

The Middle East's Predominant Issue

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Abstract:

The Middle East is one of the global regions most embroiled in turmoil. Yet, the production of oil has made it one of the most lucrative. The region, too, has already witnessed a series of wars at different levels. This paper tries to determine the overarching issue that has triggered much of this turbulence in the Middle East. This will be established by looking at a series of interconnected events and their economic consequences. Document analysis will be employed for this study. Highlighting major events such as the eight-year Iraq-Iran war and tracing subsequent connected episodes such as the invasion of Kuwait by the former Iraqi regime in 1990, economic sanctions on Iraq, the presence of foreign troops in the Arab Gulf states and liberating Kuwait will be covered in this project. Also, this paper claims that relevant events that led to the Arab Spring and its aftermath were brought about for the same reason. All the themes covered will be supported by data-driven evidence, which supports and explains the claim that this paper argues.

Keywords: Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Kurds, Arab Gulf States, Israel, Arab Spring

Introduction

Whenever there is an ongoing dilemma with no objective remedy, this leads to a series of problematic issues, which aggravates the situation. The more time passes, the worse the scenario will become, unless we go back to square one and try to unpack the fundamental issue so that the whole picture can be revised. Throughout history there have been many protracted conflicts linked to a single concern that escalated into related disputes. This paper tries to shed light on the source issue that has led to the overwhelming problems in the Middle East. Though, when we talk about conflict in the Middle East, the overarching problem that comes to mind is the Arab Israeli conflict. However, this is not true, especially when we consider the current multi-dimensional problems and their consequences affecting the entire Middle East region. This argument is particularly valid when looking at the current normalisation process of the major Arab Gulf states with Israel: this has had no impact on the many ongoing issues that the region is witnessing.

Methodology

Document analysis was an appropriate method to use for this project due to the various resources that were necessary to carry out this research. Many documents covering the last fifty years were studied by the researcher in considering this work. “*Document analysis is important because it allows researchers to make sense of their resources and select the appropriate pieces for their studies*”¹. Among the different tones of the available resources, the researcher selected the ones most relevant to fit the framework of this research and served to provide explanations that led to drawing the conclusion.

Another reason for adopting this method in particular was the suitability of document analysis in relation to other methods that could have been used. “*When used to analyze pre-existing texts, this method allows researchers to conduct studies they might otherwise not be able to complete*”². The nature of this study and its long historical background made a large quantity of reliable documents, treaties and other evidence available to the researcher. In this instance, accessibility and unavailability of relevant people to interview made document analysis more valuable, feasible and appropriate to the argument in question.

The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back

Going back to the end of World War I, particularly with regard to the creation of Iraq, the resentment of the Kurds led them not to integrate happily into the new state fashioned by the British mandate from the three provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, of which the Kurds comprised the majority of Mosul province: so, we can see that this was the spark for the later instability in Iraq. Also, all subsequent Iraqi governments, instead of trying to appease the Kurds in Iraq and credibly integrate them into the state, to the contrary were ready to do anything with the superpowers and regional states to make the Kurds bow to their political desire. For instance, while the Iraqi government wanted to quash the Kurdish revolution, it was ready to state to the Iranians in the introduction of the Allegris treaty “*...considering the ties of geographical proximity, history, religion, culture and*

¹ Editorial Team, Indeed. 2022. "Document Analysis Guide: Definition and How To Perform It", *Indeed* <<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/document-analysis>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

² Morgan, Hani. 2022. "Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis", *The Qualitative Report*, 27: 64-77 <http://dx.doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044>

*civilization which bind the peoples of Iran and Iraq*³: as if none of those ties existed with the Kurds whom they wanted just to accept being Iraqis.

This kind of policy by the Iraqi government reached its peak when Saddam Hussain was ready to settle the dispute over territories and waterways with the Shah of Iran, at the cost of the Kurdish issue.

This is referred to in the Allegris treaty of 6 March 1975. Article 3, of the signed treaty, states that:

“The High Contracting Parties undertake to exercise strict and effective permanent control over the frontier in order to put an end to any infiltration of a subversive nature from any source, on the basis of and in accordance with the provisions of the Protocol concerning frontier security, and the annex thereto, attached to this Treaty”⁴.

