

Report

Iran's Role in the Kurdistan Region

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Despite their discontent, some Iranian Kurds question the ability of the fighters to achieve their goals [AlJazeera]

Abstract

This report attempts to highlight the role of Iran in the Kurdistan region, and examines its influence in the region over the period preceding and following the establishment of the Islamic republic in 1979. Iran has political interests in this region, unlike its ideological interest elsewhere. These interests will no doubt change as Iran's political motivations transform, as will the reactions of the internal players in the region and the emerging geopolitical factors. This essay will argue that Iran will ultimately accept the region's aspirations. This acceptance is in Iran's best interests, essentially in terms of preserving the security of the region and Iran alike in the long term.

Introduction

Historically, Iran used the Kurdish case to pressure Iraq. It used it effectively in the settlement with Iraq over the Algiers agreement in 1975. After the Islamic revolution, Iraq withdrew from the terms of the agreement and an eight-year war began between them. Since the Islamic republic has been in power, Iran has dealt with the Kurdish issue in Iraq, and affiliated their political parties, through 'Qarargai Ramazan', a branch of the Iranian intelligence. Hence, there are mutual accusations between the political parties, including claims that rival parties were betraying their fellow Kurds, those in the Iranian Kurdish parties, by supporting Iran. Also, within the region, it was alleged that on occasion, particularly during the general elections, those political parties aligned with the Islamic Republic have been accused of election rigging, with Iranian complicity. Though the Gorran, or 'change', movement won the election in the municipality of Sulaimaniya Province in 2013, Ahmad (2013) suggests that if "we all know, and Iran knows, that in the green zone⁽¹⁾ [of Kurdistan Region] the Change Movement is the prime power, why does Iran still support the PUK?". This is where the Iranian preference is particularly

significant, with full backing of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK especially in Sulaimaniya province).

The Economic and Political Background of Iranian Policy vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds since the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (2)

The political structure of Iran during the eras of Islamic rule has always been as a Shi'a state, and since its establishment by Shah Ismael Safavid in 1501, Iran has always been attempting to expand its hegemonic power, whether geographically or ideologically. Palani (2015) notes that 'Shi'a sectarianism' and uniting Iranian forces based on nationalistic principles are at the core of the nation's foreign policy, particularly following the Islamic revolution.

This is the same expansionism policy which Iran is using to further its nationalist ambition in the entire region. Indeed, according to some sources, these ambitions have deeper historical roots. Farazi (2015) argues that the regional isolation demonstrated by Iran is not a sudden move, as the factors behind it date "to a pre-Islamic era"; these factors include the Iran's claim over the region including the Euphrates and the Tigris, all the way to Yemen. They cite US interference in the region as justification of their own ambitions, which are further supported by their "historic claim to the region" (Farazi, 2015).

For the Kurds, there are two narratives, both of which reject this hegemonic approach by Iran. The first is a secular approach, which generally considers Islam a cause of the demise of Kurdish nationalism. The second approach is Sunni religious nationalism, which does not principally accept any Shi'a hegemony.

Generally, Iran tries to export its influence through the promotion of Shi'a doctrine; in Kurdistan, there is a strong Islamic awakening, though with the exception of the Khanaqeen and the Faily Kurds of Baghdad, there are no new adherents of Shi'ism among the Kurds. Thus, Iran has attempted to expand its political influence on the Kurdistan region directly, especially during a time at which the Iraqi central government is not well positioned to impose its will on the region. Currently, Iran is paying close attention to the region; in the past, a network of neighbouring countries existed for support in these matters, such as Turkey and Syria. According to Ihssan (2000: 145), in November 1992 the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey and Syria met in Damascus to adopt a joint plan and cooperate against any Kurdish cooperation across their borders, as well as to prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. In this case, however, the Syrian regime is unable to sustain its power even within Syria, and Turkey currently has no conflict with the region, having already updated its politics in this

regard. Thus, Iran remains alone and in need of a policy update with regard to the changing circumstances of the region.

