

# **Iraq's Identity Crisis and Iran's Foreign Policy Orientation**

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## **Abstract**

Iraq has been the most prominent example of divergence and identity crisis in recent decades. The multiplicity of ethnic, religious, and power sharing groups has caused political and social divisions. Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis are the main players in this split. The ethnic has divided Iraq into two Kurdish and Arab communities, and the religious one into Shiite and Sunni groups. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution there were fundamental changes in Iran's foreign policy at the regional level and toward its neighbors. At the same time, Saddam's dictatorship did not provide an opportunity to express different ethnicities and identities. The US invasion to Iraq and the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime brought Iraq into a new and unstable phase, with various groups and ethnicities trying to express their conflicting political and social identity goals and demands. The regional countries particularly the Islamic

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Republic of Iran, have expanded their influence in Iraq by changing their foreign policy orientation based on their regional goals and national security, to prevent other competitors increasing their influence. The main purpose of the present study is to analyze and investigate the identity crisis impact in Iraq on the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation by emphasizing on the post-Saddam era from 2003 to 2020 by using Constructivism Theory. The paper, based on the nature and type of the subject, uses a descriptive-analytical method and the library resources to collect data and information.

**Keywords:** *Crisis; Identity; Identity Crisis; Constructivism; Foreign Policy Orientation*

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## **Introduction**

In one society, the contradiction, conflict, and divisions among the different groups, identities, and ethnicities can lead to crisis. Social divisions refer to indicators and criteria that may cause the separation of social groups from one another and even to the confrontation. Along with politics, the ethnicity, religion, and the social class can also initiate conflict and political, social, and identity crises. In undemocratic and heterogeneous countries, the problem of identity is very difficult to solve. In short, it can be said that many countries in the Middle East and in the Arab world are concerned about their identity and its crisis.

Lucian W. Pye, divides the political crisis into five categories: the identity, legitimacy, participation, influence and the distribution crises. The identity crisis occurs when a society realizes what has exclusively and indisputably admitted as its self-cumulative is no longer acceptable under the new historical circumstances. The political system in order to reach a new level of performance based on changes in territory, intensity, structural or eventual changes, it is necessary to redefine the participants in the system, i.e., who they are, and how they are different with the all other political or social systems. Regarding the identity crisis we can say that there are four main types of identity crisis: the first type of crisis relates to feelings about the territory and the relationships of geographic circumstance to nationalist feelings. The second form occurs when the social structure, and in particular the social class divisions expand in a way that prevents the national unity. The third case deals with the confliction between transnational identities and the commitment to a common

national identity. The fourth form of the identity crisis is caused by psychological consequences, rapid social change, and dual feelings towards foreigners (Pye, 2001: 170-171).

Iraq is a nascent state in the Middle East, formed in this region in the twentieth century due to the interests and strategies of European powers, especially Britain. It has a very heterogeneous ethnic and religious population and in terms of political, social and cultural structure is divided into three distinct areas. In Iraq, Sunni Arabs live in the central, Kurds in the north and Shiite in the south. Beside these three main groups, there are also small cultural and social identities, such as Turkmen, Assyrians, and Yazidis, who have distinct cultures and beliefs. The lack of national identity in Iraq, along with the ethnic-religious gap, has led to the emergence of an identity crisis between ethnic and sectarian groups where the historical and political factors as well as functional causes has reinforced it. The ignorance of people's rights during the different historical periods and the lack of a clear plan to reduce gaps and conflicts have caused social and political disruption. That is to say, besides the Sunni-Shiite religious identity gap, and the Arab-Kurdish ethnic identity crisis, there is a third economic-welfare-class crisis, too. Gaps and splits that arise from differences in identity, belief, ideology, and authority, since they see their interests preserving and sometimes their existence as the other party's elimination, are likely to lead to violence and crisis. From the very beginning of Iraq creation in the 1920s, Arab Sunnis, which constitute a low percentage of the population and have long domination in Iraq, continued to rule the country until 2003, even however, with the Ba'athists' efforts to spread the extremist nationalism to attract Shiite Arabs, they failed to infiltrate other claimed areas beyond the predominantly Sunni centers in Iraq. For this reason, the Ba'athist central government has always had the least legitimacy and acceptance in the southern Shia populated and northern Kurdish regions of Iraq, while Kurdish ethnic identity and Shiite religious identity are bolder than Iraq's identity among the

