



The relationship between the U.S. and Kurdistan region-Iraq post referendum

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Abstract

The US foreign policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, after the emergence of (ISIS) passed through two different stages. The first one began with the fall of Mosul and the attack of the Islamic state (ISIS) on Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KGR) we can call this stage the one prior to referendum that was held on September 25, 2017. When (ISIS) tried to enter Erbil the capital of (KGR-I), then US president Barak Obama announced that "Erbil is a red line for us" thereafter, it began to defend it by preventing the Islamic state from approaching Erbil and provided support to the (KGR) militarily and politically. The second phase of the US foreign policy towards the Kurds begins after the referendum in the Kurdistan; which we can call it the post-referendum stage. The relations were shifted from stage one completely, in which the US abandoned its support in particular the political one. Such abrupt shift in policy was a shock to Kurds as they did not expect this position from the US, given the sacrifices that Peshmerga made in fighting (ISIS). The Kurds attacked by The Popular Mobilisation Forces (al-hashd alshaebi) loyal to Iran, Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Iraqi army. The US did nothing, making the Kurds to feel disappointed and despondent with the US reaction. The study found out that: America is using the Kurdish issue in the Middle East as a card to make a balance of power. Therefore, we see that sometimes they support them and others abandon them. The disintegration of the Kurdish House was one of the main reasons that led America to abandon them in October 16, 2017.

KeyWords: Iraqi Kurds, ISIS, the U.S., the Middle East, Referendum.

1.1. Introduction

The Kurds' relationship with the US as one of the original people that inhabited the Middle East is historically labeled as an ambivalent relationship (Shareef, 2010), because this relationship ranged between engagement and estrangement through its history, and is based on US interests. Therefore, we often see that America abandoned the Kurds in critical moments, because US interest requires so. Such behavior happened to the Kurds several times during their close history. Consequently, the Kurdish leaders and people do not trust American policies (Noack, 2014).

The Kurds do not hold a considerable importance in the US foreign policy, because they inhabit a region, which is very important to US foreign policy, and its interests with these states are more significant than the Kurds. Therefore, the Kurds' relations with the US causes problem for American relations with these states (Gunter, 2011). Thus, the European countries have always considered Kurdish unity as a threat to their interests in the Middle East. Therefore, even though the US post-Gulf War in 1991 called the Kurds in Iraq "good Kurds", it deliberately neglected them in other states where they live. The US remained only in the level of humanitarian attention, and it did not abide by the promise made to them (Meho& Nehme, 1991). Nevertheless, the situation became different after the collapse of



Saddam's regime in 2003 when the Kurds became one of the main players in the Middle East. The regional states have always regarded the Kurds as a destabilizing force in the Middle East, because they struggle to achieve their own state and independence (Shiffrinson, 2006). However, the American deal in 2014 was quite different from what it was in the past, due to the serious changes took place in the Middle East and a new player appeared in the Middle East called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL). Its aim was to pose a threat to US interests in the region. It has occupied a large part of Syria and Iraq, and declared an Islamic caliphate. The Kurds was the ones who pushed ISIS out of Kurdistan territory distorted their reputations and fought them, and still are fighting this fierce enemy intellectually. The Islamic state was seized advanced weapons from the Iraqi army, during its occupation of the city of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, thus, became a threat to the whole world, not only American interests in the region.

The U.S. foreign policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, after the emergence of ISIS, is of two different stages. The first one began with the attack of ISIS on Kurdistan which led to the fall of Mosul. This stage was coincided with pre- referendum time which was held on September 25, 2017. With the attack of Mosul the U.S. President Barak Obama announced that "To stop the advance on [the Kurdish capital city of] Erbil, I've directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city," Obama said (ABC, 2019). Thus Invading Iraq's Kurdish region, it turned out, was Obama's red line for ISIS (Fisher, 2014). In this instance, the U.S. government began to defend the region by preventing the ISIS from approaching Erbil and provided support to the KGR-I, militarily and politically. The second phase of the U.S. foreign policy towards the Kurds began after the conduct of referendum in the Kurdistan. This stage can be termed as post-referendum stage. The relations shifted from stage one completely as U.S. abandoned its support to the Kurds, especially from political point of few. Such abrupt shift in policy was a shock to Kurds as they did not expect such from the U.S., given the sacrifices that *Peshmerga* made in the process of fighting ISIS. The Kurds was attacked by the Popular Mobilisation Forces (*al-hashd alshaabi*) loyal to Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Iraqi army. The U.S. did nothing, making the Kurds to feel disappointed and despondent with the U.S. reaction.

This study attempts to shed light on these two stages. Find out the reasons that led America to abandon the Kurds and try to answer these questions, why did not America support the referendum of Kurds? Why did the Iraqi Kurds resort to the referendum? What is The US perspective on the Iraqi Kurdish independence? What should the Kurds do to win the support of US policymakers? To be sure that America will support them in the future. The study attempts in this section to shed light on the perspectives of both realists and liberals of American politicians and academics who have an influence in the decision-making of US foreign policy on the independence of Kurdistan from Iraq and to what extent they support this step.

