REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
ISTANBUL GELISIM UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Political Science and Public Administration

US-IRAQ RELATIONS AFTER 2003 WITHIN THE SCOPE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

Master Thesis

Ahmed Abbas RASHID

Supervisor

Assoc Prof. Dr. Annamaria CSISZER

Istanbul – 2025

THESIS INTRODUCTION FORM

Name and Surname	**:**	Ahmed Abbas Rashid
Language of the Thesis	**:**	English
Name of the Thesis	**:**	US-Iraq relations after 2003 within the scope of regional security
Institute	**:**	Istanbul Gelisim University Institute of Graduate Studies
Department	**:**	Political Science and Public Administration
Thesis Type	**:**	Master
Date of the Thesis	**:**	16/01/2025
Page Number	**:**	89
Thesis Supervisors	**:**	Assoc. Prof. Dr Annamaria Csiszer
Index Terms	**:**	U.S.-Iraq relations, post-2003, political instability, governance challenges, security vacuum, ISIS, sectarianism, foreign influence, Iran, socio-economic impacts, regional security, Iraq sovereignty
Turkish Abstract	**:**	Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2003 yılında ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin ABD-Irak ilişkileri üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktır. Araştırma, işgalin siyasi, güvenlik ve sosyo-ekonomik etkilerinin yanı sıra bölgesel güvenlik üzerindeki etkilerine odaklanacaktır. Tez, ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin Irak'ta yarattığı güç boşluğunun daha büyük siyasi istikrarsızlığa, yönetim başarısızlığına ve Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti gibi terör örgütlerinin yükselişine ne ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu değerlendirecektir.

Çalışmanın amacına ulaşmak için, çalışma birincil verilerden ve ikincil veri kaynaklarından oluşan bir kombinasyon kullanacaktır. Araştırma, Saddam Hüseyin rejiminin düşüşü ile Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti'nin yükselişi arasında doğrudan bir bağlantı olduğunu gösterecektir. Araştırma ayrıca Irak'taki siyasi istikrarsızlığın mezhepçilik, yolsuzluk ve belirli iç veya dış aktörlerin etkisi sorunuyla nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu gösterecektir. Araştırmanın sonuçları, ABD liderliğindeki işgalin Irak'ın siyasi parçalanmasına yol açtığını, devletin vatandaşlarına temel hizmetler sağlayamamasına, daha iyi ekonomik koşullar sağlamamasına ve vatandaşlarının güvenliğini sağlayamamasına katkıda bulunduğunu gösterecektir. Özellikle askeri altyapı yok edildi ve bu da çok sayıda isyancı gruba yol açtı. İşgalin sosyoekonomik etkileri arasında yüksek işsizlik oranları ve yoksulluk yer aldı. Sonuç olarak, elverişli koşulların yaratılmasının yanı sıra, Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti mezhepsel bölünmelerin daha da büyümesini destekledi. Araştırmanın bulguları, Irak'ın güç dengesinde önemli rol oynayan ülkelerden birinin, yerel Şii milisleri ve siyasi grupları kullanan ve siyasi durumu etkilemek için Irak'ın egemenliğine zarar veren çıkarları destekleyen İran olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymaktadır

Distribution List **:**

1. To the Institute of Graduate Studies of Istanbul Gelisim University
2. To the National Thesis Center of YÖK (Higher Education Council)

Signature

Ahmed Abbas Rashid

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
ISTANBUL GELISIM UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Political Science and Public Administration

US-IRAQ RELATIONS AFTER 2003 WITHIN THE SCOPE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

Master Thesis

Ahmed Abbas RASHID

Supervisor

Assoc.Prof. Dr. Annamaria CSISZER

Istanbul – 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that in the preparation of this thesis, scientific ethical rules have been followed, the works of other persons have been referenced in accordance with the scientific norms if used, there is no falsification in the used data, any part of the thesis has not been submitted to this university or any other university as another thesis.

Ahmed Abbas Rashid

16/01/2025

TO ISTANBUL GELISIM UNIVERSITY

THE DIRECTORATE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE

The thesis study of Ahmed Abbas Rashid titled as US-Iraq relations after 2003 within the scope of regional security has been accepted as MASTER THESIS in the department of Political Science and Public Administration by our jury.

Director _____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatih Fuat TUNCER

Member _____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Annamaria CSISZER
(Supervisor)

Member _____
Asst. Prof. Dr. Selin DINGILOGLU

APPROVAL

I approve that the signatures above signatures belong to the aforementioned faculty members.

16/01/2025

Signature

Prof. Dr. Izzet GUMUS

Director of the Institute

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implications of the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 on the U.S.-Iraq relations. The investigation will focus on political, security, and socio-economic impacts of the invasion as well as its implications for regional security. The thesis will assess the extent to which the power vacuum in Iraq created by the U.S.-led invasion contributed to greater political instability, governance failure, and the rise of terrorist organizations, such as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant.

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, it will use a combination of primary data from interviews and secondary data sources. The research will demonstrate a direct link between the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. The research will further demonstrate how the political instability in Iraq was linked to the problem of sectarianism, corruption, and the influence of particular internal or external actors. The results of the research will indicate that the U.S.-led invasion resulted in Iraq's political fragmentation, contributing to state's failure to provide basic services to its citizens, promote better economic conditions, and provide for the security of its citizens. In particular, the military infrastructure was destroyed, which gave way for numerous insurgent groups. The socio-economic impacts of the invasion included high rates of unemployment and poverty. As a result, alongside with the creation of favorable conditions, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant supported further growth of sectarian divisions. The research's findings make it clear that one such country playing a significant role in Iraq's power balance is Iran, which utilized domestic Shia militias and political groups and promoted interests detrimental to Iraq's soveregnity in order to influence the political situation.

Key Words: U.S.-Iraq relations, post-2003, political instability, governance challenges, security vacuum, ISIS, sectarianism, foreign influence, Iran, socio-economic impacts, regional security, Iraq sovereignty.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2003 yılında ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin ABD-Irak ilişkileri üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktır. Araştırma, işgalin siyasi, güvenlik ve sosyo-ekonomik etkilerinin yanı sıra bölgesel güvenlik üzerindeki etkilerine odaklanacaktır. Tez, ABD öncülüğündeki işgalin Irak'ta yarattığı güç boşluğunun daha büyük siyasi istikrarsızlığa, yönetim başarısızlığına ve Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti gibi terör örgütlerinin yükselişine ne ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu değerlendirecektir.

Çalışmanın amacına ulaşmak için, çalışma birincil verilerden ve ikincil veri kaynaklarından oluşan bir kombinasyon kullanacaktır. Araştırma, Saddam Hüseyin rejiminin düşüşü ile Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti'nin yükselişi arasında doğrudan bir bağlantı olduğunu gösterecektir. Araştırma ayrıca Irak'taki siyasi istikrarsızlığın mezhepçilik, yolsuzluk ve belirli iç veya dış aktörlerin etkisi sorunuyla nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu gösterecektir. Araştırmanın sonuçları, ABD liderliğindeki işgalin Irak'ın siyasi parçalanmasına yol açtığını, devletin vatandaşlarına temel hizmetler sağlayamamasına, daha iyi ekonomik koşullar sağlamamasına ve vatandaşlarının güvenliğini sağlayamamasına katkıda bulunduğunu gösterecektir. Özellikle askeri altyapı yok edildi ve bu da çok sayıda isyancı gruba yol açtı. İşgalin sosyoekonomik etkileri arasında yüksek işsizlik oranları ve yoksulluk yer aldı. Sonuç olarak, elverişli koşulların yaratılmasının yanı sıra, Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti mezhepsel bölünmelerin daha da büyümesini destekledi. Araştırmanın bulguları, Irak'ın güç dengesinde önemli rol oynayan ülkelerden birinin, yerel Şii milisleri ve siyasi grupları kullanan ve siyasi durumu etkilemek için Irak'ın egemenliğine zarar veren çıkarları destekleyen İran olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: ABD-Irak ilişkileri, 2003 sonrası, siyasi istikrarsızlık, yönetişim zorlukları, güvenlik boşluğu, IŞİD, mezhepçilik, yabancı etki, İran, sosyo-ekonomik etkiler, bölgesel güvenlik, Irak egemenliği.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY ..... **i**
ÖZET ..... **ii**
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **iii**
ABBREDIVATIONS ..... **vi**
LIST OF TABLES ..... **vii**
LIST OF FIGURES ..... **viii**
PREFACE ..... **ix**
INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND

1.1. Background of the Study 6
1.2. Problem Statement 8
1.3. Hypothesis 9
1.4. Research Objectives 10
1.5. Scope of the Study 11
1.6. Rationale and Justification 13
1.7. Structure of the Thesis 14

CHAPTER TWO
LİTERATURE REVİEW

2.1. Introduction 16
2.2. Historical Perspectives on US-Iraq Relations 16
2.3. Theoretical Frameworks on Regional Security 19
2.3.1. Realism 19
2.3.2. Liberalism 21
2.3.3. Constructivism 22
2.3.4. Integration of Theories 23
2.4. Post-2003 US-Iraq Relations 24
2.4.1. Political and Security Challenges 24
2.4.2. Socio-Economic Impact 25
2.4.3. Regional Dynamics 27
2.4.4. US Strategic Objectives and Adaptations 28
2.4.5. Long-Term Implications and Lessons Learned 29
2.5. Regional Security Dynamics 30
2.6. Gaps in the Literature 32
2.7. Summary 34

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction 37
3.2. Data Collection Methods 38
3.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews 38
3.2.2. Questionnaire Design 39
3.2.3. Secondary Data Sources 40
3.2.4. Ethical Considerations 40
3.3. Interview Process 41
3.3.1. Selection of Interviewees 41
3.3.2. Scheduling and Conducting Interviews 42
3.3.3. Interview Framework and Key Questions 43
3.3.4. Recording and Transcribing 44
3.3.5. Ethical Considerations 44
3.3.6. Data Analysis 45
3.4. Data Analysis Methods 45
3.4.1. Thematic Analysis 45
3.4.2. Integration of Secondary Data 46
3.4.3. Graphical Representation of Data 47
3.4.4. Cross-Referencing Themes with Interviewee Roles 50
3.4.5. Conclusion of Data Analysis 50
3.5. Theoretical Framework 51
3.6. Limitations of the Study 52
3.7. Summary 53

CHAPTER FOUR
FİNDİNGS

4.1. Introduction 54
4.2. Presentation of Findings 54
4.2.1. Political Instability 55
4.2.2. Governance Challenges 55
4.2.3. Security Vacuums and the Rise of Extremist Groups 55
4.2.4. Socio-Economic Impacts 56
4.2.5. Foreign Influence and Regional Dynamics 56
4.3. Analysis of Findings 57
4.3.1. Political Instability and Governance Challenges 57
4.3.2. Socio-Economic Impacts and Humanitarian Crises 58
4.3.3. Foreign Influence and Regional Dynamics 59
4.3.4. Linking Findings to the Theoretical Framework 59
4.4. Discussion 61
4.4.1. Political Instability and Governance Failures 62

4.4.2. The Security Vacuum and Extremism 62
4.4.3. Socio-Economic Challenges 63
4.4.4. Foreign Influence and Regional Power Dynamics 64
4.4.5. Implications for Iraq's future 64
4.5. Case Studies 65
4.5.1. Case Study 1: The Rise of ISIS in Iraq (2014) 65
4.5.2. Case Study 2: Iranian Influence in Post-2003 Iraq 66
4.5.3. Comparative Analysis of the Case Studies 67
4.6. Summary 69

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 70
REFERENCES 73
APPENDIXES 80
RESUME 81

ABBREDIVATIONS

U.S.	**:**	United States
ISIS	**:**	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
PMF	**:**	Popular Mobilization Forces
UN	**:**	United Nations
GDP	**:**	Gross Domestic Product
NGO	**:**	Non-Governmental Organization
Shia	**:**	Shia Islam
Sunni	**:**	Sunni Islam
SCIRI	**:**	Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq
CPA	**:**	Coalition Provisional Authority
WMD	**:**	Weapons of Mass Destruction
NATO	**:**	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
IMF	**:**	International Monetary Fund
GCC	**:**	Gulf Cooperation Council
NGO	**:**	Non-Governmental Organization

LIST OF TABLES

Table I. Summary of Key Themes and Their Impact on Post-2003 U.S.-Iraq Relations.....61
Table II. Comparative Analysis of the Rise of ISIS and Iranian Influence in Post-2003 Iraq 67

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Thematic Map of US-Iraq Relations Post-2003.....47
Figure 2. Frequency of Key Themes in Interviews.....48
Figure 3. Word Cloud of Key Themes in US-Iraq Relations Post-2003.....49
Figure 4. Timeline of Major Events in US-Iraq Relations Post-2003 50
Figure 5. Theoretical Framework of U.S.-Iraq Relations Post-2003.....52

PREFACE

This thesis has been dedicated to exploring the wide-ranging and enduring impacts of U.S.-Iraq relations after the 2003 invasion. This event was instrumental in shaping the political, security, and socio-economic context of Iraq, for while the intervention led to the collapse of Saddam's regime, it was followed by a prolonged state of instability. Rather than contributing to decreased interference in Iraq's internal affairs, the aftermath of the 2003 invasion was marked by noticeably poor governance standards, the expansion of ISIS and other radical groups, and enhanced foreign influence, specifically from Iran. The purpose of the thesis was to determine how these aspects were interrelated and how they affected the course of action that Iraq must undertake to rebuild itself. I would like to thank everyone who has helped me to reach this objective. Especially, I would like to express my gratitude to my academic supervisors: without their guidance, feedback, and encouragement, I would have been unable to complete my task. I would also like to thank those who agreed to participate in this study: their insights were invaluable in the context of the thesis. Lastly, I am grateful to my family and friends, who had had an opportunity to suffer aspects of my prolonged absence during the research. Hopefully, my thesis will provide the readers with a valuable illustration of the after-effects of invasion and address the need to approach the act of nationbuilding with a serious level of responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The US-Iraq relationship played a key role in Middle Eastern geopolitics. Before 2003, the United States' dealings with the subject country ranged from diplomatic relations to economic sanctions and military action (Khider, Abdelmoumene Asma Taalah, Taalah, Boutheina, & Adel, 2023). In 1991, the outbreak of the Gulf War between Iraq and a US-led coalition member Kuwait provided the first turning-point by which most of Iraq's subsequent relationship with the US would be defined (Coronado, 2020). Following Iraq's defeat and the coalition's liberation of Kuwait, the US imposed stringent economic sanctions against Iraq, which overlaid its military action and, arguably, worsened its position vis-a-vis the latter's administration. The US's subsequent actions in the region, were clarified upon then President George W Bush's identification of North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as the 'Axis of Evil'. The conflict that ensued in 2003 had its purported reasons, including the necessity to eradicate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and install a democratic government (Elhadary, et.al., 2020) However, the most significant impact on the region was the change of the regime, which extinguished Saddam Hussein's rule.

This military occupation was supported in the international arena and censured in equal measure, a reflection of the nature of US foreign policy. Moreover, the US's attempt to rebuild Iraq and exert greater control over the Middle East were hindered by numerous challenges (Lewis, 1992). These included pervasive insurgency, political instability, and civilian violence. Ultimately, not only did the 2003 US invasion of Iraq destabilize the country, but it also generated further concerns for the region and neighboring countries in the subsequent years.

The period after 2003 was a time when Iraq was trying to create a stable political regime and was under the pressure of sectarian violence and external intervention. The United States played a significant role in the Iraq political regime shaping, and US efforts included the implementation of democracy, building up democratic institutions, and supporting governance occupation (Monten, 2014). However, such efforts were linked to the permanent presence of US troops in the region, and this fact provoked severe anti-American resistance. Groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq, then the ISIS model, were the demonstrations of the profound issues in the country and the whole region as

well, which created serious challenges to security. It is important that US strategies were permanently changed due to the need to confront constantly new challenges. Within the regional context, the Iraq invasion, associated forcible occupation, and external challenges to US occupation had to play an important role in Middle Eastern geopolitics changes. In such a way, there are a number of interesting and complicated critical approaches to the situation when the US has to deal with the specific military, political, and socio-economic situation in the region. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that such relations could have serious implications for the security of the region.

In such a way, one of the best examples of how the US foreign policy has to deal with the new regional situation is the 2003 Iraq war. In fact, it was a US-led invasion that was organized to put an end to Saddam Hussein's rule . In addition to this, the US targeted at social and political democratization of life in Iraq and the establishment of the democratic regime (Ağalday, 2016). However, the consequences of such a move were absolutely controversial, and it was a chain of events that resulted from the Iraq war that probably undermined to the full extent regional security in the Middle East.

In Iraq, despite numerous attempts by the US to stabilize the country and establish democratic institutions, its policy has led to continuous instability. While the long-time political process is fixated on corruption, confused by sectarian cleavages and an institutionally weak governance establishment, the US-Iraq interaction has not brought the long desired peace (Dettke, 2020). It may be noted, that even though the US to some extent helped to eliminate an authoritarian regime, the military force's actions were perceived in Iraqi society as the imposition of foreign dominance. This sets a problematic parameter of the US-Iraq interaction, which is the need to balance the necessity of US intervention with the Iraq's profound right of sovereignty and internal independence. However, the consequences of US action in Iraq cannot fully be understood without addressing the regional perspectives(Duelfer & Dyson, 2011). First, Iran is currently seeing to expand itself as a superpower within the region, thus challenging the US policy goals in Iraq and inter-state rivalry dynamics within the region. The regional actors, particularly the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council, see with great suspicion Iran's attempts, actions that contribute to the already highly dynamical and high-tension relations within the region, consequently undermining the

regional security setting in the Middle East. The implications for the US are that they must balance the necessity and actual could-be realities for the US, not to escalate but rather manage the pre-existent cleavages in the regional inter-state dialogue and balance of power dynamics. Second, the presence of such radical groups in the area as ISIS and related organisations constitutes an even more challenging actor. These organisations and their ultra-extremist policies represent not only a credible threat to Iraq but the Middle East and overall global security (Lewis, 1992). The groups' activities have risen to the rightless deaths of dozens of people. Consequently, the US was forced to undertake a series of military operations to stabilise the region and ISIS and related organisation's defeats.

Given this multivariable background, the core problem that the research aims to solve is dependent on understanding the specific features of US-Iraq relations after 2003 and how they influenced the regional security (Khider et al., 2023). This study aims to understand the key premises that defined the relationship between the two states, the US policies and their effectiveness, and broader implications. Through interviews with expert informants, such as diplomats, military officials, academics, the study will address challenges and opportunities of US-Iraq relations, specifically contributing to understanding the ways toward the regional security and stability promotion. A number of dimensions can outline the problem that the current study focusses on, and they include the primary geographic focus, the time frame, the key actors and stakeholders, and other related themes.

Speaking of the primary geographic focus, it should be pointed out that it is Iraq, and it is represented by the political, socio-economic, and security developments that occur inside the country after the 2003 US-led invasion. In the meantime, the study is also applicable to the research that is conducted in the Middle Eastern region and comprises such neighboring countries and geopolitical players as Iran and Saudi Arabia and other GCC member states (Meyer & Corrigall-Brown, 2005). For sure, it is also applicable to the analysis of international relations, which deals with the activities of great powers, the US included, in their strategic aspirations in Iraq and the whole region. The time frame is from 2003 to present and covers several relevant milestones, such as the military invasion, occupation, and other aspects of political, military, and socio-economic activities of the US in Iraq. Later in the paper, some more

detailed analysis of the events that are considered in the proposed study will be described, but the whole consideration will help to get a multi-faceted view of the problem and address these specific features.

