Iraqi Shiites and Their Interaction with the Occupying Forces after the fall of Saddam

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Abstract:

The logical, scientific and realistic analysis of the new developments in Iraq, due to various indicators such as the power of Shiite currents, the existence of influential leaders and the presence of foreign invaders, inevitably leads us to consider only the foreign invaders' perspective, here in this article. In fact, understanding Iraq's developments after Saddam will be a significant part of the future of the land, as the occupation's role in the fall of Saddam Hussein is a facilitating factor of the new situation of Shiites in Iraq. After the invasion by coalition forces and declination of Saddam's regime, the necessary conditions for the participation of all groups in Iraq's new political structure was provided. Groups opposing the Baathist regime previously established in Britain, USA, and Iran and returned to Iraq in order to participate in Iraq's new political structure. The Shiites seeking greater influence on the process of future developments in Iraq and did not show any resistance against the occupation. This research aims to investigate the interactive policy of the Shiites of Iraq against the occupiers.

Introduction

Iraqi Shiites in the country's different historical periods were dominated by Sunni Muslim rulers, especially during the rule of the Baath party they were deprived from any involvement in power and the smallest combat and movement was severely repressed. Many Shiite scholars and figures suffered from torture and harassment in the Baathist prisons and some of them were also executed. Therefore, they were forced to take refuge in other countries, especially Iran, to continue the fight. Shia outside Iraq, through dialogues and consultations with other opposition groups to Saddam, continued to try to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein. But in the end they were not successful and the Western forces attack led by USA toppled the regime

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of Saddam Hussein. After this incident, Shiites and other groups opposed to Saddam who lived outside Iraq returned to the country. Although Iraqi Shiites have always opposed to outside interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and stood in front of them throughout the history; they not only did not deal with them during the invasion of Iraq by the coalition forces but also interacted with them.

The main objective of this paper is to examine the strategy of interaction and not confrontation of Shiites with the Iraq's occupiers and their reasons for the application of this strategy.

The Doctrine of the US regime change after September 11th

One of the most important strategies of the Bush's neoconservative government after the September 11 attacks was "The doctrine of regime change" in order to remove the governments challenging the hegemony of the United States. Two basic steps of this strategy were "Removing the challenging states" and then "Creating an alternative government". The first phase was successfully carried out in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the second phase's challenge that American officials are grappling with. (Abrar Moaser, 2004: 57-58)

In Iraq, USA sought for the establishment of a regime in this country that pull the country out of the sphere of influence of Russia and France, and put it in the sphere of political - militarily and economic influence of USA. In addition to maintaining the balance of Iraq against Iran in the regional balance of power, USA wanted Iraq to be a means for increasing USA's political, military and security against Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and also reducing their resistance to Washington's regional policies. Given that Iraq is suffering from deeper legions and ethnic conflict, USA

must enforce ethnic and religious groups of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds who had no strong leader and good alternative into a power-sharing agreement from the beginning of the fall of Saddam Hussein. Therefore, USA held meetings and conferences such as the Washington Summit between the opponents. (ibid, 58-59)

After the fall of Saddam, the main issue for USA in Iraq was the institutionalization of democratic processes by installing friendly centrist government elected by the elite and ethnic groups that did not conflict with USA's strategy and move in line with the interests of this country. Hence USA tried to support moderate and influential groups in the political future of the country and approach to its main objectives. Bush's remarks (8 February 2004) on the non-Islamic future of Iraq implied that the USAns call for a secular and non-Muslim state that is friend with Israel and consistent with the USA's interests in the Middle East. But they could not ignore the presence of the Shiites as the majority of Iraq's population. Thus, regarding the demographic structure of Iraq, they tried to keep away the future government of Iraq from radical and fundamentalist Islam in addition to efforts for democratization of this country. The USAns tried to interact with moderate Shiite groups and strengthen the relationship with them. Although USA has entered into negotiations with the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, two issues were still the USA's concerns about SCIRI after the fall of Saddam. The issued that were against the interests of USAns include:

1. The purpose of the Council for establishing the Islamic state in Iraq
2. Relations with Iran (Kazemi, 2004: 62-63)

In the field of power sharing among political groups in Iraq, USA was defending the balance of political forces in Iraq's future sovereignty, because the balance of power among different groups can prevent a group from taking over the power that may endanger USA's interests. Since creating a quite Shiite government in Iraq not only leads to the dissatisfaction of some neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia, but also strengthens higher level of interaction between the Shiite governments of Iraq with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to the hostile relationship between Iran and USA, it would not be in favour of the Bush administration and USA. Nevertheless, USA didn't seek to challenge the Shiite tendencies to achieve a share in the Iraq's future political structure proportional to their population, because they were trying to make Shiite oppositional parties and individual's more convergence to USA. Hence USA intended to occupy the Shiite part of the government by secular and liberal political Shiites, and in the absence of the conditions for empowering secular Shiites, sought to strengthen the position of the Shiites who were close to USA, even if they were from Clergymen. (ibid, 59-60)

Interactive approach of Shiites before the fall

As it passed, when USA was somewhat disappointed from the Iraqi National Congress led by Chalabi, and subsequently discovered the key role and influence of Shiites in Iraq, they moved their side. Shiites, particularly the Supreme Council, at first did not respond to such signals because of their intellectual limitations and dependency to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As they always desire to overthrow the Baathist regime and change the political system in Iraq, they gradually found that they should convert their threaten-

ing image to a secure image in the region in order to achieve international and regional support. Among the measures was that they were determined to take advantage from the tension created between the West and Saddam. In 1999, a delegation of Shiite rebels visited U.S Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. In this meeting, "Hamid al-Bayati", the representative of the Supreme Council in London (the current Iraqi government representative at the United Nations) also attended. It was the first meeting of Shiite groups with the USAs and Western. At that time, members of the Dawa Party, like Noori Maleki and Ibrahim Jafari, who strongly disagreed with negotiations with the West, explicitly opposed this movement. Even the forces of Dawa Party in Tehran protested against this movement, and called it cooperation with USA. (Interview with Noori, 24/4/2007)

