

Actor-Centric Analysis of Iraq's Future Based on the Foreign Orientations of the Members of Shia Coordination Framework

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies, and the subsequent downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the Shiites effectively ascended to power, marking a historic milestone. This newly established power, coupled with the endeavor to sustain this achievement, provided the members of the 'Shia Coordination Framework' (SCF) an impetus to engage with foreign actors. As stability was established in Iraq, there was a desire among some factions to reinstate Iraq's influential role at the regional level, leading to shifts in their foreign Orientations. Concurrently, the necessities of governance, conservative perspectives on their accomplishments, and the ongoing presence of American forces in Iraq, collectively led to changes in the views of certain Iraqi Shia actors towards foreign powers.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, understanding the perspective of the Shia Coordination Framework members in Iraq towards itself, as well as two other key players - Saudi Arabia and the United States - is crucial. This can shape Tehran's policy in relation to them. Consequently, the primary question this paper seeks to address is: Given the foreign inclinations of the Coordination Framework members, what is their stance towards the aforementioned three actors - Iran, the United States, and Saudi Arabia - and what implications does this have for the future of Iraq?

Methodology

This paper, drawing on expert opinions, explores the inclinations of the five principal players in Iraq's Shia coordination framework. These include the Marjaeya (Shia highest authority), Hizb al Da'wa al-Islamiyya (Islamic Call Party), Tayar al-Hikmah al-Watani (National Wisdom Movement), al-Tayyar al-Sadri (Sadrist Movement), and the political factions associated with Quwwat al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi (Popular Mobilization Forces). The analysis focuses on their stance toward four potential scenarios: American supremacy, Saudi supremacy, Iranian supremacy, and the establishment of a power balance. The actor analysis method is employed within the Vector software to conduct this investigation.

Discussion and Results

The findings of this study highlight the profound and extensive role of Marjaeya within Iraq's Shia coordination framework. Marjaeya stands as the principal actor in mobilizing power across the four proposed situations, thereby playing a vital role in Iraq's future. Therefore, the Marjaeya will continue to be the main Shiite institution in regulating Iraq's foreign relations. Ayatollah Sistani, serving as Marja, implements a leadership strategy in Iraq that involves formulating broad frameworks while abstaining from involvement in specifics. While this approach may occasionally lead to adverse outcomes, it nonetheless facilitates the political activity of various actors within Iraq's unique, diverse, and pluralistic society, thereby serving the country's broader interests. The preservation and respect for such an institution, which has been a priority for the Islamic Republic of Iran for many years, remains essential and promotes the national interests of both Iraq and Iran.

Another aspect to take into account is the appeal of maintaining a balance of power and diversity in Iraq's foreign relations for all participants in the Shia coordination framework in Iraq. The research indicates that the preference of these participants for the balance option is not significantly different from their preference for Iran's supremacy. However, it's important to note that while the former option faces no opposition, the latter is opposed by groups such as al-Tayyar al-Sadri. In addition to the coordination framework, it's crucial to acknowledge the presence of other influential entities. Consequently, it appears that the Islamic Republic of Iran, while recognizing the needs of Iraq and its Shia actors, should strive to enhance its presence and influence in Iraq with minimal friction. Naturally, such a strategy is complex and challenging, but the inevitable acceptance of a balance in which Iran remains a strategic ally of the coordination framework and seeks to expand relations with other actors will yield more benefits. This is particularly true given that Iraq's overarching objective is to diversify its foreign relations.

Another observation is that al-Tayyar al-Sadri can adopt both convergent and divergent stances concerning various objectives. This flexibility could potentially be leveraged against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The character of Moqtada Sadr and his recent activism towards Iran, particularly during the past parliamentary elections and the prime minister's election, suggest that his capacity to diverge from Iran could provide a springboard for Iran's rivals to destabilize the coordination framework in the Iraqi political landscape. However, Sadr knows very well that his detachment from the framework will limit the possibility and scope of his political activity. This has led him to take some considerations into account in his attitude towards Iran, Marjaeya, and Quwwat al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi. In any case, Sadr's ambivalence, while potentially serving as a conduit for threats against Iran, is also viewed as a platform for creating opportunities.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be said that Iraq's future will head towards a balance and diversity in its foreign policy. For this, Iran's involvement in Iraq's foreign policy should be maintained and strengthened in this context.

Keywords: *Iraq; Shia Coordination Framework (SCF); Actor-Centric Analysis; Vector; Actor-Centric Analysis.*

