

**ATILIM UNIVERSITY**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**  
**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MASTER'S PROGRAMME**

**AFTER 2003 IRAQI POLITICS: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCES OF IRAN  
AND THE U.S. ON THE IRAQI POLITICAL SCENE**

**Master's Thesis**

**Rand Abdurrahman Hatem AL-SAMMARRAIE**

**Ankara-2022**



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## ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

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Rand Abdurrahman Hatem Al-Sammarraie

## ÖZ

Al-Sammarraie, Rand. 2003 Sonrası Irak Siyaseti: İran ve ABD'nin Irak Siyaset Sahnesindeki Etkisinin İncelenmesi. Ankara, 2022

Bu tez, 2003 yılında ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin ardından, ABD ve İran'ın 2003 sonrasındaki Irak'a siyasi müdahalesini, bu iki devleti Irak'taki siyasi süreçte önemli aktörler olarak ele alarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. 1990 yılında, Saddam Hüseyin rejimi altında Kuveyt'in işgal edilmesi, ABD'nin Körfez bölgesindeki çıkarları için bir tehdit olarak görüldüğünden, Irak siyasi sistemindeki değişiklik ABD için çok önemli bir hale geldi. Özellikle Irak-İran savaşından sonra İran, bölgede olası bir baskın güç olan Hüseyin rejimi altındaki Irak'ı, bölgesel çıkarlarına yönelik bir tehdit olarak görmekteydi. 2003 yılında ABD liderliğindeki Irak'ın işgali, ABD'nin Irak'ta dostane ve demokratik bir siyasi sistem uygulamasına izin vermişti. Bu sistem, demokratik bir devletin temellerini inşa etmek için rasyonelliğin veya hazırlığın olmaması ile Irak devleti ve ordusunun hızlı çöküşü nedeniyle, her yönden başarısız olmuştu. Bu durum, İran tarafından uzun vadeli stratejik çıkarlarına ulaşmak amacıyla ortaya çıkarılırken, Irak'ın siyasi yapısında ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin yol açtığı kaos ve zayıflık, 2003 yılından sonra müttefik bir hükümet kurulmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu iki devletin siyasi müdahaleleri, Irak'taki siyasi sistemin unsurları içinde büyük bir açmaz olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Dış müdahalenin rolü ve etkisi, 2003 sonrası Irak'ın politik sürecinde siyasi uzlaşmaların oluşması ve taraflar arasındaki normalleşme ile kendini göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Irak, İran, ABD, Siyaset, Etki

## ABSTRACT

Al-Sammarraie, Rand. *After 2003 Iraqi Politics: Examining the Influences of Iran and the U.S. On the Iraqi Political Scene*. Ankara, 2022.

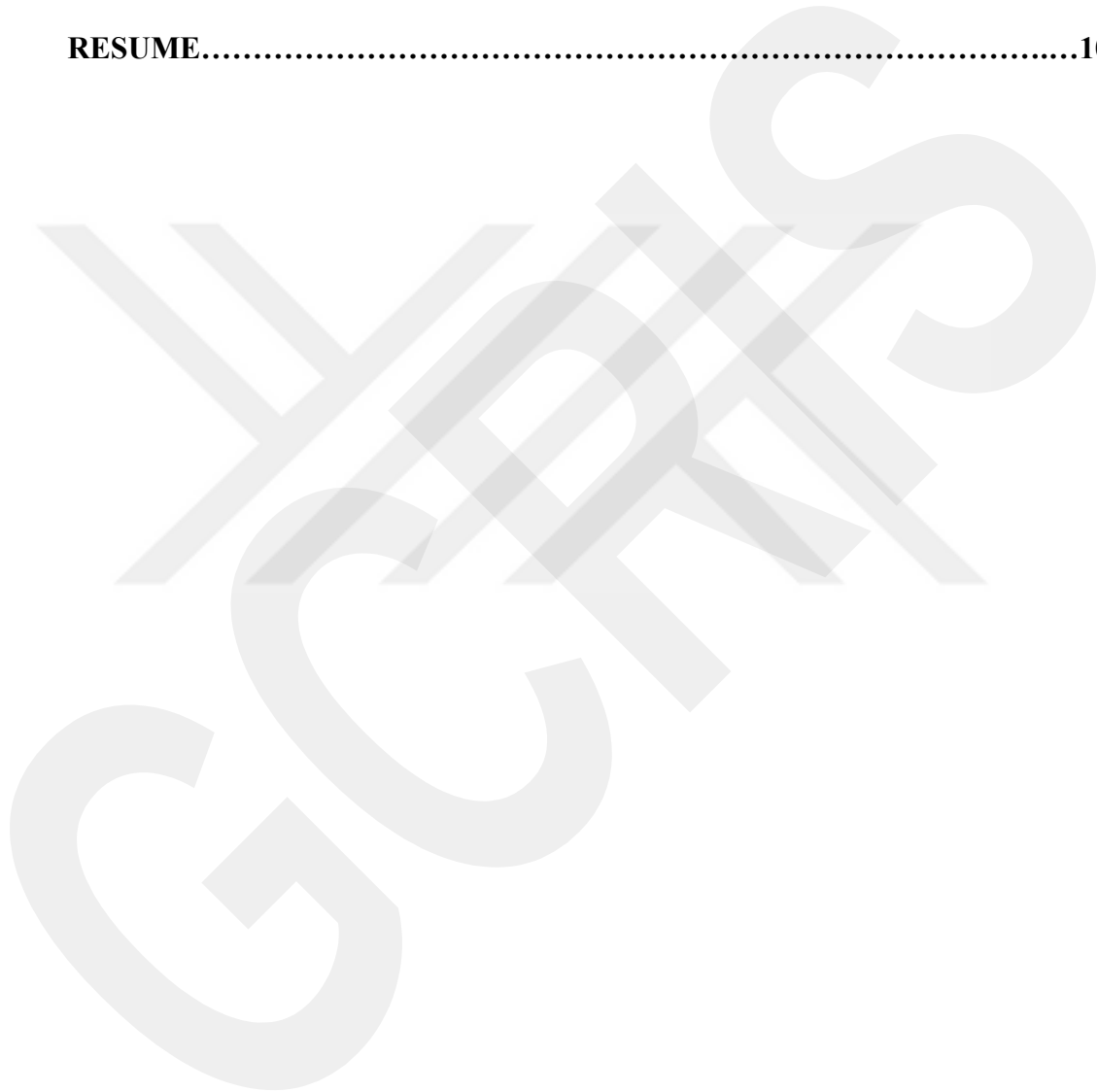
This thesis aims to analyze the political intervention in Iraq post-2003 by the U.S. and Iran. According to many political analysts, these two states are considered major actors in the political process in Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. The change in the Iraqi political system became a crucial case for the U.S., because of the invasion of Kuwait under Saddam Hussein's regime in 1990. The Kuwait invasion, in other words, could be seen as a threat to the U.S. interests in the Gulf region. On the other hand, after the Iraq-Iran war, the Islamic Republic of Iran also viewed Iraq as a threat to its regional interest in the Middle East. This war under Saddam Hussein's regime encouraged Iraq to be a potential dominant power in the region. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq allowed the U.S. to create a democratic political system in Iraq. This system was combined with failure in every aspect, due to the fast collapse of the Iraqi state, and military forces, leading to the absence of rationality or readiness for building the foremost foundations of a democratic state. Worth noting that this situation was sized by Iran to achieve its long-term strategic interest. This study discusses the chaos and weakness of the Iraqi political structure caused by the U.S.-led invasion that provides an area to implement an allied government post-2003 up to date. Besides, the political interventions by those two states are regarded as a major dilemma concerning the political system in Iraq. Thus, this thesis finds that the influence and role of the external intervention became evident in the formation of political settlements and normalization between the parties in the Iraqi political process in the post-2003 period.

**Keywords:** Iraq, Iran, U.S, Politics, Influence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The dominance of patriotism in Iraq is considered a critical case, due to the chaotic political process after the U.S-led invasion in 2003. Therefore, this leads to the fact that Iraq's political situation is always determined by other states' interests. Thus, the reasons for the interventions are also linked to the domestic policy and the ruling elites. Besides, the exposure to foreign intervention emphasized the misadventure and losses to correct the Iraqi political path towards a democratic and non-sectarian system. Several administrations and political parties ruled Iraq under the same policy during the past 18 years. Therefore, the foreign interventions had the opportunity to spread their dominance over the political process in Iraq easily. In addition, the foreign intervention's aim is more about accomplishing the interest of the intervened state and the Iraqi political elites above Iraq as a nation and people. In other words, in the post-2003 period, Iraq became an accessible arena to parade the forces between the international power and regional power. They were trying to impose their presence in Iraq. More specifically, the rivalry and conflict between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been started after the U. S invasion of Iraq. The absence of a law regulating party working for many years had resulted in a status of chaos and fragmentation in the Iraqi political scene. It is reflected in the absence of stability in the political process in Iraq.

Moreover, after declaring the Political Parties Law No (36) in 2015, the Iraqi parties' experiment was not heading toward establishing multiple forms. Due to this, it is distant from responding to the popular pressure and demands, embodied by the demonstrations that came out in most cities in central and southern Iraq to demand reforms. The renewed objects and law paragraphs were to some point compatible with the Iraqi constitution and the International Provisions and Covenants. In addition, some of the objects cannot be applicable to the reality of Iraq. Due to the matter of massive dispute about these regulations, it is modifiable in a short period after application. During the past 18 years, Iraq was in perpetual domestic conflict. Moreover, the processes of militarization were performed in several periods, starting from 2003 until 2004 and between 2006 and 2008, also between 2014 and 2017. Furthermore, the general scene in Iraq post-2003 could be seen as a time of turmoil, full of chaos, and ethnic-sectarian conflicts. Due to this, the solution in Iraq was always based on the use of military force.

Therefore, this thesis aims to study and analyze the type of the American intervention and the Iranian influence on Iraqi politics post-2003 invasion up-to-date. Furthermore, this thesis will argue to what degree the Iraqi political situation is affected by these two external influences. On the one hand, Iraq entered a new era of the political situation after the US-led invasion in 2003, causing the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime and dissolving of the Iraqi military. Since then, the political form has witnessed a major drift, and Iraq became an arena of ethnic conflicts, political experiments, political corruption, and lack of domestic security. The exposure to foreign intervention by the aforementioned states emphasized the misadventure and losses to correct the Iraqi political path toward a democratic, patriotic and non-sectarian system.

The importance of the study relies in containing the turmoil and complicity of the political process in Iraq after the US-led invasion. Iraq has entered an unending circle of foreign interventions which has shaped the entire political process. This study can be considered a useful tool to describe the situation, by analyzing the text's elements in terms of an analytical assumption. The case of foreign interventions over Iraq and its influences on the political process after 2003 took a significant presence in the political arena due to its complicity and the long period of failing governments on variable aspects.

The participated administrations and political parties in the Iraqi political process after 2003 have an obvious role in exposing Iraq to the Iranian penetration and the U.S intervention. Therefore, the significance of this thesis will also lie in examining the enormous impact of the U.S and Iranian penetration and its influence on the Iraqi political, security and state-building efforts. This thesis will contend that these two external powers have created unstable, weak, and intricate circumstances in Iraq. Thus, the central objectives of this study are revolving around explaining how Iraq is influenced by the political interests of the superpower's ideology represented by the U.S and the regional power represented by Iran.

The chaotic political situation in Iraq post-2003 has created a critical and massive turmoil in front of formatting an independent and cohesive ruling system. These crucial and critical turning points have opened the opportunity for deep penetration, leading to fragmentation and domestic political conflicts over power and interests in Iraq. Worth noting that the American involvement in Iraqi politics after

the years of invasion is due to the importance of controlling Iraq's political changes and formations with what serves the American national security. Meanwhile, describing the rapid influences and penetrations of Iran have highly increased in the post-2003 period, which is regarded to a possible threat from Iraq if it has regained its position in the region as a powerful state.

This thesis will discuss the political history of the Iraqi-American and the Iraqi-Iranian political relations during the Saddam Hussein era from 1980 to 2003. Regarding this important point, Iraqi-Iranian relations witnessed a massive deterioration during Saddam Hussein's era. As a result of several Iranian skirmishes, Iraq had responded with a wide range of overland occupations of the Iranian frontier Khuzestan province. Hence, in 1980 the two countries entered a devastating and bloody war that continued for eight years. According to many political writers and scholars, this war is considered a starting point behind the pretext or reasons for the Iranian aims and influences on Iraq post-2003. As for the Iraqi-American political relations in the first years of Saddam Hussein's ruling, there were several diplomatic contacts with the Iraqi government regarding the Iraqi-Iranian war. These diplomatic efforts by the U.S were in the favor of Iraq against Iran.

Later, there were many concerns in the U.S about the increasing power of the Iraqi regime, and the intention of occupying other neighbouring states. Moreover, after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the U.S managed to convince the international community to support liberating Kuwait. After the successful liberation of Kuwait by the U.S. and 30 allied countries, the relations between the U.S. and Iraq started shifting towards massive complexity. Later, the United States adopted the containment policy with Iraq, and forced an economic sanction through the United National Security Council on the Iraqi regime, trying to weaken its power and ascendancy in the region.

Therefore, this thesis will follow a chronological assessment to illustrate the post-2003 interventions and the consequences of Iran and the U.S over Iraq. The first chapter will discuss the modern political history related to Iraqi relations with Iran and the U.S during the Saddam Hussein era, considering this chapter as a useful tool to explain the dilemma of interventions in Iraq post-2003 by the aforementioned powers. The second chapter will present an explanatory point of view of the American military and political intervention in Iraq after the 2003 led-invasion. It

will also focus on this intervention's implications, its aim, and the implementation of a new political system under U.S. political supervision in Iraq. The third chapter will explain the type and degree of the Iranian penetration and influence inside Iraq after 2003 and will examine the shape of the Iraqi decision-making as an Iranian-affiliated one. The conclusion will present an overall assessment of the political and security consequences resulting from the intervention by the two mentioned external powers in Iraq post-2003 up-to-date. Generally speaking, the study will shed the light on Iran's exploitation of the Iraqi political chaos caused by the implemented political system by the U.S., which resulted in deep Iranian penetration, and its role in the corruption in Iraq post-2003 period.

## **CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF IRAQI, IRANIAN AND THE U.S. POLITICAL RELATIONS DURING SADDAM HUSEINS ERA**

This chapter will present the highly significant events and phases of Iraq's political history and its relations with Iran and the U.S. during the Saddam Hussein era. It will also discuss the duration of the Iraq-Iran War, taking into consideration, the U.S. role in the same war. In addition, presenting how the second Gulf war was the start of shifting the American foreign policy toward Iraq from 1990 up to the U.S-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. This chapter, however, will be important for understanding and demonstrating a distinguished period in the modern Iraqi political history. This period can be regarded as the fundamental cause for the massive transitional and transformation of the Iraqi political scene post-2003 up-to-date.

### **1.1 The Iraq-Iran War 1980-88 and The U.S. Role**

Saddam Hussein's era had begun in the late 1970s. This is an era of a dramatic and massive shift regarding Iraq's regional presence and power relating to the other states in the Middle East. The era is better to be referred to as Saddam Hussein's era. The Iraqi foreign policy and the decisions made to go through a war in 1980, and it is a favourable to be understood through a specific context (Parasiliti, 2003, p. 154). This context, however, is the policies and strategic arrangement of Saddam Hussein and its results during his period of ruling Iraq, the relations with both Iran and the United States of America. It is important to note that the Iraqi-Iranian war could be explained as a security concern over the Iraqi regime's security. And as a parade of its power and aims to conceive a larger role in the Gulf region (Parasiliti, 2003, p. 155).

The territorial, economic and human resources features of Iraq had made it a major and significant player in the Gulf region. Thus Iraq was heading towards being a dominant power in this region. In this regard, Iraq had primarily a rival state which is Iran, and from this point, the relations between those two states were heading towards many aspects of tensions and struggle (Sick, 1989, p. 231). In 1978, the Iraqi regime responded to the Iranian Shah's request to expel Khomeini due to his suspicious political activities. From Khomeini's perspective, he considered Saddam Hussein's act unambiguous evidence of empathy for the shah (Sick, 1989, p. 231). Furthermore, in 1979, Vice President Saddam Hussein was elected as the President

of Iraq after replacing Ahmed Hasan Al-Bakr. During the same period, Iran witnessed the emergence and complete control of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamist movement that managed to overthrow Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi by an unexpected coup. Khomeini had spent 13 years in Iraq in the sacred city of Najaf before he took overrule in Iran in 1979 (Yenigun & Ozcan 2005, p. 41).

Moreover, before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iraq and Iran had signed the Algiers Agreement on June 13, 1975. This Agreement included essential points about recognition of the water border in the Shatt El-Arab, and legalizing the Shah's annulment of an older treaty between these two countries. The treaty also excluded the Iraqi allegations regarding the belonging of Khuzestan and other islands in the Gulf. On the contrary, the Shah accepted to prohibit any saboteur factors from exceeding Iran's borders to Iraq. Iran had also decisively stopped aiding the Kurdish movement in Northern Iraq. After overthrowing the Shah, the Islamic Republic of Iran was not considered by Saddam Hussein's regime a threat to Iraq. Instead, the Iraqi regime had welcomed the new Iranian regime as long as it would respect the sovereignty of other states in the region (Yenigun & Ozcan 2005, p. 41).

As for Tehran, it did not share the same goodwill as Iraq. For instance, the Iranian regime started its sabotaging policy toward the Ba'ath regime to elaborate the Islamic Republic's purpose and to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic of Iran had adopted the Shah's vision of Iraq and counted Saddam Hussein as a secular regime and consider him an obstacle to spreading Islam and Iran's hegemony in the Gulf region (Karsh, 1990, p. 264.) For the majority of the Shiite population that is neighbouring Iran, and for other strategic and political reasons, Iran aims to take over the regional dominance and takes down the Ba'ath regime. However, the diplomatic relations with Iraq started heading toward collapsing after several sabotaging acts by Iran in the Iraqi lands on October 1979. During this specific period, Saddam Hussein regarded the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a non-Islamic state and a dangerous neighbour to Iraq and the Gulf region in general (Yenigun & Ozcan 2005, p. 41).

There were doubts by the Iraqi regime consisting of its Shiite population about their sectarian identity. Due to this focal point, the Iranian Islamist regime has leaned to urge the Iraqi Shiites to move against their Ba'ath secularist regime. Moreover, in the early months of 1980, there were reports about a sequence disorder

in the Iraqi southern area where the Shiite dominance was. In addition, a dramatic increase in terrorist acts was performed by the suspicious Shiite organization Al Da'wa, which had a close relationship with the Iranian Islamic regime (Dawisha, 1999, p. 557). Nonetheless, the Iraqi relations with Iran did not witness any extreme reactions until the beginning of April 1980. For instance, many bombings were made by Revolutionary Iran in different locations in Iraq. One of the bombings targeted Latif Nasif Jasim, the Minister of Culture and Information. According to the Iraqi sources, Deputy Prime Minister called Tarik Aziz was also targeted by the same terror group. On the one hand, the radio of Tehran International Service in Arabic announced that there was a clear intention to assassinate by bombs the aforementioned Iraqi officials (Nelson, 2018, p. 254).

The assassination attempt was not an isolated incident, but part of the general national struggle against imperialism and the criminal regime in power. It is not a bomb that missed its target, but part of a big explosion in Iraq these days that is bound to hit all its targets soon and uproot imperialism and that dictatorship. (Nelson, 2018, p. 254).

Therefore, the Iraqi regime had rightly linked these attempts to the Iranians-co-opposition in Iraq. Hence, the relations between Iraq and Iran took a complicated and crucial drift (Yenigun & Ozcan 2005, p. 41). Herewith, Saddam Hussein was very cautious about a crawling by the Khomeinist ideology into Iraq, which might cause disturbance and uprising against his regime. For instance, the leader of the Higher Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq Ayatollah Al-Hakim managed to escape the Iraqi lands (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 14). Nevertheless, this accident happened after characteristic responses made by Saddam Hussein such as his order to execute significant and influential Shiite cleric Imam Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir Al-Sadr in 1980 (Sick, 1989, p. 232). Hussein, moreover, deported approximately 35,000 Iraqi Shiites (also those of Iranian origin) to Iran (Dawisha, 1999, p. 557).

The Iraqi-Iranian relations witnessed fundamental changes after the transformation in the conceptions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. And in exchange, Saddam Hussein was aware of the Revolutionary regime's intentions to revert the statue-quo granted by the Algiers Agreement (Karsh, 1990, p. 264). Hence, Iraq was also considered a target for the Iranian Islamic regime since Iraq had included 60 per cent of the Shiite population. Thus, the Iranian regime was trying to use this specific point as an instrument to raise its hopes of reapplying the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

(Karsh, 1990, p. 265). Throughout these expectations, Iran would be able to succeed in stimulating the Shiite citizens in Iraq to rise against their “Demonic” regime, due to the Islamic regime’s view regarding the secularist nature of the Ba’ath regime and the last one’s opposition to the Islamic Political ruling system. Furthermore, the importance of Iraq to Iran is the existence of the holy Shiite cities such as Najaf, Kazimiyya, and Karbala. These are important and powerful instruments to strengthen and widely spread the Iranian Islamic regime (Karsh, 1990, p. 265).

