

## **Patterns of Iran's Activism in Iraq's Geopolitics**

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### **Abstract**

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the establishment of governments based on the people's votes, due to the long-standing religious and cultural ties between the peoples of Iran and Iraq, the ground for Iran's activism in the geopolitics of this country was provided. Iran's regional policy, while observing the principles of good neighborliness and non-interference, has taken a special and strategic view of these developments and has acted in an effort to secure national interests. In this regard, three patterns regarding Iran's activism in Iraq's geopolitics are proposed, which include the pattern of passive activism or non-participation, interactive activism, and activism based on soft power and economic links. Examining these three patterns and the advantages and disadvantages associated with each one, and analysis regarding which pattern will be more likely to provide Iran's national interests are the main topics of this article. Based on the results of this research, Iran can have a unique position in Iraq's geopolitics due to its relative advantages compared to other actors. Based on this, an effective regional policy to deepen the relations between Iran and Iraq, on the one hand, is focused on social relations that are rooted in culture, religion, language and common race, and on the other hand, it is focused on deepening economic relations and establishing mutual dependence.

**Keywords:** Iran, Regional Politics, Iraq, Geopolitics, Soft power.

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### **1. Introduction**

As a regional power, Iran considers its activism in the regional arena and beyond in the international system to be necessary, and evaluates it in line with its national interests. Meanwhile, Iraq is one of the most important neighbors of Iran, having many cultural and social similarities with Iran. Although the existence of the dictatorial system until 2003 prevented the two nations and two governments from building closer ties, the establishment of a government based on the people's vote in Iraq led to the formation of cultural, social and political closeness between the two countries, so that Iraq is still mentioned as one of Iran's allies. During this period, Iran has tried to expand and consolidate its relations with Iraq in various fields. This effort includes a range of economic cooperations on the one hand and political and security cooperations on the other. In the meantime, different approaches have been formed regarding how to strengthen relations and the form of Iran's activism in Iraq, both inside the country and inside Iraq. Based on these approaches, patterns can be deduced about Iran's type of activism in Iraq's geopolitics, which, of course, can be implemented by Iran's foreign policy apparatus, or have already been utilized in the real world in key moments in the past. In the meantime, on the one hand, paying attention to Iran's national interests and the necessity of Iran's active involvement regarding developments in Iraq and the region is significant, while on the other hand, it is important to concentrate on accelerated developments in Iraq. The needs of Iraq today are different from the needs of Iraq in 2003 or the needs of Iraq in 2014, when the ISIS attack began, and at the same time, different attitudes towards Iran have spread. As a result, although activism in Iraq's geopolitics should be based on the strategic needs and national interests of Iran, it should also take into consideration different attitudes in Iraq and new needs in this country. Therefore, in this research, firstly, the different models that can be formed or continued in the field of Iraq are examined, and then the main question of the article is formed around this axis, and addresses which model is more suitable for Iran's activism in today's conditions in Iraq? The findings of this research are based on the examination of both the advantages and disadvantages of each of the models, and based on this, a model that has more capabilities for today's Iraq is identified.

## **2. Literature Review**

Regarding the internal developments of Iraq and the connection of these developments with other international actors including Iran, various researches have been carried out so far, including the books "Iraq after Saddam and regional actors") Center for Strategic Research, 2008(, "Iraq developments and politics and the power of the Shiites of the Persian Gulf region" (Kherad Falah,2017) and "Middle East book«7» for Iraqi developments" (Daremi,2009) and articles "A Study of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Policy Toward New Iraq" (Darvishi Setalani and Vatankhah,2018) and "The Role of Geographical Spaces in Powers Competition; Case Study: Iraq" (Abdi and Shirzad,2016) could be mentioned as examples that were published in the Persian language.

Yazdani and Sadeghi (2009), in a study titled "Examining the impact of threats and opportunities caused by the continuation of the occupation and developments in Iraq on the Islamic Republic of Iran", considered this event to have various military-security, political, economic and cultural-social consequences for Iran. Moreover, they have emphasized that the most important opportunity through which Iran can play a role is the entry of Shiites in the Iraqi political system. Because in this way, Iran can become a superior regional power due to the cultural and ideological commonalities it has with the Shiites. Feyzi and Rezaei (2014) also investigated the security effects of Iraq's developments on Iran in a study, and while emphasizing the geopolitical and ideological opportunities for Iran after the overthrow of Saddam, they stated that at the same time, threats had been caused by extremist, Salafist attitudes and sectarian conflicts. In another study, Gholami, Abtahi, Taheri and Kazemi Zand (2017) explained the reasons for the confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the developments in Iraq and considered it to be the result of the conflict between the Shiite revolutionary identity of Iran and the Wahhabi identity of Saudi Arabia. Alipour, Heydari and Hajilo (2017) also believe that although a democratic Iraq, in which the majority of Shiites are present in the power structures is considered a suitable option for Iran's national security, this option is challenging for Iran. A federalist Iraq in which the three Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni regions are actors, will create the least challenge and the most opportunity for Iran's national security.

Among Latin sources, Kenneth Katzman (Katzman,2009) claims that after Saddam, Iran seeks to ensure that Iraq will never again become a threat to Iran and even become an ally to defend Iran against international criticism of its nuclear program. Iran hopes to create profitable investment opportunities and a growing market for Iranian products and contracts. In another study, Ismail Sari (Sari,2021) believes that despite the opportunities created, some security concerns have also arisen for Iran after 2003 and, therefore, Iran still maintains its priority to end the American occupation in Iraq. Anutosh Ram (Ram,2022) in his thesis at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, also states that the study of the efforts of Iran and the United States to gain superiority over the other ultimately shows that Iran has been more successful in gaining a relative position of power in Iraq than America.

