

The Presence of Israel in Iraqi Kurdistan and its Security Challenges for Iran's National Security

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Abstract

This study investigates Israeli presence in Iraqi Kurdistan and its challenges for the Iran's national security. Although the informal presence of Israel in Iraqi Kurdistan dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, its presence has been more conspicuous, in the recent years, due to the changes in the international political equations, informal collapse and attenuation of social, geographical, and political Iraqi borders, the opportunities arising from 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the weakening of the central power in Iraq. This has exposed the security of the neighboring countries of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially Iran to unprecedented challenges. With this in mind, this paper is conducted to analyze these challenges using the library and archival research methods and following an analytical approach. Based on the findings, it can be said that the Israeli government, mostly driven by its political isolation amid the regional countries, has been trying to create security and political divergences, undermine the regional powers, and support the Iraqi Kurdish independence and secession of the country, which in turn could influence the Iranian Kurds who may be under the effect of federalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan, and enhance the ethnicity movements in Iran, which can also pose a potential security threat for Iran.

Keywords: Iraqi Kurdistan, national security, Iran, Israel

1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Countries affect and are affected by the regional area in which they are situated. A regional area is the combination of a set of neighboring countries which have some historical, cultural, political, economic, and military bonds as well as different interactional patterns. The effectiveness and openness of the members of a regional area can be positive/negative or constructive/destructive. This situation is true about the Iraqi Kurdistan and its regional area; meaning that, one of the major factors creating the transformations in the Iraqi Kurdistan is the regional area in which the Kurdistan region is located. Because of the low level of political and social cohesion in Iraq, according to Buzan, there is a weak state and power which is not only vulnerable to the internal threats (the presence of ISIS), but this weakness causes its vulnerability to the outside environment. That is why security problems and the Iraqi Kurdistan's existence have been tied to the outside environment. By the environment outside of Iraqi Kurdistan, we mean two regional and international areas.

According to the above-mentioned components, the winner of major Iraqi transformations since 2003 has been the Kurdistan region area in the north of Iraq, which is more developed than the rest of Iraq regarding the administrative, political, and governmental systems. Kurdistan's political parties and military forces not only are running Kurdistan and solving the principal problems of the state- and nation-building, but also play a vital role in the security and political life of Iraq as a whole. Regarding the cultural and social aspects, the Iraqi Kurdistan is closely attached to the Iranian culture and civilizations, and most of Iraqi Kurds share a common historical memory with Iranians. This can be a privilege for Iranian government to expand its cultural influence and hegemony in the Iraqi Kurdistan and develop its socio-economic and political exchanges. However, in spite of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural attachments with Iran, in case of negligence on the Iranian side, the Iraqi Kurdistan, by a shift in its policies, is likely fall into the lap of other countries and consequently incur an irreparable harm on Iran. Due to its the close proximity with Turkey, Iran, and Syria, The Iraqi Kurdistan is constantly being pulled and pushed by tug-of-war like policies of these three after Iraq's occupancy. Moreover, being under the pressure of its neighbors, and a lack of trust in the US policies, Iraqi Kurdistan, influenced by a

sort of “geopolitically devotion”, has inevitably been drawn to Israel.

Meanwhile, the strategic vacuum caused by the fall of Saddam in Iraq has provided Israel with a golden opportunity to penetrate the Iraqi Kurdistan by focusing on the design and implementation of its strategic plans as well as its geopolitical and geo-strategic interests, and to take these regions, which have a significant importance in Israel’s political and military strategy, into consideration as its geopolitical heartland. Undoubtedly, this is not in line with the Iran’s short-term and long-term national and political interests. Iran-Israel opposition is more than a political opposition; the conflict is on the political and existential illegitimacy as well as an ideological opposition. Iran who does not officially recognize Israel neither as a state or a country will undoubtedly find its presence in the nearest borders intolerable. On the other hand, Israel’s presence in Iraqi Kurdistan may face the Iranian government with serious challenges in the security arena and the regional policy. Israel may use the Iranian Kurds’ protest against the central government. The secure, complex, and strategic position of the Middle East has gradually led to a kind of congruency between Israel and some Kurdish groups in north of Iraq. However, Israel’s presence in Iraqi Kurdistan, either formally or informally, can pose security challenges and strategic interests for Iran in both the short and the long run. The present study aims to investigate and explain such challenges. In other words, the present study seeks to find an answer to the questions as what are the reasons and factors for Israel’s presence in the North of Iraq (Kurdistan region of Iraq) and what challenges and outcomes does this issue impose on Iran’s national security.

