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IRAQI KURDS' INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN REALISM AND LIBERALISM

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ABSTRACT

in 2014 the serious changes took place in the Middle East and a new player appeared in the Middle East called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL). Its aim was to pose a threat to US interests in the region. The study attempts in this paper to shed light on the perspectives of both realists and liberals of American politicians and academics who have an influence in the decision-making of US foreign policy on the independence of Kurdistan from Iraq and to what extent they support this step?

The study found that the liberals to some extent support the establishment of the Kurdish state, while the realists do not support the establishment of this state because it is not in the American national interest to establish the Kurdish state under these complex circumstances. in addition, the study founded that Establishing the Kurdish state at the present time facing many challenges, such as the chaos that pervades the region, the opposition of neighbouring countries and Iraq to such a step and finally the internal challenge Considered one of the most important challenges, as Kurds lack unity

1. Introduction

Since near the end of WWI, the Kurds have sought to establish their own nation yet, their population has been divided by four nation states; Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Straddled on the borders of these countries of American strategic importance, Kurds represent sizable minorities in each of them. But the uniting of the Kurdish people into one sovereign state would come at a great political and territorial expense to the countries within the region. Thus,

the Kurds aspire that favorable US policy towards them, may hold the key to resolving their issue. However, the American deal in 2014 was quite different from what it was in the past, due to the serious changes took place in the Middle East and a new player appeared in the Middle East called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL). Its aim was to pose a threat to US interests in the region.

In this section, the study aims to illuminate both realists and liberal's views of American politicians and academics that are influential in the decision-making of U.S. foreign policy on Kurdistan's independence from Iraq and how far would they support this move. Where they divided the U.S. position according to Realism and Idealism theory in international relations, taking into consideration the geopolitical considerations of the American national security, into two camps: realism and idealism.

2. Liberalism and liberal's perspective on Kurdish independence

For its part the Idealist Camp supports the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan according to the following considerations:

First: matchmaking with the historical American values in support the peoples to independence, upon which the U.S. supported the self-determination of Latin America from the Spanish Empire in the nineteenth century, Central and Eastern European independence from the Austrian, Hungarian, German and Russian empires after WWI (Salah, 2017), Most notably, the administration of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt made this value central to their afterward efforts. The UN set in stone the principle of "equal rights and self-determination of peoples" in its charter. the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson asserted these values in an address to a meeting of the Community of Democracies in Washington. "We must support emerging democracies in the struggle to become nations that respect human rights regardless of ethnicity," he said (CALAMUR, 2017). This camp believes that Kurdish independence will be a strategic asset for the U.S. and a paradigm of democracy for the Middle East(Torell, 2016).

Second: Ending the historical oppression of Kurds in Iraq, in addition to the fact that the Iraqi Kurds did not enjoy the right to independence and did not establish their state after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, they have lived scattered among four countries (Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey) as marginalized ethnic, vulnerable to oppression (Salah, 2017). During Saddam Hussein's regime, under whom the Kurdish suffered several waves of suppression (Torell, 2016). The flashpoint of the last three decades of the twentieth century was the notorious Anfal campaign in the waning months of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) during which — according to Human Rights Watch — Saddam Hussein's army killed about 100,000 Kurds. Among those who perished were 5,000 civilians who died terrible deaths after Iraqi army dropped mustard gas and the nerve agent Sarin on the town of Halabja(Cook, 2017). Moreover, the humanitarian and refugee crisis in 1991that led to a mass

exodus was another juvenile that took place where the Iraqi forces revenge for uprisings that had taken place the same year, where more than 1.5 million Kurds run away to the borders of Iran and Turkey (Gailan, 2017). Thus, the proponents of this current of thought view the Kurdistan Independence as an endeavour to remedy the historical injustice to which the Iraqi Kurds have been subjected for over a century (Salah, 2017).