Key actors and stakeholders will be a significant part of this study. The main actors will include the US government and several of its agencies operating in Iraq, such as the Department of Defense and the State Department. Among other actors, there will be the Iraqi government and political actors, extremist groups, represented by ISIS, as well as regional powers, including Iran and the GCC countries. The roles of international organizations, NGOs, and, crucially, local Iraqi communities will also be investigated to understand wider implications and responses. In summary, this multiple-actors' framing appears as necessary for understanding the complexity and plurality of the factors that shape the course of US-Iraq relations.

Key themes that will be employed for the study's analysis include political stability and governance, security, socio-economic impact, geopolitics of the region, as well as perceptions and attitudes. On the one hand, the study will analyze the impact of the US invasion on the Iraqi political landscape, the problems of the establishment of democratic governance, and the role of sectarianism and corruption in the country. On the other hand, it will consider the factors behind the rise of extremist groups, analyze anti-terrorist strategies, and assess the meaning for wider regional security. Furthermore, socio-economic challenges and attempts to address them, including reconstruction, development, and extensive humanitarian crisis, will be analyzed. The significance of the US-Iraq relations for regional power balance and, subsequently, wider geopolitics will also be evaluated. Finally, the study will explore perceptions and attitudes of the Iraqi citizens, the US political elite, other regional actors, and the world community towards key issues.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the US-Iraq relations post-2003 within the scope of regional security. This research is justified by the fact that the relations between the two states have irreversible effects on the Middle Eastern geopolitical realm. The US-led invasion was a significant milestone that marked the history of Iraq in particular and the region in general. The invasion and the following occupation and withdrawal of military forces still have an effect on Iraq 's modern history, which implies a need to analyze the relations to have a better understanding of bigger security

processes (Veres, et.al., 2018). This research aims at assessing the US-Iraq relations and the US invasion of the country to determine the effects of the interconnection.

This research is justified by the fact that the interest in the US-Iraq relationship and the US invasion of Iraq in particular is still significant. Although more than 20 years have elapsed, the US invasion of Iraq and the following occupation and withdrawal still have an unparalleled effect on the political, social, and security context of Iraq and the region. The evolution of terrorist groups such as ISIS and the ongoing sectarian conflicts as well as the political strategies of such regional player as Iran should be analyzed within the scope of the previously established pretext. The US-Iraq relations are crucial to consider to provide a profound understanding since the effects of US invasion are still operational and shaping the nature of Iraq-related processes in the larger Middle East region.

First and foremost, the proposed area of research is justified because it is likely to add to the existing literature related to foreign intervention within a specific region, and the assessment of its implications. There is no shortage of scholarly works that focus on the analysis of the US invasion of Iraq. However, the discussion should be located in the post-2003 framework, especially when focusing on regional stability or the deficit thereof. The qualitative research design will propose a strategy for obtaining the views of key informants based on interviews allowing the author to gain primary information. These data will contribute to the existing professional knowledge and allow specialists, researchers, and students to find a comprehensive overview of international relations and Middle Eastern studies. On the one hand, regional experts should be able to assess the complexity of the discussed system. Still, on the other hand, human dimension handlers along with policymakers should understand and consider “the struggles and dreams of people in other countries”. It will be achieved by presenting and evaluation different perceptions: those of Iraqi civilians, US politicians, and the stakeholders from the region. In such a way, the thesis will incorporate general information while analyzing interests of local stakeholder. The structure of the thesis is based on five key chapters, each defining a specific question related to the analysis of the US invasion of Iraq.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

1.1. Background of the Study

The US-Iraq relationship is an essential aspect of Middle Eastern geopolitics, and it has a significant impact on the region's security (Russell, 2005). In the years leading up to 2003, US interplay with Iraq on different levels, such as diplomatic relations, imposition of economic sanctions, and military interventions, was already complex and had a considerable impact on the country (Duelfer & Dyson, 2011). For instance, the Gulf War 1991 became a turning point because, although the US successfully led the operations to remove the Iraqi army from Kuwait, and further imposed strict limitations aimed at limiting the Iraqi's military sphere, the consequences were also significant (*LIBERATING KUWAIT*, n.d.). Specifically, for the next decade, the two countries had an incredibly strained relationship marked with mutual distrust and conflicts of interest. Moreover, the US strategy in the region, which includes protecting the flow of oil and addressing some countries' potential threat to its interests, added further complexity to the relations (Art, n.d.). Specifically, heavily promoting the US concept of democracy among countries that the states perceive as a threat is likely to be problematic. Meanwhile, the Iraq intervention in 2003 caused a tremendous impact on the state and regional security situation in general.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq had a significant effect on the Middle Eastern security situation (Hınnebusch, 2007). The operation, initially justified by the need to eliminate the alleged weapons of mass destruction in the country and restore democracy, led to the ousting of Saddam Hussein and his ruling party, as well as impacted Iraq significantly (Pedigo, 2004). Unlike in the case of Kuwait's invasion in 1991, the 2003 invasion was controversial, and while some countries did support it and its purposes, some were strongly against this decision (Bluth, 2004). Many problems were faced by the occupational force during the following years. Specifically, the antiamerican insurgency and the emergence of the militant groups had a cascading effect on the security situation in the country and the region as a whole (Patrick, 2017).

In the post-2003 period, Iraq was struggling to build a stable political system, and the rise of sectarian violence and foreign influences were complicating the issue

(Dodge & Mansour, 2020). The US involvement in making Iraq's political landscape a reality was extensive, which would normally denote effective action. The country's strategic interests, then, entailed the creation of democratic institutions and the provision of support for their functioning. However, the presence of US troops and the perception of Western imposition triggered an immediate rejection of them and opposite feelings toward America (Yom, 2020). The appearance of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and later ISIS, by far has put the whole necessity into question, for it highlighted the already present issues within the country and the entire region, adding new, severe, and difficult-to-resolve security concerns to the existing ones. The US foreign policy was in the process of changing its accents and focusing on dealing with the evolving threats in the best way, at times, though, making imbalance between military and diplomatic means (Kassianova, 2001).

After the 2003 invasion in Iraq, the situation in the Middle East has changed substantially in terms of regional geopolitics. On the one hand, besides attaching a closer bond between the US and Iraq, the move was taken as an opportunity to expand Iran's powers and allow it to enter the country while filling a part of vacuum that could not remain empty from its perspective (Salloukh, 2013). This, inevitably, opposed Washington's objectives toward the region and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly, Saudi Arabia, that were alarmed by the new status quo and are still concerned that the long-term result of it will be the outbreak of full-scale religious war in the Middle East. On the other hand, by sustaining the conflict in Iraq, the US government was also dragging this other country into it, adding to the number of other reasons for its later destabilization and a series of humanitarian disasters. Thus, the analysis of the interactions between the US and Iraq after 2003 is extremely conducive to a broader understanding of contemporary security challenges in the Middle East and the problem of the country (Flibbert, 2006). Its goal is to bring clarity to the researcher of the complicated web of interactions and to evaluate and explain the choices, action, and outcomes of the US in Iraq.

To sum up, the background information for this study allows one to place US-Iraqi relations within a larger historical and geopolitical framework, pointing out the major events and trends characterizing the post-2003 period. It should also be noted that a distinction is drawn between the immediate and long-term consequences of the

2003 invasion, which creates a foundation for analyzing the intricate security-related processes that affect the Middle East today. Consequently, the given context is essential for achieving a full understanding of the issues and prospects connected to US-Iraqi relations and their effects on the security of this world region.

1.2. Problem Statement

US-Iraq relations post-2003 were a period of increased complexity. It was marked by various military, political, and socio-economic challenges that have created significant adverse effects on the regional level of security. The 2003 US invasion, which should have seemingly resulted in the overthrow of the Saddam regime and establishment of mature democracy, had a series of different and undesired effects. First, immediately after the war there was a power vacuum that has contributed to such adverse effects as drastic rise in depreciation and ethnic violence, insurgency, and formation of extremist groups, such as ISIS. Consequently, Iraqi stability has never been achieved and the Middle East has changed beyond the recognition with a more complicated and diverse regional level of security.

Despite enormous efforts of the US to make Iraq stable and help the county to have democratic governance a genuine success has not meen achieved. Political system has developed into a system of corruption and poor stability, with evident social divisions and evident inability of the government to perform the most powerful reforms. Moreover, despite the help, which was sizable, the US presence has been perceived as occupation of the land of the Iraqis and country's governance by external forces. The challenge is crystal clear: on the one hand, the US must support its integral partner in regaining stability and bringing the county to the rank of power possessing sovereign rights. On the other hand, too much external influence has not added legitimacy to the power of Baghdad regime and the US must respect right of Iraq for full self-governance and full representation of their national interests.

Lastly, an important side of regional level of US-Iraq relations was interlinked with the situation in the region itself. Due to its racial closeness to the territory and strategic interest, Iran has been becoming an increasingly more important stakeholder in the internal affairs in Iraq. However, the expansion of Iranian influence has been met unfavorably by the US and its regional alies, such as GCC countries and especially

SA. Many of these adverse effects have resulted in existing history and Iran and its intentions faced a great deal of diffidence and suspicion in the framework of regional relations. Thus, organizing a new stable framework of regional relations was a risky venture, which US has been trying to do for the past several years.

The post-2003 era has been characterized by the persistence of a political and security problem between the U.S and Iraq. While the regime of Saddam Hussein has been removed, there are still continued reprisals amongst factions and the U.S, which has strained regional security. Iraq has also been confronted with numerous human rights violations, cross-cutting sectarian violence, and new more robust Islamic extremist entities. The U.S hopes to impact its policy towards Iraq in a strategic way that will ensure regional stability. However, it is rapidly learning that resolving the security situation is not as simple due to a myriad of conflicting interests and inability of the U.S to understand these key drivers to the protracted war.

The rise of ISIS and other extremist entities on their wake have thwarted this goal even more. These entities have exploited the political and security gap present in Iraq. They are not just a risk to Iraq but to the Middle East and global security as a whole. Given the multifaceted problems present, the core problem of this research is to lay out and understand the drivers of the protracted war and the implications of the U.S Iraq policy. The other problems are to understand the key drivers in this relations and the implications of this foreign policy in the Middle East and the broader international environment. By conducting personally keyed interviews with different key people including diplomats, military officers, and academia, it will provide answers and recommendations to the current war in Iraq. The purpose of this study is to understand the drivers of the prolonged U.S Iraq war and its effect on regional security and stability. This paper is critical in understanding the complications of U.S-Iraqi relations post Saddam and the implications of the same.

1.3. Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of the present thesis is that while the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was justified on the purported grounds of eliminating threats and creating a democratic regime, it was a factor leading to the lasting instability and the novel security situation in the Middle East. This instability is manifested by the rise of

terrorism, the increased tensions in the region, and profound socio-economic issues experienced in Iraq. The author concludes that these effects are likely to be the result of both certain strategic mistake in conducting the military invasion and the socio-political division of the Middle East which was thereby exacerbated in the process. The main goal of this chapter is to explore these intricate matters in detail and gain in-depth knowledge for further investigation.

1.4. Research Objectives

The purpose of the research is to analyze US-Iraq relations post-2003 in terms of regional security. Therefore, the main goal is to investigate the main factors, challenges, and opportunities, which have influenced the development of the given relations throughout the given period. The study has the following objectives:

- **To analyze the impact of the 2003 US-led invasion on Iraq's political stability:**
  - to study the invaders' motivation and specifics of their activity;
  - to investigate the immediate and long-lasting political aftermaths of the invasion;
  - to evaluate the success of US attempts to promote democratic governance in Iraq;
  - to identify major political challenges and limits, faced by the country in the wake of the invasion;
- **To investigate the role of US-Iraq relations in regional security dynamics:**
  - to investigate the connection between US-Iraq relations and movements on the Middle Eastern geopolitical scene;
  - to evaluate the impact of the US policy on regional security in/with regards to Iraq, Iran, and GCC countries;
  - to determine regional neighbors' reaction to the development of the US-Iraq relations;
- **To assess the factors behind the rise of the extremist groups and their impact on Iraq and beyond:**

- to define the reasons for the appearance and flourishing of extremist groups such as ISIS;
- to evaluate the success of the US and Iraq-related counter-terrorist policies;
- to evaluate the general impact, which the given groups had on regional and global security;

- **To investigate the social and economic impact of the US involvement in Iraq:**
  - to analyze the social and economic problems that Iraq has been experiencing after 2003, i.e. those related to rehabilitation, development, and humanitarian crises;
  - to evaluate the effect of the US on Iraq by providing aid and programs for development;
  - to study the perception of the Iraqi population concerning the US and its social and economic effect;
- **To suggest some ways of restoring the US-Iraq relations and securing peace:**
  - to define the most influential lessons that the US-Iraq relation of the 2003-2018 period can provide;
  - to suggest a course of action for the US government, aimed at its enhancing impacts on the target country;
  - to propose long-term peace, stability, and development in the regions.

To make sure that all of the objectives and research question are properly addressed, the interviews are going to be conducted, with the help of which the process and the results of the research will be checked.

1.5. Scope of the Study

In terms of geographical concentration, this study is primarily focused on Iraq. It examines both the internal political, socio-economic, and security developments in this country in the context of the 2003 US-led invasion. In addition to that, the research places a large emphasis on the Middle Eastern region and considers the position of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the other GCC member states concerning the emergence of the current regime in Iraq. This approach also focuses on the global powers' interests,

especially the US strategic position in the region and the role it played in the formation of the new Iraqi governance system. This geographical focus ensures the consideration of the local and regional peculiarities of the US-Iraqi agreement in 2003 and its aftermath.

As for the timeframe, the considerations of this study are limited to the events happened from 2003 up to the present moment. Therefore, the period of investigation starts with the first invasion and occupation of the country by the USA and the other countries of the coalition. The invasion is the period of occurrence and the emergence of a new sociopolitical and economic order in Iraq. The following stages of the development of the state, including the spread of US-led democratic processes and the 2011 withdrawal of troops are also a part of the investigation. This timing also includes the emergence of ISIS and other radical organizations in the region and the developments that followed, with the reconstruction of the political regime in the country in terms of safety and stability measures.

The primary purpose of the study is the analysis of key actors and stakeholders involved in Iraq and regional security issues. The former are mainly the United States and its government and all the rest of the stakeholders who act in multiple ways with regard to the States' policies in Iraq. Among the primary entities are the Iraqi government and political parties, extremist groups, such as ISIS, and regional rivals and allies, like Iran and the GCC countries. Among other actors are international organizations and NGOs, and Iraqi communities that are also affected by and act in response to the situation. However, before discussing the ways of stakeholders' inclinations towards Iraq, it is crucial to investigate the political, social, and economic conditions and backgrounds associated with the States' invasion and occupation, as well as the withdrawal, and their implications for Iraq and U.S. further actions.

Therefore, the key actors and stakeholders that the study is concerned with are the products of the study perspective. The role of regional security in the time frame is paramount, while the scope of US-Iraq bilateral spectrum is wide and encompasses economic, social, and political issues.

From the methodological point of view, the study is qualitative in nature based on key informant interviews. As such, the research was conducted with a variety of key informants, including diplomats, military officials, academics, as well as leaders

of local NGOs. Such an approach to methodology aimed to provide for a thorough and detailed understanding of on the one hand the realities and nuances of US-Iraq relations, particularly within the context of regional security and, on the other hand, implement an in-depth analysis due to the comprehensive nature of the research questions. By defining the scope along these dimensions, the study aims to provide a thorough and multi-faceted analysis of US-Iraq relations post-2003, offering valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing regional security and stability.

1.6. Rationale and Justification

The research rationale for the study on US-Iraq relations post-2003 with respect to regional security is found in the critical, influential, and groundbreaking outcomes these relations have had amid the Middle East geopolitical environment. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been a point of no return that has had an impact not just on the trajectory of the country but also on the entire region. The study of this topic is indispensable for understanding the regional security balance and developing policies geared towards stability and peace. Additionally, the research gap is salient in this field in terms of a lack of academic works covering the long-term implications of the US involvement and influence in Iraq on regional security. This topic could be justified due to its continuing significance in the realm of international relations within the context of socio-political and security situations in the country and the Greater Middle East through investigating various aspects.

Such radical groups as ISIS being one of the radical reasons why the study is justified, demonstrating the continuing impact the US invasion of Iraq has had. The causes of the sectarian division prolonged by the government of Iraq and deepened by the activities of ISIS with the potential impact on the regional security status quo and the foreign policy direction practiced by such regional powers as the Islamic Republic of Iran, also confirming the reasons for the proposed study. The justification for the choice of the research is further solidified by the importance of the research topic to the field of academia as an issue for investigation.

Although there is a wide body of academic works on the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 – due to the research gap mentioned earlier – there is a lack of sufficient works

focused on the events after this historical event and their impact on regional security directions. With a qualitative research methodology planned with the participation of key informants for gaining first-hand views and in-depth knowledge, the research could be useful for scholars, students, and analysts in the field of International Relations and Middle Eastern Studies. Alternatively, Iraqi citizens, US policymakers, and accepted actors in the region considered within the study offer a contribution to the multifaceted nature of US-Iraq relations. However, this perspective is not investigated in a sufficient number of works, thus constituting another justification for the choice of the research project. Subjective points of view presented in the proposed study will be useful for an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of US policies practice and their impact on various stakeholders in the region. In total, the proposed study is a relevant, timely investigation of the problems related to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its impact on regional security. With the help of first-hand information and proper academic approach application, the research will serve the academic practice and offer substantial recommendations for policy planning and practice.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

The following is the structure of the thesis, which covers the entire work in five comprehensive chapters addressing distinct aspects of the research on US-Iraq relations post-2003 within regional security perspective.

- **Introduction:** The chapter provides the foundation and background, problem statement, scope, objectives, and justification thereof. This chapter sets the scene, whereby, it introduces and contextualizes the importance of US-Iraq state of affairs and their implication to regional security. It also includes the research questions that have been guiding the whole process and examination and states the thesis organization. The following section outlines US-Iraq relations and regional security.
- **Literature Review:**This chapter examines the perspective and the existing body of knowledge pertaining to US-Iraq relations and regional security including historical perspective, theoretical concept of the regional security, the various dimension of US-Iraq relations over the post-2003 period, and the effect of the relation to the region, and other

stakeholders. The chapter covers identified gaps in existing literature and discussions, which may validate the examination and research work.

- **Methodology and Framework:** The chapter details the research design and methodology and methods used in conducting the examination or study. The chapter also covers qualitative methods used, including key-informant-based interviews, the research data collection and analysis process. It highlights chosen theories and explains its application, discusses as well as the expected limitations of the methodology used followed by ethical dissertation. This is also a consideration based on approaches used in differential scenarios and data uses.
- **Findings:** This chapter presents the research results divided into thematic areas corresponding to the interview contents and other sources of the data used for the examination. It provides crucial dynamic, political, socio-economic and security US-Iraq relations' implications since the year 2003 including the outcomes to the region and the stakeholder's expressions. Moreover, these modalities and conclusions are satisfied, and legalized to counter regional interest situations.
- **Conclusion:** The conclusion draws all finding aspects and their considerations and their implication and affections to the US-Iraq relations and regional security. With all data considerations and result discussions, the findings have been tabulated for comparison and argument. It further provides policy implications and solutions in search of regional stability and security. This is a final consideration towards future research work possibility and existence and final food for professors and researchers at academic requirements. It also, in the end, highlights the contributions of this dissertation to the existing literature, academic publications and the practical community.

This approach ensures that the research aspects and considerations have been analyzed in both methodology and all applications for dissertation study.

