Unraveling Iraq-Iran Relations during Turbulent Period (1958-1988): Regime Security Concern in Foreign Policy

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Çalkantılı Bir Dönemde (1958-1988) Irak-İran İlişkilerinin Çözümlenmesi: Dış Politikada Rejim Güvenliği Endişesi	Unraveling Iraq-Iran Relations during Turbulent Period (1958-1988): Regime Security Concern in Foreign Policy
Öz	**Abstract**

| Dış politika geleneksel olarak devletlerin egemenliklerini ve ulusal güvenliklerini korumaları için önemli bir araçtır. Bu nedenle, herhangi bir devletin dış politikasının temel amacı, egemenliğini ve ulusal güvenliğini sağlamak, bölgesel ve uluslararası çıkarlarını gerçekleştirmektir. Ancak dış politika hem iç faktörlerin hem de dış faktörlerin etkileşim halinde olduğu ve yönetici kadroların tercihlerini ve sonuçlarını şekillendirdiği bir süreçtir. Özellikle devlet güvenliğinin rejimin bekasının sürdürülmesine eşdeğer olduğu demokratik olmayan ülkelerde, yönetici seçkinlerin iç siyasi hesapları dış politikaya hakimdir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale, 1958 ve 1988 yılları arasındaki Irak-İran ilişkilerini yeniden gözden geçirecek ve rejim güvenliği endişelerinin karar alma süreci üzerindeki belirleyici ağırlığını ortaya koyacaktır. Teorik olarak bu makale, Neoklasik realist çalışmaların sunduğu argümanlardan ve kavramlardan faydalanan rejim güvenliği yaklaşımı ile dış politikanın formülasyonunda dış-iç ayrımına karşı çıkan ve sorunsallaştıran bölgesel çalışmalara mütevazı bir katkı yapmaya çalışacaktır. | Foreign policy is traditionally an important tool for states to protect their sovereignty and national-regime security. Therefore, the main objective of any state's foreign policy is to ensure its sovereignty and national-regime security and to realize its regional and international interests. However, foreign policy is a process where both internal factors and external factors interact and shape the preferences and the outcomes of the ruling cadres. Especially, in non-democratic countries where state security is equivalent to the maintenance of regime survival, the internal political calculations of ruling elites dominate the foreign policy. In this context, this article will revisit Iraq-Iran relations between 1958 and 1988 to display the determinant weight of the regime security concerns on the decision-making process. Theoretically, this article will attempt to make a modest contribution to the regional studies which dispute and refuse the outside-inside separation on the formulation of foreign policy with the regime security approach which draws largely on the arguments and the concepts advanced by Neoclassical realist studies.. |

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Irak, Rejim Güvenliği, Dış Politika, Ulusal Çıkar	**Keywords:** Iran, Iraq, Regime Security, Foreign Policy, National Security
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Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı	Bu çalışma bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği kurallarına uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır.
Yazarların Makaleye Olan Katkıları	Çalışmanın tamamı üç yazar ile birlikte oluşturulmuştur. Yazarlar eşit oranda makaleye katkı sağlamıştır.
Çıkar Beyanı	Yazarlar açısından ya da üçüncü taraflar açısından çalışmadan kaynaklı çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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1. Introduction: Theoretical Discussion

There are many studies on the factors that affect the shaping of the foreign policies of states, especially the analysis which focuses on the state and system level. An important aspect that state-level analysis scrutinizes is the link between regime security and foreign policy. In this context, with the growing impact of another state-level theoretical approach, neoclassical realism, regional studies concentrate more on the inside-outside interaction and intervening character of the regime security concern, which eventually shapes the direction of the foreign policy. As a foreign policy-based approach, this theory intended to combine the structural aspects of neo-realist studies and state (individual)-based hallmarks of classical realism. To this end, regional studies started to look at the intervening factors like strategic culture, perception, and state-society relations, implying different regime/state characteristics, which are conceptualized by neoclassical realist theory. In other words, regional studies interrogated how several countries pursued the strategies and adopted preferences that were not in compliance with the systemic stimuli. In this context, neoclassical realism underlined the importance and weight of the mentioned intervening factors in the foreign policy process (Rose, 1998; Lobell, et al.; Ertoy, 2019).

This approach enabled scholars to analyze the issues in the Middle East region on a more balanced ground. In the Middle East region, as Darwich and Kaarbo succinctly underlined, rather than national security, which is the determinant factor of the foreign policy process in Weberian modern-sovereign states, regime security is the leading concern for almost all Middle Eastern countries as these countries largely fail to comply with the Weberian notions of statehood and sovereignty. As most of the Middle Eastern countries have an authoritarian character yet still legitimacy problems due to the exclusive and the fierce state structures, "the low-salience of sovereignty" situation as clarified by Fred Halliday constitutes the basic regional norm and enduring problem which indicates the primacy of the internal threats to the existing regimes and the presence of the powerful local challengers. This hardly means that the Middle Eastern countries totally underestimate the importance of the national security concerns but simply underline the primacy of the regime security/survival concerns while identifying their priorities. Therefore, some scholars put the regimes at the top of their regional analysis as these regimes firstly define the internal threats and, subsequently, their threat perceptions, alliance relations, and friend-enemy distinction (Halliday, 2005; 39; Darwich and Kaarbo, 2020).

