, 2019, pp. 113-114).

1.2.4. The Iranian Presidency

The post of President, who is only elected for only two consecutive terms, is the highest position after the Supreme Leader in the Iranian Republic. The constitution stipulates that in order to qualify for the Iranian presidency the candidate should not only hold the Iranian nationality, but should also be a descendant of Iranian origins, and that he has to be a believer in the Twelver Shiite sect (Iranian Constitution. Articles 113, 114, 115). This is stark evidence on how the Iranian national identity is embedded in sectarianism. The internal and external policies that the Iranian President and his ministers will adopt must be aimed at achieving the general policies of the Supreme Leader, and the president shall be accountable to the Supreme Leader as to whether he succeeds or fails in achieving the general policies of the leadership, as inspired by the Iranian constitution (Iranian Constitution, Articles 110-1,122).

During the tenure of Ayatollah Khomeini as the Supreme leader, the president of the republic, Hassan Bani Sadr, was not given any considerable political space, to the point that the Supreme Leader had finally removed him from the presidency. However, the president is not always deprived of presidential powers and privileges. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian president was

given more political space and flexibility to face the social and economic challenges (Jones, 2009, p. 8), especially with regards to improving the relationship with the West (Knøster, 2019, pp. 17-18). This culminated during the Rouhani presidency, whose nomination was intended to improve Iran's relations with the West, to conclude treaties and agreements with western countries, to increase economic collaboration, and to recognize Iran as a power center in the Middle East. Such political maneuvering of nominating a moderate president had resulted in the conclusion of the five-plus-one agreement with the West, from which the Trump administration had withdrawn in May 2018.

Both Presidents, Khatami, the former Iranian President from 1997 to 2005, and Rouhani, the Iranian President from 2013 to 2021, were trying to make great changes in the Iranian foreign policy towards the west on multiple levels. Their policy was to push Iran to be a part of the international society, as a regional power, through dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation (Yazdani, 2019, p. 475). But, due to the ambitious role and expansionist aspiration Iran is opting to exert in the region, the Iranian policy that was headed by Khatami and Rouhani had made limited successes in improving Iran's relations with countries in the region and with the United States. Even though Khatami and Rouhani's foreign policy was not secretive, which was a far cry from the previous foreign policy of secret agreements (such as Iran-Contra), this did not prevent the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and other Iranian leaders from expressing anti-Western and anti-American sentiments, describing the United States as the first enemy.

Although Iranian foreign policy succeeded in strengthening its position and becoming one of the main players in the Middle East region i.e., in Iraq and Syria, the Iranian presidency was facing serious hurdles and hardships in its foreign policy approach. For example, the presidency had been gradually excluded from exerting any influence over some important foreign policy files in favor of the Supreme Leadership or the Revolutionary Guards (Yazdani, 2019, p. 476). For example, Kasra Naji, an Iranian journalist and a correspondent for the BBC stated on 26 April 2021 that "A leaked audio tape in which Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, bemoans that the Revolutionary Guards dominate the country's foreign policy" (Kasra Naji, 2021). The intervening the Supreme Leadership and the Revolutionary Guards (as will be shown

below) in the foreign policy makes it difficult for the presidency to implement and enforce its policies and keep up its promises in front of its people and the world community (Demirel, 2016, p. 60); (Yazdani, 2019, p. 476).

1.2.5. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps IRGC

During the first year of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, Khomeini (the leader of the revolution) had legitimate fears of a military coup led by officers in the traditional Iranian army who bore loyalty to the ousted monarchy. A coup, he worried, that could bring down the new revolutionary regime. To protect the revolution and himself from such an attempt, Khomeini created a military force loyal to the new regime from outside the traditional army and named it The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps IRGC (Alfoneh, 2013, p. 23); (Barany, 2019, pp. 49-50).

According to article 151 of the Iranian Constitution, “The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements” (Iranian Constitution, Article 151). This article gives the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps the constitutional legitimacy in suppressing any political opposition to the ruling authority, as was later represented in the crushing down of the demonstrations that called for political and economic reforms in 2019. Furthermore, the Iranian constitution vests in the IRGC the responsibility of exporting the revolution outside the borders of Iran and provides it with the constitutional legitimacy to spread the revolutionary principles to the neighboring countries (Iranian Constitution, Article 151), most presumably, through brute force as will be shown below. That being said, the IRGC had become a sort of an independent institution with its own financial and economic establishments, that are only accountable in front of the Supreme Leadership rather than the presidency or other restrictive institutions

The number of the IRGC soldiers is estimated to be 120, 000 where 20, 000 of them are affiliated with the naval regiment, almost half of the Iranian naval forces (Morten Knøster, 2019, p. 65). The IRGC is also involved in missile development projects and high technology armaments.

During the Iran-Iraq war, the IRGC was an active player from the start. Despite initial losses to the Iraqi army, the IRGC later in 1982 onwards managed to liberate and regain all that had been occupied by the Iraqi army. The IRGC gained popular support due to its role in the liberation achievements and moved from being the protector of the revolution and the religious establishments towards being a symbol of national pride and patriotism. When Khamenei became the Supreme Leader in 1989, he sought to create a strong relationship with the IRGC as a way to win their loyalty in the face of other competing and more powerful religious authorities in the country. Ironically using the same strategy Khomeini used to solidify his reign. This reflected in increasing the economic reach and political influence of the IRGC during the nineties. (Dagher, 2020). The increasing role of the IRGC had put it at the center of foreign policy decision-making process, which sometimes enabled it to act independently from other high official institutions or even the presidency itself (Demirel, 2016, p. 103).

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980 - 1988), the IRGC had been able to become an independent economic giant that had controlled the backbone of the economy. The IRGC had taken control over financial establishments, i.e., Ansar bank, Iran Telecom, gas and oil companies, and religious tourism to Iraq and Syria (Ghiles, 2018). Moreover, the IRGC had exerted its influence to pass monopolistic laws to increase its share in the industrial and financial sectors not only in Iran, but also in Iraq, which had fallen under its sphere of influence. For example, the IRGC had succeeded in pushing its nominee, Ahmadinejad, to become the president, who in return, had provided the IRGC with huge economic privileges and government contracts which augmented the economic and political powers of the IRGC (Sinkay, 2016, pp. 186-187). As a consequence, the IRGC and the companies affiliated with it had taken control of over half of the Iranian imports and one-third of the non-oil exports. The profits of the companies that are affiliated with the IRGC are estimated to be around five billion US dollars every year (ADL Report, 2012, p. 3). In explaining the IRGC's share in the Iranian economy, estimates are not conclusive. One of those estimates puts the IRGC as the owner of one-sixth of the Iranian GDP (Knøster, 2019, pp. 63-64).

The IRGC, in short, seems to be an influential military, economic, and political power in the Iranian politics and has serious ramifications on the neighboring countries, like Iraq and Syria, which gradually fell under the IRGC's influence. It might appear that

the IRGC acts alone and independent from the general policies of the Iranian state due to the supremacy of its influence over other institutions. Nonetheless, one needs to remember that the Iranian state, after all, acts as a whole towards the exportation of the revolution to other Muslim states, and the supremacy of the IRGC over other institutions is not to be taken as a representative example of conflict or contradiction. The IRGC follows the guidelines laid out by the Iranian constitution and fulfills the Iranian foreign policies in the region, a role that shifted the IRGC from being the liberator of Iranian land from Iraq towards becoming an influential military tool in Iraq (Demirel, 2016, p. 104).

1.3. Principles of foreign policy making in Iran:

1.3.1. National Identity

At first, there are two principles that are deeply entrenched in the Iranian collective culture, which are the core of the Iranian national identity—Islamic Shiism and Iranianism (nationalism). These two components can be considered as the guiding principles or motivators of the Iranian foreign policies (Karimifard, 2011, pp. 240-241). Both components are indicated in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the former, Islamic, can refer to the schism of Shiism, and the latter, Iran, refers to the ethnic component of the republic. The emphasis of these two components is not nominal only; rather, they are enshrined in the Iranian constitution, reflected into the Iranian leadership and implemented and acted out into the Iranian foreign policies. The majority of the people in Iran are Shiite Muslims who constitute 96% of the country's population. Due to this huge majority, it is an accepted fact that Islamic Shiism plays an important role in the Iranian identity both at the grassroots level as well as at the official level (Ansari, 2002, p. 114). As spelled out in the Iranian Constitution in Article 12, the religion of the Iranian state is Shiism (Twelver Ja'farî school), which reads as "The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school...". Furthermore, in Article 3, paragraph 16 of the Iranian Constitution, the Iranians should establish "the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims...". According to these two constitutional articles, we can

see how important Islamic Shiism is in shaping the Iranian identity and how it became integrated into Iranian foreign policies. From the first one of these two componential elements, one can argue that the Twelver's Ja'fari school forms an integral part of the Iranian national identity, whose ethos and principles are enshrined and promoted through Iran's foreign policies. Iranianism, the second component, is the other integral part of the Iranian national identity and should be preserved and promoted as well. In article 3, paragraph 11 of the Iranian Constitution, [Iranianism should be maintained] "all round strengthening of the foundations of national defence to the utmost degree by means of universal military training for the sake of safeguarding the independence, territorial integrity..."

Many of the statements of the top Iranian leadership at various levels are directed to preserve and maintain the Iranian national agenda of Islamic Shiism, as well to defend the national interests of the Iranians if the need requires. For example, Rouhani, the previous Iranian president (succeeded by Ibrahim Raisi in August of 2020), stated that the people should need to know of and be familiar with the Iranian civilization and its historical legacy if they want to understand the Iranian regional influence in the Middle East and the legitimate claims of its demands (Rouhani, 2013).

1.3.2. Nationalism

The term 'Iran' first appeared during the Sasanian Empire (224 AD - 651 AD) to describe the same geographical area of present-day Iran and the people under its rule (Gnoli, 1989, p. 68) During the Sasanian Empire, the Persian ethnic component was the backbone of the Iranian national identity while the term 'Iranian' was retained to describe the people incorporated into the political borders of Iran regardless of their ethnic diversity (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, p. 617). The expansionism of the Sasanians into the neighboring region had incorporated other ethnic backgrounds and diversified the national milieu of the Iranians. Almost half of the population of Iran belong to ethnic groups other than Persian, such as Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Afghans, Azerbaijani and so on (Salehzadeh, 2013, p. 8). The term 'Iran' is not an ethnic attribution, nor does it equate to Persian ethnicity. Rather, the term 'Iran' refers

to the geographical entity and the citizens of the Sasanian Empire. This term developed over time to become a political identity to include all of the inhabitants who had happened to live, or who were forcefully incorporated into the realm of the Sasanian Empire. Therefore, the Persian component, along with other ethnic minorities, constituted the Iranian national identity where the Persian element remained in charge of the major decision-making process. The Persian ethnic component remains the backbone of the Iranian national identity and its major driving force in social, economic and political terms (Akbar Aghajanian, 1983, p. 211), and the renewed use of the term 'Iran' is used as an inclusionary term to reduce ethnic sensitivities and iron out any racial differences in order to incorporate, or even integrate other ethnicities into a new unified identity.

Such conception of the national identity, as mixed with the Iranian Shiism, had been strengthened and supported during the Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties. During their struggle against the colonial and other imperial European Influences, all the ethnic minorities under the cover term 'Iranianism' had fought side by side with the Persian component for their political independence and worked together for the prosperity and affluence of their citizens. The protracted Safavid-Ottoman conflicts had indirectly benefited the national milieu of the Iranian identity where the idea of 'common enemy' had ironed out any ethnic prejudice or racial discrimination, united them in the path of common destiny and cemented the national identity of Iranianism. Similarly, the Western imperial influences that occurred during the monarchies, Qajar and Pahlavi, had not only united the multi-ethnicities of the Iranians and cemented their national identity under Iranianism, but also 'Iranianism' had acquired another dimension which is 'Shiism' (Salsman, 2019, p. 62), as explained above.

The emergence of Iranianism, as developed and consistently nurtured over the years, had added another form of distinguishing criterion—the Shiite schism of Iranian flavor, or the Iranian Shiism. As described earlier, the addition of Iranian Shiism to the Iranian national identity was mainly cultivated to distinguish the Iranians, who are already ethnically diversified, from other religious affiliations, i.e., the Sunni Muslims and Arab Shiite or from any other nation, ensuring Iran stands out as a unique nation, in which it was successful. The Iranian national identity is formed around the Persian ethnic component; yet they are Iranians. Iranianism had been developed to incorporate

the people of occupied nations over time (Aghajanian, 1983, p. 214). For example, to make Iranian blend even more homogeneous, the Sunni component of the Iranian territories were exterminated completely, forcing the Sunni people of Iran to convert into the Shiite schism.

Such a complex nature of the Iranian national identity is reflected into the contradictory representations of the Iranian state. While Iran claims to be an Islamic state, rejecting any sort of secularity in its borders, nonreligious occasions like Nowruz or the Persian New Year are officially celebrated in Iran. Each year, during Nowruz, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency send congratulation letters to countries, i.e., Tajikistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, who are believed to have shared at some point in history the same Iranian heritage (Ziabari, 2014 p.1). In a similar vein, despite the Iranian revolution was purely Islamic and called for the return to the pristine principles of Islam, elements of national patriotism had been projected at some point during and after the Islamic revolution (Ansari, 2012, p. 198). Moreover, the Azeri and the Arab minorities are banned from using their native languages. Although the official language in Iran is Persian after the 1979 revolution, ethnic minorities are not allowed to use their native languages. For example, the Azeri minority, which constitutes 15% of the Iranian population, marched the streets to demonstrate against the ban of their language (Salehzadeh, 2013, p. 9). The Arab minority as well, is prohibited from using the Arabic language in the schools and universities, despite the fact that the Arabic language is taught in the Shiite religious establishments and is fluently spoken by Shiite scholars (Salehzadeh, 2013, p. 11). Those sentiments are also evident in the reactions of the Iranian elite towards random events. For example, the Iranians expressed strong feelings of anger and dissatisfaction over President Trump's naming of the Persian Gulf as the Arab Gulf during his visit to Saudi Arabia in 2017 (Makarechi, 2017), as an indication reminiscent of radical nationalism. Despite the inflaming religious rhetoric and the propaganda of Islamic solidarity, some of the Iranian officials have expressed strong criticism and derogatory sentiments towards the Arabs, which often are interpreted as to have originated from racial superiority and Iranian expansion (Moeh and Abdullah 2016, p. 3).

