

HISTORY AND CURRENT STATE OF IRAQ-IRAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

From the 1968 Baath Party coup to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, relations between Baghdad and Tehran have never been good-neighborly or normal. Therefore, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein can be considered as one of the turning points in Iran-Iraq relations. This article elaborates on the Iraq-Iran relationship and the ethnic, religious, sectarian and external forces that influence it.

Keywords Baath Party, Kurds, Shia and Sunni conflict, terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

However, the US presence in Iraq has also raised serious security concerns for Iran.

Iraq's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has the longest land border, have changed from the past to the present, sometimes on the axis of common interests, and sometimes on the axis of conflicting interests. These countries, which have the most underground and surface resources of the world, have occasionally "hosted" the conflicts of interests of the global "power centers".

In the scientific analysis of the relations between these two countries, it will be necessary to pay attention to the issues related to the use of religious, ethnic, territorial and transboundary rivers.

Although relations between Iraq and Iran date back to ancient times, today's relations between the two countries and the changes that have resulted from them mainly occurred after the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 and the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003. With a land border of more than 1,000 km, these two countries share many common values and interests, as do their borders. Seen as a hostile regime for Iran, it provided commercial, political and even military aid to Iraq, which was left with a

power vacuum after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

As we mentioned above, the most painful point of Iran-Iraq relations is the issue of water resources use. It is known that the Middle East region is a region of the world with low rainfall and low reserves of clean drinking water. Therefore, the issue of transboundary rivers is vital in relations between states. At different times of the 20th century, there have been conflicts between Iraq and Iran over "Shatt ul-Arab", the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. If we look at the history of problems related to "Shatt-ul-Arab", it can be seen that it caused border disputes in Persian-Babylonian, Semitic-Indian-European, Sunni-Shia, Ottoman-Iranian relations. Diplomatic relations between Iraq and Iran were established in 1929.

The Main Findings and Results

Although the "Algeria Agreement" signed between the two countries in March 1975 solved many problems, especially the Kurdish problem and the water problem, Saddam Hussein, who succeeded Hassan al-Bakr in 1979, claimed that the agreement was signed under mandatory

conditions. Taking advantage of the political chaos that occurred in Iran as a result of the “Islamic Revolution” in Iran in 1979 and the subsequent departure of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, on September 18, 1980, he announced that he would not unilaterally recognize the “Algeria Treaty” . With this, Saddam Hussein evaluated the political instability in neighboring Iran as a political opportunity and planned to take full control of Shatt-ul-Arab. However, the Iraq-Iran war, which ended in 1988, resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the displacement of more than a million people, in addition to material losses for both countries.

As mentioned above, another controversial part of the relations between Iraq and Iran is the ethnic issue, to be more precise, the issue of the Kurds. According to statistics, about 40 million Kurdish people live in the region. They are 15 million in Turkey, 10 million in Iran, 8 million in Iraq and 4 million in Syria. It can be seen that the Kurds are an ethnic minority in these countries. This has led to several social and political problems. It is known from history that at the end of the Second World War, the Kurds of Iraq and Iran took great political steps to establish their independent statehood. In 1946, with the help of the USSR, Mustafa Barzani, an Iraqi Kurd, and Qazi Mohammad, a leading representative of the Iranian Kurdish political movement, established an independent Kurdish state on the territory of Iran, and this state was called the Republic of Mahabad. However, as a result of this state not being recognized by the international community, it was abolished by the Iranian government in 1947 and its leaders, including Qazi Mohammad, were sentenced to death, Mustafa Barzani fled to Moscow. The Barzani tribe has occasionally been considered a problem both in Iraq and Iran. After the overthrow of the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq in 1958, Abdulkarim Qasim, who was close to the USSR, came to the political power of the country and established the Republic of Iraq. After the revolution, Qasim’s government allowed Mustafa Barzani to return to Iraq, and he briefly became the active leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, an Iraqi Kurdish political movement.

