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Iraq's *Complex* Foreign Policy Conduct:
Major Iraqi Communities, their divergent Interests and the Intervening Neighboring Countries (2004-2009)

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Abstract

This study is analyzing the foreign relations of three major Iraqi communities, namely the Shia Arabs, the Kurds and Sunni Arabs. In order to properly characterize these communities' external relations with neighboring countries, some of their foreign policy choices are examined at national and regional contexts. The issue of unresolved territorial disputes among the groups and ongoing security problems that are deeply affecting inter-group relations and their ties with the U.S.-led coalition forces are also discussed. Under the light of neoclassical realist assumptions, the role of external (regional and international levels) and domestic (national level) constraints on foreign threat assessments made by Iraqi state's foreign policy makers are investigated in order to explain Iraq's certain foreign policy making processes within the context of those major groups' external connections and strategic orientations at national, regional and international politics.

Key words: Iraq's major societal groups, neoclassical realism, foreign policy executive, Iraq's neighboring countries, foreign threat assessment, national interests, international constraints.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research question and purpose

Saddam Hussein was the sole decision maker of Iraqi state. Not only in foreign and security issues but also in domestic politics, his words were used to be recognized as rules and orders. Even though he was a Sunni Arab and he considered himself a Sunni Arab nationalist, his rule was an extreme sort of dictatorship. His strategic reliance on Iraq's Sunni Arab minority does not mean that Sunni Arabs as a societal group was ruling the country. Instead, the ruling elite were composed of Ba'ath party top officials who were strictly loyal to Saddam's personal orders. Most of those were from Sunni Arab tribes and/or Saddam's relatives. Saddam as a sole decision-maker and ruler had created a decision making tradition in Iraqi state based on completely his own personal initiative, preferences and ideas. Therefore, once foreign and security policies and other critical national policies have been decided by him, then his Ba'ath party networks and state bureaucracies were beginning to carefully implement those orders and directives. However, today, foreign policy decision making processes are no longer composed of such kinds of simple and easy dictatorial procedures because Iraq's major domestic societal groups have enough power at the national politics to interfere foreign policy making processes according to their respective group interests. Each of these major societal groups have more reasons to behave in rationalist/self-interested ways, when comes to configuration of foreign policy formulations by Iraq's top state officials and foreign policy makers. First, it is because each group has enough political power at the state's critical institutions. Second, each group has in varying degrees strategically important strong political and social connections with Iraq's neighboring countries and/or some of power components in those countries. In other words, all three major societal groups do/can influence foreign and security political decision making systematic of new Iraq in certain degrees. This study is aiming to explain this complex decision making processes by examining the groups' external relations with neighboring countries, the questions between these societal groups and their power position within Iraq's new political system. The ongoing political and social conflicts among those groups will allow us to draw their conflicting foreign policy choices and interests in Iraq's foreign politics.

After fall of Saddam regime in 2003, Iraq's political system has completely been altered. Saddam's dictator rule was replaced by a new democratic political system based on the democratic political institutions, federalism and power-sharing among the country's main ethnic and religious groups. The absolute rule of Sunni Arab minority has been replaced by the Shia and Kurdish alliance government via democratic elections. The new

democratic constitution allowed the Kurds to establish their regional government in the predominantly Kurdish areas at the north of Iraq. The Shias who constitute about more than 60 per cent of Iraq's population have won the majority of seats in the parliament. While the Shia and Kurdish coalition government is overwhelmingly dominated by Shias, the Kurds have also been given some very critical positions in strategic state institutions such the State Presidency and the Foreign Affairs Ministry. By today, the Sunni Arab minority is underrepresented because they had boycotted the previous elections. Since the end of 2008, the Iraqi government has been trying to include Sunni Arabs into political process to achieve national reconciliation among all Iraqi groups. The UN, the multi-national coalition forces in Iraq, the EU and the U.S. have also been contributing to the efforts to speeding up national reconciliation process among Iraqi groups. In fact these three major Iraqi groups are still far away from reaching a real national reconciliation at all levels and participate in all democratic institutions according to democratic principles, but establishment of democratic political institutions and approval of democratic constitution have guaranteed the removal of authoritarian state institutions and mechanisms. At today's Iraq's, it is those three major ethnic and religious communities running the political affairs. Each community has created its respective political coalition encompassing most of their political parties and groups to be able to compete with other communities for political power. Therefore, these communities have come to occupy a considerably great space of Iraq's new political system, its institutions and mechanisms.

The ongoing conflicts between some segments of Sunni and Shia communities may continue to exist in near future because of their historical rivalries and the intensity of violence has occurred between the two sides since the fall of Saddam regime. Recently new signs of disagreements are emerging between the Shia-dominated central government and the Kurdish regional administration too. The Kurds insist for referendums take place for the Kurdish cities remaining outside their autonomous region. The other reasons of this new conflict are that (a) the Kurds are also signing contracts with foreign companies to sell their oil products; and (b) the Kurdish regional government is developing direct diplomatic relations with foreign countries. All these problems among the Iraqi groups make them to pursue different objectives and strategies in their relations with foreign powers in the Middle East and in the World. Their foreign policy choices, therefore, differ from each other and contain conflicting features. Since each of these groups enjoys some power bases within the state institutions and domestic politics, they are able influence the Iraq's foreign policy decision makers in certain extent. Because of their historically rooted ethnic and religious ties with their kin-groups residing in the neighboring countries, these major social groups (except the Kurds) have naturally gone into strategic political relations with the ruling communities of those neighboring countries. In the case of the Kurds, engagement and relations with those countries have also been politically quite strategic and security-related, but the relations have never been in friendly manner because the basic intention of Turkey, Syria and Iran is to impede the increasing Kurdish autonomy and self-rule in Iraq.

By considering those three major Iraq's societal groups' power positions within the state structures and their foreign relations and foreign policy choices this research paper is going to try to explain the basic characteristics of these three groups' external relations and their foreign policy choices. My examination is basically based on two empirical observations: (1) Current power-sharing among the major communities in Iraqi politics, and (2) those major groups' strategic and political relations with the neighboring countries in the region. By focusing on the existing relations between Iraq's major societal groups and the neighboring countries, my paper will focus on answering this research question: In spite of Iraq's main societal groups' divergent interests and conflicting behaviors/actions in their external relations and their contradictory responses to regional and international constraints, Why Iraq's top state officials (foreign policy makers), who are at the same time the leaders of those domestic groups, have designed and advocated foreign policy options maintaining Iraq's national and security interests instead of pursuing their narrow group interests in foreign politics? Answering this question will allow us to see to what extent to Iraq's three major societal groups (the Shia Arabs, the Kurds and Sunni Arabs) can influence and limit the Iraqi State's foreign policy makers' through their relatively autonomous behaviors and actions inside and outside country. Therefore, there are two main objectives of this paper. First, it is aiming to explain some main characteristics of major three Iraqi groups' foreign relations and their foreign policy choices, and thus depicting the roles of those main societal groups in Iraq's foreign policy conduct. It is because, although grand ethnic and religious lines are dividing the country's population, new federal Iraqi state (through its statesmen) as a new parliamentarian and democratic republic is able to speak with a single voice in country's foreign political affairs. The other purpose of this paper is to try to explain Iraq's currently developing some foreign policy actions through neoclassical realist approach. In another word, here the objective is to show how systemic, regional and domestic variables/factors all at the same time can shape the country's foreign policies/behaviors via Iraqi State top state officials, in spite of Iraq's main societal groups' divergent interests and behaviors in their external relations and conflicting responses to regional and international constraints.

2. Method and Material

The examination in this study is basically built on the foreign relations of the three main Iraqi ethnic groups' dominant political parties and movements. This is a case study based qualitative methods. The behaviors of these political parties in question are going to be analyzed in relation to their positioning in Iraqi politics and their respective group interests in comparison to their rivals at national politics. The level of analysis is, therefore, is based on the major political components representing those three groups, the Sunni Arabs, the Kurds and the Shia Arabs, in Iraq's national politics. The illegal affiliates/wings (armed groups) of these major legitimate political forces are going to be included in the analysis due to the substantial importance of security problem prevalent in the country and Middle East politics. We also keep in mind that each of these three groups is composed of multiple political parties and then united around their respective group coalitions. In reality, those sub-groups of those three major communities do not act independently of their respective communities' basic political intentions. Some other small and marginal communities do also exist both outside those three major groups. However they are not going to be included in the analysis due to their very limited presence and power at national politics other ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq such as Assyrians, Mendaeans, Iraqi Turkmen and Armenians.

In line with neoclassical assumptions, my paper will try to explain the process in which the external structural pressures and domestic incentives all together determine the foreign policy decisions taken by Iraq's top state officials. In this study, constraints and pressure stemming from domestic societal groups and the structure of international and regional politics/system should be regarded as *independent variables*. 'For neoclassical realists, the state [top official decision makers] is an intervening variable between the international system and foreign policy' (Lobell 2009:44). Therefore, foreign policy option assessments by Iraq's top officials should be considered as *intervening variables* in this case. Iraq's finalized foreign policy decisions, on the other hand, should be regarded as *dependent* (outcome and/or output) *variables*. Domestic political incentives are the aims and actions of major ethnic/religious groups in foreign relations and their power-positions in Iraq's national politics. The dominant strategies resulted from the foreign policy decisions/behaviors of Iraqi top state officials is going to be revealed by centering on Iraq's internal political dynamics (Domestic political incentives and major Iraqi groups' aims/motivations) and the pressures/constraints exerted on Iraq by international (systemic) and regional (sub-systemic) politics.

