

The Level of Effectiveness of Members of the Shiite Regional Axis Against the Kurdistan Region Issue of Iraq Analytical studies

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Abstract: The primary purpose of this Study is to examine the effectiveness of members of the regional Shiite axis against the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq. The significance of this study lies in its examination of the future of the Kurdistan Region, considering the influence of members of the regional Shiite axis against the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq, a fundamental issue between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The study primarily utilizes qualitative methods supported by descriptive, analytical, and historical approaches. The study reaches several conclusions, the most important being that the effectiveness of members of the Shiite axis in hostility the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (2011-2024) has impacted the growth of Iraqi influence, particularly in halting oil exports from the Kurdistan Region, controlling areas addressed by Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, deepening the conflict between the main parties in the region, and posing a real threat to the entity and position of the Kurdistan Region.

Key Words: Kurdish Issue, Regional Shiite axis, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, Political Position

ناستی کارایی ئەندامانی میحوەری هەریمی شیعی لەبەرامبەر قرسی هەریمی
کوردستانی عێراق
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پوختە: ئامانجی سەرەکی ئەم تۆیژینەوێهە، لیکۆلینەوێه و خستەرپووی کاریگەری ئەندامانی بەرەو هەریمی شیعی دژی پرسی هەریمی کوردستان لە عێراق دا. گرنگی ئەم تۆیژینەوێهە لەوێهە شیکردنەوێه دەکات لەسەر ئاینەوێه هەریمی کوردستان لە ژێر کاریگەری ئەندامانی بەرەو هەریمی شیعی لە دژایەتی کردنی پرسی هەریمی کوردستان لە عێراق کە پرسیکی جەوھەرییە لە نیوان عێراق و هەریمی کوردستان، تۆیژینەوێه بە شیوہەکی سەرەکی پشت بەست بە میتۆدی چۆنایەتی پالپشت بە مەنھەجی وەسفی شیکاری و مەنھەجی میژووی. تۆیژینەوێهە بە دەرئەنجامەکانی دەریدەخات ناستی کارایی ئەندامانی بەرەو هەریمی شیعی لە دژایەتی کردنی پرسی هەریمی کوردستان لە عێراق لە ۲۰۱۱-۲۰۲۴ کاریگەری ھەبوو لە زیادبوونی ھەژموونی عێراق بە تاییەت لە راگرتنی ھەناردەکردنی ھەوتی ھەریمی کوردستان و کۆنترۆل کردن و دەستبەسەرداگرتنی ناوچەکانی ماددە ۱۴۰ی دەستوری عێراق و قولکردنەوێه ناکۆکی نیوان پارته سەرەکیەکانی ھەریمی کوردستان و مەترسی جدی دروست بکات لە سەر قەواری و پێگە ھەریمی کوردستان. **ووشە ١ کلیل:** پرسی کورد. میحوەری ھەریمی شیعی. ھەریمی کوردستان. عێراق. پێگە ١ سیاسی.

مستوى فعالية أعضاء المحور الإقليمي الشيعي تجاه قضية إقليم كردستان العراق دراسة تحليلية

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الملخص : الهدف الأساسي من هذه المقالة هو دراسة مدى فعالية أعضاء المحور الشيعي الإقليمي ضد قضية إقليم كردستان في العراق. أهمية هذه الدراسة تكمن في تحليل مستقبل إقليم كردستان في ظل تأثير أعضاء المحور الشيعي الإقليمي في معارضة قضية إقليم كردستان في العراق، وهو قضية جوهرية بين العراق وإقليم كردستان. يعتمد البحث بشكل أساسي على الأساليب النوعية المدعومة بالمنهج الوصفي التحليلي والمنهج التاريخي و توصل البحث الى عدة النتائج أهمها، ان مستوى فاعلية أعضاء المحور الإقليمي الشيعي في معاداة قضية إقليم كردستان العراق في (٢٠١١-٢٠٢٤) كان لها تأثير على تنامي النفوذ العراقي، لا سيما في وقف تصدير النفط من قبل إقليم كردستان، والسيطرة على مناطق المادة ١٤٠ من الدستور العراقي، وتعميق الصراع بين الأطراف الرئيسية في الإقليم، وخلق الخطر الحقيقي على كيان ومكانة إقليم كردستان. الكلمات المفتاحية: القضية الكردية، المحور الإقليمي الشيعي. إقليم كردستان. العراق. المكانة السياسية

Chapter One: Introductory Chapter

1.1 Introduction

This study discusses an important and sensitive issue, the role and influence of members of the Shiite regional front in the hostility towards the Kurdistan issue between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region between 2011 and 2024, and presents a historical background of their most important positions.

The reason for choosing this topic is the significance of the Kurdistan issue as a major national concern that underpins our understanding of conflicts and rivalries in the Middle East. Its impact and consequences extend beyond Iraq to other Middle Eastern countries. This issue has gained both regional and international dimensions and is currently being researched and analyzed in academic and scientific centers.

The study relies primarily on qualitative methods, supplemented by descriptive, analytical, and historical approaches, to analyze the role and influence of members of the Shiite regional axis in their hostility toward the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. It employs structural realism theory to understand and illustrate the impact of these members on the antagonism against the Kurdistan Region, while reviewing several previous studies on this topic to identify research gaps.

The research aims to answer the main question: "To what extent did members of the Shiite regional axis play a role and influence in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue during the period 2011-2024?"

The research aims to demonstrate the role and influence of members of the Shiite regional axis in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq, and to clarify their position on it. The research also aims to examine the extent to which members of the Shiite regional axis have harmed the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq. This is to demonstrate the effectiveness of members of the Shiite regional axis in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq during the period 2011-2024.

The importance of this study lies in its addressing an important and current political issue and will facilitate a better understanding of

the role and influence of members of the Shiite regional axis in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq during the period 2011-2024. This study represents an academic gap that has not been previously researched, and its preparation will serve to fill this academic gap. The study assumes that the continued role and influence of members of the Shiite regional axis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq will have a negative impact and threaten the prospects and future of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The research structure consists of the following sections: an analysis of the theoretical framework of the main principles and assumptions of neorealism theory; a review of previous literature to highlight gaps in the research and demonstrate the lack of previous research on a particular topic; a brief historical background of the Shiite regional axis to define its objectives and strategies; and a discussion of the level of competence of members of the regional Shiite front, composed of international and non-international actors (Iran, Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas, and the Yemeni Ansar Allah movement, known as the Houthis).

