Iraqi Diplomacy in a Turbulent Regional Environment: A Study in Determinants and Constraints

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This study aims to analyse Iraqi diplomacy in general, and to diagnose its weaknesses in recent times, as well as the determinants, which impede their performance with regard to a specific role in a troubled regional environment. There are many reasons which still affect the return of Iraq diplomacy to its optimal activity levels, although more than a decade and a half has passed since the changes in the political system, including   internal disagreements, as well as many external determinants. Countries that have a great influence on Iraq, have been affected by the general performance of Iraqi diplomacy regarding neighbouring countries. The problem of the study are based on: What are the internal, external determinants and factors facing the work of Iraqi diplomacy in general, and towards the neighbouring countries in particular, and is there a possibility to develop a role in the path of regional balance in light of the available data.

Key words: *Diplomacy, Determinants, Factors, Iraq, Regional environment.*

Introduction

After the American occupation in April 2003, Iraq lacked a strong and stable foreign policy, backed by effective and influential diplomacy, that would promote its national interests at first, then provide the appropriate ground for balanced relations with the various countries of the world in general and the neighbouring countries in particular. This can provide Iraq with some strategic advantages, such as being as an acceptable mediator, or by bringing the views closer among different countries, as well as achieving some economic, military and security benefits through this form of balanced relations.

There are many reasons, which still affect the return of Iraq diplomacy to its optimal activity levels, although more than a decade and a half have passed since the changes in the political system, including   internal disagreements, as well as many external determinants. This is especially the case for countries that have a great influence on Iraq, affecting the general performance of Iraqi diplomacy regarding neighbouring countries.

In this study, we will analyse Iraqi diplomacy in general, and attempt to diagnose its weaknesses in recent times, as well as the determinants which impede the its diplomatic performance concerning a specific role in a troubled regional environment.

The Problem of the Study: What are the internal, external determinants and factors facing the work of Iraqi diplomacy in general, and towards the neighbouring countries in particular, and is there a possibility to develop a role in the path of regional balance in light of the available data.

The Study Hypothesis: To deal with the question of the study, we must formulate a hypothesis, which will be 'there are many internal, external determinants and constraints that have affected and still affect in one way or another the performance of Iraqi diplomacy in general and its role in the path of regional balance in particular'.

Study Methodology: To complete the study, we chose to use various methodologies: the historical approach to track the historical impact of Iraqi diplomacy, and then we used the descriptive and analytical approach to find out the weaknesses and strengths of Iraqi diplomacy.

An Introductory Entry

Historically, Iraq has emerged as one of the political, religious and cultural centres in the Middle East, which has long exercised an effective influence in relation to the regional system, due to its multiple natural resources, and its geographical location adjacent to six different countries, thus reflecting on its domestic situation, foreign policy and influential position in the dynamics of regional politics (Maggiolini, 2013).

Iraq has witnessed multiple changes in the wake of the many wars and international sanctions, including the entry of American forces and the change of political system, the effects of the problems of disputes related to building the structure of the new political system and local conflicts, which could lead to civil war, all of which affected its political and diplomatic performance towards its regional neighbours.

The collapse of the structured political system in Iraq and the change that took place in the form of the state and decision-making centres in the aftermath of the American occupation in April 2003, was followed by the related measures taken by the Coalition Provisional Authority CPA, which was formed after this date by the United States with regard to the transfer of powers to the Iraqis. All of this caused difficulties in the process of building a balanced and strong political performance among the various political parties that controlled the political decisions, which had negative effects on balanced and effective foreign policy and diplomacy (Dobbins & others, 2009).

In addition, due to these and other changes, Iraqi diplomacy has suffered in many aspects, which affected its external relations with many countries, especially the neighbouring countries, for several reasons. One issue was not resolving, through diplomatic effort with these countries, some of the pending files since the previous political periods. This factor, combined with the lack of serious communication with neighbouring countries,, in order to persuade them that the new Iraqi political system will not be against anyone, affected Iraqi relations with these countries in general (Majeed & Ali , Iraqi diplomacy towards the Arab world before 2018: an analytical study, 2018).

On the other hand, the neighbouring countries of Iraq have also suffered, in relative terms, from some problems and obstacles which have reduced their presence and influence in Iraq, and have consequently affected relations with it; some of which are related to political systems, their external orientations, or the way they deal with some common issues, which has increased mistrust and tension between them.