In a nutshell, Iranianism refers to a political identity for all of those who lived within the borders of the Sasanian dynasty up until present-day Iran, and who were united voluntarily or involuntarily by their common history, cultural heritage, religious majority, colonial-phobia, and national interest (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, pp. 1-2).

1.3.3. Shiism

The Iranian population had gone through different historical phases that forged and readjusted their national identity. From the Safavids up to the Pahlavi dynasties, the religious Shiite establishments had been opting for a foothold and a veto power in the decision-making process in Iran, with total control of the country being the ultimate goal. To achieve such an objective, the Iranian clerics appealed to the Iranian ethnic identity as imparted by the ancient legacy of the Persian Empire and the Shiite schism in which the clerics could be involved in politics and share power with the ruling elite. The Iranian national identity was shaped in a way to accommodate the Shiite schism in order to find a room for the religious clerics to be in charge of important political positions. The power struggle between the king on one hand and the religious establishments on the other during almost all of the Iranian monarchies had displayed itself clearly, and each time the monarchy fell, the religious establishment was the one who was responsible. The power struggle in the former monarchy or the power distribution in the current theocracy is more or less the same and is reflected into the Iranian national identity. The Iranian identity which was formerly based on ethnic grounds had been persistently exposed to accommodate Shiism as another component to satisfy the political objectives of the religious clerics and other theocratic establishments. The interventionist colonial powers in the Iranian internal affairs and the role played by the religious establishments in defending the Iranian national interests had cemented the Iranian national identity around Shiism (Ramazani, 2010, p. 12); (Saraiva and Faro, 2012, p. 153).

After the Westphalian Agreement in 1648, religious and sectarian identity had no major role in establishing the modern states in Europe, as well as in the countries of the Middle East. As compared to the Iranian state, the Middle East countries are

relatively new countries which emerged in the 20th century after direct colonial occupation where local religious and sectarian identities did not have a significant role in the politics of most Arab countries. Due to the Shiite minorities in the Arab countries as is the case in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, the employment of any sort of political sectarianism might stand as a destabilizing role in these countries and can weaken their centralized powers and institutions at the socio-political level. However, Iran represents a different experience (Bishara, 2017, pp. 20-25).

The Iranian national identity, if to be fully understood, should be perceived solely through its historical legacy and sectarian selfhood rather than the modern standards of secular nationalism of western countries. To capture a fuller picture of the Iranian national identity, the relationship between Shiism and the Iranian state shall be emphasized from a historical perspective to highlight how intertwined Shiism and Iranianism are (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, pp. 616-617).

Islam entered Iran in the seventh century, and most of the region's inhabitants embraced Islam in a short period of time. Over time, the Iranian contributions to the Islamic civilization were significant (Foltz, 2013, pp. 179-191). Despite the emergence of multiple independent states in Iran from the 10th century up until the 16th century, Iran had considered itself an integral part of the Islamic civilization and the Islamic nation. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 16th century, Iran had witnessed a dramatic change of ferocious and merciless Shiitization of its own population. The vast majority of the population of Iran up until the onset of the 16th century belonged to the Sunni and Sufi sects, and the Iranian national identity was purely based on ethnicity where the Shiite sectarian component was not integrated or even considered a viable one of the Iranian identity. However, with the accession of the Safavids to power in 1501, the sectarian component began to establish itself, along with Iranian ethnicity, as an integral part of the Iranian national identity (Karimifard, 2012, p. 241).

The founder of the Safavid state, King Ismail Shah, who had been greatly influenced by Persian culture, embraced the Twelver Shiite sect and considered the Twelver sect as the official religion of the state. He implemented brute force to impose such beliefs on his own people (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008, p. 18). The shah set out to uproot the violators of his newly adopted doctrine by using unjustified force and merciless

violence. For example, Iranian Sunnis were chased and killed, and orders were issued to curse the three rightly-guided caliphs (i.e., Abu-Bakr, Omar, Othman) in sermons and public places, and whoever refuses to do so or is seen performing the Sunni way of praying is sentenced to death. Moreover, Sunni mosques were demolished, the Naqshbandi Sufi shrines were destroyed, and many other Sufi orders were suppressed. Large massacres took place against the Sunnis in many cities, such as the ‘Tabriz’ massacre, which is said to have had more than twenty thousand victims, and the ‘city of Yazd’ massacre, in which the death toll was not less than seven thousand. The cities of Kazron, Tabus, and Khorsan had met more or less the same fate (Kreem Abd al-Majeed, 2017); (Arafah Pramasto, 2020, p. 29).

It seems that the Safavid’s dynasty had been interested in creating a unifying identity that is solely unique for the Iranian nation to make it stand out from other neighbouring identities, like the Sunni Turks and Arabs, as well as the Shiite Arabs. Of major concern to the Safavids was the creation of a harmonious Iranian identity that could bond together the whole national milieu into a unique national formula that distinguishes Iranian Islamic identity from any other religious or sectarian divisions in the region, and at the same time, is commensurate with the legacy of the Persian Empire (Pramasto, 2020, pp. 29-30). Such extreme nationalism ethos of the Safavids were very dominant and widely accepted as the popular culture at that time to the extent that Western foreigners had recorded examples of it in their travelling diaries. Upon his stay in Iran for twelve years during the Safavid’s time, the famous French traveller Jean Chardin wrote “According to the Iranian notables and Geographers, their country is the greatest empire in the globe.....the Iranian emphasizes that Iran had lost parts of its vast territories but will reconquer its boundaries to what it was during the ancient period” (Safaetgoland Mansour, 2006, p. 13).

The Safavids had succeeded in cementing the Iranian identity around Iranian Shiism, and the two had become intertwined ever since, with each single component entailing the meaning of the other. The Safavids had not only succeeded in creating a national identity of Iranian Shiism, but also in creating an Islamic identity that is different from the rest of the Islamic world which will be employed later as a pretext for the Iranian expansionist aspirations in the region. Current Iran is a continuation from the Safavids’ Persia, both in geographical land and people, uninterrupted by foreign occupations as

suffered by many of the neighboring countries. One can argue that the Iranians are still holding the same sectarian nationalist mindset that their ancestors had established and instilled by brute force, and the modern state of Iran is just a novel representation of the Iranian national identity that was created around Iranian ethnicity and Shiism, which cemented uninterrupted independence since the Safavids till the current time (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008, p. 3). In the era of the Qajar monarchy that followed the Safavid monarchy in Iran, the Shiite clerics and religious establishments had come to play a significant role in the economic and political lives of Iranians. As the clerics in Iran became a social and economic powers of significant importance with great businesses and properties at their disposal throughout the country, these religio-economic institutions had become so influential and effective at socio-political levels to the point that they started to pose a challenge to the political order (Alsabki, 1999, p. 16). In the second middle of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century, the relationship between the religio-economic class and the Qajar ruling family had deteriorated as a result of the kings' concessions and privileges given to Britain and Russia which had threatened the thriving of their businesses. As a result of these concessions to foreign powers, the religious establishment aligned itself with the religio-economic class against the ruling family, where the religious establishment had been able to mobilize the masses through religious fatwas against the ruling family on religious occasions, i.e., Ashura, and other occasions. All of these activities played a major role in weakening the Qajar monarchy. In fact, the alliance between the clerical establishment, the merchant class, and other national intellectuals of westernized culture, had supported the Tobacco Rebellion in 1890, and later the Constitutional Revolution in 1905, which had finally led to the downfall of the last king of the Qajar family in 1925 (Alsabki, 1999, pp. 21-26).

The role of Shiite clerics in the national movement in resisting foreign companies and the influence of Western countries during the Qajar monarchy, and their participation in what is known as the Tobacco Rebellion and the People's Constitutional Revolution, gave them political legitimacy in front of the Iranian people because they played a major part of the national movement and defending the interests of Iranians and resisting colonial powers (Alsabki, 1999, pp. 28-29). The newly established Iranian identity around Shiism was tested first during the Qajar period, and the significant role

of the Shiite clerics in espousing and defending the Iranian national interest against foreign powers had cemented the Iranian national identity around Shiism and the Iranian religious establishments. It is this political asset that was masterfully manipulated by the religious clerics in the Islamic revolution in 1979 and contributed to its success and continues to be so up to the current moment.

In 1925, Ali Reza Pahlavi, an army officer, had carried out a coup d'état in Iran and he was later nominated as the king of Iran in the same year (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, pp. 624-625). During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925 - 1979), the Iranian people and the religious establishment were subjected to tyrannical and dictatorial rule with the relative exception of 1940s and the beginning of 1950s. Iran had also become an arena for Western intervention, especially from the United States (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 259-260). As a result of the Pahlavi dictatorial regime and the Western intervention in Iran, the sixties and seventies of the last century had witnessed violent turmoil and upheavals, where the Shiite clerics once again had played a significant role. The Shiite clerics employed religious rhetoric, fatwas and religious occasions to mobilize against the tyrannical rule of the Shah. Moreover, the clerics called for a Shiite theocracy in the form of the guardianship of the Islamic jurist, or Velayet-i-Faqih, which Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran, had later developed and adopted. Such theory of governance, which is mainly based on the Iranian Shiite theocracy, had become the political ideology of the Iranian regime after 1979 (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, pp. 624-625).

1.3.4. Islamic Revolution

During the Pahlavi's rule, Iran was a secular state that had been undergoing huge developmental projects and pursuing a promising westernization agenda; nonetheless, it had also been supporting Shiites outside its geographical borders. Such non-conventional behavior of a secular country to support and sponsor religious diplomacy abroad can explain how Shiism and ethnicity are mixed together to form the national identity of the Iranians. The emergence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was in part due to the complexity of the Iranian national identity that was divided across Shiism

and ethnicity which had nurtured and developed since the Safavids' time. Secular Iran had been assuming the defense of Shiite population outside its geographical borders as well as its national interests at the expense of the sovereignty of Arab Gulf states. For example, Pahlavi Iran considered itself as the defender of the Shiites in Arab countries and provided support for the Shiites in Iraq and elsewhere (Zimmt, 2017, pp. 139-135). Moreover, Iran occupied three islands which belonged to the United Arab Emirates, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa in 1971, and the Iranian regime considered Bahrain as a part of the Iranian lands (Camron Michael Amin, 2017, p. 144). On different occasions, the shah had stated that the Iranians belong to the Aryan race while the Arabs belong to the Semitic race, indicating the inferiority of Arabs as compared to his own (Zimmt, 2017, p. 130). Inherent in such a comment is the deep belief of race nationalism rather than ethnic nationalism, despite the fact that it was never explicitly stated or officially adopted (Ansari, 2017, p. 101).

During the Khomeini era (1979 - 1989), however, the rhetoric had changed a little bit, yet the same expansionist objectives remained unchanged. In Khomeini's propaganda there were a mixture of concepts from different political and ideological orientations jumbled together in a way that makes it stand out from any other revolutionary propaganda in the world. In its initial stage, the revolution adopted multi political ideologies of liberalism, nationalism, Marxism, Islamism, and Shiism that are reminiscent of the contradictory policies of secularism and the sponsorship of Shiism outside the Iranian borders during the Pahlavi regime (Ansari and Aarabi, 2019, p. 12).

To explain why or justify the internal theoretical incongruities, the leaders of the Iranian revolution had claimed that their ideology is a combination between communism and capitalism that serves the Islamic Nation (Ansari and Aarabi, 2019, p. 12). Despite the sheer contradictions of its theoretical and political orientations, the Islamic Revolution had succeeded, and the principles of Islamic Revolution had been added to Shiism and ethnicity as backbone constituents of the Iranian national identity. Among the proclaimed principles of the revolution were the defense of the Islamic Nation, i.e., Ummah, supporting the liberation movements, and the exportation of the revolution outside its geographical borders (Hourcade, 2017, p. 218); (Friedman, 2010, p. 5). To gain universal support for his revolution, Khomeini stated “We would like to act according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We would like to be free.

We would like independence,” expressing support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Muhammad Arif Mustunsir, 2012, p. 17).

However, it took the new regime in Iran just one year to contradict the principles of the Islamic revolution of solidarity and Islamic nationhood. In 1980, the Iran-Iraq war had erupted over Shatt Al-Arab waterway, and soon anti-Arab propaganda was resumed as earlier. The first president of the Islamic Republic, Abu Al-Hasan Bani Sadr, had explicitly stated that “Iraq was throughout history a part of ‘Faris’ (Persia) and the Gulf Region was always Iranian property. Hence, the Gulf’s oil lies within Persian territories” (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 3). Furthermore, such expansionist sentiments did not stop all along the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and new official statements supported former declarations. For example, Ali Younis, the advisor to the Iranian President, Ali Rouhani, stated that “Baghdad is now the capital of the Iranian empire” (Thomas E. Ricks. Foreign Policy, Mar. 3, 2016). Like the Pahlavi regime, which had supported the Shiites in Iraq and occupied the Emirati Arab Islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, the consecutive regimes in the Islamic republic pursued the same objectives, despite the different names given. Pahlavi Iran and post-revolution Iran had adopted the same propagandas of defending the Shiite populations outside the Iranian borders.

During the seventies and eighties, Pahlavi and Islamic Iran could not exert any significant influence over the Iraqi Shiite. Such mere fact had forced Iran during the war to appeal to other slogans such as ‘the mother land of Iran’ or ‘the Iranian nation’ instead of the Islamic nation that was losing significance (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, p. 619); (Hourcade, 2017, p. 219). Slogans such as Saddam’s regime in Iraq is the enemy of Islam and the people of Iran were also appealed to during the Iran-Iraq war (Rezaei, 2019, pp. 115-116). Once again, the Iranian national identity is being redrawn around nationalism rather than Islamism to accommodate for the dynamic changes of politics and to serve the national interests of Iran. When Ahmadinejad became the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2005, he spoke of protecting the interests of the Iranian nation which appears as an alternative to the Islamic nation (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016, p. 617).

The national identity of Iran remained the same before and after the Islamic Revolution. The Iranian national identity is divided across Iranian Shiism and Iranian Nationalism, to serve the aspirations of expansionism in the region at the expense of the Arab sovereign countries. The official statements of both the Pahlavi and the post-revolution leaders are basically the same while the change of the regime can only be considered as an internal power struggle among the Iranians themselves. The only difference between the so-called secular Pahlavi regime and its Islamic counterpart is that the former had failed in expanding its influence whereas the second had succeeded.