According to this approach, regimes consider threats to their own security as the primary issue and aim to formulate the policies against them and to take the necessary steps to balance or eliminate the existing (real or imagined) threats. In democratically organized states, state elites often translate the interests of the majority into policies, while in non-democratic states this is not necessarily the case. In non-democratic states, the state elites are not directly responsible to the people as they are not democratically elected by the latter regularly. This, however, is not to say that state elites in non-democratic states are free to ignore the interests of their subjects completely. History shows that all regimes that ignore the interests of their populations will sooner or later fall victim to insurrections. Therefore, in order to sustain regime stability, state elites, have to guarantee the interests of their populations at least to such a degree as is necessary to prevent public discontent. In so far, the interests of the people indirectly become the interests of the state elites. Nonetheless, in the case of non-democratic states, state interests are not unitary. There is a distinct

difference between the various and at times competing interests of the population and the interests of the state elites. While state elites often share interests with their populations, they additionally have the interest to stay in power (Rieger, 2013). This study argues that state elites of non-democratic states have two main interests: first, the interest to protect the state's physical integrity against outside threats, and second, the interest to safeguard regime stability against domestic perils. Particularly in world regions that enjoy conflicting identities, state elites are faced with closely intertwined threats and opportunities with respect to their interests.

Middle East history shows clearly that the existence of strongly transnational and conflicting identities provides states with opportunities to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. A state's ability to instrumentalize identities and identity conflicts beyond the domestic realm for the benefit of its own interests can be seen as a non-material source of power. Thus, the level of a state's power is defined by both material and non-material capabilities. In non-democratic states, national interest is not necessarily identical with state elite interest; although they overlap, the latter is characterized by the additional interest in the maintenance of domestic power, namely regime stability. For such state elites, the complex nature of domestic and international politics requires a flexible policy that takes into account and balances out threats and opportunities on both the domestic and international levels. As Steven David puts it in his intriguing "omnibalancing" theory,[4] it is possible to state that the main motivation of regimes that do not come to power through democratic means is to hold on to power primarily because of reasons emanating from internal threats and, therefore foreign policies in such regimes are also built on this domestic consideration (David, 1991: 233-39).

Moreover, Gause questioned the motivations of specifically Gulf monarchies in their formulation of foreign policy and, accordingly, concluded that regime security or internal threats/threat perceptions surpass the other factors in foreign policy mechanism (Gause, 2010: 1-12). In this context, Gause's studies are critical in showing the interaction between the domestic realm and foreign policy decisions via the regime security approach. In the regime security approach, as Darwich and Kaarbo clarified, "the core unit of analysis is the 'regime', that is a centralized authoritarian rule in the hands of a ruling elite or a leader." Therefore, according to Darwich, "the regime security is, hence, defined as the maintenance of power by ruling leaders or elites" (Darwich and Kaarbo, 2020; 230-235). In a nutshell, regime security concerns filter the systemic pressures which validate its intervening character in the process of foreign policymaking and indicate the intensive interplay between domestic concerns and international factors.

In addition to David and Gause, the issue of regime security forms an essential ingredient of Ayoob's analysis of the third world. Focusing on the divergent security problems of the third world, Ayoob emphasizes the dominant position of regime security in the security concerns of third world countries. In this context, according to Ayoob; in the third world countries, a key vulnerability in the political sphere is thus 'the concept of security must be

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[4] The term omnibalancing was coined by the political scientist Steven R. David in his essay *"Explaining Third World Alignment."* David argued here that Third World states do not only encounter external threats for their national security but also internal threats for the survival of their regimes. This fact, according to David's argument, forces the states to balance internal and external threats. The omnibalancing theory symbolizes an advancement of the balance of power theory, which is limited to the balancing of external threats to national security. See (David, 1991: 233-256).

defined in political terms and relation to the challenges to the survivability and effectiveness of states and regimes (Ayoob, 1995: 11). This study argues that a comprehensive analysis of international relations and foreign policy requires the scrutiny of a new analytical level. The underlying assumption is that foreign policy is not entirely predetermined by the nature of the international system. Foreign policy is not only the result of system pressures but also domestic processes. Security-insecurity is defined in relation to both internal and external vulnerabilities that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures. The thesis contends that the fundamental guideline of the Iranian and Iraqi foreign policies was the consistent application of an omnibalancing strategy as well. This omnibalancing strategy was determined to maximise both national security against outside threats and regime stability against opposition-based tendencies.[5] The formulation of national foreign policy can be seen as the strategic response to an individual set of domestic and foreign threats and opportunities for the realization of the regime's interests.

In other words, these figures briefly maintained that regime security concerns should be seen as another essential factor that forces ruling elites to consider local opposition/dissident groups' activities and their regional linkages when designing their international relations. A. Ehteshami and R. Hinnebusch's "complex realism" approach which is inspired by the neoclassical realism presumably favors this reality as well, that is intervening nature of the regime security concerns and, by extension, the interaction between internal and external realm in the decision-making process of the Middle Eastern countries (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 2013: 225-244).

Besides that, an important dynamic related to foreign policy change is the legitimacy of these regimes and their leadership. For leaders, "legitimacy" is the source of their ability to exercise both their control over the people and executive power within the state. If legitimacy is challenged by the alternative domestic political-military actors, it becomes less likely for these authoritarian leaders to remain in power. Hence as legitimacy weakens, pressure and violence increase in order to be able to stay in power. Dahl argues that high legitimacy requires a low level of use of force (Dahl, 1998). Legitimacy is obtained more easily in democratic regimes and the loss of the elections does not mean the fall of the regimes in these countries. Because, in such regimes, legitimacy is linked with the capability of the governments fulfilling their duties and meet the expectations of the people. Leaders or parties that cannot fulfill the popular demands thesis can be removed from power through peaceful ways, that is the elections. Leaders and political parties which lose their dominant position while the democratic regime continues to survive then may have the opportunity to take on important roles again (Huxsoll, 2003: 66). Besides that, the constitutional structure in democratic regimes can also create a restrictive effect on foreign policy in terms of limiting their full control over the system, preventing their complete freedom on the formulation of domestic and foreign policy, and allowing the opposition to carry out propaganda activities against the existing leader. In addition to that, since the state structure already provides certain competitive ground and inclusive mechanisms in the democratic regimes, the weight of regime security concern in these countries is less determinant compared with the authoritarian and less-inclusive regime types in the Middle East region.

