

Iran's influence in iraq

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ABSTRACT

In the period after 2003, Iran was extensively involved in Iraq by demonstrating its leading role in the international context. However, Iraq has been confronted with substantial instability as a result of Iran's invasion, even though scholars have presented mixed arguments about this issue. This paper discusses the role that Iran has played after 2003, which has affected both the dimensions of stability and instability. The primary objective of Iran after 2003 was to observe a positive economic change in Iraq and also to ensure that the Western troops were taken off.

Different factors affected Iraq's stability, including inherent sectarian divisions and the role of other states. There were two types of influence on Iran and they are: first and foremost was that the projects politically influenced leveraging close historical relationships with several Shi'a organizations in Iraq like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Badr organization, and the Dawah political party. A second factor was that Iran had used the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Qods Force (QF) to provide paramilitary training, weapons, and equipment to various Iraqi militant groups, including Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and the Special Group Criminals (SGCs). Iran also had an influence on the legal and constructive functions of Iraq. Although it was seen that Iran's policy in Iraq is also duplicitous, it publicly called for stability but diverted Iraq's government and illegally sponsored anti-government militias.

INTRODUCTION

Although the factors and consequences surrounding Iran and Iraq war have been extensively discussed in the research literature, the post-war implications have been hardly understood. The United States has been accusing Tehran of its undue interference, which was done by Arab leaders for establishing an Islamic Republic[1], and by prominent Iraqi officials of an array of illegitimate meddling. It has been observed that Iran's influence in Iraq has created a quite complex situation for the entire region. Iran had vital interests in Iraq, which can be perceived as strategic important for establishing power relations in the region. In order to maximise the success of Iraq from its political transition, it is very important that Tehran and Baghdad work together. In addition, it is fundamental for all involved parties to prevent the US from further deterioration of its relations with the Islamic Republic.[2] Therefore, the objective of the present research is to explore Iran's role and influence in Iraq in both political and military aspects.

The essay is divided into introduction followed by theoretical remarks regarding the Iraqi insurgency, and the political stability. In reviewing the literature on the conflict between Iran and Iraq, it becomes clear that Iran has played a role in bringing about instability in Iraq since 2003, which has been further divided into different sections. The first and the foremost division occurred between those academics who cite Iranian influence to be the most significant destabilising factor in post-2003 Iraq, and others who hold the opinion that Iran's influence is considered either positive or insignificant.

As per Barzegar[3], the first approach is that Iran's influence in Iraq is both strong and negative. At the same time, it has been indicated that Iran had a <https://assignbuster.com/irans-influence-in-iraq/>

negative foreign policy. The nature of Iran's relations had changed with various militant groups in Iraq and after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003. Moreover, Iran had deployed thousands of intelligence and paramilitary people to Iraq, as Iran had conflicting and negative goals in Iraq. The primary goal of Iran was to expand its influence at both national and local levels in Iraq. Thus, it was seen that it had made links with the local actors, even when they opposed Iran's preferred clients at the national level. It may be also argued that Iran follows a policy of favouritism.

In the beginning after the invasion, Iran has tried to combat US power. The US had a strong position in Iraq, which could have a negative impact on the security of Iran. With the worsening situation in Iraq, and with the regime change that the US tried to impose in Iraq, the United States became less of a driver of Iranian actions, although it was always an important factor in the Iranian leadership's calculations. Soon after 9/11 Iran also had changed some of its policy as there were significant changes in the US policy. Initially Iran had cooperated with the US with regards to al-Qaida and to some degree in Afghanistan's issues. However, later on Iran believed that the United States rebuffed its gestures. In addition to this Iran also had exploited the situation that followed the US regime and change in Iraq so as to expand its influence there.[4]

As of today, Iran has its closest ties with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), formerly the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). This relationship basically was on the exceptionally close and subservient days when SCIRI's role was that of an Iranian proxy to be wielded against Saddam's regime during the bitter 1980-8 Iran-Iraq war.