1.3.5. Iran Geopolitical Concerns

Indeed, the strategic geographic location of Iran and its huge oil and gas reservation have increased Iran's influence in the international arena. Iran derives that importance originally from the geo-strategic location of the Middle East region as a whole. Iran and the Middle East in general, are located in a critical spot of the world on the routes of vital sea trade (Mohammad Nuruzzaman, 2009. pp. 7-8). The Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf have delivered the European Countries with easy sea routes to establish significant trade with the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. Iran is also linked to East Asia via the historic silk route from the Middle East to China (Mohammad Nuruzzaman, 2009, p. 8). This could explain Iran's desire to extend its influence in Afghanistan, which shares a border with China.

Since the Iranian revolution, Iran's expansionist infiltration into the Gulf region had been increasing which attracted the concerns of superpowers such as the United States, China and Russia, as well as Israel. Capitalizing on the Iranian-Iraqi animosity that had accumulated during the Iran-Iraq war, since 1991 the United States had coordinated with Iran to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein which was the sole regional power in the region. With the help of the Americans, Iran had replaced Iraq and the balance of power was tipped off in favor of Iran. Due to the rising star of Iranian power in the region, Iran seems to have been pursuing a regional hegemony in the region that is rich in oil, and in so doing, had deviated from the American red lines

that it was supposed to abide by. Iran's nuclear program and its military presence in Iraq and Syria are very clear examples for its regional expansionist aspirations which are posing real security challenges in the neighboring Gulf Arab countries. The United States, which had indirectly helped the Iranians to become a regional power, is faced with the dilemma of containing the Iranian power or letting the Iranians to become a serious challenge for the whole region. However, the political scene is not as simple as it might appear to be, as the whole situation is getting more complex due to the political players who have become involved in the game. China, which is in constant need for oil and gas to keep up with its huge industry, had been interested to increase the levels of economic cooperation with Iran; namely, the importation of natural gas and oil in exchange for high-tech productions and technological equipment which Iran could not procure due to its rentier economy (Harlod and Nader, 2012, pp. 18-19). While the Chinese policy towards Iran is clear as based on economic cooperation and mutual benefits that are solely based on business grounds, the Russian-Iranian relationship is less obvious despite the military collaboration between them. Russia had helped Iran with the establishment of the Iranian power plants and nuclear reactors and provided Iran with armaments and artillery it needed for its security and its expansionist aspirations in the region. Yet, Russia is still abiding by the sanctions of the UN Security Council against Iran. Russia's foreign policies towards the Middle East, as it had always been in the past, had not a steady and straightforward agenda, and is always playing the odds to maximize its political and economic benefits. Russia arms Iran and provides it with modern artillery to strengthen its regional power and enable it to pursue its expansionist aspiration; nonetheless, it is always ready for constructive negotiations with the US and the West (Fite, 2012, pp. 10-11). Within such a political scene, Iran's power, and henceforth Iran's geopolitical concerns, seems to be dependent on these three major superpowers. The US miscalculation in tipping the balance for Iran, which was facilitated by occupying Iraq in 2003, seemed to be the golden opportunity that Iran had been waiting for to pursue its own political agenda in the region. With the help of the Americans' collaboration, Iran had extended its influence not only in Iraq but also in Syria as well. Although it was the Russians and the Iranians who had helped support the regime of Bashar al-Assad in 2015, it was the American-Iranian collaboration in Iraq, and the covert American consent to the Iranian expansionism in Iraq that had helped Iran to spiral out of control of the American

sphere of influence. Russia and China's roles, though influential, seem to be secondary in influencing the geopolitics of Iran. It was the Americans who miscalculated the real intentions of Iran and underestimated the whole situation, which had led Iran to propose more challenging claims in the region. The Iranian increase of power in Syria had alerted Israel and raised serious concerns for the Jewish state. However, Israel and Iran are more likely to be regional competitors rather than enemies as they do not share any geographical borders, and each one of them seeks a different sphere of influence. Iran's main interventionist policies are directed towards the Arabian Gulf whereas Israel's main policies are directed to increase its influence in the Levant (Kaye, Nader & Roshan, 2011, p. 1).

Overall, Iran is bent on increasing its political influence in the region of the Arabian Gulf, and to some extent, it has succeeded in Iraq and Syria. However, such success is transitory and temporal in nature because all of the contributing factors to its success are externally based. Russia's opportunism in the region and China's economic pragmatism towards Iran cannot be taken to mount to strategic alliances with Iran, and the rules of politics can easily shift if the Americans have the intentions to reaffirm their hegemony in the region. Furthermore, Iran's economy is solely based on rentier revenues of oil and lacks the industrial potentials to carry out developmental projects to diversify its economic resources, and the economic sanctions have proven to be an effective technique in containing its unbridled expansionist agenda.

It is obvious that controlling Iraq is geopolitically crucial for the survival of the Iranian regime to prevent any future military attacks based in Iraq against Iranian territory. Also, it's important for Iran to achieve economic and political benefits to manoeuvre the sanctions, and to extend its influence over the Arab gulf region.

Chapter Two

Since the emergence of the Iraqi state after World War I, the successive Iranian regimes have been convinced that Iraq represents a strategic depth for Iran. At the same time, Iraq represents a threat and a competitor to the Iranian state, mainly because it enjoys enormous natural resources, especially with the early discovery of oil in Iraq at the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, Iran has not missed any opportunity to contain and control Iraq along with its resources since that time.

2.1. The Iraq War and the Iranian Reaction (Expansionist Aspirations)

The Iranian expansionist aspiration in Iraq dates back many years before the Islamic revolution. At the beginning of the seventies, the Shah's regime in Iran had been providing military support to the Kurdish separatist factions to the central government in Baghdad. However, in 1975 Iran signed the Algiers Agreement, which ended the animosity between the two states, and Iran committed itself to non-interventionist policies in the Iraqi internal affairs up until to its downfall (Andreas Vis, 2015, pp. 33-55). However, the official statements of the new Iranian Islamic regime had demonstrated expansionist aspiration into the region, especially, towards the Iraqi's territories. The Iranian expansionist aspiration had been encapsulated either through the rhetoric of the exportation of the Islamic revolution to other Muslim countries or through the Iranian territorial claims into the Iraqi's land. The most obvious claim was that of the first Iranian president of the Iranian Islamic republic, Hassan Bani Sadr, that "Iraq was throughout history a part of "Faris" (Persia) and the Gulf region was always Iranian property. Hence, the Gulf's oil lies within Persian territories" (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 3). Iran, however, had not been able to actualize these claims during the Iran-Iraq war, and could not exert or extend its influence in Iraq or any Arab land till the end of the war in 1988. The Iranian dream of controlling Iraq began when the United States had invaded Iraq in 2003. After 9/11 attacks, the US had invaded

Iraq using multiple pretexts such as accusing Iraq of hosting terrorism and the possession of weapons of mass destruction. The Iranian state, as a result, had found itself accidentally at the advantage point with the international alliance against terrorism which enabled it to extend its regional influence in the Arab countries through the Iraqi territories. The American invasion of Iraq had tipped the balance in favor of the Iranians and allowed the Iranians to render Iraq as a satellite state without national sovereignty (Rezaei, 2019, p. 136). In the following discussion, the political scene of Iraq after 2003 will be explained with some details in order to highlight how the Iranian influence had eventually managed to subjugate the Iraqi state, and how it succeeded in rendering Iraq as a clientele state governed by and directed from Tehran (Rezaei, 2019, pp. 135-136)

2.1.1. Risks & Opportunities Arising from the US Invasion

The US intervention in Iraq was formulated under multiple pretexts. Among of these proclaimed covers were the Iraqi's possession of weapons of mass destructions, Iraq's sponsorship of terrorism, and the propagation of democracy in Iraq, which all turned out to be false later. Regardless of the truth or falsity of these claims, the US had changed the balance of power in the region in favor of Iran and complicated the political scene that were usually against the proclaimed promises of democracy and development. Right after the US invasion in 2003 (Danju et al., 2013, pp. 682-683), the United States played a role with the help of Iran to draw a constitution that is solely based on ethnic and sectarian division rather than principles of secularism which is considered the basic constituent of democracy, development, and the protection of human rights (Jawad, 2013, p. 10). The US implicit consent over the Iranian intervention in Iraq had given it the potential to extend its influence in the region and allowed Iran to play a larger role in the politics of the region. Iran had used the American consent for its own political benefits and pursued a policy of its own that was most of the time at odds with the American interests (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 3). Iran's growing influence in Iraq and Syria has become pressing priorities for the United States due to their future potential effects in destabilizing the security of the region in the form of breeding terrorist activities and sectarian clashes. Despite the

United States having benefited from Iran, it became very obvious that Iran had gained more from the American-Iranian collaboration. Iran has been able to decide about the foreign policies of Iraq and plays a major role in the politics of Syria, and still boasts about the exportation of Islamic Revolution principles into the Arab countries (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 1). The Iranian success in the Gulf region, in essence challenges the international order of oil security and the American hegemony in the region, which is a traditional playground for the United States. The overestimation of the Iranian power, as either a result of American miscalculations or the Iranian deviation off the outlined American policies, had become a serious concern for the United States. Currently, during Biden's administration, there have been calls in Washington for reassessment, and if necessary, a reformulation of the policies towards Iran.

2.2. The Political Scene in Iraq since 2003

After the US invasion, the Iraqi political scene had become disrupted, the government institutions collapsed, terrorism and vandalism had spread all over the country, and sectarian clashes had begun to emerge on the surface. These insecurities had allowed the pro-Iranian groups to infiltrate into the socio-political stratum of the Iraqi society, and to fill in the political vacuum that was left after the collapse of the Iraqi government.

The political scene in Iraq was not completely conducive to the Iranian intervention through clientele organizations and pro-Iranian political parties. The Iraqi political scene was not totally devoid of Iraqi political parties that were not fully in line with the Iranian political agenda or completely comfortable with its interventionist policies in Iraq. It is worth mentioning that after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and his Baathist national party, there emerged different political parties of different foreign affiliations and agendas which can roughly be classified into pro-Western and Pro-Iranian. Such classification is not to be necessarily perceived conclusive, and the two emergent groups of parties had collaborated, and sometimes, conflicted with each other due to their different political objectives. Among the pro-Western parties, are the Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP, and the Kurdistan Union Party, KUP, which had traditionally fought against the central government in Baghdad with American-British support since 1958, right after the fall of the monarchy—ten years before the Baathist

party seized power in 1968 (Dahlman, 2002, p. 286). These parties had been struggling to achieve independence for their Kurdish ethnic minority which is estimated to be 15% of the total Iraqi population (Blanchard, 2020). Historically, these parties cooperated with the parties that were loyal to Iran, and together, they had been collaborating and colluding politically and militarily against the central government in Baghdad since 1980. After 2003, these parties worked together and participated in the political process to achieve independence for the ethnic Kurdish minority and establish their Kurdish state as independent from the central government of Baghdad. As a result of their collaboration, these two parties had been successful in achieving autonomy for three Kurdish provinces of Kurdish majority with autonomous government and military forces. However, these two parties started competing over the control of the region, both among themselves and with other countries, which in turn, weakened their alliance and dissipated their political power as independent political parties. For example, left wing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party, PUK led by Jalal Talabani, strengthened its relations with Iran and the Syrian regime while the conservative Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP led by Massoud Barzani, strengthened its relations with Turkey (Leezenb, 2015, p. 166). Henceforth, the Kurdish parties lack the potential to influence the political scene in Iraq for two reasons. First, the Kurdish parties do not represent the majority of the Iraqi population; rather, they represent the interests of the Kurdish ethnic minority. Second, the involvement of regional powers like Iran and Syria on one hand and Turkey on the other, have rendered these two parties as proxy agents serving these powers rather than meeting their national ethnic rights, thus weakening their presence in the Iraqi political scene (Farhad Hassan Abdullah, 2018, pp. 3-4)

The Iraqi National Alliance, *Iraqiyya*, was established after 2003 under the leadership of Iyad Allawi, who is descendant from a Shiite family. Despite his Shiite affiliation, Allawi held secular beliefs and had political support from the United States. He assumed the transitional position of prime minister from June 2004 to February 2005. Despite the victory of his political party, *Iraqiyya*, with a high percentage of seats in the Iraqi parliament, in 2010, Allawi was unable to become the prime minister of Iraq. Later on, his political party had split into three insignificant groups without any political influence in Iraqi politics (Katzman and Humud, 2016, p. 5). This leaves us

with the last pro-Western political party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, which has a popular base among the Sunni Arab community. The origins of the Iraqi Islamic Party go back to the Muslim Brotherhood and adopts its ideology as a political program. The party which was led by Tariq Al-Hashemi had run for the parliamentary elections but later withdrew. In 2011, the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki passed an order to pursue the party leaders, including its leader Tariq al-Hashemi, and since that time he has been living in exile in Turkey (Katzman and Humud, 2016, p. 5).

Despite the limited political gains, the political parties which are not affiliated to Iran had not been able to play a major role in the Iraqi political scene. These parties did not have the ability to continue as valid political parties that are representative of sectors of the Iraqi population. For example, the Kurdish parties were minority parties by nature, and the Iraqiyya party failed to represent the majority of the Iraqi people due to its Sunni affiliation. The absence of a decent political party that could represent large segments of the Iraqi people created a political vacuum. Iran had used this vacuum to exert its influence over the Iraqi population by the pro-Iranian parties. The Shiite majority of the Iraqi people was the trump card that the Iranian state had used and manipulated to win over the other political parties in the Iraqi political scene, and most probably (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 4), with the approval of the United States, as will be shown below.

2.3. Iranian Influence

The US occupation forces' propaganda in 2003 was that they wanted to liberate Iraq from the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and build a democratic state that would be a model for the rest of the Middle East. Months after the US invasion in July, the US occupation authority had established the Governing Council in Iraq whose task was to carry out political and security missions. This council consisted of 25 members: 13 members Arab Shiites, 5 members Arab Sunnis, 5 members Kurds, and 2 members from other small minorities. All of these members were appointed by the occupation authority and the seats were based on sectarian and ethnic lines (Otterman, 2007). This classification gives the sectarian division and ethnic classification more prominence in state-building than the principles of citizenship and nationhood, the basic constituents of modern democracies — the very basic objective that the war had claimed to seek.

