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IRAN'S IRAQ POLICY AFTER THE SECOND GULF WAR

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Abstract

The Persian Gulf, regarded as the “heart” of the Middle East, witnessed the struggle of regional hegemony that took place between Iran and Iraq, which are the two important representatives of Arabic and Persian culture, during the 20th century. The balances in the area changed drastically with the United States of America’s (USA) invasion of Iraq in 2003. One of the most important results of the war is that Iran, seizing the opportunity for strategic expansion in the Middle East in general and in the Persian Gulf in particular, attained indisputable supremacy against Iraq. After the invasion of Iraq The Teheran administration started to reshape its relations with Iraq. Iran’s Iraqi policy on the subjects such as Iraqi Shiites, Northern Iraqi Regional Kurdish Administration, economic and commercial relationships is analyzed in this paper.

Key Words: Iran, Iraq, Shiites, The Persian Gulf, The Second Gulf War.

1. Introduction

Because of its geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics, the Middle East has become one of the most important engagement areas of the world. On the other hand the Persian Gulf, which is considered as the “heart” of the Middle East is one of the regions that international politics has focused on for over thirty years. One of the main reasons why the Persian Gulf has become prominent in international politics is the foreign policies of Iran and Iraq, the two riparian countries on the Gulf, and the competition between these two states. Iran, the representative of Persian culture with its political past, comes to the fore with its being on the passageways, the revolutionist ideology they use, being the political center of Shiism, and oil and natural gas reserves it has. On the other hand, Iraq gains importance because it is the most powerful Arabic country in the Gulf, its heterogenous ethnic and denominational structure, its pan-Arabis ideology, its special role in the Arabic World, and as well as in energy resources.

The problems between these two medium-scaled powers, date back to the Ottoman period. The struggle for the regional hegemony started between these two countries with the event of Iraq’s seceding from the Ottomans. This struggle intensified with United Kingdom’s (UK) withdrawal from the region in the 1970s and turned into close combat in the 1980s. But there was no winner in that war which lasted for 8 years.

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However, a series of developments took place on a global and regional scale in the post-Cold War era that deeply influenced the regional balances in the Middle East, especially the balance of power between Iran and Iraq. Primarily with the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and its collapse in 1991, the Russian centred threat disappeared in terms of Iran. On the other hand, with the First Gulf War¹, by which Iraq, the "eternal" rival of Iran, was driven from Kuwait in 1991, a heavy blow was inflicted on the military, political and economic powers of this state. Thus, Iran attained supremacy against Iraq, as a result of the intervention of coalition forces under the leadership of the USA, which it could not reach despite a war of eight years. On the other hand, after the operations which the USA organized to Afghanistan in 2001 and to Iraq in 2003, The Taliban and Ba'ath governments, which had troublesome affairs with Iranian government, vanished.

The most important result of the Second Gulf War in terms of Iran is that this country got through as an unrivalled power in the Persian Gulf. With this war, military capacity of Iraq was torn down, its political power was shaken and its government system turned into a federation of loose structure. In this period, Iraq was *de facto* divided into three regions and the Kurds gained autonomy in the North; the Shiites, who were excluded from the power during both the Monarchy and the Baas regimes, increased their effectiveness in the Iraqi political system. This political scene developed in Iraq affected Iran's Iraqi policy in particular and the Middle East policy in general. Iran, acquiring an opportunity of strategic expansionism in the Middle East with Saddam's removal, started to increase its political influence by exploiting the sectarian factors over Iraq. However, besides all of these, after the Second Gulf War new threats occurred for Iran. The fact that the USA, which especially blacklisted Iran -together with Iraq and North Korea- to "Axis of Evil", occupied Afghanistan, Eastern neighbour of Iran, in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, has become a new security problem in terms of Tehran. On the other hand, the instabilities arising in Iraq also effected Iran. According to these process, Iran, in its strategy towards Iraq, had to follow a balanced policy considering the USA factor and the instabilities arising in this country. In this article, the new strategies that Iran, which has strategic targets such as increasing the economic and commercial relationship with Iraq, reinforcing the position of Shiite groups in this country in power, restraining the influences of regional Kurdish government to the Northern Iraq, produced towards Iraq after Saddam, are analyzed.

2. Historical Background of Iran-Iraq Relations

The relationships of Iran and Iraq shaped with a painful course in the historical process. Even at the period when Iraq was under the sway of the Ottomans, this territory was considered by Iran as a part of the Persian cultural basin and sovereignty in the Middle East. From 1920's onwards, when mandate government was established in Iraq, a troublesome process began, caused by land demands and by supporting the opponent powers. Iraq longed to possess the Shatt al-Arab Waterway and the region of Khuzestan, which belonged to Iran but densely populated by Arabs. Demanding land from Iran, the Baghdad government desired to deliver its resources with broader facilities to open seas in this way. Iraq supported "Arabia" state, which founded in Khuzestan region of Iran. In response to this, Iran, not recognizing Iraq till 1929, supported the Kurdish insurgencies, which were under the leadership of Mahmud Barzanji and continued between the years of 1919-23. However, the UK, having a voice in Iraq with "mandate government" it founded, tried to improve the Iran-Iraq relations with the accession of the Pahlavi dynasty. In this period, the danger of Soviet expansionism in the Middle East by exploiting the troubles in the region was one of the factors that led to the UK to such policy (Keskin, 2008: <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1383.html>). Following the end of the mandate regime on Iraq in 1932, Iran started a campaign for determining the Iran - Iraq border on the Shatt al-Arab River. According to Iran's demand the border should pass just in the middle of the river. According to the treaty signed between two states on July 4, 1937, the

¹ In the study, the action, that Iraq was driven from Kuwait by the Coalition Forces under the leadership of the USA in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, will be named as the First Gulf War; on the other hand, Iraq's invasion by the USA in 2003 will be named as the Second Gulf War.

sovereignty of Iraq on the Shatt al-Arab River was confirmed. But at the Abadan region in the eight kilometers part of the river the mid-line (thalweg) was accepted as the border (Ataman, 2010: 167-168).

Even though there rose a number of domestic disturbances in both countries during the World War II and the early years of the Cold War, no negative developments were experienced that would affect the bilateral relations. What's more, Iran and Iraq were among the members of Baghdad Pact, which was established in 1956 in consequence of the US encouragements. However, a new era started in the region with the military coup organized against monarchy in 1958. After the military coup, Republic was declared and Iraqi government, by stages, came to depart from the Western Camp. In the meantime, Kurdish secessionist movement blazed out again in Iraq with Mustafa Barzani's, the leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), who fought for the independence of Kurds in Iraq and Iran in 1930s and 1940s, coming back to Iraq from Soviet Union. Seeing this situation as an opportunity to wear down his regional enemy, the Iranian Shah started to support KDP together with the USA and Israel, who were his alliances in the course of the Cold War. Due to the fact that Kurdish upheavals in 1963, 1965, and 1968 were not squashed, Iraqi government had to bestow extensive political, economic and cultural rights on the Kurds in 1970 (Keskin,2008: <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1383.html>).