inhabitants. Since the fall of Saddam's Ba'athist regime in 2003, Shiites and Kurds have had the first opportunity to seize the outpost of power in accordance with their demographic realities. The power elites are trying to redefine a broader and more modern national identity in this country. Thus, we continue to see the superiority of ethnic and religious identity interests on national identity and interests in Iraq. A brief look at transformations in Iraq shows the internal instability and the identity crisis have had a direct impact on the behavior and orientation of other countries foreign policy. An deep understanding of the political and social situation in Iraq can provide an opportunity to recognize its security dimensions and the effects that its stability or instability has on neighbor countries, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Using an analytical-descriptive approach and relying on the theory of constructivism, this study examine the identity crisis in the new Iraq (post-Saddam), and addresses the question of "how the identity crisis in Iraq has affected the approach, direction and orientation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy in internal, regional and international dimensions? It proves this hypothesis that the identity crisis in Iraq has paved the way for Iran to face internal, regional and international challenges and increased its security aspects. In the present study, the "identity crisis in Iraq" is considered as the independent variable and "the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation" as the dependent variable.

## **I. Theoretical Framework**

In analyzing the governments' foreign policy, most scholars have attempted to use major and dominant intellectual approaches and paradigms in international relations such as realism, idealism, and behaviorism. The main reason for these analyzes can be found in the fact that the identity subject of the most countries political system has never been seriously considered. But paying attention to the current situation of international system and the the complex structure of ethnic and religious identity in the Middle

East, the study of Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation with respect to the Iraq country, within the mentioned approaches and paradigms framework cannot be easily understood. For this reason, from a variety of theories, the constructive approach which is more descriptive and analytical, selected as the theoretical framework.

One of the most important reasons for the importance of the constructive approach in international relations is its relevance to the question of states' identity. In defining identity, constructivists have defined it as a self-definition or self-defining against others. In their view, identity allows nations to make their world meaningful, to categorize other entities, and to define others as their friend or enemy. Governments with these perceptions seek to change or maintain the status quo, unite with one country or take action against others (Wilmer, 2002: 59). According to the constructivists, other important subject related to the identity are the fluidity and changeability of identities. Identity can be fluid under material conditions, and the main mission of the constructivists is to explain this change and policy, because in their view identity is a social matter, meaning that in constructing selves, the other can also be made, so identity is fluid. This is because in their view, actors' perceptions of themselves, their interests and goals are changeable, and as a result of the new identities formation, there will be new interests for the government as well, so these different and changing identities serve the actors' interests and behaviors shape. In this respect, identity and interests are not pre-eminent and are not derived from the power distribution structure, but are sourced from the internal origins of the actors' identity (Aghaee and Rasooli, 2009: 5). According to the constructivist foreign policy model, common inter-subjective norms in both the internal and international levels of Iran national identity forms the specific national role. These roles in turn, determine the specific national interests that guide and shape the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. Thus, by applying this model one can examine how non-material

intellectual and ideological structures such as ideology and worldview, influence the Islamic Republic's foreign policy and also the role and place of non-material interests and resources in Iranian foreign policy can be determined and explained. Furthermore, the definition and prioritization of Iran's national interests based on its national identity and role could be analyzed (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2010: 43).

In modern Iraq, non-integration of ethnic and religious groups within a single nation and non-formation of national identities and the competition for power have led to the identity crisis which made the shared and common interests among Iraqi groups and other countries. In recent years this crisis with the increasing spread of terrorism and the interference of other foreign countries has influenced Iran's foreign policy in various aspects. It seems that the constructive theory, which emphasizes on the immaterial dimensions and internal identities of countries, in explaining the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy provides a better context about Iraq country. Taking into account such characteristics and features in Iraq specially the identity crisis, and by examining the reasons of its emergence and redefinition its impact on the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy the importance of this research can be understood. Identifying the identity crisis in Iraq with emphasis on the constructive theory with regard to the gaps in the less use of this scientific theory in international relations is one of the main reasons of this research. Considering the identity crisis in Iraq and its variable role and impact on the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation in order to produce an appropriate and practical study source for crisis management and scientific analysis of the identity crisis in Iraq for its impact on the policy approach of a country that has more ethnic, religious, social and political structure similarities with Iran can be theoretically and scientifically beneficial for policy makers and statesmen in dealing with the identity crisis and practically in transforming it to the opportunity to serve the national interest. The innovative and creative approach of this study is applying the constructive theory

as an international relations in one country foreign policy orientation with regard to the identity crisis.