The sectarian and ethnic structures in this form that had emerged as a direct result of the American occupation do not only represent a threat to the principles of modern democracies — the very same pretext of the American invasion — but also represent a serious challenge to the unity of the Iraqi society and the Iraqi national identity. Moreover, this sectarian classification gave the pro-Iranian parties fertile ground to expand and strengthen their influence at the expense of the nationalist parties. The thing that draws attention is that the American occupation authority has appointed some members of this council (without elections) who belong to parties that grew up under the supervision of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Iran. For example, Abdulaziz al-Hakim, the leader of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, and Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the Secretary General of the Daawa Party were members in this council at that time, although they were considered close allies of the Iranian state (Otterman, 2007).

The American occupation authority re-trained and re-structured the Iraqi ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior, by re-recruiting and building the Iraqi security forces from 2003 to 2006 (Khalil, 2006, p. 1) that favors the increase of the Iranian influence and comes in line with Iranian aspirations in Iraq. These same security forces had been involved in the sectarian cleansing against the Sunnis through direct support from the pro-Iranian military arms. The Badr Organization, which was established in the 1980s under the supervision of Iranian forces to fight the Iraqi army, is the backbone of the security forces of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (Alaaldin, 2018, p. 8). Recanting their former promises of democracy and prosperity, the Americans, as the events unfold, had been contriving and colluding with the Iranians to dismantle not only Saddam Hussein's dictatorship but to push forward the Iraqi society into sectarian and ethnic bloodbath that the Iraqi people are enduring up to the current moment.

Given the American support, being it overt or implicit, Iran had become the major player in Iraq's affairs where it had the military and political reservoirs to nominate or depose political leaders, ignite or solve problems such as the military fight between the Sadrists and the Islamic Revolutionary Council Party in Basra in 2008 (Cordesman, A. and Arleigh, R.J., 2008, p. 2), as well as influencing the most important decisions of the Iraqi internal and foreign affairs, such as the agreement between US and Iraq to withdraw from Iraq in 2008. The agreement which stated the US commitment not to

use Iraqi territory to attack Iran, stands as stark evidence of the Iranian clout over what the Iraqi government deems important in its international negotiations (Cockburn,2008,pp1-2).

The Iranian influence in Iraq had taken different formulas and policies which can be roughly summarized as ‘hybrid intervention’ where multiple politico-military tools are employed to dismantle the Iraqi state not only on the socio-political level but also by creating a sectarian and ethnic animosity among the Iraqi citizens that are not going to heal in the future even if the Iranian influence is totally gone. Multiple tools are deployed to achieve this ‘hybrid intervention’, such as the direct politico-military intervention, the intervention in the socio-judiciary policies and the direct intervention in the political process (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 6). Central to these policies is the time-tested strategy of divide-to-rule. Iran supports a multitude of conflicting political and military arms at the same time to ensure its control and supremacy over them all. The Iranian support for multi pro-Iranian groups and parties seems to be the backbone of the Iranian foreign policy while the other subjugating tools can be perceived as complementary and supplementary. In the following discussion, these tools will be discussed and explained in some detail.

With regard to the politico-military intervention, the Iranian diplomatic missions played a significant role in the expansion of the Iranian influence in Iraq. In addition to the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad, a number of Iranian consulates have been opened in Iraqi cities with a majority Shiite population such as Basra, Karbala, Najaf and Nasiriyah. These diplomatic missions functioned as intelligence headquarters to recruit new Shiite volunteers and pro-Iranian fanatics to interfere in the internal political affairs of Iraq at the provincial level (Guzansky, 2011, pp. 86-87). Among the many Iranian political institutions, the Revolutionary Guard had the largest role in achieving the Iranian foreign policy objectives in Iraq. The Iranian ambassadors assigned to Baghdad from 2003 up to the current times were former members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Members of the Quds Forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard move freely inside the Iraqi lands with diplomatic cover (Guzansky, 2011, p. 86). For example, the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kadami-Qumi, was a former officer in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard who had worked for the Revolutionary Guard as an advisor to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Moreover, the

following ambassador, Hassan Danafar, was also a former officer in the Navy of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The same goes for the current ambassador, Iraj Masjedi, also a previous IRGC officer. This is what General David Petraeus, the former commander of the US forces in Iraq, had confirmed. General Petraeus explained that the Quds Forces is the most powerful operational tool of the Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq (Guzansky, 2011, p. 87). To clarify how much the Revolutionary Guards influence in Iraq is, it is noteworthy to mention the communication that happened between the previous general commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani, and General Petraeus, in 2008. Qassem Soleimani sent a letter to David Petraeus which reads as follows:

“Dear General Petraeus

You should be aware that I, Qassem Soleimani, control Iran’s policy for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the ambassador in Baghdad is a Quds Force member. The individual who’s going to replace him is a Quds Force member.” (Soufan, Nov. 2018); (Chulov, Jul. 2011).

Furthermore, the American occupation forces had not only collaborated with the Iranians in ousting the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, but the collaboration also resumed in 2014 when each party perceived such collaboration as necessary against ISIS. In the words of David Kirkpatrick of the New York Times, “the United States had tacitly accepted General Soleimani as an awkward ally” (Kirkpatrick, Jan. 4, 2020).

Qassem Soleimani regarded himself as a political leader and a mediator who could conclude political deals. On one occasion, for example, the Mahdi Army who was affiliated with Iran under the leadership of Muqtada al-Sadr had launched an armed rebellion in the Iraqi city of Basra in 2008 against the central government of Baghdad (Cordesman, A. and Arleigh, R.J. 2008); (Guzansky, 2011, p. 87) under the pro-Iranian premiership of Nuri al-Maliki (Nader, 2015, p. 6). Nuri al-Maliki on his turn ordered the military forces to move to Basra to crush down the rebellion there. To reduce the conflict between the two pro-Iranian affiliates, the head of the Quds Forces, Qassem Soleimani, had personally mediated to broker a deal between the two conflicting parties (Cordesman, A. and Arleigh, R.J., 2008). The political role of Qassem

Soleimani in Iraq's affairs was not something that is unknown or something to be ashamed of among the heads of the Iraqi government. For example, in 2015 at the Davos conference, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haidar al-Abadi, confirmed the role of Qassem Soleimani as a stabilizer and peace maker in Iraq's internal affairs (Reuters Staff Jan. 24, 2015).



Chapter Three

The abrupt fall of the Iraqi state in 2003 and the collapse of its political and governmental institutions resulted in creating a major political vacuum and instability. This encouraged the feuding religious sects to seek political powers against the interest of Iraq as a country and people. Within this fragile political reality, Iran worked hard to strengthen its political influence from coordinating and supporting the different political parties who align with it religiously, all the way to infiltrating the whole political system in the disintegrated country. The researcher attempts to investigate the political aspect of the Iranian intervention in Iraq in this chapter.

3.1. Political Intervention after the American Invasion

Through the pro-Iranian organizations in Iraq, Iran's political influence had been extended to cover the top of the political sphere in Iraq—the Iraqi government. In the process of electing the prime minister in 2006, a dispute arose over the position of premiership among the pro-Iranian parliamentary blocs who won the highest percentage of seats in the Iraqi House of Representatives. In early 2006, Qassem Soleimani arrived in Baghdad to solve the dispute. Soleimani ordered a meeting of the pro-Iranian blocs in the Baghdad's Green Zone and concluded a deal among the conflicting parties which resulted in nominating Nuri al-Maliki as the prime minister of Iraq (Allam, Landay AND Strobel, 2008); (Nader, 2015, p. 6).

On 7 March 2010 parliamentary elections was held in Iraq, al-Iraqiyya bloc won the largest percentage of seats in the Iraqi parliament, a party that has a secular orientation and rejects the Iranian influence in Iraq. The Iraqiyya bloc which was led by Iyad Allawi outperformed the rest of the pro-Iranian-backed blocs, henceforth, Allawi was supposed to be nominated as the prime minister according to the Iraqi Constitution. However, that did not happen due to the Iranian intervention through its clientele political parties. Appalled by the success of Iyad Allawi, Iran had called for the pro-Iranian blocs to convene in Tehran for a meeting and the resulting end of this conference was the merger of all the pro-Iranian blocs which were headed by Nuri al-

Maliki. Despite the conclusion of the Iraqi Parliamentary elections and the winning of Allawi, the newly emergent majority of the pro-Iranian blocs had succeeded in assuming the position of premiership for Nuri Al-Maliki as the prime minister (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 4). The merger of all the pro-Iranian parties which was headed by Nuri Al-Maliki had exerted political pressure as well as security threats on the federal court to accept and ratify his proposed amendments of the electoral laws and regulations. Under such pressure, the court, which is empowered to interpret the articles of the constitution, had been forced to issue a decision on the possibility and legality of establishing a new bloc after the elections had already been decided for Allawi. A decision that paved the way for Al-Maliki to become the prime minister, on the basis of the majority of his newly formed bloc (Sullivan, 2013, p. 19).

The security threats, political pressure, and corruption became the dominant characteristic feature of the Iraqi judicial system under the influence of the pro-Iranian political parties. On more than one occasion, the Iraqi Council of Representatives had expressed complaints and dissatisfactions over the current Iraqi judiciary system and its submission to the Iranian political and security pressures (Sullivan, 2013, p. 19). For example, the judicial body, at the request of the pro-Iranian parties had decided the disqualification of a number of parliamentary members, who were anti-Iran, on the basis of the De-Baathification law (Sullivan, 2013, p. 20).

During the premiership of Nuri al-Maliki, which was the largest tenure in office since the American invasion, Iran had consolidated its influence and became the most influential hand in Iraq's internal and foreign affairs. Among the greatest achievements that Iran had gained during al-Maliki's time in office (2006-2014), was a clause in the agreement between Iraq and the USA during the conclusion of the US forces from Iraq in 2008, a clause that states the Iraqi territories will not be used for any kind of military or other operations against Iran (DCAF Report, 2009, p. 23).

However, the fall of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq in 2014 at the hands of ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, with forces of less than a thousand fighters in a short period of time, was a shocking defeat not only for the Iraqi people but was also a challenge for the Iranian state. The fall of Mosul, the collapse of the Iraqi army, and the ISIS control over the Arab Sunni provinces in Iraq had demonstrated the fragility

and weaknesses of the security forces and the military establishments which Iran had been working nurturing against the solidarity of the Iraqi state since 2006 (Chanchal Kumar, 2015, pp. 345-353). Due to this emerging challenge from ISIS and the support it got from the Sunnis, Iran had realized the inherent threats of its internal policies in weakening the Iraqi state and began to change its former policy. After Jun 2014, and to appease the Sunnis, Iran worked on removing Nuri al-Maliki as the prime minister and pushing forward a new candidate, Haidar al-Abadi, who was less harsh than his predecessor. al-Abadi, backed by the Iranians, had succeeded in assuming the position of prime minister. He was given a greater role in the Iraqi government and a larger political authority as a prime minister, in order to address the needs of the Iraqi people (Rezaei, 2019, p. 129). al-Abadi's nomination had not been easily agreed upon inside the Iranian institutions, namely, among the president, the Supreme Leadership, and the Revolutionary Guards. Qassem Soleimani, the leader of the Quds Forces had strongly objected such proposal of the nomination, as he had unconditional support for Al-Maliki, but after realizing the gravity of the situation, and the challenges to the Iranian influence in Iraq, he finally agreed (Rezaei, 2019, pp. 129-130).

After the American-Iranian coordination against terrorism and the expulsion of ISIS in 2018, the Iraqi parliamentary elections were held the same year. During that time, demonstrations erupted in the city of Basra and spread into other Shiite-populated provinces to denounce the poor living conditions, poverty, unemployment, and corruption. The demonstrators attacked the headquarters of the pro-Iranian parties, militias, as well as the Iranian consulates and the military headquarters of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) (al-Shadeedi and Van Veen, 2020 p. 20). The PMF, which Soleimani had played a major role in its establishment in 2014 (al-Shadeedi and Van Veen, 2020, p. 20), had participated in the electoral process in 2018. The Al-Fateh bloc, which was constituted from the commanders of the PMF, had become the second major parliamentary bloc under the leadership of Hadi al-Amiri (Gaston and Ollivant, 2020, p. 25).

The redeployment of US forces in Iraq and the demonstrations against the Iranian presence in the Iraqi territories and its ensuing policies made the Iranian state realize the negative potential of such a situation towards its national interests. To absorb the popular dissatisfaction and reduce the severity of the demonstrations over its policies

in Iraq, the Iranian state thought that replacing the prime minister with a new character of less visible pro-Iranian loyalty might solve the problem. The optimal character for this position was Adel Abdul Mahdi, one of the founders of the Supreme Islamic Council, who was finally chosen and supported by the pro-Iranian parliamentary blocs to take over the premiership position (al-Shadeedi and Van Veen, 2020, p. 21). The preference for choosing Adel Abdul Mahdi to the premiership was motivated by two reasons. The first was that he had been inactive in the political arena, and so, he was not publicly known for his allegiance to Iran. The second was that he had been a descendant from the Supreme Islamic Council, and Iran had been interested to break the monopoly of the Daawa party over the premiership which had been solely reserved for its members since 2005 (al-Shadeedi and Van Veen, 2020, pp. 21-22).

A new wave of demonstrations erupted in October 2019 in Baghdad and in the southern Shiite cities. These demonstrations are distinguished from the 2018 protests by their great and widespread public momentum, which called for greater demands than the former demonstrations. Instead of calling for the improvement of living conditions, the ending of corruption, the procurement of equal job opportunities, these protests had called for the removal of the pro-Iranian political class, disbanding the pro-Iranian militias, and ending the Iranian influence. Furthermore, the demonstrators demanded the termination of the political system of sectarian quotas and the establishment of a nationalist political system (Rubaie, 2019). The government of Adel Abdul Mahdi, however, dealt with the ongoing popular protests and the demonstrators with a severe repressive policy. The security services killed more than 600 demonstrators from October 2019 until January 23, 2020, according to reports from Amnesty International (Amnesty Report, 2020). As for the number of casualties, as of December 4, 2019, it was estimated at 17,000 wounded, and 3,000 of the wounded were permanently disabled. Many of the detained demonstrators were tortured in government prisons (al-Saadi, 2019). Likewise, Iranian-backed militias have killed demonstrators and assassinated a number of them (Bunyan, Nov 13, 2019); (al-Rubaie, 2020). For example, Reham Yacoub, a 29-year activist and women's health advocate, who had been involved in the demonstrations, had been warned that she was on a 'kill list' among the pro-Iranian militias. Later, she was assassinated while she was driving her car (Callaghan, 2020). Similarly, a 22-year-old photographer, Zeid al-Khafaji, was

kidnapped and later killed while returning from Tahrir Square in Baghdad. Zahra Ali, a 19-year-old activist whose body was found outside of her family's home, the examining doctor's report found that she had been subjected to electric shocks. Fahem al-Tai was shot dead in the Shiite Muslim shrine city of Karbala on his way home from a demonstration (DW Report, Nov. 12, 2019). These are a few examples of how the pro-Iranian government and its military wings dealt with the demonstrators.