Taking into account of the difficulties Iraq encountered in this period, Iran unilaterally dissolved the 1937 treaty in 1969 and declared that the control of the Shatt al-Arab belonged to itself (Ari, 2007:401). Another important development to encourage Iran in taking such a step was the USA's new policy towards the region. According to this policy, known as Nixon Doctrine (or "Twin-Pillar Policy"), Iran would undertake the military responsibility for the security of the Gulf Area and Saudi Arabia would undertake economic and political responsibility for it. Iran, trying to dominate over the Gulf Area by using the political and military support it got from the USA, started to damage Iraq's regional interests. Iran invaded the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb, which were of strategic importance in the Persian Gulf, in November 1971. In response to this, Iraq, stopping the diplomatic relations with Iran, constrained Iran's rights to Abadan Oil Refinery and Khorramshahr Port (Ataman, 2010:166-167).

However, the Ba'ath regime, coming on the power in 1968, was tried to pull Iraq's foreign policy much more to the Soviet line. In order to obtain political and military support in the struggle against the secessionist Kurds, Iraq signed a "Friendship Treaty" with the Soviet Union in 1972. Iraqi government, having re-equipped the Iraqi army through the support they got from the Soviet Union, launched a new attack againsts KDP forces in 1974. Realizing that the KDP had no chance of success against Iraqi army, the Iranian Shah decided to solve the problem by signing a treaty with Iraq (Rousu, 2010:59). The Algeria Treaty was signed between the parties on the March 6, 1975. According to the concerned treaty, Iraq would give up its rights of sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab, and Iran, would not back-up the Kurdish groups in Iraq. The parties would sustain a good neighbourhood relations and they would prevent the transitions between the borders. Accordingly, a "Treaty of Border and Friendship" was concluded between the two countries in Bagdath on the July13, 1975 (Ataman, 2010:169).

However, it would not take long for Iraqi administration to withdraw from the Treaty of Algeria, which they had to sign in order to squash secessionist insurgency in Northern Iraq. The process starting with Khomeini's, the cleric leader of Iran after the revolution, overthrowing the Shah in Iran in 1979, prepared necessary conditions to Saddam Hussein, the new leader of Ba'ath regime. Because, with the revolution, Iran's new administration evaluated USA and the Western world as threat to their regime and ended relations with its traditional ally, the USA. In addition, there was no possibility that Iranian government, detaching from the West Block, should come close to the Soviet Union due to its ideological discourse. Thus, upon the fact that Iran became alone in the international arena and the instabilities arising in the country, Iran found itself in a disadvantageous position against its rival Iraq.

Right in the wake of the revolution, Khuzestan Arabs claimed such rights as autonomy and representation in the central government in Tehran. Upon the claims not being met by the new government, clashes between the Revolutionary Guards and Arabs in Khorramshahr began in May, 1979. The Iraqi government provided weapons and arms to Khuzestan Arabs. The Iraqi Kurds, together with the Iranian Kurds, started to revolt again. The fact that Iran did not impede the Iraqi Kurds' crossing Iran and setting up base in its borders despite the Treaty of Algeria caused conflicts to start on the border of Iran-Iraq. On the other hand, the new regime in Iran, which predicated on Shia faith, began to influence the Iraq, where 60% of the population is composed of Shiites. Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr, who was the religious leader of Iraqi Shiites and the president of the Dawa Party, was stimulating the Shiite opposition in Iraq by praising Khomeini and his revolution (Armaoğlu (a), 1991: 775-777).

The Saddam administration, which started to purchase weapons from the great powers including the USA, the UK and the Soviet Union since 1978, was ready to benefit from current conditions in Iran. In this context, Saddam, whose target was to remove the effects of Shiite-based Islamic Revolution in Iran, received back the concessions they had to give to Iran through the Algeria Treaty of 1975. They wanted to achieve absolute dominance over the Kurds, restrict Iran's economic and political power by disintegrating the Khuzestani Arabs from Iran and, to become the sovereign power in the area by realizing the national unity in Iraq (Arı, 2007: 404). They waged war against Iran on the September 1, 1980, by not recognizing the Treaty of Algeria.

Even though some Iranian lands in the south were occupied in the early days of the war, dominance of Iraq in the war lasted a short time. Iran received its lands back via the attack organized in 1981 and Iranian troops started to move towards Basra in 1982 (Arı, 2007: 406). Although Iran had the upper hand in the war, the war turned into a war of attrition because of the fact that spare parts of the American-made weapons Iran used failed to be provided. But the USA sold spare parts and rockets to Iran in return for the salvation of some American hostages kidnapped in Lebanon in the years of 1985 and 1986. After this event Iraq got into a "weaker position" against Iran. Iran tried to hit Iraq inside by establishing tactical relationships with the Kurdish groups from Northern Iraq. For all that Iraq also tried to establish relationships with opposition groups of the regime in Iran and with the Kurdish groups they were not able to succeed in this policy (Ataman, 2010:172).

Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait helped Iraq, which was in a difficult position against Iran, in economical terms. Iraq tried to pull the war away to the Persian Gulf by attacking Iran's oil refineries and oil tankers from 1984 onwards. In response to this, Iran targetted the oil tankers of other Gulf countries as well as Iraq's oil tankers. Also, Iraq started to use chemical weapons from 1984 onwards. The chemical weapons used and the attacks made towards the oil tankers caused the war become internationalized. In the meantime, the Saddam government, realizing that they could not win the war, continuing in the axis of reciprocal invasions and repulses, offered cease-fire two times to Iran in 1985-86 (Armaoğlu (b), 1991: 29-31). On the other hand, the United Nations (UN) Security Council, approved the decision of cease-fire numbered 598 on the July 20, 1987. This decision was adopted by Iraq and rejected by Iran. However, a series of developments experienced in 1988 changed the course of the war. A plane belonging to Kuwait was hijacked to Iran and an American ship in the gulf was destructed by the mine which was laid by Iran. Upon these developments, the USA attacked two oil rigs belonging to Iran. This development meant that the USA, who could not put up with the Gulf's becoming under the control of Iran, took part in the war. The USA and the Gulf countries increased the aid they made to Saddam, and Fao Peninsula and Majnun Islands, which were invaded by Iran two years ago and are of strategic importance, were taken back. In addition, Iraqi Army gave weight to the use of rockets and chemical weapons. Chemical weapons were also used against the civillian people in Halabcheh, who collaborated with Iran. Eventually, 15 days later, when the USA hit an Iranian plane carrying 290 civillian passenger on

the July 3, 1988, the war came to an end with Iran's accepting the UN decision numbered 598 (Ari, 2007:409).

