

Main Drivers Shaping Iran's Foreign Policy Under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani: Iraq as a Case Study (2005-2021)

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پاڻهه ره سه ره كيهه كاني دارشتني سياسي ته دهه كيهي نيران له ماوهي سه ره و كايه تي
مه محمود نه حمه دي نه ژاد و هه سه نه رو حاني: عيراق به نمونه (۲۰۲۱-۲۰۰۵)
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الدوافع الرئيسية لتشكيل السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية خلال رئاستي محمود أحمد نجاد
وحسن روحاني: العراق نموذجا (۲۰۲۱-۲۰۰۵)
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Abstract:

This study examines the main drivers that formulated Iran's foreign policy under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani: Iraq as a case study (2005-2021). The importance of this is that Iran is a revisionist state and has a strong presence in the political equation in Iraq. The study also reveals the main Drivers behind Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq under Ahmadinejad and Rouhani. The study used analytical-qualitative methods and implemented the structural realism theory. As a result, the study found several main drivers that influenced Iran's foreign policy during this period: political, security, ideological, economic, and regional. However, security and ideology are the most influential of these primary drivers under Ahmadinejad. During Rouhani's tenure, security, economic, and regional Drivers have been more influential than others. These Drivers mostly reacted to the international system's anarchy, which

equally encouraged states to pursue increased power, security, and survival. These Drivers had a direct impact on Iran's growing role in Iraq, and the balance of power was mainly in Iran's interest, eventually turning Iran into a semi-state Dominant in Iraq.

Keywords: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Foreign policy, Drivers, Power.

پوخته:

نهم توڙينهويه نامانجيبهتي له پالنه ره سره مكيه كاني دارشتني سياسته تي دهره كي نيراندا له ماوه ي سره و كايه تي مه محمود نه محمد ي نه ژاد و حسن رو حاني: عيراق به نمونه (۲۰۰۵-۲۰۲۱) بگوښته وه. گرنگي نهو بابته له و دايه كه نيران دهلته كي گوزرانخوازه و ناماده يه كي به هيزي له هاوكيشه سياسي ه كاني عيراقدا هيه. هره ها نه توڙينهويه پالنه ره سره مكيه كاني دارشتني سياسته تي دارشتني سياسته تي دهره كي نيران بهرام به عيراق له ماوه ي نه محمد ي نه ژاد و رو حاني دهره خات. توڙينه وه كه رښاي و هسفي (كواليتيف) شيكاري به كار هيناوه، تيوري رپاليزمي بونيداي جيبه جي كړدوه. له دهر نه نجامدا؛ توڙينه وه كه گه شتو و ته چهند پالنه ريكي سره كي كاريگريان له دارشتني سياسته تي دهره كي نيراندا لهو ماوه يدا هه بووه، وهك پالنه ري سياسي، ناسايشي، نايدولوژي، نابووري، پالنه ري هريمي. به لام كاريگريان پالنه ري لهو پالنه ره سره مكيانه له سره دمي نه محمد ي نه ژاد پالنه ري ناسايشي و نايدولوژي بووه، له ماوه ي رو حانيشدا لهو پالنه ره سره مكيانه پالنه ري ناسايشي، نابووري و هريمي له پالنه ره كاني ديكه كاريگريان زياتر هه بووه. نه پالنه ره زياتر كاردانه وه ي پاشاگرداني سيستم ي نيودهلته ي بوونه كه به يه كساني هاني دهلته ان دهادت شوين زياد كړدني هيز، ناسايش، مسوگر كړدني مانه وه ي خويان بكهون. نه پالنه ره كاريگريه كي راسته وخويان هه بوو له سر زياد بووني رولي نيران له عيراق و يه كلابوونه وه ي هاوكيشه كان و هاوسهنگي هيز تا رادديه كي زور له بهر ژمونه دي نيران هه بووه، كه دواجر نيرانيان كړدوه به دهلته كي نيمچه هه ژموندان له عيراق.

كليله وشه كان (وشه سره مكيه كان): كوماري نيسلامي نيران، عيراق، سياسته تي دهره كي، پالنه ره كان، هيز.

الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة الدوافع الرئيسية لتشكيل السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية خلال رئاستي محمود أحمدني نجاد وحسن روحاني: العراق نموذجا (۲۰۰۵-۲۰۲۱). وتكمن أهمية هذا الموضوع في أن إيران دولة تعديلية ولها حضور قوي في المعادلات السياسية في العراق. وتكشف الدراسة أيضا عن الدوافع الرئيسية وراء السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية تجاه العراق خلال إدارتي أحمدني نجاد وروحاني. استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي (النوعي) للتحليل، وتطبيق نظرية الواقعية الأساسية. وفي النتيجة توصلت الدراسة إلى وجود عدة دوافع رئيسية أثرت على السياسة الخارجية الإيرانية خلال هذه الفترة تجاه

العراق، مثل: الدوافع السياسية، الأمنية، الأيديولوجية، الاقتصادية والإقليمية. ومع ذلك، فإن الدوافع الأكثر تأثيراً في عهد أحمددي نجاد كانت دوافع الأمنية والأيديولوجية، وفي عهد روحاني كانت الدوافع الأمنية والاقتصادية والإقليمية أكثر تأثيراً من غيرها. وكانت هذه الدوافع في معظمها بمثابة رد فعل على فوضوية النظام الدولي، الذي يشجع الدول على السعي إلى مزيد من القوة والأمن والبقاء. وقد كان لهذه الدوافع تأثير مباشر على الدور المتزايد لإيران في العراق، وأصبح توازن القوى في صالح إيران إلى حد كبير، مما أدى في نهاية المطاف إلى تحول إيران إلى دولة شبة مهيمنة في العراق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجمهورية الإسلامية الإيرانية، العراق، السياسة الخارجية، الدوافع، القوة.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Iran is a critical Middle Eastern state with an ancient civilization, vast geography, and rich nature. It was home to several different governance systems, such as the Pahlavi and Republican regimes. Iran is a multiethnic, multireligious, and multisectarian state¹. Although Iran's ruling systems varied throughout its history, until the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, all systems were hereditary monarchies. The Islamic Revolution of Iran (IRI) (People's Revolution), led by Khomeini and with the participation of most movements and sections of society, overthrew the monarchy on January 16, 1979, and established the IRI. Thus, after 2,500 years, Iran's regime changed from a hereditary monarchy to the Islamic Republic. This system and regime continue to rule Iran today. From 2005 to 2013, Ahmadinejad served two terms as

(¹) Amin, A. A. (2024) *Iran: The Historical Path*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2004/10/3/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A#:~:text=%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%83%D9%86%20%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%85%20%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%20%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85,%D9%85%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%81%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%20%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF>

[Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Katouzian, H. (2010) *The Persians Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern Iran*. 1st Ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Makarios, Sh. (2003) *History of Iran*. 1st Ed. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'rifah.

president of Iran. After that, Hassan Rouhani served as Iran's president for eight years from 2013 to 2021¹. Ahmadinejad and Rouhani each represented two different movements, radical and reformist. This study attempts to understand the main drivers shaping Iran's foreign policy (IFP) towards Iraq during those two periods.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

The IFP is the product of a sensitive, complex, and complicated process because different institutions and personalities are involved in its production. This study's problem is the main drivers shaping IFP under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani: Iraq, as a Case Study (2005-2021). This research will enrich the literature in this field and attempt to solve this scientific problem.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

This study is critical because it examines the main drivers for shaping IFP towards Iraq under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani. Because on the one hand, the process of formulating IFP is complex and goes through several filters. On the other hand, the study includes two different characters: Ahmadinejad and Rouhani. However, the importance of this study is reflected in the radical changes that occurred in Iraq, for example, the establishment of a new Iraqi system and regime in 2005, which changed the entire balance in Iraq. In addition to these, Iran's role has been increasing because of its policy. Simon Tisdall² argues that IRI is leading the Middle East (ME) instead of the United States (US). This further emphasizes the importance of the subject.