2. Review of Literature

In political science, national security is the concept of safety for the territory and population of a state and by extension, the policies adopted for its preservation

National security, which is composed of two words “security” and “national”, is a new concept recently introduced. Hence, it is emphasized that “national security” as a term dates back to after the Second World War period (Jafari, 2012).

One of the first people who defined national security is Walter Lippmann. Lippmann asserted that, “A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged to maintain them by war” (Lippmann 2009).

By looking at the above definitions, it can be understood that the experts’ acceptable common ground is centered on the need “to maintain one’s existence”. Some experts summarize self-preservation or “entity/self-protection” in four valuable phenomena: (1) preserving people’s life, (2) preserving territorial integrity, (3) preserving the political and economical system, and (4) preserving the country’s independence and sovereignty. These four elements are considered as the essence of national security. Security studies can thus never be solely an intellectual pursuit because it is stimulated to a large part by the impulse to achieve security for “real people in real place” (Williams, 2008,1) p.34).

3. Methodology

This is a library-archival study based on which the presence and infiltration of Israel in the Iraqi Kurdistan have been investigated by taking an analytical approach and the challenges arising from this issue for Iran’s national security have been explained. The main hypothesis of this study is that the existence of special and political vacuum in Iraqi Kurdistan due to the lack of political power and powerful sovereignty as well as Israel’s strategic need for being present in the Iraqi Kurdistan under the plea of having a common historical memory of homelessness and fear of destruction made Israel strive to infiltrate into Iraqi Kurdistan. The very issue itself created some challenges for Iran’s national security because of its ideological and security oppositions with Israel. Accordingly, this issue will be explained in the present study using an analytical approach taken from the study’s conceptual framework. In addition to the library sources, internet articles and online sources in general are also utilized.

4. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The normal pattern of security interdependence in the international system which has geographical diversity is in the form of regional divisions which are referred to as regional security complex by Buzan (Buzan et al., 1998, p.30). That is, security interdependence is higher in regional sub-systems than in the whole international system.

A regional Security complex constitutes a group of states whose primary security concerns are linked together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another. (cited in Buzan and Waever 2003, 44). All states are tied up in a system of security interdependence, which cluster regionally in what they term security complexes. In other terms, security complexes “are about the relative intensity of interstate security relations that lead to distinctive regional patterns shaped by both the distribution of

power and historical relations of amity and enmity (Buzan et al. 1998:11-12, cited in Ruland 2013).

In the security complex consisting of the third world countries and Middle East, there are two types of relations, one of which is the relationship with themselves. In this type of relationship, each country's domestic status is determining for itself and others. A security environment constituted of weak states has various instability factors within itself, and instability of security environment itself affects the internal conditions. The second is the relationship with the North or the global environment which is referred to as heterogeneous equilibrium by Richard Little (Azar & Moon, 1988, p.42). In fact, the low level of socio-political cohesion is the characteristic of most third world countries as well as the Middle East. This feature makes the third world states vulnerable against the influence of beneficiary foreign military and political groups.