By retrospection, the Iraqi regime at first was compatible with cooperating and improving relations with Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan’s government. He also was invited to Iraq. The inducer behind this cooperation is Bazargan’s retreating from the Western-aligned Central Treaty Organization (Nelson, 2018, p. 251). Nevertheless, the Iraqis lost confidence in maintaining good relations with Iran. This happened because of replacing Bzargan’s government with the Revolutionary Council, which had dominated the Iranian decision-making by the clerical group (Wright, 1980, pp. 278-279).

Herewith, Saddam Hussein’s regime was fully aware of its neighbour’s sabotaging intentions. On 17 September 1980, Iraq had clearly shown repudiation of its commitment to the 1975 treaty. In other words, it was an eminent sign of Iraq’s disapproval of the border division of the Shatt al-Arab waterway between the two countries. Therefore, Iraq demanded its full sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab. And the Iraqi regime was always refusing the Iranian meddling in Iraq’s domestic affairs (Parasiliti, 2003, p. 156). Moreover, the Iraqi Embassy in Tehran and the Iraqi Consulate in Kharamshar were exposed to assault by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and to occupy the other Iraqi Consulate located in Kermanshah. Iraq and Iran had no place for any negotiations to be held after the aforementioned incidences. Also, the aggressiveness was intensively escalated between the two countries (Wright, 1980, p. 280).

Moreover, the Iranian Chief of Staff General, Valiollah Fallahi, had declared that Iran would officially no longer admit its submissiveness to the 1975 agreement. However, Iran was immersed in its domestic politics after the Islamic Revolution. Thus, Iran ignores the hazard of rebuilding its forces and the Iranian repeated military purification, therefore the military fell into a statue of chaos. Simultaneously, in the period of post-revolution, Iran’s practices toward Iraq were

considered extremely provocative. The support of Shiite opposition in Iraq, its rhetoric interfering, and its military disorder had made it an easy target for Iraq (Sick, 1989, p. 233).

Therefore, during 1979-80, the Iraqi forces registered massive attacks on the Iranian military bases as a start of the Iraqi assault. However, it became a daily routine between Iraq and Revolutionary Iran, and the relations had reached the highest level of deterioration between the two countries and caused the start of a catastrophic war (Conge, 1996, p. 65). President Hussein had officially announced the cancellation of the 1975 treaty as a pretence of Iran's continuing assaults. The aforementioned exchange of attacks and Iran's serious assaults pushed Iraq to actualize the decision to invade Iran on September 22, 1980. It was first started by exchanging bombings across borderlines between Iraq and Iran, and the Iraqi military invaded the southwestern region (Ward, 2009, p. 249).

Hence, the Iraqi invasion came suddenly and on a large scale by an airstrike targeting the Iranian air force bases in the country (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 15). The essential Iraqi plan was classic and used ancient tactics of Mesopotamia. This plan relied on targeting the Iranian refineries and oil sources to destroy its vital roads. The aim behind this practice was to restrict the Iranian political regime. Also, these practices by the Iraqi military aimed to eliminate the Arab ethnic civilians from the battlefield in the Iranian region of Khuzistan and protect them from war casualties (Wright, 1980, p. 283).

Moreover, the Iraqi forces managed to capture many areas and border villages, which were contesting issues between the two countries. Thus, three days later, the Iraqi military attacked the shores and Iran called for additional mobilization. The Iranian forces movement, however, was too late to take measures in dealing with Saddam Hussein's decision (Ward, 2009, p. 249). The Iranian regime considered the war as forced warfare. And it caused intensive swiftness in the Iranian domestic and foreign relations. In exchange, this has made Iran enter a status of isolation. Herewith, the first weeks of the Iraqi invasion marked significant gains. The Iraqi army managed to cross Shatt Al-Arab and wade through the western and southwestern borderlines. The Iraqi army penetrated deeply within the Iranian lands and affected the country's strategic position (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 15).

In the latest months after the Iraqi invasion of Iran and many fire exchanges and military attacks between the two frontiers by air forces and tankers, the war had reached many predicaments. For instance, on December 7, 1980, Iraqi President Hussein confirmed that Iraq's initiation of its defensive strategy. Thus, he declared that the Iraqi forces were willing to preserve their place in Iran. Also, Baghdad's authority announced that it is the determinant of its war claims. The Iranian leadership, in return, insisted on resuming the battles backed by massive public support (Ward, 2009, p. 253). However, the Iranian view of the war undoubtedly characterized Saddam Hussein as a trespasser and linked his trespassing with huge imperial ambition and conspiracy over Iran. Accordingly, Khomeini's concern was focused on exporting and spreading the Islamic Revolution and the first step was the Shah's downfall (Takeyh, 2010, p. 367).

Yet, the war was described as fighting over territorial gains and advantages, and the time of the war was due to political and military opportunities. The Iraqi leadership was aiming to constrain the Iranian regime to present an official endorsement of the Iraqi power. The Iranian regime, however, decided to come against this aim which had pushed the Iraqi forces to invade Iran and restore its claims on territorial supremacy (Blaydes, 2018a, p. 90). From another perspective, Hussein's caution and persistence in expanding further in Iran were due to the support of the Iranian opposition elites in exile, who were against the Iranian Islamic Revolution. After the Shah was overthrown, Saddam Hussein was regarded as a possible ally to the exiled General Gholam Ali Oveysi and the senior army officer Pahlavi (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 14).

During the first year of the Iraqi-Iranian war, the Iranian-affiliated al-Hakim supporters started to organize their presence on the two sides' borders and were supported by the Iranian regime and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This organization was established in the early period of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 under the orders of Khomeini's clerical Revolutionary Council. Thus, in the early period of forming the IRGC, another revolutionary organization was formed which was the Mujahidin of the Islamic Revolution MIR (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 16). However, the MIR group was aiming and ready to export the Islamic Revolution from Iran abroad, but it was focusing on Iraq specifically rather than other states such as Lebanon. This was on account of its support and loyalty to

Khomeini. The formations of the aforementioned groups included members of the Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin Khalq Organization MKO (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 15). Thereafter, the Iranian IRGC and MIR Organizations established the use of the Iraqi Shiite refugees and opposition to fight against Hussein's regime during the war. Thus, the fighting was consistent on two Shiite sides. The first one is within the Iraqi military and the second was on the Iranian side. So, the defectors of Iran were exemplified in or near the Shiite-dominated territories of Iraq (Felter & Fishman, 2008c, p. 16).

While the Iraqi advance in the invading process and reached closer lines, the Iranians launched a counter-attack in the battle of Susangerd on January 1981, near Khuzestan province, and tried to recapture Ahwaz province. On September of the same year, the Iranians coerced the Iraqi forces to withdraw from Abadan, and the Iraqi military was thrust back to the western and northwestern sides by the Iranian army later on December 1981 (Malovany, 2017, p. 103). The Iranian took over its territories after approximately two years of Iraq's offensive attacks. And the occupying of Iranian territories was undeniable progress for Iran (Malovany, 2017, p. 104).

However, Saddam Hussein justified his invasion of Iran because of his cautiousness about Iran's dangerous intentions toward Iraq, as he stated earlier in 1981 "... do we have any option other than fighting this war until victory, there is no other option. If we had not fought Iran, it would have advanced and fought us inside our territory" (Razi, 1988, p. 710). Nonetheless, the Iraqi regime viewed the war with Iran in different ways. The aim in the first years was to win first by cooperating with the Iranian opposition. However, it was later scattered, and the second was a full military attack and crossing the international borderlines after the Iranians counter-attacked (Viorst, 1986, p. 351).

Herewith, the second phase of the war had ended in the favour of Iran, despite its political and strategic weakness in front of Iraq. However, the Iraqi President offered a cease-fire through several mediators. This offer came after tens of thousands were killed and injured on both sides. Furthermore, Iraq's economic loss of military equipment and supplies reached approximately a billion dollars. Nevertheless, Iran refused Saddam Hussein's offer (Amanat, 2017, p. 839). Hence, according to the clerical views and Iranian ideology, the war was fought not only for

restoring territories but was also about spreading the Islamic Revolution and fighting for the sake of Islam. Most importantly, the Iranian regime wanted to extend the Iranian role in Iraq (Takeyh, 2010, 370). According to the Iranian Revolutionary cleric Hujjat Al-Islam Sadeq Khalkhali on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1982, “We have taken the path of true Islam and our aim in defeating Saddam Hussein lies in the fact that we consider Saddam the main obstacle to the advance of Islam in the region” (Karsh, 1990, pp. 265-266).

The year 1982 marked a transitional phase for the Iranians as they reverted the war battles in their favour and moved the combat toward the Iraqi territory (Ward, 2009, p. 256). The Iranian aim was to use the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on June of the same year as a pretext to liberate Jerusalem by enter the Iraqi sacred city of Karbala. Thereafter, Iran launched its first chain of massive attacks to overcome the Iraqi defence, cutting through the Iraqi endowment between the capital and the south region. Thus, Iran was trying to bring Saddam Hussein’s regime to an end (Sick, 1989, p. 233). This, however, caused a shift in the dynamics of the fight against the Iraqi advantages and pushed Hussein to call for ending the war frequently. Moreover, between 1982 and 1983, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard started their offensive Operation Blessed Ramadan in Iraq’s second-largest and oil-rich Shiite majority city Al Basra (Ward, 2009, pp. 256-261).

The Iranian aim was consistent with capturing the city and urging the Shiite population to move against the Ba’ath regime and overthrow the Iraqi President (Ward, 2009, pp. 256-261). To reinforce the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, the leader of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) Baker al-Hakim formed the Badr Corps (initially Badr Organization) in 1983 as a long-term Iranian Proxy within Iraq (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20). However, the Iranian offensive failed in Al Basra and was successfully prevailed by the Iraqi military. The failure of this offensive can be also linked to Iran’s tendency to hit a strongly-rooted regime with the well-trained and armed Iraqi military by weakly organized forces (Ward, 2009, p. 260).

The extension of the war was due to the Iranian belief in the notion that the Iraqi regime led by Hussein cannot be trusted and he might be seeking for further attacks and insisted on the invasions of Iran. Regarding this claim, the Head of the War Propaganda Office in Iran posed the following question: “Who can assure us

that the apostate of Saddam after ending the war, will not regain its strength and attack us one more?" (Takeyh, 2010, p. 372).

Starting from 1984 to the end of 1986, the Iranian forces managed to perform an attack on the southern territory in Iraq. Although the Iraqi efforts to eject Iran's forces were intensive, this attack marked a single victory for Iran in its battles with Iraq by occupying an important Iraqi territory Al-Faw Peninsula. The Iranian attacks were resuming on the Iraqi territory, specifically to reach Al Basra city. However, the Iraqi military repulsed the attacks and caused massive losses within the Iranian lines (Malovany, 2017, p. 103).

After the contentious failing of the Iranian offensives, a few Iranian officials were demanding Khomeini for ending the war with Iraq. The Imam, however, refused to back down until the war events were turning against Iran's favour irreversibly. By the end of 1987, Iraq had been waged and attacked by its air forces towards the Iranian oil facilities (Ward, 2009, p. 276). To prevail against the Iraqi attacks, Iran responded by attacking Baghdad with the SCUD missiles. However, this attack did not cause massive damage to the targeted area. The Iraqi forces retreated from the attack by attacking Tehran and Qom cities with the same missiles in February 1988 (Ward, 2009, p. 277).

Thus, the Iraqi military had planned to begin the battle of Al-Faw liberation. The battle also was backed by a huge number of chemical weapons. Therefore, the liberation process of Al-Faw registered the fall of thousands of Iranian troops. These troops were attacked by massive Iraqi air, artillery, and chemical explosions, including spearheaded by one hundred Iraqi troops. The Iraqi attacks in early 1988 pushed the Iranian forces to leave their position on the Iraqi lands sooner. Thus, it had cost Iran the losing their 1987's gains (Ward, 2009, p. 291).

Nevertheless, after eight years of war and unlimited economic and human losses for both Iraq and Iran and after many failed attempts, the United Nations officials were seeking much effort to end the war (Cong, 1989, p. 76). Nonetheless, while the Iranian situation witnessed massive losses and a reduction in the war, the agreement of cease-fire was done by Khomeini and his supporters on July 1988. As for Hussein, ending the war with Revolutionary Iran was a clear possibility for the Iraqi President (Cong, 1989, p. 76). This possibility came after the improvement of Iraqi gains on the battlefield. On August 1988, Hussein accepted the offered cease-

fire by the United Nations after the Iraqi occupation of Iranian territories. Thus, the cease-fire was accepted after the Iraqi regime had reached its defensive aims of containing the Islamic Revolution in Iran and limiting the Iranian political threat to the Ba'ath regime. Hence, the UN Security Council actualized the containment of the war instrumentally in the same month. (Cong, 1989, p. 76).

Nevertheless, from January until May 1987, several discussions were held between the five members of the UN Security Council and the United States to initiate a new resolution for the Iraq-Iran war (Sick, 1989, p. 240). Moreover, on June of the same year, the agreement on the resolution had been announced by the five permanent members and called for a cease-fire. However, the mandatory sanctions were not included in the agreement. Afterwards, several changes were brought to the discussions between the Security Council. These changes had expanded to be shared by non-permanent members. Such rapid alterations were about forming a condition to investigate the causes of the war, which will lastly serve the Iranian serves (Sick, 1989, p. 240).

Herewith, the UN Security Council Resolution 598 initiated to end the contentious hostilities between Iran and Iraq to accept the withdrawal of all forces from both sides. And to accept the international recognition of borderlines without any deferment. The UN secretary-general had not requested any compensation from either side of the conflict, despite that the resolution demanded the UN secretary-general to investigate the responsible party of the war impartially and even though expressed its deprecation in heavy terms about the massive loss of souls and material devastation (Amanat, 2017, p. 847).

Moreover, on August 20, 1988, the cease-fire was applied and was rushed by the UN observers. And five days later, the official discussions started in Geneva adopted by the UN secretary-general (Sick, 1989, p. 241). Despite the continuing of the war, the exchange of assaults was suspended for the first time since the beginning of the war. Nevertheless, the Iraqi's postponing of ending the war caused a notifiable revers. Unlike Iraq, Iran emerged with a cooperative and conceivable role in this war. Undoubtedly, Iraq had gained more military power and experience which made Iraq a superpower in the Gulf region (Sick, 1989, p. 241).

The Iraqi gain, however, caused clear concerns by its neighbouring states, which pushed them to recover their ties with Iran. The emerged concerns towards

Iraq were because of the aspects of how Iraq would use its gained influence, military empowerment and regional power (Sick, 1989, p. 241). Simultaneously, when the Iraq-Iran war ended, President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani took the power in Iran. Clearly, unlike Khomeini's policy which aims to urge the Iraqi Shiite co-religious to Iran against Saddam's regime, Rafsanjani adopted a different foreign policy in which he preferred to remain neutral towards the Iraqi Shiite and avoid any sort of action that might defuse this neutrality stance (Willemarck, 1999, p. 216).

### **1.1.1 The U.S. role during the Iraq-Iran war**

As the Iraqi-Iranian war erupted, the U.S. influence under President Jimmy Earl Carter was limited and there were no diplomatic relations with either Baghdad or Tehran. Therefore, there were no arms supplied for each party of the war (Stern, 1994, p. 129). However, the officials in the Carter administration started to direct their interest toward a new strategic context of stability in the Gulf region and Iraq under Saddam Hussein's authority was ideal. Thus, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor asserted in April 1980 "we see no fundamental incompatibility of interest between the U.S. and Iraq" (Gigot, 1990, p. 4). This view, however, was applied in the first period of the Ronald Reagan administration. (Gigot, 1990, p. 4).

Despite the Iraqi invasion of Iraq, the U.S. viewed Iran as a massive threat if it would win the war and becomes a dominant power in the Gulf region. The U.S. kept its support for Iraq clandestine during the war with Iran, and in front of the international arena. The U.S. remained neutral toward the war parties. It is important to note that before 1967, the U.S-Iraqi relations have not existed until the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini and the American hostages' incident at the beginning of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, in which the hostages were withheld in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. This, however, turned the situation against Iran as they considered the United States the "Great Satan" (Gigot, 1990, p. 4).

On February 1982, the Reagan administration aimed to cooperate with Saddam Hussein, and the State Department excluded Iraq from the formal U.S. list as a non-supportive state for terrorist groups. This had opened the way for supporting Iraq with U.S. financial and high technology equipment according to situation variables. As a starting point, the U.S. administration was seeking to prevent an Iraqi

defeat and had blatantly launched economic, diplomatic and military means. To explain more, Iran had represented a clear threat to the United States specifically after reversing the Iraqi attack during the summer of 1982. The implications of a possible Iranian victory were expressed through sending a memo by the chair of the National Intelligence Council Harry Rowen to Geoffrey Kemp, a Senior in the National Security Council (NSC) and one of the members of the staff who were responsible for the Middle East. According to Rowen:

We may soon be faced with a situation in which a significant portion of the oil supplies to the West is heavily influenced by Iran or by political forces hostile to the West or by forces unable or uninterested in maintaining the flow of oil. (Resnick, 2019, p. 139).

Moreover, the United States started its shift in policies during the war after Iran's large offensive on Iraq in late 1982. The chances of an Iraqi defeat and possible collapse were increasing, and the U.S. interests in the Gulf region were threatened if Iran won and imposed its powerful position in the region. Thus, the neutral policy of the U.S. was sooner shaped as a tendency in Iraq's favour (Sterner, 1984, p. 129). Herewith, in 1983 the United States and Western interests were highly threatened after Iraq attacked the shipping movement and Iran's oil facilities. In return, in the case of Iraq verifying its threat, Iran warned to forbid the shipping movement in the Gulf without exception (Sterner, 1984, p. 129).

Therefore, the United States emphasized its willingness to prevent closing the Gulf and announced its total capability of using the forces located in a station near the Gulf. The United States started diplomatic efforts through its regional allies in the Gulf to stop the escalation, but the efforts had failed. And in 1984, Iraq actualized its threats and started attacking the shipping movement in the Gulf. This has pushed the United States to supply the air defence to its Arab allies in the Gulf, and the air defence was used against the Iranian aircraft (Sterner, 1984, p. 130).

The U.S. started to provide Iraq with intelligence information regarding military movements through AWACS scouting, satellites, and military support which had helped the Iraqi forces to locate the Iranian vulnerable points. Moreover, the U.S. stopped the military support and arms flow to Iran by the launch of Operation Staunch on December 1983. However, at the end of 1984, the United States made closer ties with Iraq as a response to these events (Sick, 1990, p. 239). Herewith, regarding the Iraqi regime using chemical weapons against Iran the Reagan

administration assigned Donald Rumsfeld as a special peace envoy to the Middle East and had two meetings in 1984 and 1985 with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. The goal of both meetings was to express the U.S. concern over the Iraqi use of chemical weapons in the war with Iran (Doran, 2012, p. 101). However, the State Department of the U.S. diffused the papers, showing Rumsfeld's actual aim of the visit which is to negotiate the possibility of initiating the Aqaba pipeline. The goal of constructing the pipeline is to allow the flow of Iraqi oil through the port of Aqaba in Jordan to avoid the Persian Gulf (Doran, 2012, p. 101).

Nonetheless, in 1985, the U.S-Israel efforts to free the hostages in Lebanon were translated into a clandestine weapons supply for Iran. Herewith, in late 1986, the U.S. undercover support for Iran was revealed and the doubts were arising by the Gulf States about the credibility of the United States regarding its policies with these states (Sick, 1990, p. 239). In 1987, the United States had to re-establish its relations and gain the trust of the Gulf states after a period of confusion and anarchy (Sick, 1990, p. 239). Therefore, the increase of intervention in the Iraq-Iran war was more active in the interest of Arabs and Iraq, and a suitable choice for the United States. In the same year, an Iraqi F-1 Mirage aircraft hit the American Navy frigate U.S.S. Stark is located in the Gulf (Sick, 1990, p. 239).

However, by September 1989, an Iraqi sense had figured out that the United States wanted to impose its hegemony in the Middle East region, and the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva Barzan Ibrahim Al-Tikriti had advised President Saddam Hussein about the American intention of weakening Iraq to achieve its aims in the Middle East. Herewith, Barzan wrote, "the real danger [to Iraq] is the United States and its followers, Israel, and the Americans want to control the region and we are the only obstacle in front of them" (Brands & Palkki, 2012, p. 648). And he warned that the United States wants to completely invade Iraq, and take advantage of Iraq's national debt and the low price of its oil (Brand & Palakki, 2012, p. 648).