1.4 The Aim of the Study

(¹) Amin, 2024; Katouzian, 2010: 291-295; Saikal, A. (2019) Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic. 1st Ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Pp. 4-9; Al-Madani, S. J. (1993) Contemporary Political History of Iran. Translated by: Shukor, S. 1st Ed. Tehran: Iranian Media Organization - International Relations. pp. 255-260.

(²) Tisdall, S. (2024) The US isn't the Biggest Power in the Middle East any more Iran is. (Online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/13/iran-is-thwith-china-and-russia-behind-it-iran-is-the-big-kid-on-the-block> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

The Study aims to address and provide a scientific analysis of an important issue: the main drivers of shaping IFP under Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani towards Iraq (2005-2021).

1.5 The Questions of the Study

To achieve the objectives of this study, filling the scientific gap, this study attempts to answer a primary question: What are the main drivers that formulated IFP towards Iraq under Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani? With a secondary question: Which driver has had the most significant influence on IFP?

1.6 Methodology of the study

This study used the descriptive method of analysis (qualitative). It relies on various reliable sources, such as constitutions, books, research, articles, etc. Finally, it has considered its impartiality and ethical considerations to provide a scientific answer to the research questions.

1.7 The Scope of the Study

The study covers foreign policy for over 16 years, from 2005 to 2021, with two decision-makers, Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani, and Iran and Iraq.

1.8 The Structure of the Study

In addition to the abstract, the study includes an introduction and a conclusion. It discusses the theoretical framework. It then separately sheds light on the main Drivers that shaped IFP towards Iraq under Ahmadinejad and Rouhani (2005-2021).

2. Theoretical Framework: Structural Realism

Structural realism theory emerged in response to criticisms of Classical Realism theory. In his masterpiece, Waltz proposed this theory in 1979: "The Theory of International Politics." This theory is one of the critical theories in politics and international relations and differs from Classical Realism in many of its assumptions. Its prominent thinkers are Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and John

Mearsheimer. Several names know this theory, for example, Neo-Realism or Systemic Realism¹.

Classical realism equates the anarchy of the international system with human nature, which is selfish and aggressive. However, structural realism equates the anarchy of the international system with the absence of a higher, absolute, and global authority above states². Structural realism has several assumptions. Here is a summary of the main assumptions:

1. The international system's structure is anarchic because there is no higher authority than states³.
2. The international system's structure, anarchy, is the main driver for states' actions, behaviors, and foreign policy⁴.
3. States are the leading and rational actors, seeking to achieve the most significant benefit with the least harm¹.

(¹) Wahban, A. M. (2016) Realists and the Analysis of International Relations from Morgenthau to Mearsheimer: An Analytical Study of Realist Theory Over Six Decades. p. 1209. *Journal of Law for Economic Legal Research*, Faculty of Law, Alexandria University, Issue 1, 2016. pp. 1196–1236. Available at: <https://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/sites/default/files/lwqywn.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

; Mukhalif, M. K. (2014) Neo-Realism in International Relations Assumptions, Classifications and Foundations. P. 215. *Journal of International Studies*, University of Baghdad, Issue 59 (2014), pp. 213-236. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/jcis,+213-236%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/jcis,+213-236%20(1).pdf) [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Hussein, S. (2018) *Foreign Policy*. 2nd Ed., Erbil: Tafsir Library. Pp. 279-282; Faraj, A. M. and Rashid, B. N. (2020) Neorealism and Terrorist Groups: A Comparative Study of the Descriptive and Explanatory Power of the Theory. P. 3. *Journal of Political and Security Studies*, Volume (Third), Issue (Fifth), June 2020, pp. 11-30. Available at: <https://www.centerfs.org/files/2020/07/1-Vol.3-No.5a-11-30-1.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Sutch, P. and Elias, J. (2007) *International Relations, the Basics*. 1st ED. London and New York: Routledge. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/Master's%20research/Theoretical%20Frame%20work/Sources%20Theory/International Relations The Basics Peter.pdf](file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/Master's%20research/Theoretical%20Frame%20work/Sources%20Theory/International%20Relations%20The%20Basics%20Peter.pdf) [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. p. 49.

(³) Waltz, 1979, p. 89; Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Wahban, 2016, p. 1213.

(⁴) Waltz, 1979, p. 111; Misbah, A. (2011) *Theory of International Relations: Major Theoretical Dialogues*. Cairo: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Hadith. pp. 28-29.

4. States' supreme goal is to remain within the international system. Therefore, they seek to increase their power².
5. The best measure to ensure the security and survival of states in the theater of international relations is the principle and system of self-help³.
6. Power is a means, not a goal. The best means of ensuring state survival and security in international relations is power⁴.
7. The possibility of war is always open. Military power and nuclear weapons are the best and most potent means of preventing war, ensuring states' survival, and ensuring security in the international system. Therefore, states constantly attempt to accumulate and increase their power⁵.
8. States do not trust each other because they cannot understand the intentions of different states. The intention is not something to be measured⁶.

Structural realism theory includes two directions: Defensive Realism and Offensive Realism. The former is led by Kenneth Waltz, and the second by John Mearsheimer⁷. Defensive Realism

(¹) Waltz, 1979, p. 96; Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29; Al-Naimi, A. N. (2011) *The Decision-Making Process in Foreign Policy: The United States of America as a Model*. 1st Ed., Amman: Zahran Publishing and Distribution House. p. 167)

(²) Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, p. 134.

(³) Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29; Waltz, 1979, p. 111.

(⁴) Waltz, 1979, p. 126; Mearsheimer, J. (2013) Structural Realism. Pp. 77-78. Ed: Dunne, T., Kurki, M., and Smith, S. *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*. 3th Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 77-94. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/Master's%20research/Theoretical%20Frame%20work/Sources%20Theory/Tim%20Dunne,%20Milja%20Kurki,%20Steve%20Smith%20-%20International%20Relations%20Theories-Oxford%20University%20Press,%20USA%20\(.pdf](file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/Master's%20research/Theoretical%20Frame%20work/Sources%20Theory/Tim%20Dunne,%20Milja%20Kurki,%20Steve%20Smith%20-%20International%20Relations%20Theories-Oxford%20University%20Press,%20USA%20(.pdf) [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁵) Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, pp. 119-188.

(⁶) Waltz, 1979, p. 105; Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29; Hussein, 2018, p. 280.

(⁷) Al-Adila, M. T. (2015) *The Development of the Theoretical Field of International Relations, A Study of the Principles and Foundations*. Thesis (PhD). University of Batina. pp. 225-228. Mearsheimer, J.J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power*

believes that states should seek to gain power to ensure their survival, not to seek regional or international hegemony because if they do, the international system will punish them. Offensive Realism, however, believes that states should try to gain power as much as they can, to the extent that they become regional hegemons because global hegemony is brutal¹.