Based on the above conceptual framework, we address the regional environment of Iraqi Kurdistan and the pressures on the regional zone, especially in relation to Iraq, Iran, and Israel. Here, two major points are taken into account: First, the internal conditions of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan as a member of this regional security complex exert an influence on other country's positions as well as the relations among countries in the region. Secondly, the requirements and conditions of the regional environment, force the member states in the complex to adopt a stance towards Iraq and North of Iraq transformations. In sum, this paper distinguishes the effectiveness of two factors in the type and quality of policies of member states in the complex on Iraqi Kurdistan. One of them is the domestic conditions of Iraq creating some benefits for each of Iranian and Israeli states, and the latter is the requirements of the regional system. As previously noted, these countries' positions are contradictory and inconsistent, the most important outcome of which is complicating security crisis in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Iran, as well as Israel's infiltration into these regions.

5. Main Discussion: Israel Infiltration into Iraqi Kurdistan and Security Challenges for Iran

The main discussion of the present study is explored in several parts based on a conceptual framework and previous empirical studies. First, the geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan region and its geo-demographic situation will be discussed. Then the historical roots of Israel-the Kurds cooperation are examined. The next discussion will be on the reasons for Israel's presence in the Iraqi Kurdistan, followed by a discussion of the benefits the Kurds' gain from cooperation with Israel. Finally, the effects of such presence and cooperation on Iranian national security and the challenges it will be confronting will be dealt with.

A. Geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan

Kurdistan is a high geographical space in the Middle East which constitutes the hometown and habitat of the Kurds ecologically. This high region covers some parts of the West and North-western Iran, The East and South-eastern Turkey, the North and North-eastern Iraq, Syria, and the West of Caucasus which is overlooking its surrounding low-lying lands and plateaus (Hafezinia, 2006, 9-10). Access to the documented data about the magnitude and population of Kurdistan seems very difficult. Randall has estimated the area of Kurdistan over 200000 square miles, which is almost equal to the size of France (Randall, 1999). Mehri Pour (2000, p.65) and Hafezinia (2000, p. 11) have estimated the area of Kurdistan to be 409650 square kilometers. Some researchers such as Leizer, Mc Dowall, Milton Edward, Hinch Cliffe, and Elson have declared the number of Kurds in the Middle East between 27 to 30 million people. In turn, the Institute of Kurdish Studies has announced the number of Kurds to be 40 million people (Mohammadi et al., 2010, p. 7). Since the latest census belongs to 1990, if we consider the growth of population as 1 percent, the Kurdish population will be approximately 35 million people in 2014. The approximate area of Iraqi Kurdistan is 72.000 square kilometers which is 16 % of the total area of Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds mainly reside in the four provinces of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Kirkuk, and Dahuk. The Iranian Kurds with a 5.4 million strong population constitute 9 % of the total population of Iran and mainly reside in West Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam provinces. The area of Iranian Kurdish regions equals to 124.950 square kilometers constituting 6.7 percent of the total area of Iran. The Kurds are also living in Aleppo regions as well as Northeastern part of Syria, and the Kurdish population of Syria includes 1.4 million people (Zahiri Nejad, 2001, p.3). Meanwhile, the Turkish Kurdistan is the widest and most populous part of the Kurdish regions (Maqsoudi, 1999, p. 130). The population of the Turkish Kurds has been estimated to be 14.5 million people incorporating 25 % of the total population of Turkey.

The biggest sustainable challenge of Iraqi Kurdistan geopolitics is its closed geographical situation. The prerequisite for any exchange with the outside world is attracting the cooperation of surrounding countries, especially Iran and Turkey. Many of Kurdistan needs are met through the border crossings between the two countries. The existence of any challenge in the Kurds and American's relations with these two states has shown that these two states will not hesitate to impose their wishes due to their hegemonic position (Ziba Kalam, et al 2011).