It also presents several issues related to members of the Shiite regional axis, and examines the role of members of the Shiite regional axis in opposing the Kurdistan Region of Iraq issue during the period 2011-2024. Finally, it presents the research findings along with the most important sources used in its preparation.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The American thinker Kenneth Waltz ¹ founded the theory of neorealism, known as basic realism, in 1979 ²This theory views the regional system as a stage for states to advance their power and supreme interests, and that the structure of the regional system determines the behavior and nature of its actors. It is characterized

¹ Kenneth Neal Waltz (1924-2013) is an American political thinker who is considered one of the founders of basic realism theory through his book entitled *Theory of International Politics*, which appeared specifically in the late 1970s (Munro, 2025).

² Hussein, Shamal (2017) *International Relations: Concept principles, history and stages, and theses and theories*. 1st ed, Erbil, Tafseer Press, p. 281.

by a balance of power and hegemony, and insecurity dominates the interaction between the units of the regional system¹

The regional system consists of the structure of the system and the states, along with the interaction of the states. The structure of the regional political system contains three main elements.

The first is the characteristic of the organizing principle (anarchy and hierarchy). Regional political systems are characterized by chaos and a hierarchy of organizing principles at the internal level of states.

The second is that the characteristics of the units are similar in their chaos but differ in their hierarchy. The third is the nature of the distribution of power within the system, which emphasizes that the factor of power is not a fixed factor, but rather is constantly changing and renewed²

The reason for anarchy in the regional system is due to two characteristics. The first is the absence of a supreme power that transcends the power of states. Therefore, the existence of war and political conflict between parties is a natural feature, as chaos is the principle and organizing factor in regional political relations³ The second is the characteristics and actions of actors, whether states or non-states, which are characterized by self-reliance. What distinguishes actors from one another is the degree of power they possess⁴

However, this does not prevent actors from forming alliances to deal with their adversaries in regional politics⁵ This theory holds that states are the primary actors, using non-state actors as tools or allies to achieve regional interests and increase their power and survival in

¹ Waltz, Kenneth (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. 1st ed. Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, p. 74.

² Waltz, 1979: pp. 80-87.

³ Hussein, 2017: p. 287.

⁴ Waltz, 1979: p. 111.

⁵ Mearshiemer, John (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. 1st ed. New York: W. W, NORTON & COMPANY, 156-162

the regional system, because power is a means and the goal is survival¹

Neorealism theory includes two approaches: defensive realism and offensive realism² Defensive realism emphasizes that actors in an anarchic regional system focus on enhancing their security and survival by maintaining and creating a balance of power, rather than by exercising regional hegemony and expansion. Because the structural factors of the regional system compel states not to amass a large amount of power, as Waltz argues, the strategic pursuit of regional hegemony is illogical, but rather an attempt to secure only the extent that guarantees their security and survival. This confines security conflicts between actors to the interactions of the regional system³

Defensive realism places great importance on creating a balance of power, viewing it as the only means of ensuring security and stability⁴ However, offensive realism holds that states, to maintain and enhance their security and survival, strive to maximize power to achieve regional hegemony, ensure relative power over other states, and weaken the capabilities of rivals⁵

Because fundamental factors encourage states to maximize their share of regional power and, if the situation is favorable, seek regional hegemony. Because it is the best way to survive in the regional system, John Mearsheimer⁶, a thinker in this field,

¹ Walt, Stephen (1987) *The Origins of Alliances*. 1st ed. New York: Cornell University Press.

² Issa, Albert (2019) *Introduction to International Relations*. 1st ed, Sulaimani, Sardam Presss, p.72.

³ Waltz, 1979: p. 40.

⁴ Waltz, 1979: p. 101.

⁵ Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milya, and Smith Stiph (2016) *International relations theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Dima Alkhudra, 1st ed, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

⁶ John Joseph Mearsheimer (1947) was an American political thinker who was instrumental in developing the theory of basic realism and is considered a follower and inventor of offensive realism (Munro, 2025).

emphasizes that geopolitics plays an effective role in increasing the power and dominance of actors in the regional system ¹

1.3 Literature Review

This study analyzes a body of previous literature relevant to the study topic to identify research gaps. Although none of the available literature is directly related to the study topic, it discusses some aspects in general. In this regard, we will discuss important aspects to bridge the scientific gap. The study seeks to explain and provide a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of members of the Shiite regional axis against the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

First: Research by Mohammed Al-Rumaithi (2010) entitled "Iran's Strategy for Hegemony in the Middle East." This study analyzes how Iran uses its affiliated armed groups, particularly Hezbollah, and the information framework to enhance its hegemony and destabilize Gulf regimes in the Middle East. The study asserts that while Iran's nuclear capabilities are a major concern for regional states, Iran's use of proxies and media campaigns to increase regional instability constitutes an important aspect of Iran's strategy in the region.

The study also examines the role and importance of Hezbollah for Iran, which it uses not only in military matters but also in political matters to influence public opinion in the Arab world. Iran also uses pragmatic messages to weaken regional regimes and create divisions among Arab states by allying with Lebanese Hezbollah. Finally, the study concludes that Iran is working to increase its influence in the Middle East through the use of proxy strategies and information frameworks. This has created significant challenges to regional stability ²

¹ Mearsheimer, 2001: p. 118.

² Alrumaithi, Mohamed (2010) *IRAN'S STRATEGY OF INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST*. THESIS, NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL.

Second: Research by Snor Jamal Jalal (2022) entitled " The Influence of Shiite Political Parties on Iraqi Foreign Policy and Relations between Iraq and Iran after 2011, as a case study". This study examines regional relations between Iraq and Iran and the role and influence of Shiite political elites in shaping Iraqi foreign policy toward Iran, especially after 2011. The primary objective of the study is to uncover the programs and agendas of Shiite political parties and their influence on building relations between Iraq and Iran. The main question of the study is: What are the programs and agendas of Shiite political parties? And does this affect Iraq's foreign policy and relations with Iran? The study concludes that the changes that occurred in the Iraqi political system in three different periods, especially after 2011, have further revealed the role and influence of these parties on the Iraqi government.