Third: Protection of minorities in Kurdistan region, including tens of thousands of Christians, who escaped the country in post-Saddam's regime era for fear of oppression or arrest or murder by ISIS, after they took control of vast areas in Iraq. In addition to other minorities, such as Shabak and Yazidis, which have also run away to Kurdistan for similar fears, where the region and its government were more tolerant towards minorities compared to Iraq or countries in the Arab region (Salah, 2017). Therefore, President Obama made clear what his model for the country's future was "The Kurdish region is functional in the way we would like to see," he said in a speech. "It is tolerant of other sects and other religions in a way that we would like to see elsewhere. So, we do think it is important to make sure that that space is protected (Noack, 2014)."

fourth: remuneration the Kurds who were nearer to the Western countries and collaborated with various American administrations since invasion of Kuwait in 1991. This cooperation has increased after the occupation of ISIS to the city of Mosul, where Peshmerga proved to be the most effective in the war on ISIS, achieving the objective of the U.S. in extirpating the organization without forcing Washington to plunge its forces into a new war quagmire. Thus, Peshmerga helped the U.S. avoid incurring more heavy losses similar to those sustained during the Iraqi occupation (Salah, 2017).

Due to these considerations, there are many politicians and American academics supporting the independence of Kurdistan, Senator Conrad Burns is one of them, he argues in an article published in CNN Under the title "Why U.S. should support independence for Kurds" that "yes, it is True, Kurdistan's location and natural resources make it a very attractive strategic partner of the United States and our allies, but such political and strategic considerations should not be at the forefront of our decision-making process. Instead, we should support independence for Kurdistan because it is the right thing to do, and because America should – and must – remain the guiding light for those in pursuit of freedom (Barnes, 2017)." The senator criticized those who say that America should not interfere in the affairs of other countries except in the interests of the U.S. in the region, when he said "Undoubtedly, there will be those that believe that the U.S. should not intervene with the internal politics of foreign states. They will argue that the U.S. interest in the region is based only on the great reserves of natural resources that Kurdistan possesses. Such doubters fail to understand the true importance of supporting freedom and are disregarding the Kurdish aspirations towards independence (Burns, 2017)." The Senator appreciates the sacrifices of the Kurdish people for independence, and believes that the Iraqi Kurds have been struggling for independence for

generations. They have been neglected several times by outside world powers. The Kurds tolerated atrocities and have paid the price for freedom. And it is therefore time that the U.S. took heed of these sacrifices and fulfilled its moral obligation to support the Kurdistan and their aspirations for freedom and national sovereignty (Burns, 2017).

Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. diplomat who has been a vocal advocate for Kurdish independence, says “it’s baffling” why the U.S. doesn’t recognize a Kurdish state. Galbraith, who was in the Kurdistan region for the recent referendum as an unpaid adviser to the Kurds, argues that the area has long been a stronghold of stability in Iraq. “Could a place of 5 million people be a viable place?” he asked. “I would think so. It’s larger and more viable than half the states in the United Nations” (Calamur, 2017).

Ziva Dahl published an article in the Washington Times under the title “Smashing a critical American ally... Why the betrayal of the Kurds is a victory for Iran?” he argues that “This current U.S. position plays right into Gen. Soleimani’s hands, giving tacit legitimacy to Iran’s actions. If Iran and its proxy in Baghdad achieve their goal regarding the Iraqi Kurds, it will be both a major victory for Iran in extending its Shia Crescent and a profound defeat for America and the West” (Dahl, 2017). Then he mentioned The Iraqi Kurds’ future is at stake, together with the broader balance of power in the Middle East. Iraqi Kurds is a pro- American castle against both Iran and ISIS in a region rife with repressive Islamism. therefore, The U.S. should use the Kurds as strategic leverage against Iran (something we lost with Mr. Obama’s Iran deal) and with Iraq (something we lost with Mr. Obama’s 2011 pullout) (Dahl, 2017). Dick Cheney’s national security adviser stated on Kurdistan TV interview;

“The U.S. needs to understand that this is no longer a matter of Kurds and Arabs. This is now the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps against America; QassemSoleimani against Donald Trump. Whatever the administration thought about the wisdom of the [Kurds’] peaceful referendum on independence, it would be a terrible blow to U.S. interests to allow an Iranian terrorist group and its Iraqi proxies to respond by smashing a critical American ally with impunity (Dahl, 2017).”