CHAPTER TWO

LİTERATURE REVİEW

2.1. Introduction

The US and Iraq relations were vastly transformed by the US-led invasion in 2003, and thus greatly affecting the regional security. The incidences intended to have dismantled Saddam Hussein's regime and the perceptions of the threat from the nonconventional weapons based on Iraq or WMD. This resulted in causing a series of varied and complicated dimensions, political, security, social, and economy thus affecting the region. Therefore, the study examines the security consequences by looking into the country's relations from the three perspectives, from the liberal, realistic and constructivist views. The discussion looks beyond the violence and explores the effects such as the rise of a developed power vacuum, terrorism, and insurgency in Iraq among other impacts. This is achieved by critical reading as it presents a gap due to the use of the media report and other biased sources as main sources. Others are policy papers that do not cover the critical impacts. Some perspectives cover the security concern beyond liberal, realistic, or constructivist perspectives. It also gathers credible sources that have been missed, such as policy reports providing a new view, it ensures the reassessment of US-Iraq relations and determines the lasting security implications. It also seeks to establish the difficult experiences though not covered by the policy reports. Therefore it facilitates a comprehensive analysis and provides better understanding.

2.2. Historical Perspectives on US-Iraq Relations

The relationship between the United States and Iraq is described by several strategic and often ambiguous interactions that have determined the address of the overall political and security context seen in the Middle East (Blagden & Porter, 2021). In general, the states have interacted over the past few decades, starting in the late 1940s, but drawing significant interest after the end of the World War II (Maier, 1977). First, it should be noted, underlings, the minimally-invasive approach on the part of the United States to the unfolding political agendas of the region. The states' primary concern was the broader Cold War confrontation and their efforts to neutralize the

Soviet Union's ally (Magaço et al., 2023). At the same time, the ascendancy of the Ba'ath Party and the leadership of Saddam Hussein in 1979 defined the beginning of the US interest as Iraq started to pose more engagement-oriented challenges to the region by elaborating on its hardline policies and enhancing military programs (Russell, 2003).

During the 1980s, the US interaction with Iraq was defined by the on-going confrontation of Iran and Iraq, manifested in the Persian Gulf War (Vaezi, n.d.). The US adopted the policy of dual containment regarding these militaristic intentions to ensure that neither of the respected countries would project its dominance on the neighboring states (Motin, 2022). Despite the fallibility of the Iraqi regime and the repertoire of the human rights violations, the United States extended its support to Iraq through policy inaccuracies, correlated to mainly intelligence and economic provision (Crawford, 2022). The political willingness to collaborate was conditioned by the US interest in counteracting the Iranian intentions and ensures regional stability (Saleh & Yazdanshenas, 2024).

In the early 1990s, the US-Iraq relationship took a turn after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990 (Scott, 2023). As a result of the action, the Gulf War broke out, during which the US led the coalition of countries in the operation for the liberation of Kuwait, known as Operation Desert Storm(Carmichael & Anderson, 2021). As the event took place, Iraq experienced a massive military defeat, which ended in February, 1991 and was compound by the economically devastating consequences of the sanctions imposed by the United Nations (Sluglett, 2024). The latter was aimed at taking away Iraq's opportunities to fight by disarming the state and shrinking its military power (Garey, 2020). However, the civilians were affected in the first place, as the following post-war decade demonstrated a continuing presence of the US troops in Iraq, which was followed by the severe skirmishes with the national military force and the widespread suffering of the Iraqi population (Garey, 2020). Thus, throughout the 1990s, the relationship between the two countries was defined by the policy of containment and the series of conflicts related to it (T. Beck & Wagner, 2020). During the period, the sanctions were continued to be applied by President Clinton, and several military actions were undertaken in response to Iraq's

noncompliance with the UN orders (Torbat, 2020). Moreover, the US started to support the opposition within the state with similar results.

The events of of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror have marked another pivotal shift in US-Iraq relations (Irwan Syazli Saidin & Adu-Gyamfi, 2022). The Bush administration, under the doctrine of preemptive action, identified Iraq as part of the "Axis of Evil" and argued that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction and had links to terrorist organizations (Kellner, 2020). Despite controversial debates within the international community and the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the regime's WMD programs, the US led a coalition to invade Iraq in March 2003 (Simuziya & Jonathan, 2023). The invasion quickly toppled Saddam Hussein's regime but set the stage for the prolonged instability and internal conflict within Iraq (Jawad, 2021).

The post-2003 period has seen a considerable amount of effort aimed at rebuilding Iraq's political system and the country's physical infrastructure, with the US taking the lead in these efforts. The initial phase of the occupation has been marked by the considerable challenges such as the widespread looting, insurgency, and hoard of sectarian violence (Joseph Yakubu, Franklin Aideloje, & Solomon Taiwo, 2022). The dissolving of the military and the de-Ba'athification policies have further exacerbated the already significant security vacuum, lending more weight to the numerous insurgent groups (Abdullah, 2023). The US's strategy has shifted over the course of the occupation, with varying degrees of the troops' presence on the ground and the changes in the military policy aimed at achieving the goal of stabilizing the country and bringing the rival forces to political reconciliation (Dai et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the long-term result of the efforts was far from the necessary threshold of stability. The emergence of ISIS in 2014, with the militants capturing significant territories of Iraq and Syria, has made the order complained to avert the second crisis (Helvalı, 2020). This time the US's role in the escalation was limited to the military presence within the country's borders, aiding the Iraqis and the Peshmerga in regaining the lost territory.

Overall, the historical perspective on US- Iraq relations is marked by strategic alliances and military conflicts as well as reconstruction and stabilization efforts. The cooperative approaches during the Iran-Iraq War were followed by less amicable

relations after the Gulf War and, most importantly, after the invasion in 2003. The nature and outcomes of these relations or confrontations dramatically shaped both countries and the Middle Eastern region at large. Consequently, knowing the historical context is the key to being able to analyze the current state and perspectives of US-Iraq relations and their implications for the regional security and stability.

2.3. Theoretical Frameworks on Regional Security

If one is to consider US-Iraq relations after 2003 in the context of regional security, a number of theoretical frameworks have to be examined in order to better understand the mechanisms of international interaction and regional safety. For the current research, there are three major approaches that have to be taken, specifically, realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

2.3.1. Realism

Realism is one of the most influential International Relations theories. According to the proponents of realism, inherently international system is anarchic, and states are the main actors which act to ensure their security and survival, guided primarily by their interest (Singh, 2023). Key points of realist theory are state sovereignty, military strength and power and national interests. Realists see international system as anarchic because there is no hierarchy between states. It means that in the international system, there is no greater sovereign power to check other states. Furthermore, under anarchy, states should aim to gain their security through power and beneficial alliances (Csiszer, 2010). The launching of the US intervention in Iraq is in line with the realist theory. From the realist perspective, the intervention was carried out to maintain and boost American hegemony in the Middle East.

One of the reasons why the US invaded Iraq in 2003 was that the US wanted to resume the normal exploitation of the oil resources in Iraq (AL.Yasiry, 2020). Furthermore, with the invasion of Iraq, the US wanted to weaken and control other regional threats and adversaries, above all, Iran. Balance of power is a central concept of realism. The balance of power theory claims that because in anarchic international system states are the ultimate sovereign powers, they always aim to preclude one state from become much more powerful than any other state. According to the balance of power theory, if some country becomes too powerful, other states will become

frightened and gang up aganst the threatening state. This is one of the explanations of such apparent absurdity as Saudi Arabia's alarm about the growing influence of Iraq after the 2003 US invasion (AL.Yasiry, 2020; Bir, Savaşı, Ömer, & Gültekin, 2020). The siege mentality led the Gulf Cooperation Council countries at least to tighten diplomatic and economic ties with the US. Balance of power is one of the major causes of ongoing conflicts in Iraq. Another affirmation of the realist position that military power is essential for state security is the US intention and action to overthrow Saddam Hussein regime. The US invasion aimed to destroy the Iraqi government because it posed a threat do regional peace and the interest of the US. However, the US intention to stay in Iraq was counterproductive because it engendered insurgency: all factions within Iraq were united in their wish to fight the occupation (AL.Yasiry, 2020).

Another premise of realism which can be related to the US intervention in Iraq is the concept of national interest. The foreign policy of any state is determined by its national interests. In the case of the US, one of the major national interests was in preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, Iraq was known to support a range of terrorist organizations and might have also had links with Al-Qaeda (Byman & Mir, 2022). Anxiety over future oil supplies to the US was yet another national interest guiding US involvement in Iraq. Consequently, regardless of the controversial nature of the WMD issue and the fact that these weapons were never found in that country, the invasion of Iraq has proved that the issue of national interest does play a key role in the foreign policy of any state.

Realism also revolves around the concept of power politics. The actions of the US in Iraq could well be perceived as the realization of the power politics concept because the Invasions of Iraq was only a step in shaping the "greater Middle East" strategy proposed by Paul Wolfowitz (Ram, 2022). In this regard, it should be noted that the US did not merely use military force, but also political and economic means to shape Iraq and the Middle East. Nevertheless, the outcome of these actions remains uncertain. Many researchers have recently argued that the US has just destabilized Iraq, the Middle East, and probably the rest of the world.

In conclusion, realism provides a comprehensive explanation for the US intervention in Iraq because it dwells on the major implications of force and power for foreign policy-making. Within the framework of this theory, the foreign policy of the

US can be seen as a response to the chaos of the world which cannot be organized without the use of force.

2.3.2. Liberalism

Another theory, liberalism, offers a paradigm shift, which emphasizes international institutions, cooperation, democracy, and human rights. According to this theory, a more peaceful and prosperous world can be achieved through democratic regimes and value transformations in the global order (Keohane, 2021). As in the case of democracy, U.S. actions towards Iraq can also be considered through its implications for some of the key principles of this theory. Although democracy is the first principle in terms of the U.S.'s intervention, it has already been covered, and therefore, the discussion below will focus only on the other four (Yılmaz, 2021).

An important principle of liberalism is the promotion of democracy. The U.S. justified the 2003 invasion of Iraq by claiming that it will establish a regime there (Irwan Syazli Saidin & Adu-Gyamfi, 2022). It was assumed that democracy will increase political stability in the country and reduce the risks of internal and regional conflicts. Value transformations may also follow its establishment so that Iraq can become a responsive and welcoming member of the world order.

International norms and institutions are also among the key elements of liberalism (Csiszer, 2020). When justifying its actions in Iraq, the U.S. sought to respect the wishes of these organizations. The U.N adopted resolution 1441 demanding Iraq to get rid of WMD in 2002, and sanctions would be imposed if Saddam didn't comply. Liberalism asserts that the U.S. invasion of Iraq is consistent with these documents, as the deployment of WMD was fairly widely known (Braut-Hegghammer, 2020). Since only some states supported this position, such an example indicates the impotence of liberal claims in international relations.

Dependence of world affairs was the final key point of liberal theories. When transforming Iraq, the country will get involved in world relations and the world economy as well. The chaos will be reduced, as the U.S. hope will diminish now when we refrain from ignoring world interdependence (Hehir, 2023). National security is conditional on world politics and vice versa.

Another principle of liberalism that can have implications for the U.S.'s actions in Iraq is the promotion of human rights. The U.S. actions toward Iraq have been widely explained by claiming that they will support respect for human rights and, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, lead to public elections (Klimešová, 2021). This process will require harsh political bargaining and make the establishment of a liberal order much more complicated than previously thought.

2.3.3. Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that focuses on ideas, identities, norms, and discourses in the study of international relations. Generally speaking, constructivism views the interests and identities of states as socially constructed rather than given a priori. Unlike realism and liberalism, constructivists believe that state behavior is shaped by the identities and norms that states adopt. One of the main assumptions of constructivism is that state identity is relational, which in turn leads to the interconnectedness of the state interests and their construction. For example, in US-Iraq relations, constructivism emphasizes the importance of constructed identity and norms of the states (Abdulameer, Supervisor, Prof, & Ghanem, 2022).

Firstly, constructivism views the interest of the US in Iraq through the prism of the constructed identity of Iraq as the part of the "Axis of Evil" (Ram, 2022). Constructivism postulates that "the determining state is guided by the dictates of its national identity, and by the presumption that it can be secure only by maximizing the power". By constructing the identity of Iraq as the "Axis of Evil", the US created a firm basis for their intervention. The identity of Iraq helped to secure the support of foreign policy officials, intelligence agencies, and legislatures by portraying its invasion as vital to international security. The identity built by the US administration was accepted by much of the country and US foreign policy decision to invade Iraq was uncontested (Löfflmann, 2020). However, there were a considerable number of people in the US and transnational protesters who resisted the US invasion of Iraq and Iraqis' resistance of the occupation. The international community rejected the legitimacy of the invasion, which was contrary to the sovereign rights of the states and the UN charter.

Secondly, constructivism views the interests of the US from Iraq through the prism of the norms and legitimacy (Sussex, 2022). Constructivism postulates that interests cannot determine what in the absence of a prior identity. The US invasion of Iraq challenged the existing norms of the world order, which include the irrevocability of the borders and the non-violation of the sovereign rights of the states. The official reason for the invasion by the Bush administration was preemptive self-defense. The US also claimed that it was going to change the regime in Iraq in order to spread democracy. This was a legitimate claim in the official US discourse, but it did not find much support in any society in the world. These claims legitimized the US invasion of Iraq to the international society. However, the invasion of Iraq split the US state and the international society, provoked a terroristic threat, and led to a crisis of the unity of the Western world (Qandil, Syed Fraz, & Naqvi, 2020). Thus, it is evident that US-Iraq relations can be understood from the constructivist perspective by analyzing the role of ideas and identity.

2.3.4. Integration of Theories

Each of the theoretical frameworks offers unique insights into US-Iraq relations, but an integrated approach can be used effectively to offer a comprehensive understanding (Ram, 2022). Realism allows explaining the strategic causes and power dynamics involved, liberalism can describe the force of democratic ideals and international institutions, while constructivism focuses on identities and norms (Savu, 2021). Implications of the realist struggle for power, liberal ambitions to promote democracies, and constructivist understanding of regional—especially of the Middle Eastern—identities and their influences (M. Beck, 2020). These aspects have contributed to the creation of a highly volatile and complex security environment in the sphere. At the same time, addressing the conundrum of sleeping or reviving hostile forces that are at times unaccepting and at times accepting of the US's regional role has been challenging for the state. As such, there have been multiple dimensions of relations, from military interventions and political strategies to economic implications and cultural exchanges. The theoretical frameworks can also be used to consider long-term implications of the invasion for regional security concerns. For instance, rising ISIS and other post-2003 extremist groups, the forms of sectarianship in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, and the vague nature of Middle Eastern alliances are given

(Helvalı, 2020). The implications of these phenomena on the regional security system will be considered throughout the analysis to understand the stance and potential responses for the US.

Overall, every logical standpoint on the issues related to the case—realist, liberal, and constructivist—offers a separate dimension through which the current challenge can be assessed. Each perspective will be considered to provide an adequate understanding of the implications for US-Iraq post-2003 relations. Such broad and multifaceted consideration will offer an integrated vision of the dynamics through sublenses to create more integral general understanding. As such, a multifocal and multifaceted approach will be used throughout the study to provide a more nuanced view of the specific security phenomenon that will be analyzed.

2.4. Post-2003 US-Iraq Relations

This chapter of US-Iraq relations is characterized by two general factors: the US attempts to rebuild Iraq following the 2003 invasion and the emergence of insurgency movements. The following sections of the paper will go into major details regarding the development of both. What comes to the remainder of the world, it should be noted the international implications of these processes. On one hand, the presence of US troops and the resistance towards US activities on the territory of Iraq became a new geopolitical factor. Necessarily, this impacted US relations with the neighboring countries. On the other hand, the United States adopted several major pieces of legislation or rather strategies aptly portraying these developments . This paper will also explore said strategies in more detail.

2.4.1. Political and Security Challenges

While the immediate results of the 2003 invasion were the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the power vacuum to fill, the results of this power vacuum filling for the USA were arguably as undesirable (Khider et al., 2023). The USA’s initial strategy of de-Ba’athification and dissolving the Iraqi army were to remove all the likely power structures to maintain order and thus actually bet to an inevitable power grasp by various insurgent and militia groups. The period from 2003 to 2006 was the most violent with the most intense insurgeny and sectaraian fighting (Hamourtziadou, 2020). The remnants of the Ba’ath party, disillusioned Iraqi nationalists, and jihadists

from other countries all effectively declared war on the US forces and their local satellite: The bombing of the Shia Al-Askari mosque in Sammara in 2006 gradually became a call for nationwide Shia reprisal killings, thus almost tipping the country in a civil way (Caleb Michael Herring, Rosales, Thesis Director, Hare, & Alessandro Brogi, 2022). Nontheless the US surge campaign coupled with Sunni 'Awakening' that saw the Anbar province tribes alloeid with the US forces to ferociously fight Al-Qaeda in Iran managed to largely satbilize the country by 2008. However, while al-Qaeda in Iraq's strength was used up, all of the underlying Sho'a – Sunni tensions and dissatisfaction remained.

Another turning point was the US withdrawal in 2011. It officially ended the process of the transition of Iraq to full sovreignity but as the protests of late 2010 and now 2019 showed, Iraq remained a failed state of sorts (Strovers, 2020). Or perhaps the more correct way to say it that the USA now moved away to more covert methods in controlling fire and the endemic corruption within the local puppet government by the local population. From 2006 until the ISIS changed the Gulf region in 2014, the most violent cause was different insurgencies attacking different factions of US forces or the Iraqi police, all of which however kept the USA aimenna in a number of cases as a necessary counter-Terrorist measure.

The race of the ISIS was particually dangerous and alarmng, particualrly in 2014 (Helvalı, 2020). In such a brief time ISIS managed to establish a presence throughout most of the country-uniting lost Sunni population under its banner due to the Maliki government's corruption and theocratic ambition (Helvalı, 2020). It also became infamous globally for the declaration of a caliphate and its battlck situationfg tactics which often took a form of a brutal massacre. Thus by 2014 the USA had no choice but to intervinne once again in the region military and set a reluctant international coalition to suport its actions. At the end of 2010th Iraq remains a politically balkanized and miserable regardless of the lowered direct interventnion status of the US forces (Kadri, 2023).

2.4.2. Socio-Economic Impact

The socio-economic landscape of Iraq was changed in profound ways by the 2003 invasion and the subsequent occupation. In the initial period of the U.S.-led

presence in the country, significant efforts were made to rebuild the destroyed infrastructure (Najjar, 2023). Billions of dollars were spent on the construction of new hospitals, schools, roads, and other facilities (Najjar, 2023). However, the policies were not efficient in many cases, as the occupation force was marred by corruption, frequent changes in priorities and management, and resistance in the form of violence (Najjar, 2023). Employment and poverty were the key issues. The Iraqi economic infrastructure was derailed by years of sanctions and war, and widespread poverty only deepened due to the destruction of numerous social services (Furness & Trautner, 2020). The occupation authorities also tried to improve the situation by investing in the oil sector; however, these efforts generated little effect since the people in Iraq were not benefiting from oil production, which is the major part of the country's exports (Furness & Trautner, 2020).

On the contrary, it only served to exacerbate the division between the classes. As for the education and healthcare systems, they were among the most affected ones. Many schools and hospitals were destroyed or severely damaged during the conflict, and the provision of services was further made difficult by the continuous presence of violence (Najjar, 2023). Naturally, the situation was also aggravated by the fact that numerous professionals fled the country taking advantage of the civil unrest, and there was a significant shortage of skilled workers, undermining efforts to improve the education and healthcare systems. The social situation was marred by violence and mass displacement. The relationships between religious sects, primarily Shia population and-the Sunnis in the central and Western parts of the country and the Kurds in the west, were very tense and only exacerbated by the policies of the new governments and the more violent actions of various militias and insurgent organizations.