These studies have investigated Iran's impact on the developments in Iraq and its consequences. Some of them have focused on the relations between Iran and Shiites, and some of them have focused on the competition between Iran and regional and extra-regional powers regarding the developments in Iraq. However, in the existing investigations, the alternative patterns of Iran's activism and the consequences of each of them have not been extensively covered.

### **3. Methodology**

The research method in this article is descriptive-analytical, and in order to collect data and information, library and internet sources have been used. In order to apply this method and enable comparison between different outputs, modeling has been used. In order to make the phenomena easier and understandable, the word “pattern” or “sample” deals with the regulation of the elements of that phenomenon and creating an order in them, and makes it in the form of a logical plan and a figure. Therefore, if a researcher is going to provide the anticipated results for a regular process or an algorithm every time data is entered, he uses the presentation of a pattern in the title of his research (Moradi and Miralmasi,2018:45-46).

### **4 .Theoretical Framework: Smart Power**

The concept of smart power was first used by Suzanne Nossel, defining it as a purposeful and wise combination of hard and soft power in dealing with threats. She believed that coercive and persuasive resources, including

capabilities and advantages, military, economic, cultural and ideological, should be coordinated in one direction so that the result guarantees the continuity of the country's superiority (Nossel,2004). The design of the concept of smart power should be seen as a response to the threats, risks and limitations that arise in its use. Since the threats in the era of globalization have a complex, comprehensive and organized nature, in order to deal with such conditions, the patterns of power use must also be changed; In the same way, the forms and tools of power are also in a state of change, reconstruction and optimization (Hinen,2008).

Joseph Nye has played the greatest role in deepening and expanding the concept of smart power, as he states that the United States should combine hard and soft power and create smart power, as it did during the Cold War (Nye,2007). In his upcoming book *Power*, he expands on the concept of smart power. He believes that the first step for smart power and effective power conversion strategies is to understand the full range of power sources and recognize the problems of their effective combination in different fields (Nye,2011).

Nye states that focusing only on soft power or hard power is not the solution to problems. Although he emphasizes the serious effectiveness of soft power, he believes that soft power is not the right solution for all problems, and in support of this claim, he presents the following examples: The fact that North Korean leader Kim Yong-il is interested in watching Hollywood movies should not affect the country's nuclear weapons program. Also, the soft power of the United States in the 90s could not create a rift in the relationship between the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the Al-Qaeda group, and finally it was the hard power of the United States military that ended this alliance in 2001 (Nye,2007:33).

As a result, it is important to pay attention to hard power as one aspect of smart power. The most important feature of bare hard power is the visibility of its sources. The expansion of military weapons and hardware, the approval of huge budgets for the promotion of combat systems, the increase of military forces ready for war, and the caution and importance of militaristic methods in governance and foreign policy are the naked and obvious aspects of the use of hard power. In general, the resources associated with hard power include material and tangible element, such as force and money (Nye,2011:25-49).

Another aspect of smart power is soft power, which Nye believes is success in world politics, not with hard power, but with the use of soft power. Therefore, countries that pay enough attention to its use are successful in this field. Although this type of power also has limitations, despite being more effective and durable with lower costs. A country that only uses soft power tools is surprised by unpredictable threats and critical situations, and loses the necessary power to act (Aghajamali,2017:90-91). Soft power was also proposed for the first time in the framework of an independent theory by Nye in 1990 regarding the review of the nature and results of American power. this type of power can be called the second face of power (Nye, 2003:66-67). But before, scholars such as Alfred de Grazia, Klaus Knorr and John Kenneth Galbraith explained forms of power that are similar to soft power and mean legality, legitimacy and democracy. In contrast to power through force, soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. Nye believes: soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others without the use of force. According to Joseph Nye, attractive personality, culture, values and acceptable political organizations and policies that have legitimacy and moral validity, information and communication technology and generally capitals that create attractiveness are the sources and components of soft power (Nye,2004:35).

The importance of soft power is to the extent that Nye himself emphasizes that in the information age, success is not only dependent on which country is superior in the military arena, but it is also important which country is superior in the soft power arena (Nathan and Medavoy,2009). In soft power, the actor achieves the desired result through indirect methods. This theory is based on shaping the preferences of others, but this is applied in an intangible way using cultural attractions and values. As a result, soft power is different from influence, because influence may be based on hard power, threats, or rewards, but soft power is the ability to win over others based on consent (Asgari,2010:67).

In his early works, Nye mentions the types of power in the global information age, including military, economic and soft power, and considers power to have two layers, hard and soft. He classifies economic power as a part of hard power, just like military power. However, in his later works, he



considers economic resources as one of the sources of soft power and believes that economic resources can produce both soft and hard behavior (Nye,2010:32). Later, according to Nye, the importance of economic power as one of the most important items in the toolbox of soft power policies goes so far that he deals with the issue of economic power in a separate chapter in his book "The Future of Power"(Nye,2011:136). On this basis, understanding and recognizing soft economic power is a very important area that cannot be neglected. Of course, soft economic power is generally used in dimensions and areas where hard economic power does not work, or at least there is no need for it in the beginning (Seif and et al,2013:32).