Due to the characteristics of this theoretical perspective, by which the research question is going to be explained, the analysis will be carried out at two levels: (1) Iraqi state (unit)-level analysis and (2) inter-state level (international and regional level). At first, main Iraqi groups' power positions in domestic politics and their strategically dynamic political and social ties is going to be detailed. Iraq's new constitution specifies the autonomy enjoyed by the groups at national level. Therefore the constitution is one of the key sources. I will also benefit from relevant reports and articles published by multiple American think-tanks, academic journals and news reports. The interactions between the major Iraqi groups and their relations with the neighboring countries, regional forces and international powers will be examined within the context of Iraq's foreign policy actions at regional level. By doing so, we aim to see Iraq's societal actors' influence over the foreign policy choices. At inter-state level analysis, the pressures from regional and international levels on Iraqi major domestic forces and the consequences of those constraints on the Iraqi foreign policy makers are going to be examined.

This study is limited in terms of time and covering the period 2004 - mid-2009. It is reasonable to do so because the first interim Iraqi government was established in 2004 after the fall of Saddam regime by the U.S.-led coalition forces in 2003. Therefore, given the structural political changes, the year 2004 is of great importance for Iraqi politics. The main Iraq's societal (ethnic and religious) groups began to establish themselves organizationally within the state's new political and bureaucratic institutions when the transfer of political power from the multinational coalition forces to the Iraqis started out in 2004.

3. Theoretical Framework

An emerging *realist* approach to international relations and foreign policy analysis is going to be used in this paper to explain the problematic and characterize the main features of external relations and foreign policy choices of the three main Iraqi societal groups, namely the Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shias. This new realist school of theories is *neoclassical realism*. I will basically try to order and problematise the issues and questions in this paper according to neoclassical realist assumptions developed by Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman (2009). Some realist assumptions of Samuel P. Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis are also going to be employed in the analysis instrumentally in order to properly characterize the role of domestic societal groups in shaping Iraq's foreign politics. Employing neoclassical realist school of foreign policy analysis will allow us to make a more comprehensive examination of the complex foreign policy conduct of the new federal and democratic Iraq at today. Neoclassical realist view is not aiming to develop a comprehensive universal theory of international relations, instead '[f]or them the question is: which realist school (if any) is most useful for analyzing issues of foreign policy at a given place and time? To some extent, the choice of theory is contextual issue' (Wohlforth 2008: 35). Neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy study as Lobell (2009) rightly states. Therefore, we have many reasons to employ this realist foreign policy theory to explain Iraq's main domestic groups' foreign policy tendencies and the constraints these groups face from inside and outside.

Huntington's assumptions, on the other hand, is going to be employed to characterize the Iraq's main societal groups as autonomous cultural and political entities within Iraq's new political system. As a version of classical realism, Huntington's thesis of clash of civilizations is primarily concerned with the sources and uses of cultural-religious-civilizational power and conflicts in international relations. For this reason, the leading classical realist theorists have put great emphasis on 'power distributions amongst states, as well as the character of states and their relation to domestic society' (Taliaferro 2009:16). When we look at the power-sharing mechanisms present in Iraq's political and its new legal system, constitutional acts and governmental practices, one can easily see the fact that the political power are shared between these three main Iraqi social and political groups. Some local and regional level cases, such as Kirkuk city issue and the issue of Kurdish conflict in Turkey and its impacts on the triangle relations between the Kurdish regional government, Iraq's central government and Turkish state is also going to be examined to reveal the severe competition over political and economic resources among the major Iraqi groups and their relations with Iran, Syria and Turkey. By doing so, I aim to make the analysis more practical and touch upon relevant facts and factors.

Pointing to those small scale regional questions will, in great extent, help us to see the groups' attitudes and behaviors in the country's foreign politics and their alignment with foreign powers. The groups' external ties with foreign powers within the context of those issues will allow us to characterize their relations with regional and international actors more clearly because Iran and the Sunni Arab countries did, more or less, involve in these regional issues by advocating the interests of their kin groups in Iraq. However more importantly, classical realism's assumptions explaining foreign policy decision are of great importance for our analysis.

Not Iraqi groups' foreign ties and their individual group interests but the national interests do determine the foreign policy decisions. However we should point to the fact that the foreign policy decisions by Iraqi leadership (Iraqi government which are composed of the leaders of those major groups) were not only product of those politicians' rational pursuit of Iraq's national interests against outside powers. The constraints and pressure exerted on Iraqi state by international (systemic) and regional (sub-systemic) political competition amongst states has also influenced the final decisions of Iraq's foreign policy makers. As neoclassical realists rightly argue, not only national state-level analysis and factors but also interstate-level analysis and variables need to taken into account in order to understand how foreign policy decisions are taken by top official politicians in practice. According to neorealism, international system does not only refer to the interaction among states, instead it is a sort of material structure that influence and determine the foreign policy behaviors and decisions of individual states partly (Viotti and Kauppi 1999:84).

In order to undertake a deep analysis of the relations between the state's political forces and society, Samuel P. Huntington's concept of kin-rallying-country and his arguments about the divisions within Islamic are going to be used in this thesis. Since Iraq's population and politics is represented by three main social-political forces whose identities are essentially constructed on ethnic and religious differences, the relations of major three Iraqi groups can be examined according to Huntington's conceptualization of the relations between ethnic and religious groups and/or among them and other neighboring states with similar and different backgrounds. Samuel P. Huntington argues that religious and cultural differences will be a new source of conflict and of political activitism at international politics. His arguments are helpful in defining the groups' political and social ties at regional level. It is commonly acknowledged that the relations between Iraqi groups and their neighboring countries are essentially based on their common religious and ethnic backgrounds, histories and identities. Huntington's theoretical assumptions will allow us to see the role of religious and cultural identities behind the conflictual relations between the Iraqi groups, and between them and their neighboring countries. This perspective also makes possible for us to define these groups not only as political actors at national politics but also as social and cultural entities pursuing relations beyond the borders of Iraq.

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Islamic world is separated into contending powers. Each of these power-centers is trying to draw advantages from Muslim identification with the whole Muslim world in order to contribute to the progress of Islamic cohesion under its leadership (Huntington 1996:176). Therefore, in the Middle East region, the major source of competition between the Muslim countries has been the sectarian divide between the Shia Islam and Sunni Islam. It is likely to argue that the Shia Islam today is represented by a powerful core state, Iran. However the Sunni Muslim world is still divided, and within Sunni countries there is no core state appears to lead them at international level. Yet, because of the competition at regional level and the severe ongoing conflict and clashes between the Sunni and Shia groups in Iraq following the regime change in 2003, there has been some Sunni states supporting covertly or sometimes openly the Sunni Arab groups in Iraq. Putting in Huntington's (1996) terminology, a "fault line war" within Islamic civilization has come about in Iraq following the fall of Saddam's Ba'athist rule and the regime change. Huntington's (ibid) concept the "kin-country rallying" deserve more intention here. It is because while the Shia Iraqis have been backed by Iran, the Sunni Iraqi Arabs (both secular and radical groups) have been advocated by Sunni Arab countries though at lesser extent. These concepts not only help us to define these major groups in terms of their social characteristics, but they will also allow us to characterize their external ties with external powers over the common identities they share with them. It should be noted that, in this study the Huntington's assumptions are instrumentally employed in order to characterize the major Iraqi societal groups' ethnic and religious orientations and their culturally backed political ties with their kin groups and states properly within the boundaries of realist tradition. These assumptions do not contradict with neoclassical arguments; instead they in a way help us to underline the essential characteristics of Iraq's major domestic groups and their power potentials at national and regional contexts. This refers to a realist assumption that neoclassical realists and classical realist share.

3.1 Neoclassical Realism and Iraq's foreign policy conduct

Neorealists basically claim that 'systemic and sub-systemic structural forces shape the broad parameters of a state's behaviour in the international arena' (Sterling-Folker 1997 in Lobell 2009). 'These external constraints and opportunities for action will create incentives and disincentives, but they alone cannot account for a state's particular foreign policy' (Lobell 2009:62-63). However, as neoclassical realist Lobell (2009:63) rightly argues, internal problems and domestic forces with divergent interests can prevent a State from acting in the rational ways in foreign politics. According to neoclassical realism, 'both systemic and sub-systemic structural and unit-level forces influence the behavior of state leaders' (Lobell 2009:64). It is because in neoclassical realist view, 'systemic and sub-systemic pressures are translated through intervening variables at the unit-level to explain a particular state's foreign policy or a specific historical event' (Lobell 2009:73).