David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute argues that the Iraqi Kurds aim for an independent and self-governing state “do so” for moral and practical reasons. The quest is likewise firmed in historical events and unfulfilled promises from Successive Iraqi governments. From a moral perspective, the Iraqi Kurds argument have three premises: First, the right to self-determination; Second, a history of persecution such as genocide, meted out by Iraqi governments; and Third, over the past twenty-five years, the Kurds have created a stable, peaceful, relatively democratic, and tolerant region that does not threaten neighbouring countries (Knights et al., 2017).

3. Realism 's perspective on Kurdish independence

On the other hand, the second camp is the realistic. The arguments of this camp are grounded on the American geopolitical interests in the region. It is more influential among the new U.S. administration; its proponents reject Kurdistan's referendum and consider it ill-timed, for several reasons as follows:

First: the U.S. Priority is war on ISIS: They believe that supporting the Kurdish independence at the present time could adversely influence the course the U.S. war against ISIS, a priority for the U.S. national security strategy issued in 2015 (Salah, 2017). The U.S. had always made clear to the president of Kurdistan Region Mr. Masoud Al-Barzani that it opposed the referendum, saying it would excite ethnic conflict, destabilize the region and undermine the fight against the ISIS. the Iraqi government took steps to isolate the landlocked Kurds after the referendum, with the assistance of Tehran and Angara (Zucchino, 2017). The U.S. Special Presidential Envoy to Counter ISIS Brett McGurk stated in a press conference in Erbil, asserting: "There is no international support for the referendum, really, from anybody." He described the referendum as "ill-timed and ill-advised" and "risky" (Myloie, 2017). furthermore, the U.S. has pressing priorities agenda more important than Kurdish referendum, such as, the Iranian nuclear agreement, North Korea and Gulf conflict, meaning that the Iraqi Kurdistan crisis could wait or be postponed, at least from the U.S. perspective (Salah, 2017). Because the referendum in such circumstances and in an area such like the Middle East which is very important in the U.S. strategy will cause disturbances in the region and this does not serve the national interest of the U.S., the Kurds therefore should not continue to held the referendum at the present time.

Second: Antagonize the central government in Baghdad. Supporting the independence of Kurdistan could jeopardize the relations between U.S. and Iraq, which rejects the Kurdistan independence because of oil wealth, and for fear it courage sectarian separatism in Iraq (Salah, 2017). Therefore, U.S. relations with the Iraqi Kurds have been predicated on encouraging Kurds cooperation with the Iraqi forces during the Mosul aggression. Brett McGurk, appointed in October 2015 as the special presidential envoy for the global coalition to counter ISIS, has played a significant role in this relationship (Frantzman, 2017). U.S. officials are also concerned that the Kurdish independence, and raise political tensions between the Iraqi government and Kurdistan region, could derail the anti-ISIS coalition, even though peshmerga fighters have been among the most effective in battling the group (TAMKIN, 2017). Stressed U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan "Unity, is Iraq's best weapon against ISIS and other extremist groups." He emphasized the need for a continued dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil. The U.S. supports a federal, unified, prosperous, , and democratic Iraq, one that meets the aspirations of all Iraqis (Sullivan, 2018). For these reasons, the U.S. administration is conscious that antagonizing the central government in Baghdad would mean a possible loss of a prominent ally in the war against

ISIS, and may lead Baghdad away from Washington and push it towards further rapprochement with Tehran. This comes amid U.S. tries to contain the Iranian leverage in the region (Salah, 2017).