1.2. Research Questions

In order to provide specific answers to the above-discussed issues, the researcher will try to address the following questions through a survey:

Why has the relationship between the U.S. and Iraqi Kurdistan fluctuated between engagement and estrangement throughout its history?

Why US support the Kurds in 2014 and did not support them on 16 October 2017?

What is the US position on the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence from Iraq after the emergence of ISIS?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

In light of the questions stated above, the objectives of the study are:



The aim of this study is to understand the changes and analyze the vicissitudes in the United States' foreign policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan after emergence of ISIS. In addition, this study is a contemporary historical narrative of the foreign policy of America in the Middle East in general and Iraqi Kurdistan in particular and an examination of historical analyses of several U.S. administrations' foreign policy approaches toward the Iraqi Kurds. Thus, the study of the history of this relationship would help the research to find out the reasons and factors that led the United States' policy to be ambivalent throughout this period in the Middle East region.

To investigate the US foreign policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan in the second term of the Obama Administration, especially the event in 2014, when ISIS attacked Kurdistan territory, but America did not allow it to enter Erbil. The research aims to study this event, is this just an event or is it a change in US policy toward the Kurds?

Finally, the research examines the United States perspective on Iraqi Kurds after the emergence of ISIS; particularly after the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Mr. Massoud Barzani insisted to hold the referendum on September 25, 2017. In addition, the negative reactions of Americans to the referendum

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical Realism will be used as a theoretical framework for this research. "Realism (or political realism) is a school of thought that explains international relations in terms of power. The exercise of power by states toward each other is sometimes called realpolitic, or just power politics" (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2009, p35). "Realism emphasizes the constraints on politics imposed by human nature and the absence of international government. Together, they make international relations largely a realm of power and interest" (Donnelly, 2000, p9). Realism Theory has dominated international relations after the end of World War II, when the idealism theory failed to maintain peace and security in the international arena. The idealists believe that the dictatorial regimes are causing wars and the establishment of democratic regimes will prevent the occurrence of war, because the monarchies fight for self-interest not for national interests (Hity, 1985). Idealism believes that the people's interest and their desire are behind peace; if given the opportunity, people will seek to achieve their desire and interests. According to this, the enemy of peace is the dictatorship; authoritarianism and anti-democracy were alleged to have control over Germany, Austria, Hungary and Russia in 1914 (Ainley, 2005).

However, according to neo-realism, the balance of power and national interest are significant principles of the theory. There are two ways to achieve a balance of power: first, increasing your power, second, alliance. Therefore, Mearsheimer argues that to keep the balance of power in a region, a state should be powerful. There are the two ways to be powerful. First, dominating a region and extending the influence on the dominated region. Second, making sure that no one competes with you in the region you dominate. Thus, the United States can serve its national interests in the region. This is what the United States aims to do in the Middle East; it has dominated the region for a long time, and has not allowed any other competitor to play any serious role in the region since 1991. But recently, especially after the Arab Spring, the Syrian crisis in 2011 and the emergence of ISIS other player intervened in the Middle East in particular Russia and its allies in the region: Iran, China and Hezbollah in Lebanon. They challenge the US presence in the region, and the situation became more complicated. However, the American policy-makers used the Kurds and their issue in the Middle East as one of the factors to help them attain the principle of the balance of power in the region, in order to serve US national interests. The observer will notice obviously this US policy toward the Kurds in the last period, as it provides support for them when it is in the US national security's interest and abandon them when support is detrimental to US national security. Therefore, America easily abandoned the Kurds in the hard moments. Even after the



end of the Cold War, US foreign policy toward the Kurds was double standardized; the American classified the Kurds in Iraq as good Kurds, but in Turkey as bad Kurds. However, ironically, in Syria despite the fact that the Democratic Unionist Party (PYD) allied with the *Bashar Assad's* regime, is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and holds the same ideology of the PKK, the US classified the PKK as a terrorist organization. Nevertheless, the United States deals with the PYD completely differently, supporting and arming its members. US policy makers believe that this serves their national interest.

On the other hand, the research criticizes realism with all its types, as not being able yet to accommodate the role played by non-states in the international arena. Despite the fact that the neo-realism to some extent recognized that non-states can play a role in international policy. It is not up to the role played by non-states in the international arena, especially in the Middle East, where we see that non-states have a significant impact on the international arena, such as the Kurds, the organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Realism still believes that the state is a key player in international relations, while actually it proves the opposite. The research, criticizes the liberalist theory as well, because when it mentions the role of a non-state it only focuses on the economic institutions, such as the multinational companies and non-organizational in situations; forgetting non-state actors which consist of political entities, such as the Kurds, ISIS and Hezbollah. Nowadays, these institutions play a significant role in the international arena.

1.5. Methodology

The methods for the analysis of this study are a blend of descriptive and historical analytical approaches. The research, as the nature and field of this study, is of a qualitative nature, mostly dealing with accounts of contemporary historical incidents. Given the empirical nature of this study, the research will focus primarily on how, what and why these policies and decisions were made by the policy-makers.