3. Main Drivers Formulating IFP towards Iraq under Ahmadinejad

3.1 Quest to Gain Hegemony in the Iraqi Political Sphere

Political Drivers are among the most influential in shaping the IFP under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran has tried to achieve its political goal of gaining some hegemony in Iraq. According to Eisenstadt², Iran supported Shiite forces in Iraq to ensure the coming to power of a pro-Tehran government, therefore encouraging close allies such as the Badr Army, the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, and the Da'wah Party to participate in political life and rebuild Iraqi institutions. Iran's support for the Shiites was intended to convert their demographic value into political influence and strengthen Shiite sovereignty in Baghdad. Thus, after 2005, Iraq went from a regional enemy to a regional ally of Iran³. Iraqi Shiite political and armed groups made Iranian influence in the Iraqi political

Politics. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Pp. 3-11. Al-Akeely, H. M. (2021) *The Influence of Realist Theory on the Foreign Policy of the U.S.A Case Study: US Foreign Policy towards the Syrian Crisis (2011-2021)*. Thesis (MA). Middle East University. p. 30.

⁽¹⁾ Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 1-23; Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 77-90.

⁽²⁾ Eisenstadt, M. (2015) *Iran and Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/ayran-walraq> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

⁽³⁾ International Crisis Group (2005) *Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?* (Online). (Washington, D.C.: International Crisis Group, March 21, 2005). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/38-iran-in-iraq-how-much-influence.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

environment a reality¹. This reaffirms the assumption of structural realism that non-state actors are instruments that states uses them². Although it aligns with the vision of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, as Khomeini³ believes: We must support and liberate the oppressed peoples.

Ahmadinejad visited Iraq twice during his presidency, in 2008 and 2013. He was the first Iranian president to visit Iraq⁴. The US presence in Iraq did not prevent Iran from working for these political goals in reality. This is consistent with the assumptions of structural realism, which states that states are rational actors working to achieve their interests⁵. Iran has worked in various ways. For instance, IRI has the most prominent diplomatic presence in Iraq. In addition to its embassy in Baghdad, it has four consulates in other Iraqi cities⁶. This is consistent with the orientation of Offensive Realism, which believes that gaining the maximum

(¹) Salum, M. (2024) *Iran and its Changing Role in Iraqi Geopolitics: From Competition to Alliance*. (Online). Available at: https://mecouncil.org/ar/publication_chapters/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84/ [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 76-80.

(³) Khomeini, R. (2010) *Islamic Government*. 1st Ed, Tehran: Ministry of Guidance. p. 36

(⁴) BBC News (2013) *Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Visit Iraq on Thursday*. (Online). Available at:

https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/07/130714_iran_iraq_ahmedinejad [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁵) Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29.

(⁶) Taha, Y. (2018) *Iranian Influence in Iraq and Tehran's Cards in Najaf and Baghdad*. Kurdistan Conflict and Crisis Research Center, 11. (Online). Available at: <file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/Telegram%20Desktop/%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%DB%95%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%20%D8%A6%DB%8E%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%D9%84%DB%95%20%D8%B9%DB%8E%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. p. 5; Eisenstadt, 2015.

amount of power to the point of hegemony is the best means of ensuring the state's survival¹.

After the 2005 and 2010 elections in Iraq, Iran played a crucial role in supporting Nuri al-Maliki as prime minister. Despite Ayad Allawi's list winning 91 seats to Maliki's 89 in 2010, Maliki formed a government with Iranian backing, showcasing Iran's influence in Iraq's politics². Iran even succeeded in producing a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Iraq and the US in 2008 to withdraw US troops from Iraq, aimed at reducing US political and military influence. Similarly, Iran thwarted attempts to remove Nuri al-Maliki from the post of prime minister in 2012, although the necessary votes were collected in parliament for this purpose³. Furthermore, Iran signed more than 100 agreements with Iraq between 2005 and 2013⁴. This reflects how political Drivers influence the IFP towards Iraq. This IFP reflects the assumption of structural realism, which emphasizes that states seek to increase their power to ensure their survivability⁵. Therefore, political Drivers have been a significant driver for the IFP towards Iraq, which aims to secure political hegemony for Iran's Shiite allies,

(¹) Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 2.

(²) Policy Analysis Unit at the Arab Center (2014) *Maliki's government: a "safe agent" for Washington, or for Tehran?* (Online). Last Accessed 26 May 2025 at: https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/document_E95D3DFA.pdf [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Mason, R. C. (2012) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA): What is it, and how has it been utilized? Library of Congress, *Congressional Research Service*. p. 16. Available at: <https://roar-assets-auto.rbl.ms/documents/47146/RL34531.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Barzani, M. (A) (2023) *Barzani and Kurdish Liberation Movement*. Volume 6, 2003-2016, Kurdistan and the New Iraq. Chapter 1. 1st Ed, Erbil: Roxana Press. Pp. 294–300.

(⁴) Menati, A., and Hdian, N. (2019) The Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy towards Iraq from the Perspective of Balance of Threat Theory (2003-2018). p. 9. (Online). *Journal of Political Sociology of Islamic World*, 7(15), pp.139-164. Available at: https://iws.shahed.ac.ir/article_1040_edab713333db4c95944bc732957e02b0.pdf?lang=en [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁵) Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, p. 126.

resulting in a kind of imposition of Iran's political domination in Iraq.

3.2 Ensuring Maximum Security as the Supreme Goal of the IRI

Another major driver in shaping IFP towards Iraq is security. Because Iraq has always been a regional and strategic rival for Iran, Iran has worked to keep Iraq weak¹. Iran wanted Iraq not to become a threat to Iran's national security again, so it tried to make Iraq dependent on Iran because the security of the IRI system is above all Iranian goals. Khomeini also believed that all components of Islamic society should have the duty to protect the security of the IRI². Even Khomeini believes preserving the IRI system is more

(¹) Gharbi, H. (2019) *US- Iranian Rivalry in Iraq Since 2003*. p. 115. *Iranian Madarat Magazine*, published by the Arab Democratic Center - Berlin, Germany, Issue (04), June 2, pp. 113-126. (Online). Available at: <https://democraticac.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%E2%80%93%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%88-2019.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Hashim, F. A. (2023) *The Pillars of Iranian Movement Towards Iraq: A study of the dynamics of balance and constraints of interests*. Pp. 133-138. (Online). *Lubab for Strategic Studies*, Issue 17 - Fifth year. Available at: <https://lubab.aljazeera.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD-The-pillars-of-Iranian-movement-towards-Iraq-A-study-of-the-dynamics-of-balance-and-co compressed.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Qadir, P. R. (A) (2020) *National Security and Identity*. 1st Ed. Thran: Mad. pp. 145-146.

critical than safeguarding Imam Mahdi, which aligns with the assumptions of structural realism, which holds that security is the state's ultimate goal¹. Arango² contends that Iran achieved its objectives by backing the Shiite majority rule, which not only bolstered its security but also turned Iraq into a stage for extending its dominance and influence in the region. To realize this goal in Iraq, Iran operated both vertically and horizontally.

Iran enlisted a significant number of Shiite militia fighters, referred to as Iranian proxies, into the army, police, and security forces, resulting in an increase in the proportion of Shiites in the Iraqi military from 55% to 95%³. IRI believes that bolstering its security necessitates the use of military force. This viewpoint embodies the structural realism assumption that states aim to enhance their power to guarantee security⁴.