The first option for Iran in this regard, as a strong state acting upon an emerging neighbouring Kurdish entity, is to challenge it; the higher the ambitions of the region, the stronger the position of Iran. Namazi (2014) notes that the head of the Kurdistan Government, Masoud Barzani, requested the creation of an "independent commission" towards state independence; this move was quickly dismissed by Abdollahian(3) as a poor decision, as he asserted that many Kurdish leaders "would not consent to the breakup of Iraq" (Namazi, 2014).

As for the contextual background of the economic ties linking the region to Iran, this relationship goes back to the international sanctions imposed on Iraq during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As a result of these sanctions, an opportunity arose for Iran. By failing to act in accordance with the wishes of the international community, Iran was in a position to profit from the needs of Iraq. Thus, on the one hand, Iran became an important gateway for the smuggling of goods into Iraq across Kurdish borders on both sides of Iraq and Iran. On the other hand, it received much of Iraq's wealth, cars, Lorries, bulldozers and miscellaneous machinery which, under the terms of the sanctions, were not in use anymore in Iraq. After 2003, these smuggling routes became recognised border points between the Kurdistan region and Iran, which are still in use today. Since then, the crude oil trade has been ongoing via tankers, operating day and night to transfer oil from the region into Iran, to Bandar Abbas. In addition, many other import and export activities between both sides have been ongoing, with Iranians being the prime beneficiaries. Further, trade disputes which occur between Iranian and Kurdish businessmen always result in local authorities in the region, especially in the Green Zone, siding with the Iranians. Yet, Iran's economic ambitions in the region are still not fulfilled, as they wish to overtake Turkey as the prime beneficiary.

ISIS and Conflict: Iran's Stance on the Kurdish Issue

When ISIS first gained control of Mosul, they were making a huge stride towards Baghdad, which was at one point considered by Iran to be its 'red line'. Soon afterwards, ISIS shifted its advancement towards the Kurdistan Region. During the same period, the grand Ayatullah Sistani issued a fatwa calling upon the Shi'as to practice jihad (legally-sanctioned combat), which resulted in the creation of the Shi'a militant group 'Hashd Alshabi', which practices a politics of sectarianism. Immediately following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran initiated its sectarian politics, by sending extremists, including Al-Qaeda, into Iraq(4) and at the same time backing the Shi'a militants against the Sunni terrorist group. In fact, Iran was not alone in adopting this policy, as the Syrian regime was also directly sending those terrorist groups across the border into Iraq. The aim of both countries was to fail Americans in Iraq in an attempt to distance themselves from

the danger of a similar invasion in their own countries. This was exactly the same policy adopted during the Syrian revolution, with the creation of the Al-Nusra front, a decision which the Syrian regime later benefited from, which led to the growth of ISIS.⁽⁵⁾ By pointing out the rapid spread of ISIS the Syrians and Iranians sent the world a message to decide whom to support: the regime or terrorist groups. They also hoped to portray ISIS and its alleged barbarism as an example of violent Sunni Islam.

At the same time, Iran was trying to embrace the region. For example, the threat to Erbil by ISIS gave Iran an opportunity to show its goodwill, as the primary aid donor in the Region. Mehr News Agency (2015) quoted the region's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani as stating "during the first stage, when ISIL invaded Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran was the first country to help us out". Further, during the liberation of the two Kurdish districts of Jalawla and Sa'diah, Iran was helping Peshmarga directly. Nevertheless, the escalation of the Iranian position towards the region's goals is not difficult to identify. Namazi (2014) adds that cleric Ahmad Khatami, who is a member of the Assembly of Experts, considered plans for independence a "conspiracy", which risked creating another Israel-style conflict. In addition, Marzieh Afkham, a representative of the Foreign Ministry, branded the talks "a Zionist conspiracy" (Namazi, 2014).

Traditionally, in order for Iran to maintain its interests in the region, it relied on the internal political disparities within the region's the political parties. Gunter (1998) states that "Each of the two main Kurdish parties has a distinct clientele and territorial base from which to draw support". Of course, Iran is the major influential power in the region and in 1996, when the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) sought the Iraqi army's help to defeat the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Iran helped the PUK in controlling the entire Sulaimaniya governorate.