As a result of these consecutive demonstrations, Iran had sensed that its national interests in Iraq were being challenged, henceforth, a change of policy was an urgent necessity. The new Iranian policy worked in three directions. First, the appeasement of the Iraqi people while keeping their state under control. This policy included the acceptance of the position of the premiership to be from outside of the pro-Iranian blocs, while at the same time, working against the premier's policies. Second, relying on the militias and security forces to suppress any demonstrations and to silence any opposing political activists. Third, the removal of US forces from Iraq which is widely believed to be achieved through the launching of military attacks against the US bases in Iraq where many of US soldiers were killed. This last policy was motivated by the belief that ousting the Americans from Iraq, the demonstrators will not be able to find any support from the United States, and that would help consolidate and perpetuate the Iranian influence in Iraq without any competition from the Americans. Due to the irrational policy of attacking US bases in Iraq and killing American soldiers (Christopher Blanchard, 2020, p. 4), the United States assassinated Qassem Soleimani, the leader of the Iranian Quds Forces, and Abdul Mahdi al-Muhandis, the commander of the Popular Mobilization Forces in January 2020 near Baghdad airport, by an American air strike. Despite this American ultimatum, the Iranian militia is continuing to attack US interests in Iraq, albeit sporadically (Christopher Blanchard, 2020, pp. 4-5).

On December 1st, 2019, the Iraqi parliament approved the resignation of the government of Adel Abdul Mahdi; nonetheless, it remained a caretaker government till a new prime minister was appointed. There were long deliberations among the parliamentary blocs over the nomination of the new prime minister. Later on, however, they settled on Mustafa al-Kazemi for the position of the premiership who finally assumed the position of Prime Minister in April 2020 (BBC Report, May 7, 2020). al-

Kazemi, the former intelligence director between 2016 to 2020, is not affiliated with the pro-Iran parties despite his good relationships with Iran. The Iranian government issued statements to support the al-Kazemi's government in implementing its agenda to control the security chaos, the proliferation of weapons in the hands of militias, and the cessation of militia assassinations. Despite that, he had not been able to achieve many of these goals. Rather, he himself was threatened. For example, the pro-Iranian Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades issued many threatening letters on different occasions to kill him (Knights, Oct. 2020).

The Iranian interventionist policies in Iraq had followed the traditional colonial strategy of divide-to-rule policy, which is apparent in its consecutive strategies towards the Iraqi state and its people. Manipulating the Iraqi Shiite, the Iranian state through the Revolutionary Guards, the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council, and the pro-Iranian political parties and their associated military wings had been able to infiltrate the Iraqi state institutions and weaken its sovereignty. The simultaneous Iranian support to multiple pro-Iranian parties, which are usually in constant competition and power-struggle, seems to be carefully crafted along the divide-to-rule strategy, but is slightly modified in the Iranian context (Blanchard, 2020, p. 4). The Iranian strategy takes the shape of sponsoring multi pro-Iranian parties where no particular single party alone can have the final say in any matter unless after referring to Iran for consultation. The sponsorship of pro-Iranian political parties along with their military wings seems to be intended not only to render Iraq as a satellite state to Iran, but to weaken the Iraqi state to where Iran, and only Iran, can have the final say over the Iraq's internal and foreign affairs (Blanchard, 2020, p. 11). Therefore, the nomination or the elimination of pro-Iranian premierships, though based solely according to political and military considerations, can demonstrate the bases of the Iranian policies towards Iraq, and the strategies employed to subjugate the Iraqi state.

3.2. The Iranian Political Tools in Iraq

In the preparation for the war on Iraq in 2003, the American administration and Iranian government began in early 2002 to collaborate and collude their efforts to share their

influence in Iraq which took different forms and manifestations. Realizing the imminent political vacuum that would occur after the occupation and the dissolution of the Iraqi Baath party, and the ensuing security and administrative problems, the American administration perceived Iran as a natural ally to achieve its political agenda in the Middle East (Katzman, 2003, p. 16). Due to the Iranian expansionist aspiration in Iraq and the American plans to invade Iraq, the American-Iranian collaboration and coordination had been represented into the London Conference in December 2002 and Iraq Conference in February 2003 through their proxy agents of the nascent opposition parties. The Iranian state was directly involved in the organization and coordination of the Iraqi opposition of Iranian-Shiite affiliation that falls under its influence. In the London Conference, which was held on December 14, 2002, the Iranian influence was present through political parties that are associated with Iran. In the Iraqi opposition conference in February 2003 in Erbil, which has a geographical connection with Iran, Iran had provided logistical facilitation and protection coverage for all the opposition parties to enter the conference through its territories (Katzman, 2003, p. 13). Among the mediators of this conference was Ahmed Chalabi, a former banker at Petra Bank, who is known for his close ties with the US administration and the Revolutionary Guards (Rezaei, 2019, p. 115). He was also prosecuted by the Jordanian judiciary for embezzling 200 million dollars from Jordan's Petra Bank in 2003 (Smyth, 2015); (Chan, 2015); (Leigh and Whitaker, 2003). Chalabi had played a coordinating role between the American and the Iranian administrations over the future control of Iraq (Katzman, 2003, p. 13). Of important incident, Ahmad Chalabi prepared a personal meeting, shortly before the occupation of Iraq, between US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Ayatollah Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Islamic Council—one of Iran's most important political and military figures in Iraq, which was also attended by US Vice Dick Cheney by videoconference. In the meeting, the two sides discussed the necessary preparations for the invasion of Iraq and the post-Saddam Hussein era. However, the US leaders did not discuss the military and the political relations of the Supreme Islamic Council with Iran (Rezaei, 2019, p. 115).

The political map of Iraq after 2003 had dramatically changed in favor of Iranian influence through the pro-Iranian parties that fall under Iran's sphere of influence. With the aid of the pro-Iranian parties, Iran had been able to draft, and later approve,

a new Iraqi Constitution that comes in line with the Iranian interests and provides the Iranian state with certain influence in procuring sensitive political positions in the Iraqi state for pro-Iranian officials. The Iranian interventionist policies towards Iraq, through the pro-Iranian military wings and later the pro-Iranian political parties, date back to the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, but the extent of such intervention had been on the rise since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and is still increasing up to the current moment. Among the politico-military tools which will be given some emphasis in the following discussions are the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Iraqi Daawa Movement, and the Sadrist movement.

3.2.1. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq

The armed wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, ISCI, was established in Iran under the direct supervision of Iran's Revolutionary Guards (Schmidt and Soren, 2012). This religio-military body was strongly tied to the intelligence service of Iran. The members of this organization had a military role in fighting alongside the Iranian forces against the Iraqi army during the Iran-Iraq war which extended from 1980 to 1988 (Schmidt and Soren, 2012). Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, who supervised this organization in Iran, had been assassinated after his return to Iraq in 2003 in the city of Najaf. After his assassination, his brother and his nephew, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and Ammar al-Hakim, respectively, had assumed significant political roles to strengthen the Iranian influence in Iraq. As Dai Yamao explained: "under the auspices of the SCIRI's [ISCI's] umbrella, the Iranian regime's impact on the Iraqi Islamists increased in terms of both direct control and ideological influence" (Yamao, 2012, p. 33). Upon his return to Iraq from Iran in 2005, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim began to call for the establishment of an autonomous region of nine provinces with a Shiite majority, located in southern Iraq which he called 'Shiastan' (International Crisis Group (ICG) Reports, 2007, p. 17). It is noteworthy to mention that the southern region of Iraq includes most of the Iraqi oil wells.

3.2.2. The Iraqi Daawa Party

The Iraqi Daawa Movement was founded in 1957 by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr as a Shiite religious theological reference. In 1980, the Daawa party and its founder had not only declared their support for the Iranian revolution, but also supported the Iranians against their own people in just before months of the Iran-Iraq war. Due to such pro-Iranian stance against his own people, he was persecuted and executed on charges of treason (Aziz, 1993, p. 207). During the eight years of war, the Daawa party and its members had been residing in Iran and joined the Iranian forces until 2003 (Yamao, 2008, p. 251). Among the leaders of the Daawa Movement are Ibrahim al-Ja'fari, Nuri al-Maliki and Haidar al-Abadi, and all of them have become prime ministers of Iraq, eventually serving the political benefits of the Iranian state rather than the Iraqi people as their political past would attest.

3.2.3. The Sadrist movement

The Sadrist Movement was established in Iraq after the American occupation in 2003 with a Shiite political reference, led by the young Muqtada al-Sadr. Muqtada al-Sadr had studied religious sciences intermittently in the Iranian city of Qom since 2003, which is considered the holiest place for the Iranian Shiites. He had established good and close relationships with the Iranian regime through the Shiite ideological rapprochement between the Iraqi and Iranian Shiite references. His political party is popular among Shiite circles because the Sadr family has a long religious heritage (Patten, 2008, p. 1). This party has armed squads, called the Mahdi Army, which sometimes fought against the American forces. Other times, it was involved in the bloody sectarian cleansing in Iraq (Patten, 2008, pp. 1-2). This party has members in the Iraqi parliament as well as ministers in successive Iraqi governments since 2003.

In 2005, the three parties formed a coalition, ending up winning 140 of the 275 Iraqi national assembly seats (The Guardian Journal Report, Feb. 14, 2005). In 2010, the pro Iran parties won 159 of 275 national assembly seats (the New York Times Report, Mar. 2010).

3.3. Splits in Political Factions

The three religio-political movements were all divided after 2003. The Supreme Islamic Council had split into two political parties, one of which kept its name and headed by Abdel Aziz al-Hakim while the other was named the Badr Organization headed by Hadi al-Ameri. al-Ameri, the former commander of the Supreme Council's military wing, is currently presiding on the second largest parliamentary bloc in the Iraqi Parliament (Guido Steinberg, 2017, pp. 1-5). Likewise, the Daawa Movement was divided in terms of members; that is, the members of the Daawa bore loyalty and allegiance to two prominent leaders of the Movement. Some members of the Daawa Movement bore allegiance to Nuri al-Maliki while the others to Haidar al-Abadi. Similarly, the Sadrist Movement was splintered into multiple groups of insignificant importance. However, among the most effective splintered groups was the Asaib Ahl al-Haq Movement which was headed by Qais Khazali who is known for his enthusiastic allegiance to Iran. All These religio-military movements, which later become religio-political parties of sectarian agenda, have become the most characteristic tools of the Iranian state to subjugate Iraq and keep it under its influence (Marisa Cochrane, 2009, pp. 14-15). Such political behaviour is reminiscent of the colonial divide-to rule strategy which was adopted by imperial Britain. In the Iraqi scene, it seems that Iran supports multi political parties of Shiite affiliation along with their military wings on equal grounds, leaving the political scene of Iraq unstable and in constant conflict and competition which enables Iran to have the upper hand over Iraq's self-determination and independence.

3.4. Cases of Critical Intervention

In this section we will touch on a few cases that demonstrate how obvious and influential is the Iranian reach in Iraq

3.4.1. Case 1: Circumventing the Iraqi Constitution to appoint a favorable premier

In the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary elections, al-Iraqiyya bloc which was of sectarian orientation and anti-Iranian influence had won the majority seats in the parliament. The al-Iraqiyya bloc headed by Iyad Allawi was supposed to become the prime minister since he won the majority of seats, yet that did not happen due to the Iranian influence through the pro-Iranian blocs. Before Allawi was able to assume the premiership, Iran convened a meeting in Tehran and called all the pro-Iranian blocs and ordered them to merge under one bloc under the leadership of Nuri al-Maliki. Later, in clear contradiction to the constitution and the conclusion of election in favor for Iyad Allawi, Nuri al-Maliki had assumed the premiership of the parliament with the help of Iran (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 4).

3.4.2. Case 2: Amending the Iraqi Constitution

The 2005 amendment of the Iraqi constitution was a political success for the Iranian state. Just after two years of the US invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi constitution was amended in a way as to substitute the principles of nationhood to be based on sectarian divisions rather than the Arabic identity and to facilitate the pro-Iranian influence and direct Iranian domination (Harith Hasan al-Qarawee, 2014, p. 8). Among the new amendments, which all were directed to subjugate Iraq to the Iranian influence, were the sectarian connotations of Shiite privileges casted on virtuous Imams, the federation of the state of Iraq, and others, which will be discussed in detail below. However, among the most obvious examples is the federation of the state of Iraq without specifying the central government of the state which opens the door for the Iraqi provinces to conclude deals and make alliances with foreign powers independently from the central government of Baghdad. The amendment of the constitution in this way legalizes the independence of the Iraqi provinces and allows them to act independently from Baghdad, a matter that strengthens the Iranian influence. In rendering the Iraqi provinces with relative autonomy, Iran can have the potential to exert a direct influence to attract these provinces into its sphere of influence and sever

them from their gravity point of reference—the central government of Baghdad (Reidar Visser, 2007, pp. 812-813). The new constitutional amendment in 2005 served the perpetuation of the Iranian domination over Iraq and legalized the Iranian intervention under the cover of law to subjugate the Iraqi territories.