Although the Kurds have lived in the same

geography throughout history, there are religious, sectarian and political divisions within them. In particular, it is impossible to reveal the sectarian and religious division of the Kurds in Iran with exact figures. According to some data, 66% of Iranian Kurds are Sunni Muslims, and 27% are Shiite Muslims. Also, about 6% are representatives of Ahli al-Haq religious doctrine. There were political and social reasons why Kurdish nationalism in Iran weakened after the fall of the beloved Kurdish state. Kurdish nationalism was seen as a threat not only by the government, but also by the landowners who owned three-quarters of the land inhabited by Iranian Kurds. In the late 1960s, the Kurdish movement gained strength again in Iran. The branch regime of Iran established close relations with the leader of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, Mustafa Barzani, and kept the activities of the Iranian Kurdish separatist movement under control. Mustafa Barzani received money, weapons and ammunition from the Shah, as well as secret information about the location and movements of Iraqi army units, and in return cooperated with the Shah against the Iranian Kurds. In other words, while the Shah supported Barzani’s official anti-Baghdad movement, with his help he crushed the Kurdish political movement in Iran . The overthrow of the Shah in Iran in 1979 provided a welcome opportunity for politically organized Kurdish nationalism. The majority of Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims. The problem of the Kurds has had a great impact on the relations between the two countries.

In 2003, as a result of the overthrow of the Ba’ath Party and Saddam Hussein’s government in Iraq, the coming to power of the Muslims of the state, who had been away from political power for a certain period of time, opened the way for the beginning of a new era in relations with Iran.

According to Iranian officials, the surest way to prevent a post-Baathist Iraq from emerging as a threat was to influence the new Iraqi administration. The support of the representatives of the Shiite sect in the new Iranian administration to be established in Baghdad should be understood in this context. In order for the new government in the new Iraq to be effective, Iran encouraged the movements associated with it to participate in the political process and tried to increase its influence

on the Iraqi people with the help of “soft power”. After the fall of the Ba'ath regime, the Shia movement's relationship with Iran has two aspects. The first is that the Shiites seek outside support against other factions in their struggle for power in Iraq. In the process of political restructuring in Iraq, the main concern of the Shiites was to gain an important place in power and to institutionalize this place. The position of the Iraqi Shiites in the Arab world is distinguished by the fact that they represent the Shiite sect.

The second aspect of the relations of the Shia political movements in Iraq with Iran is related to Iranian interests and policies. Compared to secular and nationalist groups that have a distant stance towards Iran, Islamic Shia groups are closer to Iran, and the strong position of Shias in the new geopolitics of Iraq has led Tehran's administration to focus on Iraqi Shias. The Iranian side, which mediates ideological values in accordance with its national interests, has always advocated a policy of rapprochement with Iraqi Shiites within its strategic ties and goals. As a result, it ensured the protection of Iran's interests in Iraq and changed the regional balance of power in Iraq's foreign policy.

Under Nouri al-Maliki, there was a period of change in Iraq's policy towards Iran. Nouri al-Maliki, in response to the demands of the people and the desire to consolidate his power, reached an agreement with the United States and withdrew troops from Iraq. Although this situation had a positive impact on the public, it had a negative impact on the internal stability of the country due to problems such as Shia-Sunni conflicts in the country in the following period. During his second presidency, Nouri al-Maliki wanted to strengthen ties with Iran because he did not want to lose Shiite influence in the parliament. However, this situation created a problem with the Kurds living in Iraq.

Nouri al-Maliki's assistant, Sunni Tariq al-Hashimi, was not liked by the Shiite representatives of the Maliki government, and as a result, he was sentenced to death by several serious charges. But Tariq al-Hashimi fled to northern Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, in the next period, Hashemi went to Qatar and Saudi Arabia and emphasized that the

cause of the political and economic problems in Iraq is the fanatical sectarian domestic and foreign policy of Nouri al-Maliki, and that Iraqi prisons are full of Sunni Muslims. Maliki's policy of rapprochement against Iran has not only worried Iraqi Sunni communities, but also neighboring countries in the region. Relations between Iraq and Iran have remained warm from the era of Nouri al-Maliki to the current prime minister, Mohammad Shia al-Sudani. This can be explained by the fact that political power in Iraq remains in the hands of Shiite Muslims.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be said that the relations between Iraq and Iran at the modern stage can be divided into two parts. These are divided into the period when the Baath Party was in power and the period after. The relations between Iraq and Iran are also significant due to their direct impact on the socio-political processes in the region. In Iraq, it is seen as a close regional partner for the Shia Arabs who came to power in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

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