Neoclassical realists argue that 'the state exists as a potentially autonomous actor that is distinct from any [domestic] societal group' (Ripsman 2009:280). In the foreign policy realm, the state consists of the foreign policy executive [(FPE)], principally the head of government and key ministers and officials charged with the conduct of foreign policy… [And] although the members of the foreign policy executive may be drawn from a particular class or societal coalition, their interests and preferences reflect a distinct *raison d'état* focus' (Ripsman 2009:280-81). We should also note that neoclassical realists do consider diplomats, intelligence officers and policy makers as a component of FPEs, in addition to those top state officials serving in critical governmental and bureaucratic institutions. The FPE concentrate outward on the inter-states competition at international and regional levels, and inwards on the competition between major domestic societal groups at national level (Lobell 2009:46). FPE as a unified central decision maker assess foreign threats to national security and interests at the systemic, sub-systemic and domestic levels when formulating the state's foreign policy decisions (ibid).

Leaders/elites of domestic societal groups may press and force FPE to decide and behave not in the nation's grand strategic interest but favoring their specific group interests (Lobell: 2009:61). Such sort of efforts by societal groups' leaders may result in certain policy outcomes if societal groups are very powerful at national politics and in state's critical political institutions as in the countries such as Iraq. We also should note that state leaders (FPE) may not be always unified in their assessment of threat because they may have very strong ties with major domestic societal groups (Lobell: 2009:62). 'Also it is important to note that many FPEs are erstwhile societal elites and will likely to return their former or similar positions' (ibid).

Lobell (2009:64) argues that State leaders (FPE) are unconstrained or constrained minimally, if (1) at international and regional levels, the FPE identifies a certain power component of the foreign state as a threat to the national interests, and if (2) at domestic level, all leaders of societal groups agree on branding a foreign state as threat to their interests. But, when forces on the international (systemic), regional (sub-systemic) and national (domestic) levels do not converge, the FPE is constrained in its foreign threat assessments and consequently in foreign policy making according to the national interests. For example, the FPE do identify a component of power of the foreign state as a threat to their national interests and security but the FPE's societal supporters do not identify the element as a threat to their narrow/local interests. In this case if the leaders/elites of domestic societal groups have strong ties to the FPE, the outcome will be a delayed, sluggish or insufficient threat assessment and foreign policy decisions by FPE, Lobell (2009:66-67) argues.

Jack S. Levy of Rutgers University rightly says that neoclassical perspective focuses on "how internal state structures filter external threats and opportunities, and how state leaders evaluate threats, formulate strategies, and mobilize societal resources to support

those strategies." [1] Despite the paradoxes they are facing due to their divergent group interests, the major three Iraqi political forces have not allied with foreign states threatening Iraq's integrity. And when comes to choosing between the country's common national interests/security or collaborating their respective kin-countries at the expense of Iraq's national interests in foreign politics, they have modified the foreign policy choices and actions conflicting with the country's grand national security interests. It is basically because the groups' leaders (and their other high-rank officials) were the same state's top officials who finalize these foreign policy decisions at governmental levels in the end. Assessment of regional and international constraints on Iraqi foreign politcs by those Iraqi foreign-policy makers does constitute another important part of our analysis of foreign policy decision making process. But without considering the major domestic societal groups' foreign policy choices and their relations with foreign countries, we may not be able to explain the exact factors that forced those three major Iraqi societal groups to act in line of the country's top state foreign policy makers/officials on the behalf of the country's national interests in foreign politics. Therefore in order to explain the state's finalized foreign policy choices and actions properly, it seems necessary to take carefully into account the pressure of domestic societal groups on FPE and foreign policy making processes in addition to systemic and sub-systemic constraints, as neoclassical realists do claim so.

Like classical realists, neoclassical realists are concerned with the state and its relation with society but they additionally take into account the neorealist assumption that *international system* shapes and restricts the states' foreign policy options (Taliaferro 2009:19). The following chapter is concentrating on a set of political, cultural and economical factors that have been shaping Iraq's major communities' (Sunni Arabs, Shias, and Kurds) foreign relations with Iraq's neighboring countries and their foreign policy choices related to some certain selected issues. In other words, the societal groups' political and strategic orientations and the inter-community relations within the context of Iraqi politics will be analyzed in line with neoclassical realist assumptions.

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[1] In his review on the book 'Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy' by Steven E. Lobell (ed), http://cambridge.org/us/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=0521517052

4. The Major Iraqi Communities and their External Relations

When we look at writings of neoclassical realists such as those who are referred to in this study, they pay great attention to the domestic societal groups. One may need to put much more emphasis on domestic societal groups, if the case of study is of the foreign policy analysis of a country whose population is divided through sharp religious and ethnic lines organizationally such as Iraq. In such countries, major societal groups can influence the country's foreign and security policies decision makers via their domestic power at national level, their external relations with foreign countries and their alignment with (or opposition to) regional and international powers. This chapter is aiming to depict Iraq's major societal groups' above-mentioned characteristic in line with neoclassical realist assumptions and some of Samuel P. Huntington's realist arguments. Examining Kirkuk issue will also help us to indicate the implications of inter-groups' relations (conflicts) at national level for domestic, regional and international forces.

4.1 The Shias

Shias today constitute around 60 percent of Iraq's whole population, whereas Sunnis make up 37 percent, divided between ethnic Arabs and Kurds (Gritten 2006). With national elections in 2005, a coalition of Shia political groups (*'United Iraq Alliance'*) won 140 out of 275 seats in the Iraqi parliament. Today together with two major Kurdish parties, the Iraqi government is run by a Shia and Kurdish coalition. Current Iraqi prime minister (Nuri al-Maliki) is also the leader of Islamic Dawa Party, the second largest Shia group within the ruling Shia alliance in Iraq. The biggest Shia party within Shia *United Iraq Alliance* is the 'Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq' (SCIRI) led by Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim. The movement of Muqtada al-Sadr (a Shia cleric leader) and some other small Shia secular groups are also included in this alliance. Like Islamic Dawa Party and Sadr movement, the SCIRI is also known as an Iranian-backed movement, which have opposed to Saddam regime from early1980s (Gleave 2007:7). SCRI and Dawa party came back to Iraq and they went into cooperation with the U.S.-led Iraqi transitional government following to the fall of Saddam regime (ibid). Internal divisions within SCRI and Islamic Dawa party left the Sadr movement as the largest parliamentarian group (having around 30 MPs) within the Shia alliance today. However, the Shia alliance (and consequently the government) is led by Nuri al-Maliki's Dawa party. When comparing to SCRI and Sadr's movement, Islamic Dawa party tends to be more secular and it did not hesitate to form alliances with moderate Shia parties and some

secular Sunni movements at local and national levels despite its on-going relations with Iranian regime.

There have been two influential Shia armed militia groups whose violent campaigns against the coalition and Iraq's new security forces have been secretly advocated by Iran. The most powerful of these two is the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr 'whose brand of Shia nationalism, opposition to the coalition forces and hostility toward the powerful established Shia political parties in Iraq has proved popular among disenfranchised, poor Shias' (BBC, 15 Aug 2006). Sadr's Mahdi Army is the first Shia group began fighting against the U.S.-led coalition forces after the invasion. When Sunni insurgents and al-Qaeda groups have more and more intensified their attacks on Shia areas, 'the Mahdi Army has become one of the major armed forces on the ground in Baghdad, controlling - and protecting - predominantly Shia areas' (ibid). Both Shia militias and Sunni insurgents have carried out sectarian killings against each other since the beginning of war in 2003 (ibid). The other Shia militia group is the *'Badr Organization',* which has been known as the armed branch of the SCIRI, has very strong Iranian connections (ibid). Tahran regime has the power to influence Iraqi Shias because most of Shia societal/political leaders have spent years in exile in Iran (Beehner 2006). The U.S. intelligence service claims that Iraqi Shia extremists are being trained in several locations inside Iran.[2]

Muqtada al-Sadr backed 'Maliki of the Dawa Party, who became as prime minister in April 2006.' However, in the summer of 2008, Sadr broke with Maliki over his refusal to set a timetable for American withdrawal (*New York Times,* 09 June 2008). And so in March of 2008, Iraqi security forces began to launch military operations against Mahdi Army in Basra. Not surprisingly, it was Iranians who negotiated a ceasefire and brought an end to the clashes between two Shia groups (ibid). Mahdi army, known with its extreme anti-U.S. and anti-Maliki government stance, have clashed with Iraqi and the U.S. security forces that spread many towns of Basra province and Sadr city of Baghdad in March of 2008 (The Washington Post, 28 March 2008). For Iranians, intra-Shia in Iraq conflicts is not a desirable thing which is likely to weaken their influence on Iraqi politics. When the two Shia militias (Sadr's *Mahdi Army* and SCIRI's *Badr Organization*) started fighting each other in Baghdad in 2007, Iranian regime forced successfully the warring parties for a truce to keep the unity among Iraqi Shias (The Economist, 16 Feb 2008). This shows that Shia societal groups' relations with Iran is quite strongly established both at socio-cultural and organizational levels. Iran's influence on the Shia community in general can be highly determinative. By keeping intra-Shia relations secure and well, Iran is aiming to balance American pressure on itself and keep Shias dominant in Iraqi political system to strengthen its positioning at regional level against the powers such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and the U.S. forces in Iraq. Iraqi

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[2] Iraq's Shia extremists 'trained in Iran by Hizbollah, in *Telegraph.co.uk* (15 Aug 2008) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/2565758/Iraqs-Shia-extremists-trained-in-Iran-by-Hizbollah.html

Shias' organizations and their societal elites close ties to Iran allows Tahran regime to deepen its relations with Shia societies across Iraq.