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[5] The term *security* is understood in the light of the negative security concept. In this regard, security means the absence of a military threat or a state's protection from attacks and coups, respectively.

On the other hand, in non-democratic regimes or authoritarian regimes like most Middle Eastern countries, the difference between the executive and the legitimacy of the regime disappears. In such regimes, leaders utilize varying ideologies like religion, nationalism, and even sectarianism to empower their domestic status and regime legitimacy. In this context, especially when regimes are unable to take necessary steps for the development or fail to increase the welfare level during any economic turmoil, leaders usually try to bring the foreign policy issues to the public agenda to appease any possible reaction/opposition from their societies. By creating a success story or presenting an immediate threat in foreign policy, they intend to re-consolidate public support (Huxsoll, 2003: 68). Therewithal, leaders in non-democratic regimes can manipulate public opinion and suppress popular uprisings through their control over the media and decision-making process (David, 1991: 238-239; Jackson, 2002: 29-52; Miller and Toritsyn, 2005: 325-363).

Considering these two interrelated factors, namely regime survival and the concern on the loss of legitimacy, this article will follow a historical path to understand the relationship between domestic political considerations and foreign policy decisions. Therefore, the article will be divided into three important historical periods. In this context, as non-democratic countries in that period Iraq's and Iran's policies towards each other will be analyzed and their strategies/tactics to enhance their internal status and to distort public opinion via foreign policy events will be exposed. Following such analysis of the historical relations, the interplay between internal concerns and foreign policy preferences will be revealed to confirm the main argument of the article, that is regime security is the primary intervening factor specifically in the non-democratic countries in the Middle East.

To summarize, the theoretical approach suggested in this study is tailored specifically for the analysis of the foreign policy of a particular group of states (non-democratic Middle Eastern states) at a particular period of time (during the last three decades of the Cold War). Additionally, we argued that every state is unique in its domestic nature based on a distinct composition of societal, economic, political, historic, ideational, and identity-related characteristics and that these aspects determine the nature of the foreign policy. We asserted that in non-democratic states the elites have an interest in twofold self-preservation in the form of both state and regime security and that in order to realize these interests they tend to refer to a policy of omnibalancing. Over the course of the rest of this study, we shall apply the above introduced theoretical approach in practice in an attempt to reveal Iran and Iraq's interests, foreign policy options, and eventual foreign policy decisions in the timeframe of 1958 to 1988.

2. Shifting Relations between Iraq and Iran (1958-1979): From Amity to Enmity

Following the revolution in Iraq in 1958 (Slugett, 2002: 209; Alam, 1994: 104) relations between Iran and Iraq started to change dramatically. The republican revolution in Iraq which overthrew the Hashemite Monarchy led to deteriorated relations between the two Gulf nations. The revolutionary identity of the new regime and its engagement in radical rhetoric caused considerable regime security concern in the Shah regime and created major tensions in the relations between the two countries (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27). Until the Iraqi revolution of 1958, there are the same political regime (Monarchy) in Iran and Iraq. Also, the foreign policies of these states confirmed pro-Western orientation before that revolution and constructed their domestic legitimacy on this orientation. Previously, both monarchic regimes in Iran and Iraq had been relatively cooperating to curb the intensity of the potential conflict. But the Iraqi revolution brought a new regime to power in Baghdad whose rhetoric, self-perception, regional role, and foreign policy orientation were opposite to the Tehran regime's orientations (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27).

The new regime in Iraq (after the 1958 coup) was seen as a threat by the Shah's administration as it was dominated by revolutionary rhetoric, tried to implement nationalist and pan-Arab policies, and followed anti-Western and pro-Soviet policy. In fact, the signing of a 15-year Friendship and Cooperation Agreement with the Soviet Union in 1972 worried the Tehran administration, which had close relations with the United States (Little, 2010: 77). In addition, the collapse of the monarchy in Iraq, the murder of the royal family and the prime minister, Nuri Said, and the revolutionary character of the new regime, as well as the disturbing radical rhetoric for Iran, created new challenges for the Pahlavi administration. The most well-known aspect of this challenge was that General Qasim's regime named the Khuzestan region, the center of the Iranian oil industry, as "Arabia" and supported the Liberation Front of Arabia, which was fighting for the liberation of Khuzestan (Bakhash, 2004: 16). As a result, an ideological dimension was added to the confrontation between the two countries, and they both perceived each other as primary threats to domestic survival and their legitimacy.

The Iraqi revolution resulted in the country's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact in 1959 which was founded in 1955 by Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Great Britain, and Turkey as a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military, and economic goals (https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/98683.htm, 2021). Nevertheless, as a defense agreement between the five nations, the pact was endorsed by the United States as an anti-communist Cold War strategy as well (Sanjiani 1997: 226-266). But after the revolution, Baghdad started to approach the Soviet block and its regional allies and started to take a more aggressive stance on bilateral relations and border disputes between Iraq and Iran. For example, General Teymur Bahtiyar, the former head of the Iranian intelligence service SAVAK, who relates to the Tudeh Party and allegedly preparing for a coup against the Shah, took refuge in Iraq in 1961 fed Pahlavi's concerns (Milani, 22 January 2022). Moreover, although all the difficulties that existed between the two countries, the former Iraqi administration was an ally of the Tehran government in the Baghdad Pact, and Iraq's separation from this pact changed the balance of power in favor of the revolutionary radical anti-Monarchy and anti-Western opponents. The tolerance of the Qasim regime to the communist elements after the revolution intensified the concerns of the Shah regime in Iran. Because the Shah regime was exposed to the threat of communist destruction in 1953, made an intense effort to suppress

the Tudeh elements in Iran. As a consequence, the new orientations of the Iraqi government became a source of concern for the Iranian regime's security and Iran adjusted its foreign policy according to this new reality.