Despite the Iraqi expectations, the United States' aid to Iraq was continued after the Iraqi-Iranian war had ended with a formal decision of cease-fire in August 1988. Nevertheless, in 1989, Iraq was eliminated from receiving loans from the international banks, but the American administration under George H. W. Bush carried on providing one billion dollars to Iraq as agricultural loans. Furthermore, the

National Security Directive initiated 26 authorized links between Washington and Baghdad (Holsti, 2011, pp. 14-15). Hence, as the directive declared,

Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer-term interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and the Middle East. The United States Government should propose economic and political incentives for Iraq to moderate its behaviour and increase its influence with Iraq (Sciolino, 1992, p. 3).

Moreover, the U.S. support, diplomatic efforts, and military training continued for Iraq against Iran during their war. For instance, in the final phase of the war and when the U.S. registered the oil ships of the Iraqi Arab allies, the U.S. launched a direct naval battle with the Iranian forces (Pillar, 2016, p. 211). The military and political intervention of the United States during the Iraqi-Iranian war was regarded as an equalizer (House, 1992, p. 24). For Iran, it meant that the Iranian efforts to export the Islamic Revolution and the goal of resuming the “Pax Irana” foreign policy, were all stopped. Herewith, the American intervention in the Gulf had generated a primary consequence for Iran. Military power that was started by the U.S cannot show its foreign policy interest, specifically towards Iraq (House, 1992, p. 24). This had resulted in the United States’ ability in containing the Iranian aim of applying the Islamic Revolution experience in Iraq and the Gulf region. As for Iraq, the American intervention assisted the Iraqi Regime to end the war through negotiation arrangements and achieving its foreign policy aims at its term which is in contrast to what Iran aimed for (House, 1992 p. 25).

The Iraqi-Iranian War caused both sides enormous loss of casualties estimated at one million deaths and over two million wounded for both parties and millions of refugees. During the war, the worldview consisted of the idea of letting the two-sided drain each other down. However, the United States took the side of Saddam Hussein’s secular regime against the Iranian clerical regime of Tehran (Masmoudi, 2015, p. 215). The war continued until the middle of 1988 and ended with the aforementioned UN resolution. However, the war had left Iraq bankrupt and in heavy debt to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. According to several historians, the Iraqi-Iranian war had played a significant role in the formation of Iraq’s history and its people as well as the region. The war’s outcome had strengthened the Iraqi military and prepared it to be more aggressive and later led Iraq to invade Kuwait in 1990 (Masmoudi, 2015, p. 216).

## **1.2 The U.S. Shift in Policy with Iraq From the Gulf War 1990-1991 Until 2003**

The new American administration under George H. W. Bush had inherited the efforts of the former Reagan administration in the context of implemented ties with Iraq. The Bush administration took the U.S. review in the Persian Gulf region. This process of wide-range review had produced the National Security Directive 26 (NCD), titled U.S. Policy toward the Persian Gulf and was finished in June 1989. And officially was signed on October 2 of the same year by President Bush (Hass & O' Sullivan, 2000, p. 55). The NCD 26 directed to conduct the formerly placed context of a limited engagement with Iraq. Also, the oil in the Persian Gulf was accessible in addition to securing the U.S. key allies in the region as a primary concern for the United States and its national security (Hass & O' Sullivan, 2000, p. 55). Thus, according to directive NCD 26, the United States is obligated to protect the aforementioned interests, and the use of the American military is available by any term. The NCD 26 had also included that the U.S. prefer to keep its normal relations with Iraq if it will serve the American interest in the Middle East and the Gulf region on long-term stability (Hass & O' Sullivan, 2000, p. 55).

Meanwhile, as the Iraq-Iran war ended, massive consequences resulted especially for Iraq. The cost of the war drained the Iraqi economy by approximately 450 billion dollars. In addition to the financial costs of the war, the Iraqi dispute over the border with Kuwait was expressed as a Kuwaiti demanding Iraq for concessions. Also, Kuwait had increased its oil production and crossed the assigned limit that is specified for it by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Council (OPEC), thus, this had increased the Kuwaiti oil overrun in the markets and affected the Iraqi oil by causing oil's price reduction in which was declined in 1990 between January and June from 20 to 14 dollars (Chitalkar & Malone, 2017).

However, on July 1990, the American Ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie held a meeting with President Hussein in Baghdad. In this famous exchange, President Hussein threatened and clearly warned his intention to invade Kuwait and Ambassador Glaspie stated:

We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflict, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. I was in the American Embassy in Kuwait during the late 1960s. The instructions we had during this period were that we should express no opinion on this issue and that the issue is not associated with America (Gigot, 1990, p. 9).

Herewith, a couple of days later, Hussein moved his military to invade Kuwait. Nevertheless, during Ambassador Glaspie's meeting with the muster of Iraqi forces at the Kuwaiti borders, President Bush sent a diplomatic cable to President Hussein (Gigot, 1990, p. 10). According to the Middle East Policy Survey Newsletter, on the one hand, the cable included a pinpoint but also a general refusal to the use of force. On the other hand, it did not refer to a specific defence by the U.S. for the sake of Kuwait's security. The cable also assured aiming for better relations (Gigot, 1990, p. 10). And to confirm the U.S. intention of not interfering in the Kuwait invasion, John Kelly stressed in front of the Congress on July 31, that the U.S. have no treaty related to protecting the Gulf states, and historically the U.S. avoided interring in what relates to border disagreements or OPEC debates. Instead, the current U.S. administration under President Bush is certainly seeking peace in the region, similarly to the former U.S. administrations (Gigot, 1990, p. 10).

On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had actualized, and the Iraqi military troops entered Kuwait within hours. One day later, the condemnation came into the picture by the UN Security Council. Simultaneously, President Bush sent the American warships and air crafts to the Gulf region to dispatch the air forces and ground troops to Saudi Arabia (Regan, 2013, p. 177). The U.S. aim behind this disposition was to prevent any possible danger from Iraq toward Saudi Arabia. In early November 1990, 230,000 American military troops moved to Saudi Arabia (Regan, 2013, p. 178). On January 1, 1991, the U.S. forces had been increased to reach 450,000 troops, which was authorized after the congressional elections and later announced by the pentagon. And the dispatching of the forces titled Operation Desert Shield was contributed also by forces from Saudi Arabia, France, Great Britain, Syria and Egypt (Regan, 2013, p. 178).

Nevertheless, Iraq was a pro-American ally in the region and the United States kept its tilt to Iraq until the first year of Bush's administration which was marked as the top of the co-obtaining policy. This policy however declined after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait as an act of protecting his interest. Hussein invaded Kuwait after he got the green light from the U.S that there would be no American response (Hurst, 2009, p. 223). But by doing so, the American hegemonic interest in the Gulf region was threatened at all levels. So, the consequences were posed as the ability of Bush's administration to respond with a war against Iraq (Hurst, 2009, p.

223). Therefore, on August 6 the UN Council announced its decision to impose an economic ban to prevent Iraq from exporting its oil and other imports excluding humanitarian support. On August 8 Iraq officially concurred with Kuwait and commanded the diplomatic commissioners to deport Kuwait (Hurst, 2009, p. 224).

Hence, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1990, Iraq faced the UN Council declaration of a naval siege also later declared on October 27 that Iraq was responsible for the war's destruction. However, alongside these sanctions, the United Nations announced the S.C. Resolution 678 which consisted of withdrawing the Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and its authorization for military intervention if Iraq refused to comply for the aforementioned resolution (Regan, 2013, p. 179). The United States Congress confirmed the action of the U.S. forces against Iraq if the former kept its forces in Kuwait after the withdrawing deadline assigned on January 15, 1991, by the UN council (Regan, 2013, p. 179).

Therefore, the United States' support for Iraq during the war with Iran had transformed later into a deployment of U.S. forces as a response to the invasion of Kuwait. The American and coalition forces estimated in 700,000 soldiers, were ready to fight against Iraq's one-million-man military (Connable, 2020, p. 7). Meanwhile, on January 9, 1991, in Geneva, a meeting was held between Iraq's Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker. This meeting along with other diplomatic moves had failed (Holsti, 2011, pp. 18-19). The pre-war meeting was considered a warning for Iraq and it had included a letter from President Bush directed to President Hussein (Terrill, 2009, p. 73). The letter which was frequently presented in the media informed the following statement:

Let me state too, that the United States will not tolerate the use of chemical or biological weapons, support of any kind of terrorist actions, or the destruction of Kuwait's oil fields and installations. The American people would demand the strongest possible response. You and your country will pay a terrible price if you order unconscionable actions of this sort (Terrill, 2009, p. 73).

Nevertheless, in the aforementioned discussion with Aziz, Baker stated that "If there is any use of weapons like that, our objective won't just be the liberation of Kuwait, but the elimination of the current Iraq regime and anyone responsible for using those weapons would be held accountable." (Terrill, 2009, p. 74). The American Secretary of State had candidly indicated that the United States would not hesitate in using chemical weapons harshly if Iraq committed so in Kuwait. Through

the Geneva meeting, the U.S. diplomatic efforts were made to demand Iraq for fully accept the UN Resolutions and a warning for Iraq about the American red lines (Terrill, 2009, p. 75). Even though Iraq had not admitted the possession of biological weapons, the threat came as an indication for the U.S. unacceptable of Iraq using neither chemical nor biological weapons in Kuwait (Terrill, 2009, p. 75).

However, on the one hand, President Hussein declared that the foreign residents could evacuate from Iraq. On the other hand, Hussein failed in responding to the demands of Washington and the UN council to withdraw the Iraqi troops from Kuwait. By January 12, 1991, the United States Congress along with the UN council authorized a military response against Iraq (Holsti, 2011, p. 19). On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1991, Operation Desert Storm was launched by the U.S. and the coalition forces numbered 35 states. During the early days of the Gulf War, the Allied forces performed a massive campaign of airstrikes, which targeted the Iraqi basic structures, aiming to defuse Baghdad's capability to support its forces in Kuwait. The attack of the U.S army also targeted the Iraqi airbases (Holsti, 2011, p. 19).

Operation Desert Storm had targeted the Iraqi infrastructures, which resulted in the death of innocent Iraqi civilians on a large scale. The war had also cost the Allied forces hundreds of casualties, and a higher number from the Iraqi military (Regan, 2013, p. 178). Herewith, instead of attacking the Iraqi forces that are occupying Kuwait, the American-led coalition performed an instant "left hook" attack on the Iraqi troops located in the west of Kuwait (Holisti, 2011, p. 20). Two days later the Iraqi troops were retreating from Kuwait and had to face the "highway of death" in which the U.S.-led coalition executed air attacks costed casualties from the Iraqi forces. Thus, the withdrawing Iraqi military was pursued 150 miles into Baghdad by the U.S., British and French troops. After four days of land operations, President Bush declared the liberation of Kuwait (Holisti, 2011, p.20).

While the allied forces were at the gates of the Iraqi Capital, the Shiites in northern Iraq and Kurds in the southern arose and rebelled against President Hussein. President Bush, however, did not present military action or any sort of intervention to assist them. This had enabled Hussein to impose his control over the two regions with military means (Gould, 1999, p. 121). It is safe to say that when the Gulf War ended, the U.S. hegemony in the Gulf region was eroding. On the one hand, Iran continued developing its nuclear program and was intolerant of the fact of American

hegemony. On the other hand, the containment policy of the U.S. toward Iraq was crashing in the aftermath period of the war (Hurst, 2009, p. 225).

Nonetheless, the victory achieved by the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War resulted in establishing the no-fly zones primarily in the southern and northern regions of Iraq. These zones were not mandated by the U.N council. Moreover, the establishment of the “safe haven” in 1991 was under the orientation of the Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. This was a support for the coalition efforts in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT (Pelletiere, 1996, p. 4). However, in the 1970s the Iraqi government offered autonomy to the Kurds in southern Iraq and was re-presented again in May 1991 by Saddam Hussein. In many ways, it was considered an effective plan. This offer was accepted in 1970 by Mullah Mustafa Barzani but later it was rejected, and he chose to go through a war with Baghdad’s government. Herewith, Masoud Barzani like his father Mullah Mustafa went through a conflict with Saddam’s government in 1991 (Pelletiere, 1996, p. 4).

Thus, the Iraqi opposition held a conference in the newly autonomous province of northern Iraq, which is considered the safest ground for the exiled politicians. This conference was held on October 1992, and it was the event that will prepare for the post-Ba’ath government (Dodge, 2018). Most significantly, this event was necessary for the northern of Iraq or so-called the Salah Al-din Principles and authority distribution. The event was attended by 234 political figures who were in exile. The Principles embodied and emphasized the power distribution according to the Iraqi population and the percentage of several entities, which objectively were Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds (Dodge, 2018).

Moreover, in 1994, the Program of “Oil for Food” was established by the UN Security Council Resolution 986. The establishment Program availed selling its oil in exchange for food and medicine supplies and other non-military aid came after Iraq's National Assembly acknowledged Kuwait's sovereignty (Holsti, 2011, p. 22). Nonetheless, the implications of the UN Council's sanctions on Iraq were enormous. Herewith, in 1996, the 60 Minutes TV news show hosted the American Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright. The interview was held by the correspondent Lesley Stahl (Blaydes, 2018b, p. 113). During the interview, Stahl presented a study showing that five hundred thousand Iraqi children had faced death because of the imposed sanctions on Iraq by the United Nations. Stahl asked in the

same interview, “that is more children than died in Hiroshima... is the price worth it?” Albright went on to reply, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price... we think the price is worth it” (Blaydes, 2018b, p. 113).

Nevertheless, Albright’s cruel statement was confronted with a wave of public anger and caused damage to her reputation internationally. Years later in 2003, Albright talked about her statement in her memoir *Madam Secretary*, and she wrote, “I must have been crazy ... as soon as I had spoken, I wished for the power to freeze time and take back those words ... nothing matters more than the lives of innocent people” (Blaydes, 2018b, p. 113).

Dealing with Iraq since the Gulf War in 1990 was considered a challenge for the American policymakers and the United Nations Security Council. The United States aimed to contain Iraq by imposing comprehensive sanctions through the UN Council (Potter, 2001, p. 43). They were trying to keep the “no-fly” zones in the south and north regions of Iraq and resenting the UN weapon inspectors. To contain Saddam Hussein’s threat toward the states in the Gulf region, the aforementioned instruments were inhabited (Potter, 2001, p. 43). Hence, according to Iraqi analysts, the imposed sanctions due to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait were seen as an “invisible war” which had largely targeted the civilians in Iraq and caused the loss of innocent lives that were estimated at hundreds of thousands (Blaydes, 2018a, p. 96).

Nevertheless, Iraq had faced the sanctions of the U.S. by an unusual weakness due to its dependency on the oil-exporting revenue by a heavy matter. Iraq, in other words, relies on trade transactions. According to some statistics, two-thirds of Iraq’s foodstuffs were dependent on imports, and the Iraqi suffering was doubled by a political contingent related to Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Blaydes, 2018a, p. 96). The implications of the September 11, 2001, attack gave permeation to the U.S. for waging what President Bush’s administration has called the “war on terrorism”. The war has resulted in eliminating the Taliban regime. Due to the regime’s refusal for delivering Bin Laden, the Saudi Arabian origin and the head responsible for the September 11 attack. According to U.S. information, Al-Qaida comprised its members from the Arab States. Sooner they were attached to radical Islamic movements around the Middle Eastern states (Hassan, 2009).

On January 2001, a discussion about the challenges to national security between President Clinton and Bush was held, and the incoming President mentioned

his list, which included Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. He also mentioned Saddam Hussein, Iraq, peace absence in the Middle East and other issues. The National Security Adviser of Clinton Condoleezza Rice and Bush's successor addressed: "You're going to spend more time during the next four years on terrorism generally and Al-Qaeda, especially than any other issue" (Holisti, 2011 p. 23). However, in its first cabinet meeting, the new U.S. President indicated that his administration's priority was to be at the gates of Baghdad instead of his father's decision of a cease-fire. Herewith, in the period between September 2001 and March 2003, the goal of changing the regime in Iraq was not only to deter its possible threat to the U.S. interest in the Gulf region but was also considered a gate for importing the American democracy means in the Middle East region (Hurst, 2009, p. 226). This will give a greater opportunity for the U.S. regional hegemonic interest to be more stable and consistent. Therefore, the members of the Bush administration shared the same view as the President himself (Hurst, 2009, p. 226).

During the Clinton administration, however, the administration was not able to present any notable evidence that the Iraqi regime possess weapons of mass destruction or biological weapons. And the weapon's allegation was used to justify the U.S. attacks (Zunes, 2001). Iraq had in the past produced and manufactured chemical and biological weapons but was not in a large capacity. Hence, the UN inspectors in Iraq indicated that Iraq was largely manufacturing chemical weapons. However, as a result of U.S. Operation Desert Fox in 1998, the UN monitoring devices were destroyed and the weapons were dismantled (Zunes, 2001).

On December 2002, Iraq announced its full compliance with the UN Resolution 687 terms and officially verified the demolition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In addition, Iraq had created a report that includes 24 American companies which had assisted Iraq in building the weapons and the American weaponry labs sent nuclear experts to Iraq (Doran, 2012, p. 102). Thus, the initial U.S. support and supplies were cited specifically and indicated to the U.S. Department of Energy, Agriculture and Defence. Before the report reached the UN Council, the United States managed to reach it and hand-delivered it with only 8,000 pages from the original 11,800 pages (Doran, 2012, p. 102).

However, the new American administration under George W. Bush had seen the regional hegemony a valuable interest. President Bush considered the previous

policies of co-obtaining leading then to containment were failing experiences for the United States. Herewith, the U.S needed a cogent reason for invading Iraq, and the events on 11 September 2001 provided that reason. In the early days of President Bush being in office, he had aimed for a fundamental regime change in Iraq (Hurst, 2009, p. 226).

Nevertheless, the Bush administration was consistent about its aims of reaching a global hegemony and building unchallengeable and inconceivable power. The 2002 West Point speech by Bush indicated the following “America has, and intends to keep, military strength beyond challenge.” (Lieberfeld, 2005, p. 3). From another point of view, President Hussein’s miscalculation of the U.S. interests was intensively shadowed (Hosmer, 2007, p.11). The internal and external reasons and motivations of the United States policy were also misleading for President Hussein. For instance, the Iraqi President failed to grasp the September 11, 2001, events, which included one of the American motives and reasons behind its attitude towards Iraq (Hosmer, 2007, p.11). Hussein’s reaction regarding the aforementioned event had shown no condemnation of the terrorist attack. The close members of Hussein believed that when he failed to do so, he lost the opportunity for decreasing the tensions between Iraq and the United States. Thus, Hussein had reinforced the U.S. claims about the connection between Iraq and Al-Qaeda (Hosmer, 2007, p.11).

In addition to the strategic target, the United States seeks to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s regime. This strategy can be seen as a U.S. effort to gain and enhance its presence and power specifically after the attacks on September 11, 2001, which might show America as a vulnerable state (Lieberfeld, 2005, p. 3). Thus, when Bush publicly announced that America’s priority is to achieve a regime change in Iraq, the U.S. would have appeared weak if the Bush administration retreated from the declaration of changing the Iraqi regime. Bush had put the U.S. reputation at the stake due to announcing the use of military and force in Iraq. The war against Iraq became clearly near, and it was due to the protection of national security, and the U.S. reputation as well (Lieberfeld, 2005, p. 3).

Moreover, a higher priority and aims were signalled for Iraq. The U.S. strategy was to replace the regime in Iraq. By contacting Saddam Hussein’s opposition in exile, the U.S. policy in Iraq has given permeation to Iraqi opposition to start its moves inside Iraq with the protection of the United States. These moves

included gathering information about war crimes, military movements and the weapon development process by Hussein's regime (Kettle, 2001). Thus, the U.S. targeted Baghdad in 2002 in what Bush's administration called self-defence against the Iraqi forces that tried to attack the U.S. aircrew. Furthermore, the allegations about the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq were to justify launching the war against Iraq by the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 (Holsti, 2011, p.7).

However, the relations between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda were not presented with any authentic evidence. Thus, this kind of connection is impossible. Al-Qaeda is a radical Islamic fundamentalist group like Khomeini's trend, and Hussein's regime is a secularist based-regime, which indicates to the two conflicted parts in the past decade. And regarding that history, Hussein is unlikely to jeopardize his security by aiding Al-Qaeda with nuclear weapons, which could be used without his control (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003, p. 52). Simultaneously, the U.S. viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran as less important than Iraq. Although, since the last decade the U.S. regarded Iran as a clear threat to America; due to Iran's continued support for Islamic and anti-Americanism movements against the U.S. policy in the Middle East region. (Maloney, 2011).

To conclude, the historical background of the political relations of Iraq with Iran and the United States during Saddam Hussein's era represents a period of variable switches. Since the Islamic Revolution took charge in Iran in 1979, the Iranian strategy started to be hostile toward Iraq to achieve its aims of affecting the domestic politics in Iraq. It was attempting to assert its presence in the region through the Islamic Revolutionary notion. That has pushed Saddam Hussein to stand against the Iranian aims with a heavy response in 1980 to maintain its presence and deter any possible threat from Iran. However, the Iraq-Iran war indeed managed to put a limit on the Iranian threats toward Iraq and the Gulf region.