The balances in the region changed with the process starting with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on the August 2, 1990, and some positive results arose in terms of Iran. Primarily, Iraq, after the invasion, was isolated in the international arena. Iran, indisputably condemning the invasion of Kuwait, advocated that the problem be solved in peaceful ways, and voted for the UN decision stipulating that Iraq immediately withdraw without making any conditions and legitimate Kuwaiti government be given back to the power. The most important outcome of the crisis in terms of Iran was that Saddam had to approve the provisions of 1975 Algeria Treaty (reason of the outbreak of eight-year war) without any precondition in order to be sure of the Iranian border and to deploy the troops in the Iranian front to the Kuwaiti front (Çetinsaya, 200: 302-304).

Iran pursued a policy of neutrality in the course of the war and was not against the intervention which the Coalition Forces under the leadership of the USA. After the intervention, Iraq seriously became weaker and the Iraqi army completely withdrew from the Iranian lands that they had not left after the Iranian-Iraqi war. Upon these developments, the position of Iran in the region became stronger and their image improved in the international arena (in the Arabian world in particular). Iraq was declared to be the evil-doer of the Iran-Iraq war in 1991 (Keskin, 2008: <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1383.html>).

In 1990's The Clinton administration determined policy of dual containment toward Iran and Iraq. With this *strategy neither would be assisted and both would be pressured to conform to international norms considered vital for the preservation of regional and international security*. But even in this period *the two neighbors continued to view each other and not the United States as their greatest source of insecurity. The Iranian armed forces remained fearful of the Iraqi regime's posturing toward Iran and had contingency plans for renewed Iraqi provocations over the Shatt al Arab border issue*. Dual containment policy, which was not supported by other great powers, such as European states, Russia, and China, lasted with end of Clinton administration in 2000. The Tehran administration was hopeful for establishing better relations with the Republicans. But in 2002 it found itself in the Bush's list of "axis of evil" (Ehteshami, 2003: 122).

With the Second Gulf War a new situation emerged in the region in terms of Iran, in which opportunities and threats were intertwined. Iran's interests necessitated removal of Saddam regime. But US existence in the Iraq would be greater threat in terms of Iran than the Saddam regime. Because Iran itself was in the US crosshairs as an evil power. So the Iranian government, refraining from America's military installation in Iraq, came to pay official visits with the regime opponents in Iraq on the one hand, and with the Saddam government on the other. Iran was against the invasion considering the uncertainty of Iraq after Saddam. However, with the outbreak of the war, they declared their foreign policy as "active neutrality" (Ehteshami, 2003: 122-124).

3. The Efforts to Improve the Relations: Mutual Visits and Bilateral Agreements

In the post-Saddam era, Iran primarily tried to enhance its diplomatic relationships with the Baghdad administration. Of the countries in the region, it was the first country to send an official envoy to this country to make talks with Iraqi Interim Administration Council. Particularly after the Transitional Government set up under the Prime Ministry of Ibrahim al-Jaafari in 2005, Iran Iraq relations improved (Nasr,2006:2).

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of Iran, made an official visit to Baghdad in 2008, and Jalal Talabani, the President of Iraq, to Tehran in 2010. Nouri al- Maleki, the Prime-Minister of Iraq, made four official visits to Iran before 2010, and in the course of these visits, a number of agreements were signed as regards the topics such as migration between the borders, sharing intelligence, the pipeline project to deliver crude oil between the cities of Abadan and Basra, mine clearance and the common search for the soldiers lost during the Iran-Iraq War.

During the official visit Ahmedinejad organized to Iraq in 2008, the airport which the Iranian businessmen constructed in Najaf was inaugurated, and seven different agreements including the issues of insurance, customs practices, industry, education, environmental protection and transportation were signed (Katzman, 2010:10). Also, Agreement of Military Cooperation was signed between Iraq and Iran. In order to prevent the opposition to be made by the USA, the clause that *"Iran shall not be able to train the Iraqi Army"* was added to the agreement. In this period, Iraqi leaders preferred the way of solving the controversial issues in accordance with the interests of Iran. In June, 2005, the top-executives from Iraq stated that *"the responsibility of Iran-Iraq War belonged to Iraq"*. They charged the Saddam government with the use of "chemical weapons" during the War (Katzman, 2010:9). In May, 2006, Hosyar Zebari, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, stated that the Iraqi government is against the neighbouring countries' producing mass destruction weapons, but they did see no inconvenience in Iran's peaceful nuclear energy facilities (<http://www.irantracker.org/foreignrelations/iran-iraq-foreign-relations>).

4. Developing Economic and Commercial Relations

The economic and commercial relations between the two countries were being sustained at an important level even in the periods when the political relations were troubled due to the reasons such as geographical closeness. The economic relations became more dynamic due to the commercial treaties signed between the two countries in the wake of Saddam Administration's being overthrown. The trade volume between the two countries, which was one and a half billion dollars in 2006, increased up to eight billion dollars in 2010. Yet, the balance in the commercial relations has been serving in favour of Iran. Between twenty and thirty percent portion of Iran's exportation except for oil is being made to Iraq. This figure is rather low in terms of Iraq. The exportation of only thirty seven million dollars was made to Iran. Iran exports mostly industrial products to Iraq, while Iraq generally exports agricultural products to Iran. The businessmen from Iran came to invest in Iraq in many sectors, including construction, transportation, energy and finance. Additionally, Iran got ready to deliver Iranian natural gas to Europe over Iraq and Syria. The border trade between the two countries has increased and a series of regulations aiming at improving the interregional commercial relations were put on the agenda. The establishment of free trade zones in both countries is being considered. The most important step taken in April 2010 is the establishment of free trade zone in Basra, which is ten kilo meters away from Iranian border. However, the sanctions commenced by the USA in 2010 in response to Iran's nuclear program negatively affected the commercial activities carried out between Iran and Iraq (<http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/iran-iraq-foreign-relations>).