In this period, there were multiple problems that fueled the domestic concerns of both countries and worsened the relations. The most prominent of these were the disagreements over the Shatt al-Arab river, the rivalry in regional interests, the differences in the domestic and foreign policy preferences of the regimes, and the conflicts arising from the alliances that Tehran and Baghdad formed with regional and global powers at various times. In addition to these conflicts, the existence of large, restless, and often rebellious communities in both countries, such as Arabs (Khuzestan) in Iran and Shiites and Kurds in Iraq, created difficulties for both Iran and Iraq during the period covered by the study.

When the revolution changed the politics of the newly formed republic of Iraq in 1958 and when the Pahlavi dynasty was toppled down by the Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations between Iran and Iraq went through two different phases (Milani, 2006: 564-572). In the first phase, which marked the period between the 1958 revolution that overthrew the monarchy in Iraq and the Baath Party's seizure of power in 1968, Iran was establishing strategic relations with the West while Iraq was getting closer to the Soviet Union. This made bilateral relations too embittered. In the second phase, after the Baath Party took over the power in Baghdad in 1968 and after the British withdrawal from the Gulf (Onley, 2009: 1-54) the two countries entered into a fierce rivalry to dominate the Gulf until 1975 Algiers agreement (Milani, 2011: 75).

The brutal murder of the Iraqi royal family during the revolution and the radical rhetoric of the new Iraqi regime alarmed the Shah of Iran. According to the alarming reports he was receiving from the "Sazman-e Etelaat Va Amniat Keshvar"-Nation's Intelligence and Security Agency (SAVAK) in Iraq, the Communist Tudeh Party in Iraq (CIA Historical Study Program, 1949: 1-32) was in cooperation with the Soviet Union, seeking assistance from Moscow for a coup in Iran. However, despite initial concerns, the Shah of Iran saw Colonel Abdul Karim Qasim as a more acceptable actor than the other two alternatives, pro-Nasser Pan-Arabists or pro-Soviet communists. Therefore, he welcomed Qasim's statement that improving relations with Iran was one of the most important goals of the new Baghdad government. However, this optimism proved to be temporary as both countries began to pursue foreign policy goals against each other and both began to rekindle their long-standing disagreements with chauvinistic rhetoric. (Milani, 2006: 564-572).

Moreover, when Iraq began to develop its relations with the Soviet Union, (Smolansky and Smolansky, 1991: 14) the crack in the relations between the two countries began to deepen. In addition, Tehran was concerned that Iraq's pro-Soviet policy in the region, when combined with Egypt and Syria, could affect other states in the Middle East and the Gulf region. Tensions between the two countries eased due to the overthrow of General Qasim, the architect of the 14 July revolution, in a coup organized by a coalition of Pan-Arabists and Baathists in 1963 (Tripp, 2000: 170). However, the Iranian administration was wary of the coup d'etat, given some published reports that the Baathists, who have a reputation as ruthless opponents of Nasser and the communists, had numerous meetings with the CIA before the coup. (Milani, 2006: 564-572). Then, in the same year, another coup was carried out by Abdulselam Aref (Tripp, 2000: 171). Initially, the Aref regime expressed its intention to reduce tensions between the two countries. However, the renewed negotiations between

Tehran and Baghdad did not yield results as expected. Because Iran still had two major concerns stemming from Iraq's foreign policy choices and behavior. The first of these concerns was Iraq's relations with both the Soviet Union and Nasser' Egypt, while the second was its disturbing activities in Khuzestan and the Kurdish areas. (Milani, 2006: 564-572).

In 1966, after Aref's brief rule ended with his death in a helicopter crash, his brother Abdul Rahman Aref ascended to power. In March 1967, Rahman Aref visited Iran, showing that he, like his brother, was eager to develop relations with Iran. During this visit, the two countries agreed to continue negotiations on a number of long-standing issues, including the dispute over the Gulf continental shelf. (Milani, 2006: 564-572). However, this attempt, a shared goal to resolve some of the conflicts between Iran and Iraq, failed when Aref fell from power in July 1968 in a coup led by Colonel Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr (Marr, 2012: 137-138).

The Baathist takeover of power in Iraq in 1968 greatly intensified hostile relations between Iran and Iraq. The Baath leadership was eager to champion its identity of being both Iraqi nationalist and pan-Arabist. In other words, alongside these ideological shifts such as its adoption of socialism at home, radical anti-Western position in foreign policy, and revolutionary rhetoric directed at conservative Gulf and Arab regimes (Marr, 2012: 144-146) and its development of close military and economic relationship with the USSR, Baathist Iraq became a notable concern for Iranian monarchical stability. Besides that, the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship which was signed in April 1972 further exacerbated the Shah's concerns (Marr, 2012: 146; Smolansky and Smolansky, 1991: 16-18).

Moreover, the nationalist socialist Baath started to support the front fighting for the liberation of the Khuzestan (predominantly Arab-populated region in West of Iran) which is called Arabia. Furthermore, it also supported the left-wing uprising in Dhofar, the left-leaning revolutionaries in Yemen, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf. In January 1970, after several were executed over alleged attempts to overthrow the government with Iranian aid, the Ba'ath government declared the Iranian ambassador persona non grata, closed Iranian consulates in three cities, and deported thousands of Iranians (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27). When the British withdrew and the Baathist Iraq started to be perceived as a serious threat, the United States initiated the twin pillars policy by which it considered Iran and Saudi Arabia as the essential partners for the maintenance of the Gulf security. At that time Iran both stabilized its relations with the Soviet Union and built up its naval forces. Moreover, the policy that Iraq began to follow under the Baath regime caused Iran to soften its policy towards conservative Arab regimes and to try to befriend them, particularly Saudi Arabia. As a result, even though there was a degree of rivalry in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, due to Iraqi revolutionary rhetoric Iran managed to draw the Gulf Arabs to its side (Fürtig, 2007: 627-640). These policies adopted by Iran obviously demonstrated that the Iranian regime considered Baathist revisionism as the essential threat to its regime security and re-formulated its external relations in line with this new reality.