Nevertheless, this chapter examined the role of the United States as an actor in this war which in the war's first years, took a neutral stance. This stance was later changed after the Iranian progress in the war against Iraq was evident, and the U.S. fears of this progress were due to the possible defeat of Iraq, which can give the Islamic Republic of Iran a strong role in the region. And it affects the oil-producing and transporting movement in the Gulf region. Therefore, the U.S. soon started to assist the Iraqi regime with strategic and intelligence aid to stop the Iranian progress

and turn over the war's results. Moreover, throughout this chapter's findings, the U.S. has also conducted a clandestine aid for Iran against Iraq, due to the American hostages' event. This, however, posed the U.S. in a position of an entrusted ally for the Gulf States.

At the end of the 1980-1988 war, with devastating ramifications on both countries, the Iraqi regime gained a specific power after the U.S. support during the war. And Iran was in a position of a weak and isolated state. Therefore, this chapter explains that Iraq has suffered huge economic problems after the war, which can explain the following events in this chapter. After Kuwait's demands for financial debt caused by the war, and exceeding the oil-producing and prices methods, Iraq had an overrated offensive towards Kuwait. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq also came after border disputes between the two countries. Throughout, Kuwait is considered a key ally of the U.S. and was protected according to a specific resolution.

Therefore, Iraq faced a massive military response from the U.S. and allied forces, in addition, to releasing UN sanctions on Iraq. These responses injured Iraq's economy and the Iraqi people directly. The reached facts in this chapter indicate that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait marks the U.S. shift in policy toward Iraq. After the Iraqi military started to withdraw from Kuwait, Iraq faced many downfalls in its political relationship with the U.S., which was marked by heavy sanctions on Iraq, and deterioration in economic, civil, and military aspects. The U.S. support for the Kurdish rebellions in the northern-Iraq region is considered a type of the U.S. rejection of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq.

Moreover, this chapter presented the roots of a variable stage of Iraq's political relations with Iran and the U.S. as a period of ups and downs. Nevertheless, the U.S. shift in policy towards Iraq witnessed a significant change between 1990 and 2003 when Iraq was viewed by the U.S. as a threat to its new growing interests in the region. Thus, the Iraqi regime was framed in that position, and then the American claims about its connection with Al-Qaida terrorist group were the beginning of the end. Therefore, through the reached elements in this chapter, the Iraqi regime was accused of both Al-Qaida connection and developing Weapons of Mass destruction, and despite the lack of evidence Iraq was soon witnessed U.S.-led invasion.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE U.S.-LED INVASION OF IRAQ IN 2003 AND AFTER: POLITICAL CHAOS UNDER U.S. SUPERVISION**

This chapter briefly discusses the first phase of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. This is followed by an explanatory overview of the nature of the U.S. military and political intervention in Iraq in the post-2003 period to the present. We begin with an explanation of the sectarian apportionment system “*Muhasassa taifia*” used in 2005. In addition to the U.S. political and military intervention associated with the above system, with presenting the essence of Iraqi political chaos. Accordingly, the ethnic-sectarian conflict in 2005 and 2007 will be examined. It also highlights the political corruption and the crisis of the Islamic State “Daish” terrorist group in Iraq in 2014 under the reign of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki from 2006 to 2014. In addition, the nature of the U.S. presence in Iraq after the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011 under the Status of Forces Agreement will be argued. Therefore, the events and practices under the following governments in the Iraqi political scene will be observed.

### **2.1 The War Against Iraq in 2003: Started with a Lie, Ended with Chaos**

While the United Nations refused to authorize military intervention in Iraq, on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2003, President Bush gives the Iraqi President Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq. After Hussein’s refusal, the war began with the attack on Baghdad with satellite-guided cruise missiles (Yenigun & Ozcan, 2005, p. 39). The valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were the scene of a decisive operation to defeat the Iraqi army and overthrow Saddam Hussein (Pirnie, et al., 2015, p. 60). The Iraqi reality faced defeats and frustrations in every aspect. The U.S-led invasion destroyed the substructures in Iraq (Mansour, 2019, p. 3). To reach Baghdad, the U.S. strategic plan was not to pass other cities (Pirnie, et al., 2015, p. 60). Therefore, when the U.S-led invasion began, the Iraqi forces were mainly deployed toward northern Iraq (Kurdistan Region) and the Iranian borders. The U.S-led airstrikes had prevented the Iraqi forces from establishing an effective defence (Pfaff, 2020).

Although the U.S-led invasion captured several Iraqi cities such as Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, and Tikrit, Iraq inclined into chaos and anarchy (Cordesman, 2003). Soon the Iraqi army was disbanded, and many state’s institutions were destroyed and bombed. This situation further complicated the political scene and the Iraqi people

needed political currents and parties that equally represented all categories of the Iraqi population (Mansour, 2019, p. 3). After the U.S. failed to discover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, another justification for the 2003 invasion emerged, namely the promoting for democracy in Iraq to be an example in the region. This argument was mainly used by the Bush administration (Mumtaz, 2010, p. 208). The Bush administration claimed that its presence in Iraq was to fight terrorism in the country. This point was widely exaggerated by linking Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) with Osama bin Ladin's Al-Qaeda organization in Afghanistan (Layne, 2009). Furthermore, Bush linked AQI to the 9/11 attacks and claimed that this was why the U.S. was in Iraq. However, Bush's claims were contradicted by the fact that AQI had only emerged after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 (Layne, 2009, p. 18).

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. was linked to the process of de-Ba'athification. The Iraqi Arab Sunnis reacted to this process with the fears that the Sunnis would be excluded from the distribution of power in Iraq after 2003. The U.S. coalition forces witnessed some attacks by Hussein's loyalties "Fedayeen Saddam", the loyalties were Arab Sunnis (Terrill, 2003, p. 11). The Shiite side was reluctant to participate in such attacks in the first year after the war. However, this is related to securing political dominance in the post-2003 period (Terrill, 2003, p. 12). However, the U.S.-led war against Iraq was seen as a violation of international law, which is undoubtedly incontrovertible law when it comes to condemning wars and aggression. Indeed, this was not applied within the American policy. This was evident when the American people elected George W. Bush for a second term as president on 2 November 2004. Bush's unjustified led-aggression against Iraq was neglected, even though he was responsible for the killing of about a hundred thousand Iraqi civilians in the same time of the U.S. presidential election (Karmer, et al., 2005, p. 52).

As for the fate of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. forces captured Hussein and other members of the former Ba'athist regime in December 2003, almost nine months after the U.S.-led occupation and overthrow of the Ba'ath regime. In addition, the Coalition Provisional Authority established the Iraqi Special Tribunal (IST) in early 2004 (Yildiz, 2012, p. 45). Thus, the Iraqi IST is a creation of the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and was established and mediated by the United States during the unauthorized occupation of Iraq. It is trivial that in the case of a such trial, the need

for an independent judiciary is a must. However, this is also related to the right to self-defence and a prior presumption of innocence (Sebastian, 2006, p. 5311).

At the same time, during Hussein's trial, the three top judges of the trial were removed when they reached a critical point in the trial. The removal of these judges was pushed by an outside political pressure, and as the judges dealt with issues in the court that displeased the ruling foundations. In addition, Hussein's four defence lawyers were later abducted, tortured, and murdered. The court staff and their families faced the same fate of Hussein's lawyers (Sebastian, 2006, pp. 5311-5312). Later, on 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, the death sentence of Saddam Hussein by hanging was announced and carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> of December in the same year (Yildiz, 2012, p. 46).

## **2.2 The Sectarian Apportionment System “*Muhasasa Taifia*” 2005**

The rapid collapse of the Iraqi regime forced the American officials to prepare for a quick transitional government (Bensahl, et al, 2008). In early April 2003, the Bush administration announced plans and meetings to establish the potential Iraqi leaders to discuss Iraq's political future. In the presence of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, announced on 11 April of the same year that the political transformation of Iraq would be led by U.S. and British forces. Moreover, Wolfowitz said that the interim authority would consist of a representative council and a minimal executive committee, and the UN Council would play a small but important role in this process (Bensahl, et al, 2008). However, if the opposition is elected as the essential government in post-2003 Iraq, it will be accepted by the United States (Marr, 2003, p. 14). The alternative Iraqi leadership was already existed outside Iraq. And for more than a decade, the opposition community operated in exile in the Middle East, mainly in Iran, Europe, and the United States. Within this opposition, different groups held different views about the future of Iraq and avoided uniting under one leader or leadership (Marr, 2003, p. 14).

Subsequently, the sectarian apportionment “*Muhasasa Taifia*” was developed mainly by the opposition in exile in 1990. And the Iraqi political scene of the post-Saddam Hussein period was enforced among the 234 members of the Iraqi opposition (Dodge, 2018). Thus, it first reached the highest level of the coherent

decision to form the post-Ba'ath government, which will be on the principle of confessional distribution of authority (Dodge, 2018). Nevertheless, the essential U.S. political plan in Iraq in the post-invasion period was based on the installation of six exiled opposition leaders alongside Kurdish groups that were already working closely with the United States. Thus, the US Department of Defense considered these groups the leaders of Iraq in the post-2003 government (Mumtaz, 2010, p. 211).

Hence, the apportionment system is considered the main cause of the failure of the political scene in Iraq after 2003. The design of this system aimed to establish an ethnic-sectarian distribution of power and representation, and the political offices are also allocated through partition and according to the demographic composition of Iraq (Haddad, 2020, pp. 74-75). However, except for the two Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Jalal Talabani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Mesud Barzani, public acceptance of the other opposition groups in Iraq was not clear (Marr, 2003, p. 15).

Therefore, the leadership of Iraqi groups counted one hundred split groups after 2003. These groups came together under the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and were mainly funded, incited, and supported by the United States and the United Kingdom governments. (Naidu, 2003, p. 3). The INC was led by Ahmed Chalabi who was well known among the Western-exile opposition elite. Thus, the INC included the main Kurdish parties, PUK and KDP, as well as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) party whose leadership is known and supported by militia forces (Badr Brigade). The formation of this group was mainly driven by Iran. (Marr, 2003, p. 17). However, the conflicts between these groups over leadership started immediately after 2003 (Naidu, 2003, p. 4). Moreover, this government was designated by the U.S. as the Iraqi Interim Authority (IIA) to draft a new constitution and hold early elections in a few months. The time-frame was set by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and supported by Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Collin Powell, Secretary of State (Mumtaz, 2010, p. 211).

Thereafter, President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld confirm that the government and constitution designed in Iraq will be in the hands of Iraqis. The U.S., however, contradicted its words and declared that Iraq cannot be governed by an Islamic theocracy (Naidu, 2003, p. 5). Therefore, the occupiers conducted another political map to serve a long-term engagement between the U.S. and Iraq. This map

will be led by Ambassador Paul Bremer assigned as the head of the newly-formed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). So, the elections were postponed to be far in the future. Therefore, the IIA instalment was abandoned (Mumtaz, 2010, p. 212). The distribution of authority and resources in Iraq, however, is emphasized by the U.S. to be distributed according to regional and ethnic bases and by group quotas or sectarian “taifia” bases (Natali, 2010, p.75). Nevertheless, the chaos and violence were the primary features of the post-2003 period in Iraq. The Iraqi people were in a continuing fear of their country’s direction in the future, while the law, order, and essential services were collapsing day after another and rapidly (Hashim, 2006, p. 17).

Hence, after the approbation of Iraq’s new constitution, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2005, the general elections in Iraq were held to elect the members of the INA which consist of 275 candidates (Yildiz, 2012, p. 46). The major seats went to the Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) which is a Shiite dominant party with 128 seats out of the total 275 seats. Whereas the Kurdish Alliance came the second with 54 seats, and the predominant Sunni party Iraqi Accord Front with 44 seats and the secular party of Iraqi List headed by Iyad Allawi came with the lowest of 25 seats. (Yildiz, 2012, p. 46). However, it is essential to signify that parties have enrolled in the political process after 2003—starting from the (ISCI) Shiite party headed by Abdul Azizi Al-Hakim (Rubin, 2009, pp. 1-2). This party with its historical affiliation to Iran managed to walk the road ahead to elections, bringing into coalition several organizations with the same notion and association such as the Badr Organization and the Gathering for the Sake of Iraq (GSI) (Rubin, 2009, p. 3).

Nevertheless, the elections were held in a condition of extreme violence. Due to this, it was not surely considered a fair and free election (Yildiz, 2012, p. 46). However, the Kurdistan-semi state was the primary benefit of the new Iraqi constitution of 2005 and used it as a guiding template alongside its specific parliamentary committee. The Kurdish political elites redrafted their regional constitution which was based on general principles of freedom in civic, political, and culture (Natali, 2010, p. 77). Thus, in March 2004, the Iraqi Administration signed the Transitional Law (TAL). And the Iraqi constitution of 2005 authorized the recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a separate political entity (Natali, 2010, p. 77).

Therefore, the political process in Iraq after the U.S-led invasion in 2003 was established based on imbalanced power distribution. However, on a false constitutional basis and structure: this had allowed for the political, international, and regional powers to use legal and illegal mechanisms permanently (Herbert, 2018). Notably, the mechanisms were used to change the balance of power to the interest of political elites. Nevertheless, the previously-exiled Shiite politicians established sectarian enmity in post-2003 Iraq by conducting a religious path and networks such as the grand Shiite cleric in Iraq Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to mobilize additional support and power in their favour (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 569).

Those new elites also used governmental or opposition-based tools regarding their conflict over political, economic, and social ascendancy and interests in Iraq. Thus, the government in Iraq is formed in a sectarian shape; that is why the political process took other directions instead of the essence of democratic-based mechanisms (Herbert, 2018). However, the new Iraqi government that is formed by the Iraqi opposition was combined with many leaders who were not simply Iraqi Shiite and Iraqi Kurds, rather, they were holders of the aforementioned notions (Haddad, 2016, p. 16).

Since 2005, authority was distributed in a specific order, the presidency for the Kurdish representation, the Government Presidency was given to Shiites, and the Parliament Presidency was given to Sunnis (Mansour, 2019, p. 2). As for minorities, they were represented in the Council of Representatives of Iraq by deputies. Furthermore, the Shiite Islamist groups are represented under the name of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), headed by Ammar al-Hakim (Mansour, 2019, p. 3). However, Kurdish nationalist groups, united under the Kurdistan Alliance. As for Sunni groups, they had faced inside divisions and fragmented political situations, separations, interest disputes, and the lack of central authority or institutional political representation. (Mansour, 2019, p. 5).

The government building after the 2003 period was based on empowering the political elites and their parties. Significantly, the Islamic Shiite's principles increased the sectarian attitude and rivalry between the political elites over authority. Thus, this also included dividing and shaping the institutions in the country, rewarding cabinets throughout ethnic-sectarian tendencies (Dodge, 2018). In this quota system, "*muhasas taifia*" it has given the parties a permeation to access the

country's economy and employment market, in addition to settlements of the international trading. Indeed, it was performed and accepted to increase the benefits of the parties and political characters in Iraq, and distribute the profits in a highly sectarian-based form (Dodge, 2018).

Herewith, despite the claimed tension, the Iraqi and American leaders and low-ranked Iraqi officials established trust and interest-based relations. Throughout, an obvious interest-based bond was created in the post-2003 period, which indeed made the controlling of the political process by the U.S. more possible in Iraq (Benim, 2009). Herewith, in 2006, the UIA suggested nominating their candidate Ibrahim Al Jaafari to be the Prime Minister. However, Nuori Al Maliki the deputy leader of the Dawa Party and politician within UIA was granted to be the Iraqi Prime Minister on 22 April 2006. And the installations of Al-Maliki were due to the calls of Sunni and Kurdish opposition to remove Al Jaafari in the same month (Yildiz, 2012, p. 47). Nevertheless, the Sadr Movement was one of the parties within the UIA that opposed the inclusion of all large political parties to form the new Iraqi government (Yildiz, 2012, p. 47). Thus, the Sadr Movement was particularly criticizing the roll-up of Allawi's party in the new government. This criticism emerged because of Allawi's former involvement in the Ba'ath Party in 1975 (Yildiz, 2012, p. 47).

Herewith, the new Iraq was heading towards a political reality based on notions of oppressed Sunnis and victimized Shiite and Kurdish nationalism. The responsible for this reality is largely both the American policymakers and their introductory Iraqi opposition (Haddad, 2016). Therefore, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2006, the Iraqi National Dialog Front decided not to participate in the formation of the government and declared that it was deeply sectarian (Yildiz, 2012, p. 47). Throughout, an undeniable interest-based bond was created in post-2003 period which indeed made the controlling of the political scene by the U.S. in Iraq more possible. And President Bush was punctual about maintaining a close relationship with the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki (Benim, 2009).

Hence, the U.S. administration was always trying to succeed in several aspects of the Iraqi internal issues such as political and economic success (Barro, 2004). The U.S. efforts needed good allies in Iraq, and this can be hard when the terrorism and inside divisions are the controlling element of the political scene.

Therefore, intervening too deeply in Iraq can cause multiple issues and losses to the U.S, specifically concerning the economic dimension (Barro, 2004).

Moreover, the U.S. policy towards Iraq presented an obvious connection between sectarianism and ethnic-sectarianism by the Iraqi opposition, and the American awareness of it and their interests in Iraq (Haddad, 2016). As a response to the U.S. pressure, Al-Maliki's policies were calculated to unify his power. Hence, in mid-2006, Al-Maliki presented a 24 plan which is an initiative aimed to recombine the disenfranchised Sunnis into the political arena (Gerges, 2016, p. 103). In addition, Al-Maliki visited the Gulf states to gain support and announced a clemency order for the insurgencies that surrendered and reconsider the de-Ba'athification process. However, despite this initiative's claims, it did neither serve the Iraqi's hopes nor connected the divided groups (Gerges, 2016, p. 104).

Herewith, in August 2006, a series of basic fundamentals were agreed on by the U.S. administration and the new Iraqi government of Al-Maliki. The fundamentals were about reinforcements regarding the implementations of economic and political laws, and Iraqi police forces (Yildiz, 2012, p. 54). Thus, by the end of 2006, the idea of the "80 percent plan" emerged in Washington. The idea was a U.S. leaning toward the interests of Shiite and Kurds by rejecting the possibility of normalization with the Arab Sunnis. This, however, was structured on a completely false basis to support the ideas of the Iraqi constitution, which held a consensus by the Kurds and Shiites (Visser, 2007, p. 88). As for the government ministries, they were distributed to several parties of the exiled members after the de-Ba'athification process (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 570). However, the success of the aforementioned fundamentals between the U.S. and Al-Maliki could have been a step toward a political normalization. Instead, Al-Maliki faced an intense rise in the insurgency, and the rate soon increased in 2007. Therefore, the failure of the American mission in Iraq was intuition by many experts (Yildiz, 2012, p. 43).

Nonetheless, the period marked as a Sunni engagement, was by the establishment of the Sunni Awakening forces or Al-Sahwah at the end of 2007 and was dissolved in 2010. Fighting Al-Qaeda (AQI) and the Islamic State in Iraq ISI in Iraq was in the time of the "awakening" and marginalizing of the Sunni tribes with the support of the U.S. forces and its allies. (Mansour, 2016, p. 5). The Sunni insurgency was split between Jihadists and the Iraqi moderated tribal which later

formed a cooperation with the U.S. under Al-Sahwa to fight the Jihadists (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 570). This helped to fill the political vacuum which occurred due to the mistreatment at the time of the civil war by the central government under Nouri Al-Maliki's first term as a Prime Minister (Mansour, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, the Awakening Forces formed the essential instrument to fight AQI from 2007 to 2008. The U.S. strategy with Al-Sahwa managed to clear the Iraqi cities of Ramadi and Fallujah from the grip of AQI and ISI (Gerges, 2016, p. 104).

Herewith, at the beginning of 2007, there were claims about a hesitation by the Bush administration regarding the support for national normalization concerns like the de-Ba'atification issue. This, however, was due to the assumption of the possible "Shiite reaction" which might affect negatively on the already needed establishment of a U.S-Shiite alliance (Visser, 2007, p. 89). Moreover, the post-2003 growing corruption and failure in several aspects by the political elites failed to move the Iraqi situation to a better place and did not escape from the same war legacies of the Ba'ath regime. This also includes the conflicts between political parties, elites, and inter-sectarian divisions, in addition to the large-scale corruption (Geges, 2016).

The sectarian-based politics in Iraq and the notions that underpin the system of the sectarian apportionment principles in Iraq formed a sealed mechanism that repeats the same cycle of political elites despite their performance (Al-Shadeedi, van Veen, 2020, p. 14). For example, even though the crisis of ISIS emerged during Al-Maliki's government as a Prime Minister, he managed to hold the office as a vice president of Iraq in 2018, in addition to the former chairman of Basra provisional council Sabah al-Bazuni who faced charges of corruption, but he is still in the public office (Al-Shadeedi, van Veen, 2020, p. 15). The inherited major challenges of Saddam Hussein's era were strengthened by the post-2003 conflicts and failing reconstructing plans. Specifically, Al-Maliki's sectarian exclusion led Iraq to a further abyss (Gerges, 2016, p. 105). To further add, the sectarian apportionment system "*muhasasa taifiya*" is also a party apportionment "*muhasasa hizbiya*". These overlapping characteristics were formed to serve the rivalry between the competing parties and political figures in the post-2003, inter-sectarian conflicts, and divisions (Haddad, 2020, p. 71).