5. The Iraqi Shiite Groups and Iran

The Shiites forms approximately sixty percent of Iraqi population. Nevertheless, the Shiites did not take part in the administration of Iraq during the 20th century. The exclusion of Shiites from the power dates back to the unsuccessful revolt against British forces in their country in 1920s. British forces quelled this revolt in a bloody way and removed the Shiites from the administration. This situation continued until the military coup of 1958. Even though the Shiites had a partial voice in the power after the 1958 coup, a period when they were excluded from the power and even they were subjected to pressure and persecution started with the Baath Administration's coming to power by means of the 1968 Coup. In consequence of their policies, various fractions appeared among the Iraqi Shiites. The Iraqi Shiites sympathized with the developments in Iran after the 1979 Revolution in particular caused the Saddam government to follow a more strict and oppressive policy towards them. In this period, there occurred some minor mobilizations among the Shiites but the leading Shia religious men were either executed or exiled (Arkan, 2006:170). Finally, in 1991 after the First Gulf War, the Shiites commenced a revolt in the cities of Najaf, Karbala and Nasiriyah. This revolt was again quelled by Saddam in a bloody way. The Tehran administration's effort was exhibiting a diplomatic response (Terhalle, 2007:74).

After the Second Gulf War, the Shiite population in Iraq started to show its influence. The "Shiite Crescent"² appeared not only in Iraq, but also in the Middle East. The Shiites who did not want to be in the status of political minority in their own motherland started to voice this in every platform. In May 2003, right after the Second Gulf War, approximately two million Shiites gathered in Karbala and this crowded population gave message to the World that from now on, Iraq is a country of Shia (Nasr, 2004:16). The Shiite identity rising in Iraq forms, the backbone of Iraqi policy of Iran. However, as mentioned before, the Shiites divided into various groups and there is no effective cooperation among them. The movements such as fundamentalist-secular, pro American or pro-Iran failed to generate a common response to the invasion. Also there is a competition among these groups for the religious and political representation of the Iraqi Shiites. The Iranian administration, despite the mentioned differences, pursued to improve the relations with the leading Shiite groups. The most important Shiite groups in Iraq are as follows:

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI): Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, who fled to Iran in 1980 due to the pressure of the Saddam Administration exerted towards Shiites in Iraq, founded the organization of SCIRI. After Baqir al-Hakim lost his life as a result of the assassination on the August 29, 2003, his brother, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim took his place (Ari, 2007:79). SCIRI is the oldest group that has relations with Iran. The Badr Organization (Badr Corps), the armed force of SCIRI, was armed and trained by Iranian Revolutionary Guards. The organization favoured Iran in the Iran-Iraq War, carried out activities in Southern Iraq and in 1991, organized an unsuccessful revolt against Saddam (Katzman, 2010:1). Badr Organization, which has 10.000-15.000 armed forces, comes into fore as the most organized Shiite group in Iraq. SCIRI was criticized by the other Shiite groups due to its giving moderate messages to the USA (Ari, 2007:80). The Council's power in Iraq became weaker because they took sides with Iran during Iran-Iraq War. From 2002 onwards, the organization has become prominent. In spite of the fact that the Council made an explanation against the invasion, it collaborated with the Coalition Forces under the leadership of the USA (Arikan, 2006:172-173). SCIRI took part in the government after the invasion and Badr Organization joined the Iraqi forces.

Dawa Party³: The oldest one among the Shiite groups in Iraq is the Dawa Party, which was founded by Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr in 1959. Baqir al-Sadr carried out political studies with Ayetollah Khomeini, who was in exile in Najaf between the years of 1964-1978. Baqir al-Sadr was executed in 1980 upon his revolting against the Saddam administration (Katzman, 2010:1). Later, the party was divided in three. Those who went to Iran (the party's Tehran branch) joined SCIRI, but they seceded from the Council by not accepting Khomeini Doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Those who went to UK came to the fore in the post-invasion process. Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the leader of London Branch, took part in the Interim Iraqi Administration and became the Prime Minister of Transitional Government in 2005 (Arikan, 2006:172). The Dawa Group didn't attend the meetings, which were under the initiative of the USA, in the wake of the invasion. But they undertook a number of active roles in administration by getting involved in the process in the course of time. The competent authorities of the Dawa employed the expression of pluralist society based on democracy and human rights (Ari, 2007:81). The Sadr Group remaining in Iraq constitutes the third branch of the Dawa.

The Sadr Group: The Sadr family is a rooted family that carried out the leadership of Iraqi Shiites and has political influence in this country. The leading figures of the family were executed by Saddam between the years of 1980-2003. Muqtada al-Sadr replaced Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr, who was killed in 1999. The Sadr Group is the group that showed

² The US occupation of Iraq and its project of democratizing the area, with the determination of Abdullah, the King of Jordan, gave rise to the emergence of "Shiite Crescent" in the Middle East geography. This line starts from Pakistan and -by passing from Iran, the political center of the Shiite world, Iraq, under the control of Shiites- extends to the Southern Lebanon, under the control of Hezbollah. In addition, considering the fact that 75% of Shiite population lives in Bahrain, 30% in Kuwait and 10% in Arabia, a Shiite crescent can be mentioned in the vicinity of Persian Gulf (Helfont, 2009:285).

³ This group is named as Islamic Dawa Party in some sources.

the most severe reaction to the US invasion. Al-Sadr, who was the student of Hawza School in Najaf, became prominent with his political identity after the invasion. He had large number of supporters in Najaf, Karbala, Nasiriyah and Baghdad (Ari, 2007:79). Al-Sadr recognizes Ayatollah Kazem al- Haeri in Iran as the religious leader instead of Ayetollah Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani who is the president of Shiite Council in Hawza (Ari, 2007:81). Jaish al-Mahdi, the armed force of Sadr Group, is the primary Shiite resistance group. Al-Sadr, advocating the Shia-Sunni cooperation, commenced a counter-fight against the Coalition Forces. The Jaish al-Mahdi fights not only with the occupation forces but also the Badr Organization of SCIRI and the forces of al-Sistani (Arikan, 2006:175). The Jaish al-Mahdi has an important role in the increasing sectarian tensions in the years of 2005-2006. Although the Jaish al-Mahdi was defeated by the American and Iraqi forces, it was used as a trump during the US – Iran tension (Katzman, 2010:2). While al-Sadr family traditionally supports Iraqi-centered Shiaism, Muqtada al-Sadr has come to contact with the Iranian officials in time (Ari, 2007:83). Muqtada al-Sadr, coming closer to Iran, settled in Tehran in 2008 and started to carry on his studies and conduct his operations (Katzman, 2010:1).

Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's Group: Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the leading opponents of the Saddam's period, is the president of Hawza's board of executives of ten people, which is both a Shiite religious school in Najaf, and which is the highest religious authority in the country and has the protective position of holy places in Iraq. During the invasion, this group published fatwas such as "jihad" and "not hindering" the actions of the coalition forces contradicting each other (Ari, 2007:80-81). According to al-Sistani, who was born in Iran, the Shiite's dominance will be ensured in the country by settlement of democracy in Iraq, which achieved stability instead of shedding blood (Arikan, 2010:176).

Al-Khoei Foundation: After the death of Ayatollah Sayyid Abul-Qassim al-Khoei in 1992, the al-Khoei Foundation was founded by his sons in London. The Foundation comes into force with its welfare activities rather than the political ones. Sayyid Abdul Majid al-Khoei, the president of the Foundation who collaborated with the USA forces in the course of the invasion, was killed on the April 10, 2003 (Arikan, 2006:173).

It appears that Iran engages with the main Shiite groups in Iraq, the general characteristics of which have been cited above. Iran, with the commencement of the intervention, drew up new strategies towards the Iraqi Shiites. The Iranian TV produced daily programs aimed at Iraqi people. The Iranian administration also took action to send back the Iraqi Shiite religious men in exile (Arikan, 2006:173). Iran, that had no role in toppling Saddam, tried to take active role in the political process in Iraq after the war, through establishing multilateral contacts with Shiite groups. In the political field, Iran primarily, tried to reinforce the roles of SCIRI and the Da'wa Party in the administration and in military field tried to improve the powers of the Jaish al-Mahdi and some minor resistance groups. With these efforts beyond targeting some specific goals in the short term, Iran's long term strategy towards Iraq is to achieve to a position of determining the political developments in this country (Felter and Fishman, 2008: 26).

Iran is trying to prevent some Shiite groups to come closer to the USA. Iran also has been able to establish dialoge with the Shiite leader Moqtada al Sadr who had used anti-Iranian statement before, by exploiting his anti American attitude. By this way Iran is trying to increase its influence in Iraq and withholding the shiite card to use when Iran-USA friction occurs (Keskin, 2009: 69).

Some American strategists predicted that after the invasion an alliance relations could not be established between the Iraqi Shiites and Iran. They thought that Iran-Iraqi war, that lasted eight years and caused to death of one million people, destructed the ties of the shiites of Iraq and Iran. Because, during this war, most of Iraqi Shiites did not cooperate with Iran and fought for their country. For instance, in 1982, when the Basra city was besieged by Iranian troops, Iraqi shiites resisted to the invasion.

However, the war did not divide the Iranian and Iraqi Shiites to the extent that the US strategists had predicted. In terms of the Shiites who were fed up with the Sunni dominance in the country particularly with the oppression politics Saddam exerted to them, the war was not a sufficient reason for long term hatred from Iran. Also some events such as the suppression of Shiite revolt in a bloody way, which broke out in the South of Iraq after the First Gulf War in 1991, increased solidarity among the Shiites. After this revolt, a troublesome era began for Iraqi Shiites. So in the same year approximately one hundred thousand Shiites took refuge in Iran. These people were trained and employed in the fields of theology and defence. A portion of these people rose to the position of Ayatollah. Mahmood Shahraudi, belonging to the Sadr Group, was promoted up to the presidency of Iran Judicial Assembly. Baqir al-Hakim, the ex leader of SCIRI, and Mohammad-Ali Taskhiri the chief adviser of Ali Khamani, the religious leader of Iran, are just some of those. These people are performing many activities for making the Iraqi Shiites to come closer to Iranian administration. For instance, Taskhiri carries out some operations within the Ahli Bayt Foundation in order to improve economic and cultural relations between Iran and Iraq (Nasr, 2006:2-3).

It was thought that the different interpretations and different centers of Shiism might be exploited as another point of disagreement to appear between the Iraqi Shiites and the Iranian administration. Najaf and Karbala, which were the significant centers of Shiite doctrine, revived again in the post-Saddam era. A great majority of the Iraqi Shiites gravitated towards Najaf instead of the city of Qom which is the religious center of Iran (Ehteshami, 2003:123). The potentials of Najaf and Qom Scholars to interpret the Shiism in different ways became apparent with the *Velayat-e faqih*, which is developed about political power⁴. However, in the period after the invasion, no doctrinal split in opinion, which would cause a great controversy between Najaf and Qom Scholars, came forward. The Najaf scholars of Shiites behave cautiously about making irritating explanations towards the authorities of Tehran and Qom and towards the policies of Iran. The Arabic-Persian ethnic difference has not been an important factor as regards submission to Shiite scholar. The center of the web-site of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Shiite scholar from Iraq, is in the city of Qom. Lots of Iranian youngsters consider al-Sistani as their religious leader, and they pay their religious taxes to him. With the opening of holy places in Karbala and Najaf after the invasion, hundred of thousands of people from Iran have begun to visit these cities regularly every year. Thus, the relationships between the Shiites of the two countries become more strong. The extent to which the factor of Shiism has deepened the relations of Iran and Iraq becomes clear considering the fact that religious leader of Iraq is from Iran and the person who is at the top of Iranian judiciary is from Iraq (Nasr, 2006: 3-4).

However, a number of differences resulting from national reasons and political culture between the Iranian administration and Iraqi Shiites are in question. Some religious men, particularly Muqtada al-Sadr, among the Shiite groups aim a theocratic state system of Iranian style. However, more predominant divine authority like Ayatollah al-Sistani stated that "*wrong authorities should abstain from the politics*". As for Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, the ex leader of SCIRI who once advocated the Iranian model, he stated that "*suitable conditions do not exist in Iraq for Islamic State*". Also majority of the Iraqi Shiites were not in search of theocratic governance after secular-totalitarian administration (Arıkan, 2006: 172). Ethnic structure of Iraq is different from Iran and also the chance of success of the Iranian model in Iraq is uncertain. So these factors influence the political system preference of the Iraqi Shiites. In addition to these a

⁴ According to Najaf ulema possessing the traditional Shiite political thought, political power belongs only to 12 Imam except God and prophet. Laying claims to power except the Imams means seizing. This belief contradicts with the understanding of *Velayat-e faqih* having the fundamental basis of Iranian Shiite understanding (Keskin, 2007:45). *Velayat-e faqih* was developed by Khomeini in Najaf in the 1960s. This approach, advocating the power of reverends, legally expresses the highest office of Iranian Islamic regime. According to the theory of *Velayat-e faqih*, "the lost imam" bestows the task of the administration of Islamic societies and formation of the government on the interpreters of Islamic law. Because the religious scholars (canonists) are successors of the prophet, to govern the society is their rights and duties. The prophets and "authority" (Absolute authority) particular to their imams are also valid for canonists. (Keskin, 2009:74)

substantial portion of the Shiite population cooperated with the USA. The political power of USA in the region is a significant security matter for Iran. This situation, though occasionally, turns into a matter of making preference between the USA and Iran in terms of Iraqi Shiites (Keskin, 2007: 76-77).