However, this is because Iraqi Shiite parties set the agenda for Iraqi foreign policy toward Iran due to their dependence, loyalty, and influence on the Iranian authorities and Shiites. They have been unable to adopt an effective and independent regional policy toward Iran because Iraqi Shiite political parties are dominated by Shiite religious identity. They are not very concerned with their national identity, and this has prompted Iraqi Shiite political elites to attempt to improve and maintain their relations with Iran after 2011 in regional politics, and to attempt to maintain Iranian hegemony in Iraq ¹

1.4 A Brief History of the Regional Shiite Axis (Shiite Crescent)

The Regional Shiite axis is one of the major axes in the Middle East, actively operating based on Shiite doctrine and ideology ² The Regional Shiite axis is a political and geographical concept that encompasses various other names, including the Defense axis, the

¹ Jalal, Snwr (2022) *The influence of Shiite political parties on Iraqi foreign policy and relations between Iraq and Iran after 2011 as a case Study*.

Thesis(MA), Salahaddin University.

² Khomeini, ruhallah (1970) *Al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya (Islamic Government)*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, PP, 35-36.

Resistance axis, and the Shiite Crescent ¹ The Regional Shiite axis (Resistance axis) comprises two types of members: state actors and non-state actors, each with different populations, locations, and strengths. By early 2024, this axis would consist of (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, the Yemeni Houthis, and the Palestinian Hamas movement) ²

The primary objective of the Shiite regional axis is to reach the Mediterranean, consolidate its power, establish Shiite hegemony in the Middle East, and lead the Islamic world ³ As former Iranian President Abu al-Hassan al-Sadr (1933-2021) stated, the Shiite Crescent aims to create a Shiite belt of control in the Middle East, encompassing Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon ⁴

¹ Kuhar, Neil (2023) *The Proxy Forces Iran Has Assembled Across the Middle East: A "Shiite Crescent" stretches from Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and back down to the Gaza Strip*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/27/world/middleeast/iran-proxy-militias.html>

² Sharifi, Kian (2024) *Iran's Axis of Resistance: Different Groups, Same Goals*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2024 at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-s-axis-of-resistance-different-groups-same-goals/32826188.html>

³ Al Jazeera (2024) *The Axis of Resistance is a regional alliance to confront Israel*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2024/7/19/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%A5%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9>

⁴ Abdullah, Ryam (2017) *The Middle East from the perspective of major regional powers*. {online}. *Political Orbits Magazine*, 1(2), 124-144. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/98146?fbclid=IwY2xjawKiuHZleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETfHUINRZEVWaVpxYjFnSm1HAR4zbQsTCT8brfrsBt5sb7XguYqyIZOf2q_mgRBFzn-nGBg5kW8vt71iy2gomaA_aem_SQYQNi4VMddfut8KUHePg

The resistance axis adopts several strategies to achieve its goals, including opposing Western hegemony and powers, particularly the hegemony and presence of American forces in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East, and rejecting the existence of Israel and dealing with it ¹ It also pursues hostilities and confronts the Saudi-led Arab Sunni regional axis in the Middle East ²

Using the Palestinian cause and liberating it from the Israeli occupation is another strategy of Iran and the resistance axis to achieve its ultimate goals ³ However, the former commander of Iran's Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, stated that the Shiite Crescent is an economic project aimed at controlling regional oil, particularly from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, because the oil of these three countries is mostly located in Shiite regions ⁴ The Shiite regional axis's adoption of this strategy is consistent with the assumptions of neorealism, which emphasizes that the best way to survive in the regional system is to gain power to create a balance of power and achieve regional hegemony.

Chapter Two: The Level of Competence of the Members of the Shiite Regional Axis on the Kurdistan Issue

The members of the Shiite Regional Axis (the Axis of Resistance) differ in their positions, demographic composition, and strengths. Here, we briefly discuss their past positions on the Kurdish issue and their role in Iraq's involvement and exploitation of the Kurdistan Region issue during the period 2011-2024.

2.1 The Islamic Regime of Iran

¹ Atrisi, Talal (2006) *The Difficult Republic: Iran in its Internal Transformations and Regional Policies*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, p.248.

² Al-Jazeera, 2024.

³ Abu Dawood, Al-Sayyid (2014) *The Rise of Iranian Tide in the Arab World*. 1st ed. Riyadh, Al-Obeikan Publishing Library, p. 343.

⁴ Far, Abu Dhar (2020) *Master of the Martyrs of the Axis of Resistance, Martyr Qassem Soleimani*. Yasser Tufayli, Hassan Sharara, and Hussein Al-Jundi, 1st ed, Beirut, Wafaa House for Culture and Media, PP, 475-476.

Throughout history, Iran has shown negative attitudes towards the Kurdistan issue on many occasions and has sometimes used it as a tool for its interests. In 1975, he gave up his ties to the Kurdistan Revolution in exchange for his interests in the Algiers Agreement with Iraq. As a result of this agreement, they opposed the Kurdish revolution in parallel with Iraq and defeated the Kurdistan September Revolution ¹ Iran's policy is in line with the principles of neorealism, which emphasize that states use non-state actors to achieve their goals. Here are several points to present Iran's role and position against the Kurdistan issue to present the level of efficiency:

2.1.1 Iran's Position and Reaction to the 1992 Parliamentary Elections in Kurdistan

Iran opposed the formation of the de facto Kurdistan Region in 1992 during the elections and the formation of the parliament and government ² In response to this process, Iran played a negative role in creating two administrations in Kurdistan by supporting one party against the other and preventing the formation of a unified, strong, non-governmental region. This would pave the way for the formation and emergence of an independent Kurdistan outside the sphere of Iranian influence and interests. Iran succeeded in this role by weakening the status of the Kurdistan Region and turning it into a two-centered political decision-making body. This situation continued until the fall of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq in 2003 and the formation of a unified Kurdistan Regional Government in 2005 ³

¹ TRT WORLD (2019) *What's the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq about*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/what-s-the-algiers-agreement-between-iran-and-iraq-about-24942>

² Qadir, Muthanna (2003) *Nationality issues and their impact on international relations: The Kurdish issue as a model*. 1st ed. Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Center for Strategic Studies, p. 137.