## **5 .Findings**

### **5-1 .Geopolitics and the State Formation Process in the New era of Iraq**

The nature of the government in Iraq has been in conflict with the pluralistic nature of its society since the beginning of its political life. The hundred-year history of Iraq is tied with issues such as rebellions, coups, revolutions, a civil war. The shadow of conflict has always been over this country, and it has produced a fragile structure and created a bankrupt country (Bodaghi and et al,2021:111). It is also believed that the change of regime and the subsequent system of imposed federalism has widened the cracks and ruptures of the sectarian-ethnic system of Iraq (Heydari Bani and Ezzati,2023:34). However, the change of the Iraqi system from a republic to a parliamentary system and the practice of democracy by Iraqis increased hope for gradual stability and the formation of a powerful country. Since then, five elections have been held in 2005, 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2021.

#### **5-1-1 .The 2005 Elections and the Victory of "the Unified Iraqi Alliance"**

The 2005 elections were Iraq's first national convention to form a popular government. Secular and non-secular Shiites, Sunni Arabs, Kurds and other Iraqi ethnic groups were able to freely participate in these elections for the first time. The important event of this election was the complete convergence of non-secular Shiites in the form of a coalition called "Unified Iraqi Alliance", which also received the support of Ayatollah Sistani. With this approach, the non-secular Shiites were able to win a decisive victory in the elections, and on this basis, Ibrahim al-Jaafari was elected as the prime minister (Belordi,2009:85-84). A year later, in 2006, Jafari resigned as prime minister and Nouri al-Maliki replaced him.

**5-1-2 .The 2010 Elections and Continuation of Nouri al-Maliki's Prime Ministership**

In the 2010 elections, although the secular Shiite coalition called "The Iraqi National Movement" led by Ayad Allawi managed to win the largest number of seats (91 seats), but in the end, the coalition of non-secular Shiites, including "The State of Law Coalition" and "The National Iraqi Alliance", were able to form a government, and Nouri al-Maliki remained the prime minister of Iraq. He established good relations with Iran during his premiership (Asadi,2009:32-39).

**5-1-3 .The 2014 Elections and Haider al-Abadi's Premiership:**

During the 2014 elections, the continued popularity of non-secular Shiite parties in the eyes of the people turned the election results in their favor. The coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki achieved a significant victory by winning 92 seats, but the Shia parties, especially Moqtada Sadr, who won 34 seats, (Khaki and et al,2014:310-311) did not agree with the continuation of his premiership, and so Haider al-Abadi became the new prime minister of Iraq (Taheri Kol Keshundi and Taghizadeh Davari,2015:131). It was reported that Haider al-Abadi was chosen with the approval and support of Tehran and Washington (Al-Qarawee,2016:3). Later, Haider al-Abadi's reaction with regards to following US sanctions was not considered friendly, although he later retracted these statements.

**5-1-4 .The 2018 Elections and the Victory of "Sadr" Movement**

The results of the 2018 elections had noticeable changes compared to the previous ones. Moqtada Sadr's list named "Al-Sauron" won the largest number of seats in the parliament. After that, the "Al-Fath" coalition led by Hadi Al-Amiri and the "Al-Nasr" coalition headed by Haider al-Abadi were ranked, respectively, and the government of Nouri al-Maliki was ranked fourth. As a result of this election, Moqtada Sadr, who was critical of Iran, became a more serious player in the developments in Iraq (Mansour,2019: 10). During this period, the gap created between the Shiites deepened. Because, first of all, Iraq experienced several different prime ministers in this period, namely Adel Abdul Mahdi, Mohammad Tawfiq Allawi, Adnan al-Zurufi and Mustafa Al-Kazemi. Secondly, due to the depth of the differences, this term of the Iraqi Parliament was not completed and it was decided to hold early elections in 2021.



**5-1-5 .The 2021 Elections and the Victory of "Sadr" Movement Again**

The results of the 2021 elections marked a bigger victory for the Sadr movement, and "The State of Law Coalition" came third after the Sunni coalition " Mohamed Al-Halbousi" and the "Al-Fath" coalition came in next (Al Jazeera,2021). The continuation of deep differences among the Shiites made them unable to reach a conclusion for the election of the prime minister, and therefore Mustafa al-Kazemi remained in this position until one year after this election. Finally, the Shiites overcame the differences and elected Muhammad Shia al-Sudani as the prime minister.

**5-2. Investigating Activist Elements in Iraq's Geopolitics and Political System and its Relationship with Iran**

Examining the process of the formation of governments and governments after the birth of the country of Iraq shows that in this country, no space was provided for the activities of different groups and ethnicities, either during the monarchy or during the republic. On the one hand, Iraq has been the stage for the display of power by foreign countries such as UK and America, and on the other hand, the autocratic nature of the governments has not allowed the political and social groups of this country to play a role in the formation of governments. However, the developments that started after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, became the basis for the formation of the presence of Iraqi domestic actors and elites in the state-building process. These developments made important Kurdish parties, including the "Patriotic Union of Kurdistan" led by "Jalal Talabani" and the "Kurdistan Democratic Party" headed by "Masoud Barzani", to find a serious and essential role in the fate of the country's affairs, which were rejected by Saddam. The "Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the "Kurdistan Democratic Party" have repeatedly emphasized the need to maintain good relations with Tehran and have appreciated Iran's aid to the Kurds after Saddam's chemical attacks on "Halabja" in March 1988 and after the suppression of the Kurdish rebellion in April 1991 (Ziba Kalam and Abdullah Pour,2010:52). Of course, more recently, what Iran views as a creeping Israeli presence in the Kurdistan region of Iraq has affected KRG<sup>1</sup>'s relations with Tehran (Entessar,2023:263).