It is noted that there are many principles which were established by the Iraqi state after 2003, within the parameters of foreign policy, and at the same time formed the general framework driving diplomacy towards foreign countries. Among these principles are adherence to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and international law, resorting to peace, dialogue and negotiation, as the only way to resolve differences, and to enhance Iraq's external relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect and non-interference in others'affairs.

Finally, the active participation in efforts to serve regional and international stability and security, and these principles in their entirety formed the framework through which national diplomacy moves, which embodies the foreign political orientations of Iraq, and which is responsible for formulating and defining its goals, according to the permanent constitution of 2005, the Prime Minister, as the direct official for the general policy of the Iraqi state (Al-Faisal, 2017).

The constitution also clarified the legal basis for creating foreign policy, through several articles, among them Article Three, which defines the general orientations of foreign policy, and Article Eight, which details the principles of application of foreign policy and ethics, 'its commitment not to interfere in the internal affairs of countries, and build constructive relationships on mutual respect with all parties, not to interfere in the internal affairs of states, and seeking to resolve the conflicts peacefully, and to establish relations on common interests'. Paragraph (e) of ArticleNine emphasised the peacefulness of foreign policy directions, by respecting its primary obligations mechanism in this regard (The Iraqi Constitution of 2005, 2005).

Article 110 also specifies, 'The drawing of foreign policy and diplomatic representation is among the authorities of the federal government, and of the exclusive powers related to drawing foreign policy and diplomatic representation, negotiating international treaties and agreements, borrowing policies, signing and concluding them, as well as design of sovereign foreign economic and trade policy' (The Iraqi Constitution of 2005, 2005).

Thus, Iraq, despite its real need to use new diplomatic means, possesses capabilities that clearly express the goals of the new political system, new external directions for it, and building a positive image in various countries, based on preserving national interests, and based on several foundations. Among these is persuading various countries in general and neighbouring countries in particular, of the importance and feasibility of establishing a stable and democratic political system in Iraq, and the importance of obtaining their assistance in facing various challenges, including terrorism, corruption, reconstruction, and the weakness of state institutions and others, but Iraqi diplomacy has not been able to achieve the goals that it should have accomplished, or the tasks assigned to it, due to some problems, limitations and obstacles that affected the Iraqi diplomatic performance (Majeed, Iraqi diplomacy towards the Arab world after 2009, 2015).

The Determinants and Obstacles of Iraqi Diplomacy

Based on the total economic, demographic, resources, and various miscellaneous riches that Iraq possesses in comparison to the rest of its neighbours, as well as to a lesser religious and cultural influence, it is qualified for an impressive external performance, especially in the Middle East and its regional neighbourhood. However, it is noticeable that there are many factors and determinants that influenced this performance and prompted it to retreat, some of which are internal, and some that are external, relating to the regional and international environment.

Internal Factors

The entry of the American forces to Baghdad and the security incidents that followed this date, as well as the various administrative measures taken by the Coalition Provisional Authority and formed by the United States, or those approved by international organisations concerned with Iraqi affairs such as the Security Council, are a pressing factor on the internal political environment.

The radical change that the political system became after 2003, which was characterised earlier by totalitarianism and the one-party rule, transformed quickly into a system based on multi-partisanship and adopted democratic mechanisms. This had negative repercussions on consolidating the foundations of internal political and security stability, and the manifestations that led to the weakness of the state in dealing with some important issues, especially with the emergence of some principles as consensual democracy and political quotas (Ali, 2019).

 The central government's was unable to enforce the law and protect the peaceful, gradual transition to a democratic system, and the establishment of something similar to the effective and influential subsidiary powers alongside the federal state's authority, such as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's authority, which was often not pursuing the same central government policy in some external or internal files, and adopted its own method for dealing with some files. Based on Taama's (2019) own interpretation of some of the articles of the Iraqi constitution of 2005, as well as her desire to take advantage of the power she acquired after 2003, which allowed her freedom of movement in the internal and external tracks, and the significant impact on the internal political construction, which leads to the creation of alternative power centres, has its own political priorities (Salem, 2013).

In addition to its apparent influence in making Iraqi foreign policy and setting its priorities, through the senior positions held by the region in the central government, starting with the President of the Republic, a large role was played by Kurdish politicians of departments of foreign policies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Foreign Affairs Committee in Parliament, which was often influential, for example former Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari 2006-2014.