³ Ali, Hadi (2008) *Kurdish people and international policies in the twentieth century: Kurdistan, Iraq as a case study*. Sulaymaniya: Dar-Rushnabir, pp, 216-223.

2.1.2 Iran's Policy Towards the Disputed Areas Between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region After 2005

Although Iran was the first country to recognize the Kurdistan Region's federalism after the regime change in 2003 and the establishment of a federal system in Iraq in 2005, it opposed the implementation of several articles related to the Kurdish issue. In particular, Article 58 of the Interim Administration Law and Article 140 of the 2005 Constitution, which pertained to resolving the disputed areas between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, were suspended. Iran believed that the return of these areas to the Kurdistan Region would strengthen the region's status, help it move closer to establishing a state, and enhance its position on the global energy scene. Iran considers this a threat to regional security in the Middle East ¹

2.1.3 Geopolitics as an Introduction to Iran's Role in the Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Region and Iran are neighbors, sharing a border of approximately 1,300 kilometers in length. This indicates a high degree of interdependence, as the political geography of the Kurdistan Region is of great importance to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Because the political geography of the Kurdistan Region has significant political, economic, and security implications for Iran, Iran has employed various tools to secure, consolidate, and strengthen its position as a major player in the region, especially in implementing the policy of fragmentation, balance, and dominance among the ruling parties in the Kurdistan Region, particularly among the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. By pursuing this policy, Iran has succeeded in creating

¹ Al-Hassan, Falah (2024) *Iraq: Iran besieges Kurds by politicizing the Federal Court*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://asasmedia.com/62508/>

conflict between the two parties, weakening the Kurdistan Region's position and power in Iraq¹

2.1.4 Iran's Role in the Kurdistan Region and Disputed Areas After the Rise of ISIS in 2014

Iran saw the rise of ISIS and the imbalance of power as an opportunity to strengthen its position and influence in the Kurdistan Region and conflict zones, particularly in favor of Iraq against the Kurdistan Region. Although the rise of ISIS initially posed a significant threat to Iran, its forces, and its supporters, it also presented a golden opportunity, enabling Iran to further intervene in the affairs of the Middle East in general and the Kurdistan Region in particular. Iran strengthened its military, security, and strategic positions, turning the ISIS threat into an opportunity and turning it into a gateway to strengthening its hegemony in the Kurdistan Region in general and conflict areas in particular²

After 2014, Iraq wanted to establish a new geopolitical identity through the Hashdi Shaabi throughout Iraq, especially in the conflict areas, because this would increase the position of the Shiites in Iraq and reflect on the position of the Shiite region in Iraq and the Middle East. However, this policy was rejected by the Kurdistan Region. Iran has helped and supported Iraq in implementing this new policy and strategy, and the opposition and confrontation of the Kurdistan Region. Because the Shiite Regional axis had created a strong position at the regional level because of their membership and geopolitical position of Iraq, they wanted to increase their position with this strategy³

¹ Ismael, Hemn (2019) *The Geopolitical Challenge of Iraqi Kurdistan's Natural Gas*. PhD. The University of North Carolina.

² Nader, Alireza (2015) *Iran's Role in Iraq: Is There Room for Cooperation between the United States of America and Iran*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

³ Khashan, Mohammed (2021) *Popular Mobilization Forces - A Study in Critical Geopolitics*. {online}. Last Accessed 1 June 2025 at:
<https://journal.uokufa.edu.iq/index.php/ksc/article/download/827/759/1625>

2.1.5 Iran's Position and Reaction to the 2017 Kurdistan Independence Referendum

During the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum, Iran reiterated its opposition to the process, with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stating that the United States and foreign powers were seeking to create a second Israel in the Middle East; they meant the Kurdistan state ¹ Iran invited a high-level delegation from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) before the referendum and expressed its strong position on the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum in the Kurdistan Region and conflict zones, viewing it as a threat to its national security ²

However, the insistence of the Kurdistan Regional Government's political leadership on holding an independence referendum in 2017 led to tensions in bilateral relations between the Kurdistan Region and Iran. In response to the referendum, Iran closed its borders with the Kurdistan Region and, through Qassem Soleimani, the former commander of Iran's Quds Force, using his influence over a powerful faction within the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), reached a political agreement and succeeded in dividing the main political parties in the Kurdistan Region ³

¹ CNNARABIC (2017) *Khamenei on the Kurdistan referendum: Foreign powers are trying to create a "new Israel"*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/2017/10/04/iran-khamenei-kurdistan-iraq>

² Sinkaya, perm (2017) *Iran's Reaction to the 'Kurdistan Independence Referendum'*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.orsam.org.tr/en/iran-s-reaction-to-the-kurdistan-independence-referendum/>

³ Independent (2017) *Kurdistan referendum results: 93% of Iraqi Kurds vote for independence, say reports*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/kurdistan-referendum-results-vote-yes-iraqi-kurds-independence-iran-syria-a7970241.html>

2.1.6 Iran's Role and Supervision of Resistance Front Forces in Occupying Conflict Areas

Iran supported Iraqi forces, especially the Popular Mobilization Forces and Lebanese Hezbollah, with the participation and use of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), led by former Iranian Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani. The attack on the Kurdistan Region on October 16, 2017, and its repercussions in general, and Kirkuk and the conflict zones in particular, led to the fall of Kirkuk and all conflict zones under Iraqi control ¹ Former Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi stated that the United States tried to create another Israel in the Middle East, but Qassem Soleimani changed the American dream and prevented it from becoming a reality ²

2.1.7 The Impact of the Assassination of Iranian Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani on Iran's Role in the Kurdistan Region

Following the assassination of former Iranian Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in 2020, Iran played a role in

¹ Barzani, Masoud (2022) Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement. 5nd ed, Roxana Press, pp, 113-114.