With the rise of the conservative team of George W. Bush, the relations with the Americans went forward. At the Washington Summit (August 2002) that USA officially invited SCIRI, Sayed Abdul Aziz Hakim, head of jihad, attended as a representative of SCIRI, at the summit, he described political discourse and views of SCIRI in detail. (Hakim, 2002) At the summit, the White House and the opposition groups of Baath regime reached to an agreement about the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. (Ghasemi, 2002) On the eve of the London conference, only the representatives of the Supreme Council went and attended the meeting on the behalf of the Shiite rebels. They argued that if the Shiites did not go and participate in conferences, USA would select someone like Chalabi as a representative of the Shiites and work forward. Then, in the fall of Saddam and the Baathist regime, Shiite groups would be considered like a guest as rather than a party and

they would have no role in Iraq's future sovereignty. The MPs attended the London Conferencewhile protecting their rights and presenting their demands and preconditions. All groups participating in the conference agreed with the military attack to Iraq.

When the topic of military attack to Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam was considered seriously, USA, via Khalilzad, Bush's envoy to Iraq, announced the rebels that they have no right to interfere in military operations against Saddam Hussein and coalition forces are in charge of everything. USA feared that the Kurd opposition forces in the north and Shiites in the south may capture the liberated areas in case of participation in military operations, and there by wreck the country's overall situation.

So in conclusion we can say that before USA invaded Iraq, the Shiite opposed USA and had no relationship with them and the Americans called them terrorists at that time. During 12 years from 1991 to 2003, the relations were gradually improving. USA recognized the power of Shiites negotiated with them, but did allow neither the Shiites nor the other rebels to intervene military affairs, lest they wield power independently. Thus, Shiites were entered the overthrow of Saddam in this situation. Many cities were occupied by coalition forces and Seyed Mohammad Baqer Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, condemned any kind of collaboration with the occupying forces and the coalition forces could easily topple Saddam within 20 days.

Iraqi people resented Saddam on one hand and thus avoid supporting him. On the other hand, they did not trust the Americans due to their operation in the Shaaban intifada in 1991. Therefore, they remained neutral and waited to see what happens. Gradually, the op-

position parties came into the scene and created the ruling council (Coalition Provisional Authority). (Interview with Noorian, 2005)

As mentioned earlier, the Dawa Party already opposed the relationship with USA and West and also blamed the Supreme Council for talks with USA. USA, in the past decade, called the Dawa Party terrorists, but since December 2002 when the London Conference was formed until the formation of the Coalition Provisional Authority on 13 July 2003, the Dawa party elite's perception of the importance of the existing conditions and opportunities as well as the Americans' resilience in the face of opposition led to the conflict between them disappear. This has caused two members of the Dawa Party (Ibrahim Jafari and Abdul Zahra Othman) became a member of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Ibrahim Jafari, senior member of the Politburo,took the rotating presidency of the council for the first period). Institute of cultural studies and international research of Abrar Moaser of Tehran, 2004) another important factor that affected the Dawa party's hostile policy change wasa tactical move of the Supreme Council. Although SCIRI adopted interactive approach to USA long before the invasion of Iraq, they agreed to nominate Ibrahim Jafari, who was a member of the Dawa Party, as prime minister. As the Dawa Party was in the position of prime minister, they stopped their last position in condemning the Supreme Council to cooperate with the occupiers and they also turned to interact with USA). (Interview with Noorian, 2005)

Interactive approach of Shiites after the fall

After the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces and the fall of Saddam, Shiites found an un-

precedented opportunity to achieve their rights in the political status of the country so that they could enter the political power proportional to their population weight in Iraq after many years and it was possible only with an immediate and peaceful transfer of power from the Americans. The Shiites recognized the realities of the occupation of Iraq by the US and tried to follow a balanced policy while maintaining their principles. (Taghadosi, 2007) They accordingly separated their account from some Extremist groups by trying to maintain their integrity and avoiding conflicts. They actually adopted the strategy of interaction and non-confrontation against the occupiers. This means that the Shiites did not follow the strategy of passive cooperation and violent resistance adopted by some Kurds and Sunni Arabs (Haji Yousefi, 2005: 11). They didn't confront the occupiers, but also insisted on their demands and desires. (Shanan, 2004: 282)

In regard to the deployment of interactive strategy by Shiites against invaders, many examples can be cited:

- They did not show any resistance during the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces and remained neutral in the clashes between the occupiers and the Baath party military. Because on the one hand they agreed the overthrow of Saddam and on the other hand, none of the Iraqi clerics issued a fatwa calling for armed resistance. (Quarterly Journal of Research on the Movement, 2003: 35) So they did not show any movement until the fall of Saddam and the victory of coalition forces.

- Shia militant groups were calling for the formation of an Islamic state in Iraq during their struggles, especially groups like SCIRI and the Islam-

ic Action Organization opposed to the separation of religion from politics and desired for Islamic government based on Velayat-e faqih. But over time, based on a realistic approach, especially because of the USA's concerns about this issue, Shiites abandoned the idea of Islamic government and called for the establishment of a democratic government based on elections and respect for the majority of people. (Kazemi, 2004: 65-66) Because the Islamic state with Shiite nature was not only contrary to the strategic interests of USA, but also against the interests of Sunni Arabic countries in the Middle East. So insisting on this idea would encounter opposition from USA, and cause trouble for Shiite groups as far as they might be deprived from their most basic rights. Thus, abandoning the idea of Islamic government and focusing on the formation of democratic government based on election was the best movement by Shiites; (Abrar Moaser institute of Tehran, 2004) because it would overcome a lot of concern in USA and Arabic countries, and according to the majority Shiites in Iraq, it is likely that most major posts in government and parliament are owned by the Shiites. The Shiites took an important step towards the realization of their interactive strategy with the occupiers.