3.4.3. Case 3: Pro-Iranian Militias

Another form of the Iranian domination over Iraqi sovereignty is the pro-Iranian militias, their terrorist activities, and the sectarian purification that had been going on since the American-Iranian collaboration against Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. The pro-Iranian militias had undertaken atrocities and sectarian as well as ethnic cleansings against the Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites alike who spoke against the Iranian influence and intervention (Geneva International Centre for Justice report, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, the military activities against the American bases in Iraq from the pro-Iranian militias serve multiple purposes. First, they demonstrate that it is Iran that dictates both the military and political scenes in Iraq. Second, the pro-Iranians militias are represented as freedom-fighters against the American hegemony in Iraq. Such activities are directed to convince the grassroots of the Iraqis that Iran and the United States are at odds with each other, and by extension, help to motivate the Iraqis to erase from their memories that the Iranians and the pro-Iranians have had a close collaboration with the Americans in the early years of US invasion. Third, and most importantly of all, these terrorist activities are presumed to have been motivated to exert a direct influence over the American presence in Iraq in an attempt to expel them outside of Iraq which enables Iran a full and complete control over Iraq (Jessica Watkins, 2020, p. 11). By capitalizing on Iraqis for its pro-Iranian militias, Iran seems to bear no responsibility at all in front of the international community as to whether it supports terrorism since all of the members of the militias are of Iraqi origin. Despite the triviality of such an excuse, it seems that the Iranians convinced themselves of this, and drew their policies within such flawed reasoning. The Americans do not buy it. When the pro-Iranian militias launched military attacks against American targets in Iraq in an attempt to expel them from Iraq, the United States assassinated Qassem Soleimani, the leader of the Iranian Quds Forces, and Abdul Mahdi Al-Muhandis, the

commander of the Popular Mobilization Forces in January 2020 near Baghdad airport by an American air strike (Erica Gaston and Douglas Ollivant, 2020, p. 7). Still, the Iranians are pursuing the same strategy on the belief that they would be able one day to gain complete control of Iraq against the will of the Americans (Erica Gaston and Douglas Ollivant, 2020, p. 11). All of these examples represent that Iraq sovereignty is incomplete and the political will of Iraq is at the hands of the Iranians. The elections, the Constitution, and the military scene of Iraq are completely manipulated and controlled by Iran and its pro-Iranian militias.

3.4.4. Case 4: The Delegitimization of Sunni Representation

In early 2011, and at the midst of the Arab Spring, a protest emerged in Iraq due to the misrepresentation of the Sunnis in the Iraqi government. The Sunni population and activists were disgruntled over the marginalization of the Sunnis in the government, the targeting of the Sunni leaderships, and the sectarian discrimination. The Maliki's government had crushed those demonstrators, and the security forces had tracked down the protestors and incarcerated them (Renad Mansour, 2016, pp. 7-8). After the Maliki's military crush-down of the demonstrators, he wanted to stabilize the political situation and weaken his Sunni opponents. First, he ostracized Allawi who had won the election. Moreover, he tried to fool Allawi to accept an imaginary position of national security, a puppet position that Allawi refused to assume. Second, he delegitimized Saleh al-Mutlaq, a Sunni representative of Iraqiyya who became a deputy prime minister, without any actual power. Third, al-Maliki had issued an arrest warrant in 2011 for Tariq al-Hashemi, the vice president, who had managed to escape a death sentence. Moreover, Maliki had issued another arrest warrant for Rafi al-Issawi, the Sunni finance minister, and organized a "SWAT style" raid of al-Issawi's home, but he managed to escape. al-Issawi was later judged to seven years in absentia. Now, both al-Hashemi and al-Issawi are not living in Iraq (Renad Mansour, 2016, p. 7).

Chapter Four

The importance of laws, regulations and constitutional Articles is that it defines the identity of a state and its political system of governance. The researcher will demonstrate how Iran had been able to steer the Iraqi Constitution in a sectarian direction and influence a federal political system with the intention to weaken both the Iraqi identity and the central government in Baghdad.

4.1. Socio-Judiciary Intervention

Iran, through its proxy agents, had been able to pass a bill to introduce some amendments to the Iraqi Constitution in 2005 that strengthened its power over Iraqi socio-political life. In the new amendment, namely, article 7 of the Constitution, there will be legal prosecution for any organization or person that praises or promotes in any way the Baath Party, including the party's ideas (Iraqi Constitution, 2005, Article 7). The danger is that any person, for example, who calls for a civil state, secularism, the identity of Iraq, gender equality, or the promotion of Baath slogans shall be subject to legal consequences. Those who are persecuted for such crimes are deprived from the right to run for the parliamentary elections or assume any governmental positions. As a result of such a Constitutional amendment, the Accountability and Justice Committee was established for the purpose of enacting these legal persecutions and punishments. Many of the members of this committee have close relationships with Iran. Therefore, candidates for the parliamentary elections who reject or oppose the Iranian intervention in Iraq could be excluded by this committee in order to maintain a continuous and smooth Iranian influence on the formation of the Iraqi government (Nader, 2015, p. 5); (Sullivan, 2013, pp. 19-20).

4.2. The Iraqi Constitution

The Iraqi constitution that was adopted in 2005 after the US invasion played a significant role in weakening Iraq as a socio-political entity in favor of the invading forces and their collaborators. Such a newly adopted constitution had enabled the Iranian state, through its political and military arms, not only to penetrate the political institutions of the Iraqi state, but also had provided it with the ability to infiltrate the Iraqi society and shape its social structure. During the occupation, the Americans had been interested in drafting a bill to change the constitution. Iran found that it is very opportune to legalize its interventionist policies in Iraq and actualize its expansionist aspiration through the new constitution. Henceforth, Iran had pushed some of the pro-Iranian members of the Iraqi parliament into the constitution-drafting committee to adjust the Iraqi Constitution in a way that keeps its influence in Iraq legal and in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution. Under the supervision of two American advisers and the pro-Iranian influence, the constitution-drafting committee was finally formed of 28 Shiite figures, 8 Sunni, 15 Kurds, and 4 figures were reserved for the other remaining minorities—a structure that is clearly motivated by sectarian division rather than Iraqi nationalism (Jawad, 2013, p. 10). During the discussions of the constitution drafting, some Sunni members of the committee emphasized the Arab identity of Iraq and that the state is a single political unity. They were faced with strong opposition from the Kurdish and Shiite members. Three of these Sunni members of the constitution-drafting committee were assassinated on various occasions. Moreover, Mundher al-Shawi, an Iraqi professor specializing in constitutional law, who criticized the drafting of the constitution for its sectarian structure, was kidnapped (Jawad, 2013, p. 11). Such incidents had led the Sunni members to withdraw from the Constitution-drafting committee while the Shiite and Kurdish members had remained (Morrow, 2006, p. 2). In August 2005, Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Jalal Talabani, leader of the Kurdistan Union Party, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Islamic Council, and Ibrahim al-Jaafari, leader of the Shiite Daawa Party, had met to discuss the terms of the Iraqi Constitution while the Sunni representatives were not allowed to participate. Within this meeting, both

Kurdish and Shiite representatives agreed that Iraq should become a federal state without the mentioning of the Arabic identity in the constitution (Morrow, 2006, p. 9). Such omission of the Arabic identity from the Iraqi Constitution seems to be ill-intended. While mentioning the Kurdish minority which mounts to 15% of the Iraqi population, the Arabic component which mounts to 40% of the Iraqi population is dropped off. Such intentional omission of the Arabic identity might be indicative of a partisan agenda to divide Iraq along lines of ethnic or sectarian divisions in the form of a Kurdistan region in the north and Shiite provinces in the south. Such an agenda was indeed proposed by the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, whose affiliation to Iran is not unknown. The Islamic Supreme Council had not only refused to admit the Arabic identity of the Iraqi people (Morrow, 2006, pp. 9-12), but also tried to include the Iranian nationality as a component of the Iraqi people (Jawad, 2013, p. 12). This indicates the success of the Iranian foreign policy in Iraq in weakening the national identity through its political and military arms in Iraq, and this is exactly what was expressed by the U.S. Special Representative for Iran, Brian Hook, who spoke to Voice of America Persian on Dec. 18, 2018. Hook stated “the Iranian regime wants to replace a national identity. They want to dissolve it and replace it with a Shiite identity. This has been the core of their foreign policy to create sectarian divisions. They want to do that in Iraq as well” (Hussein, 2019, VOA).

The preamble and the internal articles of the Iraqi Constitution have a significant role in facilitating the Iranian influence in Iraq. The Constitution stipulated that Iraq is a federal state without any specifications as to where the central government is. This ambiguity did not adequately regulate the relationships between the central government on one hand and the governorates and federal regions on the other. The danger of such ambiguity is that it allows different regions of the Iraqi state, like Kurdistan region, to establish relations with foreign countries and international companies without a permission from the central government in Baghdad, which in turn, leads to political and security instabilities (Jawad, 2013, pp. 14-16). This is what is called “Fluid Federalism” as Bogaards had expressed “the conclusion is that Iraq’s constitution of 2005 suffers from a lack of durable national power sharing, a preoccupation with self-rule at the expense of shared rule, and an experiment with what is called here ‘fluid federalism’” (Bogaards, 2019, p. 2). By enforcing Iraq to be

a federal state without any serious specifications and clear-cut regulations to organize the relationships between the central government and the provinces, Iran would constantly be able to control and supervise the internal issues of Iraq as well as its foreign policy (Jiyad, 2020).

Furthermore, the 2005 constitution does not work sufficiently to highlight the concept of identity, patriotism and the Iraqi state, as is the case in the constitutions of other countries that affirm the identity of the unifying state. The first paragraph of the preamble of the Iraqi Constitution did not mention the name of Iraq altogether as a political entity. What was mentioned in the Iraqi Constitution was ‘the people of Mesopotamia’, a historical name without any political significance in the current times in terms of geographical borders, international law, and sovereignty. In addition, the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 is the only Iraqi constitution in the history of modern Iraq in which sectarian terms were mentioned (Jawad, 2013, p. 15). For example, the first paragraph of the preamble contains the ‘virtuous imams’, which is an expression specific to the Shiite sect. The preamble begins as “we the people of Mesopotamia, the homeland of the apostles and prophets, resting place of the virtuous imams, cradle of civilization, crafters of writing.....” (Iraqi Constitution, Preamble). As for the rest of the preamble paragraphs of the constitution, the preamble shows the Iraqi people as sectarian and ethnic groups, including Sunnis, Shiites, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, where many glorifications all along the constitution are casted on the Shiite religious men. Likewise, Article 43 of the Iraqi constitution specifically mentioned a Shiite religious event, namely the commemorations of the assassination of Imam Hussein bin Ali and granted the freedom to practice celebrations of this commemoration. This event, a strictly Shiite religious occasion, is a clear indication of the existence of sectarian expressions in the Iraqi constitution.

The 2005 constitution did not explicitly stipulate the terms of the distribution of government and ministerial positions on sectarian or ethnic grounds. The appointments of these positions are carried out verbally, without any specific laws to organize or regulate the process, which is probably motivated to come in line with the ups and downs of international pressures. This ad-hoc mechanism allows Iran the leverage to maneuver against regional and international pressures. The loose terms such as the president of the republic shall be of Kurdish origin, the Prime Minister and other high

rank positions shall be of Shiite schism, and the head of the parliament shall be a Sunni are not regulations whatsoever. Rather, they are in essence sectarian divisions that have the potential to divide the Iraqi state in the future into a sphere of influence and may lead eventually to a civil war as was the case in Lebanon (Katzman and Humud, Mar. 9, 2016, p. 6). Lebanon bears a sheer resemblance to the loose organization of the Iraqi Constitution. Colonial France had pushed for similar sectarian divisions of governmental and ministerial positions into the Lebanese Constitution without a well-informed and regulated manner. Such loose terms like the president of the republic shall be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister shall be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament shall be a Shiite Muslim are very similar to the loose organization of the Iraqi Constitution. These divisions had finally led to civil war and sectarian cleansing in Lebanon, in a way that is similar to what is going on in Iraq right now. Those divisions had, after all, facilitated the intervention of foreign powers in the Iraqi internal affairs and weakened its sovereignty.

Chapter Five

Of the worst fears for any country, a fear that deteriorates its sovereignty and threatens its existence, is the presence of armed militias with foreign loyalties within its borders. In this chapter the researcher will elaborate on how Iran established and supported armed militias within Iraq, militias that operate out of the rule of law with allegiance to Iran not to the Iraqi state, and how those militias help expand the Iranian influence in Iraq.

5.1. The pro-Iranian Militias

The Iranian militias, which are usually composed of religious or political components, are Tehran-based groups that are deeply consolidated in the state and society in which they operate (Behnam Ben Taleblu, 2018, pp. 1-3). For being accepted into the pro-Iranian militia, prospective members shall not only have to have Shiite sectarian sentiments, but they also have to believe in the ideology of Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in order to ensure that these militias would work in favor of the Iranian interests. The Iranian militias, either through the Iranian Quds Forces of the Revolutionary Guards or the pro-Iranian Iraqi militias in Iraq, are of great importance in extending and maintaining Iran's influence in Iraq after 2003. A few days after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, expressed his most joyful moments of the demise of Hussein's regime—the enemy of the Iranian nation—in a Friday prayer sermon on April 4, 2003 (Rezaei, 2019, p. 116) in sheer conflict with the proclaimed solidarity principles of the Islamic revolution. From that date on, Iran had doubled its military efforts inside the Iraqi

territories as compared to the former period between 1989 and 2003 (Rezaei, 2019, pp. 113-114). In fact, Iran had not only doubled its support for the Iranian or the pro-Iranian militias but also it had created or helped create nearly fifty paramilitary organizations and provided them with weapons and training (Amnesty International Report, 2017, p. 9). Earlier, in particular from 1989 up until 2003, the Iranian influence in Iraq was limited only to two clandestine military organizations: The Supreme Islamic Council and the Islamic Daawa Party along with their military wings which all fall under the direct supervision of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (Rezaei, 2019, p. 113); (Felter & Fishman, 2008, p. 7).

This large number of militias shows that Iran does not want to rely on a single military party to implement all of its goals; rather, it intends to distribute the tasks among these militias. These Iranian interventionist tactics, which are carried out either through the military institutions and security forces or the Iranian and pro-Iranian militias, are crucially intended to debilitate the central government in Baghdad and devitalize the Iraqi's government performance and authority (Adel Abdulhamza Thgeel, Jul. 2020, p. 11). The large number of these pro-Iranian militias seems also to ensure the perpetuation of the Iranian influence in Iraq. In case of any change of allegiance or loyalty of these pro-Iranian militias, Iran can still have the potential to exert its influence through the remaining pro-Iranian parties (Nader, 2015, pp. 7-8). Furthermore, the large numbers of these militias can provide the Iranian state with various options to extend its power over the political scene of Iraq and to have the upper hand in its major political decisions.