² Asharq Al-Awsat (2024) *Funeral of Kerman victims Tehran vows revenge and announces the arrest of those involved*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://aawsat.com/%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/4770651-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86>

creating a real threat to security, the economy, and investment in the Kurdistan Region by launching ballistic missiles at the region's gas and oil fields especially the Kormor gas field in Chamchamal, which is the main source of gas energy for Kurdistan, and targeting the assets and interests of major capitalists in Kurdistan, particularly the two Iranian attacks in 2022 and 2024 on the homes of Sheikh Baz, Owner of a Kar company, and Peshraw Dzeyi, a major capitalist in Kurdistan, which claimed the lives of Peshraw Dzeyi and his child. The goal was to deal a severe blow to economic development and investment in Kurdistan ¹

2.1.8 Iran's Role in Legally Pressuring the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Iran has played a role in harming the Kurdistan Region in the legal sphere, particularly by pressuring and supporting Iraqi institutions, particularly the Judicial Council and the Council of Representatives, to pass several laws against the Kurdistan Region, such as the issuance of a settlement law and the amendment of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament Election Law. Following a ruling by the Federal Supreme Court, these laws have harmed the political and legal standing and authority of the Kurdistan Region ² This demonstrates that the Islamic regime in Iran has actively participated in shaping and diminishing the status of the Kurdistan Region by exploiting the power vacuum and the emergence of ISIS to increase its power in the Kurdistan Region and conflict areas and hold the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum in the political, economic, security, military, and legal spheres.

¹ Hawlati (2024) *Iranian missile attacks and the future of investors in the Kurdistan Region*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: https://hawlati.co/page_detail?smart-id=32767

² Smith, Crispin, and Knights, Michael (2023) *Reshaping Iraq: How Iran-Backed Militias Took Over the Country*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/aadt-tshkyl-alraq-kyf-astwlt-almlyshyat-almdwmt-mn-ayran-ly-alblad>

Iran viewed the growing influence of the Kurdistan Region and its efforts to achieve independence as an obstacle to the Shiite regional axis's policy, particularly in the completion of the Shiite Crescent project. At the same time, Iran views the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum as a threat to its national security, territorial integrity, and the sovereignty of Iraq, which is ruled by a Shiite majority, as an integral part of its security strategy.

Iran's involvement, role, and influence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq issue are consistent with the assumptions and principles of neorealism, particularly defensive realism, which emphasizes that interactions and dynamics in the regional system are chaotic. Therefore, states must utilize all their forces and capabilities to ensure their survival and increase their power, and prevent the formation of a defensive balance in Iraq, as such a development would pose a threat to its security and continuity.

2.2 The Former Syrian Regime

The former Syrian Ba'athist regime, due to the presence of the Kurdish issue in its country, always opposed the Kurdish issue in its own country and the countries of the region. It was prepared to cooperate and coordinate, particularly with the three countries: Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, to confront and oppose the Kurdish issue¹

The rise of the Arab Spring revolutions in some Arab countries, the spread of this wave to Syria in 2011, and the threat it posed to the Syrian regime, along with its preoccupation with the situation at home, to eliminate this threat. it was unable to send forces within the Shiite regional axis that Iraq used against the Kurdistan Regional issue, but expressed his country's willingness to use it as a gateway to transfer troops and military equipment to members of the Shiite regional axis in this issue²

¹ International Crisis Group (2005) *Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?* Middle East Report No. 38, 21 March. Brussels/Amman: International Crisis Group, P. 18.

² Jambrell, John (2024) *Analysis: Assad's collapse in Syria would be a blow to Iran's axis of resistance*. {online}. Last Accessed 28 May 2025 at:

Syria's geopolitical and geostrategic importance has led it to play a significant role within the Shiite regional axis, as it is the only land link between its members. This has enabled it to leverage Syria's geography ¹ As former Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah stated in a 2012 speech, Syria has always been a gateway or bridge between members of the resistance axis, which explains the importance of Syria's geostrategic location to the resistance axis²

2.2.1 The role and attitude of the former Syrian regime in the formation of the Kurdistan region de facto in 1992

In several previous instances, the former Syrian regime opposed the rights and interests of the Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially when Kurdistan established a de facto region and adopted a federal system in 1992. In response to this step by the Kurdish people, the former Syrian regime expressed its hostility and concern, and held three meetings with Iran and Turkey in 1992, 1994, and 1995 to oppose and confront this issue. Despite their weak relations with Iraq, Syria, and Turkey tried to restore the authority of the former Baathist regime to southern Kurdistan ³

2.2.2 The former Syrian regime's policy towards the Kurdistan Region of Iraq after 2003

During the period of regime change in Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi components worked on preparing the Interim State Administration Law of 2003 to rebuild Iraq, which protected the rights and interests

<https://apnews.com/article/iran-mideast-proxy-forces-syria-analysis-c853bf613a6d6af7f6aa99b2e60984f8?utm>

¹ Al-Zubayr, Muhammad (2020) *Iranian-Turkish foreign policy in the region and its impact on Arab countries: a case study (Iraq-Syria)*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <http://democraticac.de/?p=70034>

² International Institute for Strategic Studies(IISS). (2019) *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*. London: Think Tank Institutional Report Publication, p. 99.

³ Hituti, Nawzad (2009) *The Kurdish Case in Iraq and the Mechanisms of Resolution after 2003*. 1st ed, Duhok, Xani Printing House, p. 87.

of all components, and the parties agreed to follow the federal system. In response, former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited Turkey for the first time in 2004 and opposed the federalization of Kurdistan, describing it as a red line ¹ After the consolidation of the Kurdistan Regional Federal System in the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, the Syrian regime, through former President Bashar al-Assad during his visit to Turkey, reiterated its opposition to the Kurdistan Regional Federal System and its defense of the unity and sovereignty of Iraqi territory with all its might. It also expressed its support for the Turkish Parliament's decision to intervene militarily against the Kurdistan Region ²

The former Syrian regime continued to oppose the Kurdistan Region during the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum, opposing the process and the referendum. Former Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem stated that they would only recognize the unity of Iraqi territory and opposed the partition of Iraq and the Kurdistan independence referendum ³

¹ NBCNEWS (2004) *Syrian president makes first visit to Turkey*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna3889926>

² Al-Zoubi, Rania (2007) *Assad visits Turkey with his pockets full of mediation demands*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2007/10/19/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8>

³ I24NEWS (2017) *The Syrian government considers the Iraqi Kurdish referendum rejected*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.i24news.tv/ar/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/middle-east/156317-170925-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82->

The former Syrian regime was the only neighboring country to the Kurdistan Region that opposed the Kurdistan Region's right to autonomy and federalism, and it continued to do so until its collapse. It did not establish diplomatic relations or open a representative office in the Kurdistan Region, fearing that such recognition would undermine the position of Syrian Kurds and their demands for the same rights.