- Another measure of Shiites for deployment of interactive strategy against the occupation was agreement with the Governing Council and its representatives who were se-

lected by Paul Bremer, the American governor of Iraq. During the formation of the Iraqi Transitional Governing Council, the Americans did their utmost to make way for the council representatives who have greater coordination with the White House. The presence of members of SCIRI and the Dawa Party as the main Shiite political groups in the Iraqi political scene among the Transitional Governing Council demonstrated the success of the interactive strategy by Shiites. The two groups in any way seek to form a new council, but they announced their agreement with the formation of the Transitional Council from the beginning based on the facts available. (Farahani, 2003)At the time of transfer of power from the Transitional Governing Council to the interim government - which was formed under the auspices of UN Special Envoy Akhzar Ibrahimi, (Philips, 2004) Najaf Seminary has also welcomed this event by a statement and urged the interim government to fulfil its commitment for restoring full sovereignty of Iraq and holding elections on time. (Keyhan Newspaper, 2004)

A very important point about the use of interactive strategy with the occupier is that the interaction doesn't mean submission and obedience of the occupiers, but Shiites raised their demands and insist on them along with their interactive strategy, and even in some cases, they have surrendered the Americans to their demands. The most important posi-

tions of Shiite political groups with religious authority in Iraq since the fall of Saddam include the transfer of power to the people as soon as possible, holding cross-country elections and finally paving the way for the withdrawal of occupiers. According to American research resources, while SCIRI and the Dawa Party deemed it necessary to support the coalition and the Governing Council and became a member of the new Governing Council, they declare that accepting the occupation and cooperation by the Shiite during the transitional period is subject to the progress in autonomy, restoring public services and welfare and rapid withdrawal of the occupying forces. (Research Group, 2003: 267)

In contrast, USA's government and the occupying forces, in general, are also aware that the presence of Shiites and religious leaders in Iraq is serious and has a strong base so that when they intend to do something judicial, then it will be inevitable for all to do it. For example, the attendance of Shiite people in Arbaeen Funeral in Karbala invited by the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq surprised many political observers and even the White House officials; so that many White House officials expressed concerns about the Shiite religious movement that was commemorated for the first time in nearly three decades of Arbaeen of Imam Hussain (AS).

At the begging of occupation, the USA didn't intend to delegate the sovereignty to the nation, but they were trying to employ secular elements and predetermined figures through military governor for the administration of Iraq. (Naimi, 1385: 31) In contrast, with the support of Ayatollah Sistani, the Shiites have insisted that the transition process should be done through free elections

and the American forces have no right to se-lect local parties and individuals for an elect-ed government. They believe the Iraqi people can only achieve their real rights through free elections. Accordingly, Ayatollah Sistani urged the coalition forces to arrange a free election as soon as possible. (Iran Economy, 2003)

Elections in Iraq

After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the victory of the coalition forces led by USA, three elections were held in Iraq:

1. National Assembly election for drafting Iraqi constitution on Janu-ary 30, 2005
2. The referendum on the constitution on October 15, 2006
3. Iraq's parliamentary election on December 15, 2006

Under an agreement took place in No-vember 2003 between the Governing Council with periodical presidency of Jalal Talebani and the American governor in Iraq Paul Bremer, the acceleration of the transfer of power in Iraq was stipulated it was decided to transfer power to the Iraqi government within two years through democratic elections. On the same day, the Bush administration's plan for the political process of transfer of power in Iraq was announced. According to the America's program, the Iraqi transitional MPs will be chosen through local factions in May and the parliament will choose an inter-im government and the interim government will be handed over political power on June 30, 2004. (Jomhooriye Eslami, 2003)

Following the announcement of this agreement, Ayatollah Sistani expressly re-jected it and issued a two-page fatwa calling for a cross-country election in Iraq to select the planner's and authors of constitution for Iraq. By this fatwa, he declared that only the

constitution written by the Iraqis who have been chosen through elections will be sup-ported and the constitution written by Iraq is chosen by the Americans will not be en-dorsed. (Work and Workers' Newsletter, May 13, 2003) According to Mohammad Yahiya Mousavi, a representative of Ayatollah Sis-tani, the agreement does not assign any role to the Iraqi people, because the members of the regional fractions are selected by the committees who are elected by the members of the Iraqi Governing Council and their local institutions. Members of the Iraqi Governing Council have been chosen by USA, since none of these institutions are elected and all of them are appointed, their decisions will not have popular support. Without popular support, the transitional government lacks sufficient legitimacy to make important deci-sions for the country. Following the fatwa, the Iraqi people held mass protests to support Ayatollah Sistani and demanded for the im-plementation of direct elections and handing over power to the Iraqis. (Abrar institute, 2003)

The fatwa was first underestimated by Bush and Paul Bremer, but Bremer was forced to dismiss his plan due to the tendency of Governing Council members toward Aya-tollah Sistani, popular support for Ayatollah Sistani and increasing number of USAn fatal-ities and increasing pressure on Bush to shorten the occupation. Finally, Paul Bremer forced to implement the plan on which the sovereignty of Iraq was assigned to an inter-im government before completing the consti-tution. Despite the opposition of some groups such as Sunni Arabs with the excuse of inse-curity, it was happened by holding the Na-tional Assembly election. Therefore, National Assembly of Iraq that was actually the Con-gress of Founders was formed in charge of preparing and passing the new constitution of

Iraq after the Baath party regime. (Mollazehi, 2004) In this election, Iraqi Alliance consisting of 228 candidates from 16 parties, could own 128 seats with the support of Ayatollah Sistani. This is while Ayatollah Sistani did not go to any polling station because of his Iranian identity and having no right to vote.