However, Iran has already revised its policies towards the region, especially in light of the current regional politics brought about by the expansion of ISIS. This can be considered the second option for Iran in dealing with the region. In other words, Iran's new international and regional policy, which is emerging in the context of the recent deal with the Western powers regarding its nuclear program and the war against ISIS, might be less interventionist towards the KRG. Despite accusations that Iran has imposed its influence on the Kurdistan region, Iran's motivations remain strategic by securing positive relations with others in the region. This has already been practically guaranteed through the secure neighbourhood in this region since the inception of the Islamic⁽⁶⁾ Republic. Iran gained a certain peace of mind from its Kurdish opposition parties and their armed struggle across the region's territories.

Iranian Policy Regarding the Presidential Row in the KRG

Recently, in terms of political difference over the presidency, Iran has assumed the role of a regional mediator, backing no particular party over another. Once again, Mehr News Agency (2015) quoted the Prime Minister of the region on his remarks at the Munich Security Conference in Iran last October: "Iran took some positive steps in an attempt to bring the Region's local groups together". Conversely, from the inception of the crisis, when the speaker of the parliament insisted on passing amendments to presidential law, he was opposed by the KDP. However, the speaker, with the support of the majority of the parliamentary blocs from his own party the Gorran movement, the PUK, Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) called for the session. In order to protect the session from KDP reactions, he invited many of the diplomatic missions to the Kurdistan region, including the Iranian consul. The attendance of the Iranian consul was initially interpreted by the KDP as Iranian interference against Mas'ud Barzani, the president of the region.

The disputed position between the pro-Barzani and anti-Barzani groups in relation to the Iranian's position came after the few Iraqi central government's announced stances on president Barzani and his firm opposition against the policies of the central government, on the one hand, and his close relationship with Turkey, on the other hand. Meanwhile, Iran declared its position on this issue to the Kurdish parties, which were keen to concentrate on fighting ISIS, rather than deepening their internal differences over the presidential issue.

The Role of Iran in the Erbil-Baghdad Feud

There is a general perception among the people of the region that, despite the many tragedies suffered (including the chemical bombardment of Halabja and the genocide campaigns (Anfal⁽⁷⁾), there was not a clear Arab position. In the case of a number of Arab states, the Iraqi regime was supported against the Kurds. As a result, the Kurds tend to portray Iran and its people as the region's 'saviour'. Iran's policy within Iraq, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of 2003, was pro-federalism. The Shi'as, along with the Kurds, worked on the federation of Iraq more than any other Iraqi component. The catalyst for this policy was the mistrust of the Iranians and the Shi'as of Iraq by the Americans. In a sense, if Iraq's new policies under the US opposed the wishes of the Shi'as, they would guarantee the southern portion of Iraq under the jurisdiction of their own region.⁽⁸⁾ Meanwhile, the Kurds were looking for partners in the 'new' Iraq, on the basis of a self-ruling federation, under which they would share power in the central government. This was the case until the referendum of 2005 under the Iraqi constitution, which came with, what the Kurds considered a fair deal with regard to their affairs within Iraq. This included the disputed territories, dealt with in article 140 of the constitution.

However, during the period in which Shi'a politics were represented by Maliki, they quickly and efficiently gained power over the central government, turning against the constitution and the rights of the other Iraqi socio-political components and groups. Hereafter, three major differences, with regards to the Kurdistan region, came to the fore. The first was the issue of federalism(9) in Iraq, the existence of which the central government denied. It remained only as a concept in the Kurdish media. Other than that, the central government gradually, facilitated a centralised mode of ruling with no recognition, even in the media, of federation in Iraq. The second issue was Article 140, which outlined the three phases to be implemented by the end of 2007 in order to finalise the issue of disputed areas between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan region. This never came to fruition. Finally, the issue regarding differences over claims to the natural resources of the Kurdistan region also came to the surface.