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1.Kurdistan Regional Government

The developments after 2003 also caused the Shiites, whether religious or secular, to find a central role in the formation of the Iraqi government, to the extent that after the formation of the parliamentary system in this country, the prime minister was always chosen from among the Shiites and having a member of this faith at this position became common. This was despite the fact that before this, Shiites not only had no place in the government, but their political and social life was seriously threatened by Saddam's violent actions. In the new conditions, the quantity and dispersion of Shiites in the strategic areas of Iraq and their role in power are considered to be among the main factors that create opportunities for Iran (Afshordi and Baboli, 2017: 5).

Developments after 2003 also made Iraq's Sunni groups beyond the Baathists and Tikrits play a role in the development of Iraq, and be serious players.

These developments, on the one hand, caused the role of domestic actors to start, formalize and expand in the direction of state-building in this country, and on the other hand, it provided the ground for other countries to be effective and influential in these relations.

After the military attack in 2003, most of all, the United States of America tried to be effective in the developments of this country through state-building from above and nation-building from below. According to political philosophers, state-building is mainly internal in nature (Bashiriyeh, 1995:19). On the other hand, there are opinions that consider the government to have an external origin, which is rooted in the thoughts and actions of politicians and leaders of great powers. In this sense, state-building is a practical program that the hegemonic power usually imposes on the people of a country in line with its interests (Shafi'i, 2008). Such an approach was followed by America towards Iraq and at the same time an attempt was made to sideline Iran despite Iran's undeniable influence in Iraq. Over the past decades, America and Iran have both sought to reduce the presence and influence of the other in various arenas and developments in the region (Vaezi, 2008:20).

Saudi Arabia is another country that has tried to influence the developments in Iraq. In recent years, the difference between the identities of the two governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran, one based on "traditional-Wahhabi conservatism" and the other based on "Revolutionary-Shia internationalism", have played a prominent role in shaping the new geopolitics of the Middle East (Ekhtiyari Amiri,2016:145). which can be seen in Iraq. Saudi Arabia has tried to threaten Iran's sphere of influence and geopolitical territory by taking advantage of social divisions in Iraq, especially ethnic and religious divisions (Niakoyi and Moradi Kelardeh, 2015:122).

### **5-3 .The Requirements of Iran's Regional Policy in Relation to Iraq's Geopolitics**

The heterogeneous demographic composition of Iraq, the existence of different demographic groups, which sometimes leads to geopolitical crises, have significant effects on Iran in political, security and military dimensions (Chokhachizadeh Moghadam and et al,2013:247). On the other hand, due to the serious efforts of other countries to influence the developments in Iraq, which could threaten Iran's interests, Iran has not been indifferent to the developments in Iraq in recent years. In fact, Iran has been trying to take into account the principles of good neighborliness and beneficial cultural and religious ties in order to secure the country's national interests. Having said that, the policies that Iran has announced to take steps in this field include the following

#### **5-3-1. Non-Intervention**

From the beginning, Iran has emphasized that it recognizes the Iraqi people's right to sovereignty over their destiny, and based on this, it has supported the existence of the political system in Iraq and tried to play a protective role towards the system that the Iraqis want and agree on. In this regard, Iran has not opposed the federal system of Iraq, and at the same time, the new position of Iraqi Shiites in the political and governmental structure of this country has been evaluated as important in Iran's orientation towards this country and the future of relations between Iran and Iraq (Kakaei,2017:31).

**5-3-2.Fight Against Terrorism**

Following the growing danger of terrorist activity and considering the rapid advance of ISIS in Iraq, if the Islamic Republic of Iran had not actively intervened, the fall of the Iraqi government would have been a serious possibility. Notably, other countries, including the United States, did not take any serious measures to deal with ISIS (Seyfi and Pour Hasan,2018: 57). As Masoud Barzani, the president of Kurdistan at the time, stated: "We asked for weapons and Iran was the first country to provide us with weapons and ammunition,"(Time Magazine,2014) Also, Haider al-Abadi, the Prime Minister of Iraq at the time, emphasized that Hashd al-Shaabi, as a force supported by Iran, played a key role in the defeat of ISIS and the liberation of the city of Kirkuk from ISIS. However, he believed that this militia did not act as a proxy of Iran and was a part of Iraqi institutions (The daily herald,2017) Moreover, as Iraq became a theatre of conflict, Iran sought to defend its ally against the extremist threat posed by what it referred to as 'Takfiri' groups, such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, which were considered direct threats to its national security (Wastnidge,2020:107).

Therefore, one of Iran's other policies regarding the developments in Iraq has been the fight against terrorism. On the one hand, Iran has declared its readiness for any interaction in order to preserve the Iraqi political system and keep it safe from the danger of terrorists, while on the other hand, it has interacted with the political system of this country in order to prevent terrorists from attacking Iran's national security.

**5-3-3. Maintaining the Territorial Integrity of Iraq**

Considering and observing the positions of the internal groups of Iraq, shows that except the Kurds, they do not agree with the division of Iraq (Rastgo and et al,2018:245). Therefore, in line with the request of the central government in Iraq, Iran announced its opposition to the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan and the division of this country. Iran's concern about Iraq's experience had three internal Iranian-Iraqi, regional and international dimensions. The concern at the internal level for Iran was the intensification of Kurdish nationalist tendencies, and at the internal level regarding Iraq, it was the fragmentation of Iraq and the formation of Sunni areas and the creation of a zone of influence for Iran's regional rivals. This concern at the regional and international levels were also related to the

possible actions of Israel and the United States in creating an immigration zone (Menati and Hadian,2019:153-154).