On the one hand, Iran worked through soft power after 2005 to create a weak federalism in Iraq, dominated by Shiites and more committed to Iranian influence and hegemony. On the other hand, it ensured maximum security by reducing the US threat to Iran⁵. To achieve this, Iran leveraged the resources of its Shiite political parties and militias, as well as Sunni extremist groups like Al-Qaeda⁶. According to Hawash (2021), Iran aimed to obstruct the US

(¹) Hussain, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, pp. 126-134.

(²) Arango, T. (2017) *Iran's Rising Influence in Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/976806/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Nader, A. (2015) *The Role Played by Iran in Iraq*. (Online). p. 2. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE151/RAND_PE151z1.arabic.pdf [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Eisenstadt, 2015.

(⁴) Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, pp. 129-134.

(⁵) Eisenstadt, 2015.

(⁶) Rizaeei, F. W., Kagan, K., and Pletka, D. (2022) *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*. American Enterprise Institute. (Online). pp. 22-25. Available at: https://www.anvari.net/Iranma.org/20080227_IranianInfluenceReport.pdf [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Asl, Z. M. (2014) *The Political Conflict between Conservatives and*

project in Iraq to prevent it from being handed over to Iran in the future. Additionally, Iran adopted a strategy of controlled chaos. This aligns with the structural realism perspective, which posits that non-state actors serve as tools for states¹. Iran also advocated for the dismantling of the occupiers' political authority. It indicated its willingness to step in, along with its allies, to fill this vacuum if US forces were to withdraw². This corresponds with the principles of Offensive Realism, which holds that a state's rational strategy is to acquire as much power as possible³.

Including a provision in the SOFA agreement not to use Iraq as a bridge to strike other states reflects the influence of security Drivers in IFP⁴. Hassan Danaeifar, former Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, points out that introducing this clause was Iran's proposal⁵. Consequently, the security Drivers have played a fundamental role in shaping IFP towards Iraq during Ahmadinejad's era.

3.3 The Strategy of Exporting the Ideology of the Islamic Revolution to Iraq

Reformists in Iran (1979-2012). MA. Middle East University. p. 96. Rizaei, A. (2008) Explaining the Foreign Policy Periods of the United States from the Perspective of International Relations Theories. (Online). *Strategy Quarterly*, Year 16, Issue 48, Tehran Strategic Research Center, Summer 2008, pp. 83-100. Available at: <https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20110103144542-867.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. pp. 95-99)

(¹) Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 76-80.

(²) Alayyam (2007) *Iran Reveals Its Intention to Fill the Vacuum that America Will Leave in Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.alayyam.info/news/330MLMO0-NI1001> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 2. Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 77-78.

(⁴) Peace Agreement Debates (2008) *Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq*. (Online). Available at:

[file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/IQ_US_081117_Agreement%20US%20Iraq%20on%20Withdrawal%20of%20US%20Forces%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/IQ_US_081117_Agreement%20US%20Iraq%20on%20Withdrawal%20of%20US%20Forces%20(1).pdf) [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. p. 23.

(⁵) Menati and Hadian, 2019, p. 7.

Ideology is a key driver in shaping IFP towards Iraq. Among Arab states, Iraq has the highest Shiite presence, with Shiites comprising approximately 60 percent of the population. There are numerous Shiite shrines and holy sites in Iraq. In preparation for sharing the experience of the Islamic Revolution with Iraq, Iran introduced over 2,000 clerics to the Najaf Scientific Basin to exert its influence on the region¹. Nader² argues that Iran worked to remove Iraqi Shiites from the domination of clerics in Najaf, such as Ayatollah al-Sistani, because it is against the system of the Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist). This is why Sistani refused to meet Ahmadinejad in 2013. Iran worked with Shiite parties and groups through the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force to win their support for the Iranian jurisprudential state and succeeded³. This Iranian policy reflects the Iranian Constitution⁴, which emphasizes that the duty of the Revolutionary Guards and the (Artesh) army is not only to protect the borders but also to be responsible for the message of the belief... struggle to expand the rule and authority of God's law and Shari'ah in the world. Even this policy reflects the

(¹) Alobaidi, A. A. (2011) *Iraqi-Iranian Relations During American Occupation of Iraq 2003-2011*. Thesis (MA). Middle East University. p. 86. Mohammed, A. S., Islam, A. M., Rawia, A. S., Maryam, A. A., Yasamin, S. A. (2017) *The Impact of Sectarianism on Iranian Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East: A Case Study of "Iraq-Syria-Lebanon."* (Online). Available at: <https://democraticac.de/?p=47176> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Nader, 2015, pp. 3-4.

(³) Salum, M. (2024) *Iran and its Changing Role in Iraqi Geopolitics: From Competition to Alliance*. (Online). Available at: https://mecouncil.org/ar/publication_chapters/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84/ [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

Khuli, M. (2016) *Iranian penetration into Iraq...Motives, Forms and Tools of Influence*. (Online). Available at: <https://rawabetcenter.com/archives/27905> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2018) *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. 4th ED. Tehran: Muauanad Taden. p. 12.

ideology of the IRI, as Khomeini¹ argues in his book “The Islamic Government”: The only sacred duty of Muslims is to create an Islamic revolution.

Iran sought to weaken the position of Ayatollah Sistani against Ayatollah Khamenei because Sistani is considered Khamenei's only rival in the world, and 80% of the world's Shiites are followers of Sistani². This ideological conflict entered a new phase when the Da'wah Party and Nuri al-Maliki announced their following of Ayatollah Shahrudi instead of Sistani. This move allowed Iran's ideological project in Iraq to move faster. In 2011, Iran relocated Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi to Najaf to succeed Ayatollah Sistani³. This attempt was to eliminate the ideological threat to the Iranian Velayat-e Faqih system.

Iran's policy illustrates the principles of structural realism, which posits that trust is absent in international relations. The potential for war and conflict remains ever-present. Since intentions cannot be precisely measured, states are inherently suspicious of one another, leading to a climate of uncertainty in global affairs⁴. Although, it aligns with the principles of offensive realism, which posits that the most effective strategy for survival is to accumulate more power rather than to pursue hegemony⁵. As a result, ideological Drivers were a key influence in shaping IFP towards Iraq during this time.

3.4 Enhancing Economic Relations with Iraq

Economic Drivers have been active in shaping IFP towards Iraq. In addition to its geographical and geopolitical location, Iraq holds an important geo-economic position. For example, Iraq has more than 1,300 kilometers of land and water border with Iran. Iran-Iraq

(¹) Khomeini, 2010, pp. 29-34.

(²) Nader, 2015, p. 4.

(³) Reuters (A) (2017) *Iran Competes for Shiite leadership in Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/--idUSKBN1D81CQ/> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Waltz, 1979, p. 105. Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29; Hussein, 2018, p. 280.

(⁵) Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 77-78. Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 2.

bilateral relations have improved since their establishment in 2005¹. On the one hand, Iran has nine official and several unofficial borders with Iraq. Iran used Iraq as a gateway to escape from international sanctions, especially US sanctions. After Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called in 2012 to strengthen the "Resistance Economy." In this context, Iran paid more attention to producing and exporting non-oil commodities. Even the value of Iranian exports to Iraq in 2013 reached more than \$6 billion². Khamenei's call to strengthen the "Resistance Economy" indicates, on the one hand, that the economic sphere, like all other spheres in Iran, is under the guidance of the Supreme Leader. On the other hand, it demonstrates the influence of economic Drivers in shaping IFP.