For example, the conflicts and military clashes that erupted over the control of the oil wells and the smuggling trade among the militias of Mahdi Army, the Supreme Islamic Council, the Daawa Party, the Sadrist, and aL-Fadilah party in 2008 were only solved through the direct Iranian intervention (Cordesman, A. and Arleigh, R.J. 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, the armed clashes do not only happen among the militias themselves. Armed clashes can also occur between the militias and the Iraqi government forces; a case in point was the clash that erupted between the Mahdi Army and the governmental forces in 2008, which was later negotiated and solved in the Iranian city of Qum (Cordesman, A. and Arleigh, R.J. 2008, p. 9). In these two conflicts among the pro-Iranian groups, Iran had become as the only arbiter in mediating and solving these

clashes which signifies that the major and decisive political and military decisions of Iraq are operated and endorsed by Tehran.

Apparently, in the words of Felter and Fishman, that Iran's goal was not merely limited to getting rid of Saddam Hussein's regime but extended to debilitate and devitalize the Iraqi state and its institutions in order to exert a complete hegemony over it (Felter and Fishman, 2008, p. 10). The interventionist and the colonial policies of the Iranian and pro-Iranian militias in Iraq are clear exemplifications of Iranian territorial expansionism. The use of pro-Iranian militias, which are normally unofficial military forces, is a perfect camouflage under which Iran can conceal its real intentions in Iraq and protect it from any political or military accountability in front of the UN Security Council and International Law. In the following, the discussion will proceed to highlight the major organizations of these militias and explain their roles in subjugating the Iraqi state and its people.

5.1.1. The Mahdi Army

The Mahdi Army is considered as the military wing of the Sadrist Movement which was founded by Muqtada al-Sadr. The first military appearance of this institution as a powerful military wing was in 2004 when these forces were involved in armed clashes with the US forces in Najaf and Baghdad for two weeks. Later in 2006, the Mahdi Army joined the sectarian war between the Shiite and Sunni population and was accused of committing sectarian crimes and merciless atrocities against the Iraqi Sunnis. The Mahdi Army was also accused of vandalism, terrorism and theft on a large scale among the Sunnis (Cochrane, 2009). The high rank military officer in the Mahdi Army, Qais Al Khazali, had been accused of carrying out systematic sectarian cleansing against the Sunni Arabs, and among those who blamed him was Muqtada al-Sadr himself. Due to such a clash, Qais al-Khazali had separated from the Mahdi Army and formed his own military organization, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, which had been backed by Iran. After the rise of ISIS in 2014, Muqtada al-Sadr called on the Mahdi Army fighters to fight against ISIS and join the Popular Mobilization Forces under the name of the Peace Brigades (Cochrane, 2009).

5.1.2. Asaib Ahl al-Haq

Asaib Ahl al-Haq, or the League of the Righteous, had begun at first to emerge as a part of the Mahdi Army in 2006 which was headed by Qais al-Khazali and Akram al-Kaabi. However, this brigade had slowly begun to carry out orders outside the orders of Muqtada al-Sadr. In 2008 and at the direct instigation of Iran, Asaib Ahl al-Haq had completely separated from the Mahdi Army after being directly involved in the brutal sectarian massacres against the Sunnis that occurred that same year (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, p. 7). In 2008, Asaib Ahl al-Haq had adopted the ideology of the Velayet-i-Faqih of Tehran, and therefore, began to receive military support and training from Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah group. In 2014, this group joined the Popular Mobilization Forces to fight against the ISIS organization, which controlled a third of Iraq at that time. The leader of this militia, Qais Khazali, is famous for his alliance with Nuri al-Maliki, the former Iraqi prime minister, and for his anti-Sunni sentiments. In 2017, this militia became a part of the Fatah coalition and won 14 seats in the Iraqi Parliament (Center for International Security and Cooperation Report (CISAC), 2018).

5.1.3. The Badr Organization

The Badr Organization started to operate in 1983 during the Iran-Iraq war. It was established in Iran as a military wing of the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq under the name of Badr Brigades. They fought alongside the Iranian forces under the supervision of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (Mahan Abedin, 2003). The Badr Brigades were accused of being responsible during the Iran-Iraq war of torturing and killing a large number of Iraqi prisoners of war under the supervision of the Iranian authorities (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, p. 5). From the years 1988-2003, the Badr Brigades did not stop launching attacks inside Iraq. After 2003, the militia changed its name to the Badr Organization, and a large number of these militia were involved in the military and security forces of the Iraqi government under the

supervision of the American occupation forces (Katzman, Sep. 2008, p. 2). In 2012, the Badr Organization split from the Supreme Islamic Council under the leadership of Hadi al-Amiri.

Hadi al-Amiri, who was born in Iraq, had fought in the ranks of the Iranian forces against his own country and against his own people during the war between 1980 to 1988. As an award for his services, al-Amiri was granted the Iranian citizenship (Martin, 2015). Hadi Al-Amiri was accused of being responsible for the sectarian massacres and ethnic cleansing among the Sunnis (Morris, 2014). On more than one occasion, he appeared with Qassem Soleimani in many pictures that were taken in the Iraqi territories that were liberated from ISIS. He assumed the position of Minister of Transportation during the era of the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Hadi al-Amiri heads the second largest parliamentary bloc in Iraq and this bloc includes leaders of the Iranian-backed militias that were later integrated into the Popular Mobilization Forces (Majidyar, 2018).

The Badr Organization had been accused of carrying out systematic cleansing against the Sunnis more than once, in the period of 2004 to 2006, the period of 2014 to 2016 and in many instances during the war on ISIS. al-Amiri, admitted that there were some violations, but he considered them to be mistakes committed by volunteers who did not receive adequate training, yet, he added that anyone who cooperated or coordinated with ISIS would be punished more severely (Martin, 2015).

5.1.4. Kataib Hezbollah

Kataib Hezbollah was established in 2003 immediately after the US invasion of Iraq. This particular militia, which embraces the ideology of Velayet-i-Faqih of Iran, owes its allegiance and loyalty directly to the Supreme Leadership of the Iranian Republic. This mere fact explains why it has no political wing. This militia had been assigned several tasks, among which was to fight against the US forces and the fighting alongside the al-Assad's regime in Syria. This militia is accused of committing murder, torture and displacement of Arab Sunnis from their cities, especially from the city of Jurf al-Sakhr (Knights, Aug. 2019).

This militia is headed by Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, who was formerly accused of bombing the American and French Embassies in Kuwait in 1984 with the direct help and support from the Iranian regime (Rudolf, 2020, p. 6). Despite these direct linkages with terrorist activities against western targets, he became a member of the Iraqi parliament after 2003, again with the help of the Iranian regime. Due to his long experience in fighting alongside the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-1988, he was able to establish a strong and highly secretive and effective paramilitary group, Kataib Hezbollah, as compared to the other militias (Rudolf, 2020, p. 8). His extensive military experience had qualified him to have a larger role in the Popular Mobilization Forces and enabled him to have a strong relationship with Qassem Soleimani (Rudolf, 2020, pp. 6-7). al-Muhandis was criticized for his attempt to monopolize the decision-making process in the Popular Mobilization Forces by some Shiite religious parties (Mansour and Jabar, 2017, p. 4). He was assassinated along with Qassem Soleimani in January 2020 by a US air strike.

5.1.5. Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)

As a reaction to the rise of ISIS in Iraq in 2014, a religious statement, i.e., fatwa, was issued by the Supreme Shiite religious authority in Iraq under the leadership of Ali al-Sistani to establish a military force of volunteers to liberate the lands occupied by ISIS (Paktian, 2019, p. 3). The result was the formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces which comprised more than fifty militias whose volunteers were estimated to be one hundred and sixty thousand fighters (Knights. Malik and al-Tamimi, 2020). The Popular Mobilization Forces along with the regular Iraqi Army were able to defeat ISIS, which is classified as a global terrorist organization, with the support of an Iranian-American cooperation. With their success in defeating ISIS, the Popular Mobilization Forces had become a popular and credible military organization and many of its members registered as candidates for the parliamentary elections, and some had finally won parliamentary seats (Mansour and Jabar, 2017, p. 10). The Iraqi parliament had issued a bill to legitimize the PMF and integrate it into the regular Iraqi Army; nonetheless, the PMF had remained a separate entity from the Iraqi state apparatus, probably because Iran wanted to keep it as a card in its political game

against Iraq (Paktian, 2019, p. 1). Like other pro-Iranian militias, the Popular Mobilization Forces were accused of committing massacres and merciless sectarian and ethnic cleansings against the Iraqi Sunnis and were also accused of ruthless killings of Iraqi demonstrators from Shiite-majority provinces.

5.2. The Role of the Militias

Iran has established military training camps and facilities on its soil to train Iraqi militias near the Iraqi borders as well as near Tehran and the religious city of Qum under the direct supervision of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (Felter and Fishman, 2008, pp. 59-60). Iran brought the military trainers from the Lebanese Hezbollah to carry out these exercises due to the common language factor because Iranians do not speak Arabic. On the other hand, the Iraqi trainees expressed their preference to Hezbollah trainers because they treat them with respect, unlike the Iranian military trainers (Felter and Fishman, 2008, p. 69). In many cases, militia personnel are sent to Lebanon directly to receive the necessary military training from the Lebanese Hezbollah (Addis Blanchard, 2011, p. 4), and sometimes to Syria (Felter and Fishman, 2008, p. 68).

In addition to the military training, there are ideological indoctrination of the Iranian revolution to be provided for volunteers, namely, *Velayet-i-Faqih*, the political theory of Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as the visiting of religious shrines in Iran, especially the Khomeini shrine to maintain their loyalty to Tehran (Felter and Fishman, 2008, pp. 66-67). Such ideological indoctrination and mobilization of the Iraqi Shiites stands as the most important aspect of the militia training process for the Iranians, because the overwhelming majority of the Iraqis follows a Shiite school that does not believe in the *(Velayet-i-Faqih)* but believe in the peaceful coexistence with the Sunnis (Mamouri and Khalaji, 2019, p. 2). Iran has succeeded in increasing the number of militia members in Iraq to tens of thousands especially after 2015, arming these militias with weapons from light to heavy artillery, and providing these militias with the necessary military experience to occupy large areas of the Iraqi territories as well

as to participate in the Syrian civil war (Knights, Aug. 2019, pp. 1-3). Under the supervision of the Iranian military experts, these militias have gained the military expertise comparable to regular armies and began to pose a challenge to the US forces in Iraq as well as to neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia (Knights, Aug. 2019, p. 1).

The Iranian-backed Shiite militias and their affiliated groups fought two major civil wars in Iraq in the mid-2000s and in 2015 systematically targeting the Sunni civilians in Iraq (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, they carried out forced expulsion operations against the Arab Sunnis in multiple Iraqi cities with the aim of changing the demographic nature of those cities and of Iraq as a whole. For example, the Sunni population of the city of Jurf al-Sakhar, 50 kilometers south of Baghdad, had been forced to evacuate their homes. The whole city was demolished, and the residents were warned not to return to it. The city of al-Dor, north of Baghdad, has faced the same fate (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, p. 23); (Robinson, Connable, Thaler and Scotten, 2018, pp. 26-59). The cities and villages of the predominantly Sunni Iraqi governorates have been subjected to massive destruction and displacement activities, such as Diyala, Anbar, Salah al-Din and Nineveh provinces between the period of 2015 to 2016 where the number of the displaced people reached six million according to the United Nations OCHA report (OCHA Report, 2021). A GICJ report stated that "it is in fact a common practice for militias to enter villages and cities and proceed to loot, burn, and destroy private properties. Private houses are often burnt to the ground and all belongings, including cars, furniture, etc.... destroyed to the point they are no longer usable. The purpose of the militias' actions is to make sure that the families will not be able to go back to their homes" (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, pp. 21-22). These terrorist and vandalism activities were not limited to the forced evacuations and the destructions of the homes of the Sunnis, but the Iraqi pro-Iranian militias had also established secret prisons for the Sunnis where they are exposed to all sorts of ruthless torture and killings. In a video and pictures that were documented in September 2016, the pro-Iranian Militia was burning a Sunni Iraqi alive where one member of the Militia was heating up from the victim's burning body (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, pp. 21-22). Such a practice is similar to and reminiscent of

the Safavid state's practices where it was carrying out such massacres to convert the people from the Sunni to Shiite sect. This report shows Iran's negative role, especially the Quds Forces, which is officially affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, in these tragic sectarian events, and calls for the international community to hold Iran accountable for these crimes (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, pp. 26-27). Furthermore, the Geneva report calls for the international community to classify the Iranian military advisers and the pro-Iranian militias as terrorist organizations much like ISIS, if not worse (Geneva International Centre for Justice Report, 2016, p. 2).

The pro-Iranian militias, whether operating inside or outside the state apparatus, attack or assassinate government officials or ordinary individuals who oppose the Iranian presence or those who demand a political change that might affect the Iranian influence in Iraq even if they belong to the Shiite sect. For example, Mahmud al-Sarkhi, an Iraqi Shiite cleric, announced on more than one occasion his rejection to the Iranian interference, and rejected the legitimacy of the current Iraqi government on the basis of being a proxy agent to Iran and working against the interests of the Iraqi people (Ridolfo, 2006). Furthermore, al-Sarkhi objected the religious declaration, i.e., fatwa, of Ali al-Sistani, the supreme Iranian Shiite cleric to establish the Popular Mobilization Forces on the basis that it can spark sectarian conflicts between the Sunni and Shiite citizens of Iraq (Reuters Report, Jul. 2014). As a result of these objections to the Iranian hegemony, the governmental military forces launched an attack on Mahmud al-Sarkhi's house in the city of Karbala, and forty of his supporters were killed, and Mahmud al-Sarkhi himself had disappeared (Reuters Staff Report, Jul. 2014). Furthermore, the pro-Iranian militias have directed their ruthless repressions against the journalists, lawyers, and political activists who were bent to reveal what was happening on the ground and defend the peaceful protestors who were calling for the improvement of the political and economic conditions (al-Juboori and Lattimer, 2018, pp. 16-18). The Iraqi government usually blocks investigations over the killings, tortures, or assassinations that occur during or after the demonstrations, often covering up these investigations with the concluding statement 'the killers are unknown' (al-Juboori and Lattimer, 2018, p. 18).

Moreover, the missions of the pro-Iranian militias with the support of the Iranian Quds Forces are extended outside the geographical confines of the Iraqi borders, in Lebanon (Casey L. Addis, Christopher M. Blanchard, 2011, p. 4), and in Syria (Smyth, 2013, p. 28). For example, Qais Khazali, the leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, had crossed the Lebanese borders illegally and was hosted by the Lebanese Hezbollah (Reuters Staff Report, 2017). Such an illegal visit had prompted the Prime Minister of Lebanon to announce that it showed a lack of respect for the sovereignty of the Lebanese state (Reuters Staff Report, 2017). The expansion of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon demonstrates the dangers of the Iranian influence in the whole Arab region and poses security challenges for the sovereign Arab countries. The Iranian influence that began to extend into Iraq in 2003 has now begun to extend into Syria, and into Lebanon. Such a threat is expected to increase unless the Arab countries realize these dangers and act accordingly.