2.1. The Shatt-al Arab Problem: Traditional Concern for Regime Survival

This long-standing issue further aggravated the regime security concerns in Iran confirming the linkage between external relations and domestic concerns. After the Iraqi revolution, it was revealed that the Soviets supplied weapons to the Baghdad administration via the Shatt Al-Arab River, causing concern in Iran. (Ramazani, 1975: 399-400). Moreover, while new steps were expected to be taken for the solution of the Shatt Al-Arab problem with Iraq before the revolution, the revolution ended these hopes. Nevertheless, it was also possible for Tehran to experience other negative effects of the revolution. The forced overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq could set a precedent for the Shah's opponents in Iran. All these problems, arising from real or imagined threats, were somewhat influential in the outbreak of the Shatt al-Arab crisis in late 1959. The Shah began to instrumentalize the Kurdish issue, which had the potential to have a devastating effect on Iraq's regime stability. In this context, although the Shah regime officially recognized the new regime in Iraq on 30 July 1958, it started to adopt various discourses about the Kurds. Taimur Bahtiyar, Iranian deputy prime minister and director of internal security, for example, stated that Iranian Kurds were absolutely loyal to the Shah and that if Iraqi and Syrian Kurds wanted a union with Iran, Tehran would evaluate this step positively. When the Tehran government made a similar statement on October 25, 1958, the Arab world interpreted the situation as an attempt by Iran to incite the Kurds against the Iraqi regime.

On the other hand, the New York Times' S.C. Sulzberger claimed that there are indications of a Russian plan to overthrow the Shah's regime with indirect proxies outside Iran and wrote that the conspiracy will be established between Barzani Kurds in Iraq, who have ties to the Kurdish minority in Iran. In addition, support would be given to other proxies who wanted to overthrow the Shah, as the Soviets wanted that, but had no organic ties to the Soviet Union. It was decided that this actor would become the powerful Qashqai tribe. Allegedly, the Bakhtiari and Qashqai tribal leaders met in Munich to discuss the alliance and whether to fight the Shah. These developments showed that the Tehran government's concerns about the tribes were not so unreasonable. Importantly, in May 1959, the Kurdish issue began to come to the fore more in Iran-Iraq relations. Because, according to the reports of Ittilaat, around ten thousand Kurds fighting against Baghdad forces in Iraq crossed the border and took refuge in Iran (Parveen, 2006: 19).

With regard to the border issues, President Qasim said that since Iraq was under severe repression and the Iraqi government was in a complex situation, he gave Iran the five-kilometer Shatt strip in 1937, but this was given as a grant, not a vested right. If the border issues were not resolved, Qasim asserted that they would not depend on the bestowal of those five kilometers and would restore them to the Iraqi homeland. However, the Iranian side argued that the Iran-Iraq border along the Shattu'l-Arab River should follow the thalweg according to international law, and declared that the Baghdad administration became hostile to Iran in many areas after the regime change in Iraq. Especially with regard to the Shatt al-Arab issue, the Iranian side argued that General Qasim tried to create an external enemy to remove the problems in the country from being the problem of his own government. The other view was that the Qasim regime's embarrassment on this issue stemmed from the Shah's frequent expression of dissatisfaction with the 1937 agreement between the two countries. However, since a similar statement made by the Shah as early as April 1959 was

widely known and yet it did not provoke a known reaction from the Qasim regime this suggestion was problematic.

Despite the relative calm in the relations between the announcement of the British decision to withdraw its forces from the Gulf in 1960 and 1968, the parties could not reach a common understanding in solving the outstanding problems. There was no visible progress towards a solution during the rest of Qasim's administration in Iraq. The coming to power of Abd al-Salam Aref on February 8, 1963, was welcomed in Tehran with the expectation that the change could bring a new approach to relations with Iran in Baghdad. A year later, on February 24, 1964, a high-level delegation was sent to Tehran for negotiations for the first time since the beginning of the Iraqi revolution, and in December 1965 contacts were established between Prime Minister Howayda and Iraqi Prime Minister Abdurrahman al-Bazzaz nevertheless no sign of progress toward a settlement was in sight (Parveen, 2006: 19).

As a result of Iran's declaration that the 1937 treaty must be renegotiated based on the thalweg (the median, deep water line) principle in early 1969, the first serious crisis between the two countries erupted. Thereupon, the Baghdad regime declared that Shatt al-Arab is Iraqi territory, so Iranian ships should lower their flags while passing through it, and Iranian naval personnel on board should leave the ships. Ironically, in this tension in 1961, Iran had to take Iraq's demands into account as it had a limited military capacity at that time. However, when the balance of power between the two countries started to change in favor of Iran, this time the Iraqi side had to consider Iran's wishes (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27). Throughout this period, while the republican Iraqi regime(s) were trying to consolidate their power domestically by instrumentalizing regional issues such as the Shatt, the Iranian monarchy was trying to confine the problems that could spread toward Iran and destabilize the regime in Tehran within Iraqi territory, by provoking the historical problems of Iraq. Accordingly, both countries aimed to preserve their regimes by securitizing their relations with each other.