Iran signed seven agreements with Iraq in 2008 to expand its economic ties. The Revolutionary Guards played a key role in implementing this policy in Iraq. For example, in 2011, IRI signed 11 economic agreements with Iraq, in which the Revolutionary Guards played a key role. Some Iraqi parties characterized it as conceding control of the Iraqi economy to Iran³. Iran, and Ahmadinejad in particular, called for an increase in trade to \$15 billion annually⁴. As a result, Iran emerged as Iraq's largest trading

(¹) Alyasri, F. K. (2014) Iran's Foreign Policy Towards Iraq After the US Invasion of Iraq. (Online). *International Journal of Development*, Vol.3, No. (1) (2014): 7-17. Available at: https://journals.ekb.eg/article_67730_0e10b6c023639148e4725f5d7e2dd601.pdf [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Abbas, A. (2023) *Border Crossings: The Unholy Alliance Between Iran and Iraqi Militias*. (Online). Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/border-crossings-the-unholy-alliance-between-iran-and-iraqi-militias?lang=ar¢er=middle-east> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Alarabiya (2011) *Iran Strengthens its Influence in Iraq with 11 New Agreements During Rahimi's Visit to Baghdad*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011%2F07%2F07%2F156537> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) (2007) *Iranian President Calls on US Forces to leave Iraq*. (Online). Available at:

partner¹. Economic Drivers have, therefore, played a decisive role in shaping IFP towards Iraq during Ahmadinejad's era.

3.5 Efforts to Restore the Regional Position of the IRI.

The regional Drivers for restoring Iran's regional position have been the primary Drivers shaping IFP towards Iraq. Iran relies on political, religious, ideological, economic, and militia tools because Iraq is Iran's geostrategic depth. The Iranian regional project is to dominate the region so that Iran becomes the regional great power². Iran has been able to build the depth of its expansionist strategy in the Arab region under the name of the "Defense front" across a vast geopolitical area that extends from Tehran to Yemen

Iraq also provides a land gateway for Iran to reach the region, and the Shiite Crescent reflects this project³.

<https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1856882&language=ar> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(¹) Eisenstadt, 2015.

(²) Murad, D. M. (2020) Iranian influence in Iraq after the American occupation. (Online). p. 92. *Scientific Journal*, Faculty of Commerce, Assiut University, Issue No. 69, 2020, pp. 81-112. Available at:

<file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%89%D8%A8/%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86/%D8%B3%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%B1%DA%86%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%DA%AF%D9%87%E2%80%8C%DA%B5%D8%A7%DA%B5%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%E2%80%8C/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82.pdf>

[Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Daoud, A. A. (2014) *The Rise of Iranian Tide in the Arab World*. (Online). 1st ed., Riyadh: Al-Obeikan Publishing. p. 481. Available at:

<file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/Noor-Book.com%20%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%202014%20optim%203%20.pdf>

[Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Arif, B. H. (2019) Iran's Struggle for Strategic Dominance in a Oost-ISIS Iraq. (Online). p. 15. *Asian Affairs*, 50(3), pp.344-363. Available at:

<file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/Master%20Course/First%20semest er/2.%20Regional%20Relations%20of%20Kurdistan%20Region%20->

Iran viewed regional cooperation as a means to regain its standing in the area. In 2009, it proposed collaboration between Iran and Iraq to foster peace, stability, and security throughout the region¹. Iran asserts that it possesses the qualities necessary to assume leadership of the Islamic world, which has driven it to act as a revisionist state². In other words, Iran believes it is the core state in the Islamic world. Murad³ notes that Iran has utilized a range of strategies in Iraq to accomplish its objectives, including backing an Iranian-aligned government, supporting Shiite militias, and exploiting the

[%20Iraq/IRAN'S%20STRUGGLE%20FOR%20STRATEGIC%20DOMINANCE%20IN%20Iraq.pdf](#) [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Ahmad, M. M. (2022) *Iran's Foreign Policy Towards Iraq (2003-2018)*. Thesis (PhD). Soran University. P. 72. Asabbagh, S. (2022) *Iran's Strategic Depth in the Middle East: A Case Study of the "Axis of Resistance"*. 1st Ed. London - Cairo: Gulf Center for Iranian Studies. P. 5.

(¹) Asr Iran (2009) *Al-Maliki in a Meeting with Ahmadinejad: We will not allow Aggression Against any Country Starting from Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.asriran.com/ar/news/9208/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%81%DB%8C-%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%AD-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Hussein, 2018, pp. 448-449.

(³) Murad, D. M. (2020) Iranian influence in Iraq after the American occupation. (Online). p. 93. *Scientific Journal*, Faculty of Commerce, Assiut University, Issue No. 69, 2020, pp. 81-112. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Desktop/%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%89%D8%A8/%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86/%D8%B3%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%B1%DA%86%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%DA%AF%D9%87%E2%80%8C%DA%B5%D8%A7%DA%B5%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%E2%80%8C/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

country's internal instability, among other tactics. Hashim¹ argues that Iran aimed to blockade Iraq to prevent it from gaining enough strength to pose a future threat to Iran. Additionally, Iran has actively sought to undermine the initiatives and dominance of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, which are influential regional players in Iraq. For instance, in September 2005, Iran called for the formation of a united front comprising Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to oppose the US². Iran went further by utilizing political, diplomatic, legal, and even military agreements to contest US forces, ultimately contributing to the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011³. According to Salum⁴, Iran's influence in the country reached its peak with the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011. This Iranian policy aligns with the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, which emphasizes resistance against invaders and their systems⁵.

Iran sought to weaken strategic rivalries with Saudi Arabia and Turkey by marginalizing Sunni forces and parties within the Iraqi political process. This approach aimed to prevent these groups from being utilized as political leverage by their traditional rivals, Saudi Arabia and Turkey⁶. The Quds Force embodied this Iranian regional

(¹) Hashim, 2023, pp. 133-138.

(²) Alyasri, 2014, p. 14.

(³) Alobaidi, A. A. (2011) Iraqi-Iranian Relations During American Occupation of Iraq 2003-2011. Thesis (MA). Middle East University. p. 118. Dakhiel, H. A. and Al-Issa, M. M. (2019) U.S. attitude Toward Iranian Role in Syria and Iraq under ISIS. (Online). P. 129. *Madarat Iranian Magazine*, issued by the Arab Democratic Center - Berlin, Germany, Issue (04), June 2019, pp. 126-143. Available at: <https://democraticac.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%E2%80%93%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%88-2019.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Salum, 2024.

(⁵) Khomeini, 2010, p. 36.

(⁶) Salum, 2024. Murad, 2020, pp 92 -103.

policy and project in reality, playing an essential and decisive role. For example, Iran prevented Ayad Allawi, backed by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, from forming a government despite winning 91 seats in the elections¹.

This Iranian policy aligns with the tenets of structural realism, which asserts that the anarchy of the international system shapes states' policies and actions. It also reflects the principles of offensive realism, which argue that striving for regional hegemony is the most advantageous approach².

Consequently, the regional Drivers and restoring the IRI's regional position have significantly shaped its foreign policy towards Iraq. Throughout Ahmadinejad's tenure, five key Drivers influenced this policy: political, security, ideological, economic, and regional. Among these, the security and ideological Drivers emerged as the most influential, with the other Drivers largely revolving around these two central themes.

4. Main Drivers Shaping IFP towards Iraq under Hassan Rouhani

Following Hassan Rouhani's ascent to power in 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran adopted a more moderate and pragmatic foreign policy approach than during the Ahmadinejad era. This section will explore the key Drivers that shaped IFP's attitude toward Iraq during this period.