6. Insurgency, the Shiites, and Iran

Unlike the Sunnis, majority of the Shiites-much of whom were against the invasion- did not take part in the resistance movement together with the Kurds. They even tried to oppose the resistance movement. The reason why the Shiites adopted such strategy is due to their target to take part in the administration after Saddam. The fact that they were excluded from the administration in the Saddam's period together with the Kurds and subjected to repression politics influenced the designation of this policy. Even the groups that came to the fore as pro-Iranian during Saddam era saw no harm in establishing a close relations with the USA. This situation does not mean that the Iraqi Shiites are pro-American. These groups made a statement against invasion before the intervention. The Iranian administration appreciated the Shiite groups that did not take part in the insurgency movement and did not force them to such a policy (Arkan, 2006: 175).

For a short period of time after the invasion, Tehran administration accepted strategy of Compromise for not to be in a clashing position with the USA. Because Iran did not want to be seen as the supporter of resistance movements in Iraq. Also if the conflicts in Iraq increases and turns into sunni shia conflict, the Turkey and Arab states in the region would intervene to the chaotic situation in Iraq and this could affect Iran's regional security. In the mean time US vital interests in Iraq contradicts with that of Iran's (Terhalle, 2007:70). So Iran refrained from being accused for the responsible of the USA's failure in Iraq. On the other hand if Iran directly supported resistance movements, the Shiite dominant government in Iraq would be in a difficult position against the USA (Sinkaya, 2007: 55-56).

By this way Teheran administration suggested to the Shiite groups in Iraq *"to compromise with the USA"*. Concerning this matter, Khamanei, the religious leader of Iran, even approved the *"strategy of compromise"* despite the opposition of some Shiite groups in Iraq (Felter, Fishman, 2008: 26). Even *Iran considered the attacks carried out to the religious places representing the Shiism as the developments aiming at subverting the territorial integrity of Iraq not as action style aiming at weakening the Shiism* (Yeşiltaş, 2006: 101).

However, (according to the US specialists), Iran gave up its strategy of not supporting the resistance movements from 2005 onwards. The fundamental reason for Tehran's changing its strategy was relations becoming tense with the Washington administration. This is due to Iran's nuclear program and the support they provided for Hamas and Hezbollah in Palestine and Lebanon. Iran helped the Shiite insurgents in providing education, organization, financial support, weapon and ammunition. The explosives used in the attacks carried out against the coalition forces in Iraq were provided to Jaish al-Mahdi by Iran. Jerusalem Forces (Qods Force) and the Lebanon wing of Hezbollah stepped in for the training of insurgents (Katzman, 2010: 2). Iraqi government under al-Maleki decided to take action against Jaish al-Mahdi as disagreements increased among the Shiite groups in Iraq. Operation which the Coalition Forces supported over the air, Jaish al-Mahdi approved the condition of *"disarmament"* and an armistice was signed on the March 30, 2008. However, the clashes between the US forces and Jaish al-Mahdi continued and as a result of this, an agreement was signed thanks to the mediation of Iran on the of May10, 2008 (Katzman, 2010: 3).

After this operation was carried out against Jaish al Mahdi, the armed forces of Sadr Group were pacified. Sub-fractions that was only targeting the US soldiers appeared within the organization. In the course of the operations, twenty nine Iranian people, who were supplying Jaish al Mahdi with weapon and ammunition, were captured. The USA took a series of measures in order to prevent the weapon transfer Iran would make to Iraq. In this context, the decision numbered 1747 was made in the UN Security Council in March 2007. In the involved

decision, the arms export Iran was going to make was prohibited. The arm transfer carried out via this way was tried to be prevented by setting up bases in Wasit and Maysen provinces (Katzman, 2010:4). In consequence of these precautions of the USA the actions of Shiite insurgents significantly decreased from the late 2008 onwards, thus the influence of Iran on the Iraqi Shiites has begun to wear out. The Iranian administration is trying to sustain its political influence by establishing special relationships with the political leaders in Iraq and by focusing its attention on the humanitarian aid (Katzman, 2010: 6).

7. The Iraqi Elections and Iran

One of the most important strategic aims of the Tehran administration in Iraq after Saddam is to make the pro-Iranian political groups, becoming prominent with the Shiite and religious identities, in this country come into power. It was expected that the Shiites, who were excluded from the administration during the 20th century, would increase their influence in the post Saddam governments. Because they form 60% of the country's population and they collaborated with the USA in the new period. The Tehran administration, being aware of the fact that Iraq, in which the Shiites dominate, will be a reliable neighbour for Iran, as well as its political, strategic and economic advantages, has begun to advocate the establishment of democracy (together with America) in Iraq (Sinkaya, 2007:56). The increased power of Shiites in the administration of Iraq is seen in the Iraqi Interim government formed on the June 1, 2004. The Shiites, being represented with thirteen members in Interim Iraqi Administration Council of twenty five people, got thirteen of the ministries in the Interim government. The Shiites were represented with five members in the Presidency Council of nine people (Ari, 2007:78).

The Iranian government supported Shiites Islamic groups in the election for the National Assembly of Iraq held in January 3, 2005. During the elections, the "United Iraqi Alliance" held by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Ibrahim al-Jafari and Ahmed Chalabi received 48% of the votes, taking 140 congressmen in the Parliament of 275 chairs. "Iraqi National List" of Iyad Allawi designated Prime Minister to the Iraqi interim government by the USA got 40 congressmen by taking 13% of the votes (İnat, 2010:45).

In the parliamentary elections held on the December 15, 2005, "United Iraqi Alliance" (the Shiite Block) took 128 congressmen by taking 41% of the votes (İnat, 2010:52). One of the reasons why the Shiite Block lost votes is that the Sunnis, boycotting the previous elections, participated in these. The Shiites' participating in the elections in a state of block caused them to become the most powerful group in the Iraqi parliament. However, the splits in opinion among the Dawa Party, SCIRI and Sadr Group became apparent. In April 2007, when the operations that the Prime-Minister Nouri al-Maleki launched with the Coalition Forces against the Jais al-Mahdy was intensified, 5 members belonging to Sadr group in the cabinet resigned (İnat, 2010:59). These developments caused the Tehran administration to lessen its influence on the Iraqi government.