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Indeed, Iran even organised part of SCIRI into the Badr Corps to fight against Iraqi forces on Iran's behalf. Today, as the International Crisis Group notes, "although the extent of ISCI's continued involvement with it is a matter of debate, there is no question that Tehran exerts significant influence over the Party and that ISCI's ties to Iran's security establishment remain strong".[5]

Therefore, ISCI has been recognised as having the strongest ties to Iran. It has also been shown as quite cooperative with the United States.[6] For instance, ISCI had members, which were a part of Iraq's intelligence and police forces. These members are now working with the United States in its capacity as part of the Iraqi government; they have also gone after ISCI rivals like Muqtada as-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). In spite of ISCI being Iran's closest ally in Iraq, Tehran has had many other relationships, which were maintained at any cost including weakening ISCI, such as Iran's ties to JAM have grown to the extent of even hosting its leader Muqtada al-Sadr. This happened despite his repeated criticisms of Tehran and violent rivalry with ISCI. Thus, all these efforts were done to accomplish the initially set goals, including the major idea of maintaining a solid local influence.[7]

IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-1988)

It is important to clarify the circumstances leading to the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war in order to understand Iran's and Iraq's complicated relations. In 1979, after the rule of the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, an Islamic Republic of Iran was established. Soon after assuming power, Ayatollah Khomeini not only exported the Islamic revolution to other countries in the Middle East but also

to Iraq.[8] Because of all this Saddam Hussein in 1980 decided to initiate a war; thus, for the next two years there was a persistent war between Iran and Iraq, resulting in Iraq being expelled from Iran. [9]

Although at this juncture Iran could have been declared victorious, Khomeini fought across the Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein and forced his resolution in there. Khomeini had thought that Shiites would support him in his invasion but they were least interested to do it. Throughout the Arab countries it was assumed that it would take time for Iran to overthrow Saddam Hussein before the vulnerable monarchies of the Gulf fell, including the prized Saudi Arabia and its oil. Till now America was just waiting and watching all the drama (war), but at this juncture it decided to get into the war itself and tilt towards Iraq.[10]

During the reign of Saddam Hussein, Iran launched a number of Shiite groups who violently opposed the Iraqi Baathist regime and this particularly took place before the Iran-Iraq war had started. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIR) in Iraq was led by Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim and his militia, the Badr Brigade, also joined forces with Iran in the Iran-Iraq war and very actively participated in the war by supporting the Iranian side. [11]

After responding to the President George H. W. Bush's ill-fated call for a Shiite uprising, which happened in 1991, SCIRI temporarily occupied the Iraqi port of Basra. Soon after the reprisals, SCIRI continued to be with the Shiite group and opposed Saddam Hussein. They were competing with different groups, such as Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. After the US

invasion and also after the establishment of the interim Iraqi government, SCIRI established itself as one of the most important and main political parties, which represented southern Shia (the other being Dawa). [12]

Bakr al-Hakim, who was an Iraqi religious leader, was killed in the US led Iraq war. Abdul-Aziz Al-Hakim was the SCIRI's political leader and was very famous in Iraq as a politician.[13] Moreover, SCIRI and Dawa had supported Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim when he was in Iran and was exiled; they also gave their support to the Iranian regime and advocated an Iraqi Islamic theocracy. After returning back to Iraq, they withdrew their support from Dawa and another government party, which was led by the velayat-e faqih. As a result, they started propagating the meaningful role of religion in governance.[14]

IRAN'S STRATEGY TO INFLUENCE IRAQ

Soon after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Iran tried to influence Iraq by adopting the strategy that Iran and Iraq are neighbours with a long history of dealing with one another. In addition, they both have same historic, religious, economic, and cultural factors of influence. Moreover, the eight-year long war was a result of their troubled relationship, in which Iran tried to position itself to influence the formation of a new government in Iraq. This took place through the use of all elements of national power: diplomatic means, information technology, military, and economic resources. Iran has tried to achieve its goals in Iraq by adopting different strategies. For instance, Iran openly supported pro-Iranian factions and armed militias; it also tried to influence Iraqi political leaders by building

strong economic ties in Iraq, which were considered a manifestation of goodwill towards Iran.[15]

According to Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman,[16] Iran has persistently tried to affect the political landscape of Iraq. It has been argued that Iran has a well-developed plan so as to exert influence in Iraq in order to minimise or avoid the American power projection in the Middle East. Two significant modes of Iranian influence have been identified in Iraq. The first mode was associated with the idea to influence Iraqi politics through the assistance of various Shiite organisations, such as the Supreme Council of Iraq, the Badr organisation, and the Dawa political party.