After the election, Ayatollah Sistani congratulated the participation of people in elections and felt sorry that he couldn't attend. Also, President Bush considered the election in Iraq a success and praised the courage of those who participated in this election. He emphasized that "The voters strongly rejected the terrorists' anti-democracy ideology." Tony Blair, the British prime minister, also considered Iraq's election as a blow to global terrorism. (Ghasemi, 2004)

After the National Assembly election, the referendum on the constitution and two months later the parliamentary election was held respectively to form Iraqi government. Therefore, Iraqi Shiites led by Ayatollah Sistani could apply election as leverage and impose the occupiers their demand for holding election and assigning the fate of Iraq to the nation through democracy. The election also had nothing but the power of Shiites due to their majority. In the National Assembly election, the Iraqi Alliance that was related to the Shiites won the majority of votes. In the constitution written by the National Assembly and approved by people, Islam was the official religion of Iraq and the main authority of other laws.

(http://www.baztab.com/news) In the third cross-country election, although Ayatollah Sistani didn't support any group and preferred to assign the selection to people by explaining the issue (the necessity of mass participation in the election), the Shiites won the majority of votes and Ibrahim Jafari, who was Shiite and a member of the Dawa party, was elected as the prime minister.

The result is that Shiites who believed that any armed conflict and struggle against the occupiers will not be in their favour and keep them away from their primary objective which is achieving power and sovereignty would interact with the occupiers. As it was mentioned in the national election of Iraq, the interaction means that Shiites didn't confront the occupiers while insisting on their demands as far as the occupiers surrendered to their requests. Especially during the election, they had religious reference as a supporter, and the most important unifying factor among them was Ayatollah Sistani, as the most influential Shia cleric in Iraq. However, some Shiite groups were also refused to interact with the occupiers, and some groups, including Muqtada al-Sadr, began armed confrontation with the occupiers. These groups initially did not agree with the presence of occupiers in Iraq and continuously announced their position against the continued presence of foreign forces in the country. One reason for this opposition can be the anti-Western and anti-USAn spirit of these groups so that they refused to recognize the presence of occupiers in Iraq even slightly. But with a little pessimistic look to these positions, perhaps the reason of this group of Shiite to confront the occupiers is that they couldn't gain the desired power after the fall of Saddam and the transfer of power and sovereignty to the Iraqi groups. Thus, they were trying to attract the attention of different groups of Shiites with anti-Western positions. But in the end, although these groups did not interact with the invaders, they couldn't con-

tinue the armed struggle and only insist on their withdrawal from Iraq.

The reason for the strategy of Shiite engagement with the occupiers in 2003

Interactive strategy by Shiites against the occupiers includes:

A. The presence of coalition forces in Iraq and the reality of the occupation
B. Historical concerns about the oppression of Shiites
C. Concern about division between Shiites and the abuse of occupiers
D. Iran's policy of neutrality towards the US invasion of Iraq

A)The presence of coalition forces in Iraq and the reality of the occupation

USA and Britain, along with some allies and without the consent of the United Nations and the Security Council, began a large-scale military attack on Iraq in March 2003. They would somehow destroy mass destruction weapons of the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and bring freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people. Then, their efforts to legitimize their presence in Iraq worked and the Security Council adopted Resolution 1483 and thereby recognized the occupation of Iraq. The first action of the White House was the authorization of the United Nations (resolution 1483) and the establishment of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance and the appointment of "Paul Bremer" as the president, who gradually provided the context to form this council. (Ibid)

Given the occupation of Iraq by the international community, Shiites tried to come to terms with the fact and try to achieve their goals in these conditions in order to gain sovereignty and their lost rights; because they have found that necessary points cannot be achieved in Iraq without the cooperation of USA. The Shiites interacted with the occupiers and avoided any confrontation with them.

Based on the facts available, whether the Shias want or not, the occupiers would be in Iraq and their withdrawal is unknown. Accordingly, the best thing Shiites could do was interacting with the occupiers. Several reasons can be cited in this regard. First, the UN resolutions on this issue that recognized the occupation of Iraq by coalition forces according to which Shiites must accept the presence of foreign forces. Second, if the Shiites wanted to confront the invaders, they could not do it due to the lack of enough manpower and also enough weapons and regional and international support to deal with the occupiers. In the case of human resources, as the Iraqi people had been saved from Saddam's dictatorship with the help of occupying forces, they had no incentive to deal with the coalition forces. Even if we assume that people helped their Shiite leaders to fight with the occupying forces, they did not have enough financial and military facilities. The only supporter of the Shia in the region was Islamic Republic of Iran that was not able to finance such a movement by the Shiites. So adopting this strategy by Shiites was actually impossible. Third, they could take advantage of this fact by recognizing the presence of occupiers in Iraq and interacting with them. This means that the admission of the occupation in Iraq and Shiites' interact with them caused the Sunnis to be the main enemy of USAns during these years. On the other hand, an atmosphere was created that Shiites could impose majority rule on the occupiers in order to achieve power structure. Finally, the USAns were forced to accept holding national elections and transfer of power to Iraqis especially with Ayatollah Sistani insistence.

B)Historical concerns about the oppression of Shiites

One of the things that can be effective on the use of interactive strategy by Shiites is that Iraqi Shiites have historically been ruled by the Sunni and deprived of their rights. Except in very limited cases and unimportant posts, they have been out of power and authority and any kind of protest movements was severely suppressed by the governors. Especially in recent decades with the support of regional and international powers from Saddam Hussein, the Shiites' oppression had been increased. Many Shiite religious scholars and prominent political figures were either tortured in Baath regime's prisons or executed or forced to leave the country and settle in other countries.

