

## **Geographical Restriction and Interests as a Bulwark against Disintegration of Iraq**

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### **Abstract**

In the wake of the capture of Iraqi lands, especially Mosul by the ISIS, the talk of disintegration of Iraq was ever more serious in political circles. The idea is still at issue even after the collapse of the ISIS and its defeat in Mosul. The main objective of this study is to examine whether ethnic and religious conflicts are powerful enough to lead to Iraq's disintegration. Considering the recent developments in Iraq with pretexts of ethnic and religious conflicts, the question considered in this article is whether this situation could pose a threat to the territorial integrity of Iraq or not? Monitoring the positions of internal groups of Iraq, U.S. interests as well as neighboring countries including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey indicates that disintegration of Iraq would not be beneficial for these countries and it will cause farther violence in the region. In this research, the roles of certain Foreign & domestic or International & national elements in the Iraqi politics and society are being analyzed. A study of the effect of the three variables of Kurds, Sunnis and Shias on Iraqi disintegration or integrity indicates that the Kurd variable has the largest contributing effect on Iraq disintegration while the other two variables show lesser potential for driving the country towards disintegration. Nevertheless, the interests of the regional and trans-regional states combined with the geographical situation of Iraq as a landlocked territory prove to be an obstacle in the way of disintegration of the country. According to the findings of this research, the territorial disintegration of Iraq does not seem to be a viable scenario and territorial integrity of Iraq is more consistent with the objectives and interests of local communities and foreign governments.

**Keywords:** Decomposition of Iraq, Identity crisis, Iraq's neighbors, United States of America, Geographical restriction, Independence referendum.

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**Introduction**

One of the prominent features of Iraq after the overthrow of the Baath regime is the predomination of religious and ethnic identities, which resulted in religious and ethnic conflicts between Kurds and Arabs, and between Shiites and Sunnis. Some researchers argue that this conflict can end up in breaking up Iraq into three regions; Shiite in the South and East, Kurds in north and Sunni in central Iraq. In contrast to the view of some scholars, the authors believe that the ethnic and religious conflicts in Iraq affected by neighbors and US do not have the enough power to dismember the Iraq country. Hence, the study is explaining whether ethno-religious conflicts decompose Iraq or not? It also presents a hypothesis that global and regional powers' interests plus Iraq's special geopolitics in mixed zones of Kirkuk and Baghdad would push Iraq to remain unified. These two also disable ethnic and religious conflicts' force to disintegrate Iraq, because many years of ethnic and sectarian tensions in the country, has threaten global and regional powers of large scale tensions in the Middle East so that it is likely they will try to remain Iraq as a united country.

There are also some factors, which cause instability in a country. Nowadays, violence among states has decreased notably, while civil wars, especially ethnic and religious conflicts, have increased considerably. Ethnic groups and tribes suppressed by the governments have now entered the political scene and express their historical and racial hatred. The main point in these wars is that, the people do not kill because of their actions or previous policy but they kill for their identities.

According to social identity theory, identity competition plays a central role in the inception and escalation of intergroup conflict, even when economic and political factors are at play. Individual and group identity competition is considered a byproduct of individuals' efforts to satisfy basic human needs including various psychological needs. Religions often serve these psychological needs more comprehensively and potently than other repositories of cultural meaning that contribute to the construction and

maintenance of individual and group identities. Religions frequently supply cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, traditions, and other identity-supporting content that answers to individuals' needs for psychological stability in the form of a predictable world, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and even self-actualization. The peculiar ability of religion to serve the human identity impulse thus may partially explain why intergroup conflict so frequently occurs along religious fault lines (Seul, 1999: 553).

Undoubtedly, Identity is two-sided. Within the group, it facilitates cooperation and mobilizes agents for change, overcoming the collective action problem; where identity converges with shared territory and economic interdependence, resulting in a nation state or regional security community, the result is legitimacy and stability. Conversely, where, as in the Middle East, identity is often incongruent with state boundaries, it becomes a source of revisionism, contributing to high levels of regional conflicts. moreover, because identity presupposes and 'other' against which the self-defines and because its construction 'excludes' others, when identity differences correspond to struggle over scarce material resources, notably land, the result is protracted conflict, as between Israel and the Palestinians. The incongruence of identity and material structures has produced a conflict-prone Middle East. Imperial -boundary, in frustrating Identity, left behind states facing competition for the loyalties of their populations from both sub- and supra- state identities. Irredentism was built into the fabric of the state system, generating conflict (Hinnebusch, 2013: 148).

Iraq was born an artificial state, with communal groups having a history of animosity thrown together in one state similar Lebanon, but with the differences that Iraq had the material potential- land and oil- to be an actor rather than a victim. with no shared Iraqi identity, Arab identity was used by the ruling Sunni elite to integrate the Shia, but found a state-building formula combining hard authoritarianism, co-optation through oil- funded

modernization and bureaucratization, and legitimacy based on Arab nationalism required foreign policy victories and oil-funded militarization gave the means, making Iraq a 'war state'. Saddam used war with Iran (1980-88) to pose as defender of Arabism. Reaching no apparent victory, he sought Pan-Arab leadership by advocating renewed use of the oil weapon against the US in the struggle with Israel. Among the motives for his 1990 invasion of Kuwait he wanted to impose Iraq's pan-Arab hegemony and to realize its long-standing irredentist claim to Kuwait, seen as arbitrary detached by Britain from Ottoman Iraq. Iraq's wars are intimately linked to its artificial character, arbitrary borders, and intractable nation-building imperatives (Hinnebusch, 2013: 156). Iraq's ethnic and religious divisions made consensus on the definition of the state especially difficult. In the mystical sense of nationhood, Arab Sunnis and Shiites, Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians and Armenians each have a definition of Iraq's identity. Sunnis see Iraq as a part of the Arab world. Shiites see it as a country that stands apart from its Arab neighbors. Kurds see Iraq as host of an autonomous Kurdish zone in which the Kurdish language and culture can be preserved and celebrated. Turkomans want protection of their rights from Arabs and Kurds. Christian Assyrians and Armenians seek not only protection from the Muslim majority but also recognition of their religion and culture. These are not trivial concerns. Iraqis cannot even begin to write a constitution without first agreeing on their national identity (Mackey, 2003). But after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, violence and tensions between Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds continue to threaten Iraq's stability and integrity. Sectarianism and ethno-religious conflicts are entrenched in the rules and practices of the political process.