Consequently, the former Syrian regime, considering the Kurdish issue within its borders, had consistently opposed it in the past and collaborated with Iraq's neighbors to undermine it. Even after the change in the Iraqi regime, it continued to resist this issue. Particularly during the years 2011 to 2024, despite the country's instability, the former Syrian regime, as part of the Resistance axis, expressed its readiness to utilize its territory for the transfer of fighters, advisors, and military equipment to the Shiite Regional axis, which Iraq could deploy against the Kurdistan issue. This was intended to shape and weaken the role and standing of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The position and role of the former Syrian regime align with the assumptions and trends of defensive realism, which emphasizes that states exploit geopolitical positions to survive and enhance their power. Consequently, it collaborated with the regional alliance of the Resistance axis to address the Kurdish issue in Iraq, aiming to eliminate threats to its security and survival. With the resolution of the Kurdish issue and the increasing significance of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, Syria perceived this as a threat to its security and stability within the regional order, given the same issue within its borders.

2.3 The Lebanese Hezbollah movement

Hezbollah, as a non-state actor with a significant geopolitical position in the Middle East and possessing substantial military

[%22%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8B%22?utm](#)

capabilities, played an active and pivotal role in the events and interactions in the Region as part of the resistance axis ¹

2.3.1 Hezbollah's Ideology, Goals, and Strategy

Among its most important principles are strengthening the internal unity of Shiites in the Middle East and the world, paying attention to the Arab Islamic dimension and identity, and adhering to the jurisprudential state system and adhering to the decisions and orders of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this is due to his legal characteristics ² As Ibrahim al-Amin al-Sayyid, the former head of Hezbollah's Political Council, emphasizes, the personality of the Supreme Leader is not a geographical characteristic, but rather a legal characteristic ³

Another goal of Hezbollah is to confront Israel, its influence and activities, and the presence of the United States and its allies in the Middle East. It believes that all of the region's problems are caused by the presence of Israel and the activities of the United States and its allies, and that wherever the United States and its allies are present, resistance and defense are necessary and sacred ⁴

2.3.2 Hezbollah's Role in Training Iraqi Shiite Islamist Groups

The former Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, asserted that Iraq is under American occupation, and that we are working to defend and resist it, as well as to confront the presence of its forces and allies who seek to change and reshape the Middle East. We are prepared to support Islamic defense groups in Iraq, Hezbollah's role in the 2006 war against Israel attracted the attention of Shiite Islamist groups in Iraq, particularly the Mahdi Army of the Sadrist movement, which expressed its willingness to train its

¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019: p. 39.

² Levitt, Matthew (2021) *HEZBOLLAH'S REGIONAL ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF IRAN'S PROXY NETWORKS*. Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, PP, 5-6.

³ Motlaq, Rafqa (2009) *The Impact of Hezbollah on the Development of Resistance Thought and Methods in the Arab Region*. Thesis(MA). An-Najah National University, P, 72.

⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019: p. 40.

fighters under the supervision of Hezbollah advisors. To this end, Iran and Hezbollah trained and armed them together ¹

According to a report to the Near East Politics Center, the method used by Iraqi Islamic Defense Groups against US forces is the same method used by Lebanese Hezbollah in the war against Israel ²

This is evidence that these groups were educated and trained by Hezbollah fighters and trainers. This explains why Hezbollah has played an active role in the formation of Shiite Islamic groups in Iraq and has led to a strong relationship between Hezbollah and Shiite Islamic groups and parties. Especially the Sadr Movement and the groups that split from it, such as Ahl al-Haq, Najbaa, and Kata'ib Hezbollah Iraq ³

2.3.3 The role of Lebanese Hezbollah in Iraq after the withdrawal of US forces in 2011

The withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in 2011, the emergence of ISIS in Iraq in 2014, and the issuance of a fatwa by the highest Shiite authority, Ali al-Sistani, resulted in the formation of groups previously trained by the Hezbollah Movement Lebanese, as well as several new groups, and their integration into an entity called the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Hezbollah, as part of the regional Shiite axis, again supported these groups in training, organizing, and developing their military capabilities. This strengthened the relationship between Shiite Islamist parties and groups and the Hezbollah Movement Lebanese ⁴

2.3.4 The role and attitude of the Lebanese Hezbollah regarding the status of the Kurdistan Region and the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum

¹ Levitt, 2021: pp. 10-12.

² Motlaq, 2009: pp. 147-148.

³ Nader, 2015.

⁴ Wahab, Hadi (2019) *Hezbollah: A Regional Armed-Non-State Actor*. Thesis(MA). The University of Exeter, pp, 168-171.

Lebanese Hezbollah supports Iran's strategy and policy in Iraq as a driving and highly influential force in the resistance axis, which aims to protect the unity and sovereignty of Iraqi territory, and against the growing role of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, particularly in the recovery of Kirkuk and the Article 140 areas and its efforts for the independence of Kurdistan. This is in line with Iran's vision and strategy in Iraq and due to the strong relationship between Iran and Hezbollah, which is a historical and strategic relationship based on Shiite Islamic ideology¹ Lebanese Hezbollah viewed these moves as a threat to the influence of Shiite Islamist parties in Iraqi political power. Hezbollah's former Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, declared after the independence referendum that this was an Israeli and American plan, the first step toward dividing the Middle East, and that it must be prevented and opposed because it would cause civil war in the Middle East²

The Lebanese Hezbollah supported Iraqi forces in the events of October 16, 2017, and many other subsequent incidents. It participated in most attacks, particularly the October 16, 2017, attack on Kirkuk and the attacks on the Sahila and Mahmoudiyah areas on October 26, 2017, and supported Iraqi forces against the Kurdistan Region³

Akram al-Kaabi, Secretary-General of the Iraqi al-Nujaba Movement, also confirmed that Hezbollah, under the supervision of the commander of the Iranian Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, trained the Popular Mobilization Forces and participated in the attacks during the attacks on Mosul, Kirkuk, and the Article 140 areas⁴

¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019: p. 41.