## **II. Iraq Recognition**

Iraq is made up of 18 provinces that are federally governed under the new constitution. Each province has a private parliament that is elected by the people, and ultimately a chairman is elected as governor with relatively full authority. Cities, villages, and even districts in each province also have a council and a chief to send the views and needs of everywhere of the country to senior Iraq officials. The new Iraq parliament law permits the coalition of provinces and the formation of new regions, where now the Kurdistan Region having three Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Duhok provinces in the north, is governed by declaration of autonomous government under a federal headquarters in Erbil. This geographical coalition is possible for other provinces as well, but provincial consolidation has not yet taken place in the other 15 provinces in Iraq. Basra, Nasiriyah and Al-Muthanna provinces deciding to declare a separate region in the south by referendum but it did not reach the majority and is now governed by the central government in Baghdad under the previous procedure. Iraq has a National Assembly with 329 members from all over the country, as well as the President and Prime Minister as the most responsible person in the country with 22 ministers. The official language of Iraq is now Arabic and Kurdish, which in some provinces also speak Persian and Turkish. The religion of 97% of Iraqis is Islam, 67% are Shiites, 30% Sunnis and 3% Christians, etc. The Shiites generally reside in central and southern Iraq and the Sunnis live in the north and west. Baghdad, as the capital of Iraq, contains various groups, parties, and religions, which are currently at odds over political power and religious differences. Iraq has 3650 kilometers of common border with its neighboring countries, including Iran as the largest border with 1458 kilometers to the east, Turkey with 352 kilometers to the north, Syria with 605 kilometers to the west, Jordan with 181 kilometers



to the southwest, Saudi Arabia with an area of 814 kilometers to the south, Kuwait 240 kilometers to the southeast and the Persian Gulf 58 kilometers to the southeast (Nejatnia, 2019: 12).

### III. The Perspective of Identity Crisis in Iraq

The Ba'ath Party took the power through the coup in 1968, and Saddam Hussein ruthlessly defeated his party rivals and overthrew the regime (Bremer, 2007: 58). Saddam and his companions lacked social influence and were deprived of religious originality and, within the Ba'ath Party, pursued a radical Arab ideology based on Sunni Arab thought. This practice led to the changes and doubling weakening of the other "ethnicities" and "religions" status, such that the Arab Sunnis prevailed over the political system of this land for six periods of Bani Omayeh, Bani Abbas, the Ottomans, British Mandatory, Kingdom and Republican (from 680 AD to the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS), until 2003 the overthrow of Saddam Hussein) which continued until the formation of the Transitional Council of Iraq Government (Majlis) in May 2003, (Golchin, 2019: 18).

Based on this, six important historical periods in contemporary Iraq history concerning the establishing of contradictions, its consolidation, deepening and escalation, and finally the activation of divisions and conflicts in the form of an identity crisis at three stages: (a) The pre-Saddam era, b) Saddam era, and c) The post-Saddam era will be discussed.

**The Pre-Saddam Era:** In the studying of the historical background of contradictions and the identity crisis in Iraq despite the tumultuous history of the past few centuries, it seems that the Ottoman period, with the establishment of sovereignty and stability structures, went to be the starting point for identity structural contradictions in Iraq. Important factors, such as the existence of purely nationalist thinking that has followed the policy of Turkism, trying to change the ethnic nature of the Arab regions particularly Iraq, fostering Sunni-Shiite religious conflict, intensifying Arab-Kurdish ethnic conflicts, unification of religion

(Hanafi), emphasizing on applying military to govern Iraq regions in which were without cultural thought and economic growth for the flourishing of Iraq in various social, cultural, economic and other spheres. Ultimately caused the consolidating of the sovereignty and authority of the Sunnis on Kurds and Shiites, the dominance of the Arab Sunnis over Iraq administrations and organizations, army, scientific institutes and education. All of these led to the establishment of Iraq's contradictions, which served as the source of problems in the future. Unlike the Shiites and the Kurds, Sunnis have ruled Iraq since the founding of the Bani Abbas dynasty. For about five centuries the sovereignty of Ottoman caused the political governing of Turks and along with them the Sunni Arabs over Iraq (Mar, 2001: 28).

**British Domination:** In 1920 Iraq created from the Ottoman Empire by the British, including three constituent states, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. They did not have a common political, social and economic life background within a single political entity. They had different cultures and tendencies and were governed separately and independently, and lacked national identity and cohesion. In the policy of religious discrimination, Britain adopted the Ottoman method. The British pursued complete domination of Iraq by marginalizing and persecuting the Shiites. The result is that in the 12 years of domination, Britain tried to take advantage of Turkish, Arab and Kurdish hostility. The Shiites, who made up the majority of Iraqi society, were not safe.