The research has approached this study from an illustrative attitude, comparing and contrasting the contemporary history of US foreign policy toward the Kurds, based on the primary and secondary data available. The contemporary nature of this study was denied many useful classified governmental documents. A fundamental use has been made of the major library of primary and secondary available sources.

2. The US Foreign Policy Toward The Iraqi Kurds After Emergence Of Isis

2.1. The us foreign policy toward the Iraqi Kurds (2014-2017)

The intensity of operation by the ISIS in Iraq since June 2014 has impelled the Obama Administration to resume an active military role in Iraq, pursuant to a strategy to cripple and finally subjugate the ISIS as reiterated by President Obama on September 10, 2014 (Katzman, 2015). Obama's decision is based on the need to avert the possibility of an imminent genocide of tens of thousands of *Yazidis* trapped on Mount *Sinjar*. In addition to the humanitarian concerns, there were more practical concerns: Iraqi Kurdistan is rich in oil resources and hosts thousands of foreign workers as well as a U.S. consulate in Irbil (Noack, 2014). As the U.S. and its allies continue to look for ways to overpower ISIS, one possible ways of achieving that has been to arm the Kurds (Project, 2016) in Iraq. The eminent role played by the Kurds in the defeat of ISIS as an organization cannot be reasonably disputed. The Kurds stopped, held and rolled back ISIS, and then waited two years while the Iraqi Army re-cocked after running away in 2014. Kurdish forces then isolated Mosul as the most important strategy to its recent liberation by a revitalized Iraqi Army, albeit one energised with Iranian muscle (Audino, 2017).



It needs to be noted that U.S. has fought alongside the Peshmerga in the past and can provide powerful assistance again. Weapons deliveries could be part of this effort; indeed, the easiest way to guarantee U.S. logistical support is for the Peshmerga to receive and use U.S. weapons and vehicles (Knights, 2014). American officials have tried to hasten the transfer of arms from the government in Baghdad to Kurdish fighters in the north. But that process has been very slow and that impelled Washington to open a direct pipeline to the Kurds via the CIA (Whitlock & Jaffe, 2014). In addition, a number of European countries, namely Britain, Germany, and France, have been supplying weaponry to the Peshmerga (Katzman, 2015). The intensification of ISIS operation this summer and the group's staying power in many parts of northern and central Iraq have altered Kurdish calculations and affected the drive for Kurdish independence. According to top Kurdish officials and regional analysts, it has been asserted that Kurds are their was a significant setback for Kurds' political aspirations (Amos, 2014). However, the central government in Baghdad and the KRG have had deep disagreement over territory, the exportation of oil, Kurdish ambitions for independence, and other issues. Thus, the threat posed by the ISIS has led both parties to toe a common cause (Katzman, 2015). This stance was highly expedient to halt the advancement of the common enemy, ISIS.

It needs to be stated that, prior to August 1, 2014, the Iraqi Kurds had not felt the full brunt of attacks by the ISIS. That relative peaceful political atmosphere changed after a string of powerful ISIS strikes on Kurdish Peshmerga units between Mosul and the Syrian border. This afterwards led to response from the Kurdistan Regional Government's forces. On August 5, 2014, KRG President Masoud Barzani stated, "We have decided to go on the offensive and fight the terrorists to the last breath" (Knights, 2014). But the events of 2014 did cement closer ties between the U.S. and Iraq's KRG led by President Masoud Barzani. The Iraqi Army had collapsed in the face of the ISIS offensive. The Kurdish armed forces, known as Peshmerga, were the only reliable Iraqi fighters allied with the U.S. in 2014. The Peshmerga moved into the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and other disputed areas to combat and neutralise the forces of ISIS (Erich, 2017). Such move was a political gain for the Kurds as the area has remained disputed between the central government and Kurdistan region. Thus, the Kurdish Region extended by 40% with the express approval of the U.S. Barzani's Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, remarked: "We now genuinely know the United States supports us" (Erich, 2017). The Kurds would also export oil not only from their 'own' fields, as defined by the Constitution of Iraq, but also from the oil cluster of Kirkuk, including the massive *Bai Hassan* field and those in *Jambur*, *Avana* and *Baba Gurgur* – all of which were established before 2003. These would, according to Article 109 of the Constitution of Iraq, remain under the jurisdiction of the government of Iraq (Zedalis, 2010).

The Obama Administration provided weapons to Kurdish forces who substantially assisted in making gains against ISIS with the assistance of U.S. airstrikes (Press, 2017). The emergence of military support for Iraq's Kurds and airstrikes in northern Iraq have had marked a crucial turn in U.S. foreign policy. Although military assistance for the KRG remains limited, arming the Kurds represents a serious change in U.S.-Kurdish relations and appears to be in divergence with previous U.S. policy in Iraq. In particular, direct military and political support for the KRG will strengthen Irbil's position vis-à-vis the central government in Baghdad, and thus may elongate the process of political fragmentation unfolding in Iraq (Kaplan, 2014). That said, many Kurds still carry lingering doubts that the U.S. will betray them once again. "There's a history of contact and betrayal with the U.S. and the Kurds where the U.S. made contact and helped, but never jumped in with both feet," (Lawrence, 2008).