#### **5-4. Examining Iran's Activism Patterns in Iraq's Geopolitics**

Designing different patterns in the field of Iranian activism does not mean that this type of activism necessarily happened in the real world. Rather, the goal here is to theorize the types of activism in the world of possibilities. As a result, explaining the aspects of each of these patterns and examining the benefits and disadvantages of each case is one of the goals of this research. On the other hand, considering Iran's regional policy emphasis on non-interference in the internal developments of countries, all three patterns below have been designed based on adherence to this basic factor.

##### **5-4-1. The Pattern of Passive Activism or Non-Participation**

In the first pattern, the advice to Iran's regional policy is the absence of any kind of participation and activism in Iraq's political relations and developments. This pattern strongly emphasizes good neighborly policies and believes that any attempt to influence the developments of other countries is contrary to these policies. According to this pattern, the foreign policy of Iran is only to act as an observer of the developments and events in Iraq and organize the relations between itself and the political system in Iraq on this basis. This pattern believes that the best type of foreign relations happens when countries are not sensitive to each other's internal relations, and they consider this type of activism to be the true manifestation of good neighborly policy.

This model is promoted by Iranians who are willingly or unwillingly in favor of Iran's isolation. Furthermore, it is followed by the media of some countries in the region who are worried about Iran's activism in the developments in Iraq. For example, Turkey's Anadolu news agency claims in a report about Iran's activities: During the last two decades, Iran's government has violated the national sovereignty and the interests of the Iraqi people in political, economic, security arenas, etc. with its various actions, and has been the biggest obstacle to establishing stability and stability in this country (Anadolu Agency,2022). In fact, these news and analyzes are published with the aim of promoting Iran's isolation in developments in Iraq.



As a result, despite the fact that the intention rooted in this pattern has positive aspects in idealistic orientations, it has no place in a pragmatist policy. Based on this, there are the following basic objections to the pattern of passive activism:

First, this method does not find a place in any of the mainstream theories of international relations; Theories that countries mainly form their foreign policy upon. As such, the use of soft power, which is one of the main tools considered by neoliberal theorists in order to create influence (Motaghi and Shahrabi Farahani, 2012:209), is not considered in this type of view. It is also contrary to the neorealist opinions, which consider expansion of the sphere of influence as one of the main and major goals of countries in foreign policy (Rittberger, 2004:1).

The second objection, which is also rooted in the thoughts related to mainstream theories, is based on the idea that the unwillingness of an actor to be active in international relations does not mean that other actors will similarly choose the same idea in relation to that actor. Because influence is a prescription made for all actors in the scene of international relations, at least based on current realities.

Thirdly, many common concerns make countries cast aside a policy of indifference to the internal developments of other actors, especially in their surroundings. For example, considering that both Iran and Iraq have bordering Kurdish regions, there are common concerns and issues that require bilateral interaction and sensitivity to each other's internal developments.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that this model covers the maximum economic dimension of smart power and does not cover other aspects related to smart power, including its hard and soft parts. Therefore, Iran's security and political requirements do not fit into the framework of this model, and the aspect related to Iran's cultural and soft requirements also has no place in this model. In this model, even if the issue of economy is emphasized alone, it cannot be a solution due to the lack of the mentioned supporting factors.

#### **5-4-2. The Pattern of Interactive Activism**

On the one hand, the pattern of interactive activism is not indifferent to the developments in Iraq, and on the other hand, it emphasizes the policy of non-intervention and respect for the internal sovereignty of this country. In this pattern, indifference and insensitivity towards the internal developments of Iraq is not approved according to what was mentioned earlier about the objections to passive activism. However, at the same time, this pattern adheres to the policy of good neighborliness and considers the interaction in the developments of Iraq as dependent on the common will of Iraqi groups in order to resolve differences. The experience of forming a government in recent years in Iraq has shown that this process has suffered from large gaps and blockage, sometimes due to deep differences between Iraqi groups.

In this situation, according to the historical bond of friendship that exists between the Iranian and Iraqi elites, it will be possible for Iran to be diligent in order to overcome problems with an interactive approach towards all groups to remove the political blockage that has occurred in this country. This pattern considers the following reasons in line with its interactive efforts in the developments of Iraq:

First, the request for Political and military interaction between Iraqi groups is not far-fetched, because most of the current leaders and elites in Iraq have friendly relations with Iran, and many of them have even lived, studied or been refugees in Iran. In this situation, according to Iran's previous history of friendship, it can be the basis for untying some political blockages.

Second, due to the fact that Iraq's political system is a federal system, it is considered an open system and it is possible for all international actors to influence the relations of this country, albeit indirectly. In this situation, Iran should also pay attention to the policy of good neighborliness and non-interference, and use every opportunity to carry out interactive actions in line with its national interests and the common interests of the two countries.