Local elections of January of 2009 have brought about substantial consequences for Iraqi national politics. While Maliki of Dawa party focused much more on Iraqi nationalism and centralization, ISCI strongly emphasized sectarist Shiaism and federalism (Visser 2009). Maliki emerged as a winner from the local elections which clearly indicates the victory of centralists over federalists (ibid). The election results also showed that the Shia parties, which have been campaigning for a federal region in Basra (a predominantly southern province) similar to Kurdish federal region, didn't do well, either.[3] Since 2008, Maliki's party has minimized its Shia sectarian position, pressing the illegal Shia armed-militias in Baghdad and Basra, normalizing relations with Sunni Arabs in parliament and giving up its sectarist discourses during their provincial election campaigns (PNA, 31 May 2009). ISCI's short-term leadership within Shia alliance by Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim could not have sustained itself as they wished, basically because of the extreme Shia ideology they follow. Dawa party is doing much better because of its openness to other secular Shia and Sunni political groups of which later on joined the Shia alliance (*United Iraq Alliance*). In January 2009, while Maliki's party emerged as the biggest winner from the local elections, ISCI was the biggest loser. The success and leadership of Maliki's Dawa party within Shia alliance indicates that Iraqi Shias can broaden and deepen their political dominance in Iraqi politics when they act independenly of Iran's Shiaism and its ideological influence. More ideological independence the leading Shia parties enjoy, more they get closer to other Iraqi social and political groups. However, it is unlikely to argue that Iraqi Shia sociatal leaders will lessen their close relations with Iran in near future. It is important note that the major Shia groups follow different ideological and political lines, but all have strong links to Tahran regime. For instance, while ISCI and some segments of Shia community are campaigning for a federal Shia region in Iraq's southern Basra province, Sadr movement and Islamic Dawa party are not sympathetic to this idea, fearing that an automonus region in the South may weaken Shias' political domination at national level.

Shia societal leaders' foreign relations are charaterized by their strong connections with Iran. Unlike the Kurds, the Shias want the U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible. Withdrawal of the U.S.-led colaition forces will make it easer for Shias groups to counter the Kurds' territorial demands and weaken their power position in Bagdad. Instead of pursuing seperatist and clear anti-American strategies, the Shia societal leaders have basically chosen to dominate Iraq's state institutions via their their huge electoral power across the country. Their foreign policy choices toward Syria and Turkey are characterized by their worsening partnership with Iraqi Kurdish leadership and their highly conflictual and tentious relations with Sunni Arabs.

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[3] See, 'Basra federalism campaign failing' at *Middle East Times*, 19 January 2009
http://www.metimes.com/Security/2009/01/19/basra_federalism_campaign_failing/dd23/

4.2 The Iraqi Kurds

Iraqi Kurds under the leadership of two major Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK) have been running their own political, economic and social affairs since the first Gulf War in 1991, through their own regional government, assembly and security forces. Today, new federal Iraq is composed of eighteen governorates and one region, Kurdish federal region. The article 116 of Iraqi constitution states that "the region shall adopt a constitution that defines the structure of the regional government, its authorities and the mechanisms of exercising these authorities provided that it does not contradict with this Constitution" (Iraq's new Constitution, 16 October 2005). For this reason, the Kurdish region does enjoy a considerable degree of political and economical autonomy. The region owns a regional democratic parliament and a dynamic economy which is doing much better than the rest of country due to its highly improved political and economical stability and order (Wahab 2008). Today 'the region is hosting thousands of the U.S. soldiers, diplomatic missions, multinational corporations and business-people (Zunes 2007). The central government in Baghdad is led by a coalition made of major Shia and Kurdish political parties. As of today, Iraq's prime minister is a Shia, Nuri-al Maliki of Dawa party but the president of Iraq is a prominent Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani. In the Iraqi cabinet, Foreign Affairs Ministry is also headed by a Kurdish figure, Hoshyar Zabari from KDP. One of the two Iraq's Deputy Prime Ministers is also a Kurdish political figure, Barham Salih, from PUK. **I**raqi military commander-in-chief is also a Kurdish figure from KDP. The rest of cabinet is predominantly occupied by the leader cadres of Shia alliance.

The Kurds owe all these achievements to their persistent struggle against Saddam regime and to their close cooperation with the U.S. and the West since last three decades. Unlike Shia and Sunnis, the Kurds as a stateless nation, do not have any kin-country o which they can rely. Turkey does not still recognize the Kurdish regional administration in official terms. Turkey and Iran actually have serious problems with their own Kurds who have been struggling against authoritarian Turkish and Persian regimes through democratic means and guerrilla warfare for Kurdish autonomy. Recently, on 2nd of May in 2009, Iranian army shelled again border regions of Iraqi Kurdistan including villages through military helicopters.[4] However the fact that Iran is not alone in its practice because Turkish airstrikes and shelling on the border regions inside Iraqi Kurdistan have intensified since 2007.[5] Both Turkey and Iran argue that their military operations in border regions of Iraqi Kurdistan are aiming to target Kurdish guerillas (Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as PKK) but in fact they are also bombing Kurdish civilian settlements inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Last year, the chief of Turkey's army have publicly declared that 'Turkey and Iran are conducting joint military operations' along border

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[4] Source: Reuters, '*Iran shells Iraqi Kurdistan village*' in Alertnet (04 May 2009)
http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L4126550.htm
[5] Source: The New York Times, '*Turkey Says Its Raids in Iraq Killed 150 Rebels*' (26 Dec 2007)
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/26/world/europe/26turkey.html

regions of Iraqi Kurdistan against Kurdish guerillas (CNN 05 June 2008). Sudden withdrawal of American forces from Iraq may encourage Turkish and Persian agression towards Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey, which is known a Cold-War ally of the U.S. and a member of NATO, have been promised by the Bush administration to support Turkey in its fight against Kurdish gueraillas (BBC News, 02 Nov 2007). The U.S. officials have been apparently forcing the Kurdish government to cooperate with Turkey against their co-ethnics. Up to now, The Iraqi Kurds avoided helping Tukish forces against PKK in military ways; instead they call Americans and Turkish government repeatedly to look for peaceful and political solutions to end the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Meanwhile the U.S. has started to share real-time intelligence with Turkish army to aid in their efforts to repress PKK in Turkey-Iraq border regions in 2007.[6] Pentagon of the U.S. declared that they have been providing Turkish army with real-time intelligence that has helped the Turkish military target a series of attacks against PKK fighters holed up in border regions of Kurdistan, including large number of airstrikes since 2007.[7] Considering the coordinated attacks by Iranian-Turkish armies on the Iraqi Kurdish villages on border regions, it shows that the Iraqi Kurds' relations with their neighboring countries are characterized by tension and mistrust. When comparing with Syria and Turkey, Iran is much open to the Kurds, but the U.S. presence and its unresolved Kurdish problem obstruct the relations between Iran and Kurdistan region of Iraq to be developed properly.

The U.S officials are always referring to the political and economic achievements made in Kurdish region in their reports, and they say that Kurdistan's flourishing economy is offering great business opportunities (Rogers 2007). For instance, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Iraq Investment and Reconstruction Task Force has recommended Kurdish region as the regional gateway for doing-businesses and investing in the country (KRG 22 February 2006). It is widely acknowledged that the commercial ties between the Kurdistan region and Turkey have prevented Turkish aggression from attacking the Iraqi Kurds directly since the official establishment of Iraqi Kurdistan regional administration via new Iraqi constitution. The autonomous Kurdish Regional Government started selling crude-oil to the foreign markets for the first time after finalizing an agreement with the Maliki government in Baghdad in May of 2009. The agreement was reached on the condition that the revenue will be divided by the central Iraqi Oil Ministry amongst the country's provinces and regions, including Kurdish autonomous region (Williams 2009). Although Iraqi Oil Ministry has allowed the oil exports, Maliki government is still refusing to recognize the several oil contracts that have been previously signed between the Kurdish government and the foreign oil-corporations (ibid).

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[6] Source: The New York Times, '*U.S. Sharing Intelligence With Turkey*' (15 Nov 2007) http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/15/world/europe/15turkey.html
[7] 'U.S. Helps Turkey Hit Rebel Kurds In Iraq: Intelligence Role Could Complicate Diplomacy' (by Ann Scott Tyson and Robin Wright in 18 December 2007), The Washington Post http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/17/AR2007121702150.html

As one of Iraq's major domestic groups, the Kurdish community and its political leadership have successfully organized themselves in political and institutional ways both at local (Kurdistan) and national (Iraq) levels. Iraqi Kurds are basically tented to use Iraqi identity and their power position within Iraqi state as means to defend themselves from Iraq's Arab nationalists and Turkish and Iranian aggression. Since the fall of Saddam regime and establishment of Kurdistan autonomy, it is widely acknowledged that almost all hundred per cent of Kurdish society is supporting Kurdish independence from Iraq and ready to advocate such a declaration of independence by Kurdish regional government.[8] But international circumstances and regional forces will never tolerate such Kurdish demands at today's Middle East, apparently. The president of Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani, has several times said that 'as a nation, Kurds have the right to federalism, but also to independence. Because of current realities and conditions, independence has not been on the agenda yet.'[9]-[10] For all of these above-mentioned political and social reasons, it is in the Kurds' interests to be part of democratic federal but also a strong Iraq that can defend their borders and protect them from foreign Iranian and Turkish threats. Therefore the Kurdish foreign policy choices do not converge with Shia community and their Iran-backed political societal leaders and political parties.