However, the U.S. is unlikely to take the Kurdish side. U.S. administration often argues that a unified, strong, stable Iraq is the region's best bet to fight terrorism and prevent the return of ISIS or similar extremists (ALLEN-EBRAHIMIAN, 2017). The U.S. long-standing policy has been to seek to bridge the Arab-Kurdish divide, pressuring the Kurdistan region not to declare self-determination and the Iraqis not to use army against the Kurds. That policy seems to be breaking down, leaving the U.S. with a choice of seeking to maintain a neutral posture or adopting an outright pro- or anti-Kurdish policy (Boot, 2017). While, Ryan Crocker, who was U.S. ambassador to Iraq from 2007 to 2009, criticized this policy when he said the U.S. has weakened its position by appearing to take Baghdad's side in the dispute with the Kurds. "I do not think we should have taken a position one way or the other on a Kurdish state in northern Iraq: It's for the Kurds and Iraqis to work out," he said. "But by injecting ourselves on one side of this ... [the] concern is that we will no longer be seen as an honest broker as we move ahead" (Calamur, 2017). Therefore, Ranj Alaaldin the researcher in the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. Believes the U.S. should assess and re-defining the relationship between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan region that serve the interests of the region and the international community. Otherwise, ambitions for the Kurds will continue to deactivate and divide an Iraqi state that has a plethora of other challenges ahead, some existential and generational (Alaaldin, 2018).

Third: Could boost Iranian leverage, The U.S. is keenly afraid that supporting Kurdish independence could cause an antagonistic reaction from Iran, which views the independence as a threat to its territorial integrity and stimulate for separatism for around 10 million Kurds (Salah, 2017). In addition, its formation would cement a similar vassalage relations between Teheran and rump-Baghdad, ending once and for ever all American leverage over a country into which the U.S. has spent enormous blood and treasure since 2003 (Bernard, 2017), and stokes antipathy against the U.S., as a great power to be blamed for fragmentising Iraq into statelets. Such discourse might acquisition popularity, not only in Iraq, but also across the Arab world (Salah, 2017).

Fourth: Fuel tensions with   Angara and influence NATO, The U.S. did not back the Kurdistan independence lest this aggravates the already existing tension between U.S. and Turkey, a staunch NATO ally (Salah, 2017). The orthodox view of the positions taken by the neighbours of the Iraqi Kurds is straightforward: that the Kurds would never be allowed their independence. Angara, in particular, was viewed as being wary of the threat posed by Kurdish independence in Iraq, lest any successes there served as an example for the far greater Kurdish population of southeast Anatolia (Stansfield, 2017). The Turks are opposed to Kurdish independence because it could make Syrian Kurds

restive about independence as they are currently engaged in a fight with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a terrorist group (Cook, 2017). On the other hand, yet Turkey is also the KRG's largest investor, and Masuud Barzani's KDP has developed strong relationship to Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party. The Iraqi Kurds are hoping that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's takeover of the anti-Kurdish nationalist right will not impact their ambitions to statehood (Cook, 2017). Therefore, Dubin&Tamkin argued that "There's recognition that they [the Iraqi Kurds] struggled for a long time, paid a terrible price, and were oftentimes put in a position where they were treated as pawns in a larger game." But those intimate feelings have interfered with a host of factors that led U.S., like Iraq, Turkey, and many other countries, to dishearten Kurdish dreams of independence at this moment (Dubin&Tamkin, 2017). However, since the mid-twentieth century, few matters have managed to unify Iraq, turkey, Iran, and Syria as the Kurdish question or, more pointedly, how to prevent a Kurdish answer to that question. This has seen them aligned strategically to prevent a Kurdistan independent from emerging, even while they would each use the others' Kurds to undermine their regional competitor for tactical usefulness, as Teheran did to Baghdad very effectively in the war of 1980–88 (Stansfield, 2017).

It can be said that there are challenges facing the Iraqi Kurds that prevented America from providing any support for Kurdish independence from Iraq, one of the significant challenges is the lack of unity among the Kurdish ranks internally. The internal challenge, the problems between the political parties as all the political parties even disagree on the independence of Kurdistan. Moreover, the Kurdistan independence from Iraq faces other challenges. The first and most exciting challenge is the position of Iraq and the neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Turkey, where these countries believe that the independence of Iraqi Kurds is encouraging the Kurds in these countries to demand the same thing. The other challenge is the international concern that the international situation does not allow for the establishment of a state under these complexes' conditions in the international arena.

