Iraq and Iranian - American Interactions

Aliakbar Asadi*

Abstract

Iran–U.S. relations have been characterized by ideological inconsistencies as well as strategic competitions during the past decades. At times, their competition has been intensified particularly in the Middle East and placed the two countries at the verge of military confrontation. That said, observing the two countries' relations with Iraq is indicative of a different pattern. Unlike other areas, in Iraq, Iran and the United States have taken distance form grand strategic competition and inclined towards some kind of indirect cooperation. In contrast to the two major viewpoints about Iran–U.S. relations in Iraq which tend to describe them as either based on strategic cooperation or all-out confrontation, that the reality falls in between these two extreme views. What best describes the reality is that despite persistence of ideological inconsistencies and strategic conflicts in the Middle East, the geopolitical constraints in Iraq and emergence of joint threats in this country have driven Iran and the United States towards indirect cooperation. In other words, emerging challenges and threats in Iraq have introduced some grounds for cooperation between Iran and the United States.

Keywords: Iran, the United States, Strategic Competition, Cooperation, Geopolitics.

* Research Fellow at Center for Strategic Research, asadi@csr.ir
(Recievd 8 September 2014 Accepted 4 January 2015)

Introduction

In the years since the Iranian revolution, conflict and cooperation has been the dominant feature of Iran–U.S. relations. The conflict has been very evident in the Middle East in a way that its escalation into military confrontation has been a constant threat to both sides. Apart from roots of conflict and competition between the two countries as well as simultaneous role-playing of ideological–ideational and strategic factors, the possibility for change in relations or formation of certain levels of cooperation have been among very important questions for the students who are working on Iran–U.S. relations. Iraq developments after 2003 have created different conditions in the relations between the two countries which is noteworthy for further study. These developments have driven the two countries towards a different pattern of relations which is unprecedented during the past decades. Accordingly, despite serious competitions between the two countries in Iraq, some kind of cooperation is also observable. The United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been two major actors in Iraq in the aftermath of Saddam regime's collapse. The political and security trends in Iraq and the Iraqi policies have been impacted by the aims and policies of Iran and the U.S.

With sending troops to Iraq and its occupation in 2003, the United States commenced a new political trend in Iraq. It is clear, however, that the U.S. goals in Iraq were not confined to its internal affairs and the U.S. leaders were considering regime change in Iraq as the first step in bringing about greater changes in the Middle East. One of such changes was weakening Iran in the regional level.

Despite success in occupation, the United States faced many challenges and problems in the post-occupation phases including, among others, state–building and establishment of stability and security in Iraq. These challenges revealed geopolitical complexities of Iraq and the significance of third actors in this country. In fact, the developments subsequent to the occupation demonstrated that the United States is not the absolute significant foreign actor in post-Saddam Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran also plays a major role as an influential regional actor. The direct presence and management of the Iraqi affairs by the United States together with Iran's influence in this country posed different questions and possibilities about relations of the two countries in Iraq. As the overall relations between the two countries were conflicting and competitive in previous decades, it was predicted that the bilateral connections between them in Iraq would be purely hostile leading to all-out confrontation between them.

The developments that followed Iraq's occupation, however, demonstrated a distinctive example of interactions and departure from conflict to cooperation. The main question that raises here is that what factors have contributed to the shift in Iran–U.S. relations from conflict to cooperation in Iraq? In response to this question I hypothesize that despite the overall conflict that best characterized the two countries relations in general, the Iraqi realities and geopolitical restrictions and the possible risks for expansion of crisis led Iran and the U.S. to embark on some indirect and implicit cooperation in this country. To examine this hypothesis, first of all theoretical viewpoints concerning cooperation and conflict in the international arena is reviewed. Then, the conditions leading to conflict between Iran and the U.S. in Iraq as well as the strategic competition of the two sides in the wider region are studied. Finally and after having a look at geopolitical restrictions of both countries and the risks of expansion of Iraqi crisis, the article studies the indirect and implicit cooperation between Iran and the United States

in this country.

In this article, based on the neoclassic realist notions, the new geopolitical changes in Iraq after 2003 are taken as main independent variable and the internal characteristics of Iran and the U.S. including the two countries leaders understanding of Iraqi realities, their capabilities and ideological-identity bases are regarded as mediating variables. It will be underlined that despite distinct and special characteristics of Iran and the United States, including the ideological differences, the geopolitical realities of Iraq after collapse of Saddam served as independent variables to determine the possibility of cooperation or continuation of conflict in this country.