The Iraqi Kurdish leadership has been trying to build strategic (independently of Iraqi Arabs) relations with the U.S. which is actually having strong military presence in Iraq. The Kurdish Government has asked the U.S. which has helped develop oil infrastructure, to retain up to fifty thousand American soldiers in the Kurdish region, including Kirkuk city.[11] In November of 2008, the president of Kurdish region said that the U.S. military can have bases in Kurdistan if American administration and Iraqi central government fail to sign a security agreement, and he said his administration would "welcome" such move.[12] The Kurdish leaders have been on several occasions declaring that they would welcome the U.S. army to set up military bases in Kurdistan region since the fall of former regime.[13] The Kurds try to guarantee their security questions basically by enhancing their own political, military and economic capabilities at local and national levels and by developing strong strategic and military relations with the U.S. at national and regional contexts. For the Kurds, the most critical external actor that can influence

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[8] See 'High Expectations of Independence: For Many Kurds in Iraqi North, Autonomy Is Just a Means to an End' in Washington Post, by *Ellen Knickmeyer*
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/31/AR2005073101055.html
[9] See, 'Kurdistan: Barzani claims independence for Kurdistan' in *The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization* (UNPO) http://www.unpo.org/content/view/465/236/
[10] See also, 'A Talk with Kurdish President, Massoud Barzani (Interview by Ma'ad Fayad in Arbil in 01/09/2008)' at Asharq Al-Awsat: The leading Arabic international paper
http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=13920
[11] Source: 'Kurds want U.S. forces to remain in northern Iraq' in *World Tribune* (29 April 2009)
http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2009/ss_iraq0341_04_29.asp
[12] 'Kurdish leader welcomes US bases in north Iraq' in *Al Arabiya News Channel* (02 November 2008)
http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/11/02/59358.html
[13] 'Barzani: Kurdistan will allow US bases' in *Press TV* in 02 November 2008
http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=74103&sectionid=351020201

them positively and/or negatively is the USA. American forces in Iraq are apparently the only potential friend that the Kurds can rely on for self-defense in the case of possible attacks from Iraqi Arabs, Iran or Turkey. Almost all of foreign relations of Kurds are strategically based on the preservation of the achievements they have already made in new Iraq.

4.3 The Sunni Arabs

With Saddam's fall in 2003, the Sunni Arabs' political domination has completely ended. The U.S.-led coalition administration's de-baathification program removed most of Sunnis from governmental and bureaucratic positions (Gritten 2006). The Sunni ruling elite have been replaced by the elected Shias who are actually representing the majority of Iraqi citizens (ibid). Consequently, Sunni Arabs' resentment toward the new appointments increased. Having felt increasingly marginalized, they began to boycott the elections and support insurgents fighting the coalition forces in Iraq (ibid). Most of secular and radical nationalist and Ba'athist Sunni Arabs have formed illegal armed groups to attack on the U.S.-led coalition forces but also fighting extremist Shia militias and Iraqi security forces. Radical Sunni Islamists, on the other hand, have allied with al-Qaeda networks against the U.S. and new Iraqi security forces and Shia militias. A survey that was carried out in February-March 2007 has found that over 50 percent of the Iraqis were approving of the attacks on the U.S. troops (MSNBC World News, 19 March 2007). The same poll was indicating that more than 90 percent of Sunni-Arabs were approving of the attacks on Americans (ibid).

By 2007, the drive toward consolidation of power and influence by predominant insurgent groups has brought about critical internal friction and has indicated that the Sunni insurgents fighting the American and Iraqi forces are no longer a massive and uniform threat (Kohlmann 2007:30). In reality, insurgent groups were often considerably different from each other in terms of their structures, ideologies and political aims. For instance, cooperation between al-Qaeda groups and other Sunni insurgents in Iraq have come to an end because of al-Qaeda's 'use of suicide bombings and foreign fighters' (ibid). Although main elements of al-Qaeda in Iraq have been attacking Shia political and religious targets, Islam al-Ansar (a radical Sunni group having strong ties to al-Qaeda) have been backed by Iran for their activities in Kurdistan region, the U.S. officials claimed (BBC News, 15 Aug 2006). Since 2003, 'Syrian intelligence was widely reckoned to have quietly aided the flow of foreign jihadists to Iraq [and] as many as 80% of the foreign fighters who entered Iraq's maelstrom passed through Syria' (The Economist, 04 Oct 2008). Thanks to unpopularity of radical Islamic groups amongst the majority of Iraqi Kurds, the Kurdish security forces have successfully defeated this group from the mountainous areas of Kurdistan-Iran border regions. Apart from Syria's logistical support to all sorts of Sunni insurgency and Iran's covert and strategic support to Islam al-Ansar, no neighboring state have aided al-Qaeda networks. Foreign Arab

fighters (among them many Palestinian refugees) have joined al-Qaeda groups from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Syria (Debat 2004). In 2007 American army officials in Iraq argued that 'about 45 percent of all foreign militants targeting U.S. forces and Shia civilians and Iraqi security forces are from Saudi Arabia; 15 percent are from Syria and Lebanon; and 10 percent are from North Africa' (Parker 2007). However, as of today, Al-Qaeda seems to be not welcomed but hated by most of Sunni Arab communities because of their role in sectarian killings and bombing of Shia civilian targets. Today Sunni tribal leaders and secular Sunni groups are leading their communities to join and participate in state's decision-making mechanisms and cooperate with the coalition forces to defeat foreign terrorist networks from predominantly Sunni Arab areas.

Unlike at previous electoral processes, Sunni Arabs have participated in provincial elections held by 31st January of 2009. Through provincial elections of 2009, Sunni Arabs took the local administrative control of Iraq's second biggest province, Nineveh (through nearly 50 percent of votes), and Salahaddin for the first time since the regime-change (Robertson 2009). 'Sunni [Arab] parties will control [city] councils in the central and western provinces of Diyala, Anbar, Salahaddin and Nineveh. They will also have a stronger presence in mixed majority-Shia governorates such as Baghdad' (Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 27 February 2009).The results of local elections indicate that Sunnis did regain political power in other corners of Iraq (BBC News, 06 Feb 2009). For example, in Anbar province, only 2 percent of voters had participated to national elections in 2005 due to Sunni-boycott, whereas 40 percent of voters cast ballots at provincial elections on 31st January of 2009.[14] 'Anbar province will be governed by a tribal coalition led by leaders of the Awakening Council, US-backed armed Sunni groups that have helped quell extremists' (ibid). The return of Sunni Arabs to Iraqi politics has not only weakened the Kurdish authorities at local levels but it also weakened their positioning vis-à-vis Iraqi central government at national, regional and international contexts.

In 2005 the U.S. forces started to help Sunni tribal leaders, particularly in Anbar province but also in other provinces, to build *'Awakening Councils'* which established legal armed militias for fighting against al-Qaeda and other radical Sunni groups (The Economist, 04 April 2009). In the past, most members of the Awakening Councils were fighting against the U.S.-led coalition forces but they joined the Iraqi forces fighting al-Qaeda groups in return for monthly salaries (BBC News 03 May 2009). As mentioned above, Iraqi Sunnis are deeply fragmented in radical conflicting political and ideological lines. Some Sunni sections' recent rapprochement to Shia-led government and the coalition forces may help them to join the country's political institutions gradually, but this will not contribute to their illegal external relations with countries like Syria. We should also keep in mind that

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[14] Source: The Wall Street Journal, '*Iraq's Election Results Bolster Maliki's Party*' by Gina Chon (06 Feb 2009) http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123384434642052339.html

Sunni groups' (including former Ba'athists and Al-Qaeda networks) relations with Sunni Arab World were built on international legal and legitimate channels. Those relations were underground and illegal in their nature. This implies that Sunni Arabs will remain the least influential societal group on the State's foreign policy making mechanisms in near future. However in foreign politics they are basically lobbying Sunni Arab countries to counterbalance the Shia domination and Iran's growing influence in Iraq. They have also supported Turkey and Syria's anti-Kurdish autonomy policies fiercely but they could not have translated their diplomatic efforts into concrete effective actions due to their weak power position in Iraqi state institutions until now.