As for the other part of this factor, it is represented by the clear divisions of political parties, some of which are accused of relations with various external parties, according to some self-interests that drive them, or to return favours. Many of these parties received a lot of support from many countries during the opposition period, especially those that became in the government after the first elections in 2005.

In addition to the weak performance or failure of the occupying authority, the Iraqi governments used the power and influence of these political parties, in the political, military and social aspects, and used them to strengthen the performance of the central government, with regard to dealing with neighbouring countries. There was also the lack of a clear and specific program for rebuilding civil and military capabilities and employing them in this aspect, in addition to not being able to strengthen the state, by disarmament and agreeing on work mechanisms to strengthen its institutions and imposing its will on some parties opposing it, which does not include the parties of the political opposition.

Some policies have led, especially those related to focusing on the security and military aspect, to trying to confront the terrorist challenges faced by the state, and neglecting some other aspects related to the development of other state institutions also to working to support the building of the state and the foundations of democracy, and reducing the concentration of power in the hands of one group or party, and overcoming the effects of sectarian and national differences, which are among the most important obstacles to forming an authority capable of facing crises (Maggiolini, 2013, p. 3)

The withdrawal of the American forces and the signing of the Strategic Framework Agreement between the Iraqi and American governments took place in 2011 (office, 2008). The relative stability in the political, security and economic aspects during that period and lifting Iraq from Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter and international obligations relating to it, and the attempt to open diplomatic at the international level was not enough to start a new phase of effective and influential foreign policy.

In this context, other reasons related to this factor have emerged, which led to poor diplomatic performance, including those related to the interference of political parties active in appointing ambassadors, while not taking into account the professional, academic and technical conditions that must be met in the ambassador's job, to perform his work well (Khoshnaw, 2017). In addition to some tense media statements from some political, religious or clan leaders, which negatively affected government diplomatic efforts to improve relations with neighbouring countries (Al-Ubaidi, 2019).

It is also clear that the weakness of the Iraqi government structure, since the first government that was formed after the 2005 elections, has increased, as have the growing conflicts between the various political parties, on the strength of the government and its ability to face external interference in its various forms.

Diplomacy has also increased from the problems of expelling competencies and lack of agreement between the parties concerned with foreign policy on setting priorities, for reasons related to the mechanism of forming the government and choosing senior officials therein, so

there is a clear imbalance in political performance, conflict of interests and multiple sources of decisions, which was a real reason for weak Iraqi foreign political and diplomatic performance (Saeed, 2015).

External Factors

The world's active states in general and regional states in particular have attempted to interfere in Iraqi internal affairs, and impose agendas that serve their own interests and consolidate their influence, taking advantage of the unstable conditions that Iraq has suffered in various aspects; political, economic, security, and others.

Apart from the United States, which was present through its military forces or its various institutions in Iraq, as the country that occupied it in 2003, a long list of countries tried, in one way or another, to have influence that serves their national interests, either through the existing political parties, or through other agents from the parties and informal actors such as the media, some tribal leaders, commercial companies, etc., which clearly affected the principle of neutrality that Iraqi foreign policy and diplomacy tried to pursue.

While the role of some other countries has emerged to a lesser degree, both those neighbouring Iraq, particularly Turkey, have sought to further their own interests in the region. Turkey has tried through many means to preserve its national interests and enhance its influence in the region, as well as to secure its southern regions by fighting some organisations opposing them, such as the Kurdistan Work Party PKK, which is active in the border triangle, Syrian-Turkish Iraq, or some other country, such as Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, etc., to intervene and impose some of its agendas related to enhancing its interests, influence and imposing its agenda, related to regional balance.

The intersections and differences between countries also led to the escalation of internal disputes, which affected the making of foreign policy on various issues. This is the case especially between Iran and the United States on the one hand, or between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the other hand, or other differences related to the crisis between Saudi Arabia and the Emirates on the one hand and Qatar and Turkey on the other hand, causing disputions in more than one place, including Iraq, by supporting political or clan parties at the expense of other parties.

The troubled regional environment, already suffers from instability and conflicts among its various parties, representing grounds for conflicts of some international actors, and the competition of regional actors, in order to achieve each party's national goals or strategies.

The intense polarisation of the international environment was clearly reflected in the Middle East region, which negatively affected the conditions of the region, to witness a clear division between an axis represented by the United States and the parties that support it, and another axis that has emerged recently, represented by Russia and some of its allies, which is emerging after the success of the Russian military intervention in Syria (Ali, 2019).