Later events well explain that the intention of the Iraqi government was mainly to end the Kurdish revolution, not to settle its disputes with Iran. Therefore, after the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, Iraq found a pretext to unilaterally withdraw from the treaty, which was the main reason for the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-1988. Thus, instead of genuinely agreeing to the Kurdish demands that both parties had agreed on 11 March 1970, because the Ba’ath party after their coup d’état of July 1968 wanted time to develop a strong hold on Iraqi affairs and start negotiation with the Kurdish rebels, when it came to the moment, the Iraqi government found it was the right time to withdraw from its agreement with the Kurds and started plotting against the Kurdish revolution and its leadership.

Furthermore, “on 11 March 1974, the fourth anniversary of its Autonomy Agreement with the Kurdish leadership, the Iraqi government unilaterally announce[d] a new autonomy law”⁵. Instead, it agreed to Iranian conditions regarding their border and waterways disputes, to bring the Kurdish revolution to an end. Hence, the Allegris treaty has become a recipe for disaster in the Middle East which continues at the time of writing.

³ Iran and Iraq, "TREATY1 CONCERNING THE STATE FRONTIER AND NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND IRAQ", *Treaties.Un.Org*, 1976 <<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201017/volume-1017-I-14903-English.pdf>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

Iraq-Iran War

Disregarding the arguments of both Iraq and Iran for the reasons that led to the war⁶, the obvious one, as stated above, was the withdrawal of Iraq from the Allegris treaty of 1975. For Iraq, the impetus for agreeing to settle all the long-lasting disputes with Iran was to end the Kurdish revolution. However, after the Iranian revolution, Iraq thought that while the Kurdish revolution was continuing, and while Iran was in a mess, it was an opportune moment for it to unilaterally withdraw from the treaty.

However, other independent analyses give many other reasons, such as “*in Iraq, Saddam Hussein used war and emergency rules as pretext to establish an unprecedented totalitarian dictatorship*”⁷.

other independent analyses give many other reasons, such as “*in Iraq, Saddam Hussein used war and emergency rules as pretext to establish an unprecedented totalitarian dictatorship*”⁸.

All in all, this led to the start of the eight-year war from September 1980 to August 1988. The conflict adversely affected both countries. For instance, on Iraq’s economy before the war as stated “*the rising Iraqi economy of the 1970’s, benefitting from the nationalization of oil in 1972 and reaching a record oil production of 3.3 million BPD (barrels per day) by early 1980, plummeted within a year to 0.8 million BPD as a direct result of the war*”⁹. Funding the war was unaffordable for both countries, and despite all the aid that Iraq was getting,

“*at the end of the war, Iraq accumulated an external debt of over 100 billion dollars*”¹⁰.

Iran’s economy was in an even more critical situation. Even though it had just witnessed a regime change and was suffering from instability and a multi-dimensional economic crisis, the war worsened its situation. Iran before the war, since 1979, had already been under US sanctions¹¹.

⁶ For further details about the reasons that led to the war, see: Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Iran-Iraq War", *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

⁷ Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

⁸ Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ For further information and to overview the US sanctions since 1979, see: Clawson, Patrick, "U. S. Sanctions", *United States Institute Of Peace*, 2010

Furthermore, “its oil sector, mostly located in the war areas of Southwestern Iran, was constantly hit by the Iraqis. Unlike the Iraqis, who transferred oil export from the war torn Gulf to other directions, the Iranians continued to rely on exports through the Gulf region”¹². This led to the total cost for Iran at the end of the war reaching “\$350 billion”¹³.

In terms of the casualties, the “war strained Iraq’s manpower: in addition to the estimated 180,000 casualties, 340,000 wounded and 50,000 POWs”¹⁴. On the other hand, it was estimated that Iranian casualties numbered “500,000 to 1,000,000 Iranians were dead”¹⁵.

Generally, for the Arab states, and regionally, the war changed the focus of the of the Middle East from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Arab-Iranian struggle. Zeidel remarks in this regard:

“The war shifted the world’s attention in the Middle East from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Gulf region. It took Iraq out of any possible organization of an “Eastern Front” in a war against Israel. In fact, with the signing of peace between Egypt and Israel, the planning of an “Eastern Front” against Israel became practically impossible. Thus, the Iran-Iraq war contributed indirectly to Israel’s security”¹⁶.