The second method suggested support of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Qods Force (QF) to obtain arms and ammunition as well as paramilitary training to various Iraqi militant groups to include Moqtada al Sadr's Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) and the Special Group Criminals (SGCs). Iran's influence on Iraq has been identified as economic and religious. Iran's ambitions for influence have spread to different diplomatic, military, and economic sectors of Iraq. Iran wanted to influence Iraq not only politically but through the involvement of mass media by creating a specific image in minds of Iraqi people so as to get help for its strategy. In economic terms, Iran has helped Iraq to build its trade and expand it accordingly.[17]

IRANIAN MILITARY INFLUENCE IN IRAQ

Because of the influence over the military, it had made many insurgent groups to operate in Iraq and some of them were directly opposing the US military in Iraq. With such influence in Iraq, Iran could possibly retaliate

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against the United States. In turn, this prompted the United States to convince the United Nations to impose economic sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program. Iran also executed return attacks on the US forces using proxy militia groups in Iraq in case the US decided to take direct military action.[18]

Since 2003, Iran had pursued extensive collaboration with Iraqi political allies, such as the United States, in order to participate in the nascent democratic political process. It has also armed, trained, and funded Shiite militias with the idea to defeat the United States, which would prevent further intervention of the US army in that particular area.[19]

As Katzman mentions,[20] in the period from 2005 to 2008, Iran had increased support for Iraqi Shiite militias and took over both the material aid like physical arming of militia groups and the contribution of troops, as well as training or harbouring of insurgents. The Quds forces were supplying material to Iran, and they were charged for territorial actions, although reports have said that the military training in the Iraqi Shi'a militia was done by the Lebanese group Hezbollah.[21] The major terrorist activity was completed by Iran and Quds Force. This was confirmed in 2010 by the US State Department[22], but it appears that not only this Iranian government was involved between the IRGC and the Special Groups inside Iraq.[23]

It has been noted that the Iraqi military group linked most strongly to Iran, is probably the Badr Corps, the armed wing of the ISCI, which, even prior to 2003, was described as "Iran's most important action arm inside Iraq".[24] Bergner (2007) stated that Iraqi Shiite groups were not in the situation to

bring about such massive and destructive attacks, without weapons and training from Iran, implying that Tehran has carefully planned its actions. Again it was argued that links between military groups in Iraq were made in Iran, and this further fuelled instability. However, the question whether other agents or groups were involved in creating such an unstable situation remains open.[25]

IRANIAN POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ

By 2011, it has been observed that Nouri al-Maliki, Prime Minister of Iraq, was openly against the Vice President Hashemi. In addition, there was persistent agitation between Erbil and Baghdad, which made the members of Iraqiyya and the Kurds to actually consider prime minister's ouster seriously, which occurred in the 2012 spring. At this point Maliki's opponents took the help of Sadrist because it was necessary at that point of time to obtain 163 votes, which were required to pass a non- confidence motion. Sadr was not willing to break with the other Shiite blocs and side with Maliki's Kurdish and Sunni opponents in a non- confidence motion, in spite of having meetings between top Kurdish, Iraqiyya, and Sadrist officials (including Sadr himself) in Erbil and Najaf.[26] President Jalal Talabani was also under high pressure from the Iranian government to help and support Maliki, but he directly opposed the initiation of a non-confidence vote in the parliament, saying that there is no proper support for this action.[27] However, by June 2012, it has been evident that the non- confidence vote had faltered. It was in late 2012 reported that the President Talabani had changed his position on a non- confidence motion because of growing tensions among Arabs and Kurds.[28] By the end of 2012, Talabani suffered a stroke there by ending any chance of