Nonetheless, in the aftermath of elections, the process of forming new government, that would include Shi'a parties, has historically been mediated by Iran, which has frequently requested the aid of the Kurdish political parties in this regard. Despite promises made by the government to the Kurds, however, they were often treated poorly once the new government was firmly established. In light of this, the Kurds began to question the stance of Iran with regard to the Kurds and the Shi'a ruling in Iraq. Iran is frequently turning a blind eye to the feud between the two parties in favour of bolstering the central government, under the guise of opposing sectarianism, as if Iran has no influence it over policies towards the Kurdistan region. Ultimately, Iran must announce its position on the issues important to the region, particularly in reference to Iraq as an independent and non-sectarian state.

Iran and Kurdish Independence: Facilitator or Primary Impediment?

As for the Kurdistan Regional Government and its political parties, the formal policy is the avoidance of sectarian politics, and the implementation of step to build its relationship with Iran on the basis of shared interests and neighbouring geography. In the long term, Iran must also treat the region fairly, respect its aspirations in order to maintain the stability of the region and avoid the transit of security threats into Iran which, until very recently, had been of little concern. According to Namazi (2014) "Hashemi(10) says, better relations between Tehran and the Kurdish Regional Government might be preserved in the short to medium-term". Iran is very aware of the importance of regional relationships in the current political climate. Draitser (2014) highlights that conflict relating to ISIS in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria, has caused a shift in the power dynamics across neighbouring states, Iran especially, who are attempting to increase their political influence. It has been noted that "Turkey, the Gulf monarchies, and Israel have the most to lose from such a development" (Draitser, 2014).

The Kurdish diplomatic policy in the region has been designed with the twin aims to build a relationship with neighbours, while at the same time maintaining a neutral stance on major regional issues for self-preservation purposes. This is the case in spite of internal differences between the two Kurdish political parties and the KRG's relative distance from Iran and Turkey. It is also true that Iran tactically benefited from the existence of ISIS more than any of the other regional states, while simultaneously helping the Kurdistan region to restrain ISIS. Until Kurdistan becomes an independent state, Iran has a huge influence, and can make policy decisions to take advantage of the situation. Iran has a number of long-term goals in this regard; again, Draitser (2014) observes that Tehran have shifted their alliance towards the Kurds in the Iraqi context, in an attempt to keep Iran relatively stable in the wake of the Kurdish issue. This move is perceived by Iran as a clear indication that the Kurdish fight for independence will be undertaken peacefully as it relates to Tehran.

Yet, the explicit policy of Iran towards any Kurdish hope of independence is a negative one. Therefore, Iran will try its utmost to hinder any real effort of Kurdish people to fulfil their dream of an independent state. The reason for this can be seen in the scope of Iran's leverage over the greater Kurdistan whereby Iran enjoys considerable influence over Kurds in three of the greater Kurdistan's four parts – Iran, Iraq and Syria and, allegedly, the Alawite Kurds of northern Kurdistan in Turkey. However, as it is obvious from the current shifts in Iran's diplomacy, the country's political elites understand that they can no longer continue with their traditional foreign policy with respect to Kurds as well as the wider Middle Eastern.

As mentioned, Iran has also benefited from the emergence of ISIS and the pressing matter of combatting its threat. It allows the nation to present itself anew in the international arena – as an anti-terrorist ally. In addition, the four-sided coalition between Iran, Russia, Iraq and the Syrian regime has strengthened Iran's voice in the international community with regard to the future of the Syrian regime, as well as in other regional issues.

Despite the high morale and raising ambition of the region over the last few years, the Kurdistan region is currently experiencing oil price decline, as well as playing host to 1.7 million refugees and displaced persons. Due to these factors, and its ongoing struggle against Islamic State, the Kurds are suffering from severe financial hardship. In order for Kurdistan to survive economically at this time, Mahwi (2016) suggests that "The representative offices of the Kurdistan region abroad will directly ask host countries for financial and military aid, to help Erbil cope with a sea of refugees and an ongoing war with ISIS, amid a dramatic decline in oil prices over the past year". Recently, in the words of Rudaw (2016): "Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, briefly mentioned on Tuesday that Moscow had sent some arms to Iraq's Kurds, shortly after they were

threatened by Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist". This is despite the fact that the Kurdistan region is not part of the coalition between Iran, Russia, Iraq and Assad, as its pro-revolutionary stance has been clear since the start of the Syrian revolution.