² Al Jazeera (2017) *Kurds' vote a step towards Mideast partition: Hezbollah*.

{online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/1/kurds-vote-a-step-towards-mideast-partition-hezbollah>

³ Barzani, 2022: pp. 113-114.

⁴ Wahab, 2019: p. 173.

At the same time, former Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani confirms in his book "History" that Lebanese Hezbollah forces and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, along with the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, represented Iraq in negotiations with representatives of the Kurdistan Region ¹

As an extension of the regional policy of the Resistance axis, this party continued to oppose the position and power of the Kurdistan Region and Former Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, in 2020, to reduce the influence of the Kurdistan Region and his success in destroying ISIS, declared that if it weren't for the cooperation of Iran and the former commander of the Iranian Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, the Kurdistan Region would have fallen under ISIS control in 2014, without mentioning the role and sacrifices of the Peshmerga forces, This party has not taken any sympathetic or positive stance towards the suffering of the Kurdish people in the past, and this shows the extent of this party's opposition and hostility to the Kurdish issue in Iraq ²

The party has an extended branch in Iraq that has participated in interactions and events at the local and regional levels, particularly in the events and interactions in Syria after the Arab Spring and until the change of the Ba'ath regime in 2024, which we will briefly discuss here:

2.4 Kata'ib Hezbollah Iraq

It's A branch and extension of the Lebanese Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran as part of its regional strategy to enhance its influence in the Middle East. The party was formed after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and is led by Jamal Jaafar Muhammad, also known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The party ideologically follows the jurisprudential authority and abides by its decisions and orders,

¹ Barzani, 2022: p. 117.

² CNNARABIC (2020) *The Kurdistan Regional Government responds to Nasrallah's attack: A coward like you is too small to attack the Kurds*. {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025 at: <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2020/01/14/krp-responds-to-hezbollah-nasrallah>

namely the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution. This is due to its legal characteristics¹

The party's goal was to oppose US forces and protect Shiite holy sites in Iraq and the region, From 2011 until the end of Bashar al-Assad's regime, the party participated in Syria and played a role in protecting the former regime as part of Iraqi regional policy within the Shiite regional axis, After the formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in 2014, the party played an effective role in fighting ISIS and is now considered one of the most powerful factions within the PMF, the party's leader was assassinated in a US airstrike in 2020, and it has repeatedly used drones and missiles to attack Kurdistan and its interests²

The party's position on the 2011 Kurdistan independence referendum was sympathetic and aligned with the position of the regional Shiite front that opposed this process. The party's spokesman, Jaafar al-Husseini, stated that this process was Israeli and American, and that the Kurdistan Region, and especially its officials, had become American tools in Iraq and the Middle East. He described them as traitors and stressed that he would take the same position towards the Kurdistan Region officials that he took against ISIS to end the secession process and prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdistan³

¹ Levitt, 2021: pp. 5-6.

² Skynewsarabia (2024) *Facts: What are the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at: <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1690407-%D8%AD%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%94%D9%82-%D9%87%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%94%D8%A8-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%9F>

³ Almayadeen (2020) *Hezbollah Iraq: Barzani is a traitor, and we deal with him exactly like ISIS*. {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025 <https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/826552/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82?utm>

In general, Lebanese Hezbollah has played an influential role in the past in training Shiite Islamic Defense Forces groups in Iraq. This role was even more pronounced in 2011, and particularly after Ali al-Sistani's fatwa in 2014, it played a role in training groups within the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces that same year.

The Lebanese Hezbollah took a firm stance on the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum, describing it as a US-Israeli project and the beginning of a reshaping of the Middle East. It participated in attacks on the Kurdistan Region, Kirkuk, and the Article 140 areas with the Iraqi Shia Regional Front forces on October 16 and in other events, the party has a branch in Iraq called Kata'ib Hezbollah, it has been actively involved in the opposition to the Kurdistan Region within the Popular Mobilization Forces, particularly in opposing the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum.

This policy and strategy pursued by the Lebanese Hezbollah within the framework of the Shiite regional front against the Kurdistan Region is consistent with the defensive realism approach, which emphasizes that if conditions are favorable, it is natural to seek to acquire maximum power to enhance its strength and its survival in the regional system. The Lebanese Hezbollah has strengthened its power in the region through the Resistance axis Alliance, and it prevents the regional Resistance Front Alliance from being harmed in Iraq, because its formation would pose a threat to its security, survival, and alliance in Iraq.

2.5 Ansar Allah Movement (Houthi Movement)

The Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthi movement, is a non-state actor in the Shia regional axis and holds a significant geopolitical position in the Middle East and the world. If we look at his previous positions, especially his opposition to the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum and his opposition to the division of Iraq and the establishment of a Kurdistan state, describing it as an American and Israeli plan, but in Iraq's use of the Shiite regional axis against the Kurdistan issue, this movement had

no field participation, and its position and effectiveness can be explained within the framework of the Iranian region's position, as both are Shiite, and work to maintain Shiite influence in Iraq and the Middle East ¹

The Houthi movement may oppose the growing power and independence of Kurdistan, as the Kurdistan Region sought independence in 2017. independence referendum, because This would fragment Iraq and threaten the influence of Shiite Islamist parties in Iraq, as well as the influence and position of the Shiite regional axis in Iraq and the region, To this end, the leader of the Ansar Allah movement, known as Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, stated that this is an American and Israeli plan to divide Iraq and the countries of the region and establish an independent Kurdistan, Meanwhile, a member of the movement's political bureau, Abdul-Malik al-Ajri, stated that the Kurdistan independence referendum is the first attempt to re-divide the Middle East along ethnic and religious lines ²

Although the Houthis were not implicated in Iraq's use of the Shiite Regional axis against the Kurdistan Region from 2011 to 2024, the Ansar Allah movement's position as part of the Shiite Regional axis paralleled that of the Iranian-led Resistance axis, It opposed the increased status and power of the Kurdistan Region, the creation of an independent Kurdistan, and the partition of Iraq and the Middle East along ethnic and religious lines, This was reflected in their opposition to the 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum. This Houthi policy is based on membership and solidarity with the Shiite Regional axis. It is consistent with the neorealist theory that the

¹ Alsumaria (2017) *Al-Houthi comments on the Kurdistan referendum and warns of a "conspiracy"*. {online}. Last Accessed at:

<https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/216353/>

² Rudaw (2017) *Yemeni intellectuals support the independence of the Kurdistan Region*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/250920171?utm>

primary goal of actors in regional interactions, whether state or non-state, is to remain in the regional order.