In the Iraqi Kurdistan, geopolitical adverse conditions have imposed some restrictions regarding the decision-making and decision-taking on its leaders' policy-making, which have had a significant effect on the regional policy of Kurdistan regional government (KRG). These important conditions are as follows:

- Despite the availability of abundant water resources, Iraqi Kurdistan is practically a landlocked region.
- The Kurdistan region is located between two regional powers of Iran and Turkey; furthermore, it is neighboring some countries that are heterogeneous with Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of ethnic identity (Persian, Turkish, and Arabic)
- The oil-rich provinces of Kirkuk, Mosul, and major parts of Diyala are situated near Iran and Turkey borders, and currently, Mosul and some parts of Diyala are dominated by the ISIS terrorist group. Geopolitically, this is regarded as weakness and security vulnerability.
- KRG is somehow *de facto* state or government, and it is likely to move forward as a Kurdish autonomous government or *de jure* in the future.
- Since the formation of Iraq, KRG has always shown centrifugal tendencies.

B. The historical roots of the relationship between the Kurds and Israel

Israel's support for the Kurds in Northern Iraq became more serious when the Mossad in the 1950s migrated a large proportion of Kurdish Jews to Israel during an operation called "Ezra and Nehemiah". Other migrations were also organized by Mossad during 1970-1971 (Yaequbzadeh, 2008, p.150). The contact between the Iraqi Kurds and Israel began in 1964, through Kamaran Ali Badirkhan (Punhuber 186,2009) Israel channeled large-scale military aid to Iraqi Kurdistan in 1960s and 1970s during the Kurdish separatist wars with the Iraqi government (Entesar, 2009, p. 161). In the Kurdish revolution named Eylul revolt which started since 1961 to 1975 and continued for 24 years, Israel made major contributions to this revolution, and Barzani also viewed this relationship as a means to connect to the United States (Karsh and Rautsi 75, 2002)

Israel's official support for Kurds was made public by Menachem Begin in 1980. He disclosed that Israel provided Iraqi Kurds with money and weapons as well as trained them during 1965 and 1975. During those years, in cooperation with the Shah of Iran, the Kurdish Intelligence service named Parastin was established, and Israel Intelligence Units started activity in the Kurdish regions of Iraq.

In 1972, Jack Anderson, American journalist, revealed that "Israel pays Barzani 50000 dollars monthly and equips Iraqi Kurds with weapons made by Soviet and usurped from Egypt and Syria so that led Iraqi officials to the impression that Soviet provides the Kurds with weapons (Marchal, 1991). A controversial article published in the New Yorker by Seymour Hersh on June 28, in 2004 as Plan B, (Hersh 2004) once more drew attention to Israel's cooperation with the Iraqi Kurds and the Israeli intelligence officers' presence in northern Iraq. In this article, he discusses that the main reasons for the military and intelligent presence of Israel in Northern Iraq and the revival of long-lasting ties with the Iraqi Kurds are Israel's fear of Iranian influence in Iraq and United State's failure in establishing security in Iraq (Ghahremanpour, 2007, p. 77).

One of the reasons for Iraqi Kurds cooperation with Israel is a sort of common historical memory not necessarily a common space. The Iraqi Kurds have always been confronted with destruction and historical death. Similarly, Israelis have also had the same mortal experience in the Holocaust. Their shared experience in homelessness and historical lack of state has formed sort of common collective memory in both of them; however, this issue can only be a psychoanalytical justification and ideological deception for cooperation on part of dominant logic. In spite of the total differences in experiencing wandering and destruction atmosphere by Israelis and Kurds, and the extremely different quality of these issues, it can be a reason for cooperation, though secretly, by some politicians from both sides.