I. Contradiction and Competition

Iran–U.S. relation is best characterized by the ideological and identity contradictions together with strategic competitions for more than thirty years. Despite ups and downs during the past decades, there have been enduring elements in Iran's foreign policy including rejection of global arrogance. Lack of diplomatic and formal relations between Iran and the U.S, the ideological and identity conflict as well as strategic competition have been a constant fact about Iran's policy towards the United States. Rejection of arrogance through confrontation or resistance against the dominant powers headed by the United States is among factors that contribute to survival of the Islamic and revolutionary identity of Iran and strengthens it (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 1388: 59).

The way Iran defines its own identity and the U.S. identity has led to definition of America as the central enemy. In a similar way, in the United States there are ideological and identity understanding of U.S. conflict with Iran which has intensified the competition between the two countries. In the eye of the Iranians, the United States is the "Great Satan", who is responsible for world's problems. The United States sees Iran as a fundamentalist state that opposes the international principles and norms. Accusing Iran of supporting

terrorism and inclusion of Iran into the Axis of Evil is illustrative of how the U.S. looks at Iran through ideological lenses (Frieman, 2013).

Above the ideological contradictions, there are strategic competitions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Stets in the Middle East. This competition has been one of the key factors that affect regional trends during the past decades. Although the necessities of the international system structure and the competition between great powers has had significant impact on the formation of the Middle Eastern equations, the U.S. efforts to be the sole dominant power in the region on one hand and the Iranian insistence on the withdrawal of the extra regional powers from the Middle East have been among the elements that have left significant imprints on the region's crises and developments. The strategic alliance between Iran and Syria in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution and the efforts to find allies among the Islamic resistance movements such as Hezbollah and Hamas has been all in line with opposition to the western and American hegemony in the Middle East. The confrontation of Iran and its allies in the axis of resistance with common threats like Israel and striking balance of power vis-à-vis the regional allies of the West have been all to serve the anti-hegemonic purposes (Ehteshami, 1997: 87). The United States for its turn has directly and indirectly, has sought to curb Iran's influence and prevent it from becoming a regional hegemon through threatening, pressuring and forming regional coalitions,. Based on that, apart from the ideological incongruities, the basic logic of Iran–U.S. relations in the Middle East has been that of strategic competition (Pletka, 2014).

In Iraq like the other areas, the Iran–U.S. relation has been centered on strategic competition within the framework of the two countries' grand policies. After collapse of the Ba'ath regime, the main concern of both Iran and the United States has been the strategic status and role playing of Iraq in the Middle East in the years to come. The two countries have tried to hold Iraq as their strategic

ally while pushing it away from the other side. It can be said that, the major ideological contradictions and strategic rivalries between Iran and the U.S. during the past decades drove the two sides towards expansion of competition in Iraq. In this framework, shaping or at least influencing the process of state-building in Iraq and defining its regional stance became the major area of competition between Tehran and Washington.

The United States has tried to turn Iraq into its strategic ally and thereafter use it as a balancing actor against Iran. Even in the past, the policy of balancing Iran made Iraq significance in U.S. Middle Eastern policies. In the 1980s the United States tried to balance Iran by supporting Iraq during the war. One of the major objectives of the United States in initiating war against Iraq was to shift its policies from one of its strategic allies in the Middle East and also balancing Iran. The United States tried to curb Iran's influence in Iraq and create obstacles for Iran's actions in this country. To do so, the United States tried to empower groups opposed to Iran on one hand and prevent the groups close to Iran from gaining too much power. Some counter measures by the US against Iran in Iraq include: accusing Iran of supporting terrorism and paramilitary groups and providing anti–U.S. forces in Iraq with arms, arresting some Iranian nationals in Iraq and charging them with having connections with paramilitary groups; and inclusion of the Islamic revolutionary guard corps into the list of terrorist organizations. The U.S. also tried to pave the grounds for establishment of strategic relations with Iraq after withdrawal of its forces through signing of the Status of Forces Agreement in 2008.