In addition to the Shatt al-Arab issue, which was a chronic crisis area between the two countries, a new crisis area emerged with Iran's claim on the Tunb and Abu Musa islands in the Gulf. After the British announced that they would begin to withdraw from the Gulf, Iran's pro-active engagement in the region increased markedly. In this context, since the issue of the Strait of Hormuz was a kind of the lifeblood of the Iranian economy in the modern era, it constituted one of the most important agendas in Iran's security strategy and therefore became the main focus of Iran's foreign policy in this period too. Thus, the security of the Strait of Hormuz, which had a strategic position in the transportation of oil and natural gas to international markets, had become more important than ever for Iran. For this reason, it was essential to seize the three islands, which were key to the security of the Strait of Hormuz and control of this region. As a matter of fact, before the British army's total departure, the Iranian military seized the islands in 1971 (Mazrouei, 2015: 1-32). Thus,, Iraq and all other Arab states (although some pretended to be) opposed the occupation of the Islands. Subsequently, in line with its self-bestowed leadership, the Iraqi administration, whose regime's main ingredient of legitimacy was pan-Arabism, cut off diplomatic relations with both the invading Iran and Britain, which allowed this invasion. Additionally, although the Iraqi regime tried to get all Arab League countries to cut their relations with Iran, it could not succeed in that. Thereupon, Iraq unilaterally reacted against Iran by deporting thousands of Iraqis of Iranian origin living within its borders from the country and reviving its claim on Khuzestan (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27).

With the Baath Party coming to power alone in Iraq, relations between the two countries became even tenser. By the 1970s, Iran had increased its capacity in terms of material power, and accordingly, with the withdrawal of the British from the region, Tehran had the opportunity to become a regional hegemonic power. For this reason, it had to deal with Iraq, which was an important obstacle both material and ideational means in front of Iran's quest to become a regional power. To this end, Iran supported the coup attempt of a group of military officers against the Baathist regime in Iraq. Furthermore, relations between the two countries deteriorated further when the Baghdad government declared the Iranian ambassador persona non grata and expelled him. More importantly, Iraq also allowed anti-Shah opposition organizations to deploy in the country and to engage in anti-Iranian activities. In response to this step of Iraq, the Tehran administration increased its military, political and economic support to opposition groups against the Iraqi regime, especially the Kurds (Milani, 2006: 564-572). In the 1970s, regional competitions in the Gulf were triggered, in great part, through outside intervention in the domestic politics of neighboring states (Gause, 2010: 34). The most important example of such interventions was the Kurdish problem in Iraq. Following the 1958 revolution the Kurds, and their demand for autonomy, became a persistent problem for Iraqi governments. Having significant indicators that Iraq was unable to resolve its problems with the Kurds, Iran took advantage. Thus, to further exacerbate the internal turmoil in Iraq it started to exploit this advantage by assisting the Iraqi Kurds. Both Iran and Iraqi Kurds were concerned about Iraqi-Egyptian unity negotiations in 1965. After a showdown, the Shah regime gave heavy weapons to the Iraqi Kurds led by Barzani since the mid-1960s. The clashes between the Iraqi army and the Kurds intensified once again, especially after the USA and Israel's efforts to convince Kurds for independence. However, when the policies of the USA and Israel failed, the Tehran government made its military and financial aid to the Kurds much more comprehensive. (Bakhash, 2004: 11-27).

In 1975, the Iraqi government realized that its most important regional rival, Iran, had become a military power in the region as it was backed by the United States and Western countries, but that Iraq itself was still militarily incompetent. Therefore, the Baathist regime realized that fighting both the Kurds directly and Iran indirectly posed a serious threat to the survival of the regime. In the following years, the Baathists revealed that they made a rational choice by concluding that the Iraqi army was in a very weak situation at that time and that they did not have the strength to fight the Iran-backed Kurds. Therefore, for the sake of the Baath regime's security the Iraqi regime had to make the Algiers Agreement with Iran in 1975. (Abdulghani, 2001: 152; Khadduri, 2021). With the agreement, Iran promised to cut its support for the Kurds while resolving the Shatt al-Arab problem by imposing its own terms (Marr, 2012: 152-157). The Algiers Agreement became a major factor to assure the period of calm in Iran-Iraq relations that would last until the Islamic revolution.

The signing of the historic agreement led to short-term cooperation between the two countries. In this new period, with the second man of the Baathist regime Saddam's visit to Iran, a series of agreements were signed between the two countries to develop relations in the economic, commercial and cultural fields, particularly the initiation of direct flights and oil production and prices in OPEC (Milani, 2006: 564-572). In this process, relations developed so much that the Shah administration asked Saddam for some help to deal with the popular movements that threatened him. Ayatollah Khomeini, who came to the fore as the leader of this revolutionary opposition movement, was residing in Najaf, Iraq in 1978. Faced with

threats to his regime, the Shah requested Saddam Hussein to deport Khomeini, and upon this request, Khomeini was expelled from Iraq by Hussein in October 1978 (Milani, 2006: 564-572). Only a few months after his deportation, however, Khomeini returned to Tehran on the success of the revolutionary movement in Iran and established the Islamic Republic of Iran, which thereafter would pose a new Iranian-based threat to the secular Baathist regime. Moreover, this vital threat posed by the Islamic regime in Iran against the secular Baathist regime would lead to the start of the longest war in the modern history of the region. (Karsh, 2002: 6-10).

2.2. Relatively détente Period

Both countries agreed to sign the Algiers Agreement in 1975 within the framework of the steps they took by prioritizing regime security. Since then, Iran and Iraq softened and even improved the bilateral relations for different reasons, where the issue of regime security was at the center. For Iran, a major reason for the need to revive the bilateral relations with Iraq was the intense opposition that the Shah faced due to the practices he tried to implement in domestic politics which he also called the "Iranian Renaissance". Especially imitation of Western culture was at the center of the reactions against these practices (Karsh, 2002: 6-10). In addition, the modernization works in question failed to change the traditional social structure due to its top-down and superficial nature, and the areas of influence and connections within the social structure continued to exist (Ahin, 2010: 85). Shia academics and clergy, led by Morteza Motahhari, Mohammad Beheshti, Morteza Jazayeri, and Mahmud Taleqani, opposed the Westernization efforts by stating that the government should act in accordance with Islam and establish religious institutions and independent financial organizations. In the 1960s and 70s, Shah's actualization of Westernization as being more pro-American led writers such as Ali Shar'iati (Jahanbakhsh, 1997: 201-214) and Jalal Al-e Ahmed (Ramakrishnan, 2010: 110-133) to organize through anti-Westernism. Furthermore, with the participation of Ayatollah Khomeini (Taflıoğlu, 2010: 116-121; Taflıoğlu, 2013: 97-100; Humeyni, 1991) in this process, anti-Westernism has become one of the common points of opposing the Shah. The close relationship of the regime, which Khomeini especially criticized, with Western countries and the reform movements that he called the White Revolution caused an increase in social opposition to the regime.