Although Iraq's independence from British domination led to the 25 years sovereignty of the kingdom from 1932 to 1958, it was in fact a continuation of the domination period and Britain had completed control over rules. King Faisal attempted to reduce the severity of ethnic-religious discrimination in Iraq, but the British directly prevented it through subordinate prime ministers and governments. In the words of King Faisal, during this period Britain dictates to the Iraq government a policy that the paying taxes and killing were for Shiites, and the positions and offices for Sunnis. One of the important reasons for keeping Shiites out of

government was their strong opposition to the British during the occupation. The British, therefore, had no belief in the Shiites and tried to keep them out of sovereignty (Aliyan, 2005: 369). In this period, Britain focused on oppression of Shiites and Kurds by influencing on citizenship and social and legal discrimination against Shiites and Kurds. During this period, anti-Kurdish social policy took place and Kurds, like the Shiites, became second-class citizens.

**The First Republican Period:** In 1958, the first republic was formed under the leadership of Abdul Karim Qassim, whose father was Sunni and his mother was Shiite. He has sought to halt the process of increasing deprivation and ethnic and religious disputation in Iraq, and has taken actions such as giving Shiites posts and positions in the army and government agencies, building Medinah al-Soura and Medinah al-Nour for the poor and oppressed in Baghdad suburbs, which had often migrated from southern Shiite areas. Abdul Karim Qassim also sought to promote multi-ethnic inclusive nationalism in Iraq, and to contribute to the administration of other ethnic and religious groups. After Qassim, Abdul Salam Aref, with a far sharper and more violent approach than in the past, resorted to tribalism and hostility to the Shia. During the Republican era, the Iraq government strongly prevented the possible strengthening of the Shiites role in Iraq, which created a class division and public discontent, Shiites were always dissatisfied with the repressive view of the state (Barzegar, 2011).

**Saddam's Era:** Shiites and Kurds who had not practically participated in Iraqi rule since the formation of Iraq, in Ba'athist particularly in Saddam Hussein rule, in addition to the continuation of the past approach, were put aside along with Sunnis who did not conform to the Ba'ath Party's ideology and religion interpretation. Under these circumstances, the Ba'athist period has also been a continuation of the evolved state of the Ottoman-English and Abdul-Salam Arif era, in which at least two Shiite and Kurdish groups were not involved in the state-building

process of Iraq nation, and nearly 80 percentages of the country's population were trapped in a condition of insecurity and terrorism. The result was a great extent of contradictions, an identity crisis, and the collapse of national sentiment.

**Post-Saddam Era:** With the fall of Saddam in 2003 and the liberation of social forces, there was a special historical opportunity for Iraq oppressed tribes and religions. On the other hand, some Sunnis especially the remnants of the Ba'athist regime, rose against new conditions. Factors such as the liberation of forces from past oppression and discrimination, the overwhelming demand for power by ethnic and religious groups, the Sunnis failed attempt to stay in power, and the occupiers' failure to organize Iraq, all made the particular critical situations which the first and immediate effect was to activate past accumulated crises and showing them in the political, social and security spheres encountering and confrontation. Recent decades' statistics on the human toll crisis in Iraq illustrate the depth of the escalation and the identity crisis in Iraq. To address the problem of a new Iraq, the Americans have considered the model of state-nation-building from the outside, but this type of state-nation-building has been very costly and violent, and in the short run it has had little impact as stabilizers in the regional environment. Also, with the exiting and withdrawal of external support, nascent government structures and institutions have been on the verge of collapse as a result of internal strife caused by disagreement and denationalization (Bashir, 2009).

The study of Iraq's historical-political process reveals that it was not formed on the basis of a common idea of Iraqi citizens. Accordingly, there have been structural conflicts that have resulted in divisions and identity crises. The deepening of this gap and crisis, undermined social cohesion and and faced Iraq to the internal crisis and insecurity. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, both during the Ottoman and independence years, the country has always been plagued by internal crises stemming from a lack of public consensus on national identity and the legitimacy

of the central government, and the process of establishing a national government was a major concern for governments in Baghdad. From the outset, Iraq had a fragmented ethnic and religious context and lacked coherent elements such as language, race, religion, land, and a common historical heritage, elements that were viewed by theorists in the field of social and political science which are necessary to adopt any modern national unit (Anderson and Stanfield, 2004: 20).

#### **IV. The Identity Crisis in New Iraq**

In Iraq's ethnic and racial division, there is greater agreement on the following subdivision: 75 to 80 percent Arab (largest ethnic group), 15 to 20 percent Kurdish (second largest ethnic group), and the rest, about 5 percent which include Turkmen, Assyrians, Jews, Yazidis and Sabians. The Arabs are of the Sami race, the Kurds are of the Aryan race, and the Turkmen are of the Central Asian Turkish race. The Shiites emphasized the Islamic Republic of Iraq as their preferred alternative to the new political system. The Sunnis also supported the Iraq Arab Republic. The Kurds and other non-Arab Iraqi minorities also proposed the Iraq Democratic Republic, which was eventually recognized by the Iraq Parliament as the source of government's identity and structure (Pirani, 2019: 35).