Furthermore, this shift of conflict did not stop at the end of the war, but continued as an ongoing threat from the Iranian side, as well as Saddam’s regime too, to the Arab Gulf states that resulted in the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Even after the invasion, the threat continued and put the Gulf states in a parlous situation. Again, (Zeidel, 2013) states in this regard that:

“In the Gulf region, war reiterated the extreme vulnerability of all the Arab Gulf countries. Therefore, the war hastened a process of increasing interstate cooperation, mostly within the Gulf Cooperation Council. Under the direct threat from Iran and the potential future

<https://iranprimer.usip.org/sites/default/files/PDF%20Sanctions_Clawson_US.pdf> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

¹² Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

¹³ Encyclopedia, New World. "Iran-Iraq War", *Newworldencyclopedia.org* <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Iran-Iraq_War> [accessed 22 August 2022]

¹⁴ Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

¹⁵ Szczepanski, Kallie. 2019. "The Iran-Iraq War, 1980 to 1988", *ThoughtCo.* <<https://www.thoughtco.com/the-iran-iraq-war-1980-1988-195531>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

¹⁶ Zeide, Ronen. 2013. "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War", *E-International Relations* <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/43374>> [accessed 22 August 2022]

threat from Saddam's Iraq, the Gulf countries relied more heavily on American military might, which consequently increased dramatically toward the war's end"¹⁷.

Reliance on the Americans as the only saviour of the GCC states necessarily led to the later compromise with Israel and ended up with the current settlement. In addition, during and after the war, Turkey gained a much better position in the Middle East, mainly at the cost of the Arabs and other Middle Eastern nations. "*Further north, the war helped Turkey attain regional supremacy*"¹⁸.

The Aftermaths of the War

Both countries came out of the war fatigued, and apart from the huge number of casualties on both sides, referred to above, and despite being members of the organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)¹⁹, economically they became among the weaker countries of the region. Iraq after the war was expecting the Gulf countries, especially Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, to cancel their debts which were estimated to be \$37 billion. "*At the same time, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of over-producing crude oil for export and depressing prices, depriving Iraq of critical oil revenues, and of slant drilling into the Rumayla field on the shared border*"²⁰. Furthermore, Saddam accused the rulers of Saudi Arabia of dropping the price of oil while Iraq was busy with the war and needed further support. Saddam stated that in 1986 the Saudis reduced the price of crude oil to an extent that a barrel reached only \$7, which according to him led to the fall of the strategic port of Al-Faw²¹. This series of provocations to the Iraqi regime resulted in its invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990.

The madness of the Iraqi dictator cost the Iraqis, instead of paying back the \$37 billion to compensate Kuwait for their invasion, it cost \$52.4 billion, of which Iraq made the last payment in February 2022²². In addition, the US air raids during Operation Desert Storm, as Saleh states "*...which took place over forty-three days, caused an estimated \$232 billion in damage*"²³.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. "OPEC : Member Countries", *Opec.org* <https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/25.htm> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²⁰ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. 2016. "Igniting Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait – Loans, Land, Oil and Access – Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training", *Adst.org* <<https://adst.org/2016/09/sparking-iraqs-invasion-kuwait-loans-land-oil-access/>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²¹ Hussain, Saddam. "Saddam Hussain Talks About Lowering the Oil Price", *Youtube.com* <<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/q5AEzI9DJL4>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²² United Nations. 2022. "Iraq makes final reparation payment to Kuwait for 1990 invasion", *UN News* <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111632>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²³ Saleh, Zainad. 2022. "1 The Human Cost of U.S. Interventions in Iraq: A History From the 1960s Through the Post-9/11 Wars", *Watson.brown.edu*

This is apart from the burden and the cost of international sanctions that were imposed on Iraq as a result of the invasion. “Estimates of the total amount of oil revenue denied the Iraqi government range as high as \$250 billion²⁴” (George A. Lopez and David Cortright, 2004). As for the human cost, the sanctions resulted in the deaths of Iraq children, which alone, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), were estimated to be “as many as 576,000”²⁵. Thus, Iraq, apart from most of its infrastructure being destroyed, has gone back to square one of its development strategies, in such a way that it cannot provide its own electricity. The total amount that was lost during the abovementioned conflagration is estimated to be more than \$571 billion.

The Middle East and Iraq

Iraq’s ventures not only cost the directly involved courtiers of Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait but also affected the whole of the Middle East. Apart from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which for much of the Iraq-Iran war supported Iraq, after the war another Middle Eastern Arab council came into existence in Baghdad on 16 February 1989, called Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), which comprised Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen. The main objective of the ACC was to “be a more efficient forum for economic cooperation and integration among Arab countries; promote coordination and harmonization of major financial, customs and trade, industrial and agricultural economic policies among member states; form an Arab common market”²⁶. It was mainly Iraq funding and leading this forum. However, with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the members of ACC, with the exception Yemen, turned against Iraq.