The country faced ethnic cleansing, as hundreds of thousands of people were murdered, and more than two million of Iraqis became refugees in Jordan, Syria, and other neighboring countries. Many international organizations and NGOs tried to help the unlucky population by providing them with jobs, improving access to education, and tackling other issues (Reza, 2022). However, they usually faced difficulties doing so since the operations were made very difficult by the omnipresent danger. The

support of foreign governments was essential in mitigating the number of humanitarian catastrophes in Iraq.

2.4.3. Regional Dynamics

The US invasion of Iraq has been widely criticized, and rightfully so, for causing a wide variety of problems in the region. However, one of the most important changes in regional dynamics was the fact that it led to a shift in the balance of power. As a result of the 2003 invasion, Iran's power in Iraq was significantly increased, as it supported Shia militias in the conflict and dramatically increased its political influence in Baghdad. This was, in fact, one of the points of contention between the US and its regional allies like Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the presence of American troops in Iraq was a recipe for strife with Sunnite neighbors such as Syria, which was ruled by President Bashar al-Assad at the time, and Turkey, which was afraid of the prospect of Kurdish autonomy on the other side of its southern border (Khatib, 2021).

These complicated relationships, combined with the involvement of different Gulf States and the broader Sunni-Shia divide, made it very difficult to stabilize the Iraqi situation. The emergence of the Islamic State and the establishment of its territorial caliphate only added neighboring countries and big powers to the battle for Iraq. The airstrike campaign to defeat ISIS was carried out not only by the US and its western allies but also by the regional powers involved, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran (Arafat, 2020). However, although the territorial caliphate was mostly defeated, the ideological and security threats remained.

It should be noted that the locus of instability in the Middle East, Iraq, has broad regional significance. Military, social, and ideological conflicts in the region made it the largest producer of refugees, as well as the semi-colonization of such a large country entailed the spread of radical Islamist ideology and the constant threat of regional wars (Nakhaei, 2020). The US had to act in a situation when military dominance was not enough to stabilize the situation, so it strived to achieve some degree of consent with as many regional actors as possible.

Nevertheless, the importance of Iraq led to a rather straightforward exacerbation of the US-Iran rivalry in the region, which found expression in political influence over the government in Baghdad and in the series of proxy fights by different militias (Al-

Shabandar, 2021). The most prominent event was the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani by an American drone on the road to Baghdad Airport in January 2020. It was the one, after which Iraq was literally burning, as it culminated with Iran's airstrike on the American bases in Iraq a few days later (Al-Shabandar, 2021). Thus, the regional dynamics were quite complex and could not be properly factored into US grand strategy.

2.4.4. US Strategic Objectives and Adaptations

The strategic objectives of the United States in Iraq fluctuated based on the circumstances, with the aims considerably shifted due to emerging realities. Initially, the objectives of the United States in Iraq were: the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and establishment of a democratic government (Rexhepi, 2022). However, the objectives appeared not feasible, and US strategies in Iraq were required to reshuffle. In this regards, one of the significant shifts was the reduction of the presence of the US military; the first step toward this was the formal transfer of the mission to the advising and supporting role in 2010 and the removal of US troops in 2011.

Moreover, after the withdrawal of the United States' forces from Iraq, the rise of the Islamic State, which claimed territories in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan, stopped the implementation of the strategy (Ali, 2020). Although the response was military, and the advising and supporting policy was mainly focused on this part; the intent of the United States was to structurally strengthen other forces in the country, i.e., the government forces and Kurds, to be able to counter the Islamic State alone.

Apart from the intended hostage and leverage policy, the United States implemented the strategy of the containment of the Iranian influence in Iraq (Slavin, 2021). The policy was mainly military but included support for anti-Iranian forces and political factions as well as the attempts to build broader diplomatic coalitions for curbing the Iranian expansion. The task was to implement the strategy without undermining the position of the Iraqi government.

Furthermore, the strategy included the support for the recovery of the Iraqi economy and funds under the form of the reconstruction of infrastructure, governance and fight with corruption projects, and stimulation of economy and jobs (Makdisi &

Soto, 2023). The policy was highly military and had to overcome the resistance of existing power networks.

Finally, the humanitarian policy of the United States was traditionally highly influential; the ongoing war in Iraq has produced a huge number of refugees, forced migrants, and other vulnerable groups, for which the US was able, as well as others in the coalition, to provide significant resources of humanitarian aid, even in the most difficult conditions (Yumashev, Ślusarczyk, Kondrashev, & Mikhaylov, 2020). In conclusion, the strategic objectives of the United States in Iraq represented a highly complex combination of goals that were in many ways contradictory and, hence, the realization of many of these was not successful.

2.4.5. Long-Term Implications and Lessons Learned

The US invasion of Iraq had profound and far-reaching implications in the long term (Fawcett, 2023). The greatest consequences of the invasion are that power in the region of the Middle East got reshuffled, Iran gained increased influence, and Iraq remains unstable. There are many other outcomes of the invasion, but the threats from ISIS and violent extremist groups are perhaps some of the most visible results of military involvement in this region that the humankind can witness today. The invasion created a power vacuum that led to the rise of ISIS and similar groups; perhaps it is an attempt to fill the void left by the US (Helvalı, 2020).

In any case, the history of Iraq shows that military action cannot solve political and socio-economic problems (Costantini, 2021). Another effect was that the US and its allies received firsthand experience of the challenges of nation-building. They learned that democracy cannot be built at the points of bayonets, but planners underestimated the divide in Iraqi society. Additionally, the invasion had devastating effects for ordinary Iraqi citizens who had to suffer the results of the disastrous humanitarian situation and abandonment of the country's infrastructure. It is yet impossible to say that the situation in the country changes for the better with the help of international financial aid, though violence and political instability do not allow for any meaningful achievements. These consequences will shape US foreign policy in the decades to come and that planners will do their best to avoid this situation again (Qandil et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the US invasion of Iraq had many other implications apart from changing the situation in the Middle East or the reshuffling of power. So, the most important one is the increased influence of Iran taking into account the US's concerns about it, and the struggle against ISIS. It reflects the internal problems of the country that entail ongoing instability and political developments. Overall, it became a valuable lesson showing that military action cannot solve all the problems and that it always results in long-term consequences.

2.5. Regional Security Dynamics

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 had a profound effect on the security dynamics of the Middle East (Yüce, 2022). Perhaps the most significant event was the power vacuum that ensued after the fall of Saddam Hussein, leading to the emergence of various insurgent groups and militias. This power vacuum was routinized immediately by the growing influence of Iran. With the removal of the Ba'athist regime, Iran was able to quickly establish a foothold in Iraq, supporting the Shia militias and becoming politically involved in Baghdad. This increased the level of the sectarian divide and served to destabilize Iraq even further. This shift of power also served to alarm the Sunni-majority countries of the region, such as Saudi Arabia. The sectarian divides exacerbated the already high-stakes security climate in the Middle East by making it a more polarized Muslim-Christian conflict (Yüce, 2022).

The sectarian divide, which was relatively inconsequential before the Iraq war, quickly became one of the major security issues in Iraq (Yüce, 2022). Naturally, this paved the way for the dynamics to spill over into the rest of the Gulf and the Middle East. The presence of various insurgent and militia groups in Iraq had led to these dynamics extending beyond the borders of Iraq. Regional actors' involvement in Iraq's broth only contributed to the problem. These regional actors largely mirrored the sectarian divides of the war, causing various Islam and Christian governments to support specific factions which they had their own, often sectarian, interests in supporting. On the one side, there was an alliance supporting the groups that had hitherto been marginal in the broader regional politics of the Middle East and, on the other, an increasingly wary anti-Shia alliance (Yüce, 2022).

The Syrian civil war, which started in 2011, was closely linked to the dynamics in Iraq and transformed into a transnational crisis that destabilized the entire region. The common border was relatively easy to cross, facilitating the migration of fighters and supplies for the emerging extremist groups. In addition, both Washington and Moscow were actively involved in the Syrian conflict, and all the political actions taken in the context of one country had implications for the other. In other words, the state centeredness of the regional security order was largely a construct while the realities on the ground indicated a need to look at the current region-wide security challenges holistically and not in isolation (Khatib, 2021).

Moreover, Turkey's concerns about Kurdish autonomy added to the already highly intricate and contradictory nature of regional security politics. The Kurds were awarded considerable autonomy in northern Iraq, which allowed their leadership to act on aspirations for their own state (Yılmaz, 2021). However, Turkey has a significant Kurdish minority and a secession of the Iraqi Kurds was seen as a threat to its territorial integrity. The Turkish political elite insisted on their right to intervene militarily to eliminate the presence of PKK-affiliated militant groups that had established networks in northern Iraq. The numerous foreign and domestic actors' divergent interests and objectives created a security quagmire, but there wasn't much unity in interests on the side of the United States and its regional allies. Washington hoped to leave behind a stable democratic Iraq, but the others were more preoccupied with curbing Iranian influence and dealing with their domestic security issues. The limited success of the US operation in Iraq and its withdrawal in 2011, followed by ISIS's rise soon after, illustrates the necessity of international cooperation for tackling security issues effectively in the long run (Yılmaz, 2021).

The humanitarian impact of the conflict in Iraq had considerable regional implications. The displacement of millions of Iraqis strained the resources of the country's neighbors, as many refugees were forced to flee to other nations. The long-term consequences for the social and economic situation created an additional challenge to regional security. Meanwhile, while international organizations and national NGOs were instrumental in helping the affected population, they were faced with a problem of scale that their resources were insufficient to address. In summary, while these were crucial in the Middle East following the year 2003, and the fact that

donors gradually lost interest exacerbated the overall complexity of the situation. As a result, the vulnerability of the neighboring states could no longer be ignored, and today the whole region facing the effects of this foreign intervention (Reza, 2022).

On the whole, the regional security dynamics witnessed during the conflict in Iraq after 2003 were complex. The interplay of local, regional, and international actors, including the de-facto power vacuum in the country, the rise of sectarianism, the threat that ISIS posed, as well as the involvement of other regional great powers created a highly volatile security environment. At the same time, the challenges associated with coordinating a coherent response among the various actors should be considered. Thus, as it was discussed above, their interests and policies regarding the country and the region often diverged greatly. Therefore, this is the main lesson that can be drawn – that such system of relations is highly unstable, and ensuring long-lasting safety in the geographical territory is ultimately difficult.

2.6. Gaps in the Literature

Considering the abundance of studies on US-Iraq relations and regional security, several gaps remain a subject of interest due to the issues not yet fully considered and anomalous findings. The gaps are caused by the insufficiently sold understanding of the long-term implications of the US invasion, complicated impacts on different categories of the Iraqi population, larger regional events and developments, and changes in terrorist threats.

First, the gap is related to the limited studies on the implications of the US invasion and subsequent occupation. Certain studies focus on the events that took place in 2003 or the immediate implications of such invasion (Ağalday, 2016; Dettke, 2020; Garey, 2020; Khider et al., 2023; Russell, 2003; Simuziya & Jonathan, 2023; Yılmaz, 2021; Yüce, 2022). However, an increasing number of survey data regarding the formation of the governing system was solicited in the last decade, and such data is still not a subject of analysis. By developing more longitudinal and in-depth studies on the sociopolitical changes in Iraq caused by Western involvement, one will be able to evaluate the invasion in a broader historical context and assess whether US presence was a reason for positive shifts in the local government.

Second, there is an evident gap in the literature on the impacts of US policy on the occupation, the activities of terrorists and their supporters in Iraq, the cooperation of various armed fractions them, the activity of group members in this period, and the final implications on the main social groups in Iraq. Many studies generalize this information without taking into account different applicability for various ethnic, religious, and social groups (AL.Yasiry, 2020; Najjar, 2023; Yılmaz, 2021). This knowledge is vital for developing a holistic picture of the conflict and better considering the eventual impacts on the population of Iraq.

The literature overwhelmingly focuses on high-level political analysis and strategic assessments of the post-invasion Iraq and the presence of the US in the region. It disregards the perspectives and experiences of ordinary Iraqi citizens. As a result, there is a clear need for more grassroots-level studies about the daily experiences of Iraqis, their perceptions or misperceptions of the US presence, and their hopes or worries about Iraq's future. Such research would shed more light on Iraq's social order post-invasion and the monumental task of nation-building. In terms of regional dynamics, relatively few studies examine the irdiba's relationships with its neighboring countries, especially Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf States. Most of them focus on the strategic rivalries between the two regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and their impacts on Iraq's peace building or stabilization efforts. While these studies provide valuable insights, there is a clear need for more comprehensive research about how regional powers shape Iraq's institutions and how their interventions affect the country's security and stability.

Another critical gap in the existing literature on Iraq is the long-term strategies for dealing with the rise of extremist groups, mainly the Islamic State and protracted conflict in the area. Although there is a substantial body of literature on the formation and operations of ISIS, there are relatively fewer studies that address the strategies for dealing with the remnants of ISIS or preventing the resurgence of other extremist groups. Moreover, studies that examine the evolving nature of transnational terrorist groups and how they use the internet are essential for developing innovative counter-terrorism strategies. Such studies would also contribute to the development of more effective interventions aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating former extremists.

Moreover, one should note that the full extent of the economic dimensions of the United States invasion and occupation for Iraq's development has not been addressed in the existing academic works. Although there are several studies that consider the immediate consequences of the military campaign, such as the destruction of infrastructures and disturbances in oil production, limited attention is payed to the long-term economic effects. According to these issues, studies that examine economic policies in post-2003 Iraq, the role of international finances and the problems of the revived economy construction, would greatly enlarge existing knowledge. Finally, this analysis suggests that such a gap does exist in the literature and concerns the international component of post-invasion Iraq. Despite the numerous sources that address the United States role, such studies seldom consider international and supranational actors such as the United Nations, the European Union, and multiple non-governmental organizations, among others. Meanwhile, one must pay more attention to the international component of the invasion's consequences through examining these actors' formal and informal roles, their successes and failures together with the experiences of their work alongside local Iraqi partners.

To sum up, one must notice that although some research attempts to address the US-Iraq relations, the regional security problematics, there is a series of gaps that exist. They include the long-term social and political effects of the invasion on Iraq, the experiences of a wide variety of social groups, the changes in regional balance and the continuing threat of extremism for the region, the conflict's economic consequences and the international context of the post-invasion Iraq. Overall, they require more attention to gain a holistic understanding of Iraq since 2003 that should be used in future policy planning and academic research.

2.7. Summary

The theoretical frameworks of realism, liberalism, and constructivism provide unique insights into US-Iraq relations and their impact on regional security post-2003. Regarding realism, the balance of power between these countries and the power politics in the international system determine these relations.

Liberalism looks at US-Iraq relations and their regional impact from the perspective of the dominant democratic peace theory that implies that since Iraq has

adopted democratic systems of governance, relations are expected to be harmonious. Lastly, constructivism explains that these relations and their impact on regional security from the view that these are shaped or determined by the identities of the countries involved and specific norms.

A closer look at the post-2003 period shows that it was characterized by various political, security, and socioeconomic context. Politically, the collapse of Saddam Hussain's regime created a power vacuum that was hastily filled by various insurgent groups and militias. Sectarian violence characterized Iraq, leading to the rise of extremist groups, including ISIS. The 2007 surge failed to create a stable political environment because new era strategies could not resolve political and sectarian tensions that had emerged.

The fact that this particular era was followed by the subsequent emergence of key socioeconomic challenges highlights the extent to which the political stigma characterized the Iraqi political environment of this particular period. Looted banks, general lawlessness, ongoing corruption, and violence impacted negatively on efforts to revamp and rebuild Iraq's once solid infrastructure. As such, lack of employment, the rise in poverty, and the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq resulted.

Humanitarian crisis defined the early post-2003 period, with Western countries and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council spending billions to help. A humanitarian crisis for which Iraq was not prepared happened, and the US and its allies were the only groups capable of providing help. Moreover, the 2003 invasion had tremendous negative impacts on the socioeconomic landscape, and violence was unfolding in Iraq long after the 2007 surge. The collapse of the regime created a political and socioeconomic context that was characterized by numerous crises, and this particular period was followed by sectarian violence and the rise of extremist groups.

Regarding regional geopolitical dynamics, the 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq caused a strategic shift that affected the countries of the Middle East. Sunni-majority countries that are in direct competition with Shia-majority Iran have always taken advantage of the lack of Shia power in Iraq in a bid to contain Iran. As such, the predominance of the US army in Iraq guaranteed Saudi Arabia that its

interest would be safeguarded, especially with the major withdrawal of American troops by 2013. Iran, on the other hand, had gained unfettered entry to her western neighbor. ISIS provided the regional players and the major powers with a viable common enemy. Overall, there are various gaps in the literature, including the long-term socioeconomic and several political impacts of the invasion on Iraq, impacts on different socioeconomic classes, and the role of the invasion in the regional geopolitical context.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

The relationship between the United States and Iraq after 2003 represents one of the most salient interactions in the geopolitical picture of the Middle East. This period has become a watershed, as it was initiated by the U.S.-led invasion that finished with the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, and marked the beginning of a period of occupation and transformation of Iraq's political, social, and security systems. The repercussions of these events have remained visible in the form of new security schemes formed in the region, a multitude of insurgency movements sprouting in Iraq and its neighbors, and a number of economic challenges that emerged due to the occupation. The goal of this study will be to review these aspects of US-Iraq relations and their role in post-2013 regional security. The data collected during the interviews with diplomats, military officers, academics, and local Iraqi partners will be instrumental in investigating how these relationships shape the Middle East's current state and what could be the recommendations for policy making.

- The scope of this initial chapter will encompass several areas of interest, specifically:
- The political situation and governance issues in Iraq after 2003.
- The emergence of extremist groups such as ISIS and their effects on Iraq and regional security.
- The socio-economic effects of the invasion and following occupation, reconstruction and humanitarian crises.
- The relationship between the United States and Iraq and its effects on the regionally neighboring countries, i.e. Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The subsequent sections will provide an analysis of the abovementioned themes, referring to the informant's responses to understanding the post-2003 dynamics in Iraq. The consideration of their viewpoints will help in gaining a comprehensive

understanding of how the United States' actions affected the region's security and Iraq's stability in the long perspective.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The data for the current study regarding US-Iraq relations post-2003 in the context of regional security was collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews and secondary sources. The purpose of this choice was to receive deep insights from central actors, participating directly or indirectly in the USA-Iraq relations of the period exiting the 2003 invasion. This qualitative method was appropriate for the study which seeks to obtain a profound understanding of political, security, and socioeconomic impacts of the military campaign on Iraq and the larger Middle East region.

3.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of four key informants were interviewed to capture detailed perspectives on the impact of the U.S. invasion in the region. The selection of this method for data collection was correct because interviews encourage communication and discussion, allowing respondents to share their thoughts and worldviews . The key informants were selected based on their experiences in the areas of Middle Eastern geopolitical affairs or U.S.-Iraq relations. The background and experience of my interviewees were as follows:

- Mustafa Kaya. The member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The background concentration on U.S.-Middle Eastern relations is because he previously worked in Turkish politics and foreign affairs.
- Former UN Staff member. The interviewee formerly worked in Iraq and saw the invasion and its aftermath including left to socio-economic changes and challenges of Iraqi citizens.
- Hussein Suwadi Abu Tabikh. Minister Plenipotentiary whose contribution includes the discussion of a political vacuum and changes in regional balances.
- Dr. Qahtaan Kazim Muhammad Al-Khafaji. The military issue was explored due to the collapse of the securitization regime in Iraq by this retired military

officer due to the appearance of extremist organizations taking as the major example ISIL.