### **Ethno -Religious Conflicts and Consequences of Iraq' Probable Disintegration**

Ethno-religious conflicts have been the most serious challenge facing state rebuilding in Iraq since 2003. Indeed, Iraq maintains a long history of

violence. In the past, this occurred because of Iraq's minimal experience with statehood in which constructive civil order reigned. As compared to the past, the current violence stems more from brutal and internal Iraqi conflicts between Arabs and Kurds, and between Sunnis and Shiites. More exactly, Current gaps in the Iraqi societies must be defined based on the infrastructure factor of Iraq's population composition. According to Marx view, the inequality in the distribution of the means of production and a more reliable view from Dandruff, the basic element of the mentioned gaps is the unequal distribution of power or authority among groups (Rocher, 1989: 123). Social gaps in Iraq are based on tribal, ethnic, cultural, religious and lingual gaps. Major social groups are distinguished from each other and are in serious and constant challenge with the emergence of powerful and centralized state. Two major ethnic and religious groups of Iraq are so that the evolution of the gaps in the state-building procedure has not changed in terms of the nature. Although, some of the social gaps has been enabled or disabled in different periods. The basic elements of instability, divergence and the fragility of Iraqi former regime's legitimacy and its successive crises can be traced to two factors: first, inhomogeneous ethnic and religious composition and artificial nature of the Iraqi political structure and second, policy's inefficiency and mismanagement of Iraqi leaders. The latter is mainly influenced by the ideological foundations of the existing regimes in Iraq and unique character and culture of Iraqi elites especially its leaders. Religious gap in Iraq is the most fundamental social gap. In brief, the root of ignoring the Shiite political rights and oppression must be followed in the behavior of the Ottoman Empire, the British colonial policy and republic states, especially in 1968, which was a turning point in institutionalizing Baath structure (Borna Boldaji, 2004: 15-17).

Shiite has been one of the fighting groups against governments throughout the history, typically from the First World War, with the arrival of British colonialism. The degree and intensity of their struggle has

differed, on one hand, because of repression by the state, and on the other hand, due to traditional conservative approach of some of Shiite clerics residing in Shiite power centers i.e. religious cities, seminaries, cleric's houses and mosques. Monopolizing power by Baath party in 1968 resulted in annihilation of Shiite institutions, restriction of historical authorities and rights of clerics, prohibition of many of Shiite activities and exile of Shiite families. Baath dictatorship efforts to remove Shiite from political decision-making process had been led to form a new distinct identity for Shiite indeed. Ethnic inequality and unresolved political and economic issues have had risk of clash historically. Regime desire to rule along the ethnic and religious lines has made these existing differences political.

Regarding Arabs and Kurds, it must be said that Iraqi Arabs, especially Sunnis, succeeded in imposing their authority over the restriction of exercise of their rights in the areas of culture, language and decentralization as well. This naturally increased the level of frustration among the Kurds. And has remained as one of the major sources of Kurd's discontent and instability and hence hostility and violence. There were about seven military confrontations of central state with the Kurds in the twentieth century. Baath regime measures to suppress Kurdish culture and language and their activities for assimilation or Arabization of Iraq has been more aggressive than former governments. The reason can be traced to Pan-Arabism ideology of Baath regime. Along with the suppression of Kurds, Baath regime claimed that Kurds and their history dates back to Assyrians and Babylonians and hence, there is not any difference between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs and the Kurds are part of the Arab nation (Hakim, 2002: 49-50).

A new chapter in the history of Iraq began with the US invasion to Iraq. It is one of the most crucial juncture in Iraq's history. The advent of US, although made the Iraqi people free from the tyrant Saddam, but led to a lot of disputes and conflicts among them. Lack of sovereign control over the political issues after Saddam topple, the presence of foreigners and some

terrorist groups in Iraq and neighboring countries, the presence of foreigners and some terrorist groups neighboring countries in Iraq led to a sweeping insecurity in Iraq and becloud the future of Iraqi political consolidation. The clashes between Sunnis, Shiite, and less than it between Arabs and Kurds are mostly seen in this insecurity. The reactions of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds toward all of the events about US invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi government, elections, constitution, condition of the Baath Party and Saddam and Fighting against ISIS were different and have been caused severe conflicts between ethnic and religious groups in Iraq.

To clarify the dimensions of the issue, we analysis the presumptions of disintegration of Iraq:

- Former Iraqi regime changed ethnic and religious boundaries in Iraq in many instances, to encroach the national identity of the people living in Iraq and for political and ideological interests and looking for stabilizing its authority by making consistent clashes among them. Therefore, first post-independence demands of Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis will be reclamation of displaced or lost areas. This will complicate the process of integration and cooperation among the newly independent states and will intensify the divergence of these countries. An obvious example is found in mixed populated areas such as Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Diyala etc., which are the dissention points among central government, and the Kurdistan Region. Determining the fate of Kirkuk is considered as one of the most complex issues in the future of Iraq after ISIS. The Kurds have been looking for annexation of this province to Kurdistan Region, calling it the Quds (Sanctum) of Kurdistan. Therefore, the Kurdish populated areas out of the Kurdistan region especially Kirkuk and their future status are very important and annexation of Kirkuk to the Region is one of the concerns of the Kurds before referendum. However, this annexation has so many opponents. The official hoisting of the flag of Kurdistan in Kirkuk province by the its provincial council, faced lots of opposition from the Iraqi central

government, the Turkmen of Iraq, Turkey and Iran. The Iraqi Parliament on April 2017 voted against the decision of Kirkuk Provincial Council to raise the flag of Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) alongside the Iraqi flag in the disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk. The issue comes at a time when KRG leader Massoud Barzani has made several remarks on holding a possible referendum on independence. Hence, Turkmen took to the street to demonstrate against the decision to raise the Kurdistan flag over official premises in Kirkuk; one day after the provincial council approved it. In addition, Turkey opposed flying the flag because it does not want to encourage any change in the composition of Kirkuk, which is also home to Turkmen despite the fact that Iraqi Kurds are close to Ankara (almasdarnews, 2017). Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi also said "...we regard raising any flag other than the Iraqi flag in Kirkuk, which is governed by the federal government based on the country's constitution, as a move at odds with the constitution and a source of tension," (tasnimnews, 2017).