**Shiites and Identity Crisis:** Although Iraq is the center of Shiite and encompassed by Shiite holy shrines, in spite of their population weight they were always in minority politically. With the exception of Ale-Boyeh during the fourth century, Shiites have always been dominated by the Sunni political powers in Baghdad. Shiites were neglected despite their demographic weight throughout Ottoman, Hashemite, British, Nationalist, Communist, and Ba'athist regimes, however, today's Shiites are the largest group which makes up the majority of the entire Iraq population. The overthrow of Saddam provided the basis for the Shiites' presence and their exit from isolation and since then the Shiites have become increasingly active in the political and social arena

(Talashan, 2010: 116).

Shiites are responsible for their Iraqi identity and even love for, believing that Iraqi identity guarantees unity and integration, responds to interdependence, loyalty and religious freedom, they believe that the Iraqi community multiplies is one suitable merit and positive characteristics. The Shiites do not have much affinity for their Arab identity, the main reason being that Arab identity is now out of its natural form and has become a definite religious trait, meaning that anyone outside the (Sunni) religious framework, it is also out of the Arab identity (Golchin, 2019: 191). Therefore, despite the many ups and downs of Iraq political process, the main tendency Shiite groups is to maintain Iraq's integrity, to strive for greater power within Iraq's internal equations and practical political conditions, as well as to strive for stability and security (Vaezy, 2008: 51-17). Because of the population majority and cultural elements, Shiites are looking for Arab identity and cultural fundamentals different from the Arab world, which has more specific Iraqi characteristics (Bagheri, 2013: 149).

**Kurds and Identity Crisis:** The Kurds have always pursued an "independent Kurdish ethnic and nationalist identity, and only find it as a response to their desires and representing their own characteristics. However, the Iraqi identity that emerged after 2003 has provided them with broad material and spiritual privileges. The Kurds prefer their Kurdish nationalist identity, so during the drafting of the Iraqi constitution they did not allow to emphasize Iraq's Arab identity. The Kurds say that the Kurdish people must themselves determine their own destiny, it means that they must be able to declare independence at any time. In the post-Saddam era, Kurds have acted with consistency, coherence, and efficiency in Iraq politics, and it can be said that they have gained the most in the Iraqi political process today (Golchin, 2019: 195-191). Also, Iraq Kurdistan has always been one of the divergence areas due to the linguistic, religious, historical and cultural heterogeneity of the Iraqi majority (Zibaklam and Abdullah Pour,

2011: 63). Among the Kurdistan neighboring countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran has had the least problem with the Kurdish subjects, since the Kurds are essentially Ariyan and prideful in their ethnic affiliation with the Persians (Ahmadi, 2000: 85).

**Sunnis and Identity Crisis:** Sunni Arabs, despite being a minority, have dominated the political and social life of Iraq from the distant past with the support of the Ottoman government. On many occasions, Arabs have expressed a desire to use both Arab and Islamic identities to excel the Shiite and Kurdish groups. The Sunnis of Iraq have put their desire more towards religion, and in fact religion has sought to be the main engine of their cause and argue for the founding or emergence of their new order. Accordingly, despite years of establishment of a new system in Iraq, there is still concern that Arab Sunnis will not accept the new Iraq identity framework after the change and Iraq society and government fails to create a new Iraq (Golchin, 2019: 195-196). In post-Saddam era, Iraq Sunni groups have refused to participate seriously in the political process and, by insufficient support to the government, have created challenges to build a strong, cooperative and peaceful state for all Iraqi groups. Sunnis dissatisfaction with its role in the new power structure, and also considerations and policies of Arab countries including the Saudis, have played a decisive role in the unprotected and uncooperative behavior of Iraq Sunni groups (Asadi, 2008: 89). Sunni Arabs, because of their minority status define their Arab identity in line with the Sunni Arab world and see themselves as part of the Arab world in order to enjoy full support for a greater share of power in Iraq. They consider the Arab countries as their natural and permanent supporter and even a large part of their behaviors and roles are based on the views and policies of Arab governments (Bagheri, 2013: 149).

## **V. The solution to the identity crisis**

This study has attempted to examine the historical contexts

focusing on the post-Saddam era while answering the main research question about the identity crisis in Iraq and its effects on Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation, it is going to address the roots of the contradictions and social and political crises in Iraq to provide a model for a national unity plan. The three main ethnic and religious groups that formed the Iraq society, following the collapse of Saddam's Ba'athist regime, used extremist means to achieve their demands, namely to compete with ethnic and sectarian communities in the contradiction main nature in Iraq, it means that it is the origin of the power and resources acquisition which other foreign actors strongly influence on this competition. In other words, it can be stated that the real deprivation of Shiites and Kurds in the past years as well as the Sunnis false sense of deprivation after 2003 have triggered ethnic and religious conflicts in Iraq (Golchin, 2019: 249).