Iran has also tried to water down the U.S. influence in Iraq and prevent it from having the final say in Iraqi affairs. In line with this, Iran has strengthened the independent and even anti-American forces in Iraq and opposed ascendance of those forces that sympathize with the United States. At the same time, in various cases Tehran has tried to pave the way for building strategic partnership with Iraq. In the

political sphere, Iran interacted closely with the Iraqi groups, supported the political process in this country and maintained special relations with the Iraqi government. Providing assistance in the central government's fight with ISIS and expansion of economic cooperation are among other Iranian measures to deepen cooperation with Iraq.

In the state-building arena, although Iran and the United States have very close views with respect to the creation of a democratic and plural political system in Iraq and showed interest in removal of the Ba'ath regime, there are deep disagreements over the ways to direct the political process and state-building. The U.S. first appointed Iraqi military governor Jay Garner and then replaced him with Paul Bremer. Bremer dissolved the Iraqi political and security institutions and embarked on establishment of a governing council (Ayati, 1389: 69). To this point, the removal of the Ba'ath institutions and formation of the governing council with presence figures close to Iran were acceptable to Iran. But the disagreements and competitions soon emerged.

In the immediate period after collapse of the Ba'ath regime, the United States was seeking a real control over the state-building trend and reduction of the role Iraqi leaders and groups could play. Iran, however, was trying to prevent monopolization of Iraqi affairs in the hands of Americans and giving Iraqis maximum voice in the state-building process. The United Sates desired creation of a limited-democracy system in Iraq with selective presence of Iraqi elites. However, the persistence of the Iraqi religious and political figures particularly Ayatollah Sistani led to a nationwide election and establishment of a democratic process (Rahimi, 2001). When Bremer asked for preparing the new constitution by a selective assembly, Ayatollah Sistani issued a decree making the writing of a new constitution contingent upon holding a nationwide election and preparing the constitution by the people's representatives (Ladki, 2004). This initiative showed alignment of Iran's policies with the

Iraqi leaders that led to holding an election within the transitional assembly in order to choose people's representatives who were assigned the task of constitution preparation.

The status of each political group within power echelon was another matter of disagreement between Iran and the United States. Iran has always insisted on formation of an extensive coalition among the Shia groups and has helped the political process in a wider coalition between the Shia and the Kurds accompanied by the moderate Sunni groups. The implementation of such policies has been successful to great degrees. The United States has its own measures for containing Iran; chief among them is formation of the Al-Iraqiya coalition with presence of Sunni and secular groups headed by Ayad Allawi in the eve of the 2010 parliamentary election. However, the fact that Shia are the majority population of Iraq makes such initiatives not quite successful; thus the U.S. was obliged to accept the supreme status of the Shia leaders close to Iran.

The important point about Iran and U.S. competition in Iraq is over Iraq's possible role-playing in the region and its place in regional balance of power. Different policies of Iran and the U.S. in the Middle East order have created different expectations about Iraq's regional role. Despite the fact that Iraq was menaced with insecurities and instabilities and lagged behind in regional equations, the United States tried to gradually improve Iraq's internal affairs and thereafter enter it into its regional alliance which had included the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

The United States tried to mend its relations with the Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf which was soared in the aftermath of invading Iraq. To change their attitudes, Washington took a number of measures including giving room for more meaningful Sunni participation in the Iraqi affairs. The United States tried to convince the Arab countries to change their policies towards Iraq by offering some incentives and also applying pressures. The Americans reasoned that further distance of the Arab states from Iraqi scene would grant

Iran a free hand in this country. Selling weapons to the Arab states was a part of such American incentives to encourage shifts in the Arab countries' approach towards Iraq. It was at the same time meant to serve the policy of containing Iran (Nasr & Takeyh, 2008).

This U.S. strategy to include Iraq into its regional coalition irritated Iran and therefore hastened the Iranian policy of promoting Shia in Iraqi politics. Iran supported democratic political processes in Iraq and made use of the chill of the country's relations with the Sunni Arab states in order to bring it into the axis of resistance and anti–Israeli fold. The reaction from the Sunni Arab states further convinced Iraq to toe the Iranian line. Reduction of tensions between Baghdad and Damascus was among the Iranian achievements in binding Iraq with the axis of resistance. In spite of its increasing domestic challenges, as a result of the Syrian crisis and the instabilities it caused along Iraqi-Syrian borders, Baghdad took concrete stances vis-à-vis Syria developments. The rise in extremism as a common threat drove Baghdad towards Tehran and Damascus. The Iraqi officials perception of threat from developments in Syria turned real when in 2014 the ISIS grow its roots within Iraqi territory and occupied nearly half of Iraqi soil.