Therefore, it is also in the interest of those who oppose an Iranian-Russian coalition, both regionally and worldwide, not to abandon the Kurdistan region at this critical time. Kent (2016) highlights that Iran has exerted a significant influence over Kurdistan, which has been perceived politically as an ally of the West (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs). The position once occupied by the West, that of a military support for the Kurds, has now been filled by Iran, whose motivation lies largely in "exporting its revolution and challenging the West"; as the support from the West dwindles, Iran's influence become stronger and stronger (Kent, 2016).

This can be considered a multifaceted Iranian strategic stance on the region, first by containing it within its own regional zone of influence and power reach and second, by holding it back from its ambition towards self-determination, including a future self-determination referendum. In addition, the strategy seeks to encourage cooperation with the Iraqi central government, and its centralised policies, as well as putting Iran in a position to reassess its stance from anti to pro-Syrian regime, with reference to its influence over the Kurds.

The governance of the region has begun to put more stock in its relations with the west, starting from last year's many visits by president Barzani, to the USA, Europe, and regional Western allies such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. These visits were perceived by many as an attempt to garner international and regional support for the upcoming referendum on self-determination. This referendum is particularly important, one could argue a historical juncture in the politics in the entire Middle East. It is up to the actors involved how seriously they involve themselves to determine the outcome. Already, some of the superpowers have already weighed in on this issue. Kent (2016) remarks that UK-Kurdistan relations are in need of improvement to prevent the region "turning to powers who may not share our values" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee). These concerns are not unfounded and are likely given the "deep economic and political crises" of the Kurdistan region. (Kent, 2016).

The Way Forward

Although the Kurdish political parties and the KRG have made many attempts at avoiding sectarian politics, sectarian sentiments reveal themselves whenever any political tension presents itself within the central government in Baghdad. This is due to the fact that it is predominantly led by majority Shi'a political parties, already supported by Iran. Especially with the current mobilisation of the Shi'a militants, the display of sectarian slogans has been frequently reported, rallying against the Region and its

leadership. However, regional sectarian polarisation is rising, and is set to continue if Iran does not adopt a moderate, non-sectarian politics towards the ambitions of the Kurds.

The Kurds in Iraq, one could argue, have enjoyed federal self-ruling since 1992, following the uprising of 1991 and aftermath of the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait, during which it endured the defeat of its army by an international coalition led by the USA. Stansfield (2014) argues that "Having been autonomous in Iraq since 1991, they [the Kurds] heeded the aspirations of the United States in 2003 to assist in the removal of the Ba'ath regime of Saddam and played by the rules of the game established in the post-2003 period". Thus, upon Iraq's defeat in 2003, the Kurdistan region voluntarily participated in building a new Iraq together with other Iraq's ethnic groups, creating what Rafaat refers to as "a voluntary union with Iraq."⁽¹¹⁾

According to the Kurds, they have preserved their right to distance themselves from Iraq, especially as the Iraqi government does not want to implement the constitution, which is the contract that binds them to Iraq. This contract exists in the preamble of the Iraqi Constitution (2005: 2), as follows: "The adherence to this Constitution preserves for Iraq its free union of people, of land, and of sovereignty". Since 2007, and to this day, the Iraqi central government does not wish to adhere to the constitution.⁽¹²⁾ Therefore, as O'Leary (2015) puts it, "The question that Kurdistan must ask itself is: does it have any reasonable evidence to believe that the world of 2005 as promised in the text can be made real? [...] my view is no". This is despite the fact that the referendum movement, alongside the Iraqi general elections on 30th January 2005, ran a referendum poll, according to the Kurdistan Referendum Movement International Committee (2005), in all the Kurdish areas, including the so-called disputed areas; "the total number of Kurdistan voters participating in the referendum was 1,998,061 people". According to the same source, 98.88% of them voted 'yes' in favour of independence of Kurdistan, and the results were as follow:

Governorate	Voted for Independence	Voted for Staying in Iraq	Total Votes	Percentage For Independence	Percentage for Staying in Iraq
Kirkuk	131,274	181	131,582	99.88%	0.12%
Nineveh	165,780	111	165,891	99.93%	0.07%
Diyala	35,786	627	36,413	98.28%	1.72%
Sulaimani	650,000	5,796	656,496	99.12%	0.88%
Hawler (Erbil)	622,409	11,289	636,898	98.23%	1.77%
Duhok	368,163	2,247	370,781	99.39%	0.61%
Total	1,973,412	20,251	1,998,061	98.88%	1.12%

Source: Kurdistan Referendum Movement – International Committee, 2005.