Because in this type of activism, the emphasis is on political and security issues, Iran's role in determining the prime minister of Iraq becomes relevant. As the official of one of the Iraqi parties confirms this role and states that for the selection of the prime minister, consultations were held with other countries, but the consultations were more with the Islamic Republic and such consultations were held to choose Maliki and Ebadi or any other person (Mizan news agency,2014). In this model, on the other hand, military and security cooperation between the two countries is considered important. Although Iran has played an undeniable role in the destruction of ISIS, some Iraqis consider the destruction of ISIS as an opportunity for Iran to penetrate Iraq. Fahri Saadi, a researcher at the French University of Lebanon in Erbil, Iraq, believes in this regard: Iran's influence on the Iraqi government has been significant since the fall of the Baath regime in 2003. The emergence of the ISIS terrorist group gave Iran a golden opportunity to establish its hegemony by creating the Hashd al-Shaabi (Fahri Saadi,2021). In this situation, although the new Prime Minister al-Sudani claims that Iran and Iraq have many common interests and appreciates Iran's role in supporting the Iraqi political process since 2003 and fighting terrorism, he also states that the United States is a strategic partner for Iraq (Mahmoud,2023). As a result, today's situation in Iraq requires new necessities that are not necessarily compatible with this model. Although this model may have been effective during the years of the war against ISIS, its scope of application has been reduced now with the reduction of Iraq's security needs and the reduction of threats such as ISIS. Since the 2018 elections, which was accompanied by the strengthening of Moqtada Sadr's role in the Iraqi political arena, the effectiveness of this model has become doubtful. The Sadr movement has been increasingly vocal in criticizing Iran's influence in Iraq. The goal of Sadr's version of Iraqi nationalism is to differentiate the Iraqi Arab Shiite identity from Iran (Khanafira Mavadat,2023:164).

As a result, Despite the merits mentioned for the pattern of interactive activism, this pattern has the following shortcomings:

First, although in this pattern it is emphasized that all interactionist efforts are based on the principles of good neighborliness and non-interference, in any case, there will be a possibility of opposing this perception by actors who seek to limit Iran's role in the region and they will try to create a negative image of this issue in the minds of Iraqis.

Second, according to what has been said, the sphere of influence of this pattern is when there is a common desire of all Iraqi groups for Iran's interactive actions, just as there was the desire of the majority of Iraqis for Iran's interaction with Iraq in expelling ISIS. As a result, this pattern does not work in all situations and is limited to certain circumstances, and its use depends on the will of the Iraqis themselves and not on the will of Iran.

Thirdly, considering that the main support regarding the use of this pattern is based on previous friendly relations with Iraqi groups and elites, as a result, with the arrival of new generations in the Iraqi power scene, the scope of this pattern's effectiveness will also decrease. Because it is a reasonable proposition that Iran's relationships with the leaders of Iraq in the past, such as Jalal Talabani, and many of today's Iraqi leaders, who lived and studied in Iran and enjoyed Iran's support during Saddam's era, are more special than the ties it can build with the Iraqi elites and leaders in the future.

As a result, this model cannot have sufficient explanatory power in relation to the theory of intelligent power. Because it is mainly based on hard power and political and security cooperations, and the cultural and soft aspects of power have no place in it. At the same time, focusing too much on the hard aspect of power and its security side causes economic cooperation to be sidelined and given less priority.

#### **5-4-3. The Pattern of Activism Based on Soft Power and Economic Links**

This pattern, unlike the pattern of passive activism, recommends and emphasizes active activism and tries to influence the internal developments of Iraq, which is considered a necessity for a dynamic regional policy towards this country. However, it believes that for this effect, there is no need to use traditional methods and interactionist measures such as those suggested in the pattern of interactive activism. Rather, the emphasis of this pattern is on imperceptible, far-sighted, and at the same time, realistic actions that can have much greater and long-term effects than other patterns. These actions are based on the heritage and common links between the two

countries and are rooted in culture, on the one hand, and economic realities on the other hand. Based on the latter pattern, Iran's efforts and actions should be based on the use of soft power tools in order to deepen the cultural ties between the two countries. Moreover, it is necessary to pay attention to the economic aspects that can strengthen these links.

Of course, so far, many articles have emphasized the need to pay attention to Iran's soft power in the face of Iraq's internal developments. Some in Iran believe that strengthening and reproducing the culture of resistance, increasing the role of Iran in the arena of Iraqi politics and government, strengthening cultural exchanges and building alliances with regional and extra-regional powers are among the necessities of using soft power in Iraq (Najafi and Khosravi, 2019:33). Some others emphasize the role of Iran's soft power in order to strengthen the role and position of Shiites in the political equations of Iraq, so that in this direction Iran can develop its sphere of influence and acting power in the field of Iraqi politics (Dorj and Hedayati, 2021:81). Nevertheless, the use of soft power in Iraq should be such that it does not lead to suspicion of Iran favoring a particular religious, political or ethnic group. Therefore, the serious and fundamental challenge is how to use this power in practice. In the application of this power, it is important to pay attention to subtle points, including that its objectification should not be such that the Iraqi people feel Iran looks down on them. In this model, the focus should be on meeting the needs of the Iraqi people, especially the economic needs through the development of economic cooperation. It should be instilled in the minds that Iran will provide the necessary cooperation and assistance to the best of its ability in any field that the Iraqis need. Finally, it is important for Iraqis to believe that despite the fact that Iran considers its own national and economic interests, its efforts in Iraq are in line with the will of the Iraqi people and it is taking steps on this basis.