The data were collected in the semi-structured interview format, which allowed the researcher to explore the topics further when interesting issues emerged but maintain the system of questions strictly in compliance with one criteria. The open-ended questions were centered on several perspectives: political, security, socio-economic, and regional. This approach enables the interviewee to share the analysis and experience at the same time, providing a rich data set for thematic analysis.

3.2.2. Questionnaire Design

The interviews were guided by a pre-prepared questionnaire designed to ensure the coverage of the central themes of the work (questions are attached in the appendex). The questions revealed data concerning the immediate and long-lasting effects of the U.S. invasion. In particular, the issues considered are as follows:

- Immediate political impact. How were the situations in Iraq immediately after the invasion compared to the time before it regarding the political structure of the state?
- Long-term political consequences. What are the results in terms of governance, sovereignty, and political stability that are still observed in Iraq many years after the event?
- Security implications. How was the security apparatus of Iraq changed during the invasion and what was the key effect of this situation for the regional security of the Middle East?
- Socio-economic impact. What happened to the economy and infrastructure of Iraq, as well as the general well-being of the country's population as a consequence of the 2003 invasion?
- Regional implications. What was the influence of the instability in Iraq after 2003 for the neighboring countries of the Middle East?

These questions have provided an opportunity for in-depth analysis of the topic while letting the respondent expand on the questions requiring the application of specific knowledge.

3.2.3. Secondary Data Sources

Although the primary data for this research has been interviews with knowledgeable actors, the use of secondary data is also significant. Secondary data from academic articles, governmental reports, and think tank papers are used in two ways in this study. First, given the lack of events data that properly frame the history of U.S.-Iraq relationships, and not many sources quantifying various issues, the interviews have to be placed in a more general context of the U.S.-Iraqi relationship.

Second, even though the interviews are purely qualitative, some of the secondary data incorporated or integrated through interviews are quantitative or provide a real-life picture of the issue. This, in turn, makes sure that the research does not have to depend solely on the interview transcripts but can also refer to the documents not mentioned by the interviewees but containing important pieces of data, examples, and statistics.

In addition to academic reports and research, there are various reports by international organizations and governmental bodies discussing the socio-economic consequences of the invasion in a quantifiable context, such as the United Nations and World Bank reports dealing with poverty, displacement, and damages to the infrastructure. The result is that the research can be seen as more comprehensively providing both sides of the complex interrelationship between the U.S. and Iraq post-2003.

3.2.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adopted an ethical approach by ensuring that the interviewees' privacy and confidentiality are strictly observed. Each respondent provided their informed consent before engaging them in the research. Each participant who required to be anonymized was accordingly protected through the research. All participants' data and information will be kept safe, and no personal information will be shared with any third party as shown in the attached consent and confidentiality agreements. The data will not be kept after the completion of the research, implying the successfulness of the data retrieval. Finally, the methods undertaken by the research in collecting and recording the data have enabled me to have comprehensive research tools to influence the analysis that leads to the recognition of the impact of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

3.3. Interview Process

For this study, the interview process was primarily devised to obtain the richest and most qualitative data from a range of key informants who have been involved directly or indirectly in the consequences of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Interviews have been a major component of the data collection process because it is essential to understand the specific impacts of the event and how they influence regional security. As a result, this process included several stages for the collection of data.

3.3.1. Selection of Interviewees

A purposive sample was drawn effective to the requirements of their involvement in the development of events in the United States and Iraq and the Middle East in general from the political, security, and socio-economic perspectives and up to the regional level. The interviewees involved the main parts of the above-presented classification.

Political actors in the structure or the servants of the regional governments or international bodies who developed and implemented the above-mentioned agendas in Washington and Bagdad and could provide the information from the perspective of political decision-making and the state cooperation of both countries. The representatives were required with the closest cooperation with the government of Iraq or the U.S.'s foreign affairs. In the current research, the selected actors were defined and were supposed to fill the interviews. The interviewing was mainly represented by:

1. Political actors: People occupying posts in the government of regional states of departments or other structural units that contact and interact for the required items with the interests and agendas of the U.S. and Iraq.

Security experts with military or intelligence competences developing where the aggression on Iraq is created with the reconstruction and other relevant operations and the establishment and activities of extremist groups such as ISIS. The structure of the agenda lay on the following issues:

2. Security experts: Employees of special structures – the military, intelligence, and other other-actors who were participants in the coverage and reflection of threats to Iraq from extremist organizations.

Academicians or analysts who studied and covered the special scientific publication of the whole structure of the Washington and Baghdad aspect, i.e. U.S. – Iraq relations in the regional and international theoretical history in a liberal and critical political process. Thus, they had the following structure of the agenda lying in the following issues:

3. Academician or analyst: Researchers and employees of academic organizations who studied and studied the structure and development of theoretical aspects of U.S. – Iraq relations from the political and security angles of the issue.

Local experts – Iraqis or inhabitants of the temporarily established region of residence who are studied for the development of the socio-economic index of interest and development, as well as the development of the basis developing the perception of the role and form of U.S. activities, as well as the course of bureaucratically specified socio-economic activities by the population of the transplantation in Iraq. Thus, the agenda mainly for the interview was included in the following issues:

4. Local expert: People of Iraq or residents of Iraq who have developed professional relations with the described sector of the population and development of perception in relation to the role and form of U.S. activity.

3.3.2. Scheduling and Conducting Interviews

The interviewees were contacted through email or phone and informed of the nature of the study. They were sent the informed consent form and asked to sign it. The participants received detailed information about the study, including the interview structure, confidentiality, the projection of the research, and the right to withdraw at any time. At least two days before the interview, a reminder was sent via email. A verbal informed consent process was also taken at the beginning of the interview. The interviews were performed over two months, between june and Sepmtember. They were face-to-face, virtual, and phone, depending on the availability and the location of the interviewees. Each took form forty-five to ninety minutes, including the time for

socializing. Interviews were conducted in English and in a few cases in Arabic, as requested by interviewees. An interpreter who is first author's native language, then translated the Arabic responses to English for the purpose of this study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Most of the colleges were contacted through email beforehand. The interview was performed in the offices of the interviewees. Although the semi-structured interviews were utilized, ensuring that particular topics were addressed, the researcher could go off the semi-structured script. These revealed narratives to make the data more thorough and informative.

3.3.3. Interview Framework and Key Questions

The semi-structured interview was conducted with the help of a questionnaire that addressed five thematic points: political impact, long-term consequences, security, socio-economic changes, and regional influence. On the one hand, they made the interview as consistent as possible; on the other, they allowed the interviewees to feel relatively free in their conversation, touching related issues. The main questions were as follows:

- Political Impact. What were the opportunities and constraints of the U.S. invasion on Iraq's immediate and subsequent political environment? What were the immediate changes in the governance system shaped by the U.S. invasion in Iraq?
- Long-Term Consequences. What are the political changes in the governance of Iraq in the long-term triggered by the U.S. support of the invasion of 2003? What are the long-term political challenges that Iraq and other stakeholders face?
- Security. How did the security environment in Iraq and the region change after 2003? What were the effects of the U.S. invasion on security and stability in Iraq? Was the invasion one of the main reasons for the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria?
- Socio-Economic. What are the social and economic effects of the U.S. war in Iraq of 2003 on infrastructure, economy, and population with a focus on Iraq?

- Regional Influence. How does Iraq's destabilisation reflect on the security policy in the Persian Gulf and the regional balance of power in the Middle East, namely regarding the competitions between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Questions were modified to be more or less detailed depending on the interviewee's main field of research. For instance, security experts had more questions about the military and insurgent experiences inside Iraq during and after the U.S. invasion. Political figures were asked questions about the governance and foreign policy context.

3.3.4. Recording and Transcribing

Firstly, all the interviews which were conducted were recorded with the participants' permission. The recording process was necessary as a means of capturing as many data as possible. A few participants from each group did not agree to be recorded. In this case, all the notes were written down as accurately as possible. As soon as recording was over, an attempt at transcription followed immediately. The process was accompanied by the analysis of the collected data but the attempt to be as equally strict in transcription. Everything unclear was clarified with the interviewees.

3.3.5. Ethical Considerations

The interview was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards with the informing of each of the participants about their right to be hidden under the pseudonym and receive confidentiality. The researcher provided all the details concerning the voluntary nature of participation and took all necessary actions to hide the identification of the participants of the study. In all recordings, other people and captured audio were excluded to eliminate the possibility of identifying the person's voice. Each record, any photo, and all data were locked on a single memory device using a password and hidden from other research team members. In case of recording content associated with political or security risks, the researcher made every effort to ensure that no data that could lead to the identification of professional activity or the actual person was left.

3.3.6. Data Analysis

The data generated through interviews conducted has been coded using a thematic analysis approach following the completion of the process of transcribing. While coding the data in question, some of the central themes that were identified as being the case with all responses included ‘political instability’, ‘sectarian violence’, foreign influence’, as well as ‘economic challenges’. This demonstrates that these central concepts can be used to better understand the role of the US in Iraq following the invasion of 2003. This information has then been cross-referenced with data that had been generated through the means of a secondary source and gives an accurate portrayal of the points raised during the discussion. The data in question can then be used as the central foundation of the analysis provided in the findings section and allows the study to better understand the impact the invasion had on the US-Iraqi relations after 2003.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

In order to evaluate the US-Iraq relations after 2003 within the framework of the given research, a qualitative thematic analysis approach has been used. This approach is beneficial for deriving meaning from the context-rich, narrative data that have been received from semi-structured interviews. This section will discuss such moments of the data analysis as the most essential methods that have been used, the process of coding the responses, and, finally, how the graphical representation of the results could be presented.

3.4.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was the chosen outer-level method for the interview data as it was the best way to identify and organize not necessarily main but central, or most frequent, patterns. Generally, the steps in the thematic analysis include familiarizing oneself with the data, considering its existence in depth, defining and naming some themes supported by evidence. Since the interviews were organized by email correspondence with questions sent in writing, the data did not have to be transcribed from the video files, an outdated but still convenient way to assure integrity. The interviews were read multiple times to make sure they are familiar and understood. It

was also helpful to write down the crucial ideas of the response and to group the responses which belong to the same category.

For example, the phrases related to that of political instability, security vacuum, economic issues, regional dynamics were grouped separately and then within the groups. “Sectarian violence”, “foreign intervention,” “ISIS rise,” “infrastructure destruction,” and “Iran’s influence” were the codes which were formulated based on the data from the interviews. The codes were then assessed to create the resulting themes, such as “political instability,” “security vacuum,” “foreign influence,” and “regional power shifts.” The themes were reassessed to assure their mutual exclusivity and exhaustive subsuming of the codes. The codes were also shifted between the themes to maintain consistence with the objectives of the study. For example, the theme of “security vacuum” was added due to the need to understand how the U.S. invasion shifted the ability of Iraq to manage its internal security and to prevent new groups to attack the metro. The themes were also supported by the analysis with additional resources currently available on the Iraq invasion. Hence, the final themes were:

- Political instability and governance issues post 2003.
- The rise of extremist groups and the security problem in the region.
- Socio-economic cost and fallout of the invasion.
- Regional power struggles: Iran vs. Saudi Arabia.
- Perception of foreign occupation and implications for Iraq’s sovereignty.

3.4.2. Integration of Secondary Data

In order to place the findings of the interviews in context and to validate the findings using secondary sources, government reports, academic papers, and policy analysis were integrated into the thematic analysis. Putting the responses of the interviewees into context, and cross-referencing them with the secondary data sources allowed a more comprehensive understanding of U.S.-Iraq relationship and its impact on regional security.

3.4.3. Graphical Representation of Data

In order to present the findings as clearly and effectively as possible, it may be helpful to use visual tools to summarize the key themes and patterns discussed in the interviews. As such, some possible graphics are proposed below.

1. **Thematic map:** One of the visuals which could be made is a thematic map which depicts the relationships between the key themes such as Political Instability, Security Vacuum, Socio-Economic Impact, and Regional Dynamics. The map will show how the themes are linked and how they together contribute to the general instability in Iraq and the region. As such, it will adequately show the issues discussed by the interviewees and their relevance.

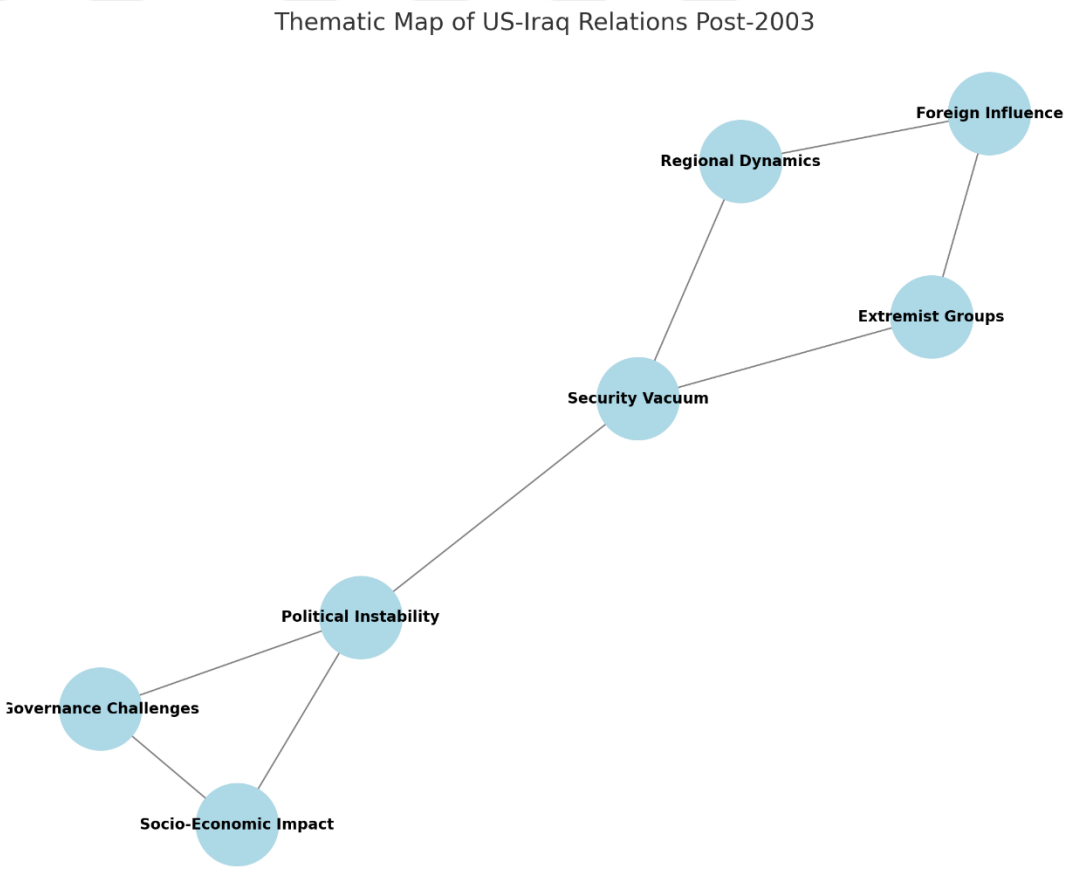

Figure 1. Thematic Map of US-Iraq Relations Post-2003

In Figure 1, it is clear to see how political instability has been the focal point of the interrelationship of primary themes influencing U.S.-Iraq relationship post-2003. This instability contributes to the critical governance challenges that Iraq faced post-

2003 which effectively created a vacuum of security in the state. This state failure is characteristic of post-conflict states and as such allowed extremist groups to form and further their control in the area, adding to regional instability. The involvement, particularly of foreign powers in these regional dynamics further added to the longevity of instability.

2. **Bar chart: frequency of key themes:**Another possible graphic to use would be a bar chart which shows the frequency of the theme's appearance in all the interviews. E.g., the term Political Instability may appear in 80% of the responses, while the term Foreign Influence will be mentioned in 60%. As such, the bar chart will illustrate which aspects of U.S.-Iraq relations are the main for the interview participants.

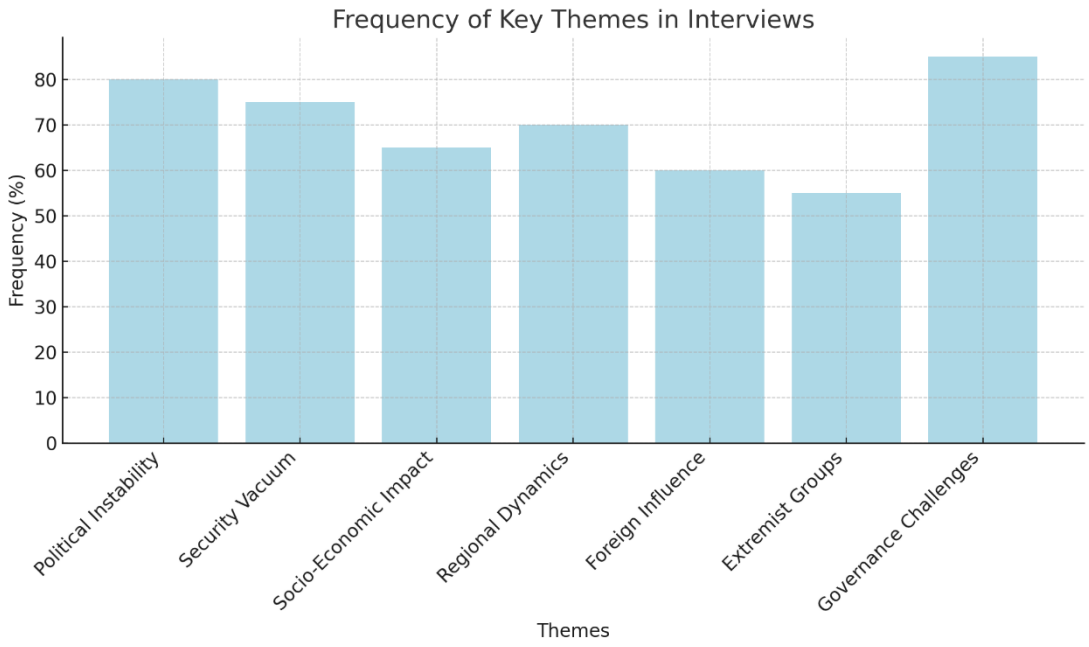

Figure 2. Frequency of Key Themes in Interviews

Governance challenges and political instability were the most frequently discussed themes during the interviews, as shown in Figure 2. It reflects the widely held belief that Iraq's political system is still deeply flawed as corruption, sectarianism, and weak state institutions continue to breed instability. In addition, concerns regarding the security vacuum and socio-economic effects of the 2003 invasion delivered a series of Iraq framing recurring difficulties. As such, it may be argued that political failure, security deterioration, and Iraqi people's hardships frequently intertwine.

3. **Wordcloud:** It may also be helpful to use a Wordcloud with words often mentioned in the analyzed text, which may be Instability, Iran, ISIS, Security, and Governance. The word cloud will display terms which were discussed and emphasized the most, reflecting what the interviewees considered was most important. In the below section, the options of implementation are given.