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renewing push to remove Maliki through a non-confidence measure. De-Ba'athification served the Iranian ambition more than the Iraqi one. The extensive period of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist rule had left a deep societal mistrust and sectarian divisions. This institution, de-Ba'athification, was created after Saddam's downfall in 2003, but it was very quickly politicised, which also applied a ban on the former members of the Ba'ath party. Again it was noted that there were links between the Iranian-backed militant groups and the head of the Shi'a-dominated commission and his deputies, Ahmed Chalabi and Ali al-Lami.[29]

Iran has been involved in Iraqi politics since 2003. Yet, Iranian efforts to exert influence over politics in Iraq have been evident since the 1980s. However, the main point which is debated is whether Iran is committed to exerting long-term control over such a government, and whether the Iranian government would be comfortable in allowing a Shiite Iraqi government to become militarily and political powerful. It has also been claimed that the Iranian government had exerted persistent political pressure over the US to force the Americans to withdraw their troops in 2008 as per US-Iraq Security Agreement.[30] It has also been observed that Iran normally exerts pressure on the political sphere in Iraq through Iraq's Shiite political parties by using its religious prowess to garner favour in the Shiite community. It appears that many of the political links were falsified after the Iran-Iraq war.

This resulted in a huge number of Iraqi political figures being exiled in Iran and returning in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion to influence the politics in their home country. Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, had to spend a substantial amount of time in Iran, although most of his exile was spent in <https://assignbuster.com/irans-influence-in-iraq/>

Syria, but this was during the rule of Saddam Hussein.[31] Similarly, it has been also noted that the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr had strong links with the Iranian religious government and political establishment, although the Sadrist movement was basically anti-Iranian.[32] There were lots of other people, who felt that Iran had a negative impact on the instability of Iraq. According to Alsis et al.,[33] after the war the elections backed all major Shiite parties, so that if any of the party wins elections can be beholden to Tehran. Again this was the strategy of Iran to get support, which had led to Shiite divisions, and thus the cause of conflict and instability in many cases.

Such political instability was the major cause of the development of various divisions in Iraqi society. The eruption of these division fuelled pressure not only in Iraq but in the entire region. During the 2010 elections, many incidents of violence were reported. This raised the question about the politically unstable country considering the presence of weak coalitions and holding of elections. This has provided Iran with an opportunity to demonstrate its support for Shiites, as this could be conducive to social stability, or such a condition may simply serve to whitewash and thus diminish the reality of the ground situation. The Brookings Institute Iraq Index (2006)[34] had charted a peak in multiple fatality bombings in January 2005, during the elections, and again during other months of the same year. All this has been seen very common in Iraq and somehow very much seen during Ramadan and elections, or in other words, it was considered quite normal during religious and political events. For example, Cordesman cites that " the number of attacks peaked to some 700 per week in October 2005, before the October 15th referendum on the constitution, compared to 430

per week in mid- January”.[35] In relation to these events, many political groups and parties, who are said to have links to political establishments of Iran and also independent elements within Iran, have argued that most of these groups have strong influence and links to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). It has been observed in recent years that the Mahdi Army, which is led by Moqtada al-Sadr, has become very powerful and influential due to reported links with Iran of Sadr.[36]

ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

Since the US invasion, trade between Iran and Iraq has steadily increased and Iran is now Iraq's biggest trading partner[37], and the trade consists of building materials, chemicals, consumer goods, and foodstuffs, much of it via the border at Mehran and Mundhirriya/QasrShirin. In addition to this, Iran has negotiated electricity deals with Iraq that were implemented after the CPA era.[38] According to the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Iran supplies 750 megawatts of electricity to Iraq daily. Moreover, two Iranian banks have received an approval to open their branches in Iraq.[39] Nonetheless, Iran's investments in real estate and businesses in Basra, Karbala, and Najaf have been seen as exploitative rather than a form of gratitude from Iraqis.[40]

To add to this Iran-Iraq economic ties are strong, and this has been encouraged to some extent by the impact of international sanctions on Iran and in other markets. It was demonstrated by Iran's ambassador in August 2010 that Iran would double its trade volume with Iraq.[41] Iranian officials have also indicated that they welcome a strong economic integration between the two countries, “ Our message to Iraqi brothers in my visit is that

Iran is fully ready to expand ties with Baghdad. We announced that Tehran is prepared to put its scientific, technical, engineering, economic and commercial potentials at the disposal of Iraq".[42] In 2005, there were reports that to get a job in Basra, this requires the sponsorship of Iran, as teaching posts were filled only by those who were supporting Iran[43]. As a result, most traders in southern parts of Iran speak Farsi and many accept Iranian currency. Iranian exports include electricity, refined oil products, and cars. It also helps to fund reconstruction. Iraqis have also started receiving medical care from Iran. Thus, Iran has presented a strong economic influence on Iraq.