As a result, based on this pattern, it is significant to pay attention to the following commonalities and links regarding the relations between the two countries:

**Historical Links:**

Historically, Iran and Iraq have a lot in common. Some of the oldest civilizations in the world, including the Sumerian and Elamite civilizations, which are said to have a single origin, (Nasab Abdullahi, 2023) were created



side by side in Iran and Iraq today and therefore, these historical commonalities have existed between these two countries since the remotest time. Historical interactions between the Caliph of Baghdad and Iranian rulers are another manifestation of this common history after Islam. Also, important parts of Iraq were still a part of Iran until the Safavid era (Mohammadi Barzegar and Osanlu, 2014:146) and historical relations between the people of these two lands have always been ongoing.

#### **Language Links**

The Persian, Arabic and Kurdish languages, which all have a common root, are used as common dialects in both Iran and Iraq. A significant part of the people of southwestern Iran speaks Arabic, which enables them to have a greater understanding of Iraqi culture. Also, the Qur'an, which is the considered to be the most important religious text by all Muslims, is in Arabic, and this is a way to deepen the linguistic ties between the two countries. In addition, a significant number of Iraqi people, especially the bazaars and seminarians of this country, are familiar with the Persian language in religious cities and sometimes speak Persian easily.

#### **Religious Links**

The absolute majority of the people of Iran and Iraq are Muslims, and therefore, through the common religion, they benefit from the same cultural ties and attachments. These religious links are doubled by the Shia religion, because the majority of the population in both countries follow this faith. Therefore, soft power tools can be used to further influence the relations between Iran and Iraq and expand political and economic cooperation.

#### **Ethnic Links**

Common ethnicities and races are another powerful feature that can deepen relations between Iran and Iraq. These ethnicities are neighbors of each other on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border. Notably, the north of Iraq is made up of Kurdish provinces, and bordering them, the west of Iran includes several Kurdish provinces. The residents of southwestern Iran, which is located in the vicinity of Iraq, are mainly of Arab race. In addition, Iranian immigrants of different ethnicities are scattered in Iraq.

#### **Cultural Links**

The set of linguistic, ethnic and religious factors has provided basic grounds for cultural ties between the two countries. For example, holding the

"Arbaeen" ceremony, which today is more than just a religious ceremony, has highlighted important aspects of the cultural link between Iran and Iraq. Because the phenomenon of the Arbaeen procession can lead to the formation of Shia geoculture and the redefinition of the modern Shia civilization. Based on the research, the respondents present in the Arbaeen procession do not consider the multiplicity of ethnicities, races and languages as an obstacle to the formation of a Shia civilization. They consider the Shiite identity as a common element between themselves and different nationalities, and they deem its strengthening with a popular phenomenon, such as the Arbaeen procession, as a cause of solidarity between themselves and other Shiites (Rahmati and et al,2021:22).

The education of Iraqi students in universities and the simultaneous education of Iraqi students in Iran's seminaries and the relations between the seminaries of Najaf, Qom and Mashhad are other aspects that are effective in strengthening the cultural bonds between the two countries. Granting scholarships and opportunities to encourage distinguished Iraqi students to study in Iran is an important tool for using soft power, since they can get to know the environment, history and culture of Iran more than before and can become messengers to strengthen the friendship between Iran and Iraq among their people.

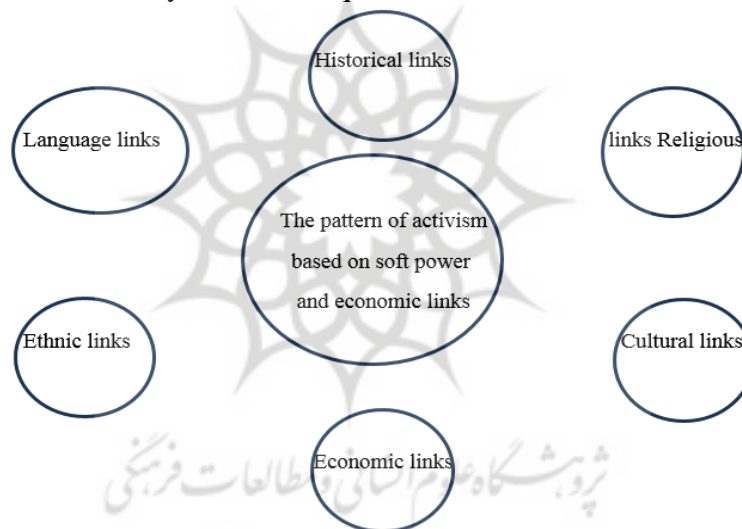
#### **Economic Links**

Economic ties are another important means to deepen the relations between Iran and Iraq and have a long-term effect on the political relations between the two countries. Economic incentives have always been strong incentives in strengthening relationships, and based on this, the theory of interdependence has been proposed and expanded. This importance in the relations between Iran and Iraq can also be crystallized in various aspects, which can at least be mentioned as follows:

First, Iraq needs Iran in order to supply all kinds of energy, especially electricity and gas, as Iran is currently the largest exporter of gas to Iraq; (Khodaparast Pirsarayi,2021:47) As a result, it is necessary to provide proper and principled planning, while responding to this need of the Iraqis in a timely and appropriate manner, so that they can be assured of meeting this need from Iran. Of course, the sanctions imposed against Iran by the United States of America are an obstacle in this path, and therefore, it is necessary to make extra effort to remove these sanctions.

Second, among its neighbors, Iran has the longest border with Iraq. These borders include not only the land borders, but also the sea border in Arvand River. Therefore, it is necessary to expand and develop the transit routes and commercial communication between the two countries as much as possible, so that, along with the prosperity of trade between the two countries, the scope for transit passage centered on these routes in the region increases.