It is obvious that any attempt to geographic expansion after the declaration of independence would result in border conflict between the two countries and costs a lot. Therefore, the Kurdistan Region tried to incorporate disputed areas into the Region as a geography expansion move after 2003 but the central government declared the conditions are not suitable yet; warning creation of political and security tensions in the country. Emergence of ISIS provides an opportunity to control the disputed areas by the Kurds, expanding their territory to the provinces of Nineveh, Diyala, Salahuddin and Kirkuk. Therefore, despite some difficulties, ISIS attacks in Iraq made Kurdistan's geopolitical position more expanded.

- Countries succeed in Iraq will be countries with a weak and unstable political system in the region and often involve internal tensions, ailing economy and indistinct procedure of culture. Lack of dominant power in the emerging political units, requirements and economic challenges, political



instability caused by the sudden change of government system, indeterminate borders and the establishment of authoritarian governments and minorities of different religions and ethnics in new countries will be some of arising problems in case of Iraqi decomposition.

- Lack of participatory culture would be another structural problem created by the breakup of Iraq. Since political participation requires the structural diversity and diversity of ideas and the relative autonomy of subsystems, redistribution of power aim to prevent the accumulation and centralization of power, mutual trust among the governors and nation and dilation in system. While none of these cases has not existed in Iraq and will not be created in the new units.

- Crisis of nationalities has been perennial problems of Iraq and still is a longstanding problem. In short, if breakup happens, ethnic issues in these areas are so complex that they cannot be resolved in the short term will continue to threaten the region's security and stability. In addition, as a further threat, they will incline to the co- ethnic and religious countries and will spill over their conflicts to these states. Iraqi security situation is such that it requires resolving internal problems along with the development of political and economic relationship with other countries. Decomposition of Iraq will also make this problem more acute. All of new formed states will adopt an independent method in their domestic and foreign policies. However, it will be difficult to get rid of the former positions due to their highly overlapping policies. Another problem is the lack of required organs for people's participation in decision and policymaking fields and weak distribution capabilities particularly that part of the capabilities that is related to the values and authority will be highly obvious.

- One of the best examples of the problems of these countries would be economic problems. The main reason is the long-term rule of the Baath regime in Iraq and outbreak of three great wars over the past three decades that have completely destroyed the economic infrastructure of Iraq. Mineral

and natural resources have not appropriate ground for processing in Iraq. Therefore, these new independent countries would be unable in applying their resources and capabilities. Since Iraq has faced many economic failures and has not possessed its foreign financial resources during the last years, the newly established states will inevitably follow barter trade. Production quality would be very low and unemployment would be the main problem in these countries. From the economic point of view, Iraqi Kurds in the past decade have stressed the need for control over the oil resources of Kirkuk as a guarantee of their economic independence. Discovering new oil fields, they are facing new conditions. Starting the discovery of rich oil and gas resources of Kurdistan dates back to 2006 as the regional government passed its own oil and gas law. Since then, the KRG has signed about 57 contracts in finding, extracting and transporting oil and gas with several international companies. According to expert estimates, the crude oil reserves in Kurdistan Region are over 40 billion barrels, which constitute about 40 percent of Iraq's oil reserves. The Region has now the production capacity of 250 thousand barrels of oil per day and is expected to produce 2 million barrels per day by 2019, In addition to oil and gas, Kurdistan Region enjoys some other mineral resources such as iron ore, chromium, copper, bauxite, gold, sulfur, steel and cement. In terms of rivers, water sources and transit passage, the Region also is in a suitable position to benefit (Asadi, 2016 a). The Kurdistan Region, in terms of resources and economic context, is in an overall good condition that can facilitate the Kurds' move towards independence. However, at least in the short and medium terms, the Region faces significant challenges and economic fluctuations that will lead it to face serious constraints. The Kurdistan Region, during the years before the rise of ISIS, was able to upgrade significantly its economic indicators in the region. By attracting foreign capital, it has been stated in 2013 that the extent of investment in the region has reached \$ 22 billion and annual revenues of \$ 257 per capita level

of a decade ago has risen to five thousand dollars. However, rise of insecurity, due to ISIS emersion, caused a serious decline in investment and economic deterioration climate so that KRG officials are now reporting new waves of migration due to poor economic conditions and stop of more than 2 thousand economic development projects in the Region. Another important issue is economic disputes with Baghdad and KRG's budget cuts along with oil price reduction, leading to employees and military-security forces' salary cut off which may result in public protests and civil uprisings. On this basis we can say that Iraqi Kurdistan despite having good economic resources in the current situation, is facing major economic challenges which slow down its move towards independence at least in medium term. However, Iraqi Sunnis are economically facing the worst and hardest conditions as they are settled mostly in desert areas lacking economic resources such as oil. This economic dependence on Baghdad is a fundamental barrier to any tendency towards disintegration of Iraq (Asadi, 2016 a).

- States in the region fear that coups and revolutions happen in the new countries after the breakup of Iraq spill over into their countries. Also, political instability, lack of independent governance experience, being on the basic levels of nation-building process, the former and current dictators managements of these communities, the use of democracy and elections terms and concepts for strengthening personal and group situations and extreme authoritarianism with restrictions on freedom of thought and view, have led to more vulnerability of them. As far as we can tell increasingly widespread economic poverty, and class gaps and financial corruption of government officials, non-rotation of political elites and consequently lack of legitimacy and acceptance by the people has alerted some local authorities that the revolutions and coups will probably spread to their countries if happen in the region. It could be said that the Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites' internal differences can be considered as a crises ground for the next

Iraqi governments.

- The identity conflicts will be other problems that grip the states establish after disintegration of Iraq. Since the new states will declare their independency around racial - ethnic and religious basis, each of these units consist of predominant tribe and race but ethnic, racial or religious minorities with different religions and languages. Thus, inhomogeneous culture and political differentiations of tribes cause tension and conflict in the vulnerable parts of region. Another issue is emerging new minorities in the next states. For example, assuming Iraqi Kurdistan region independence, it will face the rise of many new minorities. However, from the cultural and social perspective it could be said that Iraqi Kurds have a high level of cultural and social integration and this issue can be considered as the most important and the most favorable context to pave the way towards an independent Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurds are ethnically homogeneous and coherent and they are not religiously face serious fragmentation as a barrier to their integration. Therefore, this privilege causes the formation of a single, unified identity that makes them capable to separation from Iraq and establishes an independent state. Mentally and intellectually, Iraqi Kurds and especially their new generations do not consider themselves as a part of Iraq, defining a completely independent identity for them. Therefore, after the loss of social-cultural and identity connections with Iraqi Arabs, the socio-cultural contexts will be created to move towards separation and independence of Kurdistan from Iraq.