Fanack²⁷

<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/History%20of%20U.S.%20Interventions%20in%20Iraq_Saleh_Costs%20of%20War_Oct%2013%202020.pdf> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²⁴ Lopez, George A., and David Cortright. 2004. "Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked", *Foreign Affairs*, 83: 90-103 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20034049>>

²⁵ Hayes, Christopher. 2022. "Chris Hayes on the Cost of Sanctions on Iraq", *In These Times* <<https://inthesetimes.com/article/the-potential-devastating-blow-of-sanctions>> [accessed 23 August 2022]

²⁶ Global Civil Society Database, "Arab Cooperation Council", *Uia.Org* <<https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100024544>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

²⁷ Fanack.com, "Role Of The GCC", *Fanack.Com*, 2014 <<https://fanack.com/kuwait/politics-of-kuwait/role-of-the-gcc/>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

Furthermore, the Iraqi invasion opened a new chapter in the Middle East. Among the Arab states, it divided the countries into two camps. "Among those Arab states sympathetic to Iraq were Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, and Algeria as well as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)"²⁸. On the opposing side those who supported Kuwait "apart from Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states, were Egypt and Syria"²⁹. In addition, were the foreign troops deployed around the Middle East; mainly in the Arab Gulf states. Of course, without the pretext of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, there would have been no need for such foreign troops to be deployed. Many of those countries are still hosting US troops, such as Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Turkey, in addition to troops involved in the invasion of Iraq and their existence in Syria³⁰. The cost of those troops also falls under the *raison d'être* of the aftermath of Iraq invading Kuwait in 1990.

Regime Change in Iraq

The regime changes in Iraq in 2003, orchestrated by the US, was not the end of the chain of catastrophes in the Middle East, yet it was an outcome of the previous incidents that started much earlier with the creation of Iraq by the British mandate, and concentrated by the 1975 treaty of Allegris. All other hot spots, starting from the eight-year Iraq-Iran war and the subsequent events, could have been avoided by simply navigating through a different channel. The Iraq-Iran war led to the strong armament of Iraq and its possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The war also burdened Iraq to an extent that it was unable to pay back its debts. Thus, the armament capability and pressure resulted in the kind of provocation that gave rise to the invasion of Kuwait, which brought about the ensuing economic sanctions, liberation of Kuwait, disarmament of the Iraqi WMD programme and the tensions that followed³¹.

All the above led to the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003 and the regime change that, instead of ending the ongoing troubles, with hope for a new free, democratic Iraq, opened a new chapter with the worst problematic upheaval ever witnessed in the entire Middle East region. Among the pages of this new chapter, one can highlight the following major disastrous incidents: defragmentation of

²⁸ Britannica, "Persian Gulf War 1990-1991", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022

<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Berger, Miriam, 2020, "Where U.S. Troops Are in The Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized", *The Washington Post*, 2020 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/where-us-troops-are-in-the-middle-east-and-could-now-be-a-target-visualized/2020/01/04/1a6233ee-2f3c-11ea-9b60-817cc18cf173_story.html> [Accessed 7 September 2023].

³¹ Encyclopedia.com, "Iraq Disarmament Crisis (1991–2003)", *Encyclopedia.Com* <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/iraq-disarmament-crisis-1991-2003>> [Accessed 08 September 2023].

Iraqi society on the basis of a new classification of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds; the growth of sectarianism; tribalism; nepotism; corruption and the growth of terrorism. Thus, as the result, Iraq became a living hell for millions of Iraqis. "According to the U.N., approximately 1.2 million [internally displaced person] IDPs are in the country, and nearly 4 million returnees are in dire need of rehabilitation measures in their home areas"³². And generally, "Iraq was ranked 123 in the 2019 Human Development Index with a score of 0.674"³³.

As for the wider Iraqi scene, currently none of the citizens are happy, or have peace of mind about their future in Iraq. Each of them has their own reasons for their apprehension. The President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq once stated that "there is an Iraqi component [Shiites] who constantly worry about the past, there is an Iraqi component [Sunnis] who constantly worry about the future and there is an Iraqi component [Kurds] who constantly worry about the past, present and the future"³⁴. The problem for the Iraqis is that, instead of looking for the root cause of all their past problems, and trying to find a fundamental solution for it, which is the Kurdish issue, they are still dealing with the same issue with the same kind of mentality, disregarding what has happened, or might happen and continue in the future. However, Iraq is not alone; the majority of the issues of the Middle East are due to not solving the Kurdish issue in Iraq by integrating the Kurds into the state. With the same kind of political approach, the situation will remain, but also might get worse. As (Leonard, 2012) remarked "There will not be peace in the Middle East till there is Kurdistan"³⁵.