By the military attack of coalition forces to Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, there was a unique opportunity for the Shiites to regain their lost rights. In such circumstances, if the Shia began confrontation with the occupiers rather than interaction, they would be still dominated by the Sunnis and as a result not only deprived from participation in the power structure, but also deprived of basic requirements, as in the past. Because it was possible that USA would return arrow to the Shia and provide the context for Sunni to regain power due to the cold relations with the U.S and being supported by Iran during the last decades, as well as positive relations between USA and Arab Sunni powers like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait and Emirates and … (Interview with Noori, 2007)

Iraqi Shiites would never forget 46-day siege of the revolutionaries and finally their failure in Najaf uprising (March 1918), and the massacre of more than nine thousand innocent people in Thawra al-Eshreen. Because

despite all these efforts, ultimately the government positions was granted to Sunnis by the decision of the British government and the Shiites have been marginalized and were kept out of power. That's why they no longer want to be marginalized despite of their majority. They were combating for many years with various governments from royal family to the Baath Party in order to achieve their rights and access to power. Hence, they are afraid that as of 1921, the United States brings Sunnis to the government like the UK and the Shiites are oppressed. (Nakash, 2003) Therefore, they avoid any kind of confrontation and started to interact so that they can achieve the power structure based on their population and use of democratic ways.

As a result of interactive approach of Shiites and pressure of the Shiites and their religious reference Ayatollah Sistani as well as the military pressure of the Sunni opposition who had taken up arms, USA was forced to accept the general election while they were not willing to hold elections and bring the Iraqi people to the government. The USAns couldn't combat with both Sunni military forces and al-Qaida terrorists and stand against the pressure of Shiites at the same time, so they accepted the Shiites' demands and entered electoral sphere. In the end, given the majority of Shiite people, they could own the majority of parliament and cabinet, especially the prime minister position, through a democratic process.

C)A Concern about division between Shiites and the abuse of occupiers

Internal disputes are one of the issues that various ethnic groups in Iraq have always suffered from. Shiites also are no exception. Some internal disputes prevented more seri-

ous and effective participation of Shiites in the equations forming the new political structure of Iraq. The most important aspects of these disputes are as follows:

1. Traditional rivalries within the seminary of Grand Ayatollahs and references in the field of authority
2. Disputes between scholars and clergymen about the relationship between clergy and politics and government
3. Challenges related to the Shiites' attitude to how to cooperate with USA and Britain
4. Challenge related to the Shiites' participation in the government after Saddam
5. Traditional and common differences between Shiite groups
6. Disputes among seminaries and scholars of Najaf and Karbala (Institute Research Group, 2003: 55)

Dispute and competition for the leadership of Shiites' seminaries is among the three groups of Sadriuoon (Muqtada Sadr), Jamaat-e-Hakim and Ayatollah Sistani. The root and turning point of disputes between Muqtada Sadr and Hakim dates back to 1998when Sayed Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, father of Muqtada al-Sadr, held the first Friday prayers in Najaf that years - that was banned earlier by the regime -and welcomed unbeatably, as far as the Baathist regime and some of its competitors got worry about it. At the end, the Baathist regime attempted to assassinate him. Another cause of this dispute was the relationship between Seyed Mohammad Hakim the former President of the Supreme Council and USA, which initially began in the second half of the 1990s with the mediation of Kuwait and continuing bilateral negotiations. This has led to protests and concerns of fundamentalist forces such as Sadriuoon,

some of the Badr Corps and the Dawa Party. Another cause of the dispute between Sadriuoon and Hakim Group returns to independence approach of Sadriuoon and their criticism from Hakim Group's performance. It means that Sadriuoon considered high dependence of SCIRI on Iran as a blow to the movement of Iraqi Shiites.

Another dispute among the Shiites arises from Najaf Seminary's dominant tendency to non-interference of the clergy in politics. As mentioned, Ayatollah Sistani, like his mentor Ayatollah Khoei, believes that direct intervention of the clergy in politics and governmental positions would harm the religion and the clergy should guide, preach, and warn the people, rulers and officials. Among liberal tendency, some outstanding Shia figures like Ahmed Chalabi, also fundamentally opposed to any kind of religion in social and political relations. They believe that formation of Shiite government leads to the gaps and competitions that threaten political stability of Iraq and destabilize the status of Shiites. But SCIRI, the Dawa party and the Sadr group called for more active participation of religious reference in the political scene of Iraq. That's why they are unhappy with the policy of Ayatollah Sistani on non-interference in the politics.

Another cause of the disputes was the type of political activity. Two conceptions of political activity and government are competing among the various Iraqi groups, including the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq and Dawa Party. One approach focuses on the centrality of clergy in political activity and the lack of this feature leads to deviation. This feature, which is realized in the Supreme Council, finally led to the idea of Velayat-e-Faqih and considered a model similar to the Islamic Republic as the ideal model. The second conception focuses more on the

organization of forces and believes in organizational work, while observing the Islamic teachings and the position of the clergy. The proponents of this idea who are mainly in the Dawa Party believe that the specific social, religious and ethnic conditions of Iraq should be considered in addition to religious teachings and ideas. So they believe that the idea of Velayat-e-Faqih is not implementable in Iraq. (Pour Saeed, 2003)

The final point that I think is the most important cause of dispute among Shiites is their participation in the governance and power sharing between them. The question that which ministry and which position should be assigned to which Shia groups is now the biggest problem of Shiites with each other. Before the fall of Saddam, the question of who is the main represented of the Shia among opposition groups was the issues that affect them. For example, it was important for SCIRI and Dawa to be considered as a representative of the Shiites in the meetings of the opposition. It seems that one of the reason that Dawa Party didn't attend to the London Conference – that was the most important meeting of the opposition before the fall of Saddam – was the fact that SCIRI was the representative of the Shiites and the Dawa party would standing after in case of participation. Another example of dispute over power can be the Virtue Party that got out of the coalition due to disputes with the Maliki government over taking a ministry.