After forming a state and getting rid of historical wandering, Israel faced an old enemy named Arabs. The fear of repeating the history and experiencing wandering and destruction motivated Israel to plan cooperation with non-Arab nations in the region. Once, Israel found Iran an appropriate place for this purpose and practically established a friendly relationship with Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, Israel's fear of destruction grew, and the Islamic Republic of Iran became Israel's premier enemy virtually. In another period, Israel developed a strategic, military-political, and security cooperation plan with Turkey. However, this relationship was deteriorated after the cold war, undermining the strategic position of Turkey and resurgence of Islamist states. In recent years, in seeking non-Arab and strategic cooperation, Israel has been inclined towards Iraqi Kurdistan. Indeed, Israel's presence in the Iraqi Kurdistan may have little to do with the above-mentioned historical and non-spatial shared memory, and recalling such a common memory is kind of cooperation injected to the public. On the other hand, Iraqi KRG has been involved in war with Arabs and more

specifically Baath regime for years, and some grievous experiences such as Anfal operation, Halabja chemical attacks, and subsequently Arabs' support for such crimes inhibit the formation of adequate trust between the Kurds and Arabs. In addition, the advent of ISIS and their brutal invasions to Sanjar have increased this distrust. Iraqi Kurds' relation and cooperation with Turkey and Iran before 1991 and later on within the Iraqi Kurdistan's autonomous government framework have never been coherent and integrated; moreover, Iraqi Kurds have always felt the fear of invasion by these two states in their memory. This motivated the Iraqi Kurds themselves to resort to Israel who itself has stretched out its hand for cooperation. In what follows, we discuss these reasons in more detail.

C. Israel and influence in Iraqi Kurdistan

The most important concern for the Israeli regime over the past 60 years has been a concern of survival. Considering how it was formed and its extremely vulnerable position in the whole region, Israel has always been worried about the survival and continuity of its life. In other words, since its establishment, Israel has always been in a permanent struggle with the regional states and has always been in conflict with its neighbors. That is why all its leaders strive to focused on this issue to ensure its survival and continuity of life by providing security. Therefore, they have looked at any incidence from a security perspective and analyzed its security effects (Ghasemi, 2008). Given this situation, Israel has always strived to maintain a balance of power in opposition with its own regional enemies and achieve a relative priority against them. In order to improve the balance of powers in the regional system in its favor, the Israeli regime has been consistently taking three measures as follows:

1) Strengthening its power

With regard to the anarchy conditions prevailing in the regions and stressing the self-assistance principle, it is normal that Israel seeks to strengthen and promote its offensive and defensive power. In other words, with respect to the dominance of zero-sum game in Israel's relations with neighbors, an enhanced power and strength is itself considered the first and best act for this regime. In this regard, Israel has always been trying to be superior to its enemies in terms of the conventional military power

2) Seeking regional and trans-regional allies

The Israeli's second act for ensuring security against its enemies has always been looking for trans-regional allies such as the Unites States and some European states on the one hand and regional allies like Turkey, Iran (Shah era), and the present-day Iraqi Kurdistan on the other. Therefore, Israel actions in the Northern Iraq and its supporting the Kurdish nationalism are justifiable in this regard (Baig, 2004).

3) Adjusting and eventually eliminating its enemies and Arab neighbors' threat and enmity

The action began at Camp David while Israeli regime was able to put Egypt at the negotiation table with itself when Egyptian leaders could create an Arabic front against this regime by appealing to pan-Arabism. In the next step, Israel signed a contract with Jordanian state in 1994. Jordan has always been one of the serious threats to the Eastern borders of Israel. Israel also has pushed Saudi Arabia in a direction to accept the peace process. Acceptance of this process by Saudi Arabia and its efforts to enhance it shows that Saudi Arabia has realized the reality of Israeli regime and tried to compromise and get along with this regime (Gholami, 2009, p. 3)

Israeli interests in Northern Iraq and Kurdish autonomy

First of all, preventing the emergence of a pro-Iranian powerful political and military Shiite state in Iraq which might be able to militarily threaten Israel or to create a military balance with Israel has been one of the foremost important interests for Israel. The reemergence of a powerful state in Iraq is not in favor of Israel; moreover, the Israeli interests dictates that the forthcoming Iraqi state be a weak state, and ultimately, Iraq be disintegrated into three groups of the Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds.