Considered from the Iraqi perspective, the fact that the Iraqi army had not been modernized and the Soviet Union was lax in meeting the Iraqi army's demands for support prompted the Baath regime to be more cautious (Baram, 2012). At that time, it was not possible for Iraq to fight militarily against Iran, which was receiving intense support from the USA and Western countries in the military and economic fields, especially nuclear energy and thus gaining strength. As a matter of fact, in a statement he made about why he signed an agreement with Iran, Saddam stated that Iraq did not have the power to maintain the conditions of the period. According to him, making a deal with Iran was necessary in order to suppress the uprising in the north of the country and to ensure the survival of the regime inside. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the main dynamic that determined the Saddam regime's relations with Iran was the security of the regime inside through the military balance between the two countries. This balance of forced harmony that emerged after the Algiers Agreement has entered a new phase with the visit of Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Howayda to Iraq and then Saddam Hussein to Tehran and the signing of 6 agreements between the two countries in July 1977. These agreements included issues such as trade and

cultural relations, freedom to travel for Iranian Shiites visiting holy places in Iraq, agriculture and fishing, the connection of railways, and coordination against "destructive" activities (Amin, 1982: 167-188).

However, this agreement had created a situation that the Shah's opponents also benefited from. In this way, Shiite dissidents had the opportunity to visit Ayatollah Khomeini, who was deported in 1963 and lived in Najaf, Iraq. In this regard, in his statements, Richard Helms, the US ambassador to Iran at that time, stated that first, the Algiers Agreement in 1975 and then the agreement signed between the two countries in 1977 paved the way for the interaction of the Pahlavi opponents with Khomeini. The fact that Khomeini's tapes were brought to Iran and listened in mosques and the rapid dissemination of this situation among the opposition had a positive contribution to the organization of the opposition against the Shah regime (Cooper, 2011: 239). Due to the rapprochement between the two countries and therefore in order not to harm the good relationships established with the Shah regime, Saddam Hussein preferred to deport Khomeini. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this situation was not just due to rapprochement between the two countries but also, since the Saddam administration realized that the views backed by Khomeini posed a greater danger to the security of his regime, he deported Khomeini. Because the Shiites constituted the majority of the Iraqi population, which showed that the Khomeini ideology had the potential to be adopted in Iraq. As a result, due to the ideology he advocated, Khomeini was perceived as an existential threat by both the secular Iraqi regime and the Shah's monarchic regime, and thus he became unwanted in both countries (Milani, 2012: 390).

3. From Détente to Confrontation (1979-1988): Islamist Regime in Iran and Clash of Rival Revisionisms

In January 1979, the Shah was forced to leave Iran. In February, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from France to Iran and started to build a new regime. Iraq sent a congratulatory telegram to the Ayatollah on February 13, 1979. Iran did not respond to this Iraqi gesture and relations between the two countries deteriorated again in mid-1979. More critically, when Iran renewed its claims on Bahrain and called on the Shiite people of the Gulf region to rise against their rulers, Iraq with a large Shiite population was alarmed. In July 1979 Iraqi president, Ahmed Hasan Al-Bakr was replaced by Saddam Hussein, his vice president, and Saddam Hussein became the undisputed ruler of Iraq by silencing the opposition in the Baath Party. The rise of Saddam as the undisputed leader and the Islamist revisionism in Iran complicated the bilateral relations between the two countries and brought domestic concerns to the top agenda of foreign policymaking since both revisionist states tried to threaten and to question the domestic legitimacy and regime security of each other (Moghaddam, 2006: 23; Nelson, 2018: 246-266).

Hereby, the Baghdad regime perceived a direct threat from Tehran as Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr called for fierce opposition to the regime while under house arrest in 1979. Upon this call, the leading Shiite political groups in Iraq announced the establishment of the "Islamic Liberation Movement", which was ready to use any means to overthrow the Baathist regime. In October 1979, the Organization of Iraqi Ulema declared its support for violence against the government, and Al-Da'wa, Iraq's main Shiite party, formed a military wing by the end of the year (Legrenzi and Gause, 2016: 308). In that period, especially Khomeini's policy to export the anti-secular regime was one of Saddam's main concerns. Because Iraq was a country governed by a secular and Pan-Arab regime dominated by Sunnis who were the

minority in Iraq while the Shiites made up the majority of the population. In September 1979, Saddam Hussein met with the Iranian delegation at the Non-Aligned Conference he attended in Cuba and brought up the status of the Shatt al-Arab River. In response to the statement made by Iran that they did not want war as neighboring states, Saddam Hussein asked how they would solve their problems with Iran. In addition, Hussein said that Iran seized the Iraqi lands and that Iran controlled the Shatt al-Arab which was a great river that belonged to Iraq. He stated that the reason for negotiating this issue with Iran on that platform was that Iran was weak at that time, otherwise Iran would not open this issue to the discussion because it was relatively stronger than Iraq (Bowden, 2002).