In the Provincial elections held on the January 31, 2009, the Tehran government supported the pro-Iranian Shiite groups. Yet, al-Maleki's Dawa Party employing the statement of Iraqi nationalism among the Shiite groups emerged as the first (under State of Law Coalition) party from the elections by winning 9 of the 14 provinces. SCIRI, known for its closeness to Iran, could not take the highest vote in any province where the Shiites are predominant. Sadr List (Independent Free Movement Group) emerged the third in all of the the Shiite states. This situation indicates that the Iraqi nationalism can be a balancing element of the Iranian's actions in Iraq in the long term (Katzman, 2010: 7).

The Shiite groups sporadically, under different coalitions, joined the parliamentary elections held in 2010. The Prime-Minister al-Maleki's Dawa Party joined the elections under the umbrella of The State of Law Coalition. This block is in a detachment position with the Sadr Group and SCIRI, but it is an organisation representing the non-secular Shiites. Iyad Allawi, one of the ex-prime-ministers who is Shia-based but possessing a secular political view, on the other hand, set up al-Iraqiyya Block, which the Sunnis support. The Sadr Group and SCIRI set

up The National Iraqi Alliance (İnat, 2010: 66-68). Prior to these elections, the Iranian government embarked on an enterprise that the Sunnis boycott the elections and nomination of the Sunnis belonging to former Baath Party (Katzman, 2010: 7-8). However, the outcomes of elections were a complete shock for Iran because no success was achieved on this issue. Al-Iraqiyya List, the leadership of which Allawi carries on, emerged as the first party from the elections by taking the 24.48% of the votes and sent ninety one congressmen to the Parliament. Maleki's The State of Law Coalition, on the other hand, emerged as the second by taking 24.02% of the votes and sent eighty nine congressmen to the Parliament. The National Iraqi Alliance took seventy congressmen by taking 17.98% of the votes (İnat, 2010: 69-70). Even though al-Iraqiyya List emerged as the first party from the elections, the government was formed under the presidency of Maleki. For all that the USA leans to a government under the presidency of Allawi, who possesses secular political view and is supported by Sunnis, some balances in which Iran is also involved have caused to this consequence.

8. Northern Iraq Regional Kurdish Administration and Iran

The Kurdish people of Northern Iraq were the strategic ally of Iran against the Baghdad administration during the 20th century. Tehran, equally exploiting the Kurdish card against the central government, did not ignore the Northern Iraqi Kurds after the First Gulf War, when Saddam's control over the area virtually came to an end. In this period, the Iranian government made an effort to prevent Saddam from going into the region again and to reduce the influences of the USA, Israel and the regime opponents that existed in the area. They even served as mediatory in the clashes that broke out between the Barzani and Talabani groups. However, with the collapse of Saddam regime, which was the common enemy and unification factor of Iraqi Kurds and Iran, Tehran no more needed the support of Iraqi Kurds to weaken the central administration of Iraq. Thus, the traditional collaboration between Iran and the Kurds from Northern Iraq lost its validity and the strategic importance of Northern Iraq changed in terms of Iran. While Iran was settling accounts with the Iraqi administration over the Northern Iraq in the Baath period. After the Second Gulf War they do the same with the USA, Israel and the other states in the region over Baghdad (Keskin, 2008: <http://www.turksam.org/tra1383.html>). While Iran in the Saddam period, wished an Iraq, the central administration of which was weak, on the other hand after the the Second Gulf War, they aim an Iraq, in which the Shiites dominate and the territorial integrity of which is protected. Naturally, in this period, the Tehran administration has begun to get annoy of the Kurds independence claims and of their becoming prominent in the Iraqi administration. In particular, the fact that the Iraqi Kurds' increasing claims for independence influence the Iranian Kurds is the primary concerns of Iran (Arıkan, 2006: 176). With the establishment of Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) by the separatist Kurds from Iran in 2004, these concerns of Iran turned into a security problem. PJAK, using the Qandil Mounts as a base, organized attacks to the Iranian security forces from this date onwards. In response to this, the Iranian Army entered the Northern Iraq by targeting both the PJAK organization and the Peshmergas. The Iranian administration, warning the Baghdad government about PJAK, stated that they could occupy the Northern Iraq should the occasion arise (Blanche, 2008: 2009).

One of Iran's concerns in the field of security regarding Northern Iraq is the possibility that the region can be used by the USA (and Israel) against Iran as a base (Bahcheli and Fragiskatos, 2008: 76). The Iraqi Kurds, taking sides with the Coalition Forces against Saddam, have become the new ally for the USA in the region. The Kurds became concerned about mixing up in an affair between Iran and the USA and about the Northern Iraq's becoming the field of showdown between Iran and the USA (Keskin, 2008 : <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1383.html>). It is thought that, Iran developed relations with the new strategic actors in the region. For instance, it is claimed that the organizations such as Anser al-Islam (composed of the Kurds and Afghan Arabs) is supported by Iran and intelligence has been provided to these organizations. The Iranian administration is trying to suppress the Iraqi government and the Kurdish parties and trying to keep the USA out of this balance (Arıkan, 2006: 176). Despite the

security matters cited above, Iran did not ignore improving economic and commercial relations with Northern Iraq Regional Kurdish Administration. In fact, Iran has become the most important commercial partner of Regional Kurdish Administration today (Bahcheli and Fragiskatos, 2008: 78).

9. Some Issues Posing Obstacles for the Improvement of Bilateral Relations

Despite some positive developments mentioned above, a series of problems constitute impediments for the bilateral relations come into question. One of the problems in Iran-Iraq relations is the harbouring of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), which has a base in Iraq and campaigns armed struggle against the Iranian regime. This organization, founded against the Shah regime in 1960s, took an active role in the process of Revolution. However, this organization proceeded counter-actions against the Iranian administration after the revolution. Members of the organization took refuge in France and settled in Iraq in 1986. They collaborated with Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War (Arıkan, 2006: 177). Although they did not do any actions against the coalition forces during the occupation, their bases were bombarded by the USA in August 2004. A cease-fire agreement was signed between the USA and PMOI. The members of PMOI, who were disarmed within the framework of the concerned agreement, drew back to their base. The members of PMOI, whose ceding back to Iran were prohibited, were provided with guards within the context of Geneva Convention (Arıkan, 2006:178). Yet, due to PMOI's collaborating with Saddam, their existence in Iraq is not welcomed by the Shiites and Kurdish groups. The Tehran administration made attempts for PMOI, recognized as a terrorist organization by the Western countries, to be displaced from Iraq by making interviews with the Prime-Minister Maleki and the pro-Iranian Shiite leaders. The Iraqi Security Forces blockaded the Camp Ashraf of PMOI located in the area close to the Iranian border and took the base under the control (Katzman,2010:8). The control of PMOI's camp in Iraq was ceded to the Iraqi Security Forces with an agreement signed between the USA and Iraq. However, the Baghdad administration could not take decisive steps towards displacing PMOI from Iraq. In the period when the pressures increased, the European Union excluded PMOI from the list of terrorist organizations (Katzman, 2010:9).