All in all, against the backdrop of ideological contradictions and strategic competitions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States, the post-Saddam Iraq is interpreted as a new field for competition. Such competition was heightened with respect to bilateral ignorance of the other side's security and military concerns and the desire to turn Iraq into their strategic ally in the Middle East and its introduction into the balance of power equations to their advantage. This opportunistic approach however was gradually affected by the geopolitical restrictions which not only hindered materialization of both countries objectives but also threatened the Iraqi territorial integrity and national security. This drove Iran and the United States towards some sort of implicit and indirect cooperation in Iraq.

II. Geopolitical Constraints

The geopolitical competitions account for a major proportion of Iran-United States relations in Iraq. These geopolitical competitions are however tempered by the geopolitical constraints and therefore new doors for pragmatism are opened. The most important geopolitical constraint is firstly the ethnical and religious diversity of the Iraqi society and secondly the geopolitical connection of the Iraqi sectarian–religious groups with their surrounding environment. The religious and sectarian geopolitical map of Iraq and their links to the outer region is illustrative of the problems and challenges that the actors involved in Iraqi affairs have to cope with.

With the easy conquer of Iraq and no major resistance the United States aspired for idealistic goals and plans for the future of this country. However, within a few months problems and challenges emerged and the Iraqi domestic realities made U.S. gradually reconsider its ambitious goals. In fact, lack of enough knowledge about the Iraqi religious and ethnical realities as well as weakness in communication with Iraqi groups and leaders account for conception of unrealistic plans and their challenging implementation. The gradual understanding of the realities on the ground and the Iraqi ethnical and religious complexities drove the United States to redefine its goals in accordance with the Iraqi realities. At the end, the geopolitical constraints of Iraq and the surrounding environment affected the strategic goals of Washington including strategic competition with Iran.

The ethnical and religious diversity and the intergroup rifts and tensions and particularly their competition over resources and posts affected the United States efforts in creation of a democratic and stable political system. Therefore the Iraqi democratic political process faced challenges and contradictions that prevented it from performing its expected functions. Lack of consensus over national identity among the Iraqi groups and the secessionist tendencies

among the Kurds as well as rejection of democratic processes by the Sunnis, disrupted a normal transition to democracy. Most importantly Iraq faced the intolerable insecurity and instability emanating from military actions of the rebel groups comprising of the Ba'athists dispelled from their positions and the foreign religious extremists.

The other important point is that the unsatisfied Sunnis were enjoying extensive Sunni and Arabian support throughout the region granted by those who were resentful of U.S. plans and objectives. At the same time the U.S. could not maintain positive relations with the Iraqi Shia without respecting for their religious and cultural ties to Iran. Therefore none of U.S. strategic policies could succeed without taking into account the geopolitical links of Shia and Sunni groups to their regional environment. Moreover, Iran had cultural and ethical bonds with the Iraqi Kurds that facilitated its role-playing in Iraq. Therefore the geopolitical constraints of Iraq and its surrounding environment not only made the U.S. to amend its objectives but it also convinced it to embark on some cooperation with Iran to prevent Iraqi political and security collapse.

The United States faced serious problems in shaping a new strategic role for Iraq. Insecurity and instabilities, increased domestic challenges, negative outlook of the Arab states vis-à-vis the new political trends in Iraq and the different strategic understanding of the Arab countries about the future of Iraq's regional role are among the major problems Washington faced in meeting with its strategic interests in Iraq. Differences in the ways the U.S. and its allies perceived the process of state-building in Iraq were among the important obstacles for cooperation between Iraq and US allies. When the Arab states were still blaming America for increasing Iran's influence and the shift in regional balance to Iranian advantage The U.S. strived to unite Iraq with other allies in the Persian Gulf in form of a new bloc. Saudi Arabia was particularly very skeptical and believed that Iran and the United States are bargaining over crisis in Iraq and the ways in which they can divide their interests (Khamis,

2010, 83). On this basis the United States never managed to create strategic and reliable partnership between Iraq and its Arab allies even when the Arab countries soften their stance towards cooperation with Iraq.