Chapter Six

After the Iranians have taken control over Iraq using different tools of intervention, they have turned their attention towards the Iraqi economy and resources. The Iranian economic intervention in the Iraqi economy has taken many shapes, such as using Iraq as a market for Iranian products, the change of Iraqi customs regulations to facilitate the trade with Iran, and the take-over of Iraqi oil.

6.1. The Economic Intervention

Iraq which is located north of the Arabian Peninsula has huge natural resources including oil, gas, water, and agricultural potential. Iraq holds between 145- 150 billion barrels of proven oil reserve, which represents between 8- 8.8 % of the world's total oil reserves (Reuters Staff Report, Feb. 19, 2017) (EIA, Feb. 24,2021). The two rivers of Euphrates and Tigris procure more than 44 billion cubic meters of water every year which help improve the agricultural prospects and increase the arable land (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5). These great economic potentials have not benefited the Iraqi people since the American invasion in 2003 and the Iranian interference in Iraq short after. Iraq, who had emerged victorious from the Iran-Iraq war, had become subjugated economically to the Iranian economy, and its sole function had become to feed and support the deteriorating Iranian economic system.

The Iranian regime perceives the economic collaboration with Iraq not on an equal basis of mutual interests for both countries and for the benefits for their people. Rather, Iraq seems more and more like a life support line for the Iranian regime due to the economic sanctions imposed on Iran and its leaders. With the fall of Iraq under the Iranian influence, Iraq can stand as the sole Iranian window to the world to evade and overcome the economic sanctions, and to increase its economic power. Economic collaboration and developmental projects between the two countries are not on the agenda. Rather, the Iranian regime is only interested in subjugating the Iraqi economy to serve the economic needs of Iran and compensate for the Iranian financial deficits (Haik Gugarats, Jan. 5, 2021).

Iraq has become a market for Iranian non-oil goods, and the Iraqi financial institutions have become the perfect safe haven to circumvent the economic sanctions imposed by the United States (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5). As indicated earlier, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard possesses the value of one third of the non-oil commercial operations in Iraq, and this can explain to a large extent its desire to monopolize the Iranian foreign policies towards Iraq; that is, to protect its commercial interests. In the first years after the US invasion of Iraq, 110 economic agreements were signed between the Iraqi and Iranian governments (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5). As a direct result of these agreements, the trade exchanges between Iran and Iraq increased dramatically after the pro-Iranian parties had consecutively taken control over the Iraqi governments. The amount of such trade exchange had risen to 7 billion US dollars in 2009, but the trade balance tends to favour the Iranian regime because Iran imposes a protectionist policy of high taxes and tariffs on Iraqi goods. The Iranian goods going to Iraq are charged with taxes and customs at a symbolic level; while the Iraqi goods going to Iran undergo huge taxes and tariff impositions (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 12). Such economic policies have protected the Iranian economy and favored the Iranian interests over the Iraqi interests. The amount of the Iranian trade business in Iraq reached in 2018 up to 9 billion US dollars according to the UN (Trading Economics, Jun. 2021). Iran is seeking to increase the trade exchange between itself and Iraq up to 20 billion US dollars, as Iranian President Rouhani expressed, saying in a meeting with the Iraqi Foreign Minister in Tehran in February 2021 (Financial Tribune, Feb. 2, 2021). Among the Iranian export products to Iraq are fresh produce, processed foodstuffs, as well construction materials such as cement, iron, glass, bricks, cheap consumer goods and cars. Furthermore, Iran's exportation of cheap goods taking advantage of its low prices and the symbolic tariffs have significantly affected the economy of the Iraqi state in both the agricultural and industrial sectors. Likewise, there are five Iranian banks that have opened in Iraq after 2003, such as the Bank Melli and the Agricultural Bank, where many branches of these two banks are spread across the Iraqi cities such as Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 12). Iran also sells and supplies electricity to Iraq, especially to the southern provinces (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5). Due to the importance of Electricity in modern life, the issue of electricity supply has become a pressure tool that Iran and the pro-Iranian militias can use against Iraq (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 13).

Moreover, to maximize the Iranian benefits from tariffs and taxation, Iran had begun to use its naval ports for the importation and exportation activities at the expense of the traditional Iraqi outlet through the Jordanian port of Aqaba (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5).

As for religious tourism between the two countries, Iran benefits from Iraqi pilgrimage to its religious cities, to the point that it became lucrative for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to take over this business sector as indicated earlier. An estimated one million Iraqis had visited the religious shrines in the cities of Qum and Mashhad (Ahmed and Massad, 2009, pp. 64-65); (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5).

As for the water resources of Iraq, Iran has dammed and diverted the rivers and tributaries that feed the Shatt al-Arab waterway such as the Kalal and Karkha rivers which greatly undermined the Iraqi agriculture sector in the south and hindered efforts to revive Iraq's marshlands, as well as increased in the salinity of the Shatt al-Arab waterway (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011, p. 12).

As for the Iraqi oil resources, the oil wells near the Iraqi-Iranian border in Basra governorate are being channeled to Iran. Taking advantage of the Iranian political hegemony, and the precarious security situation and corruption that Iraq has been undergoing since 2003, the estimated amount of the stolen oil is 500,000 barrels of oil per day (Moeh and Abdullah, 2016, p. 5).

Despite the allegations against the corrupt regime of Saddam Hussein, the pro-occupation and pro-Iranian governments have greatly increased the extent of corruption to the point where many demonstrations and protests have erupted as recent as 2019 and 2020 (Mahdy, 2016, p. 21). After 2003, Iraq became one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In 2003, Iraq ranked 113 among the world's countries. In contrast, Iraq had jumped to rank 174 on the scale of corruption, just after eight years of pro-Iranian governments (Salman and Attiya, 2018, pp. 14-15). Corruption had been extended to government positions where high rank positions were distributed along the lines of sectarian quotas; that is, certain government appointments are retained and kept for certain political and military organizations (Perito, 2008, p. 4). For example, the Ministry of Interior is monopolized by the Badr Organization

(Steinberg, Jul. 2017, p. 1) while the Iraqi Ministry of Health is kept for the Sadr movement (Murphy, 2006).

6.2. Exploiting Corruption in Iraq

Furthermore, the corrupt pro-Iranian militias are thriving in different sectors of the Iraqi economy, especially in the oil industry. The pro-Iranian militias are independent military establishments because they can collect their revenues from illegal trade activities like smuggling and exploitations. Due to their military presence on the ground, these militias have become the de facto controller of the Iraqi economic resources, with or without the consent of the Iraqi government, which is already being pro-‘Iranianized’. Asaib Ahl al-Haq smuggling Iraqi oil in quantities valued at 300,000 US dollars a day is just one example of many (Burden, Dec. 8, 2019). Exploitation combined with terrorism is another example of how corrupt Iraq had become after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. The pro-Iranian militias threaten and exploit foreign investors in exchange for money. For example, the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigade had blackmailed a foreign company working at the Baghdad Airport. When the director of that company had refused to pay the ransom money, he was beaten up by some of Hezbollah’s members. The director eventually escaped, and his company shut down its operations in Iraq (Worth, Jul. 29, 2020).

It is in Iran’s best interest to maintain and fuel the corruption in Iraq, in order to render the Iraqi state politically and economically weak. The weakening of the Iraqi state through economic and financial corruption can serve a twofold objective. In one sense, it can debilitate the Iraqi state making it unable to carry out any developmental projects which could strengthen it, thus rendering it a weak state unable to defend itself. In another sense, the corruption of the Iraqi state benefits the Iranian state. The oil theft and exploitation benefit the pro-Iranian militias and support the purchase of the necessary armaments. The quotas of official appointments guarantees that Iran maintains its powerful influence over the decision-making process, while the tariff law adjustments increase the Iranian trade infiltration into the Iraqi economy.

The pro-Iranian military intervention, either officially through the pro-Iranian political parties or the semi-official pro-Iranian militias, have been working since the American occupation to debilitate the Iraqi state and dismantle its institutions. As a direct result of such military influence in almost all the Iraqi institutions, Iran had taken control over the Iraqi economy and financial resources and established a fertile soil for corruption at almost all Iraqi financial and administrative levels.



Conclusion

The Islamic revolution in 1979 in Iran had a great impact on the Middle East in general and on Iraq in particular. As a direct result of the Islamic revolution, the principles of the Velayet-i-Faqih and the revolutionary Iran or the exportation of the revolution had emerged as the main guidelines to inspire the Iranian foreign policies. Central to these two principles is the institutionalization of religion through the invention of the Supreme Leadership of the Islamic world where the Supreme Leader assumes the highest political authority in Iran as well as the leadership of the whole Islamic world. Inherent in such an assumption is the claim of the right to interfere with the internal affairs of other Islamic countries to expand Iran's influence in the region. The principle of Velayet-i-Faqih is not completely a new invention; rather, it is traced back to the emergence of the Shiite identity during the Safavid era, long before the Islamic revolution in 1979. In an attempt to create a distinct identity from the remaining Muslim world during the Ottoman empire, the Safavids had reshaped the Iranian national identity on Iranian Shiism by brute force, and Sunni Iran had finally been forcedly converted into Shiism. The clergy establishment in modern Iran is not that different from the clergy establishment during the Safavids, with its trademark 'Velayet-i-Faqih'. In the Qajar and Pahlavi states, the role of the religious establishment had gained a new boost because it had been actively involved in national revolutions against the influence of Western countries and played a significant role in fighting against Western colonial ambitions. Such active participation of the religious establishment in Iran had helped the rise of clergy to the political scene during the 1960s and spread the conviction that the religious establishment should be at the helm of power as Imam Khomeini had been calling for in the form of Velayet-i-Faqih.

In light of the Iranian interventionist practices in Iraq, it seems that the Iranian national identity is basically encapsulated to restore the glories of the Sasanian and the Safavid empires where Baghdad was once part of the latter. The aspirations for the annexation of Iraq to Iran had been part of the Iranian foreign policy since the early years of the Islamic revolution and were explicitly expressed by top Iranian officials on multiple occasions. For example, Hassan Bani Sadr, the first Iranian president after the revolution and an advisor to the current president of the Iranian republic, Rouhani, had

once stated that Iraq is an Iranian property and Iran shall take control over it. Contrary to the proclaimed principles of the Islamic revolution and the attractive propaganda of Islamic solidarity, Iran had been involved in sectarian atrocities and ethnic cleansings among the Iraqi people either from the Sunni minority or the Shiite majority, which implicate that the Iranians' real motives are colonial ambitions and regional expansionism rather than any other propaganda claims.

The numerous pro-Iranian political parties and militias in Iraq had enabled Iran to exert a direct influence on Iraq, and remotely control the Iraqi state and direct its foreign policies. The Iranian subjugating tools in terms of military, politics and the economy through proxy agents might be related to its historical past of fighting against the western influence. It seems surprising that Iran, which had suffered a lot from the proxy agents of colonial powers in the form of western companies and multinationals during the Qajar and Pahlavi monarchies, employed more or less the same techniques to subjugate the neighboring state of Iraq. Iran was able to stir up a sectarian strife in the once homogeneous Iraqi society through its pro-Iranian parties and militias and to split Iraq's institutions across sectarian quotas. By doing this, Iran was able to render the sovereign Iraqi state into a federal state whose central government is Tehran through the endorsement of a pro-Iranian constitution that serves the interests of Iran rather than the Iraqi people. The Iraqi constitutional amendment of 2005 had deepened the sectarian strife and exalted the sectarian identity at the expense of the national identity of the Iraqi people and helped the breakout of the sectarian cleansings where many Iraqis were killed or tortured to death as a result. Under such pro-Iranian constitution, the Iraqi judiciary had fallen under the direct influence of Iran and its political and military arms where incidents of kidnapping, killings and threats are well documented among the judiciary members. Furthermore, under the de-Baathification regulations, all those who called for an independent Iraqi state get persecuted or receive death threats even if they belong to the Shiite sect. Taking control of the judiciary establishment under the new constitution, Iran was also able to control the political scene through its political parties and their affiliated militias and was finally able to nominate or depose the premiership or any other political figures. On economic terms, Iran had rendered Iraq as a market for its non-oil products due to amendments of the taxation regulations of the Iraqi state without any regard to the Iraqi national

industrial and agricultural sectors. Furthermore, Iran and its militias had been involved in oil theft, the seizure of Iraqi water shares of rivers, as well as other natural and financial resources. These practices, which are more conducive to piracy than to a responsible state, were probably carried out with an American complicity or without any serious attention from the US government. The researcher concludes that the sentiments of the Islamic Revolution were only a cover for Iranian expansionism in the region and has nothing to do with the true principles of Islam. In one sense, the Islamic Revolution is a reformulation of the former Iranian monarchies that sought territorial gains in the Arab region at the expense of its people and their fortunes.

Recommendation

The relationship between the American and the Iranians with regards to Iraq is still under-researched. The infiltration of the Iranian influence in the Iraqi territories after the US invasion of Iraq is fully understood and there is a need for an in-depth investigation of how the Iranians had gradually replaced the Americans in Iraq and how such replacement of influence had taken place. Furthermore, the political instabilities that Iraq had undergone since the US invasion, the constant Iranian interventions and the ensuing sectarian cleansings had greatly undermined the Iraqis' sovereignty and Iraq's independence. This endless cycle of violence cannot be stopped unless the international community of regional and superpowers come to terms that the people of the region have the right to live peacefully, without national prejudice or sectarian divisions. The United Nations and Security Council can help establish such objectives through international conferences to meet the needs of security and safety for the inhabitants of Iraq as based on equality and human rights principles.

Future Study

The Iranian influence in the Arab territories had gained a foothold in what can be called the ‘corridor’ of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. In such doing, Iran is technically isolating the geographical borders of Turkey from the rest of the Arab world. Similarly, the Iranian unconditional support of Armenia against the Muslim-Shiite Azerbaijan might have been motivated by the same reason, that is, the severing of Turkey from the Muslim world in Central Asia. These two issues should be seriously investigated given the Iranian expansionism aspirations in the region as substantiated in the case of Iraq.

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