4.4 Kirkuk issue and other territorial disputes

Kirkuk issue does lie at the core of territorial disputes between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government in Baghdad because 'Kirkuk is the center of the Iraqi petroleum industry and thus strategically and economically important to the Iraqi state' (Global Security 2009). For the Kurds of Kirkuk and the KRG, the inclusion of Kirkuk is about far more than just the city's very rich oil reserves. The Kurds argue that Kirkuk is symbolizing Kurdish struggle for autonomy, and it is Kurdish geographically, histororically and demographically. The Kurdish authorities say they can be reconciled with the Arab majority (both Sunni and Shia) only when Saddam regime's '*Arabization*' policy (the settlement of tens of thousands of Sunni Arabs in Kirkuk and displacement of thousands of Kurds during his thirty years dictatorial rule) is changed to the contrary. "Article 140 of Iraq's new constitution provides for several things: the return of Arab "settlers" and a redrawing of the boundaries of Kirkuk province, surrounding the city; a census; and … a referendum on whether Kirkuk should join the present Kurdistan federal region.… [However] the referendum's exact terms have yet to be drafted. Among other things, the Kurds want to adjust the borders of Kirkuk province to bring back four Kurdish-populated towns (Chamchamal, Kalar, Tuz Kermatu and Kifri) which Saddam had put into other provinces to shift Kirkuk's demographic balance against the Kurds" (The Economist, 07 Apr 2007). According to the Article 140, referendums shall also be held in some other Kurdish towns remain outside Kurdish region such as Shengal, Makhmur, and another oil-rich Kurdish city, Khanaqin. Today Federal borders of Kurdish region cover Iraq's three provinces in the north (Duhok, Arbil and Sulaymani) according to the Iraq's new constitution. Nevertheless in reality Iraqi Kurdistan region, which the Kurds assert and KRG's personnel control at local admisnisrative terms, is covering certain parts of following provinces: Nineveh, Saladin, Kirkuk and Diyala (The Economist, 19 Apr 2008). Turkey, Iran, Syria, and major Iraqi Arab groups (both Shia and Sunni) believe that inclusion of Kirkuk into Kurdistan will foster the economic base for a future declaration of an independent Kurdish state, which may attackt their persecuted Kurdish populations to break away (Mardini 2009).

Up to now, the Kurds' close collaboration and friendly relations with the U.S. has appeared one-sided. The KRG's Prime Minister says that "when we say something about protecting our people's rights, they [Americans] see it as a problem that disrupts their Iraq policy" (The Economist, 21 Feb 2009). The Kurdish-Arab tension may boil over again. While many diplomatic observers think that the U.S. should let the United Nations and the European Union involve in the issue and bring an agreement between parties, the Kurdish side wants Obama administration to nominate a special-envoy to handle this question, however the new U.S. adminisration have not showed any signal of doing so yet (The Economist, 21 Feb 2009). When, in 2008, Iraqi army units entered into Khanaqin city without asking for the consent of Kurdish authorities, the tension between the central government and the Kurds reached its highest level. As the soldiers of Federal Kurdistan have remained deployed around Khanaqin, Mulla Bakhtiyar (Kurdistan President Barzani's Khanaqin representative and a leading figure of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) told the media in Kifri that "the position of the Kurdish political leadership is very clear; we defend our land, never attack, and always prefer peace" (The Kurdish Globe 2008:3). Bakhtiyar did also add that "Kurdish negotiators in Baghdad have opened 99 gates for dialogue and one gate for war. If they [the Iraqi government] choose the gate to war, they have been told that if war happens in Khanaqin it will happen in Kirkuk, Mosul, and the other disputed areas" (ibid).

Kurdish leadership recently declared that they will fully respect the constitutional acts and articles referring to distribution of the oil reserves among all Iraqis equally, however they also add that "Kirkuk together with its oil reserves, is part of Kurdistan" in terms of historical, geographical and historical facts (PNA, 30 May 2009). As mentioned above, the article 140 of Iraq's new constitution requires a referendum on the status of Kirkuk, but referendum has been held yet because pre-referendum requirements (security, census and return of exiled Kurds) have not been fulfilled up to now. The U.S. shows careful forethought about Kurdish demands over Kirkuk because it fears that any strong confrontation between the groups can cause inter-group conflicts which can damage the Iraq's integrality. It should be noted that 'control of Kirkuk and the distribution of oil revenues' in the Kurdish region are still the most quarreled issues between the Kurdish regional government and the central Iraqi government (ibid). Any unilateral move aiming to control those controversial territories is likely to end with an internal war between the Kurds and Arabs. On 28th of June of 2009, the Kurdish security forces loyal to Kurdistan regional administration saw an Arab-led Iraqi army unit approaching Makhmur, a predominantly Kurdish city in Kurdistan but remains outside official borders of Federal Kurdish region. According to *Washington Post* news report, 'Kurds believed the unit was trying to enter the town, and for 24 hours, Kurdish leaders, Iraqi officials in Baghdad and the U.S. military negotiated until the Arab-led Iraqi unit was diverted.'[15] The U.S. military is actually trying to by-pass such potentially quite dangerous moves by bolstering its presence in Kirkuk after the confrontation in Khanaqin.

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[15] Kurdish Leaders Warn Of Strains With Maliki, in *The Washington Post* (July 17, 2009) http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/16/AR2009071604369.html

5. Constraints on the Groups' foreign policy choices and behaviors

5.1 Limits of the Groups' behaviors: Common interests at national context

We may not be able to explain in the right manner why the leaders of Iraq's major societal groups needed to act according to Iraq's national interests, if we do not take carefully into account the internal circumstances forcing them to do so. For instance, the Kurds' external relations are based on a defensive strategy. The new status-quo balancing Iraq's political system has provided great benefits to them. They have their self-ruled autonomous region, the power of which is clearly defined in the Iraq's new democratic constitution. The Kurdish political leaders gained critical positions in the government and the state's crucially important bureaucratic bodies. The Kurdish elites' strong presence in Baghdad makes it harder for their external enemies (Syria, Turkey and Iran) to go openly/directly into cooperation with the Shia-dominated government against the Kurdish interests. It is likely to say that defending current status-quo and preserving the political achievements made against any external threat is in the interests of Iraqi Kurds. Put differently, defending Iraq's new constitution, its federal political system and the security of its borders from foreign aggressors are in the interests of KRG and Kurdish leaders serving as Iraq's FPE. It is because without the current balance of power and new status-quo, the Kurds could not defend themselves from their internal rivals (Shia majority and Sunni Arabs insurgents) and external Turkish and Iranian threats. For the Kurds, it is vital for them to preserve their regional autonomy within Iraqi state, backed by the coalition forces. If the Kurdish region would not be a part of federal Iraq, the Kurdistan administration could have been attacked by Turkey, Iran and Syria. The shelling and air-strikes by Turkish and Iranian armies on the Kurdish border regions inside Iraq since 2006 does vindicate such kind of assertions.

Defending the Iraq's borders and struggling for the country's national economic and political interests have been in the interests of other Iraq's two major communities too. For instance, the Shia alliance needed to keep the country's integrity and preventing it from dissolving into three parts because their overwhelming demographic majority assured their political domination at Iraqi parliament and other state institutions. A legitimate Shia-led political rule in Baghdad could not have only deterred Sunni Arabs'

claims for more political power at state's structures but it have also balanced or blocked increasing Kurdish demands for more autonomy in the North.

Sunni Arab communities and their organized political parties, from the beginning, were against the creation of a loose federal system because all important rich oil-reserves lie at the North and South of the country whose inhabitants are predominantly Kurdish in the north and Shia in the South. Sunni Arabs' illegal sections have finally realized that fighting against the Shia-dominated government will only marginalize/weaken themselves vis-à-vis Shia and Kurdish at all governmental levels. Their current participation into electoral processes gave them certain political power at local levels (provincial councils). Cooperation with secular Shia Maliki government against al-Qaeda networks has strengthened their position in military affairs as well. They realized that they can protect themselves via legitimate military mechanisms much better against extremist Shia militias and al-Qaeda's foreign fighters. All these recent developments encouraged them to not ally with external threats to Iraq such as global Al-Qaeda networks and Syria's destabilizing efforts and radical pan-Arabic and Islamic (anti-American) nationalists. Their current inclusion into Iraqi political and military establishments indicate that they have fired the some ideological bridges connecting them to the enemies of Iraqi State abroad, namely radical international fundamentalist groups and the remains of Saddam's Ba'ath party. The Sunni communities' integration to national political mechanisms will help them to resist more efficiently the Kurds' territorial claims in Mosul and Kirkuk provinces as well.

One may not need repeatedly to point to Shias' interest in the preservation of current political status-quo in Iraq, because they have been the biggest beneficiaries of the Iraq's new democratic political system. Some may doubt about their relations with Iran. Shias' relations with Iran have been selective and limited in many ways because of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. The growth of secular wing in Shia politics under the leadership of Maliki shows that strong political connections are weakening with Iran in general at Shia front. The Shia militias' reliance on Iran was basically due to military and technological assistance provided by Iranian army for encountering the U.S. and Iraqi forces[16]. By today almost all Shia parties, except some sections of Sadr's radical movement, have normalized their relations with Maliki government, and consequently with the U.S. forces in Iraq.