IRAN'S BROADER ROLE IN IRAQI SECURITY

The interests of Iran and Iraq security coincide in certain areas and security competition is complicated as it is seen by some Iraqis that Iran is making huge efforts to acquire nuclear weapons as a Muslim bomb, and not as a threat to Iraq.[44] It was also noted that Iran has given some funding to Iraq's security forces in 2005, and Iraq had to promise the United States that Iran would not train Iraqi security forces.[45]

Iran had pressurised on the security arrangement between the US and Iraq. General Odierno who was the Commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq at that time said on October 12, 2008, that Iran may try to corrupt the members of the Council of Representatives so as to vote against the Status of Forces agreement.[46] However, in December 2011 Iran indicated that the US forces should withdraw from Iraq, as the US should not use Iraqi land,

sea, and air for launching or for any transit point when they attack other countries.[47]

It has been argued that some Iraqi military and intelligence officials had significant influence over elements of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, and had accused Iran of providing shaped charges and artillery to Iraqi militants. Moreover, Iran had also recruited thousands of Iraqis for gathering information; in fact, Iran has had intelligence agents in northern Iraq for at least 20 years.[48] As per Dafna Linzer, the rough estimate about Iranian intelligence officers in Iraq in 2007 was about 150.[49] It was also observed that some of the Iranian people felt that an increase in Iraq would be a threat to them, while others have attempted to use Iraq's military as a wedge to force the US out of Iraq.[50] As per Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, "Considering the fact that the Iraqi Army can provide security, their presence in the country is not justifiable".[51]

THE ROLE OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD IN IRAQ

Immediately after the fall of Saddam in 2003, Iran began funnelling much of its aid to militias in Iraq via the Qods Force, which is a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.[52] They not only provided funding, weapons, operatives, and training to groups in Iraq, but also to Islamic militants in Palestine, Bosnia, Hezbollah in Lebanon, fighters in south Sudan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan.[53]

It was argued by Mahan Abedin, who is a director of research at the London-based Centre for the Study of Terrorism that Qods' training was largely focused on utilising intelligence and this was the key to their success. As per <https://assignbuster.com/irans-influence-in-iraq/>

official figures, the number of Qods and Iranian intelligence personnel in Iraq was 150, while US commanders believe there were only fewer Shiite provinces.[54] Although the United States was slow to grasp the full extent of Iran's expanding role in Iraq, but on July 19, 2005, the United States sent a secret cable to Iran which stated that a British soldier was killed by an explosive which was supplied by Iran, although Iran denied there involvement, which lead to confrontations. [55]

The Commander General Petraeus, who was in power during the Multi-National Force operation in Iraq, stated in his testimony to Congress that “ none of us earlier this year appreciated the extent of Iranian involvement in Iraq, something about which we and Iraq's leaders all now have greater concern”.[56] Moreover, the Qods was a tool used by Iran directly or indirectly for hurting the US military and also disrupting American interests in Iraq. In 2007, General Petraeus stated that, “ There should be no question about the malign, lethal involvement and activities of the Qods Force in this country”. He went on to add that Iran was “ responsible for providing the weapons, the training, the funding and in some cases the direction for operations that have indeed killed US soldiers”.[57] American officials did not accuse the Qods Force directly for attacking Americans and very carefully said that they were not aware of leadership of the Iranian government as being involved in the Qods Force's activities.[58] Such uncertainty in the US regarding the potential involvement of Iran in hte Qods Force raises certain issues that should be addressed by American politicians. Although the American president, George W. Bush, confidently said that those arms, ammunitions and explosives, which were used in Iraq, were certainly from

the Qods Force, but “ we are not aware whether or not the head leaders of Iran ordered the Quds Force to do what all this and what all they did ”. [59]