The political parties at that moment hoped to guarantee the Kurdish rights within the Iraqi constitution by rebuilding Iraq and staying within it, rather than acting on the wishes of the 98.88% of the voters. As they disappointed the Kurds with consecutive

Iraqi governments failing to implement the constitution, gradually the position of the Kurdish political parties shifted towards stronger support for independence.

Therefore, the Kurdistan region is quite confident in its ability to run another referendum, and, as previously mentioned, they are looking forward to determining whether the Kurdish people in the Kurdistan region want to stay within Iraq, or favour self-determination and an independent state. However, currently, given the sudden drop in oil prices and the ensuing worsening of the region's economic situation accompanied by the considerable political instability, these are not the only possibilities. There also exists a middle ground between the status quo and independence. This option has been explained by O'Leary (2015) as follows: "A confederation with Baghdad represents a half-way house between amending the constitution and going for independence, as it leaves the exterior structure of Iraq intact".

Conclusion

Iran exerts a significant political influence over the Kurdistan Region which is vital to its survival. However, due to the majority Sunni demographic of the Kurdish population and the relative strength of the Islamic awakening in the region. This awakening is represented by a 17% share of Islamists in the Parliament, ever-increasing presence of the Salafi, and the high percentage of adherents to Sunni Islam among the Kurdish population in the region; Iran has little or no ideological influence on the region at all. It is important to note that under the current geopolitical system and in light of the advancement of the position of the region due to its opposition to ISIS and its natural resources, Iran is reconsidering the region. Furthermore, it is likely to change its politics towards the region as this process continues. Iran understands that, with Turkey as a key ally and, with the prospective support of the Arab states and with the deepening identification of Kurds as Sunnis, Kurdistan will survive without Iran's support. Therefore, Iran has, in recent years, been seeking a friendly relationship with the region, and has expressed a desire for more economic interaction with Kurdistan (13), similar to the way in which Turkey works with the region. More importantly, Iran does not desire to leave the region, or a future Kurdistan state, which is potentially a springboard for anti-Iran activities. Hence, Iran is unlikely to be hostile towards this newly evolving Kurdistan.

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- (1) Green and Yellow Zones refer to the two predominated areas by the two main rival political parties, where Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani predominately rules over Sulaimaniya, Kirkuk and Garmian, and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mas'ud Barzani predominately rules over Erbil and Duhok Provinces.
- (2) In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein withdrew his forces and administration from parts of the Kurdistan Region. Faced with an administrative vacuum and a double embargo, the Kurdistan Front, an alliance of diverse political groups opposed to the Ba'ath dictatorship, organised a general election. Their goal was to establish an administration and fulfil the population's strong desire to choose its representatives. The election on 19 May 1992 was the first free and fair parliamentary election in the history of Iraq; after decades of dictatorship, the people of Kurdistan were able to choose their own representatives. This regional election led to the formation of the first Kurdistan National Assembly (later renamed the-Kurdistan Parliament) and the establishment of the KRG. (Kurdistan Regional Government official website).
- (3) Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Middle Eastern and African Affairs.
- (4) Prior to 2003, Iran was the prime benefactor of the Kurdish terrorist groups 'Jund al-Islam' and 'Ansar al-Islam' on its borders, and used to employ them against the Kurdish authorities, especially in Sulaimaniya. However, when in 2003 those terrorist groups came under attack from the US forces, Iran provided a safe haven for them inside its territory, only to send them back into Iraq, whereby these groups were particularly active in the Sunni territories of Iraq, such as Fallujah. Ultimately, they united with and Al-Qaeda and participated in creating the sectarian civil war. For further details on the role of Iran in creating of politics of sectarianism look at: Werleman, CJ, 2015.
- (5) For further details on the role of the Syrian regime in creating ISIS, see: Cordall, S., S., 2014.
- (6) Since the establishment of the KRG, Iran has been safe from guerrilla warfare by the Iranian Kurdish political parties that have established their base in the region. This is due to the assertions of those political parties not to induce the KRG and its political parties to confrontation with Iran. However, Iran never stopped pursuing those Iranian oppositions in the region, as, on many occasions, Iran has attacked, kidnapped or assassinated members of the Kurdish opposition using its agents. See: the kidnapping of Mawlood Afand, the Iranian Kurdish journalist in Kurdistan Region in 2013 (Darweshi, B., 2013, <http://bakhtiyardarwishi.blogg.se/2013/september/>).
- (7) Anfal--"the Spoils"--is the name of the eighth sura of the Koran. It is also the name given by the Iraqis to a series of military manoeuvres, which lasted from February 23 until September 6, 1988. While it is impossible to understand the Anfal campaign without reference to the final phase of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, Anfal was not merely a function of that war. Rather, the winding-up of the conflict on Iraq's terms was the immediate historical circumstance that gave Baghdad the opportunity to end its longstanding efforts to bring the Kurds to heel.