Attempts to secure national borders and opposing to foreign aggressors (foreign terrorist networks or bombings of neighboring states like of Iran and Turkey) have become a common characteristics of Iraqi parties. This is why not only the U.S. forces but also dominant Iraqi political parties (Shia, Sunni and Kurdish) have never approved Turkey's efforts to carry out massive cross-border military operations inside Iraq's territory against

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[16] For more information about Iran's military technological support to Shia militias, see: The Economist, '*International: Who makes the bombs?; Iraq*', London: Feb 17, 2007. Vol. 382, Iss. 8516; pg. 58

Kurdish guerrillas and Turks' attempts to involve in Kirkuk issue since 2006, despite a lack of agreement among them over these controversial territorial issues.[17] [18]

5.2 Regional and International constraints on the Groups' actions and objectives

Syria
With the approval of President al-Assad, Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups (mostly former Ba'athists and including the Revolution Brigades and Ansar al-Sunna) met Syrian capital city to establish an opposition alliance to Iraqi government. They announced in Damascus in July to form 'a coalition of seven Sunni Arab insurgent groups with the goal of coordinating and intensifying attacks in Iraq to force an American withdrawal' (Naylor 2007). Through establishing strong relations with these groups, Syria has been aiming to obtain influence in Iraqi politics before the withdrawal of the coalition forces. Iranian regime is Syria's primary friend and a critical supporter of the Shia-led government in Iraq, therefore The Iranian pressure makes difficult for Syria support all Sunni groups, especially former Iraqi Ba'athists (Naylor 2007). Assad's Ba'athist regime has apparently been supporting former Iraqi Ba'athists (Gerson 2007; Naylor 2007).

On 16th may of 2009 in Damascus, The President of Turkey and The Syrian President al-Assad re-expressed together their common concern over the criticality of Iraq's territorial integrity for Iraq's two neighboring countries. Turkey's President Gul said, "We agree with Syria on the necessity of protecting Iraq territorial integrity" (Syria Online, May 2009). Al-Assad also said that two countries advocate the Iraqi government's efforts to accomplish national reconciliation and keep Iraq' territorial unity until the withdrawal of the U.S.-led coalition forces from the country (ibid). Since the invasion of Iraq, Syrian leadership has strongly been underlining the cruciality of Iraq's territorial integrity and its Arab identity for their national and regional security. [19]

Turkey
Turkey's foreign-policy toward Iraq is built on two essential national interests: maintaining that Iraq's territorial integrity and fighting the Kurdish guerrillas, who have military settlements on the mountainous Iraqi-Turkish border region. In Turkey's view, a politically de-centralized Iraq can increase Iranian power in the region and, more threateningly, strengthen the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, thus threatening to encourage *the Kurds in Turkey* (around over 10 millions) for claiming Kurdish cultural and political

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[17] BBC News, 'Turkish planes bomb northern Iraq' (16 December 2007) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7146567.stm
[18] BBC News, 'Turkish troops pull out of Iraq' (29 February 2008) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7270566.stm
[19] See also, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's speech at Damascus University, November 10, 2005 http://www.presidentassad.net/SPEECHES/ASSAD%20DAMASCUS%20UNIVERSITY%20SPEECH.htm

rights. Because of this, Turkish state is supportive of a stronger Iraqi central government vis-à-vis the Kurdish regional government in north of Iraq (ICG-Middle East Report No.81, 13 Nov 2008). Turkey has openly been expressing concern over the autonomous status of Iraqi Kurds.[20] Not only in the case of joint-military operations against Kurdish guerrillas, Turkey has also been cooperating with Syria and Iran over the Kurdish issue at regional level seriously because Syria and Iran hold similar views and interests with Turkey when comes to the political and economic progresses the Kurds have achieved in Iraq. As of today, Turkey's relations with Shia and Sunni parties are based on its anti-Kurdish strategy. Turkey has been lobbying among the main Shia groups, especially Maliki government, to persuade them taking action against Kurdish guerrillas living in mountainous regions on Turkish-Iraqi borders. However the critical role of Iraqi Kurds in Iraqi politics makes almost impossible for both the U.S. and Maliki government to back possible Turkish incursions into northern Iraq.

Sunni Arab countries in the Gulf
Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Sunni Arab states fear that an unplanned quick withdrawal of the U.S.-led coalition forces can trigger Iranian-backed Shiite militias to dominate Iraq, fostering the growth of an Iran-led Middle Eastern alliance which is already including radical armed organizations like Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah.[21] [22] Saudi Arabia considers itself as the leader of Sunni Islam and is profoundly mistrustful of Iraq's Shia-dominated Maliki government, which has strong Iranian connections. Neither Iraqi Kurds and Sunni Arabs, nor wealthy Sunni Arab countries in the Gulf want to see a strong central government in Baghdad. The Kurds and Kuwaitis have still fresh memories of sufferings from the hands of Saddam regime and the Iran-led Shia nationalism. The Kurdish regional government and Kuwaiti officials recently have raised concerns over possible USA sale of thirty six advanced F-16 fighters to the central government in Baghdad (The Kurdish Globe, 11 Sep 2008). The role of USA here is crucial, as the closest ally of rich Sunni Arab Gulf countries, to understand the dynamics of Shia-Sunni competetion over Iraq at regional level. In April of 2008, Nuri al-Maliki participated two critical international conferences, one in Bahrain hosted the U.S.'s best Arab allies, the other in Kuwait that conveyed all of Iraq's neighbours and also G-8 countries (The Economist, 26 April 2008). Maliki did lobby not only for more support from the rich western countries but he also tried to persuade those regional and international powers that his government is not with Iranians (ibid). Such kind of formal meetings and tenative steps indicate that Maliki government's main purpose is not to broaden Iran's influnce but assure their rule in Iraqi politics by developing a secular political line which is more likely to converge with American interests. Yet, Sunni Arab countries are still far away from developing normal friendly relations with Maliki

[20] Source: CIA World Fact Book, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html
[21] Source: Robert H. Reid (08 Aug 2007) *'Arab nations are reluctant to back Iraqi government despite their fears of U.S. withdrawal'* in Tucson Citizen. Note: He is correspondent-at-large for The Associated Press on Middle East since *1980s.* http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/altss/printstory/opinion/59492
[22] Taipei Times, *'Arab allies reluctant to support Iraq'* (04 Aug 2007)
http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2007/08/04/2003372684

government because of the ongoing competition between Iran-led Shia alliance and Sunni Arab world at regional level.

The USA

Tamara Cofman Wittes of the Brookings Institution rightly argues that there are many active parties in Iraq's political reality, and this means that the Americans have a restricted power to force them (Associated Press, August 03, 2007). Therefore, she argues, what the USA can do is just to establish a domain in which all actors can accommodate their demands and reach a nation-wide compromise before its eventual withdrawal from the country.[23] Especially when comes to the issue of territorial disputes between the Kurds and Arabs (both Shia and Sunni), the role displayed by the U.S. is highly important. It was basically substantial American military presence that discouraged the Turks from invading the northern Iraq. The U.S. presence in Iraq deters and frightens the individual communities to pursue maximalist strategies and aims at Iraq's national context and at regional levels. This suffices the neoclassical realist argument that international threats to regional powers do emerge from the great powers and their influence on regional dynamics (Lobell 2009:48).

Ramzy Mardini[24] (2009) of the Jamestown Foundation rightly argues that the threats posed to 'Iraq's security environment since 2003' has been very impressively eased in 2009 because of three developments in Iraq's domestic politics: (1) establishment of the formal Sunni militias by the government to maintain security, (2) ceasefire by Sadr's Mahdi Army, and (3) the U.S.'s new strategy of authorizing and keeping territory against insurgencies (ibid). Iraqi government owns those three abomentioned developments to the U.S. military operations and their peapproachment to Sunni tribal leaders. As mentioned above, mobilization of formal Sunni Baathists and Sunni militias have been organized by the U.S. officials, not by Shia government. Maliki has of course drawn advantages from the ameliorated situation to strengthen his authority. But, Maliki's efforts have also triggered a new sort of instability, which came out of the overlapping of contradicting interests maintained by the country's two governments: the Kurdish regional government and the central Iraqi government (ibid). The U.S. stance is likely to be a critical factor determining the fate of Kirkuk issue. It was again the U.S. officials who have pursuaded and/or forced the concerned Iraqi groups to let the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) work on a plan to develop a peaceful solution for the Kirkuk question and 14 other territorial disputed areas in northen Iraq.[25]

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[23] '*Arab Opinion Split on Iraq Pullout*' from *Associated Press*, Amman-Jordan (August 03, 2007) http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,144757,00.html

[24] "Ramzy Mardini is a terrorism analyst writing on security and Middle Eastern affairs for The Jamestown Foundation. He was previously Special Assistant on Iranian Studies at the Center for Strategic Studies in Amman and a former Iraq Desk Officer for Political Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. He has also served within the Executive Office of the President in Washington, D.C." http://www.metimes.com/Opinion/2008/04/24/ramzy_mardiniiraq_strategy_misperceptions/4206/

[25] Sam Dagher, 'Can the U.N. avert a Kirkuk border war?' in *The Christian Science: Monitor*, (25 April 2008) available at: http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0425/p06s02-wome.html

6. Why could not Iraq's major groups' infringing foreign policy choices prevent the FPE from taking decisions pursuing the national interests?