One needs to recognise that President Barack Obama authorized the airstrikes to protect U.S. interests and personnel in the region, including facilities in Irbil, as well as *Yazidi* refugees fleeing militants onslaught (Press, 2017). Carnegie Middle East Centre reported that



the U.S has a number of interests in Kurdistan, all of which serve to reinforce Obama's retraction of the no-engagement policy. For instance, the Kurdistan region is a stable and trustworthy pro-U.S. ally that Washington needs in an increasingly unstable and chaotic Middle East. It is of interest to note that many U.S. lawmakers view the region as a fledgling democratic, secular, and pro-Western friend determined to assist in the fight against the *Salafi jihadists*. It is in a geostrategic area bordering Iran and Syria. It also has the potential to be a great oil-exporting entity and has given contracts to several U.S. companies, including ExxonMobil and Chevron. And Erbil, the Kurdistan region's capital, hosts a significant number of Americans (Mansour, 2017). In recent years Erbil has been transformed into an oil-boom town, a base for numerous multi-national energy corporations, including the big American companies Chevron and Exxon Mobil, all now drilling for oil and gas.

However, the period, which began after June 10, 2014, when the ISIS was trying to invade Erbil, could be regarded as the golden age in the history of the relationship between the Kurds of Iraq and the U.S. The U.S. had a sterling record of sincere assistance to rescue Kurdistan region from being submerged by the forces of ISIS. In such an attempt there was a brilliant attempt on the part of the U.S. forces and Peshmerga to collaborate and dislodge ISIS. The Kurds thus felt comfortable with this American support. The relationship between the two sides was formalized after the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two sides. The Kurds played a major role in the fight against the ISIS with military and moral support from the U.S. The Peshmerga was the first to dislodge the ISIS in the face of the collapse of Iraqi army. The rate at which Iraq lost its territory to ISIS was astonishing as it remains a military mystery to observers and policy makers. Iraq lost about a third of its territory within days. The Kurds took advantage of the collapse and took control of vast disputed areas. If the Peshmerga had not taken control of these areas the ISIS would have taken over the control of the resources of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. This convergence angered Iran, Turkey and Iraq. Unfortunately, this relationship did not continue and the situation changed after September 25, 2017 when the Kurdistan Region organized a referendum on independence unilaterally without informing Baghdad. The Kurds felt disappointed again by the U.S. position on the issue thereby going back to the old mantra of "the Kurds have no friends but the mountains". The apathetic nature of the U.S. to such unilateral declaration of independence is in accordance with the U.S. Middle East policy of maintain the status quo. If the U.S. had supported the Kurds in Iraq for independence it might have regional political and social backlash.

2.2. The us foreign policy toward the Iraqi Kurds in the post-referendum era

The U.S. foreign policy toward the Iraqi Kurds took a downward spiral after the Kurdish leaders held the referendum in Kurdistan on September 25, 2017. The U.S. had earlier warned Kurdish leaders not to take such a step as the time was not appropriate for a referendum. The U.S. was of the view that the major priorities should be to eliminate ISIS. The U.S. has been telling the Kurds and Kurdish President since last spring not to proceed with the referendum as it would be disastrous for both Kurdistan and Iraq (Calamur, 2017). Eomid Sabah, spokesman for the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, said: "So far America stands against the referendum of Kurdistan and I hope that America understands the status of the Kurds and change their attitude towards the referendum of Kurdistan" (Personal communication, October 2, 2017). However, the Kurds did not take these warnings seriously. The Kurdish leadership's perception was that the global situation would alter after the referendum and the international community will deal with the Kurds as a de facto, such as what happened in 1992 when the Kurds insisted on holding elections despite the opposition of the international community to this step and became de facto after that. This was the perception of Kurdish leaders when they remained adamant on holding the referendum.



Therefore, on September 25, 2017 Iraqi Kurds went to the polls to hold a referendum on the determination of their fate and According to the results issued by the Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq more than three million participated in the referendum, and more than 92% voted in favour of independence from Iraq (Rudaw, 2017). *Masoud Barzani* did not respond to all internal, regional and international appeals. He said: "We are ready to accept any offer or alternative that guarantees our rights to live in Iraq safely" (Barzani, 2017).

The September 2017 referendum on independence that was overwhelmingly backed by Iraqi Kurdish voters has raised tensions between Erbil and Baghdad. While the Kurdish government has invoked the vote as a mandate to negotiate with Baghdad over the terms of separation, President Haider al-Abadi has instead demanded that the referendum be annulled and threatened to isolate the landlocked region. A move toward independence would also risk conflict with Iran-backed Shia militias and possibly even inflame the sectarian competition between Iraq's Sunni and Shia Arabs (Relations, 2017).

The State Department issued a press release from Secretary of State Tillerson rejecting the legitimacy of the Kurdistan Region (KR) independence referendum. The Trump Administration stated strongly that: The U.S. does not recognize the Kurdistan's unilateral referendum held on 25 Sep because it is lack legitimacy and the U.S. will continue to support a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq. We are deeply concerned about the potential negative consequences of this unilateral referendum (Bernard, 2017).