4.1 Preserving the political landscape of Iraq

Political Drivers have effectively shaped the IFP towards Iraq during Hassan Rouhani's era (2013-2021). Iran has worked to protect Iraq's political landscape by preserving the experience of Shiite rule in Iraq. When the new Iraqi government was established in 2014, Iran chose not to endorse its preferred candidate, Nuri al-Maliki. Instead, it supported Haider al-Abadi for the role of prime minister; this decision aimed to alleviate the protests, particularly

⁽¹⁾ Barzani (A), 2023, pp. 259-260.

⁽²⁾ Waltz, 1979, p. 111; Misbah, 2011, pp. 28-29; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 1-23; Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 77-90.

those of Ayatollah al-Sistani. Iran's primary objective was to avert a political vacuum and ensure that power remained with the Shiite community¹. When the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacked Mosul on June 9, 2014, capturing nearly a third of Iraq's territory, Iraqi forces collapsed. The political future of Shiite rule faced an existential threat². In response to this threat, Iran bolstered Shiite militias and the Iraqi government. The Quds Force played a crucial role in this effort, with Qassem Soleimani at the forefront of preserving the Shiite ruling experience³.

After the war against ISIS ended, Iran supported Shiite armed groups to participate in politics. These groups won the 2018 elections, formed the "Construction Coalition," and established a government⁴. Through its allies, Iran enacted a new law in 2016 called the "Hashd Al-Shaabi Board," which designated these groups as an effective armed force alongside the Iraqi military establishment⁵. The establishment and official recognition of the Hashd al-Shaabi forces alongside the Iraqi army represented a

(¹) Taha, Y. (2018) *Iranian Influence in Iraq and Tehran's Cards in Najaf and Baghdad*. Kurdistan Conflict and Crisis Research Center, 11. (Online). p. 6. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/Telegram%20Desktop/%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%DB%95%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%20%D8%A6%DB%8E%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%D9%84%DB%95%20%D8%B9%DB%8E%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Eisenstadt, 2015.

(²) Barzani, 2020, p. 54.

(³) Aladdin, F. (2020) *Iran and the Policies of Hegemony over Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2141871/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Taha, 2018, p. 7.

(⁴) Aladdin, 2020.

(⁵) Iraqi Parliament (2016) *Popular Mobilization Authority Law*. (Online). Available at: <https://archive3.parliament.iq/ar/2016/11/26/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A/> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Nader, 2015.

transfer of the IRI Basij army model to Iraq. These militias served as protectors of Iranian policies within the country.

Iran strongly opposed ISIS to the best of its ability, as it perceived that the victory of ISIS would signify a triumph for the radical Sunni front, ultimately altering the balance of power against Iran. Javad Zarif also noted that the emergence of ISIS was an effort by certain regional countries to recalibrate the balance of power¹. In this context, Iran opposed the KRI's independence referendum held on September 25, 2017².

Iran played a significant role in shaping Adel Abdul Mahdi's and Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's governments. Additionally, Iran opposed the anti-government demonstrations and efforts to overthrow Adel Abdul Mahdi's government in 2019³. Iran aimed to maintain Iraq's political landscape, as it believed changing it would not serve its interests.

This is consistent with structural realism's assumption that self-reliance is the basis of work in an anarchic system⁴. Iran's policy is also aligned with defensive realism, which holds that states should seek to acquire as much power as necessary for their survival⁵. Therefore, political Drivers have significantly shaped IFP toward Iraq during Hassan Rouhani's period.

4.2 Guaranteeing Security as the Highest Goal of IFP

Security Drivers have played a significant role in shaping IFP towards Iraq. Ali Shamkhani emphasized the importance of strengthening the stability and security of Iran and its allies⁶. Menati

⁽¹⁾ Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 7; Arango, 2017.

⁽²⁾ Barzani, 2020, pp. 111-114.

⁽³⁾ Arango, 2017; Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 7.

⁽⁴⁾ Waltz, 1979, p. 111.

⁽⁵⁾ Hussein, 2018, p. 280; Waltz, 1979, p. 134.

⁽⁶⁾ Tasnim International News Agency (2020) *Shamkhani Arrives to Baghdad*. (Online). Available at:

<https://www.tasnimnews.com/ar/news/2020/03/07/2218903/%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%DB%8C%D8%B5%D9%84->

and Hdian¹ highlight that the swift rise of ISIS in Iraq in 2014 presented a significant security challenge for Iran. In response to this threat, Iran has resolutely provided support to Iraqi forces and Shiite militias.

The Quds Force played a crucial role in ensuring the security of Iran and its allies in Iraq. In this context, Iran was the first country to support the Kurdistan Region in its fight against ISIS². The emergence of ISIS has Substantially heightened security and military collaboration between Iraq and Iran.

On the one side, Iran formed a quadrilateral alliance with Russia, Iraq, and Syria on September 26, 2015, to combat ISIS³. On the other side, on July 23, 2017, in Tehran, Iran signed a military cooperation agreement with Iraq to enhance military and security collaboration⁴. However, Zuwairi⁵ argues that the extent of IRI's

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF](#)

[Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(¹) Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 12.

(²) Aladdin, 2020; Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 13; Taha, 2018, p. 7; Salum, 2020; Barzani (A) 2023, p. 44.

(³) Marai, M. F., and Wadi, A. F. (2017) Russian-Turkish Relations and Current International Alliances in the Middle East a Study on Influence and Impact. (Online). pp. 114-115. *Tikrit Journal for Political Science*, 3 (11) (2017), pp. 98-126. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/4-p98-126.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Reuters (B) (2017) *Iraq and Iran Agree to Increase Military Cooperation and Fight "Terrorism"*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-iraq-dr2-idARAKBN1A80IZ/> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Hatam, M. H. (2019) The Iranian Role in the Middle East. *Regional Variables - Iraq - Syria - Examples*. (Online). p. 175. *Madarat Iranian Magazine*, issued by the Arab Democratic Center - Berlin, Germany, Issue (04), June 2019. pp. 165-181. Available at: <https://faculty.uobasrah.edu.iq/uploads/publications/1609553755.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁵) Zuairi, M. (2017) *Defense Cooperation Between Iraq and Iran... Is there anything new?* (Online). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2017/7/27/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9>

influence in key Iraqi institutions has reached a point where formal agreements are unnecessary, as the IRI acts as a decision-maker in Iraq. These efforts aimed to bolster Iran and its allies to guarantee their security, as the IRI believed that enhancing the security of others would be at the expense of Iran's and its allies' security. Iran succeeded in achieving this strategy¹.

Security Drivers have been evident in Iran's strong opposition to the KRI's independence referendum, which it perceives as threatening IRI national security². Iran believed the referendum would encourage Iranian Kurds to demand secession. It also divides Iraq and encourages Iraqi Sunnis to demand secession, reducing Iran's influence, which will be a threat to the Iranian regional position. Zarif also stated that the referendum threatens regional security³. Iran actively opposed the KRI's attempt at independence, indirectly through its proxies like the Hashd Al-Shaabi forces and directly through the Revolutionary Guards. It also supported Iraqi forces in controlling disputed territories⁴. This Iranian policy aligns with the assumptions of structural realism, which posits that in the anarchy of the international system, self-reliance is the most effective principle of action, and power is the most reliable means of ensuring security⁵.

[%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%84](#)
[Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(¹) CNN Arabic (2018) *Iran and Iraq Agree to Establish a Free Trade Zone*. (Online). Available at: <https://arabic.cnn.com/business/article/2018/11/17/iraq-iran-economic-trade-free-zone-railway-electricity-gas-oil> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Menati and Hdian, 2019, pp. 13-14.