2.6 The Palestinian Hamas Movement

Hamas, as a non-state actor with a geopolitical position, and despite being part of the regional axis of resistance, did not participate on the ground in opposing the Kurdistan issue. Iraq used it as a Shiite Regional axis between 2011 and 2014. Hamas, due to its ideological affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, strives to establish a state that unites Muslims and opposes the division of Islamic countries ¹

However, Hamas was an ally and supporter of the Iraqi Baath regime in the past, and did not take any positive or sympathetic stance towards the Kurdish issue and Kurdistan, which this regime practiced against the Kurdish people. When the Baath regime was threatened in 2003, the former leader of Hamas, Ahmed Yassin, expressed his support for the Baath regime led by Saddam Hussein and called on Muslims to go to Iraq to defend and support it ²

Even after the Baath regime was overthrown in 2006, Ismail Haniyeh, the former prime minister of the Gaza Strip, described the Kurdistan Peshmerga forces as a mafia, reflecting the movement's views and positions in opposition to the Kurdish issue in Iraq,

Even after the Baath regime was overthrown in 2006, Ismail Haniyeh, the former prime minister of the Gaza Strip, described the Kurdistan Peshmerga forces as a mafia, reflecting the movement's views and positions in its opposition to the Kurdish issue in Iraq ³

¹ Al-Jarbawi, Ali (1993) *Hamas is the Muslim Brotherhood's gateway to political legitimacy*. {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/36995>

² Washington Times (2008) *Saddam was friendly to terror groups*. {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/mar/21/saddam-friendly-to-terror-groups/?utm>

³ Mahdi, Usama (2006) *Palestinian government: Haniyeh did not underestimate the Kurdish people*. {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025 at:

While this movement is fighting for the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people and their liberation from Israel, previous leaders of the movement have a different view on the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people in the Kurdistan Region, Ismail Haniyeh, the former head of the Hamas Political Bureau, stated in an interview with Rudaw that they support the Kurdish people's right to self-determination, but only if it is in agreement with the Iraqi government ¹

However, Khaled Meshaal, the former head of Hamas's political bureau, stated on the same channel that they support granting the Kurdish people in the Kurdistan Region their rights within the framework of Iraq, while preserving their privacy. In other words, the movement's general policy is not to support the partition of Iraq and oppose the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, which contradicts their efforts to achieve the right of self-determination and independence for their people ²

Hamas not only opposed the Kurdish issue in Iraqi Kurdistan, but also supported Turkey's attacks and demographic interventions in Syrian Kurdistan due to its proximity to Turkish regional policy, considering it Turkey's right to defend security and sovereignty ³

https://elaph.com/Web/Politics/2006/10/183069.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com#google_vignette

¹ Rudaw (2022a) *Ismail Haniyeh to Rudaw: Israel bears responsibility for the bombing of Erbil, and we support the Kurds' right to self-determination.* {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/010420228>

² Rudaw (2022b) *Khaled Meshaal to Rudaw: The Kurdistan Region has the right to determine its position on the Iranian bombing, and both sides must address their political issues.* {online}. Last Accessed 27 May 2025 at:

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/interview/08042022>

³ Geo-Strategic (2024) *Frankly speaking, why do Kurds hate Hamas and its followers in Palestine, the Arab world, and the Islamic world.* {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025 at: https://www.geo-strategic.com/2023/10/blog-post_15.html

Then, during Hamas's war with Israel in 2024, Israel released a Kurdish Yazidi girl from the Gaza Strip who had been under Hamas control since 2014. This shows that Hamas, despite its absolute control over the Gaza Strip, remained under the control of this woman for ten years. Without taking a stand or attempting to return to her family in Kurdistan, many other Yazidi women captured by ISIS may remain under Hamas's control in the Gaza Strip. This means that the movement has not denied the tragedy ISIS inflicted on the Yazidi Kurdish girls in 2014¹

Hamas Movement. However, it took a position on the Kurdish issue as part of the Shiite regional axis, in line with its interests and the preservation of the regional balance. It did not participate on the ground from 2011 until 2024. However, later, as part of the Shiite regional axis, its positions were aligned with Iran's strategy in the region. This is reflected in the position of its leaders, who opposed the partition of Iraq and the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity. It supported the attacks and hostilities of regional countries against the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Syria. This is due to its policy as a movement that follows the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and its alliance and solidarity with regional countries in their hostility to the Kurdish issue.

Hamas's pursuit of this idea is consistent with the premise of offensive realism, which asserts that the best way to survive in the regional order is to gain maximum power, reaching the level of regional hegemony if conditions are favorable. Because Hamas

¹ The Times of Israel (2024) *Israel rescues Yazidi woman from Gaza after she was kidnapped by ISIS at the age of 11*. {online}. Last Accessed 29 May 2025 at:

<https://ar.timesofisrael.com/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B0-%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A3/?utm>

seeks to remain a non-state actor within the regional alliance, this is also consistent with the orientation of defensive realism, which asserts that actors use alliances to survive and increase their influence in the regional order.

Conclusion

Based on neorealism theory, the study examined the effectiveness of members of the Shiite regional axis in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue in Iraq during the period 2011-2024. This study shows that members of the Shiite regional axis actively participated in opposing the Kurdistan Region issue, viewing the changes and events in Iraq and the region as an opportunity to undermine the official status and authority of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. As a result, the authority and status of the Kurdistan Region were defined and shaped, especially after the events of October 16, 2017. As a result, Article 140 areas were seized and removed from the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the Kurdistan Region's oil exports to global markets were halted. This increased Iraq's power, position, and dominance, especially after the return of Iraqi authority to the areas covered by Article 140 of the Constitution.

Members of the Shiite regional axis participated in the hostility to the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq to varying degrees and different ways. The study confirms the hypothesis that the continued role and influence of members of the Shiite regional axis in the Kurdistan Regional Government will constitute a real threat to the prospects of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

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