The second interest of the Israeli regime is achieved by increasing sectarian campaigns in Iraq and making it insecure. Moreover, ISIS terrorist penetrations from Syria and their announcing Islamic caliphate in the Sunni regions of Iraq on the one hand, Masoud Barzani's petition to the Kurdish parliament in Iraq for a referendum about the autonomy of the Kurdish region on the other hand can eventually lead to the further undermining and disintegration of the Iraqi Shiite state which has been more consistent with Iran's policies.

Furthermore, constituting a Kurdish state can put further pressure on the Israel's two serious rivals, i.e. Iran and Syria, at this critical period of time when flames of sectarian wars are raging in the region. This along with the presence of extremist terrorists in Iraq and Syria intensify Iran's ideological security problems.

North of Iraq is geo-strategically regarded as a highly sensitive region. If we view Iraq as the heart of Arabic

Middle East in terms of geopolitics, Northern Iraqi will also be a part of the heart of Arabic Middle East. The presence of significant oil sources, lack of water problems, neighboring Iran, Turkey, and Syria are of the most important geopolitical advantages of Northern Iraqi, and Israel's presence in such a geographical environment will bring certain benefits for it.

Intensifying the ethnic and religious conflicts in Syria and Iraq is in favor of Israel and its national security, and the formation of a Kurdish state will enhance the ethnic-religious conflicts in this region, and finally, these ethnic conflicts will be extended over other countries with Kurdish minorities. Iraqi KRG is the first and the only official institution with power based on the Kurdish nationalism which has been acknowledged by different states including Iran, and this naturally increases the Kurdish ethnic sensations and desires in other Kurdish regions including Iranian Kurdistan. The Kurdish identity and Kurdish ethno-nationalism is, in fact, "*raison d'être*" of Iraqi KRG. Now, the above-mentioned trend has achieved considerable success in some part of this region, gained power at regional governmental establishment level, and needs to constantly strengthen its Kurdish identity to maintain its existence.

Iraqi Kurdistan position as an important region in the Middle East and with its de facto or de jure governance is not a threat to Israel but quite contrarily it intensifies the strategic environment in the region (Abdulahpour, 2011, p. 30).

David Ben Gurion, Israel's first president, proposed the periphery alliance strategy in 1948 to ensure Israel's security (Podeh, 1997, p. 3). As the main cause of crisis in the Middle East over the past-half century, Israel has always experienced a degree of isolation and closure in the periphery security environment. Hence, under such circumstances and escape from such unpleasant conditions, Israel has sought to establish strategic relations with non-Arab countries and minorities in the Middle East region; Israel's relation with and influence in Iraqi Kurdistan is a case in point (Khatib Zadeh, 2002, p.40).

Israelis are seeking to establish a state and ally in the political future of the region, and it is believed that supporting the Kurds to solve their problems is in their favor. This Israeli approach is based on the reasoning to create a better geopolitical balance in Israel's favor in the North of the Middle East (Zibakalam & abdulahpour, 2011,p.16).

Apart from the above geostrategic and geopolitical factors, another factor has drawn Israel's attention to the Kurds. It is rooted in the ideology of Israeli government and history of Jews based on which the Jews tend to be close to the stateless nations, and they back up the formation of a state by these nations. Jews believe that nations such as the Kurds who have been stateless for centuries have much in common with Jews in terms of historical feeling and can be appropriate allies for them. The indirect outcome of this is the increase of legitimacy of constituting a Jewish state amongst Arabs and Palestinians. This indicates the significance of Jewish attitude towards Israel's foreign policy. Israeli leaders along with the material factors take also such subjective factors into account in expanding their cooperation. Any change that weakens the sense of isolation among the citizens of the Jewish state and undermines their unique and special feeling in the international system arena is in Israel's favor.

The sum of what was said leads us to the conclusion that Israel follows long-term interests in forming a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq as well as increasing their autonomy and cannot simply overlook it.

