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Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies

# Iraq Foreign Policy amidst Regional Interactions

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**Al-Bayan Center Studies Series**

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Iraq foreign policy has been more balanced recently due to the new government attitudes towards the regional strategic environment, which has been affecting the security and stability of Iraq adversely. The new balanced attitudes of Iraq foreign policy have positively isolated Iraq from regional crises and conflicts, on the other hand, it is not easy for Iraq to stay out of regional political interactions, given its aspiration of playing proactive regional role by approaching all powerful actors, winning their trust, and adopting effective role towards regional crisis based on Iraq's domestic interests and regional ambitions. The perception of regional situation in Iraq in light of the formulation of new foreign policy could be identified by studying Iraq foreign policy towards regional crises. Foreign policy in Iraq is currently based on neutralization and strategic openness towards all regional actors, which might prepare Iraq to play proactive regional role in upcoming era to formulate new regional balance, where Iraq balances the interests of regional actors, namely Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The most important principles that Iraq foreign policy should be based on in regional affairs are:

## **First, independence of foreign policy**

Iraq foreign policy in post-2003 crystalized around the principle of independence

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and adherence to purely national interests, where Iraq supposed to execute its foreign policy away from outside pressures, which results from regional environment and driven by the escalation of regional and international crises among active power in the region. Based on the principle of moderation, Iraqi foreign policy characterized by being rational, objective, and balanced. Therefore, regional crises did not affect the dynamics of its foreign policy, which acquired Iraq regional acceptance and enabled it to interact with regional powers freely and transparently. An adherence to the principle of respecting states' sovereignty and realistic foreign policy have created a balance among Iraq different domestic needs,<sup>1</sup> as well as, the pursuit of its foreign goals by rational, reasonable, and balanced diplomatic dialogue. This principle granted Iraq positive diplomatic image in the regional and international frameworks.

### **Second, staying away from adversarial regional alliances**

Iraqi foreign policy emphasizes the necessity of staying away from adversarial alliances in the region; Iraq aspires to play proactive regional role without harming the interests of regional states, and refuses to ally with one camp at the expense of another as a fundamental principle in its foreign interactions; especially in the Middle East region that suffers from competition and conflict among different regional axis, which has affected Iraq domestic and foreign interests adversely.<sup>2</sup> The

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1. Yasir Abd Al-hussien, "Towards A Strategy for Iraq Foreign Policy: Vision, Superiority, and Future," *Journal of Strategic Research*, Beladi Center for Strategic Studies and Research, no. 9, (2015), 109 – 113.

2. Malik Deham Muta'b, "Political Reading of Iraq Foreign Policy towards Neighboring Countries," *Journal of International Studies*, Mustansiriyah University, no. 23 (2013), 98.

current Iraqi foreign policy has been transferring from a reactionary foreign policy into a planned one, as prelude to play much wider role in formulating equations of regional balances, and moving towards consolidating foreign policy based on the principle of independence and hopefully this development in foreign policy enable Iraq to play larger positive role in regional affairs.

### **Third, avoiding regional conflicts and wars**

Iraq suffered from reckless politics that led to several wars, which brought only financial and political woes, therefore, Iraq foreign policy emphasizes peace and constructive diplomatic dialogue to address regional crises. Current foreign policy in Iraq is based on certain sets of attitudes which conceive regional dynamics in a way that prevents Iraq from being implicated in extremist issues and aligning itself towards policies that are moderate and diplomatic, as well as, favoring dialogues and non-aggressive attitudes. Even though the region suffers from escalating regional conflicts,<sup>3</sup> Iraq succeed in distancing itself and halted the possibility of using Iraq as a gateway to threaten neighboring countries. Iraq foreign policy is directed towards peaceful interactions with its surrounding and rejects being exploited as geographic base to threaten any state in the region, as well as, reject any entity or organization that might threaten regional states directly or indirectly.

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3. Fikrat Namq Abd Fitah et al., “Determinants of American Stand on the Security Crisis in Iraq following the Capture of Mosul by ISIS,” *Journal of Political Affairs*, College of Political Science – Nahrian University, no. 37, 15.