Anfal was also the most vivid expression of the "special powers" granted to Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of President Saddam Hussein and secretary general of the Northern Bureau of Iraq's Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party. From March 29, 1987 until April 23, 1989, al-Majid was granted power that was equivalent, in Northern Iraq, to that of the President himself, with authority over all agencies of the state. Al-Majid, who is known to this day to Kurds as "Ali Anfal" or "Ali Chemical," was the overlord of the Kurdish genocide. Under his command, the central actors in Anfal were the First and Fifth Corps of

the regular Iraqi Army, the General Security Directorate (Mudiriyat al-Amn al-Ameh) and Military Intelligence (Istikhbarat). The pro-government Kurdish militia known as the National Defense Battalions, or jahsh, assisted in important auxiliary tasks. The first was the integrated resources of the entire fense Battalions; the word jahsh means "donkey foals. The second was "Saboteurs", the term commonly applied by the Iraqi regime to the Kurdish peshmerga guerrillas and their civilian sympathizers. Military, security and civilian apparatus of the Iraqi state were deployed, in al-Majid's words, "to solve the Kurdish problem and slaughter the saboteurs". Human Rights Watch, n.d., Anfal Campaigns, online available at: <http://m.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFALINT.htm> [Retrieved 03 February 2016].

- (8) Actually the hope of the Shi'as of Iraq in federalism goes back to pre-invasion of 2003. For further details in this regard, please see: Anderson and Stansfield, 2005, the Implication of Elections for Federalism in Iraq: Towards a Five-Region Model.
- (9) For further remarks on this issue, see the presentation of Professor Brendan O'Leary, Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania, USA at session 8 of the forum 2015 of MERI: Middle East Research Institute, 5th November 2015, Online Available at: <http://www.merik.org/multimedia/forum-2015-session-8-the-challenges-of-keeping-iraq-united/> , [Retrieved 03 February 2016].
- (10) Nader Hashemi, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver.
- (11) For more information, please see: Rafaat, A., (n. d.) 'the Kurds in Post-Invasion Iraq: the Myth of Rebuilding the Iraqi State', The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies, Online Available at: <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-1625359641/the-kurds-in-post-invasion-iraq-the-myth-of-rebuilding> , [Retrieved 26 March 2016].
- (12) For further information in regards to the implementation of the Iraqi constitution and the dispute between the central government and the KRG, see: Stansfield and Anderson, 2009, Kurds in Iraq: The Struggle Between Baghdad and Erbil, Middle East Policy Council, Volume XVI, Number 1.
- (13) According to (Rudaw: 2016) "The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will start exporting oil through Iran as part of an agreement due to be signed in a month time". Rudaw, 2016, Kurdistan to Export Oil Through Iran, [Online] 5 April, Available at: <http://rudaw.net/english/business/05042016?keyword=Iran> , [15 April 2016].