Struggle for political domination in Middle East between Shia (Persian and Arab) and Sunni Arab powers have been substantially influencing the shape and characteristics of external and inter-group relations of Iraqi Shia and Sunni Arab groups. It is basically because Iran but also Sunni Arab countries have been supporting their kin groups in Iraq to dominate the country's political institutions, thus so restricting their regional rivals within Iraq for regional dominance. This is exactly what the Shia groups have been doing for a long time, though secular Maliki government is partly shifting this conventional Shia position in Iraq because of U.S. pressure and Maliki's pragmatic calculations. Essentially two distinct sorts of external constraints, namely from Iran and USA, have been imposed on the Iraqi Shias. Iranian ideological impact on Iraqi Shias can be explained through Huntington's (1996) concept of kin-country-rallying, Iran's leading role within Shia Islam and its struggle with Sunni countries over regional domination. However, ruling Shia alliance under the leadership of Maliki have recently developed a *national* alliance by cooperating with secular Sunni and Shia groups, in addition to the Kurds. This kind of strategy converges with the U.S.'s and UN's efforts to bring about a true reconciliation between Iraqi groups and its anti-terrorism strategy aiming to destroy al-Qaeda networks in Iraq. But it could be mistaken to argue that the U.S. is solely determining Maliki government's threat assessment. The U.S. stance regarding Kirkuk and other fourteen disputed areas issue in Kurdish region will demonstrate the degree of U.S. influence and leverage on the Iraq's major societal groups.

Security problem occupies considerably a substantial dimension of Iraq's foreign politics within the context of the groups' political relations with outside world. Syria's support to former Iraqi Ba'athists and other Sunni radical groups could not have sustained their struggle against Shia government alone. Sunni Arabs' return to legal spheres and their cooperation with the U.S. and Shia-led Iraqi security forces have substantially weakened the Sunni Arabs' ties with al-Qaeda terrorist networks abroad. In near future Sunni Arab countries may begin supporting their kin groups in Iraq. It is likely that disagreements over Kirkuk issue may trigger such a rapprochement between Arab countries' and their Iraqi fellows. Recent developments in Iraq show that the Sunnis will remain searching for external support.

The Kurdish leaders who are serving as Iraq's FPE at the State's critical institutions have begun to join American-Turkish intelligence sharing cooperation against PKK fighters due to increasing pressure from the U.S. administration in Washington. Despite its decreasing geo-strategic importance for U.S. military presence in Middle East and Europe, Turkey as a regional actor still can draw support from the U.S. government against its own Kurdish minority's cultural and political demands. In late January of 2009 Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zabari said that they have agreed with Turkey and the U.S. to set up a joint command-center in Iraqi Kurdistan for gathering intelligence to fight Kurdish PKK guerillas in the border-regions.[26] However as we mentioned above, Barzani have rejected Turkish government's pressure demanding joint-military attacks on PKK bases in mountainous Turkey-Iraq border regions. And despite substantial diplomatic pressure from the U.S. and Turkey, Kurdish President Barzani has several times been refusing to define PKK as a terrorist group since 2007 (Romano 2008).

The President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani who is also a Kurdish leader, has dismissed the Kurdistan President's invitation to the U.S. administration for setting up military bases in the Iraqi Kurdistan. President Talabani, in an interview made in November 2008, said that it is impossible for the American forces to stay in Kurdish region without consent of Iraqi central government.[27] The impact of objections from Shia and Sunni Arab groups needs to be taken into account. For instance, Muqtada al-Sadr's movement has severely criticized Barzani's offer to the U.S. military and rejected his invitation.[28] It is important to see the fact that both Talabani and Zabari as Iraq's FPE members, had to challenge the radical choices of Kurdish community's practical leadership such as Barzani's offer to the U.S. for establishing military bases and his stance towards Turkey regarding PKK issue. FPE's objection to Barzani administration may bear some tactical strategies too, but this can not deny the practical changes that have been appearing in Kurdish leadership's position regarding those controversial issues. For example, in late June of 2009, Kurdish regional parliament has approved a new constitution which defines Kirkuk and other predominantly Kurdish areas within Nineveh and Diyala provinces as part of Kurdistan region.[29] The Kurdish authorities at first said that the constitution will be put before Kurdish voters for ratification on the same day that the region holds parliamentary and presidential elections but the U.S. Vice President Biden has strongly criticized the Kurdish move as "not helpful" to the administration's goal of reconciling Iraqi major societal groups.[30] Not only the U.S. administration and Turkey but also Shia's United

[26] Source: Reuters 23 Jauary 2009, Turkey, Iraq, U.S. step up efforts to fight PKK, (Reporting by Zerin Elci, writing by Paul de Bendern) http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE50M4DQ20090123
[27] Source: Al Jazeera News: Middle East, Talabani dismisses US base offer (04 November 2008) http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/11/200811404636600934.html
[28] ibid.
[29] 'Iraq Kurds pass new constitution to include Kirkuk' (AFP 25 June 2009), in *The Times of India* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Middle-East/Iraq-Kurds-pass-new-constitution-to-include-Kirkuk/articleshow/4699161.cms
[30] 'Kurds Defy Baghdad, Laying Claim to Land and Oil' by Sam Dagher in *The New York Times* http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/10/world/middleeast/10kurds.html

Iraqi Alliance and Sunni Accordance Front bloc stressed that they will not recognize the constitution drafted and passed by Kurdish parliament.[31] Just a few weeks later, on 13th of July 2009, Kurdistan Parliament Speaker Adnan al-Mufti told the media that 'parliament has decided to put back the referendum on the regional constitution until a date yet to be fixed'.[32] Even though the Kurds are well-united in political and organizational terms and not divided in their strategic objectives at political party-levels, the above-mentioned pressure from international (the U.S.) and regional (Turkey, Syria and Iran) levels have apparently constrained the KRG leadership and Kurdish political community's ability to influence Iraq's FPE (especially the Kurdish societal elites within FPE) according to their specific interests in the country's foreign affairs.

Shia societal elites have, on the other hand, faced a sort of intra-group obstacles (domestic constraints). In fact, Shia community in general and Shia societal elites have showed their interests in foreign policy behaviors favoring their close ideological and sectarian relations with Iran. However the internal disagreements and severe military conflicts between centralists (Dawa party and Sadr's movement) and federalists (ISCI and some small local Shia parties) have prevent the Shias from being more persistent in their pro-Iran choices in Iraq's foreign politics. Maliki's Dawa party had to develop a broader Shia alliance (embracing secular Shia and other Arab groups) to keep the government on their hands. Washington also pressured Maliki and his Shia-dominated cabinet to not allow Iran's growing influence on Baghdad, and thus the U.S. officials obstructed the growing Tahran's influence on Shia elites serving as Iraq's FPE and Iraq's national and foreign affairs. By today, while U.S. is backing Maliki's FPE, Iranians pursue a very different strategy advocating as many Shia factions as possible in order to constrain the U.S. and Iraq's FPE in developing anti-Iranian policies (Visser 2008). In the case of Shia society, it is the internal divisions (intra-group level constraints) and international (the U.S. basically) constraints the Shia political community and their societal elites to force the Shia-dominated FPE for a more pro-Shiaism and Iran in Iraq's foreign policy behaviors.

Sunni Arabs, the situation has always been tougher because they are still facing constraints from all levels. Especially the Sunnis' weak political and social position within Iraqi national politics makes it harder for them to influence the Shia and Kurdish dominated-FPE. They still can not draw strategic political support from their regional kin-countries in governmental terms at regional levels due to their Ba'athist past and ties to radical Islamic networks. In sum, the FPE's foreign threat assessment do differ from those of the domestic groups due to multiple internal and external circumstances and factors favorable to their autonomous positioning in Iraq's foreign and security policy making independently of the major domestic societal groups' demands and choices.

[31] Source: 'Iraqi Politicians Concerned By New Kurdish Constitution', *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty* http://www.rferl.org/content/Iraqi_Politicians_Concerned_By_New_Kurdish_Constitution/1767702.html
[32] Iraqi Kurds delay vote on expansionist constitution (13 Jul 2009, AFP), in Yahoo News http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20090713/wl_mideast_afp/iraqkurdistanpoliticsconstitution_20090713093745

7. Conclusion

Iraq's FPE are composed of the leaders of major societal groups but they have essentially acted according to the country's national interests and for regime's survival as do neoclassical realists expect. However because the state leaders are also influential leading figures of their respective societal groups and political communities, they may not be willing to act independently of their societal groups, if domestic, regional and international constraints do allow them to do so.

Iraq's domestic societal groups are the major ethic religious groups, therefore they differ in terms of their organizational and political characteristics from the domestic societal groups exist in western democratic countries such as interests groups, ideological political parties or small minority-rights parties. This case shows that the state institutions and FPE can enjoy a sort of great political and ideological autonomy from their respective societal groups even in socially divided countries with very young political democratic institutions such as Iraq. However this does not imply that the domestic societal groups' external relations and their connections with their kin-countries are not important or insignificant for other national, regional and international political actors.

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