### **Iraqi Groups' Positions on Breakdown**

#### **Kurds**

Iraq had been geopolitical constraints since the establishment and independency from the Ottoman Empire. This has always created problems for Iraq. Kurds are well aware of these geopolitical constraints of Iraq. In addition, they know that Iraqi geopolitical problems will spread even deeper to the newly established state in case of Iraqi breakup. They are well aware

that with declaring independency, they will face problems with its neighboring countries particularly Turkey and Iran and most importantly, the Sunni Arab country established after disintegration of Iraq and the probability that the neighbors block oil exports out of the region is much. In the case of the Kurdish uprising in neighboring countries, the neighboring states consider the newly established Kurdish country as the main factor of the riots and they will confront it.

Certainly, Current situation of the Kurds in Iraq is the result of positive behavior with US over the last 27 years. Saving the Kurds from Saddam, US has provided the actual field to use them against Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Kirkuk release had historical, economic, cultural and military importance for Kurds. They knew that only by taking over the city of Kirkuk they could claim autonomy and even independence to create an economic balance between Kurds and Shiites. However, after the discovery of oil in many other parts of Kurdistan, Kirkuk does not have the past economic importance for Kurds but the control over it is essential as part of the disputed areas. This was because Shia subjugated Iraqi southern oil-rich regions with the minimum conflicts. The fact is that the Kurds think about independence and integrity of Iraq less than enough. Moreover, their attention to Iraqi issues is due to fear of interference in the region and United States demand. With this basis, the Kurds believe in US as the most important ally against regional governments and United States is well aware of the Kurds need.

Certainly, Barzani seeks independence especially as a personal wish. The democratic party is seeking the realization of Kurdish independence as a tribal, ethnic and popular demand within the framework of its ongoing campaign, believing in Massoud Barzani as a man who bears the task of realizing Kurdish goals along the family's past leaders in the current situation. Accordingly, independence is assumed as a historical and strategic purpose for Barzani family especially the very Massoud Barzani. On this

basis, despite the importance and priority of the Kurdish state ideas for all Kurds, some say, with emphasis on Barzani efforts, that Kurdish independence has declined from a popular-ethnic goal to a family, party and even a personal demand. Massoud Barzani is trying to take the advantage of the historical and ethnic demands of the Kurds on one hand and the new conditions on the other hand, to make himself a historical figure for the Kurds; establishing a great achievement in his lifetime. The first and most important goal of the Barzani leading democratic party of discussing Kurds independence is to realize Kurdish historical demand to establish a Kurdish state; turning Barzani to a historical figure for the Kurds. The second goal, taking advantage of the sense of identity and Kurdish separatist tendencies, is to exclusively dominate the political arena and stabilize Barzani's leadership among the Iraqi and possibly the Middle East Kurds which secure a great range of long-term, political, economic and security benefits for their democratic party. Another motivation of the party to stress independence and secession referendum is to create an atmosphere of psychological pressure on Baghdad and other international actors in order to earn privileges and extended resources which are important for their short-term interests and will pave the way towards separation and real independence in long-term (Asadi, 2016 b: 13-14).

Conducted surveys on Kurds' conditions show that despite the availability of some platforms and structures to move towards independence from Iraq, there are still serious obstacles that make it difficult. Despite psychological and propaganda operations on declaring independence, especially Massoud Barzani's repeated insistence on holding a referendum, these obstacles have caused Kurds autonomy to be a constantly delayed goal. The Kurds are trying to change thoughts and gradually reduce barriers of independence by repeatedly insisting on independence; showing the availability of its grounds. But despite the relative success of Kurds in regional and international psychological operations on independence,

internal disputes among Kurdish currents that may even lead to the formation of two separate Kurdish regions including Irbil and Sulaymaniyah as one region, non-resolution of the disputed areas between Baghdad and Irbil and its challenges , and finally the lack of serious regional and international support for Kurdish independence and separation from Iraq are the three major factors make Kurdish independence very difficult and even impossible in the years ahead. As a result, it could be said that the Kurds do not want independence at high prices.

Nevertheless, Iraqi Kurds have finally set a date for their long-discussed referendum on independence from the rest of Iraq, with the Kurdistan Regional Government calling for a vote on Sept 25, 2017. what was concerning was for Iraqi Government that the Kurds intend to have the referendum extend to Kirkuk, Makhmour, Shingal, and Khanaqin — all of which are disputed under the constitution (Johnson and Tamkin, 2017). As Kurdish authorities have already played the independence referendum card several times at the wrong times and places, it no longer has much effectiveness in exciting domestic solidarity. It does, however, save the authorities from criminal prosecution. These factors have created immense disappointment and frustration among the Kurdish people even in light of celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the uprising that overthrew the Ba'athist regime. The current geopolitics of Kurdistan and regional countries' negative stances toward an independent Kurdish state are additional strikes against the independence project (Sherko, 2017).

Although the Change Movement (Gorran) and Kurdistan Islamic Group parties said they support independence, they objected to the timing and organization of the referendum. In Kirkuk, the local ethnic Arab and Turkmen communities called for a boycott (BBC, 25 September 2017), But the decision was finally taken to hold it on September 25 and more than 90 percent voted for secession, escalated long-running tensions between the Iraqi Kurdish region and the central government over the sharing of oil

wealth and the fate of disputed territories such as Kirkuk (Aljazeera, 13 October 2017). However, Oppositions to the referendum was predictable; Major international actors, United States, Russia, Britain, and regional powers, Turkey and Iran, opposed the vote (Dalay, 2017).

Likewise, the KRG has miscalculated the international and regional support for independence. It committed many mistakes during the process of holding the referendum. To the disappointment of the Kurds, support for the Iraqi territorial integrity and status quo was more pervasive than they anticipated. Moreover, the fragmented nature of political landscape on the independence referendum in Kurdistan in which Islamist Komal and opposition Gorran parties declared that they will boycott the referendum (a position that both of them reversed only hours before the referendum) boded ill for the Kurdish cause. In a similar vein, the division within the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) archrival and long-time governing partner, further aggravated the cause of independence referendum. Combined effects of these factors led the independence referendum to be solely seen through partisan, KDP, if not personal, Masoud Barzani, lenses by many instead of the national one. This in return has partially reduced the international acceptability of the referendum. Furthermore, the prevailing image of being valiant fighters in the fight against the ISIS, adopting the language of human rights, self-determination, and democratic popular demands weren't powerful enough for the Kurds to overcome the regional and international actors' resistant which were driven partly by the concern about the geopolitical consequences of this move and partly by the default preference for the current status quo. The premises of proponent of Kurdish independence referendum and of opponent of it is different. A right-based language advanced by the Kurds pitted against geopolitically reasoned rejection by the opponents of the referendum. Barzani was perplexed when he said that he wished he knew since when Kurdistan's neighbors have become so



interested in the unity of Iraq. Nonetheless, it appeared that there are many regional and international defenders of territorial integrity of Iraq (Dalay, 2017). Finally, under severe pressure, The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) had to express to freeze the results of a recent referendum to secede from Iraq.