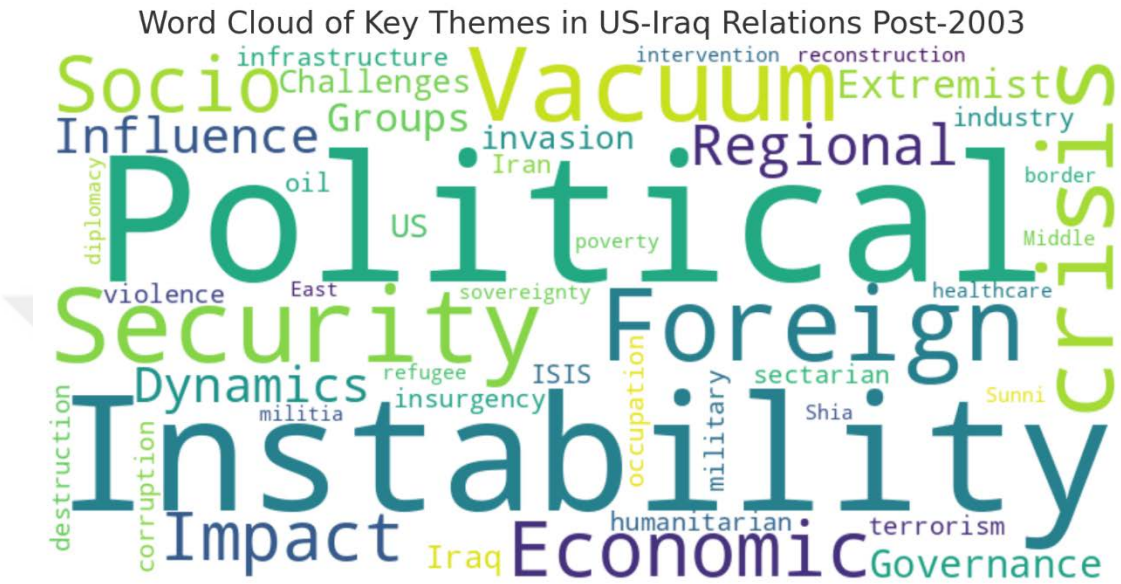

Figure 3. Word Cloud of Key Themes in US-Iraq Relations Post-2003

The figure below shows the word cloud associated with the data obtained from the interviews; it mainly reflects the key issues the solution will have to take into consideration. One of the most noticeable pairs is “political” and “instability” as well as “security”, which are the most dominant terms. Correspondingly, the fact that the most frequently occurring word of the cloud is “political” and the second most occurred term is “instability”. These concepts are actively discussed in the interviews, meaning that the issue of Iraq’s inability to ensure its political order and secure its borders remains among the most topical. Still, the cloud also features such terms as “foreign”, “government”, “refugees”, “extremist”, “groups”, “influence”, indicating that the current state of Iraq is greatly influenced by various factors. To sum up, the cloud represents the key issues discussed throughout the interviews.

4. **Timeline of events post-2003:** It will be possible to present a timeline chart of the key events which happened post-2003 in Iraq since the U.S. invasion, giving such examples like the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in 2011, and the emergence of ISIS in 2014. As such, the visual will place the discussion in the

proper context, showing how the events discussed by the interviewees correspond to the real-life processes.

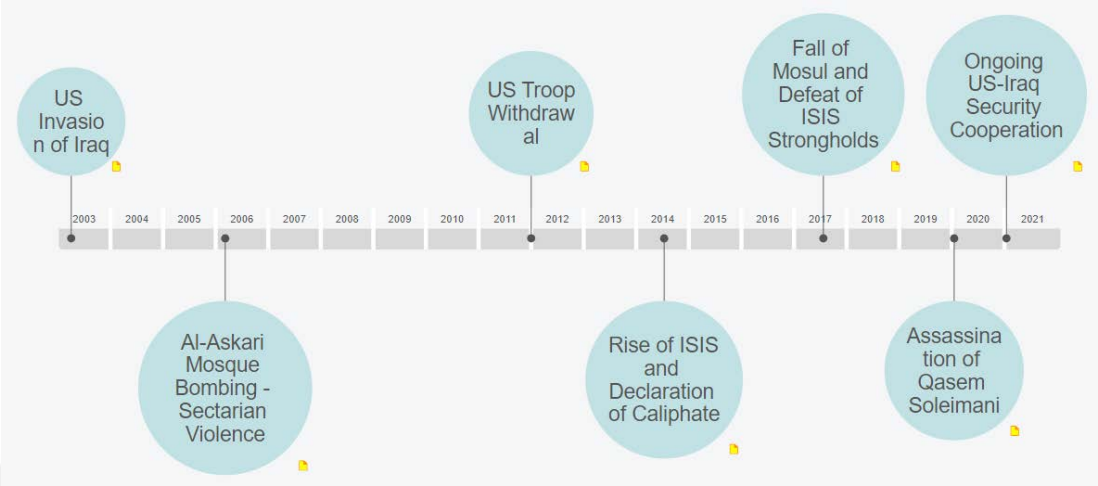

Figure 4. Timeline of Major Events in US-Iraq Relations Post-2003

Several of the most crucial dates that had a significant effect on U.S. and Iraq relationships are presented in Figure 4. These dates are 2006, when the Al-Askari Mosque's Golden Domed mosque was bombed, and the move sparked Iraq's sectarian violence; 2011, when U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq completely; and 2014, when ISIS emerged. All of these events have had major implications for Iraq's security, regional ties, or internal stability and may be seen in the figure.

3.4.4. Cross-Referencing Themes with Interviewee Roles

Ultimately, one final layer of analysis consisted of cross-referencing these themes with the backgrounds of the interviewees, seeing how emphasis of different roles or experiences elicited differences in the expectations and considerations of each particular informant type. For example, political actors would find governance and corruption matters more pressing, while military experts might find issues of security to be more impactful. This whole comparison helped to see the ultimate value in the analysis garnered from each type of informant, further adding elaboration.

3.4.5. Conclusion of Data Analysis

The analysis methods, which combine thematic analysis with graphical representations and secondary data, provide a comprehensive approach to examining U.S.-Iraq relations post-2003. These mechanisms overlap and complement each other, ensuring that their findings are based on broad data beforehand. This reflects, on the

one hand, their potential validity while assessing, on the other hand, whether they allow for any meaningful insights into political, security, and socio-economic discourse.

3.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study to make sense of the U.S.-Iraq relationship post-2003 is designed to integrate the wide range of factors and measures that have ultimately affected the situation in the complex national and international areas in Iraq. Based on the primary data from the interviews and secondary data about the event, the theoretical framework highlights five central themes that influenced the relationship between the U.S. and Iraq, Iraq's political order, and security issues. They concern Political Instability, Governance Challenges, Security Vacuum, Socio-Economic Impact, Foreign Influence, and Regional Dynamics.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a sequence of the steps according to which Iraq's political order collapsed under the pressure of the U.S.'s and their opponent countries' influence. Under the occupation's pressure, the new political system was formed and adopted, which, however, was not successful in functioning properly. The political instability of the new system and corruption, sectarianism, and the inability to address the significant number of existing political and security problems and to control the situation created the conditions for people's resolving of the governing rule, leading to the governance challenges. The inability to keep law and order within the state and lack of political and security upright leadership have given rise to the activities of a large number of people involved in the security vacuum inside the country.

The security vacuum facilitated the designs of extremist groups, particularly ISIS, and Iraq experienced radical socio-economic impact from the U.S.'s invasion and the situation in general. The terrorist group manipulates the existing threat to city life and security form the rise in unemployment due to the destroyed infrastructure and widespread atmosphere of poverty. The involvement of foreign countries directly into the internal situation in the struggling-for-power, making the complex rival country even worse has also contributed to the radicalized tendency of developed relations (Csiszer, 2022). The impact of these factors affecting leadership, the social-economic

tendency, and the extreme situation created by extremist groups ruling people's lives in military operations and sabotaging them has had far-reaching implications for the rest of the country of the whole region in the existing national and international relationship, security, trade, and business initiatives. The theoretical framework with the visual framework of a flow chart in Figure 5 shows how the measuring material is relevant in causing the dynamic of the central aspect of Iraq's regional dynamics.

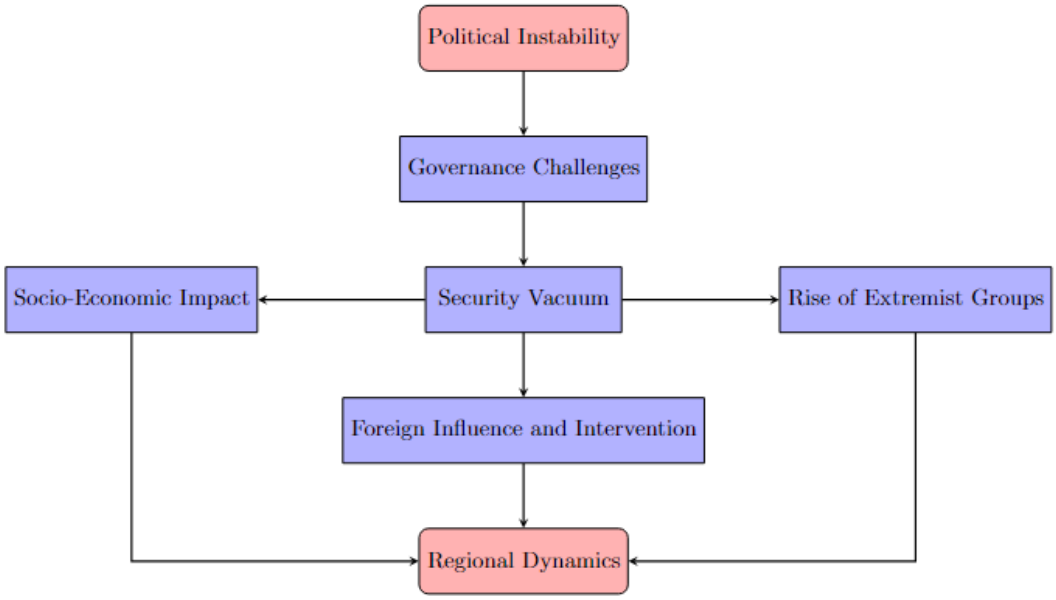

Figure 5. Theoretical Framework of U.S.-Iraq Relations Post-2003

3.6. Limitations of the Study

The first and most prominent limitation of this study is the reliance on qualitative data gathered from a limited number of interviews. While the interviewed individuals have provided insightful information on the current state of U.S.-Iraqi relations after 2003, the impressions of a small amount of people may not entirely represent the reality. In Iraq, there is a significant diversity of perspectives, whether in terms of region, sector, affiliations, or even political beliefs, so by interviewing a small and limited sample of these people, the researcher may not have gathered a holistic and representative data set. In addition, while the study has taken steps to ensure the reliability of this data by interviewing different people, cross-referencing the obtained information with secondary sources, and analyzing potentially divergent views, the essence of the qualitative study is usually reliant on the impressions of individuals, which may be influenced by biases and personal experiences. As such, the findings of

this study are not always objective, as much of the data is based on subjective impressions.

Another limitation is the focus on the period after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States as at the main point of departure of the time scope of this study. Naturally, the period in question has seen the implementation of multiple changes at the political, security, and socio-economic levels in Iraq, making it a logical focus for the study. However, it lacks an extended historical perspective, failing to consider the long-term structural antecedents that were present in the relationship between the two countries before the invasion. Without these earlier events and issues, it is challenging to provide a deep understanding of the roots of the modern relationship and the problems that it brings – as such, future studies may choose to include such a comprehensive historical analysis.

3.7. Summary

This chapter has discussed the research methodology applied in this investigation of the United States- Iraq relation post-2003, focusing on the most central themes related to political instability, governance issues, security vacuums, socio-economic conditions, and foreign influences. A combination of semi-structured interviews with experts and key informants and secondary sources were applied to achieve an in-depth picture of various implications and factors characterizing the post-invasion Iraq. Through thematic analysis of findings, the relationships between these aspects have been identified, where the nucleus is the political instability that weakens the governance and creates security vacuums for extremist groups. Moreover, the effects include increased detrimental aspects in society and economy. The theoretical framework of the study is depicted in Figure 5 to provide a visual representation of the relationships. Moreover, beyond the problematic influences of foreign agendas, the framework illustrates that local and regional dynamics further complicate the already unstable conditions in Iraq. At the same time, it is relevant to acknowledge the limitations of the investigation, such as the exclusive application of a small amount of qualitative data and a focus on the short period after the invasion. However, the analysis is vital due to its application of the multi-faceted approach to the discussion of major factors and implications.

CHAPTER FOUR

FİNDİNGS

4.1. Introduction

The post-2003 period in Iraq has been defined by major political, security, and socio-economic changes affecting every aspect of the country's life as a state. These changes were largely influenced by the U.S.-led invasion and its consequences, which resulted in a decade-long reality of instability and insecurity in Iraq. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the primary data obtained through interviews and secondary sources, examining in-depth the nature of the main dynamics observed post-invasion. It tries to identify how the interactions between political instability, governance issues, security vacuums, foreign influences, and the socio-economic status of different actors helped determine the pattern of Iraq's development. By comparing the literature review and the interview responses, the chapter seeks to identify the reasons for the observed instability and their probable impact. The phenomenon it will focus on in particular is the rise of such groups as ISIS, the position and activities of foreign influences in Iraq in the post-2003 period, and its consequences for the population. The idea is that the findings will help understand the complexities of Iraq's relations with its neighbors and other major players and select how the shown realities correspond to the theoretical framework. As a result, the analysis aims to provide the reasoning for the current state of affairs with insights for Iraq and other stakeholders.

4.2. Presentation of Findings

Based on the data that has been gathered from both the interviews with experts and the secondary sources of information, this chapter aims to provide an overview and discuss the most critical insights that have been gained. These insights are grouped according to the five main themes that have been identified with the help of the theoretical framework. They are political instability, governance challenges, security vacuums, soci-economic impacts, and foreign intervention. This chapter aims to discuss the insights under each of these categories, further describing how they are linked and contribute to the post-2003 dynamics of U.S.-Iraq relations.

4.2.1. Political Instability

The insights obtained with the help of semi-structured interviews reveal that political instability is still one of the primary problems for Iraq following the U.S. invasion. The data indicates that when Saddam Hussein's regime fell and the dictator was captured, a power vacuum appeared that resulted in the rise of sectarian politics and disputes between Sunni and Shia. According to what the interviewees have agreed upon, Iraqi political institutions and practices have generally failed to become legitimate since then due to corruption, sectarianism, and weak state structures. Despite the idea that different governance elements have been built, the interviewees report, the system is not stable and cannot introduce anything close to effective security and development governance. As such, according to the obtained data, political instability continues to be a problem, shaping interrelation between the discussed states.

4.2.2. Governance Challenges

The data from interviews also discloses the idea that governance challenges should be considered another crucial issue for Iraq in the context of the U.S. invasion. The information reveals that some of the most significant problems represent the lack of accountability and corruption of the Iraqi government. In addition, the authorities cannot manage their resources and use oil-revenue benefit to reconstruct state infrastructure effectively. Moreover, the absence of institutions and failures in reforms have led to the critical condition of the state, whose weakness is only intensified by existing divisions.

4.2.3. Security Vacuums and the Rise of Extremist Groups

One of the themes observed during the interviews was the security vacuum that emerged after the dismantling of Iraq's military and security infrastructure. This had led to a fertile environment that allowed the rise of extremist groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq. ISIS was able to build and expand its control of territory due to the vacuum in security infrastructure and has had long lasting effects on Iraq's domestic and regional security. Most of the responding interviewees seemed to agree that Iraq was fragile and unguarded in 2014. Poor planning of the invasion and its aftermath had a serious negative impact on the country's social fabric and security infrastructure.

Reconstruction of an effective and cohesive security force was one of the problems that persisted after the invasion. As observed during the interviews, Iraq's current situation is a security threat that can be utilized by an organized insurgent force.

4.2.4. Socio-Economic Impacts

Another theme that manifested during the interviews was the impact of the conflict of Iraq's socio-economic environment. A significant number of respondents brought up the issue of the tremendous economic decline that Iraq is experienced. The country was reported to have high unemployment rates, extreme poverty, and a lack of access to good healthcare and deliveries. The infrastructure was destroyed, and years of war and continued conflict had hindered the recovery and growth of the country's economic capabilities. Some of the interviewees mentioned that efforts have been made to rebuild its economy, but the inability of the governing lack of capacity because of their corruption and incompetence has impeded the success of the international intervention. The crises of displacement and survivors of the conflict also exacerbated Iraq problems.

4.2.5. Foreign Influence and Regional Dynamics

All interviewees pointed to the role of foreign powers as a critical determinant of Iraq's trajectory post-2003. In particular, according to our respondents, Iran has emerged as a troubling influence both in Iraq's political and military institutions. Especially since the U.S. withdrawal, Iran has exploited the absence of American actors to grow their presence, influence, and control over the region. Other regional powers, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, also had a hand in determining Iraq's course.

According to interviewees, however, the actions of these states were generally in direct competition with Iranian interests. The U.S., even after its military withdrawal, remains a critical actor in Iraq through its security cooperation agreement and anti-ISIS efforts, among other activities. All interviewees agreed that while foreign interventions were sometimes ultimately good for the country, these determinants severely complicated Iraq's ability to determine and follow its own course, developing a self-sustaining stability.

4.3. Analysis of Findings

In this section, the findings from the interviews and the secondary data will be compared with the theoretical framework. At the same time, such issues as political instability, governance challenges, security vacuums, socio-economic consequences as well as foreign interventions will be further discussed and their implications on Iraq and the region's future will be explored.

4.3.1. Political Instability and Governance Challenges

The data from the interviews illustrated a high level of political instability and governance challenges. The majority of the interviewees referred to a large number of political parties and groups in Iraq and their divisions. Business Insider describes the situation in Iraq as feeble due to the historical, political, and social contexts based on the sectarian division in power among the entire population. Saddam Hussein's regime clearance was supposed to take a closer step to democracy, but the event created a space filled with new political leaders who are all sectarian. That is, the case is about heterogeneous fractions which still cannot find a formula of effective interaction. The situation which was reported by the interviewees made the state fragmented and lacking unity. The theoretical framework also indicates that a high level of political instability directly contributes to governance challenges, and due to the fragmented state, governance structures are weak. Weak governance structures mean that service provision is ineffective and, in some cases, entirely unavailable. The interviewees also directly referred to governance, stating that the state's inability to protect its citizens makes governance problematic.

The information from the interviews also illustrated that governance challenges are closely connected with issues of systemic corruption. An exampling phrase was referring to the situation as "from parliament to street cleaners is corruption." It should be noted that the position assumes that Iraq has a relatively big share of funds as the country is rich in oil. The findings align with the theoretical framework that political instability directly increases levels of corruption. The situation forms a vicious cycle protecting the status quo and making Iraq's unity impossible. The conclusion that can be made is that lack of political reforms and anti-corruption measures is one of the reasons why Iraq remains unstable.

It is significant to note that the findings largely confirm what the literature described – that security vacuums have contributed to the rise of multiple extremist groups like ISIS and AQI. In both cases, the U.S.-led invasion removed the existing military and security forces without proper plans to reconstruct them. This created the conditions for insurgent groups to emerge and take control of vast territories in Iraq, such as their seizure of land in 2014. The theoretical framework suggested that the collapse of governance resulted in severe political instability, which in turn facilitated the appearance of security vacuums that gave rise to extremist and terrorist groups. The interview findings largely confirmed this, as Iraq still has some of the strongest militias that cannot be brought under the central authority. In critical responses, soft security has been used to unify different factions have not been successful; the war on terror has done more harm than good. Hence, it could be concluded that any solution to Iraq's troubles would involve methods to strengthen and unify its military and police forces, thereby eradicating or at least forcing the powerful militias to become part of the legitimate authorities.