Thirdly, considering the geopolitical limitations of Iraq (Radmehr and et al, 2021:44) and the few borders that this country has in the Persian Gulf, Iran can be a facilitator and a bridge connecting this country with open waters; This matter requires special and strategic attention so that the goodwill of the country towards Iraq becomes more evident.



**Figure (1): The Form of the Pattern of Activism Based on Soft Power and Economic Links**

This model has more explanatory power than other models regarding the theory of intelligent power. This could be attributed to the fact that although it places greater emphasis on soft power and economic cooperation, it does not negate political and security interactions, but instead believes that the focus should not be on these issues. Because it requires the intelligence of the power to be sensitive to the requirements of Iraq today and act accordingly. Having said this, considering the importance of having hard

power and especially soft power, can provide more and more comprehensive fields for economic Cooperation.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6-1.Evaluation of Iran's Activism Patterns**

Examining the history of the formation of the government and the developments of the political system in Iraq showed that with the departure of Saddam Hussein and the opening of a new chapter in the history of this country, space has been provided for the role of different groups and strata of the Iraqi people in the political scene of this country. In this regard, Iran has tried to play a supporting role, and as an example, it responded to the request of the Iraqi authorities to counter the ISIS attack and eliminated the serious threat created against the existence of the Iraqi political system. In the new conditions and due to the fact that the political system of Iraq is federal, the ground has been provided for the influence of international actors in the developments of this country. In the meantime, Iran is confronted with different patterns to face this political reality. The analysis of the passive activism pattern indicates that this pattern has an idealistic state and is less applicable in the real world. On the other hand, the second pattern, i.e., interactive activism, has its own justifications and logic, but at the same time, it has a limited scope of application and cannot be used in all times and conditions. In addition, with the change of generation of Iraqi leaders, the scope of effectiveness of this pattern also decreases. Also, the series of new developments in Iraq, on the basis of which Iraqis' security needs have been reduced while anti-Iranian attitudes have been popularized by people like Moqtada Sadr in this country, have cast doubt on the application of this model. In contrast to these two patterns, a third pattern based on activism through soft power and economic links is proposed. This pattern, if applied in a favorable way, can lead to the result that the elected Iraqi people from any spectrum and group will adopt a positive and constructive approach towards Iran. Because if building friendship with each and every Iraqi citizen is discussed from the bottom up, the result will be more stable and deeper. This method can culminate in the existence of a constructive and long-term approach in the eyes of Iraqi leaders in relation to Iran, and can hopefully provide a suitable basis for strengthening the relations between the two countries and realizing mutual interests.

Therefore, the best pattern in the field of Iran's activism in the geopolitics of Iraq is the activism pattern based on soft power and economic links.

**Table (1): Comparative Table of Different Patterns of Iran's Activism in Iraq's Geopolitics**

Pattern of Activism / Evaluation	Advantages	Disadvantages
The pattern of passive activism or non-participation	-Only observing the principles of good neighborliness	- Non-compliance with mainstream theories - Non-compliance with the realities of international relations - Failure to pay attention to common concerns
The pattern of interactive activism	- Help to remove the political deadlock in Iraq - Advancing regional policies - Compliance with the principles of good neighborliness	- Negative depiction in the mentality of Iraqis by actors opposing Iran - Lack of efficiency at all times - Decreasing the range of effectiveness over time
The pattern of activism based on soft power and economic links	- Deep and lasting results - Advancing regional policies - Consolidation of friendship with all Iraqi groups - Creating friendship with each Iraqi citizen - Compliance with the principles of good neighborliness - Deepening and entanglement of economic interests	- Absence of immediate results

## 7. Conclusion

Today's Iraq is different from the Iraq of 2003 and even the Iraq of 2014 at the time of the ISIS attack, and multiple domestic actors in Iraq are trying to turn this country into a strong actor, while practicing democracy to establish the rule of law. A country that is less dependent on its neighbors, but at the same time, cooperates with other powers in the region. Therefore, what should be important for Iran is to pay attention to the rapid developments in Iraq. An efficient and coherent regional policy is a requirement for the dynamism of any type of activism in foreign policy, and therefore, efforts to influence regional developments, even if not announced, are pursued by the majority of capable international actors. These efforts do not necessarily mean interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. In the meantime, while all the regional and international actors interested in Iraq are trying to influence the developments in Iraq and strengthen their relations with this



country, due to having relative advantages over these actors, Iran can possess a unique position in this arena. Compared to other international players, Iran has greater fundamental links with Iraq. An efficient regional policy can make optimal use of this opportunity and smoothen the conditions to deepen the relations between Iran and Iraq. Regional policy based on such components, on the one hand, is focused on social relations that are rooted in culture, religion, language, and common race, and on the other hand, it is focused on deepening economic relations and establishing mutual dependence. In order to advance the goals related to the social and cultural sphere, it is necessary to make a serious and coherent effort towards the appropriate use of soft power tools. These measures include a wide range of scholarships for Iraqi students and coherent planning regarding the strengthening of friendships in the form of rituals such as “Arbaeen”. As a result, these efforts are focused on actions that will achieve Iran's regional goals with the lowest cost and the largest contribution in a comprehensive and long-term manner. Also, in line with the greater stability and effectiveness of this type of regional policy, it is necessary to look at various aspects related to the expansion of economic ties, such as meeting Iraq's energy needs and increasing trade exchange and transit routes. These measures could also help solve the geopolitical problems in Iraq, further strengthening ties between Iran and its neighbor.

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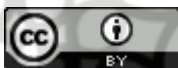
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