### **Shiites**

Both Sunni and Shia sects have a common goal in the territorial integrity and solidarity of country since the establishment of modern Iraq by Britain in 1921. Preservation of Iraqi territorial integrity and integration are a critical issue for The Sunni minority, who make up 17 percent of Iraqi population. Nevertheless, for Iraqi majority Shiites, who make up 60 percent of the population, maintaining the integrity of Iraq, is the question of profit and loss. In case of the collapse and disintegration of Iraq, Shiite will lose Baghdad accepting the fact that they constitute half of the population of the city. They will lose Kazemein and Samara holy shrines and substantial revenue of oil fields of northern Iraq. Finally, the Shiites have to overlook the dream of owning a big success state that hold since their defeat in the 1920 Revolution (Nakash, 2003: 68-70).

Shiites have gotten release of past miserable situation with the fall of Saddam and have found a light of hope in their political life. They have now become the dominant power in the Iraqi political scene and considering being at the majority; they will be the most important group and become the main actor in the political scene in Iraqi future. Due to high position of the Shiites in terms of population and power structure, Shiite political and religious leaders have always opposed any divergence and secessionist tendencies in the country, showing obviously their protest against attitudes and actions aimed at undermining the integrity of Iraq. The Shiite religious authority and political leaders' protests against some issues like foreign plans to divide Iraq such as Biden plan, creating new Sunni or Shiite regions, military aid to Kurdish and Sunni groups outside the control of

Baghdad, creation of diverge encouraging armed forces like National Guard (Haras Alwatani) are among their most important approaches in this regards.

Despite all mentioned attitudes, the reality of the impact of increasing security-political concerns and poor economic condition of the country in the last decade have changed the mentality of some Iraqi Shiites about Iraq's integrity. This means that continuous insecurity and political instability plus poor economic conditions will reinforce the notion among some Iraqi Shiites to establish an independent Shiite region or country with vast economic resources, getting rid of united Iraq troubles and achieving some level of stability, security and economic prosperity. The recent public protest in central and southern Iraq intensifies the matter. In addition, the religious authority's warnings about the danger of breaking up Iraq are significant in this regard.

The Iraqi tribes are determinant factor in the political events like parliamentary and presidential elections if leaders could be successful in their relationship and get their satisfaction. If so, they can gain the votes, but many things will change if the tribes turn against them. Iraqi Shiite community, lives in any way, constitute a major part of Iraq history because they comprise 65 percent of the population. In other words, we can say that the Iraq is more important than the religion for Iraqi Shiite and they like Iraq more than Shiite faith and this lead to give priority to Iraq in their choice between Shia and Iraq. This was seen clearly in the war between Iraq and Iran. The importance of this point is that they prefer to live in a unified and integrated Iraq than a mere Shiite community. They do not like to lose an important part of a land, which belongs to them from several years ago because of its non-Shiite inhabitants. They hope on Iraq future and they know that they will achieve important political positions if the democratic process in Iraq continues and will assume political control of Iraq. The wise prefer to rule on a bigger land with more mineral and human resources than a small land with less human and natural resources. Shiites realize that they

will lose the Baghdad and oil wells of the Kurdish areas in case of Iraq breakup. Therefore, they are against decomposition and want to continue to run it and have these parts on hand to share the oil revenues.

As we are witnessing, The Shiite Arab-led Iraqi government has taken a tough stance on the Kurdish referendum. It has rejected an offer by the Kurdish government to discuss independence. It has demanded that it cancel the result of the Sept. 25 referendum or face continued sanctions, international isolation and possible military intervention. In this regard, the Iraqi government will not hold talks with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) about the results of "unconstitutional" referendum on independence, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said: "We are not ready to discuss or have a dialogue about the results of the referendum because it is unconstitutional" (Aljazeera, 26 September 2017). Iraq's prime minister insisted that the Kurdish independence referendum be declared void, an apparent rejection of the Kurdistan region's offer to "freeze" its independence push as part of efforts to resolve the crisis through talks. "We won't accept anything but its cancellation and the respect of the Constitution," Haider al-Abadi said (Reuters, 26 October 2017).

### **Sunnis (Arabs)**

Sunnis who have lost their more than 80 years' authority and rule over Iraq are still optimistic about the future. They live in uncultivated lands without any natural resources and if Iraq disintegrates, they will have no source of income. They consider themselves as rulers of Iraq and do not want to lose even an inch of it. They disagree with federalism in let alone Iraq disintegration. None of Shiite and Sunni leaders has announced their willing to Iraqi breakup since the occupation of Iraq. They have stated in all of their interviews and speeches that want Iraq to remain unified. For example, Ayatollah Sistani was the first who posed election issue in Iraq seriously. The elections in Iraq were hold after his insistence and Shia follow up. Subsequently, Iraqi constitution was written and approved by the people.

Ayatollah Sistani said on election on January 30 that the vote of each Iraqi is more valuable than gold (Wong, 2005).

Contrary to Iraqi Kurds' high tendency to independence, the Sunnis of Iraq have a completely different approach on this issue, which has been associated with the changes. The Sunni variable impacts on the division of Iraq is influenced by various geopolitical, political, security, economic and socio-cultural developments; each is worthy of study even briefly. From the geopolitical perspective, Iraqi Sunnis are settling mainly in the western and central parts of the country in provinces including Al Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin and Diyala. In addition, parts of them are living in Baghdad. In terms of geopolitics, Iraqi Sunnis have common areas, which are outstanding; in Baghdad and Diyala with Shiites, in Nineveh and Kirkuk with Kurds. These common areas will cause socio-political challenges in the Sunnis' move toward any independence. The other important issues are barriers to access to the sea. However, due to their religious sequel in the neighboring countries such as Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia the dilemma is partially resolved.