Consequently, the conflicting countries have found in the internal environment of some countries, including Iraq, a wide scope for movement and imposing some wills related to achieving superiority over the countries that are hostile to them, through direct or indirect pressure on the official or unofficial actors in order to direct diplomacy and foreign policy to the direction corresponding to its strategic goals.

Another factor is the exploitation some loopholes related to the tense relationship, which links some internal parties, in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, or by benefiting from the escalation of some policies that lack justice, or those characterised by corruption, to achieve rapprochement with the affected parties and provide support to them, and try to take advantage of that, as a favour that should be returned after a while.

With the changes in the regional scene, as a result of the intensification of the Syrian crisis and direct Russian military intervention in it, and increased coordination between (Russia, Iran, Syria and Iraq), an opportunity for Russia to make up for its strategic absence from the region has presented itself, it has also provided some international conditions, including international sanctions imposed on Iran, to increase its presence in this country, and to try to influence some of its policies, especially after the Adel Abdul Mahdi government signed an agreement with the Chinese government, which includes many points, which qualify it to be effective in the Iraq scene (Al-Ali, 2015).

In summary, both the internal factors and the trends of the internal parties involved in Iraqi political decision-making and foreign policy, as well as the effects of the conflict between various international and regional powers have affected Iraq's regional policy and diplomatic activity, and this has led, in many cases, to undermining its relations with a number of neighbouring countries, especially Arab countries, in exchange for strengthening relations with other countries, while not taking into account issues related to the interests of the state.

The Future of Iraqi Diplomacy in a Turbulent Regional Environment

Despite the multiple weaknesses, internal and external determinants, and constraints that have affected the overall Iraqi diplomatic performance, the Iraqi governments have been able to move at the external level, in order to achieve some strategic goals according to their national interests (Al-Faisal, 2017), including success in persuading the Arab countries to the summit

meetings in Baghdad in March 2012. There have also been attempts to mediate between Iran and the international community regarding the Iranian nuclear program crisis, by hosting direct talks between the two parties in May of the same year (Maggiolini, 2013, p. 5)

In this regard, and although ISIS managed to occupy vast lands from Iraq in 2014, the government tried to build bridges of communication with neighbouring countries and tried to restore its role and political influence in the region, the former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (2014-2018) said, "the government is keen on strengthening relations with neighbouring countries, pointing to the importance of maintaining distinguished relations with it in the interests of all parties, stressing the importance of the active role of Iraqi diplomacy in strengthening relations and reducing differences" (Board, 2018).

Also, the Iraqi government that was formed after the 2018 elections headed by Adel Abdul Mahdi, who resigned a year after its formation following the demonstrations, has planned to reactivate diplomacy towards the Middle East and the world in general, through visits by government officials and diplomats to various neighbouring countries, and the signing of many agreements and treaties.

There other roles of Iraqi officials in the government and parliament seeking to achieve the same goal, as many meetings were held in this regard, including the Summit of Speakers of Parliaments of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, Baghdad, April 2019, which, in its final statement emphasised supporting the stability of Iraq and preserving its unity, as being of importance to the stability of the region, (Saleh, 2019). The importance of the conference is that it brings together contradictory regional states among them, in an Iraqi attempt to convergence of various views (Al-Hanafi, 2019).

Accordingly, there are many internal and external factors that have in some way affected Iraqi diplomacy towards the neighbouring countries, as well as some structural problems that they suffered during the period that followed in 2003, the forefront of which is the overlapping of competencies and the lack of general agreement between decision makers on setting priorities. Another issue is the clear intersections between the various institutions concerned with diplomacy and external decision-making, which in turn affected the unity of external discourse and then its effectiveness and impact at the regional and international levels.

In addition to the negative effects stemming from the long history of differences, which limited the possibility of cooperation with some neighbouring countries, there is the emergence of some types of modern problems, due to the shape of the current political system and its method of dealing with those countries, based on the nature of strategic thinking to each group on the one hand, or the influences related to its possible external links on the other hand.

Although, Iraqi diplomacy recently tried to overcome the failures of the periods after 2003, it lacked some essential features In this regard in particular, the Iraqi diplomacy has been subjected to direct and indirect criticism from various parties, through its lack of a clear agenda for foreign policies; and it does not specify its priorities in preserving national interests.