#### **Fourth, fighting any entity or approach that adopts discrimination and terrorism**

Iraq suffered the most from terrorism and its ramifications, therefore, Iraqi foreign policy prioritizes fighting terrorism and extremism. Iraq participates in the Global Coalition Against Daesh and launched military operation outside its borders, namely the airstrikes against Daesh in Syria. Iraqi foreign policy asserts the necessity of fighting terrorism according to international norms. Iraq works also with NATO on combating terrorism to prevent the usage of its territories as headquarters or corridors for terrorist or aggressive actions, as Iraq foreign policy emphasize peace and dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Iraq does not constitute any threat to the security of any state, as it pursues its interests based on safe neighbor theory. Also, Iraq does not intervene in domestic affairs of any state, as Iraq foreign policy adhere to the principle of respecting state sovereignty, which is a fundamental principle in formulating foreign policy in regional and international affairs.

#### **Fifth, strategic openness in the framework of peaceful interactions**

Iraq foreign policy is based on the principle of strategic openness towards all regional powers, as Iraq possesses serious political will to abandon historical hostilities and move towards political and security cooperation, accompanied by willingness to establish balanced relations with all Arab and regional states by

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4. Ali Faris Hameed, "A Study of National Security challenges and Scenarios of Diplomatic role," *Journal of Strategic Research*, Beladi Center for Strategic Studies and Research, no. 9 (2015), 109 – 113.

zeroing disputes. This is evident in the recent record of Iraq foreign policy, where Iraq succeed in building constructive relations with all regional states, including Gulf states in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

The status of current Iraq foreign policy in the region indicates the possibility of Iraq playing new regional role that could formulate new balance for regional interactions,<sup>5</sup> as the Middle East suffers from instability due to the dynamics of balance of powers. Therefore, the revival of the regional role of Iraq could contribute to the stability of the region.

### **Sixth, approaching regional balance peacefully**

Iraq could play the role of balancer between antagonistic regional alliances by keeping the same distance towards all regional states. Different regional powers have been trying to lobby Iraq to side with one regional power(s) at the expense of others, especially after the eruption of regional crises and its consequences, due to the perception that winning Iraq to their side would change regional balance of power, therefore, they seek to contain Iraq as strategic partner in the region.<sup>6</sup> The regional balance of power has affected international and regional alliances, therefore, the rise of Iraq as a regional power might constitute a change in the maps of regional alliances. If Iraq continues its policy of strategic openness, it could strategically engineer these alliances and their framework in the near future, as all

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5. Khader Abbas Atwan, "Vision for Iraq relationships with Arab States," Center for Arab Unity Studies (2004), 315.

6. Malik Deham Muta'b, *Ibid.*, 101.

alliances in the region are based on two strategic objectives: security and mutual interests.

### **Seventh, containment of conflicting policies of international actors**

The revival of strategic balance in the region would positively serves that interests of all regional powers, but the dilemma can only be addressed by Iraq due to its geostrategic status of power and influence, the dynamics of regional politics that enable it to paly such role. Iraq adopts foreign policy that is based on double strategic openness with the aim of converging conflicting perspectives between Russia and the United states in the region, as well as, taking proactive steps to minimize political disputes between them.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Iraq aspire to be a gateway for these powers to discuss several standing issues, most importantly, the Syrian Crisis.

In conclusion, Iraqi foreign policy is based on certain set of constitutional and legal principles, which in its turn constrain political interactions and its tools in the region, therefore, Iraq relies on neutralism as a doctrine in his political attitudes towards regional crises. This might enable Iraq to play superior regional role, as a balancer of antagonistic regional alliances in the Middle East. Based on the principle of neutralism, Iraq foreign policy moves towards more moderate policy alternatives.

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7. Ahmed Nouri Nuimi, "Process of Policy Making in the United States' Foreign Policy," Zaharan for Publications, Amman, Jordan (2011), 122 – 126.