(³) Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 16.

(⁴) Barzani, 2020, pp. 111-114.

(⁵) Waltz, 1979, pp. 111-129.

Iran worked to defeat the 2019 demonstrations in Iraq because it considered them a threat to its security, its allies, and the experience of Shiite rule in Iraq¹. The demonstrators demanded Iran's withdrawal from Iraq, citing a serious security threat, as Iranian consulates in various Iraqi cities were burned several times between 2018 and the present. The Karbala consulate was set on fire three times by protesters, who also hoisted the Iraqi flag². The Supreme Leader of IRI even described the demonstrators as British Shiites³. This Iranian policy is in line with the Islamic Revolution's principle that the security of the Iranian system is above all⁴. It also reflects the assumption of structural realism that security is the state's ultimate goal⁵, because security means the existence and continuity of the state.

The killing of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3, 2020, by a US drone considerably increased the influence of security Drivers in IFP. Soleimani was the most influential figure in Iraq's political and security landscape following the ISIS war⁶. Security Drivers have, therefore, been one of the main Drivers shaping IFP towards Iraq during this period.

4.3 Ideological Drivers in IFP

Ideological Drivers influenced the IFP's attitude towards Iraq during Hassan Rouhani's era. Iran believed that events occurring in the

⁽¹⁾ Monte Carlo International (2019) *Iran: Iraq Protests are US-Saudi-Israeli Conspiracy*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.mc-doualiya.com/articles/20191008-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%80-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%80-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

⁽²⁾ Monte Carlo International, 2019.

⁽³⁾ Alobaidi, 2019.

⁽⁴⁾ Khomeini, 2010, p. 39; Qadir, A. 2020, pp. 145-146.

⁽⁵⁾ Waltz, 1979, p. 126.

⁽⁶⁾ Aladdin, 2020.

region, particularly in Iraq and Syria after 2014, threatened its interests. Several countries in the region attempted to rebalance power to serve their interests¹. After Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani issued a fatwa of “Jihad Al-Kifa'i” on June 13, 2014, calling for resistance against ISIS², according to Saadi³, Iran viewed this fatwa as an opportunity to establish a Shiite militia force under its leadership. Abbas⁴ argues that this fatwa was influenced by Iran, mainly by Qassem Soleimani, who persuaded Sistani to issue it. Iran was the primary beneficiary of the fatwa, as the Iranian Quds Force played a crucial role in establishing, training, and arming the Shiite Hashd al-Shaabi militia. Consequently, the pro-Iranian militias are more numerous and significant than the marja'i militias⁵.

In 2014, Ali Shamkhani reiterated that Iran aims to establish security and stability in Iraq and the region, drawing on the principles of the Islamic Revolution. He commended the role of Shiite groups and religious marja'ahs⁶. Iran appreciated the role of

(¹) Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 74.

(²) Sistani (2014) *What was Mentioned in the Friday Sermon of the Representative of the Supreme Religious Authority in the Holy City of Karbala, Sheikh Abdul Mahdi Al-Karbala'i, on (6/13/2014 AD)*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.sistani.org/arabic/archive/24918/> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Saadi, F. W. (2021) *The Hegemony of the Islamic Republic of Iran over Iraq, its Causes and Effects*. (Online). p. 11. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/sky%20for%20technology/Downloads/Telegram%20Desktop/%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%84%D9%86-%DB%8C%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1-> <نیران بهرامبر عیراق و کاریریریرکان.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(⁴) Abbas, 2023.

(⁵) Aladdin, 2020; Taha, 2018, p. 7.

(⁶) Tasnim International News Agency (2014) *Shamkhani: Strengthening Cooperation with Iraq will not be limited to the Defense Sector, and we will soon Witness the Liberation of all Areas of Iraq from Terrorism*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/ar/news/2014/12/30/604126/%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%84%D9%86-%DB%8C%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1->

religious leaders and non-state actors, specifically Shiite armed groups known as Iranian proxies. It sought to ensure regional stability in alignment with Iranian Islamic ideology.

During this period, Iran aimed to preserve its ideological project rather than expand it. This approach was grounded in the belief that a degree of moderation should be shown toward the Najaf marja'a, given the sensitivity of the situation and the significant threats posed by groups such as ISIS, which represents radical Sunni Islam¹. In a meeting with Ali al-Sistani in 2019, Hassan Rouhani praised the role of the Kifai jihadi fatwa².

This policy reflects the Iranian Constitution, which states in its preamble³ that the duty of the Revolutionary Guards and the army (Artesh) extends beyond merely protecting the borders; they are also

[%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%82%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B9-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8](#) [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(¹) Tasnim International News Agency, 2014.

(²) Alalam Chanel (2019) *The Historic Meeting Between President Rouhani and Said Sistani*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.alalam.ir/news/4110541/%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(³) Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018, p. 12.

responsible for conveying the message of belief. Supporting the oppressed is the duty of the IRI wherever they may be¹. Ideological Drivers have, therefore, been a major motivating factor shaping IFP toward Iraq.

4.4 Elevating Economic Relations to the Highest Level

Economic factors have played a crucial role in shaping the IFP. In early 2014, the Iranian government officially adopted the "resistance economy" strategy in response to the adverse effects of Western and U.S. sanctions. This approach became particularly significant after the U.S. withdrew from the P5+1 agreement in 2018 and intensified its pressure on Iran. As a result, Iran shifted its focus towards increasing the production of non-oil goods to diversify its sources of income, especially given that the oil sector, traditionally the backbone of the Iranian economy, has suffered severely from international sanctions². Iran has been focused on enhancing its economic ties with Iraq. In 2013, Iranian non-oil exports to Iraq amounted to \$6 billion, while by 2021, this figure had increased to \$8.9 billion³. Figures indicate that Iranian exports to Iraq have significantly increased, utilizing both official and unofficial border crossings.

Iran has successfully boosted the annual trade volume between itself and Iraq to \$12 billion. In 2019, Rouhani advocated for further trade growth, particularly in energy products, aiming to reach \$20 billion by 2020. Consequently, Iraq emerged as Iran's largest trading partner⁴. Iran has signed a railway agreement with Iraq and has reconstructed Iraq's infrastructure through 9,000 construction projects. To a significant extent, trade between Iran and Iraq has been one-sided, with Iran reaping most benefits⁵.

⁽¹⁾ Khomeini, 2010, p. 36.

⁽²⁾ Abbas, 2023; Khuli, 2016, pp. 5-9.

⁽³⁾ Abbas, 2023; Murad, 2020, p 98.

⁽⁴⁾ Hatem, 2019, p. 174; Abbas, 2023; Salum, 2024.

⁽⁵⁾ Noornews (2020) *Iran and Iraq towards Further Developing Economic Relations*. (Online). Available at:

<https://nournews.ir/ar/news/51912/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86->

Iran's exports to Iraq reached 22%, selling 1,200 MW of electricity directly to Iraq, increasing to 4,200 MW in the summer¹ (Fard, 2020). In 2018, Iran focused on establishing several free trade zones between itself and Iraq². This IFP reflects the principles of structural realism, which posits that states are rational actors seeking to maximize their interests³. Consequently, economic Drivers emerged as one of the primary influences shaping IFP towards Iraq during Hassan Rouhani's administration.