However, a battle is underway between the Iraqi Government, backed by Iran, and Iraqi Kurds for control of Kirkuk in Iraq. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), Counterterrorism Services (CTS), Federal Police, and Iranian-backed popular mobilization forces (PMF) launched a combined offensive with intent to seize the K1 military base, the Kirkuk airport, and Kirkuk's oilfields from Kurdish Peshmerga forces at 2:00 a.m. on October 15th. The offensive follows two days of failed negotiations after the government of Iraq, backed by Iran, demanded Kurdish forces withdraw (Cafarella, Kassim & Malik, 2018).

Thus, Iraqi government forces, with the help of Popular Mobilization Units aligned with Iran, retook the disputed city of Kirkuk. In this effort they benefited from the tacit cooperation of Kurdish military forces, known as Peshmerga, who are loyal to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK is the historic rival of the Kurdistan Democratic Party under the leadership of Masoud Barzani, who is also the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (Cook, 2017).

However, the Kurds were again dumbfounded by America's position in relation to the conduct of referendum. The Kurds have bitter memories of a previous U.S. betrayal when the U.S. and the Shah backed a Kurdish insurgency against Iraq as a mechanism of pressurizing Saddam to back down. But then in 1975 Kissinger opted for settlement of the issue and gave Saddam a tacit approval to attack the Kurds (Erlich, 2017). In this attack, some 200,000 Kurds escaped into Iran and 40,000 were forcibly repatriated. This kind of outward behaviour in the international system has been displayed variously by the U.S, either to promote the national interest or to intimidate the would-be hostile partner. Kissinger famously said, "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests" (Erlich, 2017).

It needs to be stressed that U.S. did not support the referendum of Kurdistan, but the U.S. State Department issued two important statements that allegedly signalled green light to that effect. The first was about the disputed areas when Heather Nauert Department Spokesperson stated that, the reassertion of federal authority over disputed areas in no way changes their status – they remain disputed until their status is resolved in accordance with the Iraqi constitution. Until parties reach a resolution, we urge them to fully coordinate security and administration of these areas. To that end, all parties should engage in dialogue now on the basis of the Iraqi constitution, as Prime Minister Abadi offered and the Kurdistan



Regional Government accepted publicly (Nauert, 2017). The second important signal cum statement was the readiness of the U.S. to provide support to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq headed by Nechirvan Barzani and his deputy Qubad Talabani, and stated that, We call on all Kurdish parties to back up the KRG because it works to solve suspending issues over the remainder of its term and get ready for elections in 2018 (Nauert, 2017).

These statements have had a significant impact on the stability of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The first statement stopped Iraq's ambitions to control all the disputed areas as the Iraqi army, with militias loyal to Iran, prepared to enter to Erbil city. This statement and the steadfastness of the *Peshmerga* in the area of *perdi*, *Suhaila* and *Mahmudiya*, where the *Peshmerga* forces resisted violent resistance, compelled Iraqi forces to retreat. The second statement was important for the stability inside Kurdistan. After October 16 opposition parties announced that his government is unable to negotiate with Baghdad after its defeat and this while opposition parties demanded to form National Salvation Government to lead Kurdistan until the elections. But after this statement all their attempts in this regard failed and the regional government was able to stand on its feet and lead the region to overcome all difficulties and the government succeeded in determining the September 30, 2018 as date for the parliamentary elections. Therefore, one can conclude that America did not support the Iraq's Kurds in their referendum because it considered that the time was not right as the danger of ISIS still loomed. Such conclusion represents the American argument for not supporting the Kurds at that critical moment.

2.3. The U.S. perspective on the independence of Iraqi Kurds

The aftermath of the referendum and the subsequent seizure of Kirkuk are playing out in a predictable fashion. The referendum brought to the fore some important regional political issues as the U.S. withdrew its support, decisive action by Iran, and a flexing of muscles by the Iraqi state. The U.S. apathy to the referendum of Kurds in Iraq gave the Iraq national government the power to reflect on the way to deal decisively with the Kurds. At this juncture, it is important to raise an important question: Why wasn't the U.S. able to persuade one of its most reliable allies in the region to postpone the referendum as well as to lend support for Kurdish independence outright? It important to note that as long as national interest directs the tune of the U.S. foreign policy, as applied to other global major powers; one expects the U.S. to continue to use the Kurds in Iraq as bargaining chips for its political agenda in the region. In this while, it might be a rare occurrence on the part of the U.S. to put its weight behind the Kurds aspiration for nationhood without resulting to pros and cons of such drastic decision. According to Phillips stated that as recent history has shown that independence movements, wherever they are, face a complicated trip. And even if there is a moral pledge to grant independence, the right to self-determination is a complex process (Phillips, 2015).