Although Ayatollah Modarresi leader of the Islamic Action Organization acknowledged the disputes between Iraqi Islamic groups and movements in Iraq, he has always stressed that these disputes are not fundamental. Actually, the disputes are derived from the fact that each of the groups has been es-

tablished at a different time and grown in different places. The disputes cannot hinder the unity and harmony of Islamist groups with each other. (Zain al abedin, 1991: 183)

By the attack of coalition forces to Iraq and the fall of the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein, most Shiite groups tried to put aside differences and introduce themselves to the occupiers in a uniform identity. They deeply maintained their commitment to religion and religious authorities and showed their cohesion over again in different areas. Shiites have found that they can cover some wishes by the US. Therefore, according to the requirements governing the country (except for a limited period, the first months after the fall of Saddam), the vast majority of Iraqi Shiite groups and organizations took steps toward organizational integration and unity around Ayatollah Sistani and leadership of Seminary in Najaf. (Asadi, 2004:89)The broad participation in the first Arbaeen Hosseini Funeral after the fall, unique welcome for Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Baqir Hakim when he returned to Iraq from Iran, and more importantly, supporting the fatwa of Ayatollah Sistani about holding elections in Iraq are the examples of cohesion and unity among Shiites. The Shiite religious reference and Ayatollah Sistani are the most important and most effective factor of unity among Shiites in Iraq. Shiites are able to put aside the disputes under the religious authority and unite achieve the goal. Shiites' unity around Ayatollah Sistani was so tangible that Hoshyar Zebari, Foreign Minister of the Iraqi Interim Governing Council who is Kurdish, warns that lest the Shiites' demands in this regard are challenged; because in these cases they have proven to be easily able to set aside their differences and act as a single party. (Shih sunrise, same)

Accordingly, it seems that since Shiites after Saddam's fall could put their differences aside easily and achieve the governance by obeying the Shiite authority, the dispute among Shiites cannot be considered as a factor to adopt interactive strategy with the occupiers. But it can be said that the discord and dispute among Shiites is only one of the problems on the way to achieve their main objective, namely the sovereignty of Iraq. Indeed, it cannot be a factor of interacting with the occupiers.

D)Iran's policy of neutrality towards the US invasion on Iraq

To verify this, first it is necessary to briefly describe the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, particularly the Shiites, as well as Iran's positions about the occupation.

There is no doubt that cultural, historical and ideological cohesion between Iran and Iraq is among the most important variables in the relationship between the two countries. Shia and special spiritual connection between the Shiites of both countries, the presence of the holy shrines in the holy cities Najaf, Karbala, Kadhimiya and Samarra in Iraq and the holy cities of Mashhad and Qom in Iran, the seminaries in the two countries and scientific and cultural ties between them, single Shiite authority for the people of both countries as well as the Iraqi Shiites' expectation of Iran to resolve their problems are the examples and signals of the cohesion between the two nations and states. However, unlike the above-mentioned common things, a historical review of past ties brings us to the conclusion that the relationship between officials of the two countries have often been strained.(Borna Boldaji, 2004: 109-113)

During the rule of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran was the most important refuge and haven for Shiite militants and rebels against Baath regime. And important groups such as SCIRI and the Dawa Party considered Iran as a base to continue their fight. During the presence of Shiite rebels in Iran, very close and deep relations were established between these groups and the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic of Iran also put Shiite rebels under its protection by granting material and spiritual facilities, although the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was directing multiple parties to a unifying strategy for the victory of Shiite movement in Iraq. But gradually when Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim emerged as the main leader of rebels and the Islamic Republic of Iran's connection with Iraq's Shiite movement, other opposition groups felt that the Islamic Republic of Iran' treatment is not fair with all the opposition groups. So some of them took a departure to other countries that were linked by Iraqi rebels in different ways. (Ibid)

On the eve of the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the Islamic Republic of Iran chose (active) neutrality policy in response to the invasion. (Haji Yousefi, 2004:249)The position was officially announced by the leader of the Islamic Revolution and recommended to the Diplomacy System. Ayatollah Khamenei explained why adopted this policy and stressed that: "The Iranian government announced its neutrality. Neutrality means that: both sides, the side of attackers and the side of Saddam, are ruthless and we have helped none of them ... This position that the Islamic Republic officials have declared is completely Islamic and revolutionary; because it is the denial of aggressiveness and the events occurred against people… (Keyhan, 2006) Iraqi nation also did not support any of two sides and we are exactly in the same position of Iraqi people". (Keyhan,

2006) A member of the National Security Commission of the Iranian parliament also described active neutrality policy as follows: "When we introduced the policy of neutrality, it means that we must dialogue with all parties involved in the crisis and continue talks with all officials to achieve peace and non-fulfilment of war in all areas. It is natural that we have negotiated both with the Iraqi opposition and the Iraqi authorities and should foster relations with all the parties involved. In an interview with international organizations and countries in the region, we try to prevent the war with the formation of various power blocks within the region. We would also form some power blocks so that regional great powers cannot take advantage of the lack of power." (ISNA, 2002)What is important is that Shiite opposition groups were calling for neutrality in this war. The evidence for such position is the statement of Sayed Muhammad Baqir Hakim, the late president of ISCI, before the U.S attack on Iraq. He stressed that: "we have said over and over that we would not be for and against USA in case of war. The ISCI also has explained this issue for the USAns, because we believe that the war may hurt the Iraq's infrastructure and kill more Iraqis people." (Exclusive interview with Ayatollah Hakim, 2002) This represents a convergence between Iranian politics with Shia rebels' position against the occupation of Iraq.