Economically Iraqi Sunnis are facing the worst and harshest conditions for independence, living in areas, which lack economic resources like oil. Therefore, their serious dependency to Baghdad is the main obstacle in seeking independence. Culturally and socially speaking, the Iraqi Sunnis' tendency towards independence is not serious, as they have seen themselves as the dominant ethnic-religious group in the country and cannot imagine and independent identity apart from Iraq. However, their political-security conditions and approaches have caused some behavior by the Sunnis over the past decade which has had positive effects on the disintegration of Iraq and negative impact on maintaining the integrity of the country (Asadi, 2016 a; Asadi, 2017: 15-17).

At the beginning of the post-Saddam period, the Sunni groups of Iraq strongly opposed federalism but today are joining the defenders and

demanders of establishing a Sunni region independent from Baghdad. In the current situation, regardless of developments emerged, there are three main political-social Sunni mainstreams in Iraq; each with its own approaches towards unity or division of Iraq. The first stream includes those participating groups in political process and power structure of Iraq, which emphasize on maintaining unity and stressing some autonomous military-political independence from Baghdad at the same time. These groups, according to the experience of Kurdistan, consider the use of Baghdad financial resources along with political and security autonomy as an optimal pattern. The second stream is the Baath-secular one outside the government, which seeks the collapse of the political system in order to return to power again in a united Iraq. The third includes extremist, Salafi and pro-Islamic Caliphate groups reflected mainly in ISIS. This group not only seeks divided Iraq but it sees the country as part of the great Islamic Caliphate in the region. Despite not believing in dividing Iraq in opinion, the Sunni political-security currents' behavior has led to weakness of central authority and reduction in country's integrity in action.

### **Stances of United States and Iraq' Neighbouring Countries against Iraq Decomposition**

#### **United State**

United States Initiative for the Middle East is one of the most important priorities of US strategy. "The doctrine of regime change" to remove, "states challenging the hegemony of the United States" has been at the center of Washington's new strategy of national security After September 11 and preparing the ground for materializing the neoconservative strategists. Neo-conservative decision-makers of George W. Bush administration with a focus on "regime change strategy Challenger" in two stages first, "deletion of challenger states" and then the "creation of an alternative model state", successfully carried out the first stage with a large-scale military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the creation of an alternative state as a

“model state” is still a challenge and so far no success (see: Sariolghalam, 2003: 3-9).

In addition, US interests have a long deal with the Middle East due to oil and Israel. Long-term interests have convinced US to encounter with the radical Islam i.e. the Islam that acting contrary to US interests. In other words, the main issue for US in Iraq is to maintain the integrity of Iraq and institutionalizing democratic processes by bringing on the moderate government, elected by the different ethnic groups and elites and have not conflict with the US strategy (Institute of Contemporary Abrar, 2004).

Therefore, Integrity of Iraq is a success for United States; it can be well observed in the words of one of Iraq’s pro-disintegration Peter Galbraith; he states: *“American policy makers are reflexively committed to the unity of Iraq, as they were to the unity of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The conventional response to discussions of Iraq's breakup is to say it would be destabilizing. This is a misreading of Iraq’s modern history. It is the holding of Iraq together by force that has been destabilizing. This has led to bog armies, repressive governments, squandered oil revenues, genocide at home, and aggression abroad. Today, America’s failed effort to build a unified and democratic Iraq has spawned a ferocious insurgency and a Shiite theocracy”* (Galbraith, 2007: 206).

From US perspective, Iran is more dangerous than Iraq; therefore, they simply refuse to accept the influence of Iran in Iraq. Breaking up Iraq for Iran ahead of all the problems that brings with, will pave the way to Iranian influence in disintegrated Iraq. Iran will become a regional unrivaled power and US would not like this thread (Vaeidi, 2003: 2). However, Former president Obama opted for a policy of withdrawal and pursued his strategy accordingly, despite the emergence of ISIL and its extension of control over large portions of Iraqi territory. In order to differentiate itself from the Bush administration, Obama ordered U.S. troops to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011. The order came into effect at the end of 2011, leaving only

very few U.S. military advisors in Iraq. The emergence of ISIL and its control of one-third of Iraqi territory by 2014 forced the Obama administration to send more military-advisors and some special forces to the country to aid it in its fight against ISIL. Although this military presence was very unpopular among segments of American society, there was also some criticism directed at the Obama administration for the ill-planned and executed policy of withdrawal without leaving behind a stable structure to secure the successes of post-Saddam Iraq (Washington Post, 11.08.2015).

Finally, America, with Obama's decision in 2011, was forced to leave Iraq without specifying the purposes for which it invaded Iraq. In the Obama administration, there were those who pursued dividing Iraq like Joe Biden but the new administration's approach is not seeking the collapse of states and it supports Iraqi unity to improve the country's economy. Trump has announced that America will end the policies of regime change in other countries which date back to several decades ago causing the collapse of many governments. In this regard, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, during a meeting with Massoud Barzani on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Friday, expressed his country's support for a "unified, federal and democratic Iraq." (Dawn, 2017). As a result, US's new concern is not Iraq division. On the contrary, it opposes the division of the country largely due to the instability and crisis in the region. For example, The United States has expressed concerns that a recently announced referendum on separating the Kurdistan region from Iraq could distract from the battle against the Islamic State group; and State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert state: "The United States supports a unified, federal, stable and democratic Iraq," (Rudaw, 2017).

As noted, America did not support Kurdish referendum on independence, declaring it as illegitimate. "The United States does not recognize the unilateral referendum," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in Washington's first substantive statement on the vote; "The vote and the

results lack legitimacy,” Tillerson said, “and we continue to support a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq.” He urged both sides to reject the use of force and engage in dialogue, and to remain focused on the fight against the Islamic State, which he said was “not over” (Salim, DeYoung and El-Ghobashy, 2017).

### **Iran**

Iran has been committed to help the Iraqi people in order to achieve political stability and security through the political process after the fall of Saddam, by supporting the government council and succeeding governments and encouraging different groups of Iraqis to participate in the elections and referendum. Like the past events, Iran called for the participation of all Iraqis, including any tribe or ethnic group (Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minorities) in the recent elections, which is at utmost importance, because of its permanency on political process in Iraq. The broad participation of all groups of the Iraqi people has created national consensus to adopt the inclusive government and ensuring more stability and security in the next phase of the country's political life. Therefore, above stance of Iran is in line with its main attitude of foreign policy toward Iraq, which is to help maintaining security and stability based on good neighborliness.

