ALEKSANDR ABROSIMOV. IRAN'S SECURITY IN IRAQ: THE INFLUENCE OF MILITARY, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL FACTORS

Keywords: Iran; Iraq; Middle East; International politics; regional security.

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Citation: Abrosimov A. Iran's Security in Iraq: The Influence of Military, Religious and Political Factors // Russia and the Moslem World, 2026, № 3 (333), P. 46–59. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2026.03.03

Abstract. This article examines the influence of military, religious, and political factors on Iran's security in Iraq. The author points out that, along with the use force to protect its interests in Iraq, Iran resorted to humanitarian and economic diplomacy, as well as religious affinity with the Shia communities of Iraq. As can be seen from the study of Iran's fight against ISIS[*]*, its conflicts with the U.S., and its active participation in Iraq's political, social, and religious life, each of these factors played a special role.*

The author notes that the primary challenge for Iran's complex policy-making was that the combination of certain factors was not always successful due to the rapidly changing political environment in Iraq. In practice, this sometimes complicated relations between Iran and the Baghdad leadership, Iraqi political and religious organizations, and influential international actors. As a result, it had a long-term negative impact on the future of Iran–Iraq relations

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the establishment of multipolarity did not put an end to the policy of power politics. This behavioral stereotype is also characteristic of major regional players, including Iran, Türkiye, Israel, and a number of Arab countries. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic once again confirmed the strategic premise of the Islamic

[*] Here and hereafter the organization banned in the Russian Federation.

Republic of Iran that Iraq is a critical factor in Iran's national security. The two countries share a long common border. They are united by close ethnic and confessional ties. Notably, the nature of Iranian-Iraqi relations has its own particular features. These stem from the specifics of the ethnic and religious diversity of the two peoples and the history of their interaction. The presence of a significant number of Iranians in Iraq and a large Shiite community have influenced the policy of the Iraqi authorities toward Iran.

Iran's influence on Iraq has a long history based on geopolitics and religion. Tehran has traditionally relied on the Shiite population, especially in Najaf and Karbala – centers of Shiite theology. However, ideological differences between the schools of Qom and Najaf turned their relationship into a complex balance between cooperation and rivalry. Qom, as a center of politicized theology, stood on the position of "velayat-e faqih" – the direct participation of the clergy in governing the state. Najaf, led by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, championed a model of religious autonomy from politics. In the relations between Tehran and Baghdad, questions of defining national identity have always played a more significant role than in Iran's policy toward other Arab states.

The aggravation of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan could pose a potential threat to the security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given the evolving situation, studying the motives and policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Iraq can provide insight into a new behavioral model of Iran in the Middle East in the foreseeable future.

The Fight Against ISIS*

The summer of 2014 became a turning point for Iraq. The capture of Mosul by ISIS* militants demonstrated the catastrophic state of the Iraqi army and threatened the very integrity of the country. At this moment, Iran found itself in a unique position: on the one hand, it sought to protect its strategic interests and allies in Iraq, and on the other, it was forced to act under conditions of the parallel presence of the United States, also involved in the fight against ISIS*. The main mechanism for the institutionalization of the "axis of resistance" in Iraq became the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd al-Shaabi, PMF). These structures, formally incorporated into the Iraqi army, were essentially a network of groupings coordinated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These groups united dozens of units, most of which had close ties with the IRGC. Among them, Kata'ib Hezbollah stood out especially. It was fully loyal to Iran. The elite