Furthermore, the system of power-sharing and distribution which is dependent on the conventional quota is established in a country that is 93 percent of

its revenues is dependent on oil-export. This, however, means that the resources are also distributed under the bases of the sectarian apportionment system (Jabar, 2018, p. 7). In addition to this fact, most of the Iraqi leaders in the post-2003 period lacked any democratic experience. This, therefore, was obvious in the gap that emerged in the nascent democracy in post-2003 Iraq. This gap was between the installed model of claimed democratic path, and the actual practices and notions of the Iraqi political leaders (van Veen, al-Shadeedi, 2020, p. 32).

### **2.2.1 Sectarian civil war in Iraq 2005-2007: the first sign of catastrophe**

As the U.S. dissolved the Iraq army immediately after the invasion, it tended to replace it with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) as the new Iraqi military. However, this renewed the security imbalance in Iraq also the ISF was created by ethnic units which are mainly the Kurds and Shiites (Barak, 2007, p. 463). Nevertheless, the development of insurgency in Iraq was enhanced by mistakes that were made by the U.S-led coalition, specifically by neglecting the huge ramifications in the period of post-Saddam Hussein. Which is a period when Iraq needed to be secured, rebuild, and stabilized (Yildiz, 2012, p. 43).

Therefore, the tries of rebuilding the Iraqi forces were weakly planned and the difficulties were unseen. These factors contributed massively to the absence of law in too many parts of the Iraqi state (Barak, 2007, p. 463). Thereafter, the deterioration of security in Iraq was increased: the Sunni complaints came to the roof as insurgency, and the Shiite militias were spreading through the country (Barak, 2007, p. 464). The U.S. confessed its fallout decision of dissolving the military, and the former Iraqi soldiers were recruited into the ISF. The salaries were continued and later included former Ba'athists. Thus, the ISF was conducted on 60 percent of former Ba'athist soldiers (Barak, 2007, p.467).

Herewith, in the summer of 2004, the Mahdi Army headed by Muqtada Al-Sadr emerged among other Shiite resistance groups that claimed to be against the U.S. presence in Iraq. Al-Sadr managed within a few weeks to mobilize over ten thousand young men which were derived from southern cities of Iraq and Al-Sadr city formerly named (Al-Thawra) in Baghdad. The mobilization mainly dragged the indigent ones (Kaldor, 2006, p. 10). In addition to including other insurgencies that adopted many attacks on Iraqi citizens (Yildiz, 2012, p. 45).

The first government was headed by the Shiite politician Ibrahim Jaffari in 2005. This formed a reason for the escalation of communal relations. The Sunnis were massively blown as their worst fears of Shiite dominance came to the surface (Hahim, 2007). Therefore, the ethnic-sectarian war started across Iraq, specifically in Baghdad. It began with the AQI bombings in the Shiite areas and mosques, specifically the Askri Mosque in Samarra city on 22, February 2006. As a response, the Mahdi Army and the militias of the Sadr Movement launched its death groups which were moved to perform assassinations of Sunnis and depart them from the Shiite areas (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 571). After several days of the mosque bombing in Samarra, the Sunnis were exposed to systematic killing which was approximately reached 1,300 people according to media sources. In addition to attacking one hundred Sunni mosques by Shiite militia (Zakheim, et al., 2019, p. 166). Soon, this has enhanced the emergence of one of the hugest security threats in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq “Dawlat Al Iraq Al Islamiya” 2006. The organization included the AQI headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi a Jordanian militant (Hashim, 2007, p. 47).

Herewith, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March of the same year, the Shiite neighbourhoods in Baghdad witnessed a series of car bombings reached to six bombings, causing the death of 50 people and 200 injuries. The bombing was adopted by AQI (Zakheim et al., 2019, pp. 166-167). Moreover, in the same period, the escalation of suicidal bombings was increased, reaching 442 bombings in Iraq and causing approximately 24,000 civilian casualties. On August 14, 2007, a coordinated suicidal attack conducted by four, occurred in the northern towns resulting in 796 civilian casualties (Yildiz, 2012, p. 49). The year 2007 is considered the summit of the civil war, and in its latest months, the number of casualties was decreased. Despite this fact, however, the insurgences and militias became undoubtedly a consistent characteristic of Iraq in the post-2003 period. Therefore, the need for a counterinsurgency plan is an urgent need to proceed with any further resolution (Yildiz, 2012, pp. 49-50).

### **2.2.2 Nouri al-Maliki 2006-2014: U.S. withdrawal, start of corruption, ISIS crisis**

In late 2006, a debate over the future of the U.S. strategy in Iraq was at crossroads. A timetable for withdrawing was pressed by the Democrats in the Congress, while a split regarding the way forward was in the Bush administration (Watts, et al., 2021). However, the political situation in Iraq enhanced the strategic

and political need of the U.S. to take the role of supporting instead of leading. The movement of the American military within Iraq is now precluded according to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The agreement, thus, set forth that all of the U.S. military operations be performed by the permitting and coordinated with the Iraqi government (Nagl & Barton, 2009, p. 3). In addition, the U.S. forces will depart to unified bases and evacuate the Iraqi population places from any military presence (Nagl & Barton, 2009, p. 3).

The new government of post-2003 Iraq under Nouri Al-Maliki in 2006 could not enhance institutionalization. Al-Maliki was unable to direct his cabinet which was divided between the rival parties that were demanding their part of the spoils. The clandestine divisions of the high-ranked powers between the president, prime minister, cabinet, and parliament, were the essence of the resuming conflicts overpower (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 571). Moreover, in 2007, Al-Maliki was aiming to engross the aforementioned Sunni Awakening Forces in the Shiite majority areas, specifically in southern Iraq by forming the supportive councils or “Isnad” (Gerges, 2016, p. 105). By establishing these supportive councils, Al-Maliki would be able to fight the Shiite opponent’s militias and counter the political influence of his rivals, such as the ISCI (Gerges, 2016, p. 105). Nonetheless, Nouri Al-Maliki was moving forward to consolidate his political power. On January 31, 2009, such moves were reinforced by replacing 14 out of 18 local councils in Iraq, except for the three cities of the Kurdistan Region, due to its separate governing (Yildiz, 2012, p. 46).

Simultaneously, Al-Maliki managed to place himself as the commander in chief of the Iraqi army, this was through a doubtful constitutional base (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 571). In addition, the Isnad forces were financed by Al-Maliki himself and their loyalty was only to him. Al-Maliki was continually hostile to the possible growth of the Sunni political legitimacy which in his opinion might form get stronger with the growth of its forces (Gerges, 2016, p. 106). Therefore, the Iraqi army of 650,000 men became under the Nouri Al-Maliki’s feudalism command and a tool to increase his power and repress the political Sunni rivals (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 572). Thus, his supporters have entered the agencies and parliament and also became regional military commanders by delivering the ministry of defence headed by Sunnis to them (Hinnebusch, 2016, 572).

Furthermore, the ruling Supreme Court in Iraq suggested changing the electoral rule to be suitable for the provisions of the 2005 constitution. The law was passed by the end of 2009 and on March 7, 2010, the parliamentary elections were held (Yildiz, 2012, p. 51). The elections were set to choose the members of representative of Iraq conducted of 325 members, which will elect the Iraqi President and Prime Minister. However, a ban emerged on over a hundred candidates to prevent them from participating in the elections with the U.S. support of this decision, and heavy criticisms came out. The justification for the ban was due to allegations about a connection between those members and the Baath Party (Yildiz, 2012, p. 54).

In the first term of Al-Maliki (2006-2010), he declared the name of his electoral bloc “State of Law”. Al-Maliki started targeting the paramilitaries that were related to Muqtada al-Sadr, the AQI, and Mahdi Army. However, Al-Maliki aimed to include other paramilitaries in Iraq’s Interior Ministry such as the Badr Organization with the support of the U.S. forces in Iraq (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 4). To elaborate more, the tensions increased between the Al-Maliki government and Mahdi Army. And Al-Maliki launched an operation against the Sadr Movement in Basra titled “Charge of the Knights” or “Saulat al-Fursan” (Gerges, 2016, p. 106). The city witnessed severe conflict and ended after a period of cease-fire imposed by Iran in March, and Muqtada al-Sadr approved to withdraw his militia from the streets (Gerges, 2016, p. 107).

Moreover, between 2006 and 2009, Iraq took third place out of the four worst countries in the world regarding corruption. This, however, was due to the system of power building, which was based on a patronage rivalry between the politicians to establish networks of clients, and this was based on the misappropriated funds by the U.S. and Iraq (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 570). Hence, the official’s prosecution for corruption was highly impossible, due to the veto in the ministries regarding investigations. Thus, the corrupted politicians were guarded by their armed militia (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 571). In addition, the election was suspicious, as claims were emerging regarding the prior planning of Nouri Al-Maliki for the elections. One of the claims for example was by the INA, which accused Al-Maliki of misusing his authority and power as a prime minister. The misuse was by supplying the tribal

leaders a free government land property, and farms to gain their votes (Yildiz, 2012, p. 47).

Despite the loss of the State of Law under Al-Maliki in front of al-Iraqiyya, Al-Maliki gained secret support from Iran to continue his government building (Mansour, & Jabar, 2017, p. 5). Herewith, during the elections of 2010, the Al-Maliki government was also accused by the Islah Party of Ibrahim AL Jaafari of fabricating 800,000 votes in Al-Maliki's favour, in addition to other accusations by political leaders of a results manipulations by Al-Maliki in other areas of the state (Yildiz, 2012, p. 48). Moreover, Iraq was handled by Al-Maliki by the Freedom House, even though the elections were claimed to be free. It was framed under the category of the opposite, and the "civil liberties" were more like the one in Iran (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 570). Furthermore, the authority of the Iraqi parliament was hampered by a proclaimed ruling that prevented it from any right to present legislation. This was achieved in 2010 with the assistance of the co-arranged Higher Judicial Council (Gerges, 2016, p. 110).

Hence, Iraq reached a stage where the effort to develop is cumbered by security challenges and weak governance (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 39). Therefore, the demonstration started in Iraq in March 2011, as an inspiration from the Arab Uprising. The Iraqi people protested, demanding reform near the governmental Green Zone which was a centre of the U.S. occupation and was secured for the Iraqi political elites (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 570). The Iraqi population had its share of Al-Maliki authoritarianism. As soon as the demonstrations spread across the country, Al-Maliki suppressed them with security services (Gerges, 2016, p. 112). Hence, the Iraqi demonstrators were raging due to the weak infrastructure and the absence of power supplies since 2003, despite the major amount of money spent on it (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 571).

Therefore, the violations of human rights were apparent in the government's practices against prisoners of the aforementioned demonstration, and 129 people were executed, with the highlighting of the human rights organizations. Al-Maliki government tortured prisoners for a claimed "confessions" (Gerges, 2016, p. 113). Thus, Al-Maliki established a spurious hybrid regime, authoritarian elections, and neo-patrimonialism that is deeply fragmented (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 572). Nevertheless, the claims about the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq might push for an

increase in Iranian power within the Gulf region. This can be a true claim but also a misleading one (Layne, 2009, p. 19).

However, a wide agreement spread among foreign policy experts about the fact that Iran is the biggest benefit in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. With the invasion of Iraq and the changing of the entire Iraqi regime and political structure in the country, the Bush administration made the Iranian power expand within Iraq and the region (Layne, 2009, p. 19). A proposal in the aforementioned agreement included a demand to keep a specific amount of U.S. troops in Iraq after withdrawing in 2011. The aim of this proposal was to prevent domestic security threats and also to maintain American influence on military decisions (Renahan, 2017, p. 404). After the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011 under Nouri Al-Maliki's supremacy, the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) kept its partnership with the American advisors which resulted in a successful offensive against ISIS "Da'ash" (Pfaff, 2020, p. xii).

Moreover, on January 2011, an issue by Chief Justice Medhat Al-Mahmoud consisted of the expansion of Al-Maliki's control over the remaining institutions in Iraq. This included the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), the central bank, and the Committee of Integrity (Gerges, 2016, p. 114). Deliberately, the political structure was filled with several domestic rivalries, and each entity or ethnic group tried to gain positions based on either the public concession or the number of armed forces such as the militias (Dodge, 2018). Hence, in 2012, billions of dollars were not registered in the 2012 budget according to a parliament member. Also, there was nothing to explain where the money was spent, and many lawmakers expressed that the funds were for supporting paramilitary (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the issue of corruption was the dominant one. The estimation of the U.S. Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction declared that in 2013, 40 percent of the reconstruction projects were inefficient. This includes overcharging by virtual projects, unaccounted expenses, fraud, and profligate (Alaaldin, 2017, p. 7). Therefore, the second term of Al-Maliki from 2010 to 2014 proved that failure in preventing divisions in Sunni-Shiite relations failed regarding the inter-sectarian dynamics. In addition, the hopes of a better political situation faded during the debatable elections of 2010, but Nouri Al-Maliki lost his effect and kept his power (Haddad, 2020, p. 72).

Furthermore, on June 2014, the Iraqi city of Mosul fell into the ISI aggression. This had reactivated ISI and grew to become the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ISIS (Gerges, 2016, p. 115). The deriving reason behind the emergence of ISIS was the domestic politics, which also led to the emergence of paramilitary groups and the failure of the state-building (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6). In addition, the fuel for the rise of ISIS “Daesh” was due to the increasing sectarianism and authoritarianism of Al-Maliki, his affiliation to Iran, his shortsightedness, his incapability of countering corruption and being part of it (Gerges, 2016, p. 116).

Moreover, in the period before the war with ISIS, corruption played a major impact on Iraq comprehensively, specifically on the security efforts, justice system, and economy (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 36). However, this had also caused the shocking withdrawal of the Iraqi Army in front of ISIS attacks in Mosul in June 2014 (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 6). Hence, the initial reason behind the weak performance of the Iraqi Security Forces was the weak administration, the synapse in the chains of command and the limitations in the strategic command, and the weak capabilities of intelligence (Pfaff, 2020, p. 65).

Simultaneously, as ISIS emerged in June 2014 and the Iraqi forces withdrew, Al-Maliki signed an official order for the establishment of the commission for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) “Hay’at al-Hashd al-Shaabi” (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 7). In addition, the support of this declaration came immediately from Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, by issuing a verdict “fatwa” that calls the Iraqis from every sect and ethnicity to volunteer with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in facing the ISIS onslaught (Garrison, 2017, p. 3). However, the aforementioned declaration by Al-Maliki is a clear violation of the Iraqi constitution which is indicated in Article 9 Paragraph B. (Manour & Jabar, 2017, p. 7). The Article elaborates the following: “The formation of military militia outside the framework of the armed forces is prohibited.” (*Full Text of Iraqi Constitution, 2005*).

Furthermore, the PMF was prominently responsible for its messaging which are Hadi Al-Ameri, Jamal Al-Ibrahimi known as Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, and Ahmed al-Asadi. Hence, al-Muhandis is merged with Kata’ib Hezbollah, which is a pro-Iranian militia in Iraq, Al-Muhandis a deputy leader and strategic leader in the PMF (Garrison, 2017, p. 3). As ISIS crawled toward the southeast, the city of Tikrit and parts of Kirkuk were captured, and the plan was to reach Baghdad. Hence, the

Iraqi army trained and equipped by the U.S. left its position and weapons (Renahan, 2017, p. 408). The situation was worsened by the Kurds when they phlegmatically took advantage of the Iraqi forces withdrawing from Kirkuk. The initial aim of the Kurds was to control the city and make it permanently belong to the Kurdistan Regional Authority (Renahan, 2017, p. 408).

Nevertheless, the corruption took a part in the fall of Mosul when a significant amount of public payroll was used in the case of “ghost employees” or “ghost soldiers”. In this case, the salaries are given to non-existed employees or individuals. The Iraqi military estimated that there were 30,000 ghost soldiers and their salaries were misappropriated by the corrupted politicians (Alaadin, 2017). Moreover, it is important to shed the light upon one of the worst security faults in the security system. This fault is clarified in the tragedy of the June 2014 Camp Speicher Massacre, when ISIS murdered 1,700 students of the air force academy linked to the Iraqi Ministry of Defence. The victims were mainly Shiite young men (Manour & Jabar, 2017, p. 8). In addition, the camp was located in Tikrit and the academy soldiers in the camp were unarmed. Thereafter, the massacre brought worse tension between Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites politicians. The accusation by the Shiites that the Sunni locals of the province had prompted the ISIS attack on the camp (Omar, et al., 2016, p. 24).

Nevertheless, Al-Maliki aimed to stay in power after the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. He supported the Shiite factions against Iraq’s national unity. Al-Maliki’s attempts were translated when he replaced coalfield leaders in the security services and the Iraqi military with ineffective figures regarding military leadership, rather, their benefit came from their loyalty to Al-Maliki (Cordesman & Hawng, 2020, p. 98). The continuous violence and distrust which are features of the political and sectarian-based relations will only be beneficial for the political elites and hard-liner actors from all sides. In addition, Iraq’s clandestine and unnamed civil war formed another factor in front of shifting to state’s legitimacy, and against the corruption, state inefficiency, and delivering all kinds of services (Haddad, 2016, p. 17). It is important to note that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 had opened the gates at the forefront for the Islamic extremist to spread in the marginalized west and northwest territories in Iraq. The growing presence of those groups was soon enhanced by the

Iraqi government when its attention was shifted from the Iraqi Arab Sunni's marginalization in 2010, (Cambanis, 2022).

It is important to note that when ISIS captured Mosul on June 6, 2014, a half-million out of 1.7 million, which included Christians, Shiites, Kurds, and other minorities who lived in the east area of Tigris, fled towards Kurdistan. In addition to governors and other officials, this mass escape included Shiite as well (Renahan, 2017, p. 406). The fall of Mosul in the summer of 2014 pushed for questioning the legitimacy and power of Al-Maliki and was finally crumbled. Al-Maliki and many of his loyal officials were blamed for the incapability of Mosul to deter the terrorist Islamic State invasion (Mansour, 2016, pp. 9-10). The country's large-scale corruption during Al-Maliki governing period was believed that it has contributed to the fall of Mosul. Therefore, Al-Maliki was compelled to leave the office, and Haidar al-Abadi took the premiership (Mansour, 2016, p. 10).

Herewith, the second term of Nouri Al-Maliki was embedded in the sectarian division. This division included inter-sect ones along with the Sunni-Shiite fragmentation. The fragmentation was evident in the 2014 elections. (Hddad, 2020, p. 73). Thus, the establishment of the PMF by Al-Maliki and his supporters Hadi Al-Amiri and Qais Khazali was considered an important move for Al-Maliki after he left the office of prime minister in August 2014 (Mansor & Jabar, 2017, p. 9). Thus, Al-Maliki had willfully prevented the paramilitary groups to be under the direct order of the Ministry of Defence or the Interior Ministry. Therefore, while Al-Maliki was in the position of Prime Minister, the PMF Commission was directly connected to his office (PMO) to successfully impose his full control over it (Mansour & Jabbar, 2017).

Finally, it is important to note that the success of ISIS in controlling important cities of northwest Iraq revealed Al-Maliki's tyrannical, failing and corrupted governing policy and as an ineffective ruler, alongside other involved parties in the Iraqi political process (Kam, 2014, p. 2). In addition to the failure of the U.S. which is responsible for training and building hundreds of thousands of Iraqi army and police forces post-2003, which failed in protecting the country and imposing law, and finally failed to deter the threats of an external enemy (Kam, 2014, p. 2).

### **2.2.3 Hider Al-Abadi 2014-2018: dealing with ISIS, and continued broken politics**

For the new Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi, there was an obvious issue to be faced, which is the Al-Maliki's continued influence and control over the PMF. However, the vulnerable Prime Minister Abadi had to accept the presence of PMF under the command of Al-Maliki. Instead of taking the risk of compromising the state's security (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 8). Nevertheless, on the one hand, the constituencies between Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds have hardly seen any overlap. On the other, fragmentation was present in each of the aforementioned sects (Hddad, 2020, p. 75).

Moreover, including Iraq's second-largest city Mosul, one-third of the Iraqi state was captured by the so-called Islamic State. Fears were increasing about the possibility of ISIS reaching Baghdad (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 10). Hence, Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi, installed Hadi Al-Amiri to be the commander of the police and army in Diyala, in addition to the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Iraqi army (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20). Even though Al-Abadi is hailing from Al-Maliki's same party the Da'wa, he quickly placed himself as a reformer and chose to be in the party's camp against Al-Maliki. The new prime minister promised to fight against the terrorist Islamic State and to reengage the marginalized Sunni population (Mansour, 2016, p. 11).