Iran's stance towards Iraq decomposition or integration can be analyzed through its perceptions of the future independent Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni and radical governments after Iraq breakup. Iran will be faced with problems with Kurdish government to establish in northern Iraq, as same as the Turkey and Syria. However, its problem with the Sunni and Shiite government of Iraq is different in nature. Shiites are the majority of Iran population. However, has a heterogeneous ethnic composition. Azeri, Persian, Kurd, Baluch, Arab, and ... are ethnicity that live in Iran. Iran structure is more complex than Iraq in terms of ethnic composition. However, all ethnicities coexist peacefully due to the policies of the Islamic



Republic of Iran and the kingdom government in the past. In terms of governance type, the Iranian system is based on Supreme Leadership (Valie Faqih) system, which makes Iran separate from all Muslims even Shiites. Formation of an independent Kurdish and Shiite government in Iran borders will create probable problems for peaceful ethnic co-existence in Iran and likely newly established Shiite state in Iraq will challenge the Supreme Leadership system.

The breakup of Iraq is not totally against Iran indeed. Iraq breakdown has both benefits and disadvantages for Iran. Iran will get rid of one of its regional enemies in recent decades forever, by breakdown of Iraq. This point was not missed that no foreign policy leader as Saddam Hussein has suffered the Iranian people at least in the last two decades. However, this will happen if a pro-Iranian Shiite government in Iraq takes power and there is no need to breakup in Iraq. Iran has gotten all these benefits while Iraqi continues to be integrated and still is not disintegrated. Shia and the Kurdish political allies of Iran are in Iraq's new government structure and are stronger than ever. Iran sees in Iraq political arena that Shia community in an Arab country has found an international recognized and legitimate position for the first time and Iran has come out of isolation and loneliness.

In addition to the problems that come from independent government of Iraqi Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni autonomous governments may also create difficulties for Iran. In addition to the Shiites, Sunnis also live in Iran and the emergence of a radical Sunni state could be causing the conflicts between the Sunnis and the central government of Iran. As already mentioned, Iran has many different ethnic groups such as Azeri, Turkmen, Arab, Kurd and Persian and ... and experience has shown that whenever there is the slightest instability in the Iran and region, Iranian ethnics riots against the central government's policies. Examples of this are creation of the Mahabad Republic and the Rise of Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani and declaring independence from Iran. Moreover, some turmoil happened in

Kurds and Arabs regions after the Islamic Revolution. In addition, these ethnicities will try to create chaos with the slightest excuse. However, these are the western's views, and as it seen, Iranian people live in peace and the created problems between them are much less than the problems in other countries. The point is that, if an independent Kurdish and Sunni government is to create in Iranian western border, it will effect on Iranian Kurds and Sunnis and will create numerous challenges among them and the Iranian government. for example, the formation of ISIS in neighboring Iran had been already high costs, including ISIS Attacks (June 7, 2017) Iran's Parliament and Imam Khomeini Tomb that Martyred at least 17 people and wounded more than 40.

Finally, Iran's position on Kurdish referendum and Iraq's disintegration is very clear. Iran has described the independence referendum as "untimely and wrong", and reiterated its support for Iraq's territorial integrity and the "democratic process" (McKernan, 2017). Now Iran is considering drastic measures to stop the process. As Tehran increases diplomatic pressure on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), military measures could also be on the table, whether in the short or long term, more in response to the vote, Iran sealed its border and closed off its airspace to all flights to and from the region at Baghdad's request. Iran's military also began holding exercises in the Oshnavieh border region, an annual event held to mark the start of the 1989-1988 war with Iraq. Iranian troops and border units frequently clash with Kurdish militants (Telesur, 2017).

### **Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries**

Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states are monitoring developments in Iraq and they closely follow current affairs. Fear of formation of a Shiite crescent leading by Iran in the region is very disturbing for Sunni Arab elites. They concern three aspects: the first is the ideological nature. Second, is based on the mobilization of the Shia masses in the Arab world and their loyalty to Iran. Third, is based on opportunistic and expanding exploitation

of Arab democratic potentials by Iran for increasing its role in the Arab world. Indeed, fears of Arabs are about Arab attitudes and inclination of communities toward Iran rather than Shiite crescent formation. Iraqi breakdown and the establishment of the first Shiite state in an Arabic country has raised concerns for the Sunni elites that Shiites gradually demanding a greater role in their countries' political and economic institutions. It could lead to putting pressure on governmental systems and finally withdrawn of Sunni ruling elites of the states (Barzegar, 2008: 110-111).

There is a tension between Riyadh and Baghdad due to Iran influence's increase in Iraq after 2003, although Iraqi Shiite political factions do not uniformly support Iran's influence. On the other hand, Iraqi politicians and officials have routinely accused the Kingdom of supporting extremists in the country. However, as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) grew and became a key to punish back extremist groups, Al Abadi supported attempts to improve relations with Riyadh.

In summary, the Arabic countries and their heads, Saudi Arabia, concerned about the breakdown of Iraq, and therefore, sometimes has tried to help to establish peace and holding elections in Iraq. Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries called for a Sunni government in Iraq because they are afraid of the Shiites in Iraq. That is why they never sought to disintegration of Iraq. They will face to a Shiite country around their borders if breakdown of Iraqi happens. This would not be pleasant for Sunnis especially Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, they resort to any tool, including terror and killing innocent people, in order to gain a greater share in government for Sunnis (Rastgoo, 2007: 198-200). Nevertheless, on 01 January 2016 Saudi Arabia reopened its embassy in Baghdad Saudi Arabia had cut off diplomatic ties and closed its Baghdad embassy in 1990 after the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait; and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir made a historic visit to Baghdad 25 February 2017, marking

the highest level visit by a Saudi official to Iraq since 1990 (Global security, 2017).

Persian Gulf Arab countries took a cautious stand against the referendum. There was strong support in the Saudi and Emirati traditional and social media for the vote, but both governments formally expressed concerns about Iraq's territorial integrity and the need for stability. Bahrain also advised Kurdish leaders not to rush into an independence vote that might destabilize Iraq. Kuwait was even more forthright in emphasizing that its primary interest was in the continued national unity and independence of Iraq. Oman did not take a public position. Qatar took the strongest [Persian] Gulf Arab position in opposition to the Kurdish vote, expressing "deep concern" that the referendum could "pose a threat to the unity of Iraq and the security and stability of the region" (Ibish, 2017).

### **Turkey**

Governing of the Shiite or Sunni or a combination of them is not important for Turkey, the Iraqi northern neighbor, but Ankara is seeking its own interests. But it is better that the future states of Iraq be secular state. As per Ankara views, a government in Iraq should be at work that can be so strong that while dominating the country, could maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq and reduce the concern for the probable separation of Kurds in northern Iraq.