The Path to the Arab Spring

Up until the invasion of Kuwait, the Arab states were closed with no non-state media or satellite TV. The local government-controlled television channels were "mostly localized to their country of origin, and covering official inaugurations, ceremonial events and reporting on the whereabouts of heads of states"³⁶. This was the case with all Arab state media. Accordingly, citizens were firstly not aware of what was going on around them and worldwide, and secondly accepted what they were told by the state media. As a consequence, the people, by and large, remained fettered with no

³² BTI Transformation Index, "Iraq Country Report 2022", *BTI*, 2022 <<https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/IRQ>> [Accessed 08 September 2023].

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Barzani, Nechirvan, "Bilthalatha: Nechirvan Barzani", *Youtube.Com*, 2021 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-oETR7ITvM&t=2118s>> [Accessed 08 September 2023].

³⁵ Leonard, Graham, "Middle East Problems - Origins Part 4 Of 5", *Youtube.Com*, 2012 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCL0qTCYIW0&list=PLC7740161CBF67841&index=5>> [Accessed 08 September 2023].

³⁶ PBS, "Dishing Democracy ~ Handbook: Satellite Television In The Arab World | Wide Angle | PBS", *Wide Angle*, 2007 <<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/uncategorized/dishing-democracy-handbook-satellite-television-in-the-arab-world/1843/>> [Accessed 25 August 2022]

progress in terms of their political, economic and social ambitions. However, with the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi troops in 1991, as stated below:

“the strongest catalyst for radical change in the Arab media landscape was CNN’s live coverage of the Gulf War in 1991. Until then, Arab audiences had virtually no access to international news coverage. Watching live reports from the fields, often broadcast in real time, jolted the viewers across the Middle East, exposing them to the modern face of TV journalism and leaving them longing for more. Regional states, as well as private entrepreneurs, quickly recognized the strategic power of shaping public opinion through images. The Arab satellite media revolution was on the verge of re-shaping the Arab TV forever”³⁷.

The possibility of transforming the Arab landscape, by opening up the public sphere through receiving live satellite channels and keeping up with what was going on elsewhere, was not something the Arab regimes and their intelligence apparatus would tolerate. To those regimes, this would eventually lead to what they would refer to as the joke of democracy. “*In a region characterized by repressive, authoritarian regimes, satellite television’s ability to transcend national borders and government control makes it an important catalyst for democracy*”³⁸. Though the states were trying to keep the status quo, some satellite channels started broadcasting. Aljazeera, especially its live political debates and harsh criticism of Arab regimes from late 1996 onwards, pushed many of the Arab states to launch their own satellite TV stations. The purpose of this was mainly to defend themselves and show a better image. Nonetheless, that led to the public sphere of the Arab World opening up.

Another factor that boosted the situation came after the terrorist attacks of September 11, when the Americans concluded that one of the reasons that led to growth of terrorism mentality was the dictatorship of the Arab states. “*The victim role as well as longstanding historical injustices and grievances may be constructed to serve as justifications for terrorism*” (Borum). In that regard, the American government post-September 11, was assessing the Arab World, and the necessity of free media in the following manner:

“The power and popularity of Arab satellite television programming has not gone unnoticed by the U.S. government. After 9/11, U.S. officials became more actively involved in the region’s growing satellite TV market, creating a station of its own, and producing

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ ibid

entertaining Arabic-language programming for licensing to satellite and cable television networks throughout the Middle East”³⁹.

Not only this, but also the United States started to have a direct influence on the Arab World after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. PBS highlighted that:

“The United States has also taken steps to ensure its message reaches the Arab world. In May 2007, the National Security Archive released a report obtained through the Freedom of Information Act that uncovered the Defense Department’s recommendation to create a Rapid Reaction Media Team in Iraq in 2003. This team was intended to help a liberated Iraqi media transition from state-controlled media outlets to a free press. The RRMT vision included a cadre of U.S.-trained Iraqi journalists who would broadcast programming based on “U.S. government policy guidance and oversight”⁴⁰.