Iraq has failed to overcome the crisis of national identity and political legitimacy since the start of the modernization process after 2003, which has led to the emergence of a third crisis as the security crisis. For this reason, the country still has to deal with the national identity crisis and the security implications of undeveloped nation-state. Although a new political structure based on federalism, democracy and elections has been in place since 2003, there is a long way to go before a favorable political order and a proper identity framework in which the interests of all ethnic groups can be met. On the other hand, the most important challenge for the central government in Iraq before entering the stabilization process is how to establish and maintain security. This is so important that even the continued legitimacy and presence of government and sovereignty on the scene, depends directly on the function and ability of the government to maintain its internal security; since no economic, cultural or social activity or in other words, the return of life to its normality is not possible without security. This principle is greatly important in Iraq because of its complex ethnic and demographic nature and also due to the lack of tolerance and reconciliation between different



groups.

To overcome security problems in Iraq requires an effective negotiation and intelligence, and an initiative based on an understanding of the nature, structure, mechanism and objective evaluation of real capabilities and limitations. In such circumstances, there should be a focus on the reform process, the rule of law, the power strengthening and the powers to de-escalation and structuralizing. Achieving strategic alignment of the major Iraq tribes, focusing on central government cohesion and authority and fostering Shiite, Sunni and Kurds integration and participation in governance commensurate with electoral requirements, are the backgrounds that provide the necessary context and capacity which will provide understanding. The speed and improvement of this process depends largely on having a single definition of national interest and a practical commitment to maintaining Iraq's integrity. On the other hand, it seems that although the constitution of Iraq's federalism was originally designed to preserve and consolidate Iraq's integrity, but it is a factor in diverging and weakening its national cohesion at present. The formation of federals on the basis of ethnic and religious identities can undermine and threaten the principle of its national unity and identity. Therefore, other models must be taken into consideration by the people that respond to ethnic and religious diversity and can address the deprivations imposed on the people of this landmark, which dates back centuries. The provincial federalism model is well-suited to achieving this goal and is well implemented and in contrast, the three-federalism model (Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish) can be the worst model because it weakens the spirit of national solidarity and will reinforce the ethnic and religion identities in such a way that the "Iraqi" national identity will be severely damaged and even forgotten. To the extent that Iraq can deviate from the three federalism model formation, it has similarly departed from the danger of disintegration and is close to reinforcing its "Iraqi" national identity (Golchin, 2019: 252).

## **VI. Iraq and Iran relations**

Looking at the background of Iraq and Iran relations after the Islamic Revolution, it can be further divided into two periods. The first is the contradiction period and the struggle starts from the victory of the Islamic Revolution to the fall of Saddam. During this period, everything is affected by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The image of an enemy from Iran was very prominent among its neighbors particularly for Iraq, which resulted in the creation of a common sense among neighbors. The region countries, especially Iraq and Saudi Arabia feared that the Islamic Revolution would penetrate their countries, Tried to find a solution to stifle the Iranian revolution. In this situation, Saddam's government, on behalf of all opposition governments, based on past border and territorial disputes, launched an eight-year war against Iran.

The second period can also be a peaceful coexistence period that has been going on since the fall of Saddam and the formation of the Shiite government (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2010: 135). During this period, Iran welcomed the collapse of the Ba'athist government, insisted on the rapid withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq and the development of friendly relations. During this period, the Shiites topped Iraq political system in the January 2005 elections. The trial of Saddam by the judiciary and the issuance of a statement by the Iraq government on the recognition of the Algerian 1975 treaty were other factors that changed the attitude of the Iranian diplomatic system towards the new Iraq government (Sadeghi, et al. 2017: 138).

Iraq's expansionism towards Iran is directly countered by Iran's national power. As Iran's national capability has diminished (or perceived by Iraqi leaders as such), its expansion has grown, and vice versa, at times when Iran has been powerful, Iraq's aggression has diminished. As a result, Iran is the best balancing force to restrain Iraq's eastward expansion. The political and ideological nature of Iraq has also played a significant role in intensifying and restricting the expanse of Iraq. Consequently, the

establishment of a democratic political system in Iraq, even if it is not revolutionary in nature, will pose less security threats to its neighbors, especially Iran in the future, because theoretically in the framework of democratic peace theory, one of the ways to moderate the aggression in Iraq foreign policy is a democratic order. On the other hand, the deployment of political system that has substantial and ideological differences with the Islamic Republic of Iran increases the threats. Therefore, in the state of formation the American oriented regime in Iraq it is likely to recreate its territorial and border disputes with Iran, as well as future Iraq-Kuwait disputes over border issues (Akbari, 2015: 312-311).