4.3.2. Socio-Economic Impacts and Humanitarian Crises

The findings suggest that the socio-economic impacts of post-2003 Iraq's instability were immense. The evidence shows that due to economic mismanagement and decline of infrastructure with poor and incapable governance in place present until now, Iraq fails to recover its previous development levels. On top of the unemployment rates with women's labour force participation being affected and poor access to healthcare and education services observed in Iraqic society, a meaty economic crisis takes its toll. Its citizens are becoming increasingly dissatisfied and are much more willing to take the streets and pledge allegiance to extremist groups outsourcing young men left without opportunities by those who lead the country. The theoretical framework describes clearly defined causal connections between economic decline and politics of instability. Poor conditions in socio-economic terms make the state illegitimate or incapable of the effective governance of the case while vested interests and the centralism of the government in power only boost the existing tension. The evidence correlates with the theoretical framework that socio-economic conditions and operations have deteriorated the social fabric and made Iraq's state of affair unstable.

Moreover, the connections between the central government and regional areas damaged the situation in the country.

Besides, the findings suggest that international aid and efforts to revive Iraqi economics did not result in efficient solutions, sometimes making the conditions even worse due to corruption and inadequate allocations. Solutions should, therefore, entail the development of targeted and efficient approaches to economic capacity and governance restoration.

4.3.3. Foreign Influence and Regional Dynamics

The findings and evidence suggest that foreign intrusion is still valid in Iraq's post-2003 reality. The findings suggest that Iran is the most influential one after the USA fully left the station in 2011. However, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which are leading competitors and enemies of Iran in the region, as well as the U.S. through its security efforts, take an active part in the country despite uplift and full troop withdrawal intentions.

The results of the data analysis are consistent with the theoretical framework, showing that foreign influence of any form (militarily, diplomatically, or otherwise) exacerbates internal governance and security issues of the host country. More specifically, foreign influence is harmful because it is inherently focused on the pursuance of the external power's interests, which can run contrary to the host country's needs and, often, even its sovereignty. Respondents to this survey also pointed out that foreign interventions, despite sometimes being necessary to ensure long-lasting stability, disturb the realities of governance within Iraq. In addition, the interactions at the regional level between powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, including a proxy conflict on the territory of Iraq, were found to increase the overall instability and deprive Iraq of the chance for an independent, sovereign life free of turmoil. As such, the findings of this survey can be used to concur that the overall decrease of foreign involvement will result in increased stability.

4.3.4. Linking Findings to the Theoretical Framework

The findings are consistent with the elements of the theoretical framework in several ways, as the framework is specifically designed to explain the continuous

interplay between political instability, governance issues, security vacuums, socio-economic problems, and foreign involvement. Specifically, it argues that political instability feeds governance issues, leading to failures in managing the state and making room for security vacuums that are quickly filled by extremist groups. In turn, this complex of issues exacerbates socio-economic problems, which, in turn, can worsen the above-discussed issues. At the same time, foreign countries leverage Iraq's weakness to influence geopolitics in the region, creating a complex system of interrelated factors that fuel the overall instability. The framework, thus, explains the solid structure of issues that lead to the ongoing nature of Iraq's problems. With this in mind, the findings indicate that to ensure stability, a multi-component approach that addresses these issues at their core will be necessary.

Table 1 encapsulates the principal results of the study by categorizing the salient themes observed in the analysis: political instability, governance issues, security vacuums, socio-economic repercussions, foreign influence, the emergence of extremist organizations, and regional dynamics. Each issue is examined regarding its particular influence on Iraq, illustrating how they exacerbate the nation's persistent instability and difficulties. The table correlates these data with the theoretical framework, illustrating how political and governance failures result in security vacuums, thus providing possibilities for extremist organizations and foreign forces to exacerbate regional instability. The findings highlight the interrelation of various concerns, demonstrating the intricate and diverse character of Iraq's post-2003 situation.

Table I. Summary of Key Themes and Their Impact on Post-2003 U.S.-Iraq Relations

Key Theme	Findings	Impact on Iraq	Link to Theoretical Framework
Political Instability	Collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime created a power vacuum filled by sectarian and factional competition.	Continued fragmentation of Iraq's political system, weakened legitimacy, inability to establish effective governance.	Political instability drives governance challenges, leading to weak institutions and inability to manage security.
Governance Challenges	Corruption, mismanagement of resources, and lack of accountability within government structures.	Hindered development, poor infrastructure, and diminished public trust in the government.	Governance failures exacerbate political instability and weaken Iraq's capacity to address security and economic issues.
Security Vacuums	U.S. dismantling of Iraq's security forces led to a vacuum exploited by insurgent groups like ISIS.	Rise of extremist groups, ongoing violence, and the proliferation of militias operating outside state control.	Security vacuums, created by governance failures, allow extremist groups to thrive, further destabilizing Iraq.
Socio-Economic Impacts	Destruction of infrastructure, high unemployment, poor access to healthcare and education.	Increased poverty, humanitarian crises, and socio-economic discontent fueling unrest and extremist recruitment.	Socio-economic crises contribute to public dissatisfaction and undermine governance efforts, creating further instability.
Foreign Influence	Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other regional powers exert influence in Iraq, complicating internal dynamics.	Iraq's sovereignty undermined, with regional rivalries contributing to internal instability and factionalism.	Foreign intervention amplifies internal instability by exploiting political and security vacuums for regional gains.
Rise of Extremist Groups	Security vacuums and governance failures facilitated the rise of ISIS and other insurgent groups.	Devastating impact on Iraq's security and territorial integrity, necessitating international military interventions.	Extremist groups emerge as a result of the failure to build strong, unified security forces and institutions.
Regional Dynamics	Competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia over influence in Iraq, with the U.S. playing a diminishing role.	Further complicates Iraq's ability to achieve stability, as external actors prioritize their interests over Iraq's needs.	Regional dynamics are shaped by foreign influence and contribute to the broader instability of Iraq and the region.

4.4. Discussion

To reiterate, the results highlighted the long-term and overarching impact of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Such adverse consequences included political instability, failure in governance, security vacuums, socio-economic impacts, and foreign

influences. The objective of this chapter is to provide SERO with an overall conclusion of how these findings shape the understanding of conclusions associated with the impact of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and contemplate the activities of external actors in terms of regional dynamics.

4.4.1. Political Instability and Governance Failures

Political instability and the failure in governance have been identified by the findings to design and explain the dynamics of the events in Iraq after 2003. First of all, the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime has created a power vacuum that has not yet been filled. As a result, the rise of sectarianism and competing factions and the high level of corruption have weakened not only the Iraqi state but created a situation in which the government is not able to deliver basic services or maintain basic law and order. This has created a continuous state of anarchy and violence, which in turn undermines any trust in political systems and with it any reform initiative.

Consequently, politics instability and governance failure display a cyclical relationship, where both are responsible for the existence of weak institutions, which are unable to curve corruption and thus lend the government the degree of legitimacy which is necessary for the maintenance of the status quo. SERO should focus on approaches conducive to fostering institutional power, which is the prerequisite for curbing corruption and encouraging political order. Any solution for Iraq in the long-run must be accompanied by strengthening state structures, increasing transparency and rebuilding trust. If such measures are not implemented, political instabilities will continue to foster violence and unrest, which in turn exacerbate governance challenges.

4.4.2. The Security Vacuum and Extremism

One of the most crucial implications of Iraq's post-2003 instability is the creation of a security vacuum, which allowed extremist groups such as ISIS to emerge. In particular, the dismantling of the country's military and security infrastructure after the US-led invasion, coupled with the slow process of building new military and security structures, has resulted in a conducive environment for the rise of insurgent groups. According to the findings of this assessment, ISIS's rise in 2014 was a direct product of the security vacuum in Iraq, in which the government's abilities were so

weak that the ISIS forces were able to gain control of the vast territories. The question of security vacuum discussed here relates to the theoretical framework because the inability to build a strong and unified security force is one of the critical reasons for extremism's rising. In particular, due to the lack of proper border security and maintenance of internal order, violence has been waged in Iraq for traditionally long periods of time, creating an even weaker state. One of the most critical implications of this finding is the necessity to address the security issues as the precondition for Iraq's stabilization. To do that, it is vital to invest in the restoration of the military, the integration of existing and emerging militias into the national security forces, and the improvement of intelligence services. These investments are critical to prevent the reemergence of extremist groups due to the perpetuation of the newly formed security vacuum.

4.4.3. Socio-Economic Challenges

The significant challenges from the socio-economic point of view also emerge from the invasion and instability that followed the US-led intervention in 2003. According to the findings, poverty and unemployment and the extensive damage of infrastructure severely impeded the recovery of Iraq. These challenges are closely interconnected with the themes of political instability and the governance failure, which were explored in the previous section. In particular, the threat to Iraq's economic recovery is caused by corruption and mismanagement, which do not allow the proper resource's notions and economic growth. Furthermore, due to the increase in poverty and unemployment among Iraq's young male population, one of the implications of the socio-economic challenges is high vulnerability to the recruitment by extremist groups.

For Iraq to experience long-term stability, the issues associated with its social economic conditions need to be addressed. Socio-economic reforms in terms of diversity the country's economy, moving beyond its present heavy reliance on oil, infrastructural development, and job provision are needed to rebuild this social fabric. In this context, these conditions prevent wealth from reaching the majority of the country's population, much of it siphoned off by a corrupt governing elite. The most significant aspect of this is that while on the one hand, existing social-economic conditions have bred significant public discontent, on the other hand, there is a

substantial lack of understanding of the conditions that need to be set for long-term stability.

4.4.4. Foreign Influence and Regional Power Dynamics

Foreign influence is another issue that has a significant stake in Iraq's political conditions. According to the findings, Iran has been the most successful in establishing influence within the country, benefits from the departure of the U.S from Iraq in 2011. On the one hand, this has also created new difficulties within the country, as all sides in the conflict are now also being split based on their alignments with foreign regional powers. At the same time, the departure of the U.S has also had a significant influence on the region's stability, manifesting in the country's relations with Saudi Arabia and Turkey. So far, these countries have sided with U.S in terms of engaging the Iraqi regime, Iran and Iranian-backed Majashi militias, and American disengagement has had a direct influence on regional geopolitics.

Overall, the discussion of foreign influence brings up the fact that Iraq needs to navigate its own difficulties simultaneously in the context of broader regional power dynamics. In some cases, foreign involvement may have been necessary, such as in the fight against ISIS. In most cases, however, this involvement makes it difficult for Iraq to achieve sovereignty and enact conditions for long-term stability. Hence, to achieve that aim, Iraq will need to work with its own conditions and create alliances that reinforce this stability.

4.4.5. Implications for Iraq's future

The study's findings suggest that Iraq's future is lights on its ability to cope with multifaceted forms of instability, governance failure, security vacuum, socio-economic difficulties, and foreign dominance. Reforming rotten political institutions, containing widespread corruption, strengthening the security agencies, and triggering economic growth are necessary for any long-term stability. However, such reform measures must curtail the over-dependence of Iraq on foreign influence and ensure that the pathway it adopts is suitable for most of its people. In conclusion, it is worth noting that post-2003 Iraq's crises are critical, attributable, and multifaceted, and it is not possible to overcome them. However, with minor reforms in Iraq's political institutions, stringent security measures, and revitalized short-run-oriented economic

development strategies may enhance the nation out of the current mess. The key issue is dealing with the root causes of Iraq's instability and ensuring that the people are in the middle of the rebuilding process.

4.5. Case Studies

In order to further demonstrate the central dynamics that were discussed in this work, it is important to provide two case studies that will demonstrate the main driving and resisting forces behind the post-2003 US-Iraq relations. In particular, the following case studies can be examined: the rise of ISIS in 2014 and Iran's political and security influence in Iraq in the post-invasion timeslet. Both examples show how political instability and governance issues, as well as the foreign intervention, shaped the conditions in which Iraq these days. Both cases also demonstrate the central frameworks provided in the papers, as each driving force is able to affect the US-Iraqi relations on a daily basis.

4.5.1. Case Study 1: The Rise of ISIS in Iraq (2014)

The rise of ISIS in 2014 stands out as one of the most resonant examples of how the security vacuum and governance failures in Iraq have contributed to the creation and maintenance of extremist groups. As a result of the U.S.-led war in Iraq, the dismantling of Iraq's military and security forces led to the establishment of a power vacuum that has allowed insurgent groups, such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, to organize and seek control. ISIS, an offshoot of the same organization, used the resulting unstable situation and weak or non-existent state institutions to establish control over a significant portion of Iraq's and Syria's territories. Moreover, the group's ability to act in both countries has been particularly threatening to the region's stability. Because of the country's past in the context of the U.S. invasion, weak government, fragile and ever-fracturing society, and the resulting struggles with security and terrorist threats, ISIS's rise in 2014 as already a serious threat was particularly concerning for Iraq. It took a multi-year effort on the part of the U.S. and its allies and the coalition's military intervention, particularly, airstrikes, to reduce the terrorist group's control and eventually reduce the threat it posed. Nevertheless, even after ISIS's apparent disappearance, the security situation in the country remains very fragile. Therefore, ISIS's rise in 2014 offers the best example of how all of these concepts interact,

highlighting the consequences of poor planning after the crisis and the continued existence of the threat despite the apparent victory that the U.S. and coalition forces have achieved over the extremist group.

4.5.2. Case Study 2: Iranian Influence in Post-2003 Iraq

The second case study deals with political and security influence exercised by Iran in Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion. As the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime left the Shia majority in power, this political force, which has been oppressed by the Sunni rule for decades, finally has taken some political influence over the country. For Iran, as the other Shia-majority country which has strong historical and religious bonds with Iraq, this was a great chance to increase its influence in the political and military spheres of the neighbor country. The U.S. invasion in a way created a geopolitical vacuum that was exploited by Iran to increase its military and political presence in Iraq through supporting a number of Shia political parties, militias, and paramilitary groups like the Popular Mobilization Forces. Although the influence of Iran in Iraq has numerous manifestations, perhaps the most visible form is the support of Shia militias that were often involved in the fight against ISIS. While these paramilitary formations were of great help in the struggle against the terrorists, their growing influence raised serious concerns about Iraq's capability to retain real sovereignty and control its independent armed forces. Besides, many of the militaries trained by the U.S. with Iran's help proved rather loyal to Tehran, but not to Baghdad, contributing to the failure of the long and costly program of rebuilding Iraq's security forces. Politically, Iran with its sectarian division and numerous political allies and proxies was able to significantly influence the policy of the Iraqi government and shape the country's domestic and foreign directions. Such influence brought Iran into conflict with Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, other Middle Eastern countries, which believe that Iraq is just a tool used by Iran in its efforts to dominate the region. Thus, the second case study demonstrates that foreign powers, and especially Iran, supporting the U.S. operation in Iraq, turned to mercilessly exploit this country's political instability and security vacuums, by contributing to a better order in some spheres, but also to a lot of trouble and further divides, which made the formation of a unified state and people even more problematic.

4.5.3. Comparative Analysis of the Case Studies

In many ways, both of the provided case studies showcase the strong impact of political instability, governance failure, and security vacuum on determining the paths of Iraq's development in the post-2003 period. For ISIS, it means that the lack of deliberately established safety forces along with very fragmented governance has allowed this movement to gain momentum. For Iran, the opportunities for employing its resources and policies to dominate the neighbor's state were created by its turmoil, as happened in the case of other regional actors. Thus, together, both cases confirm the theoretical framework's nature as both of them have been determined by the same sources. Moreover, created cases make it obvious that only deliberately creating strong, independent institutions can help Iraq achieve resistance to any internal insurgency and attempts of external actors to intervene in the state's processes.

However, resolving these concerns cannot happen without addressing the sources of these problems, as highlighted by the analyzed case studies. The table 2 below reflects the essence of both of them, outlining the drivers, resulting impact on security, the presence of external parties, their influence on the positive/negative political outcomes, socio-economic results, changes in sectarian balance, and long-term implications.

Table II. Comparative Analysis of the Rise of ISIS and Iranian Influence in Post-2003 Iraq

Aspect	**Case Study 1: Rise of ISIS (2014)**	**Case Study 2: Iranian Influence in Post-2003 Iraq**	**Comparison/Analysis**
Key Drivers	Security vacuum, weak governance, disenfranchisement, sectarian divisions, failed post-invasion planning.	Collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, empowerment of Shia political factions, sectarian ties, Iranian regional ambitions.	Both cases stem from the collapse of strong governance and the exploitation of security and political vacuums.
Impact on Security	ISIS seized large territories in Iraq, leading to years of conflict, displacement, and destruction.	Iranian-backed militias contributed to defeating ISIS but now challenge Iraq's sovereignty and internal security.	Both cases significantly impacted Iraq's security, though ISIS caused direct violence, while Iran's influence complicates sovereignty.

Role of External Actors	International coalition, including the U.S., intervened militarily to help defeat ISIS.	Iran provided military and political support to Shia militias and political parties in Iraq.	External actors played decisive roles, with the U.S. directly confronting ISIS, while Iran's involvement is more political and indirect.
Political Influence	ISIS undermined the Iraqi government's legitimacy by exploiting governance failures and creating a caliphate.	Iran has gained significant political influence through its support of Shia political factions and militias.	ISIS sought to dismantle the Iraqi state, whereas Iran's influence aims to shape Iraq's political landscape in favor of its interests.
Socio-Economic Consequences	ISIS's rise led to significant economic destruction, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.	Iran's influence complicates Iraq's economic recovery, particularly by deepening sectarian divides.	Both have hindered Iraq's socio-economic recovery, though ISIS's impact was more destructive, while Iran's influence fuels sectarianism.
Sectarian Impact	ISIS fueled Sunni extremism, leading to further sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia factions.	Iran's support of Shia groups has deepened sectarian divisions within Iraq's political landscape.	Both cases intensified sectarian divisions, with ISIS exacerbating Sunni-Shia tensions, and Iran backing Shia factions.
Long-Term Implications	The defeat of ISIS has not fully eradicated extremism; Iraq remains vulnerable to insurgent activity.	Iran's entrenched influence continues to challenge Iraq's sovereignty and complicates regional relations.	Both cases present long-term challenges: ISIS's ideology persists, and Iran's influence hinders Iraq's independence and stability.

In conclusion, the above case studies of ISIS's rise and Iran's influence in Iraq are only a few examples that may illustrate the conceptual considerations developed in the course of the present study. These cases demonstrate that in order to ensure that principles of the international order are applied in practice and political and governance failures are addressed effectively, international actors should reconsider their practices and policies. They also suggest that dealing with the root causes of instability and preventing future crises is an important condition for Iraq's sustainable development and sovereignty..

4.6. Summary

This chapter presented and examined the most critical findings from the interviews and secondary sources that involve post-2003 U.S.-Iraq relations. The findings focused on the current political instability in Iraq, lack of effective governance, security vacuums, socio-economic consequences, and foreign involvement in the issues. The researchers found that political instability and failures in governance processes have generated entrenched problems that result in security vacuums that groups such as ISIS have capitalized on to foster their presence or influence. The arena of political instability in Iraq also paved the way for other countries such as Iran to take advantage of its broken politics, hence complicating its efforts to develop a coherent, strong, and sovereign nation. These findings were analyzed with the help of case studies and were found to be highly interrelated. That is, the inability of the Iraqi government to undertake proper governance processes while being vulnerable to foreign intervention has fostered the rise of ISIS and the extended influence of Iran in the country. This observation can be made after comparing the two case studies.