Compared with the United States, Iran had a better understanding and knowledge of Iraq's geopolitical realities which enhanced Iran's role in this country. Geographical proximity and the geopolitical and cultural connectedness between Iran and Iraq together with historical close ties between Iranian leadership and the Iraqi Shia dissidents, who had ascended to the top of power echelon, granted Iran important advantages and a more active role in Iraq. Despite this, Iran did not remain immune from the complexities and problems of the special Iraqi geopolitics and faced certain restrictions in advancing its goals.

Although cultural connections between Iran and the Kurds and the long lasting political relations with the Kurdish leaders provided solid grounds for Iranian actions in Iraq, new Kurdish geopolitical changes in the northern Iraq brought about complexities in utilizing such potentials, especially when the changes moved towards further divergence of the Kurds from the central government legalized through the federal law. Iran tried to strengthen the Shia–Kurdish coalition to help both groups to meet their interests; moreover this could advance Iran's own goals. Meanwhile Iran was concerned about the secessionist tendencies among the Kurds that could result in Iraq's dismemberment and start a domino of geopolitical changes in the Middle Eastern countries, particularly those neighboring Iraq. The other dilemma for Iran was the religious Shia–Sunni divide and the costly behaviour of Sunnis in the state-building process which guaranteed continuation of tensions, violence and security crises. Furthermore, the dissolution of the Ba'ath Regime led to expansion of extremism from East to the West of Iran. Such threats were even heightened considering the anti-Shia ideology of the Al-Qaida in Iraq and particularly ISIS, comparing with that of global Al-Qaida

organization.

Such geopolitical challenges and constraints in Iraq and the possibility of their shift into imminent threats made Iran cautious and more conservative in pursuit of its strategic interests in Iraq and its confrontation with the United States. On this basis, the strategic competitions of Iran and the United States were tempered in the face of geopolitical constraints and challenges and drove the two sides to reduce competitions and embark on some implicit and indirect cooperation with the aim to cope with the common threats.

III. Common Concerns

Despite the strategic competition of Iran and the United States in Iraq after 2003 and the efforts of the two actors to contain one another, the geopolitical challenges and constraints in Iraq and its surrounding region drove them towards some pragmatism and easing of competition. This approach was necessary for preventing catastrophe and annihilation of achievements in Iraq after demise of Saddam. In fact the geopolitical constraints hindered complete materialization of Iranian and U.S. strategic priorities in Iraq and affected their capacities and abilities to manage the political and security trends unilaterally. In such an atmosphere, the expansion of instability and insecurity and increase in the risks of Iraq's political and security issues, stark warnings were sent to Washington and Tehran. The most imminent threat for both actors, who despite strategic competitions, pursued their interests through democratic political trends in Iraq was flaming of a civil war and intensification of radicalism, the failure of political process and undermining of Iraqi territorial integrity. To prevent such a worst case scenario Iran and U.S. started some indirect and implicit cooperation.

Before turning to the common interests for cooperation between Iran –U.S. it is necessary to have a quick look at the concept of cooperation. Cooperation is literally considered to be synonymous to coordination. On this basis some introduce cooperation a

coordinated action that is consciously taken by two or more actors. Robert Keohane argues that for cooperation to start it is not necessary for the states to resolve all conflict of interests. It is however about the ways that enable those states to cope with their differences with the aim to reach their bilateral interests. Therefore in his opinion, countries may adopt harmonious policies without having prior coordination (Asgarkhani & Mansourimoghadam, 1381: 191).

Cooperation may take place in different levels and appear in different forms. Williams distinguishes between three types of cooperation: implicit cooperation, asymmetric cooperation and complete cooperation. The implicit cooperation is in essence informal and implicit and is aimed at having the crisis controlled. The initial motivation for implicit cooperation is to avoid risks or reducing threats and can be conductive to a formal or informal regime. The asymmetric cooperation is based on consent. It occurs when one side enters a conflict in full strength and the other supports it implicitly or explicitly and acts as a facilitator. The third type of cooperation i.e. the complete and unconditional cooperation takes place when individuals or states have common or bilateral interests and cooperate in an explicit way to meet those interests (Asgarkhani & Mansourimogahadam, 1381: 192).