## **VII. Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran Foreign Policy**

Governments, depending on their internal needs, geographical and geopolitical situation, and under the international system structure and function influence, choose their specific orientations and strategies to meet their national goals and interests. Since the international politics emerges in a dynamic environment, and the transformative factors emerge from all sides, one should not expect that the foreign policy structure and governments orientations will remain unchanged. What is certain is that these changes are sometimes slow, gradual, and at times rapid and underlying. The most important orientations and strategies of governments are neutrality, isolation, alliance and non-compliance (Qawam, 2002: 146). In other words, the foreign policy of each country consists of two parts, relatively stable and relatively changeable. The sustained part reflects the overall foreign policy framework within which the foreign policy exercises and strategies are structured and it is largely based on theoretical doctrines, value systems, and the dominant identity of society, while the second part is influenced by human experience and observes policies that are compiled and regulated due to the circumstances (Sabouri & Salehian, 2013: 177). In this field, with regard to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979

and consequently Saddam Hussein's power in Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy orientation has been briefly examined in both a) Saddam and b) post-Saddam periods:

**Saddam era:** The victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 transformed the political system in Iran and led to dramatic and profound changes in the Middle East and its coalition system, exactly at the same time Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq. It can be said that the biggest source of threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran in the first decade of the Islamic Revolution was Iraq and the Ba'athist regime. The attitude of these countries towards each other was in fact a security one and in fact, since the collapse of the Ottoman government and the formation of the Iraq government in west of Iran, policies adopted by Iraq officials have always been a threat to Iran's national security, and this country has rarely had friendly relations with Iran. The most important factor which showed Iran as an enemy to Iraq was the norms and principles that emerged from the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Due to its structure and identity, the Ba'ath regime sought to counter the Islamic Revolution from the very beginning. Saddam saw the Iranian revolution as a serious threat to his internal security and stability.

Under these circumstances, Ba'athist government imposed a full-scale war on Iran for eight years on September 31, 1980, with a prior decision and plan to overthrow the nascent Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iraq War with Iran after the Vietnam War was the second long war of the twentieth century, during which the Ba'ath regime committed war crimes, genocide, and other inhuman acts. The war ended with the issuance of Security Council Resolution No. 598 by the temporary ceasefire between Iran and Iraq in the summer of 1988 (Golchin, 2019: 140).

From the end of Iran-Iraq war to fall of Saddam, Iraq's containment policy has gone through three stages. The first phase, from the truce to the Iraq invasion to Kuwait, was a kind of "neither war nor peace" state between Iran and Iraq. Secondly, it was a two pronged policy that spanned from the invasion to

Kuwait until the end of Gulf War. Since the beginning of Kuwaiti crisis, Iran has divided its policy on the invasion of Iraq from the policy it had taken on the unresolved issues of Iran-Iraq war. On the day of Iraq invasion to Kuwait, Iran condemned the move and called for "the immediate withdrawal of Iraq troops to internationally recognized borders and the peaceful resolution of the dispute." The third phase, covering the end of 1991 Gulf War until 2003, was in some ways similar to the first phase status, "no war, and no peace." (Ramazani, 2017: 85-87).

**Post-Saddam Era:** After the fall of Saddam, Islamic Republic of Iran was pleased with the fact that it was dissatisfied with the presence of occupiers especially the US in Iraq, and did not regard it as its national interest. Iran has several important principles regarding post-Saddam Iraq: 1. Opposition to any separatism in Iraq. 2. Opposition to creation or promotion of ethnic, religious and racial conflicts in Iraq<sup>3</sup>. Helping create security and stability in Iraq<sup>4</sup>. Opposition to continued occupation in Iraq<sup>5</sup>. Opposition to any foreign intervention and emphasizing on Iraq's destiny<sup>6</sup>. Promoting Shia position in Iraq condition (Akbari, 2017: 64).

Among Iraq neighbors, Iran has consistently supported the establishment of security, stability, territorial integrity and national unity in post-Saddam Iraq, while most of other Iraq's neighbors have not been satisfied (Niakui, 2016: 130). Iran which had pursued a policy of positive neutrality in Iraq crisis (Persian Second War), sought to maintain normal relations with its new government and pave the way for improved relations in the future. In post-Saddam, Iran has always insisted on Iraq's territorial integrity and has backed its official government. Overall, Iraq has had opportunities and threats for the Islamic Republic. The new Iraq government even if it shifts to a secular and pro-western government, due to its new civil and democratic structures will be less of a regular threat than Saddam's threat to Iran.