Rather, it tries to confuse what is political and ideological, in addition to accusing it of subordination to some countries in the region, and some political parties responsible for making foreign policy confuse the thinking of the opposition man with the thinking of the government man, which causes them to move within the principle of returning the favour, which it is possible contradicts the pragmatism with which states should move (Hussein, 2012).

With regard to developing the performance of Iraqi diplomacy and playing a more effective role, this depends on resolving some of the internal problems and limitations that this study referred to, addressing the imbalance, and agreeing to present the national interest to the rest of the interests, determining the responsibilities of each party, and then enabling diplomacy to provide initiatives and move externally.

In addition to overcoming some structural problems related to the overlapping of the work and tasks of state institutions, especially diplomatic ones or those of foreign policy making, or trying to take the role and tasks of these institutions, there is the issue of negative roles played by some members of parliament, or members of the parliaments of neighbouring countries, through nervous statements which generate negative reactions on various parties.

At the same time, external factors, especially regional ones, have clear effects. Conflict and competition between different regional powers, especially Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other countries, and with the participation of major international powers, such as the United States and Russia, have significantly and clearly affected Iraq's foreign policy towards regional states in particular, and the lack of agreement with them, as a result of the influences of specific external actors or the mood of a certain Iraqi political decision-maker and his strategic vision towards it, which had negative repercussions on the support of states or international and regional parties to it (Al-Faisal, 2017).

To overcome some of the limitations of developing Iraqi diplomacy, responsible authorities, particularly the Iraqi government, can take a number of measures and provide some structural conditions, including those relating to the needs of some institutions concerned with foreign affairs and diplomacy to administrative reform, and overcome some obstacles, as well as the need to find a form from the agreement and coordination of views between the concerned

authorities, especially between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Foreign Affairs Committee in Parliament, to achieve common goals (Mohsen, 2010).

In addition is the important role that can be played by both the President of the Republic or the Speaker of Parliament in strengthening the external role of Iraq, which was evident in the positive role of the President of the Republic Barham Salih, whose external movements had a clear role in rapprochement with some of the neighbouring countries, through delivering a message stating that "Iraq is part of the region and cannot live in security and stability without its stability, and that its foreign policy is a policy agreed upon between the presidencies (republic, parliament and government), which has earned it greater legitimacy" (al-Mallah & Joudeh, 2018).

Also, these administrative and technical measures should be accompanied by a set of development plans to advance Iraqi diplomacy, by developing their work, starting with selecting people who are qualified to obtain diplomatic jobs and then urging them to participate in courses and workshops to develop their performances, as well as resorting to innovative means in diplomatic work, and the use of economic, digital or social diplomacy of other types, to enhance the external position of Iraq, in the light of developments in the international and regional environments (al-Mallah & Joudeh, 2018).

Conclusion

Obviously, national interests should be the main driver or motive for Iraq's external relations and its diplomatic behaviour in general, and due to the major changes that occurred on the political system after 2003, and the emergence of indicators that provided the opportunity for the emergence of clear internal and external influencing factors, each of which had a role in ordering its priorities and preserving its interests and influence, with the emergence of some political parties, with different visions.

Relative successes were achieved by Iraqi diplomacy in some of the pending issues with the neighbouring countries and with international organisations, including the exit from Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, and the affairs of the occupation of Kuwait, debts, compensation and other outstanding issues.

However, none of this was enough in light of the accumulation of other outstanding issues, especially with neighbouring countries, and there was an absence of a serious desire to activate or move the mechanisms of real diplomatic work to dismantle them and find solutions to them.

This requires joint efforts by all concerned parties, especially in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the institution directly responsible for implementing the foreign policy of the government and for Iraqi embassies and consulates abroad, overcoming some of the determinants of developing its work, achieving a renaissance in diplomatic work, and selecting competent persons for various positions. It is also advisable to undertake structural reform measures that push towards overcoming some points of deficiency in the diplomatic work and achieving the foreign policy goals of the Iraqi government.

Also, in light of Iraq's presence in a turbulent regional environment full of crises and conflicts, the authorities responsible for managing Iraqi diplomacy must direct it to become more dynamic and pragmatic regarding the implementation of foreign policy goals, not to engage in any regional or international axes, as well as to avoid antagonism between political parties, and to focus on the national interest.

 The possibility of performing other roles such as mediation or bringing views between the different regional parties, should be prioritised in light of the availability of the necessary conditions for that and the conviction of the concerned parties themselves, which can provide great advantages for Iraqi diplomacy, adding to them the possibility of performing positive roles in the regional environment.

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