After the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces and the overthrow of the Baathist regime, the official position of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the military attack and the fall of Saddam were fully consistent with the principles of international law. From the beginning, Iran condemned military occupation of Iraq and unilateral approaches of international crisis management in Iraq. Iran has also emphasized on the use of regional solutions to settle the dispute. In general, Iran's strategic foundations on this international crisis were as follows:

1. Iran insisted that this war shouldn't cause minimal harm to Iran and its harmful effects within the territory of Iran should be zero.
2. The other case was the desirability of the overthrow of the Baathist regime and its constituent structures such as party, army and etc. that was agreed and accepted by all the leaders and people of Iran.
3. Contribution to establish stability in Iraq through some very specific frameworks such as the need to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity and prevention from fragmentation of the country, providing the formation of a democratic system and bringing an end to the occupation.
4. The need to take advantage of the new situation in order to change the future of relations between Iran and Iraq. (Sajadpoor, 2004: 809-813)
5. Disagreement with inducing or inciting to ethnic, religious and racial disputes in Iraq; because the difference between Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs, Kurds and Turks, Christians and Muslims will spread the violence and thus provide a convenient excuse for the continuation of the occupation in Iraq.
6. Opposition to the continuation of the occupation in Iraq by helping to eliminate any insecurity and creating good grounds for investment in order to improve employment and economic progress in Iraq after the occupation. (Beheshtipour, 2004)

Apart from the Islamic Republic of Iran's policy of neutrality on the conflict between USA and Saddam Hussein, some of the positions adopted by Iran played an important role in the direction of the Iraqi Shiites. For example, at the beginning of the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces, Iran closed its borders and do not encourage the Shiites to resist against the occupiers. In addition, Iran didn't support the Iraqis' resistance against the occupation. The speed of action in support of the Iraqi Transitional Governing Council and finally supporting Iraqi elections in the shadow of the occupation forces as well as serious efforts to establish the rule of full-fledged Shiites government in Iraq are other positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Emami, 2005: 931-932)The most important issue for Iran was that Iraq become stable as soon as possible and start friendly relations with Iran. (Hamidi, 2005)Iran was the first country in the region that recognized the Governing Council and respectfully interacted with Transitional and Interim Governments. Also, Iran was the first country in the region that missions its highest level diplomatic group to Iraq. (ISNA, 2006) The State Department Spokesman of Islamic Republic of Iran expressed the position of country on the formation of the Iraqi Interim Government and considered the transfer of power to an interim government in Iraq as a step toward the establishment of democratic government and restoration of full sovereignty of the Iraqi people. He also said that: "The transfer of power to the Iraqi interim government and the end of occupation in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1546 was a positive step. And the interim government is expected to provides the context to restore full sovereignty of Iraq, end the occupation and hold free and inclusive elections in due course in this country.") Institute of cultural studies and international research of Abrar Moaser of Tehran, 2004)

During the overthrow of Saddam, Islamic Republic of Iran believed that Shiites should make every effort to be not far from the power and sovereignty and prevent the Shiites' rights to be overwhelmed. In connection with the Iraqi Shiites interaction with USA, Iran did not disagree and did not stop them. As before the fall of Saddam when the Shiite rebels were still in Iran, Iran did not oppose the talks and meetings of the Supreme Council's leaders with the Americans. As mentioned earlier, Iran would not encourage the Shiites to resist the invaders after the occupation. But besides this, it was important for the Islamic Republic of Iran that the Shiites' interaction with occupiers shouldn't turn into mere cooperation like the Kurds, and also shouldn't turn into hostility like the Sunnis. In other words, Iran insisted that the Shiites' interaction with the occupiers shouldn't make them subservient and mercenary to USA, but also they should express their demands easily and impose some of them to the Americans. Of course, it happened and Shiites could interact with the Americans and impose some demands, such as holding elections quickly.

So in the case of the occupation of Iraq and the fate of this country, the fulfilment of the Shiites' rights and achieving political sovereignty of Iraq were very important for Iran. Even if it is possible only through interaction with USA. The important point is that the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this field was totally consistent with Shiite groups and the authority of Iraq: "the fulfilment of the Shiites' rights in Iraq by achieving the power through the mechanism of cooperation with influential foreign forces in Iraq, i.e. USA, while maintaining principles and ideals (neither opposition nor mercenaries)". (Interview with Noorian, 2007)

The result was that the Iraqi Shiites knew that the only way to achieve their goals is interacting with the occupiers and the Islamic Republic of Iran also approved this strategy. In this way, Iran not only did not create any obstacle to Shiite militant groups, but also accompanied them.

Accordingly, it seems that Iran's neutrality policy toward USAn invasion of Iraq had no role in implementing the strategy of interaction and non-confrontation against the occupation of Iraq. In other words, these two issues, namely Iran's neutrality policy against military aggression by coalition forces in Iraq and Iraqi Shiites' interaction with the occupiers, are separated from each other and have no effect on each other. Because Iran's policy of neutrality has been taken towards the United States and its allies on the one hand and the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein on the other hand and the Shiites were included in none of the two sides. Here, rather than the neutrality policy, we can consider the "lack of Iranian support for Shiites' resistance against the occupation" or "Iran's support for Shiites' interaction with the occupiers" as an important factor in implementing the strategy of interaction and non-confrontation with the occupiers. This means that the Islamic Republic of Iran not only did not encourage the Shiites to resist the occupation of Iraq, but also supported the interactive policy with the occupiers did not hindrance in order to fulfil their rights and power as the majority of Iraq's population. At the same time, Iran emphasized that they should not become subservient and mercenary of the invaders.

