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Factors Affecting the Future of Iraq's Soft Power

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Soft power and hard power (economic and military) are the main sources of governments' power in international relations. The concept of soft power was first proposed by Joseph Nye.¹ This type of power includes cultural, ideological, political, and artistic components, democratic values and human rights, scientific and cultural abilities, diplomatic power, knowledge power, and related media power. Also, technological development and increasing global challenges have increased the value of soft power.

Now that Iraq has overcome various internal and external crises, it wants to use stronger measures in its foreign policy than in the past. One of the tools for achieving this goal is soft power. In this regard, Fawad Hossein, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, emphasized focusing on the sources of soft power in diplomatic work. Because this is the way to achieve the interests of the country and Iraq's foreign policy². Currently, many internal and external factors affect Iraq's soft power.

Sources and bases of Iraqi soft power:

The history of Iraq from the earliest settlements in Mesopotamia and the resulting Sumerian civilization – five thousand years B.C.– until today, is an important part of the heritage of humanity. The historical heritage of Iraq is embodied in its ancient civilizations. Mesopotamia still represents the cradle of the first civilizations in global thought. In the minds of Iraqis, the Arabic and Islamic culture and history of Iraq,

1. <https://wcfia.harvard.edu/publications/soft-power-means-success-world-politics>

2. <https://mofa.gov.iq/losangeles/?p=3513>

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the capital of the Islamic world in the Middle Ages and its big cities, etc., are important symbols of their national and religious power and pride. Iraq is the source of the main monotheistic religions in the world. Iraq is extremely important and attractive due to the existence of a number of the most important Shia and even Sunni holy places.

Ceremonies like Ashura and Arba'een³ attract millions of religious tourists. Iraq's democracy after 2003 has also created positive values throughout the Middle East. In other fields, for example, education, Iraq used to have "one of the best educational systems in the Arab world".⁴ And the number of foreign students in Iraqi universities, after years of isolation and infrastructural damage has increased with advancements in educational methods, research, and international study programs. The high number of Iraqi immigrants⁵ can introduce the culture of Iraq to other countries. Iraqis abroad can form Iraqi lobbies and promote Iraq's view in international forums and countries.

Factors affecting the future of Iraq's soft power:

A) Internal factors:

- 1- Internal support and inside acceptance:

If hard power only shows the power of governments, soft power shows the power of people, and strong countries have both strong governments and people.⁶ The duration of the political tyranny of Iraq's rulers (both internal and external) has caused severe damage to the people and civilization of this country, and its negative effects were reflected in the values, traditions, customs, and intellectual patterns.

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arba%27een_Pilgrimage

4. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/4417.html>

5. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.TOTL?locations=IQ>

6. <https://abu.edu.iq/research/articles/16238>

The credibility and influence of the government in the society after the past conditions are among the factors affecting the soft power of Iraq. It means, to what extent the government can strengthen the nation-state building, which means solving internal problems, including economic and cultural problems, providing jobs for the youth, improving the educational infrastructure, reducing inflation, and reducing ethnic and religious differences (Kurds, Sunni, and Shia).

For example, strengthening the educational infrastructure is one of the most important things that will lead to strengthening the soft power in Iraq. In soft power discourses, the expansion of the educational exchange sector, as well as the attraction of international students, can have an impact on the country's soft power. Therefore, after these steps, a country can begin to strengthen its soft power, because, for the implementation of soft power it is required to overcome some obstacles and problems of people and society.

2–Political division and sharing of power:

There are many causes of division and conflict among Iraqis. Resolving differences between groups and parties and preventing insecurity are among the other effective factors in Iraq's soft power. Because, in order to implement the decisions that have been made, there must be a high degree of convergence among the decision-makers. As a result, decisions appropriate to the political environment can be made correctly with soft power tools. To fulfill the soft power, the most important political step is to solve the problem of differences between Iraqi groups. If this difference, which constitutes the main body of the government and the system, is not resolved, internal differences will undoubtedly cause weakness in all dimensions of soft power⁷ and will have consequences. However, Iraq has not lost its

7. Talha Köse, Mesut Özcan and Ekrem Karakoç(2016). A Comparative Analysis of Soft Power in the MENA Region, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 3, *Understanding Foreign Policy in the Middle East* , pp. 354–373 (20 pages).Published By: Oxford University Press.

global influence and will continue to have this influence through its soft power. Indeed, Iraq needs intelligent individuals who, with their will, determination and ability, are attractive models to their people, rulers, and management system.⁸

3- Coherent foreign policy:

The Iraqi government and decision-makers in this country consist of three groups.