D. The interests of the Iraqi Kurds in being close to Israel

Seeking independence among Kurds has strong historical roots and dates back to the period after the First World War. Afterwards, the Iraqi Kurds have been fighting against the central government to gain independence at different periods of time, and, ultimately, striving to form an autonomous Kurdish state. Israel, trying to alleviating the pressure it is experiencing, is the only sponsor for establishing an autonomous Kurdish state in the Middle East region. Being aware of this matter, the Iraqi Kurdish leaders sought to be close to Israel in order to accomplish this aim. Due to its linguistic, religious, historical, and cultural heterogeneities with the majority of the Iraqi Arabs, the Iraqi Kurdistan has always been one of the areas experiencing divergence. Regional powers' interference with the Kurdistan's affairs and Baghdad governments' approach to this region have been further accompanied by deprivation and suppression throughout the history of formation of Iraq.

The United States has always adopted a dual policy towards the Kurds and divided them into the good (Iraqi) and bad (PKK) Kurds, whose result has been the United States' vague and fluctuating status in relation to the Kurds. The Kurds hope to change the U.S. view in its absolute support for the independence-seeking of the Kurds by approaching Israel and attracting Jewish lobby in the United States. Here, we should refer to Mullah Mustafa Barzani's letter of 16.01.1975 (in 1975) sent to the U.S. in which he announced his readiness for submitting the

Iraqi Kurdistan to America as the 51th state (Salah al-Kharsan, 2002, p.183).

Turkey, Iran, and Syria are the main oppositions to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the region in general and in Iraq in particular. On the other hand, given that Kurdistan is surrounded by Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria, achieving an independent Kurdish state is extremely complex and sophisticated (Davoody, 2005).

If viewed realistically, Kurdistan in the form of a hypothetical state is a land-locked region, and this situation brings about the vulnerability of Kurds (Barkey & Laipson, 2005). The Kurdish leaders are well-aware that the life and stability of a Kurdish state in the region either needs the consent of the above three countries or creating the balance of power with them. Alongside the different actors, Israel can also be a contributing player by striking a balance of power among the Kurdish state and the other three countries.

No state can survive only by ideology and nationalistic feeling, but it needs material resources as well. Over the past few decades, the Kurdish nationalists did not care much about the material elements of power; however, at present, the experience of governance in Northern Iraq has taught them that the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish state in Iraq will not be possible without a strong economy.

At the level of public opinion, due to the increased poverty and low level of subsistence and public welfare, the people of Iraqi Kurdistan support the policies that are providing and ensuring the economic interests and raising the level of public welfare. This issue, i.e., the economic poverty prevailing in Kurdistan has provided the necessary grounds for increasing Israel's presence in the Iraqi Kurdistan by taking advantage of the economic poverty of the region on the one hand and forming public positive attitudes towards Israel and its actions in Iraqi Kurdistan, on the other (ZibaKalam & Abdullahpur, 2011).

At the present stage, turning the Iraqi Kurdistan to a model of stability and security in this country can enhance the Kurdistan's attraction for the Kurds in the region, and that is why the Kurdish leaders in Iraq have focused their attempts on developing the industrial infrastructures, transportation, and communication throughout the region. They even have invited Israeli companies. In this regard, Massoud Barzani announced that if negotiation with Israel is illegal for the Arabs, it is not illegal for the Kurds because they are not Arab (Ziba Kalam, et al. 2011). Talabani also has formally invited Israeli investors to invest in the Iraqi Kurdistan.

E. The challenges of Israel's influence in the Iraqi Kurdistan on Iran's national security

Extending the Israel's spying and sabotage activity in Northern Iraq against countries in the region after the collapse of Saddam made many media and press address it in their reports. In what follows, we will refer to some of these reports.

In an interview with AL-Jazeera newspaper, a high-ranking security source in Turkey maintained that Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, completed its cyber-espionage base in Northern Iraq in 2005, and this is its second espionage base after the establishment of the first espionage base in Southern Azarbaijan located on joint borders with Iran (Mehr News Agency, as cited in Al-jazeera Saudi Arabia, 1384).