Regarding the classification about cooperation, neither complete nor asymmetric cooperation can characterize Iran–U.S. cooperation in Iraq. Therefore Iran–U.S. cooperation in Iraq can only be implicit. In other words, while Iran and U.S. could have common and close interests in Iraq, in practice the cooperation has taken place only implicitly with the aim to control the Iraqi situation and counter a political and security collapse. The three spheres of common interests/threats in Iraq are first, continuation of federal and democratic state-building; second, securing territorial integrity and relative stability and third, fighting extremism and terrorism.

Despite competition between Iran and the US over shaping political trends and exercising influence in Iraq's new power structure,

the two sides are certain about the necessity to sustain the federal–democratic state building process as a new framework for taking care of the Iraqi political equations. The United States had initiated the dissolution of all Ba'ath political and security–military structures after entering Iraq and has established a new state building process in this country. Success or failure of this trend will be considered as success or failure of America's Middle Eastern politics which affects U.S. international prestige. The other important matter is that there are no suitable alternatives for participation of different Iraqi groups in the political process of their country. Both Iran and the United States are well aware of this fact. For Iran the democratic political process serves both its own interests and those of the Iraqi nation. In such a framework formation of a political structure which is detrimental to Iran's interests would be unlikely. To the contrary, Shia's ascending the ladder of power with participation of Kurds and non-Ba'ath Sunnis bears important political opportunities for Iran.

Accordingly, Iran and the United States are concerned about any systematic threat to the new Iraqi political process and are ready to react to such threats. Iran has tried to help reducing differences between the political groups in Iraq and to remove some obstacles for advancing political process. In fact, Iran, more than any other country, has been more supportive of political process in Iraq. Despite pursuing different priorities in balancing power between Iraqi political groups, the United States has opposed to termination or malfunction of political process in Iraq. Iran and U.S. support for the premiership of Nuri Maleki and later backing Haider al-Abadi and formation of the new government have been both indications of mutual Iran–U.S. approval of the democratic political process in Iraq.

The Iranian and Iraqi insistence on preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity and political sovereignty and opposition to secessionist tendencies are among the common goals between Iran and the US. Iran considers Iraq's disintegration as geopolitical threat that affects Iranian territorial integrity and therefore the Iranian

officials have always underlined Iraq's unity. Iran has helped the Iraqis in coming to common understandings and cooperation among themselves. Moreover, Islamic Republic coordinated Iraqi Shia leaders in resisting against hostile trends and separatist actions. For the United States, Iraqi disintegration is equivalent to extensive geopolitical changes in the Middle East which is not an acceptable option, at least under current circumstances. This explains United States' negative responses to requests for independence from Kurds of Northern Iraq. However, in certain instances, some American officials like Obama's deputy, Joe Biden, have called for federalism and separation of Iraq into three federal states as the only way to sustain Iraq's territorial integrity (Biden, 2014).

Taking action against Sunni extremism including Al-Qaida and ISIS terrorism are also among the common goals of Iran and the United States. The way the U.S. reacted to extremism and terrorism in the Middle East and particularly in Iraq has been contradictory, vague and paradoxical. This is better understood against the backdrop of U.S. use of radical groups in the Middle East to advance its objectives or avoiding decisive confrontation. However, the United States has been obliged to cope with such groups when they have jeopardized its vital interests in the region. Ever since the occupation of Iraq, the United States has been faced with threat of radical groups and terrorism. With the rise of such threats after 2007, the U.S. increased the number of its military forces and also helped in formation of the Awakening Councils. Such measures were quite effective in diminishing Al-Qaida in Iraq. In 2014, after seizure of half of Iraq's soil by ISIS, the United States left the initial hesitations aside and started military strikes against the group (Tziarras, 2014).

These geopolitical changes and the threat they posed to the United States interests, particularly with ISIS getting close to Erbil, the US raised its military interference and made efforts to form a global alliance against ISIS. In an interview with NBC, the United States president, Barack Obama, said that for the first time this is not

Iran who is making trouble for Sunni countries allied with the U.S. The problem is not the Shia–Sunni confrontation; he asked for assistance from Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Turkey to fight with the Islamic State (NBC news, 2014).

Iran has also been involved in fighting extremism and insecurities in Iraq. In some cases, Iran has contained the Shia groups to contribute to reduction of violence. For instance, in 2006 when violence rose in Iraq, it was Iran that convinced Shiite not to take retaliatory measures against the Sunnis. Such Iranian initiatives together with increase in number of U.S. troops and formation of the Awakening Councils led to reduction of violence in 2007 (Cordesman, 2011). Iran has also actively supported the Iraqi government in its fight against ISIS. Furthermore Iran did not oppose or seriously criticize the U.S. air strikes against ISIS in 2014 which demonstrates its consent with the anti-terrorist approach of the United States.