In some periods, almost inconsistency in foreign policy among Iraqi officials is effective in the development and influence of Iraq's soft power. Because different opinions of decision-makers will lead to inconsistency. There are differences between the effective groups in formulating and drawing foreign policy, which will lead to an impact on soft power and its strategies. Undoubtedly, coherent foreign policy is aware of the advancement of its soft power. Iraq's government can well pursue the country's national interests by pursuing a centrist foreign policy and building good relations with a wide range of regional and international partners.

But sometimes Baghdad's power is challenged by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Kurdistan has practically been developing its foreign relations in some cases separately from Baghdad's policies. Consistency in foreign policy leads to the executive framework of soft power and makes it work.⁹

Therefore, in Iraq, there are different factions and leaders in the political spectrum of Shia and Sunni, Kurds and Arabs to draw or formulate and implement the foreign policy. Challenging some policies

8. <https://tinyurl.com/2mwh4w47>

9. Paul Salem(2013).IRAQ'S TANGLED FOREIGN INTERESTS AND RELATIONS, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Iraqs_Tangled_Foreign_Interests_and_Relations.pdf

by other poles is another blow to Iraq's soft power. Therefore, in order to implement the methods of increasing soft power in Iraq's foreign policy, there should not be division among politicians (Kurdish, Shiite, Sunni).

4- Strengthening technological infrastructure and military power:

Although we have discussed the factors affecting Iraq's soft power, we cannot deny the effects of hard power and technology on soft power. The weakness of hard power makes soft power more limited and vulnerable in its influence. It is because, by increasing the hard power of a country, its global and regional power also will increase, and this affects the executive power of some of its policies, and the grounds for some influences and interferences, and the resulting crises will be reduced. Therefore, it will provide social and political peace to deal with soft power. On the other hand, with the growth and development of technological affairs, some external dependencies will decrease and this independence will bring more power. In other words, it makes Iraq more secure.

5- Solving economic problems:

Although Iraq has many internal resources, it faces many economic challenges. The economic situation affects soft power. Iraq, as a country in the heart of the Middle East, is rich in resources, but at the same time, it is an unstable country. It has the potential to be either a force for regional adaptation and stability or an engine for economic growth. By solving its economic problems, Iraq has improved its relations with other countries and can use soft tools and improve its soft power in different countries. Also, solving economic problems can help to reduce problems and provide internal stability. Therefore, solving the problems will have an impact on Iraq's soft power.

b) External factors (regional and international):

1- Geopolitics and security:

For Iraq which is located in an unstable region with certain problems, it is a bit difficult to establish relations with crisis-prone countries. Because it is difficult to apply soft power or increase soft power in a land whose neighbors are suffering from ethnic and identity wars, and it will have consequences. Maybe some countries prevent the increase of cultural communication in the form of soft power. It is because some crises can contagion and spread in all societies. For example, one of the previous threats in Iraq was the ISIS terrorist group and its propaganda for the youth of different countries. Therefore, from a cultural point of view, there may be dead ends for some cultural measures and soft measures.

2- Infiltration of foreign forces:

One of the most important external factors in Iraq that has hindered Baghdad's efforts to create a coherent foreign policy is the influence of other countries.

The presence of foreigners has an impact on foreign policy and soft power, because all countries as foreign actors have unique interests that often conflict with other actors, and therefore they tend to reflect their interests in the foreign policy of the respective country. This will cause anxiety and incoherence in Iraq's foreign policy. The confused and incoherent foreign policy that comes from the request of foreign countries will never be a good basis for the coherence of decisions and the increase of Iraq's soft power.

Future vision

In order to consider a suitable perspective for Iraq's soft power in the future, we must point out some opportunities and threats. Dependence on technology, interference by foreigners, differences between politicians and lack of coherence in foreign policy, and most importantly, the weakness of the nation-state building and gaining the full support of the Iraqi society by the government, are all factors that threaten soft power. Because if Iraq cannot solve the initial internal challenges, social crises will continue in Iraq without a doubt. On the other hand, science and technology have caused dependence on different countries. This, along with almost ethnic differences, will create a big hurdle on the path of Iraq's soft power. It seems that in the future if Iraq would be able to resolve political differences between groups, it would acquire high internal legitimacy and foreign interference will be reduced, and the establishment of balanced relations will lead to the increase of Iraq's soft power. Iraq will not have a coherent foreign policy until it resolves the deep and lasting internal differences over issues such as the division of power, territory, and energy. When the foreign policy is not coherent and the domestic policy is not accepted and legitimate, it is not possible to use soft power and its tools. However, the sources of soft power in Iraq are extensive. Therefore, in the short and medium term, Iraq is strengthening its soft power. In fact, it seems that step-by-step soft power is playing an appropriate and growing role in Iraq's foreign policy.