Turkey and Iraq have had sine relations with many up and downs during the last recent years which climbed towards tensions in past few years. These tensions have continued even in the era of prime minister al-Abadi, who has tried to behave more interactional in comparison to al-Maleki period. The tension is characterized by Turkey's military presence in northern Iraq, which Baghdad considers a violation of its sovereignty. Iraq criticized this presence and complained to the UN Security Council. Although Turkish officials have said in recent months that they do not want a permanent presence in Bashiqa and northern Iraq totally, conducting

counter terrorist attacks there, but there is no perspective to leave the areas and uncertainties in this regard has overshadowed relations between the two countries. At this time one of the most pressing concerns of Turkey state in Iraq is the insistence of Kurdish of southeast Turkey for autonomy and the formation of Great Kurdistan including the Kurdish areas of Iran, Syria, Turkey and Iraq that they have published its flag and map of their ideal geographical regions. Turkey is concerned about the possible announcement of independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq due to three reasons:

- This realization of this issue may stimulate and encourage other nations to create independent states in Turkey and the region, bearing in mind that the area is formed of the mosaic of ethnic and religious groups that it will provide a ground for their separation.

- 2.5 million Turkmen live in northern Iraq, which most of them have lived in the area since a long time (Kibaroglu, 2005: 318) is another concern of Turkey. Establishment of a Kurdish independent state will be encouraged the Turkmen to do the same. This resulted in more fighting to protect the rights of Turkmen due to close relationship of Turkey state and Turkmen. In case of Independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, one of Turkey's main objectives will be an autonomous government for Turkmen residents in Kirkuk that will not be accepted by Kurds.

From a historical point of view, part of northern Iraq is considered as territory of the province of Mosul Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. This region was separated from Turkey and joined Iraq following the World War I and the Interventions of League of Nations and the British government. Although the new Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk wanted to join the all regions of the Ottoman Empire to new Turkey, but with the biased intervention of the League of Nations, the Turkish government was forced to accept an agreement in 1925 and agreed to separation of the region. If any of the other ethnic groups in Iraq are thought to secede from the country, maybe it strengthens this issue that Turks claim again the sovereignty over

these parts of Iraq in order to fulfill the historical injustice. Totally, Turkey—a key ally of America in the region, does not accept disintegration of Iraq.

It was clear that Turkey will react to independence referendum s KRG; so, Turkey warned that an “irresponsible” decision by Iraq’s autonomous Kurdish region to hold an independence referendum would be a “grave mistake” (Rudaw, 2017). Turkey’s President, Tayyip Erdogan, said Iraqi Kurdish authorities would pay the price for an independence referendum that was widely opposed by foreign powers. Turkey has repeatedly threatened to impose economic sanctions, effectively cutting their main access to international markets, and has held joint military exercises with Iraqi troops. However, after Erdogan said that Iraqi Kurds would go hungry if Ankara halted the cross-border flow of trucks and oil, it has said that any measures it took would not target civilians and instead focus on those who organized the referendum (Independent, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Evaluation of three Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite variables affects on division or integrity of Iraq indicates that the Kurdish one has the most positive and intensifying effects on Iraq’s decomposition. However, analyzing each variable’s certain criterion shows realities that are more complex. While the Kurds have a great socio-cultural and economic potential for moving towards separation, they face challenges such as geopolitical conflicts, current economic crisis, fragility and vulnerability of military-security situation and lack of political cohesion in short and medium term, which are among serious obstacles in their move towards independence. Moreover, the lack of regional and international agreements, as the main challenge that may last in long term, cannot be ignored.

From various aspects of geopolitical, economic, socio-cultural and security-political perspectives, the Iraqi Sunnis show no serious tendency and ability towards disintegration of Iraq. However, their recent approach and actions to obtain some form of autonomy apart from Baghdad even in

united Iraq structure have raised behaviors that undermine the unity of the country and help disintegration process.

Iraqi Shiites, according to their population majority, central position in the power structure and disintegration potential costs, make the most efforts to preserve the integrity of the country; evaluating united Iraq to their benefit. However, the continuous expanded, economic and security costs have made coexistence with other Iraqi groups doubtful for some of them in the united Iraq; gradually reinforcing the idea of achieving a better life, in form of an independent Shiite state separated from Iraq, for some Shiite factions. Geopolitical and economic capacities of Shiite areas along with the recent two years' costly developments have also helps the idea of course.

External neighboring factors, such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are important. Ethno-religious minorities of these countries depend upon a solution to Iraqi problems for their own internal security. On the one hand, these three neighboring countries are concerned that their minorities will seek to secure their autonomy or higher stakes in the political game, just as their Iraqi counterparts have. On the other hand, each of these countries supports one actor in the Iraqi conflict or another according to its own interests. Turkey supports the prevention of the autonomy of the Kurds, Iran backs the Shiite government and Saudi Arabia prefers the Sunnis 'return to power.

Totally, as found in this study, it could be concluded that the Iraq breakup neither is a matter of Iraq itself nor is an affair that could easily happen. There is a need for a full-scale civil war to disintegrate the country, which will be extended to all of the neighboring countries. Secondly, breakup of Iraq will have main consequences on neighbors of Iraq and the United States of America as well as European countries. It should be noted, however, that Iraqi federation and autonomy should not be assumed as decomposition. Benefits and interests of United States and neighboring countries are the main factors to prevent breakup of Iraq. In the case of Iraqi

neighbors, Iraqi refugee flood, spread of terrorism and formation of the radical movements and separatist activities in neighboring countries, are among the factors that compel them to do their best to hold a unified Iraq. In addition, jeopardized oil supplies in the region plus all the issues that were discussed in detail, would force United States to do so.

In the case of September 25 referendum we saw that it was faced disagreement on three national, regional and international levels. Only Israel supported the independence of Kurdistan, which was also to Kurds' detriment, because of its poor record in the viewpoint of the countries of the region. Subsequently the Iraqi government sent troops to the Kirkuk region and removed Kirkuk and many disputed areas from the Kurdistan region's Sovereignty. As a result, the differences between the Kurdish groups appeared and even accused each other of treason. Eventually the Kurdish Region was forced to propose suspension of the referendum on independence to begin talks, but the Iraqi government rejected the proposal and called for a cancellation of its outcome as a prerequisite for talks.



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