Apolitical clergy
Based on the contents mentioned in the past chapters, it seems that another important fac-

tor that prevents Shia from confrontation with occupiers was apolitical Shiite clergy and Najaf Seminary. Najaf Seminary and its authority didn't believe in political struggle against tyrants to achieve power for the implementation of Islamic law in occultation. During the 35-year rule of the Baath Party, the Shiite authority didn't take any militant movement and protest against the government. The political and religious policy of the Shiites everywhere was "clergy-oriented" and the fatwa is considered as an authoritative reference for them. Hence, wherever the clergies issue a fatwa on any subject, the people bound themselves to implement it. The clergy can be clearly considered as the unifying cause for the Shiites. On the other hand, the Shiite opposition groups during their struggle have always called for the creation of Islamic state in Iraq. Even the key groups such as the Supreme Council and the Islamic Action Organization in the past considered "an Islamic State based on "Velayat-e-Faqih" as their desired governance, although they didn't officially call for its implementation in Iraq. It seems that they needed a political authority to mobilize people for the realization of an Islamic state. Accordingly, it seems if Ayatollah Sistani, whom called as "Imam" by the Iraqi people, (Interview with Noori, 2007) issued a fatwa for people to stand against the occupiers, then the Iraqi Shiites would certainly fight against coalition forces since the obedience of the Shiite authority is a must. As mentioned above, the Iraqi authorities' policy, particularly Ayatollah Sistani, was non-interference in political issues, and except where they believe it is necessary to interfere. For example, during the elections, Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa and required the occupiers to hold inclusive

elections; however, he did not fight the invaders for the establishment of an Islamic state. He believed that armed struggle is not in favour of the Iraqi people, thus the fight against the occupiers must be peaceful.

At the beginning of the occupation of Iraq, the Dawa Party and the Supreme Council tended to have a religious authority that is more effective and active participation in the political life of their country. Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Baqir Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, when he first arrive Iraq declared that his goal is to strengthen the Shiite religious authority, i.e. Ayatollah Sistani. But when Seyed Mohammad Hakim despaired from entering Ayatollah Sistani into the political arena and he did not support SCIRI, they were forced to pursue a different policy. So Hakim did not directly criticize Ayatollah Sistani, but he tried to deal with religious affairs and pave the way for him to become religious reference and thereby achieve political goals of SCIRI. However, his goal was failed due to his martyrdom. The Dawa Party, who also knew themselves as true followers of Ayatollah Sadr and consequently calls for an Islamic state (not in the style of Velayat-e-Faqih in Iran) in Iraq, wanted the Iraqi religious authorities to play a more active role in the political agenda of the country. But they never protested publicly to Ayatollah Sistani and his apolitical approach. (Hashemian, 2003)

It is natural that in such circumstances and with such an apolitical thinking governing the authority of Iraq, especially Ayatollah Sistani, Shiite political groups were not able to make any anti-imperialistic movement against foreign occupation day. Because they had no hoped that the authority with this thinking invites people to revolt against the occupiers. So groups like SCIRI and Dawa were unable account on the religious authority in order to cope with the occupiers. So they found that interacting and non-confrontation with the occupiers is in favour of them through which they can achieve inalienable rights of Shiites. So it seems that apolitical seminary of Najaf is an important factor in implementing the strategy of interaction and non-confrontation by Shias.

The final point is that although the Shiite authority was considered an important factor in the unity of Shiites, it was not involved directly in the interactive strategy and the Shiite political groups adopted this strategy on the basis of the circumstances and reasons. So it seems that the first sentence of the hypothesis that highlights the role of religious authority and its leadership in strategy of interaction and non-confrontation is irrelevant.

Conclusion

Iraqi Shiites, although being the majority of the population, always have been deprived of power and government, and under the oppression of Sunni rulers. Following the Saddam's overthrow, to justify their rights, they deemed it to engage with the occupiers of Iraq and above all, the United States of USA. In fact, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by the coalition forces, the Shiites took the strategy of engagement and non-opposition to the occupation. One of the Shiites actions that indicate the use of this strategy by them is their avoidance of any resistance and engagement with the invaders during the invasion of the coalition forces in Iraq. That is, the Shiites not only did not enter the armed struggle with the occupiers, but were completely neutral in the clashes between the occupiers and the Ba'athist's military forces. Shiite militant groups also called for the formation of an Islamic government in Iraq during their campaign years and long

before the US invasion of Iraq, but over time and based on a realistic attitude, especially because of the USAn concern about this issue, the idea of formation of the Islamic state had been abandoned and they demanded for the formation of a democratic government based on elections and respect for the majority of the people's demands. The other Shiites' move to engage with the invaders was that they did not oppose the Transitional Government Council and its representatives, selected by the American ruling Iraqi leader Paul Bremer, and as a result of their engagement with the occupiers, despite the fact that The Americans made every effort to bring the White House delegates to this council, witnessing the presence of representatives from the Supreme Council and the Dawa Party as the main political groups of the Shiites in the Iraqi political scene, along with the Transitional Government Council. A very important point is that this interaction did not mean pure obedience to the occupiers, but Shiites, along with an interactive policy with the occupiers, put forward their demands, too. Even in some cases, the Americans have surrendered their demands, too; including the immediate transfer of power to the people and the holding of national elections, that have been the most important positions of Shiite political groups, along with religious authority, since the beginning of the fall of Saddam. In contrast, the US government and the occupiers generally acknowledge the power of Shiite and authority in Iraq and their impact on the developments in the country. Therefore, respect for the views of the Shiites, and especially the Shi'a authority, has always been their concern.

As a result, we can summarize the result that the Shiites of Iraq due ,

A. The presence of coalition forces in Iraq and the reality of occupation

B. Historical worries about oppression to Shiites

C. Iran's avoidance of support Shi'a resistance to the occupation

D. The non-political nature of the Shia's authority in Iraq

Followed a strategy of interaction and non-opposition to the occupation.

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