Conclusion

Ideological contradictions and strategic conflicts and competitions are the basic characteristics of Tehran–Washington relations for decades since the Iranian revolution. This has been manifested in various fields particularly the developments in the Middle East. Iran and its regional allies have moved against presence and role-playing of the United States in the Middle East. The United States has also spared no efforts to contain and pressure Iran in the post-cold war era. This has been mainly aimed at domination over the Middle East. After U.S. invasion of Iraq and demise of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, Iraq became a new ground for competition between Iran and the United States. In the aftermath of the fall of Saddam, the most important subject for Iran–U.S. competition in Iraq is Iraq's strategic role in the region. In fact, Iran and the United States are trying to use the new Iraqi circumstances and establish strategic relations with Iraq in line

with their interests, goals and also threat perceptions. Giving direction to the new strategic position of Iraq is the main subject for Iran–U.S. competition in the Middle East after 2003. The following developments, however, demonstrated that the geopolitical realities not only create important restrictions for Tehran and Washington to pursue their goals in Iraq but they also drive the two countries towards a sort of implicit cooperation.

Despite differences and strategic competitions between Iran and the United States in Iraq after 2003, the special geopolitical features of this country and its surrounding environment served as obstacles in advancement of strategic goals for both countries and hindered further intensification of competitions. The most important constraints for the Unites States are those related to religious and sectarian geopolitics, and close relation between the geopolitical Shia of Iraq with Iran as well as intensification of violence and extremism in Iraq. These constraints blocked the process of state-building in Iraq and disrupted materialization of U.S. interests in this country. For Iran, the geopolitical challenges and constraints include emergence of new Kurdish geopolitics and expansion of extremism.

As a result, the United States and Iran were more engaged in coping with common threats instead of unilateral materializing of their maximalist interests and continuing strategic completions. The most important among those threats are sectarian and religious divergence, rise of terrorism and insecurity, the emergence of existential threats for Iraq and the possibility of dismantling the new political processes and even disintegration of Iraq particularly after domination of ISIS over one third of its territory in 2014. Therefore, the geopolitical constraints and the new developments transformed the Iranian and U.S. assessment of the opportunities and threats in Iraq and gave rise to implicit and indirect cooperation between them. Such cooperation includes sustaining the new democratic political trend, maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity and fighting against extremism and terrorism.

To conclude, study of Iran-US relations in Iraq and their policies in the past decade, demonstrates that despite impacts of the mediating variables like identity-ideological factors as well as goals and outlooks of the decision makers, the most important factor is the geopolitical realities and changes in Iraq. In fact, these changes and realities created challenges and restrictions and also brought about common threats to Iran and the United States' interests. Such factorts diminished the significance of the strategic competition between Iran and the U.S. in Iraq and defined grounds for implicit and indirect cooperation between them.

References

Asgarkhani, Abomohammad and Mansouri Moghadam, Jahanshir. 2010. Cooperation and Conflict in the International Relations: A Look at the Constructivist Theory of Wendt, ***The Politics Quarterly: The Journal of Faculty of Law and Political Sciences***, No. 40, Vol 3.

Ayati, Alireza. 2010. ***Iraq: An Influential Focal Point***, Tehran: the Center for Islamic Revolution Documents.

Cordesman, Anthony H. and others. November 28 2011. ***The Outcome of Invasion: US and Iranian Strategic Competition in Iraq***, accessible at: http:// csis. org/ files/ publication/ 111128_Iran_Chapter_6_Iraq.pdf.

Dehghani Firoozabadi, Seyyed Jalal. 2002. The Transformation of Conflict and Cooperation Theories in the International Relations, ***Law and Politics Research***, No 8.

Dehghani Froozabadi, Seyyed Jalal. 2009. The Ontological Security and The Foreign Policy of The Islamic Republic of Iran, ***Quarterly of Foreign Relations***,Vol. 1, No. 1.

Ehteshami, Anoushiravan and Hinnebusch Raymond A. 1997. ***Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System***, Routledge.