Moreover, the performance of the PMF was bleak during the fight against ISIS and failed in nearly every operation. Also, Al-Abadi sequentially indicated to order's insubordination by the PMF. Noting also that PMF did not even try to regain the areas of Tal Afar to detain ISIS aiding line despite the giving orders (Pfaff, 2020, p. 57). Nevertheless, as a result of ISIS capturing Tal Afar in June, a few weeks after the fall of Mosul, many of the locals became victims and faced sectarian cleansing, many were also executed and others were forced to depart (Renahan, 2017, p. 406). Therefore, the mobilization of all the Iraqi forces was backed by different allies such as Iran and the U.S. to gain the lost territories. In addition, tens of thousands of Iraqi volunteers joined the Iraqi military (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 11). Hence, during the Mosul Operation, the performance of the Iraqi Army was improved and managed to achieve durability and accommodation as a reminder when the Iranian forces were driven from the Iraqi soil (Pfaff, 2020, p. 47).

However, the nature and degree of U.S. participation in the war against ISIS is a crucial issue. A call for the U.S. to conduct air attacks was made by Staff General Abdul Wahab Al-Saidi, the operational commander of the Iraqi forces in Salahuddin (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 10). Thus, during the war against ISIS, the U.S. provided military assistance which included aircraft and weapon supplies, in addition to contentious training with CTS (Pfaff, 2020, pp. 57-58). Nonetheless, the supporting of the PMF by the U.S. was problematic, this is because the Iranian-related groups were supported by the PMF, and this has contributed to decreasing Iraq's security institutions. And Washington preferred to support those institutions (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 11). Herewith, the U.S. forces were decreased along with the use of the bases and facilities of Iraq, in addition to limiting its efforts of training and assisting. This, however, was after the defeat of ISIS and its caliphate in Iraq's western area and the eastern side of Syria (Cordesman, 2021, p. 3).

On April 2015, an important turning point came into the picture, the Iraqi Army regained its strength while the PMF's immoral actions were uncovered in Salahuddin and Diyala provinces (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 15). However, according to the "International Crises Group" (2019), during the period of ISIS control over Iraqi territories, a large amount of money was accumulated by the terrorists. The money was split to be stashed inside Iraq and some sent abroad (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 15). However, the conflicts over power were increasing between Nouri Al-Maliki and Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi who is struggling to strengthen the country; and Muqtada Al-Sadr who is trying to prevent Al-Maliki from returning to power (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 15).

Therefore, Al-Abadi brought other disappointing results, even though his emergence was welcomed as an end to Al-Maliki's authoritarian regime. This, however, was due to the activeness of Al-Maliki and Hadi Al-Amiri as remaining centered power, and strongly linked to Iran. Therefore, the expressed disappointment of the Obama administration is attached to the crippling process of re-engaging due to the waning support of Sunnis to Al-Abadi (Mansour, 2016, p. 11). It is significant to indicate another case of corruption that weakened the capabilities and readiness of the Iraqi Army. The cases of purchasing positions and command in the army were the most devastating (Pfaff, 2020, p. 59). The prices of those positions are different, and there were reports describing that the brigade command position can be worth

five hundred thousand dollars, and a higher position, for example, a division command can reach 2 million dollars' worth. This, however, was noticed by the U.S. advisors before the withdrawal of the U.S. troops (Pfaff, 2020, p. 60).

Meanwhile, the dilemma of the Iraqi administrative was risen by the PMF. Al-Abadi acknowledges that Al-Maliki established the PMF Commission, and he is the one responsible for funding, recruiting, and communicating with PMF (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 16). Following this, Muhandis expressed his deprecation through a letter sent to Al-Abadi, and later the prime minister announced that the PMF salaries will be paid by his office, by allocating one billion dollars per year. This money, however, comes by deducting three percent out of the civil aides of the domestic refugees and PMF (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 16).

Moreover, by the beginning of 2015, several successful offensives by the Iraqi military managed through to impose control over the Iraqi territories that were seized by Da'esh (Pfaff, 2020, p. 93). Meanwhile, in August 2015, the government announced large-scale reforms as a response to anti-government popular protests, which were inflamed due to corruption and shortage of providing electricity and demands to eliminate the cabinet of ministries (Cordesman, 2017b, p. 15). The public protest movements across Iraq in 2015, were movements of rejecting the political system without any exception (Jabar, 2018, p. 8).

Nonetheless, in July 2016, the Iraqi Capital Baghdad witnessed a horrific suicidal bombing by the terrorist Islamic State in Karrada, a Shiite majority area, and caused the death of over three hundred civilians. Therefore, despite the mobilization against ISIS, a wave of public anger rose against the Iraqi government due to its corruption and failure in protecting civilians (Haddad, 2020, p. 73). When Al-Abadi took the office, he wanted to take control of the PMF and eliminate the pro-Khamenei leaders. And to do so, he assigned Faleh al-Fayadh as head commission and assigned Muhandis the pro-Khamenei to be deputy head (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, 17).

It is important to indicate that the justice system, military, and police in Iraq took their share of the overall corruption in the country. The mid-war with ISIS 2015-2016, was a period in which the corruption increased in the Ministry of Defence (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 31). To elaborate more, Al-Abadi could not control the allocation of funds for the PMF, and the legitimacy of the PMF commission

along with the PMF's popularity became an obstacle in front of Al-Abadi and lost the ability to act independently (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, pp. 20-21). Hence, the function of the Iraqi Parliament faced serious problems regarding administrative basics, budget, and economic planning. The *Systematic Country Diagnostic* of the World Bank warns that the Iraqi government faced long-time failing at every level (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 31). These failures were a result of the self-interest and ambition of all the leaders, and rivalry between the politicians, which was against the national interest of Iraq. In addition to the parliamentary system established by the U.S. help in post-2003 period (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 35).

Finally, as the Mosul city was liberated, the Iraqi forces managed to defeat an enemy that caused a global fear, and its atrocities formed a worldwide shock. The victory, however, did not bring any noticeable development to Iraq's economy, and welfare was not a belong of the citizens as it was expected. (Gustafson, et al, 2021, p. 15). Meanwhile, the performance of the Iraqi government was far from reaching any serious reform. Iraq was drowning in corruption to the point that, in 2016, Iraq was ranked 165 out of 195 on the scale of developed countries. This shows that Iraq had never reached any progress during the years spent on reforming talks (Cordesman, 2017a, p. 37). The Iraqi government managed only to show its ability to take back Mosul and major parts of western Iraq and defeat ISIS. However, it was not able to claim its victory without the outside support of Iran and the U.S., and other coalition members (Cordesman, 2018, p.3).

Herewith, an important issue came to the Iraqi scene, when on September 25, 2017, a call for independence came from Kurdistan Regional Government KRG through a referendum, which included all major three cities and Kirkuk which included as a disputed territories (Kuoti, 2017, p. 1). However, this move was confronted by a heavy refusal, starting with the Iraqi government, the Supreme Court, and the Parliament, and considered it illegitimate, against the constitution, destabilizing, and wrong-timed action (Kuoti, 2017, p.1). This opinion was shared by Turkey, and Iran in addition to several Western states and international institutions (Kuoti, 2017, p. 1). Notwithstanding, the fact that Iraq's government could not bring patriotic unity or effective reforms or stop the corruption. In addition, it could not decrease tensions between Iraq's sects or manage the basic responsibilities of governance (Cordesman, 2018, p. 4).

#### **2.2.4 October demonstrations: Adil Abdul-Mahdi collapse 2018-2019: the transitional government of Mustafa Al-Khadimi**

The declining economy and rise of unemployment in Iraq, specifically after the war with ISIS, is a contentious grievance for the Iraqi citizens, and therefore the need for serious reform became more urgent (Gustafson, et al, 2021, p. 15). The Iraqi demonstrations started to fight back in 2011 against the corrupted politicians and governments of post-2003 period, even though the results and responses of these demonstrations were always disappointing (Alaadin, 2017). Herewith, according to the Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC), in the elections of May 12, 2018, conducted the participation of Iraqi citizens voting at 44,52 percent, and it was considered less than 2010 and 2014 elections which reached 60 percent (Mansour & van den Toorn, 2018, p.12). However, claims of electoral fraud formed an extended division among the Shiite and Kurdish politicians. This means that any change in the results of the election might cause a zero-sum game (al-Shadeedi, van Veen, 2020, p. 42). Hence, the reason for the lack of participation was regarded to the overall scene in Iraq, which reflects the loss of trust by citizens in the post-2003 governments (Mansour & van den Toorn, 2018, p. 13).

Herewith, in spite that the elections of 2018 brought the Sunni politicians Khamis al-Khanjar and Jamal al-Karbouli to establish a settlement with the Binaa coalition led by Shiite Hadi al-Ameri and Nouri al-Maliki. Karbouli and Al-khanjar had been in a serious disagreement and severe rivalry with Shiite leadership (Mansour, 2019, p. 4). This situation swiftly changed, when the Sunni politicians faced a breakdown and lack of influence in Iraq in several aspects (Mansour, 2019, pp. 4-5). Al-Sadr's list of Sairoun used the sentiments of the past public demonstrations as a tool to enhance reformist mechanisms centered on the unprivileged citizens (al-Shadeedi & van Veen, 2020, p. 40). Herewith, in 2018, the aforementioned Sunni leaders were arranged to enter coalitions with Binaa leadership. These leaders considered that joining powerful and influential Shiites, will be a solution to overcome other Sunni opponents (Mansour, 2019, p. 5).

Nevertheless, a disagreement emerged between the political factions to choose the next party leader to form the government, the former Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister during the Al-Maliki government, Adil Abdul Mahdi, was appointed to be the Prime Minister after Sistani facilitated negotiations (Halawa,

2021). The government under the newly installed Abdul Mehdi needed six months to be formed and it received 36 percent acceptance since he came into office (Lawlor & Davison, 2020, p. 11). Nevertheless, on October 2018, Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi, and the Iraqi President Barham Salih, were appointed to the enormous complications and difficulties to confront ahead (Schweitzer, 2018).

The process of rebuilding the political system will be taking long years in terms of deepened sectarian ideologies and uncompromising political figures (Schweitzer, 2018). Moreover, during a year under the aforementioned government, the Iraqi-U.S. relations and democracy process witnessed horrible damage; the freedom of pro-Iranian militias was enhanced, and the American personnel and allies with immunity were attacked; hundreds of Iraqi civilians were injured during demonstrations. In addition, expelling the U.S. forces through Abdul Mahdi's announcement of a non-binding declaration (Gustafson, et al, 2021, p. 17).

Therefore, the government of Abdul Mahdi witnessed massive and country-wide public demonstrations and was treated as large-scale violence. Hence, the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 2019, finally led to Abdul-Mahdi's resignation (Cordesman & Hwang, 2020, pp. 98-99). The mass popular rejection of the political system comprehensively proved the failure of the sectarian apportionment system. Which, however, failed to prevent corruption, corrupted politicians, and sectarian divisions from taking a massive part in Iraq (Lawlor & Davison, 2020, p. 12). It is important to note that, the political direction was absent from Iraq on a large scale between the summer of 2018 and the demonstration outbreak. The new form of government was installed arguably without civilian support of the elections to choose the new Prime Minister (Halawa, 2021).

This leads to the fact that the coalition governments of Haider Al-Abadi and later Adel Abdul-Mahdi were weak, and that government was unable to manage the gradual breakdown of ISIS and the collapse of its "Caliphate" from 2014 to 2019 (Cordesman & Hwang, 2020, p. 101). Herewith, the Iraqi parties become more divided and the independence of KRG becomes more remote in the aftermath of the Kurd referendum in 2017 (Pfaff, 2020, pp. 93-94). Even though Iraq is represented by three sects, a Kurdish presidency, an Arab Shiite Prime Ministry, and an Arab Sunni Parliament Presidency. Iraq had still not reached a full patriotic government or

a reliable legislature, nor an effective politician and political effectiveness (Cordesman & Hwang, 2020, 103).

This sequence of governments allowed for foreign interventions to penetrate severely in the country, and Iraq was led to losing its patriotic dominance in the post-2003 period. Moreover, the Iraqi demonstration took that issue seriously, demanding the whole political elites over the past years to be out of Iraq, refusing the Presence of both Iran and the U.S. (Mansour, 2019, p. 8). It is important to note that, both Iran and the U.S. practised significant efforts to form Baghdad's governments of 2005, 2010, and 2014 to their interests (Mansour, 2019, p. 8). Also, the allied proxies of Tehran and Washington were used in those political processes, and both al-Maliki and Abadi shared the same political performance. Therefore, the Iraqi public rejection of the 2018 government came strong and rejected foreign interventions of Iran and the U.S. or other different entities (Mansour, 2019, p. 6).

Nevertheless, the resilience of the demonstrations was proven in the first year and managed to reach the result of placing a new moderated Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Khadimi soon after Abdul Mahdi resigned. This was actualized despite the Sadr movement's abandonment of the protest, and the state's brutal engagement by forces, in addition to the assassination campaigns against some protesters by Iranian-backed militias (Lawlor & Davison, 2020, p. 13). The new Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Khadimi is a former director of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service 2016, he was officially installed as Iraq's Prime Minister on April 2020. Al-Khadimi gave promised reforms of strengthening Iraq's governance, specifically in imposing law (Schneider, 2020, p. 1). However, the hardest choice in front of the Iraqi protesters is whether to allow the new Prime Minister Al-Khadimi to start his effort in slow institutional reforms, or to face the same movement as his predecessor Abdul Mahdi. However, Al-Khadimi does support the demonstration's demands but with a pragmatic and evolutionary non-revolutionary view (Lawlor & Davison, 2020, p. 13).

Moreover, Mustafa Al-Khadimi was supported by Iran and despite the Iranian elimination of a close U.S.-tided candidate, the United States welcomed Al-Khadimi's appointment (Shavit, 2020, p. 1). Soon after Al-Khadimi was installed, the U.S. administration under President Donald Trump, released a two-month exception from the U.S. sanctions on Iran. This was to enable Iraq to resume its

purchases of natural energy from Iran (Shavit, 2020, pp. 1-2). Moreover, since the protests of October 2019 imposed an early election that led to appointing Al-Khadimi as short-term prime minister, the sixth elections of parliamentary started on October 10, 2021. This election was also considered by the Iraqi activists and citizens as a disappointment and could not present any change, and the elections were boycotted. Therefore, the participation percentage was the weakest in post-2003 Iraq, with a maximum estimation of 43.54 percent participation (Alshamary, 2022, p. 1).

Thereafter, the turmoil began following months of the polls, which were mixed with violence, threats, and delay in announcing the results of the elections for several months. Thus, negotiations between political parties to form a major parliament coalition failed, and no name emerged for Prime Ministry to take place of Mustafa Al-Khadimi (France 24, 2022). As a result of the elections the winners were, the Sadr Movement, the Progress coalition (Taqadum) under Mohammad Al-Halbousi the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, and the State of Law coalition headed by Nouri Al-Maliki (Alshamary, 2022, p.2)

Generally, the civil war and sectarian conflicts in Iraq only witnessed a military solution. Therefore, the victories in Iraq by the U.S. forces were military ones and have not claimed a victory to end the actual conflict, starting from George W. Bush leading to Donald Trump. Thus, the military solution was far from tackling the basic reasons that led to the emergence of terrorist groups in Iraq, such as ISIS (Mansour, 2019, p. 12). Herewith, President Trump allowed the U.S. troops to continue their presence in Iraq. But he remained hesitant about whether to choose to withdraw U.S. forces or to maintain the strategic interest by keeping the American military in Iraq for the coming two years (Shavit, 2020, p. 2). However, President Trump publicly announced that the U.S. uses the Iraqi territory to monitor Iran's activities, and U.S. military vantages applied for this reason by using Iraq as a proxy against Iran. Herewith, the justification behind the American support for the Iraqi government is also considered a type of proxy (Gaston & Ollivant, 2020, p. 25).

Moreover, the political allies of the U.S. in Iraq were also used as a proxy. This was to change the positions of Iraq as a state to perceive the American interest. In addition to manipulating the results of Iraq's domestic issues and stand-offs. The U.S. assured its position in these political standoffs by relying on political allies,

which are Sunni and Kurdish to defend the American interests (Gaston & Ollivant, 2020, p. 27). Therefore, when U.S. President Joe Biden came to office, his administration undoubtedly saw a complex chain of problems in Iraq. Starting from the political deep corruption led to an intensive Iranian influence, and a military sized by Iranian-backed militias alongside their political power (Wahab, 2021, p. 3). Nevertheless, Iraq is still considered important for the United States, regarding security and economic matters. This importance is derived from the fact that, if a failure between the U.S. and Iraq reemerged it will lead to enhance the threat of ISIS. In addition, enhancing the Iranian ability to take advantage of Iraq to achieve its regional aims, thus, attacking the U.S. allies and jeopardising its interests (Wahab, 2021, p. 4).

To conclude, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 brought a massive, and catastrophic political system to Iraq. After the Bush administration failed to prove the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the U.S. justified the invasion with the notion of democracy promoting in Iraq. Nevertheless, the new implemented political system by the U.S., the sectarian apportionment system is a complete failing one in the post-2003 period. The U.S. political supervision in Iraq can be considered the foundation of the failure and misadventure within the Iraqi political scene. Starting from the new founded Iraqi constitution which is built on false distribution of power. In addition, the dissolving of the Iraqi army immediately after the invasion, and the reformatting of the security forces by the U.S., helped massively in creating a security vacuum in Iraq. This vacuum was followed by a devastating sectarian civil war and the emergence of various terrorist groups in Iraq.

Herewith, the U.S.-led invasion brought the Iraqi opponents of Saddam Hussein's regime into the picture. The opposition took the lead in the Iraqi state-building under the U.S. supervision. The results, however, registered a misuse of power and corruption by the Iraqi government starting from Nouri Al-Maliki which has led Iraq into multiple faces of corruption. Thus, inter-sects' conflicts between political parties and elites over power. In addition, the U.S. forces' withdrawal from a non-stable Iraq, caused more fragility within its domestic scene. And therefore, as a result of the misuse of power and corruption, which massively affected the Iraqi military, domestic security was fragile and faced the emergence of ISIS in 2014. The

ISIS crisis was also a result of U.S. responsibility for training the Iraqi military and security forces which failed to confront the ISIS occupation of Mosul.

As Nouri Al-Maliki step down from the office. The following Iraqi governments faced the ramifications of his corrupted ruling period, and no change occurred. This is regarded as the U.S. implementation of aforementioned the political system which allowed for the corrupted parties and unqualified political figures to keep their control in the Iraqi political scene. These parties and politicians are active in a repeated cycle and managed to sustain their position within the political process by increasing their dominance domestically. However, the continued unsatisfied performance of the Iraqi government in the post-2003 period has pushed for several civil demonstrations across Iraq since 2011 and as a refusal of the political system and political elites comprehensively.

In addition, the demonstrations emerged as an objecting to the deteriorated domestic security, lack of stability constantly, and lack of basic living services in Iraq. Moreover, the U.S. presented aid during the battles against ISIS, which confirms the weakness and cumbersomeness of the Iraqi government. Moreover, after the ISIS defeat, the newly elected Iraqi Prime Minister was installed under a suspicious process, and after one year, the public demonstrations led to his resignation. The transitional government led by the new Prime Minister took charge of the fragile and non-independent political system.

## **CHAPTER 3: TYPE AND DEGREE OF IRAN'S INFLUENCE IN IRAQ POST-2003 PERIOD: REASONS AND RAMIFICATIONS**

This chapter will identify the Iranian instruments to penetrate Iraq and impose influence in post-2003 period. Therefore, Iran's penetration will be put in the frame of the Iranian influence over the Iraqi politics and the decision-making process of the Iraqi government from the first Iraqi government after 2003 until the emergence of ISIS. Herewith, the reasons for Iran's deep penetration and its implication will be also examined by the Iranian use of the Iraqi political parties and politicians in post-2003 as Iranian-affiliated entities, also the militias' origins and their ties to Iran. Moreover, the chapter will further analyse Iran's intervention and influence after the rise of ISIS in 2014 up-to-date. The Iranian intervention was performed through supporting armed groups and militias which resulted in an increase in fragility in the Iraqi political process and domestic security threats. Finally, this chapter will examine the Iranian-backed militia as Iran's invisible hand in Iraq that participated in weakening the Iraqi security efforts and preventing the formation of an institutional state in Iraq post-2003 period.

### **3.1 Iran's Political Influence in Iraq: An Affiliated Decision-Making Process**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was a reason for several consequences of deterioration in Iraq. One of those consequences is the massive political vacuum in Iraq. This vacuum has been filled with various regional, domestic, and global agendas. The rivalry between these agendas used Iraq as a ground for their conflicts (Dagher, 2021, p. 3). Moreover, the Iranian reaction to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the Iraqi elections on January 30, 2005, have underscored the complex aims of Iran's foreign policy toward Iraq. Nevertheless, some Iranian politicians prioritized that Baghdad's government should be under a strong Shiite-dominant (Kemp, 2005, p. 5). Hence, the Iraqi government under the Shiite politicians had close ties to Iran. This is shown in several situations of acting according to Iran's secret guidance (Yildiz, 2012, p. 53). Moreover, one of Iran's essential aims is the need for a friendly and non-threatening Iraq. Tehran also seeks to prevent any domination over Iraq by another state, specifically a state that is considered a threat to Iran (Pollack, 2017, p. 5).