This step came after the Americans launched Al-Hurra Satellite TV, which was an attempt to improve their image in the eyes of Arabs, especially in defence of what Aljazeera was saying about their invasion in Iraq. Directly after the invasion, as PBS recalls:

“In 2004, the U.S. government created its own Arab television station, Al Hurra, or The Free One, as part of the Bush administration strategy of promoting freedom in the Middle East. The station aims to portray a positive image of America in the region, countering what conservatives deem a negative portrayal of America by Arab broadcasters. With an annual budget of more than 70 million dollars, the station reports on regional and international events to 22 countries in the Arab region”⁴¹.

Hence, regional enterprises, states such as Qatar and its Aljazeera channel, and the Americans pushed hard towards opening the closed media sphere of the Arab World. As a result, the rest of the Arab states had to follow suit, first to defend themselves, then to try to improve their image, and to show that they are no longer dictatorships as they were allowing free media. In this context, the revolution of social media, mainly Facebook, spread across the Arab World. All this triggered political resentment that had fermented for decades, and resulted in sparking the Arab spring in Tunisia, in weeks reaching Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. Later on, the spring stretched to Sudan too, and partially to Lebanon and Iraq.

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

The aftermath of the Arab spring was too costly for the regimes in the abovementioned Arab states, the people, and other regional and international states. The series of the events were linked together as a chain that started with the Kurdish issue mainly in Iraq, that had not been satisfied, then all the events followed one after another until they ended with the Arab spring.

Conclusion

This research has studied the Middle East's predominant issue, carefully going through the root causes of all the major turning points over a century, from the creation of Iraq under the British mandate until the time of writing. Recalling all the events demonstrates that depriving the Kurds of the equal rights enjoyed by other nations of the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the founding of nation states, became a recipe for disaster. Looking solely at the Kurdish issue in Iraq well elaborates the argument of this study. Document analysis was utilized for this qualitative research.

This project notes that the resentment of the Kurds, right from the outset of the creation of Iraq by the British mandate in a way that disregarded their ambitions, led to all the subsequent events that transpired. Also, it highlighted that the events that happened throughout the twentieth century between the Kurds and the Iraqi regimes were not as disastrous as the 1975 treaty of Algeiras, when Iraq gave away its long-disputed territories and waterways to Iran. The cost of the treaty to Iraq, with the collaboration of Iran, saw an absolute end to the Kurdish liberation movement. However, after the regime change in Iran in 1979, Iraq unilaterally withdrew from the treaty, because the Kurdish revolution was not obliterated, as Iraq had expected. Despite other emerging differences between Iraq and Iran, the Iraqi withdrawal from the treaty became the straw that broke the camel's back. Thus, many dramatic events followed. The Iraqi regime could have avoided all subsequent conflicts by simply agreeing with the Kurds and trying credibly to integrate them into Iraq.

The study then turned to the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran that broke out after the Iraqi withdrawal from the 1975 treaty. The aftermath of the war produced another series of disasters, this time not only for Iraq alone, but also the entire Middle East region, in particular to the Arab Gulf states. Simply by reversing the chain of events, we can envisage a totally different current and future image of Iraq and the Middle East. If the Kurds had been embraced by the Iraqi regimes, and willingly and convincingly integrated into Iraq, the Iraqi regime would not have needed to sign the 1975 treaty with Iran in that fashion. Then, after the 1979 revolution in Iran, there would have been no need for Iraq to renege on the treaty, thereby precluding the 1980-1988 war between the two countries. Avoiding the conflict would have prevented the attrition suffered by both countries which led to millions of casualties and the diminution of their economic power.

Not least, Iraq would not have been burdened with the heavy debts that led to the regime's reaction and provocation towards Kuwait, which resulted in the invasion of 1990. There would then have been no necessity for the presence of foreign troops in the Arab Gulf states to protect them from the Iraqi regime and to liberate Kuwait. Within this context, and just a few days' later, economic sanctions would not be imposed on Iraq. Also, the inspection of Iraqi military arms and subsequent disarmament would have been avoided that resulted in the invasion of Iraq. Without the invasion, the resulting chaos would have been averted, such as the fragmentation of Iraqi society and the growth of sectarianism, tribalism, nepotism, corruption, and terrorism. Without, the action taken by Iraq and the knock-on effects experienced by the entire Middle East, all subsequent events would not have happened, the consequences of which resulted in bloody civil wars during and after the Arab spring. The upshot is that the Middle East will not witness stability until its overarching problem, which is the issue of the Kurds, is solved peacefully and convincingly with the Kurds.

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