Friedman, George. 2013. The U.S.-Iran Talks: Ideology and Necessity, ***Geopolitical Weekly***.

Khalood Mohammad Khamis. 2010. The Iraqi Foreign Policy vis-à-vis the Saudi Arabia After 2003, ***the Journal of International Studies***, No. 44.

Ladki, Nadim. February 20 2004. Sistani Hints at Allowing Election Delay in Iraq, Washington Post, accessible at: http:// **www. washingtonpost. com**/ wp- dyn/ articles/ A57182-2004Feb20.html.

Nasr, Vali and Takeyh Ray. 2008. The Costs of Containing Iran, ***Foreign Affairs***, accessible at: http:// www. foreignaffairs. com/ articles/ 63048/ vali- nasr- and- ray- takeyh/ the-costs-of-containing-iran.

Obama to Chuck: The ISIS Threat. 5 september 2014. accessible at: http:// **www. nbcnews**. **com**/ storyline/isis-terror/obama-chuck-isis-threat-n197641.

Pletka, Danielle and others. 2014. ***America vs. Iran: The Competition for the Future of the Middle East***, accessible at: http://www.aei.org/papers/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/middle-east-and-north-africa/america-vs-iran-the-competition-for-the-future-of-the-middle-east/.

Rahimi, Babak. 2006. **Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post – Ba'athist**

Iraq, United States institute of Peace, , in www.usip.org.

Rawilliams. Feb 10 2009. ***Neoclassical Realism and Middle East Wars***, accessible at: https://www.scribd.com/doc/.../Neoclassical-Realism-and-Middle-East-W.

Schweller, Randall L. 2006. ***Unanswered Treats***, Princeton University Press.

Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. 2006. State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State, ***Security Studies***, Vol. 15, No. 3.

Tziarras, Zenonas. July 29 2009. ***The Iraq Crisis and Its Geopolitical Implications***, accessible at: http:// www. e- ir. info/ 2014/07/29/ the- iraq- crisis- and- its-geopolitical-implications/.

Channel News Asia. 23 Aug 2014. US Backs Federal System in Iraq: Biden, accessible at: http:// **www. channelnewsasia. com**/news/world/us-backs-federal-stem/1326446.html.

عراق و کنش و واکنش‌های ایران و آمریکا

علی اکبر اسدی
پژوهشگر مرکز تحقیقات استراتژیک

ایران و آمریکا در طول دهه‌های گذشته روابطی پرتنش و رویارویی‌های استراتژیک مهمی را در خاورمیانه تجربه کرده‌اند. حمله آمریکا و فروپاشی رژیم بعث در عراق باعث شد تا آمریکا به اصلی‌ترین بازیگر خارجی در این کشور تبدیل شده و برای پایه‌گذاری و پیشبرد روند نوینی از دولت‌سازی در این حوزه تلاش کند. اما به تدریج و به موازات رویارویی آمریکا با ناکامی‌ها و چالش‌هایی مهم در عراق، ایران نیز به عنوان بازیگری اثرگذار در عراق مطرح شد. بر این اساس نوع روابط ایران و آمریکا در عراق با توجه ویژگی‌های خاص این کشور به موضوعی تعیین کننده در معادلات منطقه‌ای تبدیل شد. بر خلاف دیدگاه‌های مبتنی بر تطابق و همکاری‌های استراتژیک و یا رقابت و رویارویی تمام عیار بین ایران و آمریکا در عراق، در این نوشتار بر این موضوع تاکید می‌شود که به رغم رقابت‌ها و تعارضات استراتژیک بین ایران و آمریکا در عراق، تنگناها و محدودیت‌های ژئوپلیتیک درون عراق و محیط منطقه‌ای، دو کشور را به برخی همکاری‌های تاکتیکی و غیرمستقیم به منظور جلوگیری از فروپاشی سیاسی و امنیتی در عراق پس از صدام وادار کرد. در نتیجه با متاثر شدن اهداف و رقابت‌های استراتژیک ایران و آمریکا در عراق از چالش‌ها و تهدیدات نوظهور ناشی از محیط ژئوپلیتیکی خاص، حوزه‌هایی از همکاری و منافع نزدیک بین ایران و آمریکا در عراق بروز یافت.

واژه‌های کلیدی: ایران، آمریکا، عراق، رقابت استراتژیک، همکاری، ژئوپلیتیک.