In the post-2003 Iraq, Iran followed three ways to impose influence on Iraq. Firstly, by promoting and supporting the religious impact of “velayat-e faqih”. Secondly, placing itself as the primary controller within Iraqi political inner-conflict by assisting its several allies to gain power through the political process, causing rivalry between them and place itself as a resolver of a conflict, which initially was placed by Iran. Thirdly, supporting armed insurgencies and Iranian-backed militia as a way to pressure the active political elites (Nader, 2015, p. 2). For Iran, assuring the aforementioned aims in Iraq is partly to prevent the possible repeat of the defeat and horror of the Iraq-Iran War. Furthermore, Iran’s administration is always looking to keep its influence and axis in the region connected to Hezbollah in Lebanon, Assad in Syria, Tehran, and Baghdad (van Veen et al, 2017, p. 47).

Additionally, this is also followed by the Shiite clerical establishment “Hawza” in the Iraqi city of Najaf which is an important religious destination for 90 percent of Iranian Muslim Shiites (Pollack, 2017, p. 7). Herewith, in the spring of 2004, the holy city of Najaf witnessed a series of violent uprisings by the Muqtada Al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, after a newspaper related to Al-Sadr was a ban in Iraq. The conflict titled Najaf Crisis was escalated between Mahdi Army and U.S. troops alongside the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) (Felter & Fishman, 2008a, p. 34). The conflict waned after a few weeks and arose again on August after Al-Sadr and hundreds of its supporters settled into Imam Ali Mosque which prevented the U.S. and the Iraqi forces to attack (Felter & Fishman, 2008a, p. 34). Moreover, Iran is an advanced state in exploiting Iraq’s parliamentary system. Thus, Tehran convinced the Shiite parties to run unified under coalitions to use their demographic power in Iraq’s elections (Nader, 2015, p. pp 2-3).

Moreover, Iran worked closely with the Kurdish and Shiite parties to influence the political process and create a Shiite dominance accessible to Iranian influence. The Da’wa Party, Islamic Supreme Council (originally SCIRI), and Badr Organization under UIA coalition, and later Sadr Movement, are considered the closest parties to Iran and were supported by it in the Iraqi political process (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 3). The aforementioned parties had significant ties to Iran. So, the conflict destabilized the situation in Iraq and supported by several Iranian-backed groups and the SCIRI. This organization has roots in its activeness against Iraq during Iraq-Iran War (Forrest, 2009, p. 101). The SCIRI was established in Iran

in 1982 under Iranian supervision. Thus, during the Iraq-Iran War, it was appointed originally to rule the provisional government in the Iraqi city Basra when it was the Iranian troops captured it (Mumtaz, 2010, p.231). It is important to note that the cleric leader of SCIRI Abdul-Aziz Al-Hakim fought alongside Iran against Iraq in the Iraq-Iran War. (Kemp, 2005, p. 5).

Iran and Iraq's Kurdish parties (PUK) and (KDP) established longstanding connections, and the Kurdish Peshmerga were fighting alongside Iran against Iraq in the Iraq-Iran War. In addition, Tehran provided the weapons for PUK during its conflict with the KDP from 1994 to 1998 (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 3). Herewith, Iran's support for Sadr Movement and its Mahdi Army is shaped by being a sanctuary, providing political influence and military aid (Forrest, 2009, p. 107). Nevertheless, the Iranian foreign policy toward Iraq is revolving around maintaining its influence through the establishment of a Shiite-centric government and preventing it from becoming powerful (Nader, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, the crisis of Najaf was a serving case for Iran's political aims in Iraq, despite Iran's incapability to practice direct control over the conflicting sides. However, it helped to reassure the attachment of the electoral process in Iraq to the constitution which puts the Iranian-tided political allies into positions and allows them to shape a long-term Iraqi future (Felter & Fishman, 2008a, 34).

Thus, the new Iraqi constitution is resulted in serving Iran's interests. The constitution provides a ground for a federalist system that allows the choice of the referendum to the Iraqi provinces and announces autonomy (Nader, 2015, p. 5). As the SCIRI and Da'wa avoided conducting violent confrontations with the U.S. presence, it helped to achieve success in the January 2005 election, and the Da'wa member Ibrahim al-Jaafari became Prime Minister (Felter & Fishman, 2008a, p. 40). The drafting process of the Iraqi constitution was not driven directly by Iran. Yet, it served its goals largely based on its further outcome. Therefore, Iraq cannot form a threat to Iran in the future when it is decentralized and federal, and Iraq is becoming weak from within (Felter& Fishman, 2008a, p. 40).

Herewith, on August 2005, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani conducted a meeting with Iran's foreign minister and refused to contact directly with the U.S. This meeting provides a sign of the Iranian influence on the Iraqi Shiite leaders (Kemp, 2005, p. 6). Simultaneously, the Parliamentary elections of both January and

December 2005 witnessed the winning of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) government which includes the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, Islamic Virtue “Fadhila Party, Badr Organization, Da’wa, Sadr Movement, and other Shiite groups, all backed with Iranian support (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 4). Hence, the Iranian strategic and political influence was practiced through the electoral fraud of the December 2005 elections. The Iraqi border police captured thousands of fake ballots from Iran, and this raised concerns about the constitutional referendum whereas 99 percent of the votes supported the constitution (Felter & Fishman, 2008, p. 41).

Nevertheless, Tehran practiced its influence in Iraq via its Embassy in Baghdad and consulates in Irbil, Sulaymaniyah, Karbala, and Basra. Thus, both of Iran’s ambassadors in Iraq in the post-2003 period worked in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Qods Force. This refers to the implementation and formation of Iran’s policy in Iraq through the role of security services (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 4). The Iranian policy in Iraq is controlled by the IRGC Quds Force under Major General Qassim Suleimani (Kagan, et al, 2012, p. 63). Moreover, during the disagreements over the new Iraqi prime minister in 2006, Suleimani held negotiations with the Iraqi leaders in the Green Zone in Baghdad. And finally broke a deal that installed Nouri Al-Maliki into the office (Nader, 2015, p. 6). Therefore, the Iranian policy in Iraq was reinforced and started with Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, a leader that is protected and covered by Tehran, and led Iraq with a sectarian and authoritarian policy (Haykel, 2014).

Tehran played the role of broker dealing in Iraq, and the resulted deals brought a crisis in the first place as a result. For instance, Al-Sadr became a challenger for the Iraqi government due to Iran’s support for Al Mahdi militias. (Nader, 2015, p. 7). Nevertheless, Al-Maliki government conducted frequent meetings with the Iranians such as Suleimani who was needed for advising on the Security of Forces Agreement (SOFA) negotiations (Khalil, 2009, p. 3). It was also claimed that Al-Maliki replaced his negotiation’s long-standing team which was familiar to the U.S. and assigned three advisers without having any background in the negotiation. This was followed by a propaganda campaign deployed by the Iranian government toward the Iraqi people regarding the SOFA (Khalil, 2009, p. 4).

This leads to the fact that the UIA coalition government always adopted a deceitful way to equal their own goals with their Iranian patrons. For example,

Tehran opposed the aforementioned agreement, despite the Iraqi government's awareness that such an agreement would serve its interest (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p.p 4-5). Therefore, in 2008, the Iraqi government and the U.S. signed the Security Agreement (SA) which included language emphasizing that the Iraqi lands will not be a ground to attack Iran. (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, the Iranian influence spread in the religious cities of Iraq in 2009, reaching the point that the Iraqi minister of internal ministry prevented the spread of Iranian posters in Karbala. Thus, in the same year, the Iraqis protested in Karbala against assigning an Iranian company to reconstruct the holy city with a 100 million dollar founding by the Iraqi government (Nader, 2015, p. 6).

Meanwhile, Iran's influence was present in the March 2010 Iraqi parliamentary elections, when Nouri Al-Maliki became the prime minister heading the State of Law coalition with the Iraqi National Alliance headed by Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, instead of the Al-Iraqiyya coalition headed by Ayad Allawi, which won with a majority of seats and was prevented from taking the office (Nader, 2015, pp.7-8). As it was predictable, the political affiliation of Iraq's Shiite leaders was conducting a strategy in the interest of Iran. This is because of the close bonds and relations with the Iranian clerics. In addition, the deep economic connections between Iraq and Iran made Tehran penetrate more into Iraq (Layne, 2009, p. 20). Therefore, the Iranian influence on the results of the Iraqi elections was apparent in 2005, and the provincial elections of 2009, through advising and funding its favourable elites, in addition to the 2010 parliamentary elections (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 6). In addition, after months of disputes, Iran managed to convince the Shiite and Kurds to support Al-Maliki. Soleimani, however, reportedly performed the role of dealer broker in Iraq (Nader, 2015, p. 8).

Herewith, an additional aspect of Iran's political influence was revealed in the March 7, 2010, elections within the practices of the Iraqi Accountability and Justice Commission AJC, which resulted from the de-Ba'athification Committee. Since 2003, this progressing entity controlled by the Shiite politicians Ali Al-Lami and Ahmed Chalabi, which are the paving between Iran and the Shite factions of Iraq (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, even though Al-Maliki shares the same mindset as Iran's worldview of Shiite Islamism. He was also careful about his reliance on the U.S. to survive. Thus, he tried to adopt a middle road between the two

powers and avoid a clear embrace or criticism of Iran. However, this can change after the U.S. troop's withdrawal from Iraq in late 2011 (Eisenstadt, et al, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, the broad Iranian aims in Iraq led to a wide-range penetration in the period 2008-2011. During this period, Iran used a policy that generates instability and weakness within the development of Iraq's political and economic spheres (Kagan, et al, 2012, p. 67).

Nevertheless, the essential Shiite political groups witnessed many splits and fractions within its coalition process. These splits became more obvious after 2005. For example, in 2006, Asaib Ahl al-Haq headed by Qais Al-Khazali left the Sadr Movement. Likewise, in 2007, Kataib Hezbollah broke its coalition with Badr Organization. Then, in the same year, Badr Organization under Hadi al-Amiri limited its coalition with ISCI and in 2012 and finally broke with it (van Veen, et al, 2017, p. 50). This indicates the fact that Iran conducted the strategy of "divide and weaken" in Iraq (Cordesman & Khazai, 2014, p. 10). In addition to the Iranian role of imposing coalitions and factions following its interest (Nader, 2015, p. 9). Hence, it is important to mention that al-Amiri started his career in the military during Iraq-Iran War. He was against Saddam Hussein and entered the war of 1980 as a senior official within the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq located in Tehran and was on the front line fighting against Iraq during the war with Iran (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20).

Moreover, Iran came against an extension of U.S. troops' presence in Iraq after its withdrawal in 2011. Even though a majority of Iraqi politicians favoured privately a minimum presence of U.S. troops in Iraq after the 2011 agreement. Nonetheless, the mistrust and nationalistic facts among the politicians prevented any courageous attempt by them for any agreement without the support of other blocs (Kagan, et al, 2012, p. 67). Furthermore, a wide range of the Iranian aims in Iraq starts from a highly desirable to an acceptable range of Tehran's goals to be achieved in Iraq. As a result, many Iranian leaders aspire to see Iraq as either a servant of Iranian interests or formal compliance and ready to accomplish the Islamic Republic's demands (Pollack, 2017, p.5).

It is important to indicate that the Iranian leadership has a diverse view of Iraq as a threat to it (Pollack, 2017, p. 5). The rise of ISIS and controlling some Iraqi territories was seen as a serious threat to Iran which viewed it as a part of the Sunni-Shiite conflict. And the instability on the border of Iraq is undesirable due to the fear

of possible spillover of the conflict into Iran due to having minority entities (Kam, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, the ISIS attacks on Iraq in 2014 triggered a fast response from Iran. In addition, Iran was also accused reportedly of its part in the replacement of Al-Maliki with Haidar Al-Abadi for prime ministry (Nader, 2015, p. 9). This, however, is also concluded in the Al-Sistani fatwa of mobilizing arms against ISIS, thus, a call for change in the Iraqi leadership (van Veen, et al, 2017, p. 33).

Moreover, the rise of ISIS is considered also a failure of Iran which became an extensive external influence in Iraq specifically after the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 (Kam, 2014, p. 3). Nevertheless, Iran can rely on a wide range of influential relationships which includes the PUK, KDP, other Shiite political parties which are less tied to Iran, Sunni politicians, and minority leaders (Gaston & Ollivant, 2020, p. 27). Nonetheless, even though, the formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces was recruited newly, the organizations included preexisted Shiite militias. These organizations are Asa'ip Ahl al-Haq, Muqtada's Saraya Al Salam, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, and Badr. Thus, more than 40 varied militias believed to be of being included in the PMF, and the United States considered several of them terrorist organizations (Garrison, 2017, pp. 6-7).

### **3.3.1 Iran's political strategy in Iraq after ISIS: utilizing weakness**

The central government's forces of Baghdad are still recovering from the damages caused by the former Prime Minister Al-Maliki and the defeat by the ISIS attack. Thus, the PMF militias and the Iraqi Kurdish forces are independent of the contentious weak of the Iraqi government, resulting in a weaker and more divided Iraq and an increase in the Iranian influence (Cordesman, et al, 2016, p. 109). Therefore, the Iraqi leaders were actively requesting Iranian advice to combat ISIS. In 2016, Haidar Al-Abadi indicated during the conference of "The World with Iraq to Defeat Da'ash" that the Iranian advisors were requested into Iraq according to the Iraqi government's demand (Arif, 2019, p. 351).

Moreover, the participation Badr Organization under Hadi Al-Amiri in the fight against ISIS reported that Badr has practised horrible sectarian campaigns against the Sunni civilians. The consequences of these actions would form a disappointment for Haidar Al-Abadi's efforts in promoting Iraqi national identity (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20). Rather, Al-Amiri's practices referred to the fact that he is

fighting for Shiites under Iran's order. And this was elaborated in August 2014 by a militia member in Diala (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20). The statement elaborated the following:

When I withdraw my forces now the Sunnis will come back and they will become an incubator for ISIS again. When I liberate an area from ISIS why do I have to give it back to them? Either I erase it or settle Shia in it. (Abdul-Ahad, 2014).

Hence, after Iran's involvement in the war against ISIS by supporting the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, it was essential for Tehran to take advantage of the Iraqi situation after ISIS in the elections of May 12, 2018 (Arif, 2019, p.). Therefore, the advantage was translated into the PMF's ability to present its candidates to compete in the May 12, 2018 elections (Gasto & Ollivant, 2020, p. 23). Nevertheless, the Iraqi constitution of 2005 forbids any militias or armed groups from possessing any political presence or position. Yet, this has not prevented Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq and Badr Organization militant entities to place dozens of their members in the Iraqi parliament. For example, the Asa'ib militias went from one seat in 2014 to hold 50 seats in 2018 (Wahab, 2021, p. 5).

Moreover, in mid-October 2017, the Iranian-backed PMF marked a political and military possession over the area of Sinjar. Thus, the deployment and control of the border between Iraq and Syria in southern Sinjar which is considered a strategic road was decided by the PMF leaders (International Crises Group, 2018, p. 5). In addition to deciding which side the Yazidi armed groups should join, either unite of the PMF or the Iraqi army (International Crises Group, 2018, p. 6). Moreover, the Iraqi government refused on October 2017, the demand of the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to dissolve the Iranian-backed PMF militias. According to Tillerson's statement, the Iranian militias in Iraq should return to their land as the fight against ISIS is about to over. He indicated that those militias should let the Iraqi people be in charge (Arif, 2019, p. 349). Herewith, since 2014, the PMF leaders were seeking for increasing the apparitions of agendas (Gasto & Ollivant, 2020, p. 24).

Nevertheless, even, Hadi Al-Amiri exercised extensive corruption and practised a high amusement of authority when he was chosen by Al-Maliki as Minister of Transportation in 2010. In addition to his authorization for Iran to exploit the Iraqi airspace to transfer weapons to Bashar Al-Asad (Arosoaie, 2015, p. 20). Therefore, Al-Amiri's Fatah Alliance joined again in the 2018 elections, regardless

of his close ties with Iran and its leader fought against Iraq in the Iraqi-Iran War (van Veen & al-Shadeedi, 2020, p. 34). Thus, as the Fatah Alliance is a branch of the PMF, it has benefited from its fighting against ISIS. Also, it has conducted political and financial results from the elections in the form of reconstruction contracts, governmental positions, local security budgets, and ministerial positions (van Veen & al-Shadeedi, 2020, p. 35).

Moreover, at the end of 2018, the PMF conducted an actual territorial control or secondary influence over a wide range of territories. Starting from the traditional Shiite bases in the south of Iraq such as Basra, leading to the disputed territories and the adjacent areas in Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah al-Din, and important economic roads in Anbar and Ninawa and border areas (Gasto & Ollivant, 2020, p. 25). Comprehensively, the aforementioned economic and formal political advantages of the PMF leaders which came with territorial control have increased and allowed the PMF and their leaders to impose significant and intensive influence on Iraq. Which in turn, they gave Iran further opportunities to progress its interests in Iraq (Gasto & Ollivant, 2020, p. 27). Moreover, while the Iraqi government provided salaries for the PMF leaders, they stayed completely outside the control of the Iraqi government. Thus, much of the alleged 150,000 salaries of the government were instead possessed by the corrupted leaders of the militias (Lawlor & Davson, 2020, p. 15).

Simultaneously, Iran's influence on Iraq's political process to the point that will ensure that any proposed solutions will not come against its interest in Iraq. This, however, explains Qasem Soleimani's visits to Iraq during the demonstrations of October 2019 and after. Soleimani possesses Iraq's portfolio alongside his involvement in the process of choosing the next Iraqi prime minister (Shavit, et al, 2019, p. 1). Since the demonstrations of 2019, the militias started targeting Iraqi activists through assassination and kidnapping, as thirty were killed and dozens were kidnapped (Wahab, 2021, p. 6). Thus, Tehran's leadership was determined to conduct a hard line towards the Iraqi demonstrations, and according to Iraqi reports, the Iraqi protests were suppressed by the dispatch of the Iranian Basij forces and the Revolutionary Guards (Shavit, et al, 2019, p. 2).

However, after appointing Mustafa Al-Khadimi, he appeared more independent unlike his predecessor but for Iran, what was important is the support of PMF militias. Assuring the support of these militias or even several of them will

enable Iran to cross the Prime Minister's Office and resume its influence in Iraq and as a base for military activities against any threat (Scheider, 2020, pp. 1-2). To further add, the most critical incident was the outrageous and brutal assassination of Hashim Al-Hashimi in July 2020 who he was Al-Khadimi's advisor (Wahab, 2021, p. 7). In spite of the perpetrators being unknown, al-Khadimi was aware that this was a message to him, due to depending on Al-Hashimi's advice to bring the militias systematically under the state's authority. And despite the promises of accounting for the perpetrators, it was never actualized (Wahab, 2021, p. 7).

Nonetheless, the Iraqi state's sovereignty is highly threatened by the Iranian influence and its active militias or (proxies) in Iraq. These militias were able to form a ghost state which gained power and influence in Iraq more than the formal government (Dagher, 2021, p. 4). However, January 3, 2020, marked the assassination of General Kasim Suleimani head of Quds Force IRGC, and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis the head of Kata'ib Hezbollah and senior commander of the PMF in Iraq while they were heading to Baghdad. The double assassination of the U.S. airstrike had indicated the close ties between Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard (Clausen, 2020, .5). However, the engagement of the American military in Iraq failed to deal with the security dilemmas imposed by the militias which attacks bases of Iraqi army troops, civilian airports, and foreign embassies in Iraq (Wahab, 2021, p. 8).

Simultaneously, despite the fast deterrence after the U.S. strike, the Iranian-backed militias resumed their assaults on Iraqi soil leading in 2021, assuring Iran's willingness to harm the U.S.-Iraqi relations and imposing its influence on the country (Wahab, 2021, p. 8). Nevertheless, according to a report from the Pentagon Inspector General's office in late 2021, appointed that the Iraqi government under Al-Khadimi is incapable to impose control over the Popular Mobilization Committee, or projecting its Iran-affiliated militias for accountability (Karam, 2022). Herewith, Al-Khadimi managed to make changes in the military by replacing some commanders and forcing higher control over borders and specified services. Therefore, he has moved cautious steps toward earning a chance for a second term in October 2021 (Wahab, 2021, p. 7).

Nevertheless, after the results of the October 2021 elections were announced, the supporters of PMF took the streets and gathered near the Green Zone in Baghdad

with furious objections. Thus, the riot took place also in the area where some offices of PMF were located and other Iranian-backed militias such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (Mahmoud, 2021a). Moreover, the day after the riot, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Khadimi faced an assassination attempt by targeting his residence in Baghdad with drone explosives (Mahmoud, 2021b). Soon, Qais al-Khazali claimed that the attack on Al-Akhdami was fabricated and demanded technical specialists investigate the attack. His words were the following: "If the attack was real and not accidental then we condemn it openly and those who carried it out should be pursued and brought to justice," (Mahmoud, 2021b).