Hassan Mneimneh is a contributing editor with Fikra Forum and a principal at Middle East Alternatives in Washington, outlined these challenges that facing the Kurdish state in an article in The Washington Institute for Near East Policy; he mentioned that the challenges of this rosy scenario are at multiple levels. The first is internal, with the inherent challenges of fulfilling the promise of a representative system, the realization of the independence of civil society, and the completion of unified security agencies (Mneimneh, 2017). The second level is clarity relating the relation with Baghdad, taking into account historical rights and social realities. The questions at stake are thorny, with Kirkuk, oil, and water the most distinguished issues. A swift resolution of these issues is in the mutual interest (Mneimneh, 2017). The third level is about the hostility of the regional countries. The question is, however, tempered by realities. In Turkey, despite consternation and back-pedalling, it can be surmised that Turkey realizes that the Kurdish issue is in need of resolution, and that

delaying it only exacerbates the issue. An independent Iraqi Kurds can serve as a mediator towards arrangements for a soft landing of the recurring conflict. Only Iran may harbour the illusion of firm and permanent control on its portion of Kurdistan, and a Kurdish independent state to its west may cause the emergence of a internal threat. The Iranian grip on its Kurdistan is loosening, the most prominent evidence of which is being jihadi mobilization. Counter-intuitively, the emergence of Iraqi Kurdistan, as an alternative reference, may thus shape a retardant to radicalization in Iranian Kurdistan (Mneimneh, 2017). The fourth level is that of the international implications for the emergence of a Kurdish state as a model for independence. It is incumbent on the U.S. and the European Union to help usher this new experience away from characterizations of separatism, while also providing support to avoid a repeat of the “new state as a failed state” trope that has afflicted recently independent states (South Sudan, Eritrea, and Timor Leste). U.S. leadership on this question would be in keeping with promises, stated and implied (Mneimneh, 2017).

Considering the U.S. and its allies' strategic interests, the new U.S. president needs to deal with the Middle East carefully and effectively. For the first time since WWII, the U.S. officials have the opportunity to use the “Kurdish card” in Iraq and Syria at the same time; this is to strengthen its leverage on four significant states in the Middle East at once (Sherko, 2017). Playing the “Kurdish Card” in Islamic Middle East nations by the New U.S. administration could have unique political implications towards Kurds by looking at the whole Kurds in Middle East region as a specific strategic policy package. During the next four years, the new U.S. president's policy toward Kurdistan should focus on securing a confederate system based on the historical, geographic, and administrative aspects of Kurdistan (Sherko, 2017). Therefore, the new administration should adopt a direct action to preserve international confidence and make connections to the Iraqi Kurds (Knights, 2017). Likewise, it is remarkable that the U.S. press pay attention to international protection of the Kurdish areas liberated by the Kurds from ISIS (comprising 49% of Kurdistan) until the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution and the boundaries of Kurdistan region are marked; this will settle the argument over the fate of disputed territories outside the Kurdish control (Sherko, 2017).

As for Kurdish officials it appears to have overrated their strategic importance in the U.S. eyes, an error commonly made by local Middle Eastern powers. supposedly the Iraqi Kurds thought that Israel and the UAE could secure them American approval (Abdul-Hussain, 2017). Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the Kurdistan Regional Government's Department of Foreign Relations, told Foreign Policy during a visit to Washington that “The people of Kurdistan do hope that the United States would stand by the values, the principles, and also the friendship that we have developed,” Bakir said (Abdul-Hussain, 2017). But it seems that U.S. policy does not believe in values and principles. All these are gadgets to achieve U.S. national interests in the region, therefore, the Kurds must know that, the game of nations is a complicated. In addition, the Iraqi Kurds appear be unaware that they still need more cards that they can play if

they ever seek self-determination. The U.S. might send its love to Kurds, but love is never enough to secure statehood (Abdul-Hussain, 2017).