4.5 Strategy for Maintaining Iran's Regional Position

The regional Drivers or strategy for maintaining Iran's regional position significantly influenced IFP toward Iraq during this period. On one hand, Iran perceived ISIS as a regional project aimed at reorganizing the balance of power⁴. On the other hand, U.S. combat forces returned to Iraq as part of the international coalition against ISIS⁵. Additionally, Iran engaged in a quadrilateral alliance with Russia, Iraq, and Syria on September 26, 2015, to coordinate efforts against ISIS⁶. Iran's reaction was to protect its regional position. Iran has taken a tough stance on the KRI's independence referendum, attempting to form a regional front against it. To this end, it has established a tripartite alliance among Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. The country also closed its border gates with the KRI. The

[%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9](#) [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Fard, F. W. (2020) *Trade Relations Between Iraq and Iran...requirements and opportunities*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.bayancenter.org/2020/11/6474/> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(¹) Fard, 2020.

(²) CNN Arabic, 2018.

(³) Misbah, 2011, p. 28-29.

(⁴) Menati and Hdian, 2019, p. 7.

(⁵) Arango, 2017; Saadi, 2021, p. 11.

(⁶) Marri and Wadi, 2017, p. 114-115.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards even led Iraqi forces and Hashd al-Shaabi in recapturing the conflict areas¹.

Kush² argues that Iran rejected the division of Iraq to safeguard its security, interests, and influence over the region. Furthermore, Iran viewed opposition to the KRI referendum as a stance against an Israeli project in the region, perceiving this push for independence in the KRI as an effort to establish a second Israel³. Through its influence in Iraq and its allies, such as the Assad regime in Syria⁴. Iraq provided land routes for Iranian-allied militias to navigate through Iranian-controlled areas in response to threats from the Iranian-led defense front, often referred to by its opponents as the "Evil Front." Iran aimed to pursue a balanced diplomatic approach toward the countries in the region. However, regional developments, particularly in Iraq, have complicated these efforts. By weakening the Sunni population in Iraq, Iran has enhanced its political and military presence directly and indirectly through its proxies in Iraqi Sunni cities. This strategy was intended to undermine the structures through which Saudi Arabia sought to alter the balance of power in its favor in Iraq. Consequently, Saudi Arabia accused Iran of dominating Iraq⁵.

"Today, Iran is an empire. Its capital is Baghdad. We will fight against Islamic extremism, Takfiris, and Wahhabis," said Rouhani's

⁽¹⁾ Kush, 2017; Barzani, 2020, pp 110-113.

⁽²⁾ Kush, 2017.

⁽³⁾ Menati and Hdian, 2019, pp. 13-14.

⁽⁴⁾ Salum, 2024.

⁽⁵⁾ Murad, 2020, p. 91. Mustaffa, 2016.

adviser, Ali Younesi¹. This statement refers to Saudi Arabia, which positions itself as the leader of the Sunni front. However, in 2021, Iran facilitated Iraq's role as a regional mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia². Iran believed that the presence of Turkish military bases in Iraq threatened its position in the region, leading to its opposition to these bases. In response, Turkish Ambassador to Iraq Fatih Yildiz stated that Iran is the last country from which Turkey should seek advice on protecting Iraq's borders³.

(¹) Alsayyad, A. M. (2017) Demographic and Identity Change in Syria and Iraq. (Online). p. 144. *Journal of Iranian Studies*, Specialized scientific studies and research, first year, second Issue - March 2017, Arab Gulf Center for Iranian Studies, pp. 120-145. Available at: <https://rasanah-iiis.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8F%D9%88%D9%90%D9%8A%D9%8E%D9%91%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82.pdf> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

(²) Najat, A. (2022) *Iraqi Mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia: Motives and Consequences*. (Online). 1st Ed., Baghdad: Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning. 6-23.

(³) Suhail, A. (2021) *Turkish-Iranian Debate over Iraq and Sinjar District, the Root of the Dispute*. (Online). Available at: <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/198316/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1/%D8%B3%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81> [Accessed: March 4, 2025].

In the face of the US, Iran maintained its regional position by signing the P5+1 nuclear deal until Donald Trump took office, even during the war against ISIS, Iran and the US coordinated indirectly. Misal Al-Alusi, a member of the Iraqi parliament, believes that the US allowed Iran greater freedom in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq in exchange for an agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue¹. However, after the US withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018 and imposed new sanctions, relations between Iran and the US continued to deteriorate, especially following the drone strike that killed Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3, 2020. In response, Iran launched missile attacks on U.S. bases, including the Ain Al-Assad military base in Anbar and other locations². Khamenei stated that the most potent response to the killing of Qassem Soleimani would be the withdrawal of US forces from the region³. Meanwhile, Zarif characterized the Iranian attack on the US

(¹) Mustafa, H. (2016) *Rouhani's Advisor's Remarks about an Iranian Empire with Baghdad as its capital Shocked no one in Iraq*. (Online). Available at: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/308051/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%8B%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A> [Accessed: March 4, 2025]. Arango, 2016)

(²) Asabbagh, 2022, p. 85.

(³) RT Arabic (2020) *Khamenei: Expelling US Forces from the Region Would be the Strongest Response to Soleimani's Assassination*. (Online). Last Accessed 26 May 2025 at: <https://arabic.rt.com/world/1183792-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A6%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA>

base as an act of self-defense¹. This indicates Iran aims to preserve its position without further straining relations or escalating the conflict. Through its allies in the Iraqi parliament, Iran facilitated the passage of a majority resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq (Aladdin, 2020), aiming at US forces in Iraq. "We will oppose all parties, systems, and ideas that seek to alter the balance in their favor and against Iran," stated Rouhani's adviser, Ali Younesi².

This policy aligns with the principles of the Islamic Revolution, emphasizing the need to protect the Iranian political system. Resistance is also necessary in times of peace, and the Islamic Republic must resist Jews, the US, and foreigners³. This policy is consistent with the structural realism that the state should seek to gain enough power to ensure its survival, not quest for hegemony⁴. During Hassan Rouhani's era, IFP aimed to strengthen the country's standing in the region through various political, diplomatic, and military efforts, with varying degrees of success. The primary factors influencing Iran's approach towards Iraq during this time included political, security, ideological, economic, and regional

https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/07/130714_iran_iraq_ahmedinejad
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(²) Alsayyad, 2017, p. 144.

(³) Khomeini, 2010, pp. 29-31; Qader (A), 2020, pp. 145-146.

(⁴) Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 77-78.

drivers, with security, economic, and regional Drivers being the most impactful.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the main Drivers shaping IFP towards Iraq during the tenure of Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani (2005-2021). The process of formulating IFP is complex and sensitive, involving multiple filters and the participation of several key institutions. The study employed qualitative methods and applied the theory of structural realism. While the assumptions of Structural realism theory are relevant to this case, the approach of offensive realism aligns with Ahmadinejad's tenure, whereas defensive realism is more applicable to Rouhani's. This distinction reflects the differences in the approach and expressions of IFP under these two presidents.

During Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani's eras, various regional and international changes, along with the dynamics of the international system, led to several key factors influencing IFP. Throughout their tenures, five main Drivers significantly shaped IFP towards Iraq: political, security, ideological, economic, and regional. However, during Ahmadinejad's administration, the most influential Drivers were primarily security and ideological.

Under Hassan Rouhani, however, security, economic, and regional Drivers have been the most influential in shaping IFP. In both periods, security has been the primary driver of this policy, as maintaining the survival, continuity, and security of the IRI's system takes precedence over all other objectives and constitutes the grand strategy of the IRI.

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