**Iraq Scenarios:** With the security situation in post-war Iraq, the impact of Iraq developments on the Islamic Republic of Iran

security issues has increased. The formation of ethnic and religious identities in future Iraq could give rise to a new concept and identity in the Middle East and towards the neighbors. Iraq is undergoing a period of political and security developments, and despite passing years of the Ba'athist government collapse, efforts to improve the security situation and organizing the political structure, speaking out about the institutionalization and stabilization of this country is too early. In this context, four possible structures and scenarios that Iraq may face in the future due to the identity crisis and the interference of the major powers need to be discussed:

**Iraq as a Weak Country** :this is the case when Kurds, Shiites and Sunni Arabs cannot agree to form a national state and Iraq is without a state and the ethnic groups cannot resolve disputes due to their conflicts. The most important contradictions and major divisions that may arise in the future Iraq are: the Kurdish-Arab dispute, especially regarding Mosul, Kirkuk and other areas of conflict between the two sides; Sunni-Shia continuing and diverse contradiction. Both groups are seeking to end violence, but for many reasons the problem still needs to be resolved. The mixed Sunni and Shia regions have not yet fully stabilized, and the competition for power and government centers and government resources is still intense. Disagreements among Shiites, including Sadris and al-Da'wa, Majlis A'la and al-Da'wa, etc. have always been slow to make progress on the above issues and there is a possibility of conflict. This is both an opportunity and a threat for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The unrest may weaken the Shiites, and this weakness will spread to Iranian borders. On the other hand, Iran can manage and mitigate these conflicts, especially disputes between Shiites that are not compatible with national interests. Saudi Arabia views these developments as the beginning of Iraq's disintegration. Turkey is also aware of the consequences of turning Iraq into a federal and dispersed state to serve its interests in the north.

**Iraq as a Stable and Secure Country:** this scenario is long-

term for the evolution of current trends in Iraq. As the security situation improves and national reconciliation is finalized, Iraq's international standing will change. To amplify stability in Iraq will open the door to foreign investment and construction in other sectors of the economy and will draw Arab investors into Iraq. With the gradual improvement of Iraq's security situation, Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia are being persuaded to lead Baghdad to a more active role in regional security and political affairs. This scenario is in the interests of the Islamic Republic if the Shia rule.

**Iraq as a powerful countr:** Iraq will become one of the most powerful Arab countries if it is stable and united with its democratic structure and significant oil reserves. If the central government can solve the problems of Kurds and moderate Shiite and Sunni Arab conflicts, then a powerful and nationalist Iraq will sound the alarm in other countries in the region and they will inevitably do so to change their policies. This scenario is dangerous for the Arab countries, since Iraq is likely to become a partner for Iran.

**Iraq as a failed country:** this is dangerous to regional security and to Iraq sovereignty, meaning the failure to achieve national consensus on subjects such as oil revenue sharing, the Kirkuk issue, and the inclusion of Iraq militias in national armed forces and also it means the failure to bolster political participation at the national level and defeat the current Shia and Kurdish coalition. This scenario is detriment to Iraq national security and unity and is not in Iran's interests (Akbari, 2015: 316-312). Each of these scenarios with various consequences differentiates Iraq's role and position in the Middle East, and could affect its neighbors particularly Iran.

## Conclusion

Some Countries in the region and world powers are strongly opposed to the prosperity and democracy in Iraq and seek to block Iraq's progress for two reasons: first, to prevent and stop the

process of democracy in Iraq that may affect the Arab countries in the region. Second, the Iran-Iraq coalition and its impact on the Persian Gulf that could threaten the interests of the West and its dependence rulers. What the Islamic Republic of Iran is looking for in Iraq is a stable, secure and powerful country, which must always take into account the possibilities and always monitor the political and social events in Iraq and take appropriate orientation and action in accordance with the Islamic Republic of Iran foreign policy principles. If national unity and integration are maintained, Iraq will be a calm and safe neighbor for Iran and the region. Iraq can be Iran's strategic ally in the ideological and political realm. But if it goes out of the way of national unity and integration, it will face internal crises resulting in poverty and insecurity. In this case, ethnic and religious groups will ignore their role and pave the way for other countries to intervene. In the worst case, the break up of Iraq would be within the federal government and could be a battleground for third powers to expand their influence in the strategic region of the Middle East. The way out of the current identity crisis in Iraq is to establish a strong, stable and pervasive government that will attract the trust and attention of all ethnic and religious groups. This article attempts to analyze the situation in Iraq in terms of ethnic and religious identity, and describe briefly the crisis that is followed in various historical periods, from the beginning of independence until 2003 to the fall of Saddam, and explain in detail from 2003 to early 2020.



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