4. Conclusion

The study answered that there are several reasons behind that, which prompted the realists of American academics and politicians not to support the independence of Kurdistan. Firstly, the priority of the war on terror which represented by the Islamic state, where U.S. officials have repeatedly stated that one of their priorities is to eliminate the Islamic state. Secondly, supporting the independence of Kurdistan raises the hostility of Iraq. Iraq is one of the countries with its weight in OPEC; consequently, America saw it difficult to stand beside the Kurds in such circumstances. Thirdly, supporting the Kurds in this way poses a danger to American interests with a strategic ally, Turkey, the second largest army in NATO. Furthermore, U.S. support for the independence of Kurdistan threatens the unity and territorial integrity of Iran and Turkey, which does not guarantee the silence of these countries on such a step if carried out by America. Therefore, these countries considered that the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity would encourage the Kurds in their countries to do the same thing, which jeopardizes their national security and territorial integrity. Thus, these countries have done all they can to discourage America from providing any support for the Kurdistan independence from Iraq. All these challenges have made America unable to support Kurdistan's independence.

The study found that U.S. policymakers are driven by national interests only and that U.S. interests with these Kurdish-populated countries far outweigh America's interests with Kurds. The study also found that the principles that America believes in human rights, democracy and peace are all mechanisms that work for American interests when they serve these values in their national interest and leave them when these values are against American interests.

Likewise, the study concluded that U.S. foreign policy is a realistic policy and America uses the two main principles in the realistic theory to deal with the Kurds, namely, national interests and balance of power. As we mentioned that American politicians consider the American national interest above all considerations (STONI, 2018). Therefore, we found America and through the history of their relationship with the Kurds that they supported them sometimes and have given them away at other times according to U.S. interests in the region. U.S. policymakers also use the Kurdish card to preserve the balance of power in the region without paying attention to the values and principles that they believe in it and spending the billions of dollars in order to spread them in the world. Their dealings with Syrian Kurds are the best evidence, where the U.S. classifies Turkey's PKK as a terrorist organization, at the same time support the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria and offering it arms and money. Note that this party is without a doubt dependent to the PKK in terms of origin, thought and system.

In addition, The Kurds in Iraq has been variously affected by the pros and cons of international politics since the aftermath of First World War. The various promises that had hitherto made to Kurds in the Middle East - the hope of having their own separate state did not coincide with the interests of major powers, most importantly the U.S. Such regular disappointment of the statehood has rendered the aspiration of Kurds in Iraq meaningless and unrewarded. In this manner, the overall debate of the U.S, foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurds points to some important realistic political inclinations. One, as long as the national interest of the U.S. is not served by the Kurds political process in Iraq, it needs to be noted that the U.S. will not totally incline to lend any support. Two, The U.S. foreign policy towards the Kurds is dictated by the realist prescription of “survival of the fittest”. The U.S will normally rise to assist and respond to the demand of Iraqi Kurds if such demand is to reinforce the survival of the U.S. in the Middle East and other parts of the world. Lastly, it needs to be reiterated that there has never been any seriousness on the part of the U.S. and other global powers to lend meaningful support to the Iraqi Kurds’ political aspiration in Iraq and as long as global powers remain to be directed and guided by their national interest, the Iraqi Kurds will remain pawn in the hand of the U.S.

however, it seems that the Kurds exaggerated their importance in the U.S. strategy and they could not read the reality as it was. the Kurds imagined that the United States and the European countries will appreciate the sacrifices made by the Peshmerga forces in their fight against the organization of the state when it was fighting the Islamic state on behalf of the world. Moreover, the Kurdish conflicts and the Kurdish suffering from internal conflicts had a significant impact on the abandonment of America from them as the Iraqi forces would not able to enter the city of Kirkuk without the help of a wing of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, who agreed with Qassem Soleimani. History has proved that every time when the Kurds get close to gain their independence then this dream usually gets destroyed by betrayal of Kurdish to the Kurds. What happened on 16 October 2017 is the best proof of this. The Kurds must realize one thing is that no one can give them independence on a plate, but they must rely on themselves and unite their ranks first and foremost. As well as U.S. interests with Turkey and Iraq made the U.S. to stand in such a position. For all these reasons, America did not support the Kurdistan independence referendum.

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