The border between the two countries sometimes occur. The Iraqi Security Forces introduced the oil fields on the Iranian border at the end of 2009, the Iranian armed forces, occupied the oil well in Maysen Province of Iraq. The occupation lasted for 3 days, then the parties agreed. The matter was overcome thanks to negotiations. Accordingly, the specialists of both countries commenced works in February 2010 at Qasr-e Shirin province of Iran to solve the borders issue ([http:// www.iran-tracker.org/foreign-relations/iran-iraq-foreign-relations](http://www.iran-tracker.org/foreign-relations/iran-iraq-foreign-relations)). The border on the Shatt al-Arab, one of the reasons for Iran-Iraq War, hasn't become clear yet. In the official visit Ahmedinejad made to Iraq in March 2008, the parties expressed their opinion that conduit and airspace boundaries on the Shatt al-Arab should be re-established. However, the uncertainty has not been clarified yet (Katzman, 2010:10).

Another issue posing problem in the bilateral relations is related to 153 military and civilian aircrafts that had to land in Iran during the First Gulf War. The Tehran administration did not deliver the concerned aircrafts to Iraq. The Tehran administration complained about the Iraqi officials' not taking the necessary precautions against PJAK organization (Katzman, 2010:10). Even PJAK's actions towards Iran sometimes cause the Iranian Armed Forces to launch an operations to Northern Iraq. Finally, Iranian forces carried out military fortification in Iraq in July 2010 and this situation was depicted as "occupation" in the media organs of Western and Arabic countries. In response to this, senior officials of the Iran Parliament, suggested that anti-terrorism agreement be made among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Another point constituting a problem in the bilateral relations is the matter of "War reparations". Many congressmen in the Iran Parliament allege Iraq as the responsible part of

the Iran-Iraq War, and bring forward a claim for reparation as a right due to the international law (<http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/iran-iraq-foreign-relations>).

10. General Evaluation and Conclusion

Iran has become an actor whose influence increases day by day in the Middle East after Iraq's occupation by the US. This new regional role of Iran is particularly seen in the relations of Iran-Iraq. After the occupation, Iran has become one of the political actors that determine the political system in Iraq. Iran, wishing to increase the economic and commercial relations with Iraq to maximum level, is trying to make this country a market to which they will export their industrial products and an energy corridor through which they can transport their energy sources to the West. The oil revenues allocated to the armament in the Saddam period are now allocated to the services such as reconstruction, urbanization and infrastructure. In this case, the neighbour Iraq has become a significant foreign investment area for Iran's economy. In parallel to improving economic and commercial relations, the interdependence will increase, and thus the potential for clash between themselves will decrease.

The most important aim of Iran towards Iraq is that this country should never reach the position where it will be rival for Iran and it should not oppose to the Tehran's regional politics. Iran, if it can succeed, is even trying to make Iraq a country under its guidance. Seeing that in the near and medium term, Iraq can not attain the power by which it can compete with Iran, Iran seems to have achieved at least one of its objectives. In parallel to the increase of Shiite's role in the administration, Iraq will be more under the influence of Iran. This target forms the fundamental politics of Iran towards the Iraqi Shiites. With the occupation of Iraq, Iran has also found an opportunity to increase its influence in the Middle East through this country. If an alliance relations is established between Iran and Iraq where the Shiites are in the administration, Tehran will be able to strengthen the Shiite Crescent in the Middle East and direct the radical organizations in the region.

However, there are two important obstacles to hinder these policies of Iran. First, the existence of the USA in the region and the anti-Iranian politics they conducted in this country give rise to the corrosion of the influence of Iran. The second obstacle is that ethnic and cultural differences in Iranian and Iraqi Shiites can be turned into a discriminating factor by stimulating them. For all that this strategy has not been able to be put into effect so far, the Iraqi nationalism rising among the Shiites along with their taking part in the administration, is regarded as a potential discriminative point between the Iranian and Iraqi Shiites.

In spite of the fact that the Northern Iraq Kurdish Administration's coming close to the USA after the occupation and PJAK's harbouring in Northern Iraq have caused Iran's strategy towards the region to change. But this strategy can change in the long-term. Breaking off the relations with the Iraqi Kurds they established close relations during the 20th century would not suit the Iran's interests in the long run. As long as PJAK is not sheltered in the Northern Iraq and the relations between the Northern Iraq Kurdish Administration and the USA are not turned into an ally relations against Iran, it is likely that Iran keeps the Kurdish existence in the North as a trump in return for the prospective attitude of Iraqi administration.

The success of Iran in realizing its aims over Iraq depends on the US's politics about Iran. Iran, included in the "Axis of Evil" of G.W. Bush, was considered the new target of the USA after the Second Gulf War. However, the resistance movement going on in Iraq and a series of improvements experienced in the US domestic politics and in the international politics caused deviation in the US's politics in Iraq. The Washington administration, refraining from embarking on an adventure of Iran solely upon the failure in Iraq, switch on its strategy of multi-sidedness as regards the issues such as nuclear program. In this way, the USA so as to say remembered once again the UN, to whose legitimacy they vitiated in the course of the Second Gulf War. On the other hand, a series of actions the USA implemented in Iraq and the Middle East geography aim to remove the acquisitions of Iran obtained in the concerned geography and countries after the occupation rather than directly targeting Iranian regime. Also, as from

2009, when the Neocons assigned the power, and the economic crisis occurred at the same year, the moderation emerging in the Middle East (and Iraqi) politics of the USA can be viewed as an advantage for Iran. The domestic turbulences (Arab Spring) starting in Tunisia and Egypt, and then bounding to Libya, Syria and Yemen caused the attention of Barack Obama administration to center upon these countries. So for a short time Iran gained the freedom of action in the Persian Gulf and Iraq. But today USA ending the invasion of Iraq, put the Iran on the agenda again. The success of economic embargo, applied to Iranian oil (and also some new restrictions in near future), will certainly affect Iran's Middle East and Iraqi policy.

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