However, after some aborted struggles to break away from Iraq, the Kurds finally got their first indirect assistance from the U.S. in the early 1970s, more thanks to the Shah of Iran than anything else. In 1972, Iraq aligned with the Soviet Union and the Shah pushed the U.S. to arm the Kurds by selling them Soviet weapons seized in Egypt. By 1974, the Kurds were in overt rebellion led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, of the same tribe Barzanji was from. But by 1975, Iran and Iraq made peace under the Algiers Accords. Iranian support for the Kurdish uprising abruptly came to a halt and the rebellion collapsed untimely without achieving any political score (Newton-Small, 2014). David Phillips, scholar of Kurdish and Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights argues that, the 20th century was a period of bogus promises, treason, and abuse for Kurds. The Kurds had national ambitions as the Ottoman Empire started to fading. They seek political backing and protection from the Great Powers. Promises were made, but



Iraqi Kurds were ultimately abandoned. Hopes dashed, Iraqi Kurds revolutionize and were suppressed, their political rights and cultural identity brutally denied (Phillips, 2015). Nevertheless, for years, Iraqi Kurds have had a cosy relationship with Washington, building up a reservoir of goodwill across the government and on Capitol Hill (Tamkin, 2017).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Kurds have achieved their greatest international prominence, most notably in Iraq. Iraqi Kurds were an important partner for the U.S.-led coalition that ousted Saddam Hussein from power in 2003. After more than a decade of serving as the "glue" that holds the country together amid sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Arabs, Iraqi Kurds are increasingly asserting their autonomy and charting a path toward independence (CFR, 2017).

Thus, the relationship between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the U.S. has flourished significantly, especially after the recent exploration of energy. Many companies came to the region to invest in energy, including major American companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron and others. The importance of Kurds in the U.S foreign policy has grown in the Middle East after the emergence of the ISIS, where the Kurds showcased themselves as reliable force in fighting against the ISIS. The U.S. believed that it would be difficult to defeat the ISIS without the Kurds and as such offered all kinds of support to the *Peshmerga* to fight the terrorist group and the *Peshmerga* managed to offer best strategy to defeat the ISIS.

The role of Kurdish forces in the fight against the ISIS in particular has raised their international profile. Some countries, including Germany, have directly armed and trained Iraqi Kurdish forces in order to remain formidable in the face of any terror threat (CFR, 2017).

Therefore, Kurds exploited this disorder in the Middle East to pursue their aspiration in declaring the Kurdish state, especially after the liberation of the city of Mosul from the ISIS. They considered that the first step to achieve this dream is to hold a referendum in the region. The President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Massoud Barzani in an article in the Washington Post stated that, "On Sept. 25, the people of Iraqi Kurdistan will decide in a binding referendum if they want independence or to remain part of Iraq" (Barzani, 2017).

Here one may ask why the Kurds of Iraq resorted to the independence. There were several reasons that led the Kurds to conduct the referendum as a first step to independence despite the adequate knowledge of the complex nature of the exercise. When the U.S. troops began to withdraw from Iraq in 2007, the Kurds became concerned about the future of Iraq. The Kurds lobbied the Americans to stay and build bases in Kurdistan. The Americans ignored the request and in 2011 the withdrawal was attained. This was one of the first tipping points creating a chain of event leading to a Kurdish choice to declare independence and see statehood as the "ultimate goal" (Gailan, 2017). As soon as the Americans issued the withdrawal, things went wrong and a serious chain of events unfolded. Politically, Iraq was broken, with sectarianism being the defining feature of the political landscape. Economically, the Maliki government cut the 17% constitutional share of oil revenues allocated to the KRI, costing the KRG nearly \$1 billion a month (Stansfield, 2017). The border question was also one of the issues that impaired the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad since 2003; its non-resolution has fed frustrations that brought Barzani to the point of organizing a referendum (Hiltermann, 2017). In addition, The Iraqi government started to impose a series of sanctions against the Kurds including the cutting of salaries of Kurdish public servants, Kurdistan's share of the Iraqi budget, medical supplies etc. It needs to be stated here that when ISIS declare war against the Kurds, the Iraqi state did not interfere and left the Kurds alone. The Kurds have since then found themselves in a security dilemma and an environment threatening their survival (Gailan, 2017). The Kurds believed that the only way to get out of Iraq's dilemma was to go to the referendum and employ such to negotiate with Iraq to get out from Iraq peacefully without bloodshed. But it seems that the Kurdish politicians does not



understand the political reality and appeared that the Kurds exaggerated the perception of U.S. support for its independence.

Therefore, as it has been reiterated earlier, the conduct of referendum ended the honeymoon between the Kurds and the U.S. The U.S. has publicly stood in opposition to this step from Mr. Massoud Barzani and thus advised him not to embark on such venture. It is thus a political suicide on the part of Barzani to have done that as the U.S. opined the time was not ripe for such declaration. Thus, America gave up on the Kurds aspiration and as such suffered great tragedy by losing nearly 52% of the territory they hitherto controlled, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