In summary, this chapter vividly illustrated the severity of the current problems in Iraq and their origins. It was noted that the primary issues involve the failure by the government to undertake the required establishment of relevant political reforms and ability to prevent foreign actors from taking advantage of its vulnerable state. The secondary sources' effect can also be seen in the significance of other scholars and official reports in extending the current state of knowledge of Iraq as a failed state. The findings will be used to formulate the conclusions and recommendations by facilitating the identification of some viable solutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate and evaluate the consequences of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by U.S.-led forces within the context of the country's future stability and development. This paper has demonstrated that political instability, governance failure, absence of security, and exposure to international involvement all have intersected at the point where they impaired Iraq's ability to recover and grow. Thus, Iraq's history since the year 2003 had been far from the promotion of democracy and creation of security. Instead, it has led to the period marked by factionalism, corruption, and the malicious or poor governance that had been contributing to Iraq's not being stable. The research has shown that the rise of extremist groups led by the development and influence of ISIS was affecting the stability of Iraq, while the involvement of external players, such as Iran, was compromising the development and well-being of Iraq by putting its political and security environment under strain. However, it was also shown that political fragmentation was one of the root causes of instability. While the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the establishment of a post-Saddam political system were badly needed for Iraq's progress, they also produced a fragmented political picture, which questioned the interlocutor and the government. Considering these outcomes, the issue of how to ensure better governance in Iraq emerges: as long as governance is underperforming and instable, Iraq is going to stay unstable, while if to improve governance and make it more stable and less corrupt, Iraq is in a better place.

Iraq has been experiencing the impact of governance failures and the collapse of military infrastructure for the entire modern period. When the United States invaded Iraq in the 2000s, the situation with ISIS, which occurred in 2014, was the consequence. Several case studies explored in the third chapter are particularly indicative. That is the time when the failure in military governance and the loss of opportunities of its reformation became the reason for the rapid spread of the new terrorist organization. The inability of Iraq's police and army in those conditions to provide a barrier situation not only led to a significant number of victims and a growing problem of displacement but also exposed the vulnerability of the country's internal security system. So, one characteristic of the rebuilding process for such country will be the revival of the military and police control, the integration of militias into the

national military structures, and the disarmament of all non-state security actors. Counter-terrorism will also be critical to preempt future radical movements. However, it seemed less decisive to solve the given set of problems.

One more serious problem that Iraq faces is economic instability. The country's economy is extremely unstable due to ongoing conflicts and the basic failure of the governance system. At the same time, it will almost desperately need stable revenue corridors. So, the economy's critical dependence on oil revenues further aggravates the current situation. The given set of circumstances causes failure to create jobs and seethes significant socioeconomic pressures that are further fueling public discontent and providing a constant flow of militants to form extremist groups. To minimize this vulnerability, Iraq must invest in the majority of peripheral economic fields, be it agriculture, technologies, manufacturing, and infrastructure health, education, or railways.

Moreover, one has to keep in mind a foreign influence, especially from Iran, which has also been integral to Iraq's new reality after 2003. While Iran's strong presence in the political and military life of Iraq threatens the country's sovereignty and independence, Iraqi authorities have limited possibilities to avoid developing this dependence and choose other powerful regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia or Turkey, or expand strategic relations with the US and its international allies. To ensure improving its security and economic conditions, Iraq has to avoid foreign exposures that can deteriorate the situation but still require engagement with the international community. Therefore, Iraq must move ahead by minimizing foreign intervention and attracting international support to promote its prosperity and secure development.

The road to stability demands Iraq to undergo changes in all spheres, including political, security-related, and social-economic. Regarding politics, the state's trust in national armed forces is to be restored; corruption and partisan interests should be minimized as well. Socially, it is vital to reinforce efforts to promote national unity and boost reconciliation processes. Concerning the security sphere, Iraq should develop its army and terrorist counteraction; anti-state militias and weapons should be eliminated. Finally, regarding the socio-economic sector, Iraq has to diversify its oil-based economy and pay attention to infrastructure restoration, job creation, and the education sector. Overall, despite the numerous issues and problems Iraq faces today,

there is a way out despite the current crisis. The state needs to initiate many changes, from reforming internal policies to establishing new foreign relations. If they are successful, the outcome can be a victory: a strong and prosperous Iraq with a stable future.

REFERENCES

Abdulameer, A., Supervisor, D., Prof, A., & Ghanem, H. (2022). *Political Islam in Iraq and its impact on foreign relations from 2005 to 2020*. Retrieved from http://acikerisim.gelisim.edu.tr/xmlui/handle/11363/3850

Abdullah, P. S. (2023). *Opening the Pandora's Box The Evolution of the Iraqi Sunni Insurgency From the Roots to the Caliphate (2003 - 2014)*. https://doi.org/10.25392/LEICESTER.DATA.24440776.V1

Ağalday, B. (2016). *THE IMPACT OF 2003 US-led INVASION ON THE RISE OF TERRORISM IN IRAQ A Master's Thesis*.

Ali, H. (2020). THE RISE AND FALL OF ISLAMIC STATE: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS. *Asian Affairs*, *51*(1), 71–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1706940

Al-Shabandar, A. (2021). *The Role of Non-State Actors in Post-Conflict State-Building*. https://doi.org/10.26756/TH.2022.269

AL.Yasiry, E. (2020). Post 2003's War: US' Failure in Political and Economic Restructure of Iraq. *Social Development and Security*, *10*(5), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.33445/SDS.2020.10.5.1

Arafat, A. A.-D. (2020). Iranian-Saudi Geopolitical Rivalry. *Regional and International Powers in the Gulf Security*, 133–170. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43316-1_5

Art, R. J. (n.d.). *A grand strategy for America*.

Beck, M. (2020). The Aggravated Struggle for Regional Power in the Middle East: American Allies Saudi Arabia and Israel versus Iran. *Global Policy*, *11*(1), 84–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12778

Beck, T., & Wagner, W. (2020). National Containment Policies and International Cooperation. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *83*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/1883990

Bir, A., Savaşı, I., Ömer, A., & Gültekin, K. (2020). David Hare's "Stuff Happens": An Alternative Narrative of Iraq War. *Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (6), 28–65. https://doi.org/10.46250/KULTURDER.776016

Blagden, D., & Porter, P. (2021). Desert Shield of the Republic? A Realist Case for Abandoning the Middle East. *Security Studies*, *30*(1), 5–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2021.1885727

Bluth, C. (2004). The British road to war: Blair, Bush and the decision to invade Iraq. *International Affairs*, *80*(5), 871–892. https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1468-2346.2004.00423.X

Braut-Hegghammer, M. (2020). Cheater's Dilemma: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Path to War. *International Security*, *45*(1), 51–89. https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_A_00382

Byman, D., & Mir, A. (2022). Assessing al-Qaeda: A Debate. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2068944

Caleb Michael Herring, by, Rosales, S., Thesis Director, P. D., Hare, L., & Alessandro Brogi, P. D. (2022). *Counterinsurgency An American Journey*. Retrieved from https://oll.libertyfund.org/page/clausewitz-war-as-politics-by-

Carmichael, E. B., & Anderson, Q. (2021). The First Gulf War: Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (17 January-28 February 1991). *British Dental Journal 2021 230:7*, *230*(7), 435–443. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-021-2733-5

Coronado, D. E. (2020). *A Re-examination of the First Persian Gulf War and United States Foreign Policy towards Iraq: An Analysis of How Missed Dialogue and Missed Opportunities Changed the Fate of a Region*.

Costantini, I. (2021). The Iraqi protest movement: social mobilization amidst violence and instability. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *48*(5), 832–849. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2020.1715788

Crawford, P. R. (2022). *Plugging into the global jihad : a critical appraisal of American counterterrorism policy in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1991-2017*.

Csiszer, A (2022) *The Modernization of Hungary*. In: Comparative Modernization 1. pp.207-220.

Csiszer, A (2020) *Social Identity as a Tool of Sustainable Public Deliberation*. In. Technium Social Sciences Journal 12, 61.

Csiszer, A (2010) *Nyelvhasználat által történő befolyásolás a reklámszövegekben*. In: A tartalom és forma harmóniájának kommunikációja 12, pp. 89-92.

Dai, K., Zhang, Y., Wang, D., Li, J., Lu, H., & Yang, X. (2020). *High-Performance Long-Term Tracking With Meta-Updater* (pp. 6298–6307). pp. 6298–6307. Retrieved from https://github.com/Daikenan/LTMU

Dettke, D. (2020). The 2003 Iraq War as a Turning Point in German–American Relations: Political Leadership and Alliance Cohesion†. *German-American Relations in the 21st Century*, 12–27. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425349-3

Dodge, T., & Mansour, R. (2020). Sectarianization and De-sectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, *18*(1), 58–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2020.1729513

Duelfer, C. A., & Dyson, S. B. (2011). Chronic Misperception and International Conflict: The U.S.-Iraq Experience. *International Security*, *36*(1), 73–100.

Elhadary, T. KM Ashifa, A Csiszer (2020) The Impact of Social Distancing of Working Professionals' Daily Life Due to Covid-19.

Fawcett, L. (2023). For the full inquiry see The Iraq Inquiry,Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 16 Jan. 2023.) 3 Louise Fawcett, 'The Middle East and COVID-19: time for collective action. *Globalization and Health*, *99*(2), 2–3. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiad002

Flibbert, A. (2006). The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War. *Security Studies*, *15*(2), 310–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410600829570

Furness, M., & Trautner, B. (2020). Reconstituting social contracts in conflict-affected MENA countries: Whither Iraq and Libya? *World Development*, *135*, 105085. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WORLDDEV.2020.105085

Garey, J. (2020). The 2003 Iraq War. *The US Role in NATO's Survival After the Cold War*, 123–155. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13675-8_5

Hamourtziadou, L. (2020). *The Beginning of the End of Sectarian Violence? Writing the War 2008–2009*. Bristol University Press. Retrieved from https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/monochap/book/9781529206753/ch003.xml

Hehir, A. (2023). 'An expensive commodity'? The impact of hope on US foreign policy during the 'unipolar moment.' *Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/13540661221143941*, *29*(1), 202–226. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221143941

Helvalı, N. (2020). *The emergence and rise of Isis*. Retrieved from https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/45533

Hınnebusch, R. (2007). THE AMERICAN INVASION OF IRAQ: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, *12*(1), 9–27. Retrieved from https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/48997/625107

Irwan Syazli Saidin, M., & Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2022). US foreign policy, neo-conservatism and the Iraq war (2003-2011): Critical reviews of factors and rationales. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2022.2111829

Jawad, S. N. (2021). Iraq after the Invasion. *Iraq after the Invasion*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72106-0

Joseph Yakubu, M., Franklin Aideloje, K., & Solomon Taiwo, B. (2022). The Criminality of Counter-Insurgency in North-East Nigeria, 2012-2019. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, *2*(1). Retrieved from https://jceeas.bdi.uni-obuda.hu/index.php/jceeas/article/view/52

Kadri, J. (2023). *Theoretical Concepts and Historical Background*. 1–70. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29593-5_1

Kassianova, A. (2001). Russia: Still open to the west? Evolution of the state identity in the foreign policy and security discourse. *Europe - Asia Studies*, *53*(6), 821–839.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130120078513/ASSET//CMS/ASSET/61662F60-C1E4-4D66-95AC-7B6FD26F4E87/09668130120078513.FP.PNG

Kellner, D. (2020). Preemptive Strikes and the War on Iraq: A Critique of Bush Administration Unilateralism and Militarism*. *The Politics of Empire*, 149–172. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060536-8

Keohane, R. O. (2021). The global politics paradigm: guide to the future or only the recent past? *International Theory*, *13*(1), 112–121. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971920000445

Khatib, D. K. (Ed.). (2021). *The Syrian Crisis*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5050-8

Khider, M., Abdelmoumene Asma Taalah, C., Taalah, A., Boutheina, A.-C., & Adel, B. (2023). *U.S. Foreign Policy And Imperialism Case study: The Iraqi War (2003)*. Retrieved from http://archives.univ-biskra.dz:80/handle/123456789/26783

Klimešová, T. (2021). *The United States' policy of democracy promotion after the intervention in Iraq*. Retrieved from https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/152753

Lewis, B. (1992). Rethinking the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs*, *71*(4), 99. https://doi.org/10.2307/20045312

LIBERATING KUWAIT. (n.d.).

Löfflmann, G. (2020). From the Obama Doctrine to America First: the erosion of the Washington consensus on grand strategy. *International Politics*, *57*(4), 588–605. https://doi.org/10.1057/S41311-019-00172-0/METRICS

Magaço, A., Alonso, Y., Maixenchs, M., Ambrosio, C., Sitoe, A., Vitorino, P., … Munguambe, K. (2023). A Qualitative Assessment of Community Acceptability and Its Determinants in the Implementation of Minimally Invasive Tissue Sampling in Children in Quelimane City, Mozambique. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, *108*(5 Suppl), 56. https://doi.org/10.4269/AJTMH.22-0343

Maier, C. S. (1977). The politics of productivity: foundations of American international economic policy after World War II. *International Organization*, *31*(4), 607–633. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300018634

Makdisi, S., & Soto, R. (2023). Economic Agenda for Post-Conflict Reconstruction. *The Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings*, 23–53. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003344414-3

Meyer, D. S., & Corrigall-Brown, C. (2005). Coalitions and Political Context: U.S. Movements Against Wars in Iraq. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *10*(3), 327–344. https://doi.org/10.17813/MAIQ.10.3.F8U6T4U2708KW442

Monten, J. (2014). Intervention and State-Building. *Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/0002716214546989*, *656*(1), 173–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214546989

Motin, D. (2022). Not in My Backyard, But in Yours: Containment Realism, Restraint Realism and China-US Competition. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, *33*(1), 27–47. https://doi.org/10.1353/ISIA.2022.0024

Najjar, M. (2023). *Religion and Politics in Post-2003 Iraq: The Destruction Caused by the American Invasion*.

Nakhaei, N. (2020). *State and Development in Post-Revolutionary Iran*. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10315/38226

Patrick, S. (2017). Civil Wars & Transnational Threats: Mapping the Terrain, Assessing the Links. *Daedalus*, *146*(4), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_A_00458

Pedigo, J. (2004). Rogue States, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Terrorism: Was a Security Council Approval Necessary for the Invasion of Iraq. *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, *32*. Retrieved from https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/gjicl32&id=207&div=&collection=

Qandil, S., Syed Fraz, A., & Naqvi, H. (2020). Us Hegemonic Interests and The Strategic Dilemma In Iraq. *Quarterly Social & Religious Research Journal NOOR-E-MARFAT*, *11*(2), 111–124. Retrieved from https://www.nooremarfat.com/index.php/Noor-e-marfat/article/view/26

Ram, A. (2022). *A structural realist assessment of the strategic competition between the US and Iran in Iraq from 2003-2016*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/10289/15342

Rexhepi, R. (2022). US Intervention in Iraq. *Traektoriâ Nauki*, *8*(02–03), 1010–1016.

Reza, F. (2022). *The Role of NGOS in Promoting Education: Successes and Challenges*. Retrieved from https://www.eajournals.org/

Russell, J. A. (2003). SEARCHING FOR A POST-SADDAM REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE. In *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 7).

Russell, J. A. (2005). Strategy, Security, and War in Iraq: The United States and the Gulf in the 21st Century. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *18*(2), 283–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570500164900

Saleh, A., & Yazdanshenas, Z. (2024). China-Iran strategic partnership and the future of US hegemony in the Persian Gulf Region. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2023.2215188

Salloukh, B. F. (2013). The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East. *The International Spectator*, *48*(2), 32–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2013.787830

Savu, L.-M. (2021). REALISM, LIBERALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE PURSUIT OF SECURITY. *STRATEGIES XXI - Security and Defense Faculty*, *17*(1), 20–31. https://doi.org/10.53477/2668-2001-21-02

Scott, C. (2023). Iraq War. *Comics Through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas*, *4–4*, 65–82. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23555-9_5

Simuziya, N. J., & Jonathan, N. (2023). The (il)legality of the Iraq War of 2003: An Analytical Review of the Causes and Justifications for the US-led invasion. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2163066

Singh, D. (2023). Main International Relations Theories. *The Tripartite Realist War: Analysing Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, 7–65. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-34163-2_2

Slavin, B. (2021). How US Policy Toward Iran Has Undermined US Interests in the Middle East. *The Great Power Competition Volume 1: Regional Perspectives on Peace and Security*, 397–411. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64473-4_19

Sluglett, P. (2024). Iraq under Siege. *From Desolation to Reconstruction*, 13–33. https://doi.org/10.51644/9781554582440-004/PDF

Strovers, D. (2020). *Iraq in the 2020's: Stable Union or Balkanized States?*

Sussex, M. (2022). Understanding National Security: The Promises and Pitfalls of International Relations Theory. *The Palgrave Handbook of National Security*, 23–52. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53494-3_2

Torbat, A. E. (2020). The Economic Sanctions Against Iran. *Politics of Oil and Nuclear Technology in Iran*, 201–224.

Veres, L & Csiszer, A (2018) *New HR Competencies in the Context of Economy Digitalization. Industry 4.0.* In: International Scientific and Practical Conference Digitalization of the Economy of Kazakhstan Proceedings. pp. 10-13.

Vaezi, M. (n.d.). *The Role of the New Iraq and Neighboring Countries in the Stability and Security of the Persian Gulf*.

Yılmaz, S. (2021). A Government Devoid of Strong Leadership: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation of Turkey's Iraq War Decision in 2003. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, *10*(2), 197–212. https://doi.org/10.20991/ALLAZIMUTH.960684

Yom, S. (2020). US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Logic of Hegemonic Retreat. *Global Policy*, *11*(1), 75–83. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12777

Yüce, S. (2022). Understanding Iraq's Persistent Domestic Instability: A Revisit to the 2003 Iraq War and the Effect of the US Foreign Policy. *Afro Eurasian Studies*, *8*(3), 249–260. https://doi.org/10.33722/AFES.1096847

Yumashev, A., Ślusarczyk, B., Kondrashev, S., & Mikhaylov, A. (2020). Global Indicators of Sustainable Development: Evaluation of the Influence of the Human Development Index on Consumption and Quality of Energy. *Energies 2020, Vol. 13, Page 2768*, *13*(11), 2768. https://doi.org/10.3390/EN13112768

APPENDIXES

Questionnaire on US-Iraq Relations Post-2003 and Regional Security

Section 1: Background Information

1. Can you please provide your name and current position?
2. What is your professional background and experience with US-Iraq relations or Middle Eastern security issues?

Section 2: US Invasion and Political Stability

3. How would you describe the immediate political impact of the 2003 US-led invasion on Iraq?
4. What have been the long-term political consequences of the US invasion for Iraq?

Section 3: Security Dynamics

5. How has the US invasion affected the security situation in Iraq?
6. What role has the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS played in shaping the security landscape in Iraq and the region?

Section 4: Socio-Economic Impact

7. What have been the major socio-economic challenges faced by Iraq since 2003?
8. How has US aid and development programs impacted Iraq's socio-economic recovery?

Section 5: Regional Geopolitics

9. How have US-Iraq relations influenced the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East?
10. What has been the response of neighboring countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, to the evolving US-Iraq relationship?

Section 6: Policy and Future Directions

11. What lessons can be learned from US involvement in Iraq since 2003?
12. What policy recommendations would you suggest for the US to enhance its relations with Iraq and promote regional stability?

Section 7: Perceptions and Attitudes

13. How do you perceive the current state of US-Iraq relations?
14. What are the key factors influencing public opinion in Iraq regarding US involvement?

RESUME

Personal Information

Surname, name	:
Nationality	:
Birth date and place	:
Telephone	:
Fax	:
e-mail	:

Education

Degree	**Education Unit**	**Graduation Date**
Master		
Bachelor		
High School		

Work Experience

Year	**Place**	**Title**

Foreing Language

Publications

Hobbies