In this context, Saddam, who stated that such a chance would come once in a century, stated that they had an opportunity to seize the lands that belong to them (Bowden, 2002). There were three important reasons behind why Saddam Hussein acted aggressively in this period. Firstly, in the early 1970s, the Baath had difficulties in maintaining both territorial integrity and the continuity of the regime, as it was militarily weak against Iran. However, this military weakness was compensated especially thanks to military cooperation with the Soviet Union. Iraq was now economically and militarily stronger and therefore could carry out military operations. Secondly, the overthrow of the Shah regime and its replacement by a regime that adopted the Shiite Islamist political culture had prompted the Iraqi administration to take countermeasures. Because the new regime in Tehran was pursuing policies to export the regime and was making propaganda that the governments in the region should be overthrown. The third was the assumption that the purge of the generals in the army after the revolution in Iran (Pirinççi, 2015: 231-245) and the arms embargo imposed by the US after the embassy assault weakened the Iranian army. As a consequence, the overthrow of the Shah in Iran increased the possibilities for Saddam to materialize his objectives.

Another factor that motivated Saddam Hussein's aggressive attitude against Iran was the assassination attempt of the Islamic Dawa Party which was believed to be supported by Iran in April 1980, first against Tariq Aziz, and then the Iraqi Minister of Culture and Information. After the attack that injured Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein referred to the Battle of Qadisiyah[6] in his speech at al-Mustansiriyyah University in Baghdad. Saddam attributed the incident to the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran and said that "on behalf of Iraqis and Arabs in everywhere they will fight with Iran like in Al-Qadisiyah War (Lewantal, 2014: 893). In response to these actions, the Iraqi government executed Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and began to expel tens of thousands of Iraqi Shiites of Iranian origin from the country. These events were the last straw for Saddam Hussein. In the mid-1980s, he began to threaten Iran with the most open words: "We are not the kind of people to bow to Khomeini. He bet to bend us and we bet to bend him. We'll see who bends the other". Upon realizing that Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr had been executed, Ayatollah Khomeini accused the Baath of starting a "war against Islam" and repeated his calls to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi army to overthrow the regime. (Hiro 1991: 35).

Thereupon, the Baghdad administration expelled thousands of Iraqi Shiites to Iran and arrested many Dawa members (Wilson Center, 1982). Moreover, in October 1979, Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Iran and branded the revolution "un-Islamic". On September 17,

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[6] It was a war between the Arab Muslim army and the Sassanian Empire (Iran) army in the early periods of Islam. Although much more numerous, the Sassanian army, led by Rustam Farrokhzad, had lost to the Muslim Arabs. This victory was also the key to the conquest of Iraq.

1980, Saddam declared the Algiers Treaty was null and void thus claiming that all of Shatt al-Arab returned to Iraq. Consequently, the process in which such radical steps were taken reached its peak with the start of the Iran-Iraq War on September 22, 1980. Following this 8-year Gulf war, no side managed to defeat each other and two rival revisionist regimes survived. However, while the Iranian regime consolidated its domestic power and averted the Iraq-led regional attacks Iraq faced powerful domestic problems as a result of its failure the realization of the stated goals like the end of the Iranian regime. Furthermore, following its invasion of Kuwait in 1990 this time Saddam regime lost its regional support from the Gulf monarchies which mostly stood with the Saddam-led Baathist regime during the Iraq-Iran war and also Saddam confronted international isolation and United Nations-led (UN) heavy embargoes. Therefore, during this rivalry between two revisionist systems both countries tried to intervene in the domestic politics of each other and increasing enmity finally led to a regional zero-sum war. Afterwards, under this international isolation and growing USA's military and political interference in Iraq Saddam's regime was heavily weakened and, later, was invaded by USA-led international coalition which caused the end of the Saddam-led Baathist regime in Iraq in 2003.

4. Conclusion

This study examines Iran-Iraq relations between 1958 and 1988. The study argues that the issue of regime security which importantly benefited from the arguments improved by the neoclassical realism sits at the center of the factors that determine the foreign policies of the parties towards each other in this period and indicates the interplay between the internal and external relations. In this study, we argue that foreign policy attitudes and decisions of Iran and Iraq towards each other are best explained by both regimes' concerns about their own hold on power domestically, and how regional events could affect their own security at home. For this reason, political elites, who held the decision-making mechanisms, shaped their domestic and foreign policies by using political and military tools in order not to lose their position in power.

They perceived threats primarily through the lens of regime security rather than the more traditional balance of power assessments, but the latter also was present in their calculations. Because of the significance and relevance of transnational identities in the region, threats to regime security in these countries are particularly salient for the rulers. The most prominent and powerful regional identities that can be manipulated by neighboring states are ethnic identities with Arab and Kurdish appearances and Muslim identity with sectarian Sunni and Shiite forms. Rulers in both countries had to deal not only with traditional threats to power but more with ideological threats that their neighbors could use to provoke challenges to them within their own sovereignty domains, as neighboring rulers could use these identity issues to mobilize support across state borders.

Considering these realities the tense and, subsequently, confrontational relations between two critical regional actors during the mentioned period reveal the gradual deterioration of the ties over time as a result of the emergent revisionism in two capitals. Following the rise of nationalist republican revisionism in Iraq in 1958, the Iranian monarchical regime perceived Iraqi policies as the basic concern for its domestic legitimacy and survival and formulated the anti-western nationalist republican support for several Iranian opposition groups as an indication of growing enmity. These relations further deteriorated in the wake of the Islamist (Shia) revolution in Iran and the rise of Saddam

Hussein in Iraq. Both rival revisionist states expectedly perceived the other policies as the most destabilizing factor for their regime security and domestic legitimacy thus adjusting their regional relations and foreign policies to contain and, if possible, to eliminate these challenges. And eventually, both revisionist countries engaged in a long and endless war between 1980-1988 as a direct consequence of the deepening regime considerations. In other words, the foreign policy and mutual threat perception of both countries was formulated within the framework of the strategies to safeguard their hold on power. In a nutshell, these realities underscore that in contrast to supposed inside/outside distinction there is a mutual and intensive interaction between two realms as reflected in the impact of regime security (domestic) concerns on the external relations of Iraq and Iran and their shifting threat perceptions during the given period.

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