There are many reasons for this: regional instability; suppression of the Kurds, most dramatically in Turkey and Iraq; vehement opposition to a Kurdish state; infighting among Kurds; and, despite some prominent Western supporters, no viable advocate for Kurdish statehood. These reasons were on display this week as Iraqi forces took control of Kirkuk, the disputed oil-rich city that Kurds see as their Jerusalem. Kurdish fighters had controlled the city since 2014, when Iraqi forces fled the area in the face of an ISIS onslaught (Calamur, 2017). In addition, U.S. officials fear that the referendum vote would further undermine Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi. He is already relatively unpopular within the country and has been struggling to fight off Islamic State terrorists with one hand and Iranian influence with the other (Dubin & Tamkin, 2017). U.S. officials are also worried that the referendum, and heightened political tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, could derail the anti-Islamic State coalition, even though Kurdish Peshmerga fighters have been among the most effective in battling the group (Dubin & Tamkin, 2017). Therefore, the US told the Kurdish leaders that the time is not suitable for this step now. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG's representative in Washington stated that Kurds are consistently told it's not a good time for independence. "From our perspective, it's always a bad time," she said. "If you're looking for a moment when Iraq is stable and you have somebody reasonable to negotiate with, that's never been the case in Iraq." the best U.S. offer to postpone the referendum came far too late for the vote to be delayed. "We didn't have confidence that Baghdad would have stood by it anyway," she said (Calamur, 2017).

This distrust is not overnight, but has a historical extension to more than a hundred years. Therefore, the Kurds lost confidence in the successive governments of Iraq, but saw Iraq post-2003 as an opportunity to correct the political course in Iraq. But it turned out that the Kurds were not conciliators this time. In observing the political scene of Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime, they found that after 2003 nothing changed in Iraq, except individual government. The Iraqi policy towards the Kurds remains as it was in previous era. The recent events proved this as the central government in Baghdad did not hesitate to use military force against the Kurds when they opted on September 25, 2017 for referendum. In this regard, the Iraqi authorities have violated Article IX A of the Constitution, which prohibits the use of the Iraqi army in resolving internal conflicts.

The Kurds in Iraq has been variously affected by the pros and cons of international politics since the aftermath of First World War. The various promises that had hitherto gave Kurds in the Middle East the hope of having their own separate state did not coincide with the interests of major powers, most importantly the U.S. Such regular disappointment of statehood has rendered the aspiration of Kurds in Iraq meaningless and unrewarded. In this manner, the overall debate of the U.S. foreign policy towards Iraqi Kurds points to some important realist political inclination. One, as long as the national interest of the U.S. is not served by the Kurds political process in Iraq, it needs to be noted that the U.S. will totally not incline to lend any support. Two, The U.S. foreign policy towards the Kurds is dictated by the realist prescription of "survival of the fittest". The U.S. will normally rise to assist and respond to the demand of Iraqi Kurds if such demand is to reinforce the survival of the U.S. in the



Middle East and other parts of the world. Lastly, it needs to be reiterated that there has never been any seriousness on the part of the U.S. and other global powers to lend meaningful support to the Iraqi Kurds' political aspiration in Iraq and as long as global powers remain to be directed and guided by their national interest, the Iraqi Kurds will remain pawn in the hand of the U.S.

3. Conclusion

- The Kurds are of great importance in the Middle East as a non-state actor, if they stay united, they can influence America's policies in the Middle East.
- US foreign policy is a realistic policy in terms of the theoretical framework, so it always follows its interests in dealing with the Middle East.
- America is using the Kurdish issue in the Middle East as a card to make a balance of power. Therefore, we see that sometimes they support them and others abandon them.
- The disintegration of the Kurdish House was one of the main reasons that led America to abandon them in October 16, 2017.

4. Recommendations

- America should reconsider its policy toward the Kurds because it will not find an ally like the Kurds in the region.
- The Kurds should unite the Kurdish home to be more influential in the region
- Working to promote democracy in Kurdistan through the establishment of state institutions and the unification of military forces in the formation of one within the Ministry of *Peshmerga*.
- To continue promoting the spirit of peaceful coexistence in Kurdistan and to build the state of citizenship instead of the national state to win the support of Turkmen, Arabs, Christians, *Shabak* and others.
- Working to attract US interests to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq through investments.
- Work on building an active lobby in America to influence decision-makers in America in favour of the Kurds.

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مەھدى ئەمىن عەبدوللا ستونى

قوتباتى دكتورا لە زانكۆ ئوتارە لە ماليزيا (UUM) مامۇستاي ياريدەدەر لە زانكۆ سۇران-فاكتلى ياسا و پەيوەندى ئىودەولەتى

ئەمىن رەشىد بن يەتبان

وانەيىزى يەكەم لە زانكۆ ئوتارە لە ماليزيا (UUM) فاكلىتى خويىندى نىودەولەتى-بەرئوۋەبەرى پەيمانگاي ناودار بۇ خويىندى قودسى-ئىسلامى