As per the US intelligence reports, which leaked in 2010, certain details were provided about the precise extent to which Iran was involved in 2006-2009 violence. The report also said that the IRGC used Hezbollah to train militants in Iran before crossing to Iraq. Moreover, General Petraeus had stated Hezbollah's role in a 2007 report to Congress.[60]

The reports draw on testimony from detainees, captured diaries, and weapons originating in Iran which included explosively formed penetrators, bombs, and surface-to-air missiles. Thus, by all these reports it can be concluded that Iran had a hand in training and resourcing of specific attacks, including assassinations of Iraqi ministry officials, mortar attacks on the Green Zone, and also on kidnappings of American soldiers. In addition, General Petraeus implicated Iran in the 2007 car bombing and killing of two southern Iraqi governors. Besides using Hezbollah to train terrorists, the reports point to both the Badr Corps and Mahdi Army as allies in Iranian efforts.[61]

According to the Long War Journal, which is basically based on interviews with senior military and intelligence officials and also mid-level military people, the Qods Force streamlined its operations in Iraq by creating the Ramazan Corps. The Corps was responsible for most of Qods Forces operations in Iraq in 2007 and consists of the Fajr command in the south, Nasr command in the north, and Zafar command in central Iraq. The Qods Force's aid also included Mahdi Army, the Badr Brigades, the Qazali Network,

the Sheibani Network, and many more groups and parties, as they mostly targeted political rivals, the Iraqi Security Forces, and Coalition forces.

Moreover, when Badr Brigades and SCIRI formed a government, Iranian groups targeted them.[62] Again as per Brigadier General Kevin Begner, on July 2, 2007, Iran had supplied the Iraqi militias with \$3 million per month.

[63] Again in 2011, the US raised concerns over Iran's involvement in Iraqi violence and said that the increase in the number of Americans dying in the summer of 2011 was because Iran had supported Iraqi militants. Again in July, Admiral Mullen said that Iran was supplying militias in Iraq so as to take credit for withdrawing American troops.[64]

During the war, which lasted for 8 years, Iran has developed strong ties in terms of religious and political influence with Shiite parties. During this period, Iran played a very important role in mediating between the Iraqi political leaders. It also had strong relations with the Sadrists who are one of the largest political parties in Iran's ruling coalition. Moreover, IRGC also had a significant influence over Iraqi security forces.

Iran also has a large mix of resources, which were available in the process of exerting influence upon Iraq after Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003. Iran also used its influence in Iraq so as to divert the US goals, and pursue its own goals and interests. Iran used its sway in Iraq in order to keep the pro-Iranian Shiite Prime Minister Maliki in power and also to maintain stability along its western border. Thus, it can be argued that Iran's role in Iraq is very complex, and not a simple task to mould Iraq as per the wishes of Iran. [65]

CONCLUSION

From all that has been discussed and looked at above, it is beyond doubt that since the invasion of Iraq by the United States and the downfall of Saddam Hussein, Iran has exerted more and more influence in Iraq by both conventional and unconventional methods. It has used a number of tools ranging from economic, political, military, regional to historic to exert such influence and has also formed proxies both with organisations of different profiles and objectives. Sectarianism and factional divisions have also been largely exploited by Iran to achieve its goals.

Iranian influence in Iraq is vital to Iran since it considers its importance as a means of establishing its regional dominance and counters the influence of the United States in Iraq. Such efforts of establishing its influence in Iraq have not been without setbacks considering that Iran has had to work with organisations that have been counter-productive in their goals and objectives. The situation in Syria in the past few years has also lessened the viability of Iran's dominance in the region. Even with such setbacks, Iran has enjoyed some benefits from its dominance in Iraq since trade between the two countries has flourished in a critical moment when Iran was undergoing trade sanctions from the United States and Western countries. One can only wait to see how long such influence will be exerted and whether such status enjoyed by Iran now will continue to exist regardless of the political situation in Iraq.