The strategic position of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, owing to its proximity with Iran, has provided the Mossad with the opportunity to control Iran's activities by being presence in this region and creating security and databases in Northern Iraq. Many Israeli military elites are working in Northern Iraq under the guise of businessmen and employees of Israeli private firms (Razavi, 2008, 119).

According to Seymour Hersh, Israeli military and intelligence agents are extremely active in Northern Iraq and train the Kurdish commando units opposed with Iran's government for conducting clandestine operations inside the Kurdish regions of Iran. He also adds that Israeli forces have crossed the border and infiltrated Iranian territory with the help of the Kurdish commandos to place sensors and other sensitive components for monitoring Iran's nuclear facilities (Ghahramanpour, 2007).

Creating deterrence

Many Israeli analysts associate the challenge of this regime in post-war Iraq directly with two factors of Iran and Hezbollah. Yaakov Amidror, a senior Israeli army officer and a member of the team of "National Intelligence Evaluation" production believes that the most important political challenge for Israel after the war of Iraq is convincing the United States to continue its pro-war policies regarding Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. In many articles written by Israeli analysts or in the interviews conducted with them in different Israeli media, they have advised American politicians that creating a democratic Iraq which is replete with terrorist forces such as Iran and Hezbollah will never ensure victory in the battle with terrorism (Khosravi, 2008, pp. 145-146).

Another point that has attracted a lot of media's attention in this regard is establishing these bases by Israel on

the Kurdistan border to access information about Iran's nuclear activities. In this respect, the "Sunday Times" newspaper writes that Sharon's order to the Israeli military forces to be ready to attack Iran's nuclear facilities has been issued after Israeli intelligence agency warnings and reports about Iranian nuclear facilities in the bases stationed on the Iraqi Kurdistan borders (the Islamic Republic of Iran news agency, as quoted in Sunday Times, 2012).

In this respect, the American New Yorker magazine has claimed that Mossad agents who are operating in the Iraqi Kurdistan have initiated the covering operations against Iran in order to monitor Iranian nuclear activities.

Making Iran insecure

In order to maintain its security and undermine regional powers such as Iran, Israel intends to produce political-security divergence in the region and put it at the center of its strategic plans. Creating sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iran through the Iraqi Kurdistan and assisting as well as training the Kurds who are in opposition with the Islamic Republic of Iran can be a leverage against Iran which is considered Israeli enemy (Moin Al-dini, 2006, p. 138).

Israel tries to face Iran with a security crisis by supporting the Kurds and fueling their desire for self-determination and independence, and encouraging them to create an independent Kurdish state meanwhile consolidating its presence in the Iraqi Kurdistan which shares border with a large part of Iran (Akhavan Kazemi, 2011, p.143).

5. Conclusion

Changes in the geopolitical structure of the Middle East after 9/11 and The U.S. entry into Iraq in March 2003 paved the way for the re-emergence of the Kurdish nationalism and the building of a self-governed state. The extensive pressures exercised by the central states will inevitably focus the Kurds' attention in the region, especially the Iraqi Kurds on the trans-regional states and provide the best opportunity for Israel to pursue its strategic objectives by being present in this region through extending its cooperation with Northern Iraqi Kurds who share borders with the Iranian Kurds. Since the beginning of the formation of Israel in the Middle East, this regime has made the policy of establishing and communicating with the ethnic and racial minorities and influencing them, based on the periphery strategy perspective, as part of its strategies and objectives. In addition, establishing ties with the Iraqi Kurdistan in line with the Greater Middle East project is also among Israel's strategic goals. Due to the political isolation among countries in the region, by creating political security divergence, undermining the regional powers, supporting the independence of the Iraqi Kurds and disintegrating this country, inhibiting the establishment of any powerful states, and taking advantage of the Iranian Kurds openness to federalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan, Israel enhances the ethnic movements in Iran and poses a potential security threat for Iran.

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