پوختە

سىياسەتى دەرەۋەي ئەمىرىكا بەرامبەر بە كوردى عراق لە دواي درۇست بوني داعش لە دوو قۇناغى چاۋاز تېپەرى. قۇناغى يەكەم بە كەۋىتى مووسل و ھىترشگەردى دەولەتى ئىسلامى (داعش) لە سەر ھەرىمى كوردستانى عراق دەستىيىڭىز (KGR-I) دەتوانىن ئەو قۇناغە ناۋى بنىن قۇناغى پىش رېفراندوم كە لە 25 ى سېتەمبەرى 2017 دەستى پىش كەرد. كاتىك داعش ھەولى دا بىتتە ناۋ ھەولېر پاپتەختى (KGR-I) پاشان سەرۋكى ئەمىرىكا باراك ئوباما راگەياند (ھەولېر ھېلى سوورە بۇ ئېمە) و بەرگېرى لى كەرد لەرىكاي نەھىشتى دەولەتى ئىسلامى كە نىزىكى ھەولېر بىت و پالېشتى سەربازى و سىياسى پىشكەشى (KGR) كەرد. قۇناغى دوۋەمى سىياسەتى دەرەۋەي ئەمىرىكا بەرامبەر بە كوردى عراق لە دواي رېفراندوم دەستى پىش كەرد، كە دەتوانىن ناۋى بنىن قۇناغى دواي رېفراندوم. پەيوەندىكان لەم قۇناغە دا بەتەۋاۋى كۆران بەراۋرد بە قۇناغى يەكەم، چۈنكە لەم قۇناغە ئەمىرىكا پىشتى خۇي لە كوردى كەرد و بەتاپتەتى پالېشتى سىياسى. ئەم كۆرانكارىيە ناكاوۋە كوردى توشى شۆكى كەرد، چۈنكە ئەۋان قەد ھەزرى ئەو ھەلۋىستە لە ئەمىرىكا نەدەكەرد، لەبەر لە قۇربانىيەنى كە پىشمەرگە پىشكەشى كەرد لە شەرى دۇ بە داعش. كوردەكان توشى ھىترش بون لە لاي ھىزاكانى ھەشى شەبى كە موالى ھەرەسى سەۋرى ئىرانىن و ئارتىشى عراق، بەلام ئەمىرىكا ھىچ رەد فعلى نەبو، ئەم بىن دەنكىە كوردى توشى بىن ئۆمېدىكەرد لە ئەمىرىكا. تويۇنەنكە كەيشتە ئەو ئەنجامە كە ئەمىرىكا قەزىيەي كوردى لە پۇژ ھەلاتى ناۋەرەست بەكار دەينىت ۋەك ۋەرەقەنىك بۇ پاراستى ھاۋسەنكى ھىز لە ناۋجەكەدا، بويە دەينىن ھەندىجار پالېشتىيان دەكات و ھەندى جارى تر پىشتىان لى دەكات. ۋە لە ھەمان كات ناكوكى لەناۋ مالى كوردى يەكە بۇ لە ھوكارە سەرەكەكان كە ئەمىرىكا پىشتى لى كەرد لە 16 دەى ئۆكتوبەرى 2017.

دەستەۋازە گىرنگەكان: كوردى عراق، داعش، ئەمىرىكا، رۇژ ھەلاتى ناۋەرەست، رېفراندوم.

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ملخص

مرت السياسة الخارجية للولايات المتحدة تجاه الكورد العراقيين ، بعد ظهور (داعش) بمرحلتين مختلفتين. الأولى بدأت بسقوط الموصل وهجوم الدولة الإسلامية (داعش) على إقليم كردستان العراق (KGR-I) يمكننا أن نسمي هذه المرحلة بمرحلة قبل الاستفتاء الذي تم في 25 سبتمبر 2017. عندما حاول (داعش) الدخول إلى أربيل عاصمة (KGR-I) ، ثم أعلن الرئيس الأمريكي باراك أوباما بعد ذلك أن "أربيل هي خط أحمر بالنسبة لنا" ، بدأ في الدفاع عنها عن طريق منع الدولة الإسلامية من الإقتراب من أربيل وقدم الدعم ل (KGR) عسكريا وسياسيا. المرحلة الثانية من السياسة الخارجية للولايات المتحدة تجاه الأكراد بدأت بعد الاستفتاء في كردستان ؛ والتي يمكن أن نسميها بمرحلة ما بعد الاستفتاء. لقد تغيرت العلاقات في هذه المرحلة بالكامل مقارنة بالمرحلة الأولى ، حيث تخلت فيها الولايات المتحدة عن دعمها للكرد وخاصة الدعم السياسية. كان هذا التحول المفاجئ في السياسة بمثابة صدمة للكرد لأنهم لم يتوقعوا مثل هذا الموقف من الولايات المتحدة ، بالنظر إلى التضحيات التي قدمها البيشمركة في القتال ضد داعش. الكرد الذين هاجمهم قوات الحشد الشعبي الموالي للحرس الثوري الإيراني والجيش العراقي. مع ذلك الولايات المتحدة لم تفعل شيئاً ، مما جعل الكرد يشعرون بخيبة أمل واليأس من ردت الفعل الأمريكي. وجدت الدراسة أن: أمريكا تستخدم القضية الكردية في الشرق الأوسط كورقة لتحقيق توازن القوى في المنطقة. لذلك ، نرى في بعض الأحيان أنهم يدعمونهم وتدخلون عنهم مرة أخرى. وفي الوقت نفسه كان تفكك البيت الكردي أحد الأسباب الرئيسية التي دفعت أمريكا إلى التدخل عنها في 16 أكتوبر 2017.

الكلمات الرئيسية: كرد العراقيون ، داعش ، الولايات المتحدة ، الشرق الأوسط ، الاستفتاء.