Moreover, according to Iraqi security sources, the use of drones in the attack on prime minister Al-Khadimi were similar to previously used attacks in the country and they are Iranian-made explosions (Mahmoud, 2021b). Therefore, the Iranian-backed militias and other entities like Coordination Framework (CF) which was conducted by the Kurdish ally PUK and some Sunni politicians with ties to Iran are set behind the deadlock of the political process in Iraq. The CF is enhancing its tripartite votes to obstruct the political process of assigning a new Iraqi President and Prime Minister (Ahmed, 2022).

### **3.2 Iran's-Backed Militias: The Invisible Hand in Iraq**

Despite the essential strategy of the Islamic Republic for imposing power in Iraq through the political system, Iran has developed a critical system to provide training and aid for the militias in Iraq. Through these efforts, Iran secured the durability of its operation's influence on Iraq and completed its basic aims in several ways to deter any possible threat to its interest in Iraq (Felter & Fishman, 2008b, p. 55). Iran gave refugee-right to one hundred thousand Iraqi Arab Shiites after the war of 1980 and the so-called anti-Shiite massacre in 1991, and these refugees returned to Iraq after 2003, thus, engaged within the Iraqi military, police, militias, schools, tribal councils, courts, and the government (Nasr, 2006).

Herewith, to support Iran's political allies in Iraq, it forms, supports, and founds pro-Iranian militias in Iraq to create a playing card to pressure the political actors. Meanwhile, as long as the non-governmental actors are strong, the more the Iraqi central government becomes weak (Nader, 2015, p. 10). Therefore, in 2004, the Quds Force started providing weapons to the Shiite militias including explosions

used against the U.S. troops in Iraq (Nader, 2015, p. 10). To start with, the Badr organization had its roots in fighting against Iraq during the Iraq-Iran War under the name of the Badr Corps which was an armed wing of the SCIRI (Nader, 2015, p. 11). Herewith, after 2003 the SCIRI entered into the political process of the new Iraqi government and changed into the ISCI, and Badr Corps was dissolved. Also, thousands of its militias became merged into the Iraqi military, security forces, and police (Nader, 2015, p. 11).

Simultaneously, there are 50 Shiite militias actively operating in Iraq, including the post-invasion new militias created by Iran (Nader, 2015, p. 11). The IRGC managed successfully to extract two major pro-Iranian militias out of Muqtada Al-Sadr Mahdi Army, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq led by Qais al-Khazali and Kata'ib Hezbollah linked to the former Badr member Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis (Ostovar, 2018, p. 15). Since 2010 the Iranian government has formed between 60 to 100 militias in Iraq, these pro-Iranian militias have grown 20 times since 2010, and the U.S. put some of these organizations on the list of terrorist groups (Dagher, 2021, p. 8).

Generally, Iran has still considered the highest state regarding the number of militias. A number of those militias are present within the political profile such as Badr Corps which has 20 seats in the parliament and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq but with less presence. The rise of ISIS has empowered those militias, but their political presence is still undecided (van Veen, et al, 2017, p. 48). Herewith, given the fragility of the Iraqi institutions, Iran is not motivated to reform them to be used as an influence instrument. Rather, Iran chose to invest specifically in the Shiite militias like Badr, Khata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (Pollack, 2017, p. 8). Nevertheless, the small militias joined the fight against ISIS on the front lines and were under the umbrella of more-based militant leaders such as Hadi Al-Amiri head of the Badr Organization. Haidar Al-Abadi gave him the responsibility of the Diala confrontation against ISIS. (Nader, 2015, p. 13). Al-Amiri is tied to IRGC and specifically closed to Soleimani. This elaborates that Iran is in an effective role in the Diala operation. Al-Amiri and Iran both appeared to be the directors of recapturing Tikrit city (Nader, 2015, p. 13).

Nonetheless, former Prime Minister Al-Maliki was accused by the Sunni leaders of using the Shiite militant groups such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Hak (AAH) to

assault his rivalries. Reports have indicated that when the AAH militants use the Iraqi military uniforms during their activities (Nader, 2015, p. 14). It is significant to indicate that Iran concentrates its financial aid on three specific and major three militias in Iraq before the U.S. withdrawal, and these are Kata'ib Hezbollah, the Promised day Brigade (a significant elite of Muqtada Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army), and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq. Each one of these militias conducted a specific level of affiliation to Iran (Wyer, 2012, p. 7). Taking into consideration that, Iraq is considered a critical neighbour to Iran, the two countries share a 1,400 kilometres border, in addition to a 12-billion-dollar annual trade. In addition to 15 percent of Iran's non-oil exports to Iraq's consumption (Pollack, 2017, pp. 8-9). Nevertheless, the Iranian efforts to penetrate the Iraqi economy reached their summit after the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran, and this, in turn, inflamed the Iraqi popular anti-Iran protests (Shavit, et al, 2019, pp. 2-3).

In this regard, an incident happened on October 2019 four days after the mass demonstration in Iraq, with the Lebanese businessman and manager of Palm Jet Company Hussein Laqees. The company had a five-year contract with the Iraqi government for managing the V.I.P. terminal at Baghdad's international airport, in addition to hotels near the airport area. Kata'ib Hezbollah offered Laqees to work with them and that he had no other choice, and compel to their orders (Worth, 2020). According to Laqees, the Kata'ib militias wanted to seize twenty percent of his gross avenue. The militias wanted an answer the next day, and if he refused, they would take over everything on him. Laqees thought that there is a law in the country, but the words of Kata'ib member was "We are the Law" (Worth, 2020). Finally, however, Kata'ib forced Laqees to sign on contract annulment and replaced him with a contractor accordant to their demands. The takeover of the airport happened in October 2019, four days after the mass demonstration in Iraq (Worth, 2020).

Nevertheless, in addition to being an Iranian proxy, Kata'ib Hezbollah is considered one of the kleptocracy faces in Iraq, it has been enriching its goals at the expense of the Iraqi citizens. In addition, some of the militia leaders joined the list of Iraq's wealthy men (Worth, 2020). However, for Iran, there is no exact militias or Shiite group to accomplish the Iranian aims in Iraq. For example, Badr Organization had become involved deeply in politics, and the Sadr Movement is considering itself independent and hard to control. The smaller groups, seem more loyal to Iran such as

Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq and Kata'ip Hezbollah, which is going to be the supporting power of the Iranian policy aims in Iraq (Nader, 2015). This leads to the fact that the Iraqi Ministry of Interior is led by a member of the Badr Organization and the ministry conducted operations in the Diyala and Ninewa provinces. In addition, the PMF filled the absence of the Iraqi Security Forces in Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Salah al-Din specifically (Cordesman, 2018, p. 2).

Therefore, Iranian-backed agendas have jeopardized the formal structure of the Iraqi state's security. In addition, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented its central grand strategy in supporting the establishment of foreign militias in Iraq. Therefore, the Iraqi militias and Hezbollah all manumit the Iranian political ideology and consider Ali Khamenei the supreme leader, as their political and spiritual leader (Ostovar, 2019, p. 15). Nevertheless, even after the shocking killing of Suleimani, Kata'ib Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies in Iraq were not worried about its presence in Iraq. Knowing that President Donald Trump was unwilling to enter a war, specifically during the Covid-19 period. Their highest priority was to preserve an Iraqi system, which is a system that has everything for sale (Worth, 2020).

To conclude, as the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq caused domestic chaos, instability and weakness. This was an open gate for Iran to take advantage of this situation. This chance was considered a golden one for Iran to achieve its long-term goals, as previously mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. The roots of the Iranian aims in Iraq and the region came to exist finally, and Iran used several mechanisms to achieve its aims to become an influential power in the region through Iraq mainly. This leads to the fact that the Iranian aims came beyond all of the boundaries that were set before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The political elites in Iraq were sleeping cells, waiting for their chance to take control over the Iraqi political scene, and become a powerful establishment and a hard one to be removed. As it was presented in the first chapter and this chapter, the political parties and elites had strong ties with Iran since the Iraq-Iran war. This explains how Iran was able to play an active role in the Iraqi political process in the post-2003 period.

Therefore, Iran backed the political parties and elites in Iraq, and participated in the elections fraud and manipulation of its results, to assure the installation of a friendly government and politicians in Iraq. Nevertheless, Iran managed to affect the Iraqi decision-making process through its affiliated political parties, which serve its

aims. This is manifested on several occasions mentioned in this chapter. Iran's aims were set to be on a long-term period, and post-2003 Iraq was a perfect time to spread its influence in Iraq. Iran has also participated in the civil sectarian war in Iraq, by backing the Shiite militias in Iraq, to create more damage to the Iraqi reality.

Herewith, Iran also used its proxies in Iraq to affect the political process constantly. The Iranian-backed militias were Iran's strong and intensive influential strategy to maintain and increase its influence in Iraq. The leaders of the Iranian-backed militias enabled them to gain momentum presence and effect in the Iraqi political scene and were able to control how the political process would result. The numbers of armed militias were increasing subsequently during the first ten years after the U.S.-led invasion. These leaders of these terrorist groups also managed to enter the political process significantly after the formation of PMF, which allowed them to become a legit entity.

Hence, these militias have participated in the killing, and abduction of many Iraqi activists, and other illegal practices as it was mentioned previously. What was obvious according to the reached information in this chapter, the Iranian-backed militias showed the Iraqi government's disability and weakness in containing and controlling these militias and most significantly the failure of including the PMF under the Iraqi state's authority. This, indeed, reveals the Iranian strong influence on Iraq which increased its weakness and vulnerability to be ruled under a fully patriotic and non-influential government.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the presented chapters in this thesis, the roots of the Iraqi, Iranian and U.S. engagements went through variable stages. Since Saddam Hussein's era, Iraq faced a struggle to maintain its identity and presence as a powerful country in the region. Thus, Iran had the same ambitions since the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran under Ayatollah Khamenei, and Hussein's regime was considered an obstacle in front of Iran to achieving those ambitions. Iran and Iraq went through a devastating eight years' war against each other from 1980-to 1988, which cost hundreds of thousands of casualties and metrical destruction for both countries. At the same time, the Islamic Republic of Iran was struggling to export its ideology and revolution into Iraq and practiced several policies to overthrow the Ba'ath regime, in addition to the border disputes issue. This has led the Iraqi regime to invade Iranian border provinces.

The U.S. role in this war was neutral in the beginning, but after the Iranian progress at the beginning of the war, the U.S. changed its position and backed the Iraqi regime, due to the fear of Iranian victory and becoming a regional power in the region. This thesis managed to reveal the U.S. actual role in the Iraq-Iran war, which as a result, the U.S. intelligence and weapon support for Iraq was presented after the U.S. regional allies demanded to stop the Iranian progress. The support for the Iraqi regime is explained in this thesis in the context of protecting the U.S. allies in the region, from the Iranian threat of exporting its revolution and becoming a dominant power.

Therefore, according to the findings of this thesis, the U.S. support for Iraq leads to the fact that it was not direct protection for the Iraqi state's interests, rather, Iraq was used as an instrument to deter the Iranian threat from becoming a dominant power in the region. However, the U.S. did not take one side to support during the war, rather, it conducted clandestine aid for Iran during the American hostage's incident. Which positioned the U.S. as an active player during the war.

This thesis found that Iran came out of this war as a weak state, and it has lost its wide-range aims of exporting its Islamic revolution in Iraq as a start, leading to the rest of the region, overthrowing the threatening Saddam Hussein's regime as a first object. As for Iraq, it has emerged as a strong state with a well-equipped and

experienced army, which had formed a contentious threat to Iran's political, strategic, and regional interests. Indeed, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 proves that the Ba'ath regime was aiming to impose its power in the region, even though the reason for the invasion was not a critical one. However, the U.S. swiftly changed its policy with Iraq this time, since Kuwait is a U.S. ally. The Iraqi regime soon faced intensive military attacks by the U.S. and allied forces, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops from Kuwait, and great damage to Iraq's infrastructures.

This thesis managed to elaborate on the heavy and unnecessary U.S. response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This was later followed by heavy sanctions on Iraq, promoted by the U.S. and the UN council, causing a high-scale deterioration in the lives of the Iraqi citizens. The changed American policy towards Iraq resumed in the following years after the invasion of Kuwait. And according to the thesis findings, 11 September 2001, formed a high degree of transition in the U.S. view and policy towards Iraq. As it was explained in this thesis, the U.S. linked the attack to the Ba'ath regime and considered it a part of the al-Qaida terrorist group, and positioned Iraq within the American policy of global war on terror. Apart from this, the viewed facts in this thesis refer that, the U.S. viewed Iraq under Saddam Hussein as a possible growing power in the region, which forms a threat to the U.S. interests in the region, and had to be eliminated from its roots.

Indeed, the U.S. succeeded to break a worthy claim to remove the threatening regime of Saddam Hussein. This thesis took the events from the invasion of Kuwait until the beginning of 2003, to display the process of overthrowing Hussein's regime. The American plan consisted of the claims of Iraq's link to al-Qaida and the attack of 11 September, in addition to owning weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. claims were translated into actual action in March 2003. The U.S.-led invasion was a necessary and justified campaign toward Iraq according to George W. Bush's claims. The reached elements in this thesis indicate that the WMDs, were never proved to have existed in Iraq, and the invasion was later justified by Bush as a democracy-promoting operation in Iraq.

The invasion of Iraq by the U.S. succeeded in toppling Saddam Hussein, dissolving the powerful Iraqi army, and erasing the elements of the Ba'ath party, which has been a threat to the U.S. interests in the region. This, however, opened the way for the new political order in Iraq. The reached facts in this thesis, indeed prove

that the U.S. managed to implement the new political order by supporting the Iraqi exiled opposition. The new Iraqi political scene was framed in a dysfunctional sectarian-based political system, which the U.S. carefully arranged with the first implemented Iraqi government in 2005. As the new order and political process were implemented in Iraq under U.S. supervision, Iraq was in a state of weakness and chaos, which was considered a useful environment for being directed according to external powers.

As for the new political system, this thesis explains that the U.S. promotion of democracy failed in Iraq. Starting from the fault bases of the new Iraqi constitution, which had divided the political system in Iraq through sectarian-based power distribution under the sectarian apportionment system “*Muhasasa taifia*”. This system, a U.S. implemented one, neglected the fact that Iraq was in a state of chaos and in desperate need of a post-2003 political system that can bring all of the Iraqi elements together, and not the opposite.

Moreover, the U.S. supervision of the Iraqi political scene started by supporting the first Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. His ruling period led Iraq into its first steps of high corruption in political, economic, and military aspects. Notwithstanding, this thesis shed light on his acts of misuse of power for self-interests and led Iraq into sectarian civil war in his first years, which was merged with complexity and domestic instability, resulting in high ranks of deaths among the Iraqi citizens and deterioration in every aspect. This thesis also explained that after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, al-Qaida in Iraq emerged as a result of this invasion and the weakened Iraqi forces after the military was dissolved. And according to the reached elements in this thesis, it has come against the U.S. claims of connecting Iraq to the al-Qaida terrorist group before the invasion. But after causing a massive political and security vacuum in Iraq, the recourse was for the terrorist groups to emerge Iraq.

As it was presented in this thesis, the political corruption and violence pattern in Iraq started with al-Maliki’s government. His first period witnessed many clashes and conflicts with his political rivals such as al-Sadr Movement and other Sunni politicians for competing over power. The U.S., however, managed to conduct an arrangement with al-Maliki’s government to withdraw from Iraq in 2011. Leaving Iraq under a sectarian system, unqualified political elites, and a fragile country with

multiple deep problems. And most importantly, the U.S. handed Iraq over to Iran by withdrawing its forces. The corrupted practices especially regarding the Iraqi military by al-Maliki and his exploitation and misuse of power led Iraq into the ISIS crisis. As a result of the fault bases of the Iraqi constitution, al-Maliki declared himself as the commander in chief of the Iraqi forces, which explains further the major corruption in the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, which was discussed in this thesis.

The corruption and failing politics resumed in the following governments after al-Maliki, and the sectarian apportionment system became the main feature of Iraqi politics. The findings of this thesis managed to signal the errors of the Iraqi political system, which resulted in a public refusal of the continuous failing and unqualified governments. The post-2003 period was shaped as the most failing period in the modern history of Iraq. According to the elements of this thesis, and a period where the Iraqi people suffered from a lack of all basic services, domestic security, and the absence of patriotic governments and qualified political elites, who can create and lead a stable and democratic state. Instead, the Iraqi political reality is in fact, droning in a circle of Iranian and U.S. influence, by using Iraqi leaders and parties to achieve ground interests. Those leaders, in turn, are also pursuing self-interest, and increase in their power. This resulted from the U.S. political supervision, which has been directed since the beginning of the invasion. which included all of the opposition to the Ba'ath regime and were mainly selected and agreed on by the U.S. administration since 2005.

However, the U.S. failing mission in Iraq was apparent in each government that ruled Iraq after 2003. However, this thesis regarded the rise of ISIS in Iraq as a result of the corrupted government and a U.S. failure. Which was responsible for training and equipping the Iraqi army. The U.S. support for Iraq in the battles against ISIS was due to the fear of the crisis's effect on its interest in the region and the possible collapse of the oil-producing mechanism in Iraq. In addition, the political scene in Iraq was based on the sectarian divisions of authority, which has affected the political process in its essential form. This has drifted Iraq away from reforming and developing its mission to a state of chaos, sectarianism, and corruption.

Moreover, what is evident in this thesis, is the contentious pattern of a broken political scene in post-2003 up to date, and the U.S. is considered a major factor in forming this kind of pattern. Therefore, after the mass public demonstrations of

October 2019, in Iraq against the corruption of the Iraqi governments and political elites, the resignation of the prime minister explains the degree of public dissatisfaction with the political process in Iraq.

However, this thesis also aimed to reveal the fact of connection between the post-invasion chaos, the implementation of a new political system by the U.S., and the Iranian deep influence and penetration in the Iraqi political process. Because in major part, the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the massive political and security vacuum that accord in after 2003, opened the opportunity for Iran to implement its long-term strategy to secure any possible threat from Iraq, similar to the 1980 war. According to the reached elements in this thesis, the Iraqi political structure. The political parties after 2003 were also directed in major part by Iran, due to its close ties with Iran on one hand. And on the other, the major deployment of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. This can be explained by the affiliation of the Iraqi politicians to Iran and their historical close ties to it.

Therefore, Iran managed to implement its political strategy through the political elites, with political and strategic support build on fraud and corruption in the electoral process. This was indicated in this thesis, and the electoral fraud and results were manipulated by Iran. It is, therefore, important for Iran to implement an affiliated Iraqi government in Iraq to succeed in its aims of becoming a dominant power in the region, starting from Iraq. The Iranian strategy in Iraq was evident in the 2008 Strategic Agreement with the U.S., which managed to affect its results in what serves its interests.

Iran had several ways to penetrate Iraq, as such, the politicians with close ties and the growing number of armed militias, which were mainly supported, trained, and armed by Iran, significantly before and after the Iraq-Iran war. This thesis connected the use of Iranian-backed militias to attain an Iranian-friendly political process and system in Iraq. Which was highly obtained after 2003. Also, the Iraqi government was not able to control nor confront those militias, due to the political positions of its leaders in the Iraqi government. In addition, the Iraqi political figures, and many party leaders are commanders and heads of the militia groups, which has. And, thus, these Iranian-backed militias practiced many violations, starting from assaulting and killing Iraqi citizens and activists, achieving political settlements, and using their Iranian weapon's support to stay above the law of the Iraqi state.

Indeed, since the sectarian civil war led to the public demonstrations in the country, these groups alongside their leaders became a tool of chaos and corruption in Iraq. Nevertheless, the degree and shape of those militias' presence in Iraq were emphasized in this thesis through the reached elements that describe its deep roots in Iraq. Therefore, the Iranian-backed militias can be framed as the strong and invisible hand in Iraq, which provided Iran with high control over the political process specifically after the U.S. withdrawal of forces from Iraq.

The resulted implications of the U.S. and Iran interventions in Iraq had caused massive dilemmas within the political Iraqi scene post-2003. The Iraqi governments in the post-invasion period failed to create the hoped domestic stability, security, and successful political system in Iraq. These failings created a fragile, non-institutional and corrupted state system, which was created and manipulated to serve the interests of the political elites in Iraq, at the expense of the Iraqi people. These interests, however, are born due to the aforementioned influences and interventions by the U.S. and Iran. Which indeed, were following a strategy of weakening to dominate. The failing Iraqi political scene affected every level and aspect of Iraq, which caused public refusal of the post-2003 Iraqi political elites and their sectarian-based system comprehensively. Therefore, the call to eject the external influences and interventions by the U.S. and Iran were publicly demanded and emphasized.

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## RESUME

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<b>Undergraduate Degree</b>	Media/ Radio-TV	Salahaddin University-Erbil	2018

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<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Year</b>
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Foreign Languages: English, Turkish, Arabic

Publications:

Date: 06/06/2022

