# THE US AND IRAQI KURDS[i]
## RELATIONS BETWEEN 1945 AND 2011: AN INTEREST-BASED POLICY

## 1945 VE 2011 YILLARI ARASINDA ABD VE IRAKLI KÜRTLERİN İLİŞKİLERİ: ÇIKAR EKSENLİ BİR POLİTİKA

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## Abstract

Although the US and Iraq relations have vital importance for the Middle East, little is known about relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds. Iraqi Kurds live in the Northern area of Iraq and throughout history, they have had an impact on both Iraq and the region. This article focuses on the US and Iraqi Kurds' relations from the beginning to Arab Spring with the perspective of realism. Relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds were examined within three time periods, characterized by touchstone events in history, namely the Second World War, the Gulf War and the Iraq War. The relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds contribute considerably to our understanding of the balance of politics at the micro level in Iraq and the macro level in the region. This study investigates whether Iraqi Kurds can be gainful or the US. As a result, because of the US' interest-based realism, the US is always gainful.

***Keywords:** The US, Iraqi Kurds, Northern Iraq, Realism, Interest-Based Policy,*

## Öz

ABD ve Irak arasındaki ilişkiler, Ortadoğu için hayati bir öneme sahip olmasına rağmen, ABD ve Iraklı Kürtler arasındaki ilişkilerin çok azı bilinmektedir. Iraklı Kürtler, Irak'ın kuzey bölgesinde yaşamaktadır ve tarih boyunca, hem Irak hem de bölge üzerinde bir etkiye sahip olmuşlardır. Bu makale, başlangıcından Arap Baharı'na kadar realizm perspektifinden ABD ve Irak Kürtlerinin ilişkilerine odaklanmaktadır. ABD ve Iraklı Kürtler arasındaki ilişkiler, İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Körfez Savaşı ve Irak Savaşı gibi tarihi olaylarla karakterize edilen üç zaman aralığında incelenmiştir. ABD ve Iraklı Kürtler arasındaki ilişkiler, mikro düzeyde Irak'taki ve makro düzeyde bölgedeki siyasi dengeyi anlamamıza büyük katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Iraklı Kürtlerin, mi yoksa ABD'nin mi kazançlı çıktığını incelemektedir. Sonuç olarak, ABD'nin çıkar eksenli realizmi nedeniyle ABD, her zaman kazançlı çıkmaktadır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** ABD, Iraklı Kürtler, Kuzey Irak, Realizm, Çıkar Eksenli Politika,*

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[i] The term 'Iraqi Kurds' will be used to define Iraqi people whose ethnicity is Kurd and who lives in the northern area of Iraq.

# GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

## Çalışmanın Amacı

Bu çalışma, ABD ve Iraklı Kürtlerin ilişkilerini ne tür bir zeminde inşa ettiklerini araştırmaktadır.

## Araştırma Soruları

ABD ve Iraklı Kürtlerin ilişkileri dostane bir ilişki midir? ABD'nin Iraklı Kürtler ile ilişkisi Irak Merkezi Yönetimi arasındaki ilişkilerden etkilenmekte midir? ABD ve Iraklı Kürtlerin ilişkiler bölgesel düzeyde ne gibi etkilere neden olmaktadır? İsrail, ABD ve Iraklı Kürtlerin arasındaki ilişkide nasıl bir etkiye sahiptir? ABD, Iraklı Kürtlerin bağımsız bir devlet olmalarını istemekte midir? Iraklı Kürtler, ABD ile niçin devamlı ortak hareket etmek istemektedir? Uzun süren ilişkilere rağmen kim kazançlıdır?

## Literatür Araştırması

Gerek ulusal gerekse de uluslararası literatüre bakıldığında genellikle devletler arasındaki ilişkileri inceleyen çalışmalar mevcuttur. Devletlerin herhangi bir etnik grupla olan ilişkisini inceleyen çalışmalar yok denecek kadar azdır. Devletlerin etnik gruplarla olan ilişkilerini inceleyen çalışmalar, çoğunlukla düşünce kuruluşları tarafından hazırlanan raporlardan oluşmaktadır. ABD ile Iraklı Kürtlerin ilişkisinde de benzer bir durum söz konusudur. Dolayısıyla ABD'nin tüm Orta Doğu ülkeleriyle ilişkilerini inceleyen çok sayıda çalışma olmasına rağmen Iraklı Kürtlerle ilişkilerini inceleyen çalışmalar her zaman ihmal edilmiştir. Oysa bölgeyi anlayabilmek için bu ilişkiyi bilmek oldukça elzemdir.

## Yöntem

Uluslararası ilişkiler teorileri, genellikle devletler üzerine olan çalışmalarda başvurulmaktadır. Örneğin, ABD ile Irak'ın ilişkilerini inceleyen teorik çalışmalar mevcuttur ve bir devletin diğer bir devletle olan ilişkisini incelemek için tercih edilir. Ancak bu çalışmada bir devletin, yani ABD'nin, bir etnik grupla, yani Iraklı Kürtler ile, ilişkileri realizme dayanılarak incelenmektedir. Buradaki tehlike doğal olarak devlet olduğu için ABD'nin Iraklı Kürtlerle ilişkisinde daima hegemon konumda olarak hareket etmesidir. Zaten ABD'nin hegemon bir konumda hareket etmesi, kendi çıkarlarından taviz vermemesine ve tam bir çıkar eksenli politikalar gütmesine neden olmuştur. Dolayısıyla çalışmanın teorik zemini realizme dayandırılmıştır. Teorik zeminin ardından ise çalışma ABD ve Iraklı Kürtlerin 1945-2011 yılları arasındaki ilişkilerini üç döneme ayırarak ele almaktadır. İlk dönem, Soğuk Savaş dönemini, ikinci dönem, Körfez Savaşı ile Irak Savaşı arasındaki dönemi, üçüncü dönem ise Irak Savaşı ile Arap baharı arasındaki dönemi ele almaktadır. Arap Baharı'ndan sonraki süreç, çalışmanın boyutunu aşacağından dolayı kasıtlı olarak dışarıda tutulmuştur. Zira Arap Baharı'ndan sonraki süreç ayrı bir çalışmanın konusu olarak incelenmelidir.

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**Sonuç ve Değerlendirme**

Bulgu, hissedar aktivizmi ile KSS katılımı arasında pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Bir başka hipotez, oy haklarının gücü ve hissedarlar ve şirketler arasındaki kurumsal diyalog, şirketlerin KSS gündeminde yer almasında etkili yöntemler olarak görülmektedir.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Realism is one of the most frequently used theories to explain international relations. It is also pointless to talk about other theories without realism. Realism is a theory that goes back to Thucydides and Sun Tzu as philosophical thought. Realism, which is carried to modern times by Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, is based on the idea that human nature is selfish, self-interested and evil in its essence (Hobbes, 1987: 24). As a result of human nature being selfish, beneficent and evil, the state of nature characterizes a situation in which people are at war with each other (Hobbes, 2016: 101). In realism, with the moving from human nature, it is believed that states have also this nature.

When talking about realism, three meanings, in general, are described. First one is realism as a broad tradition; the second one is the realism which is divided into schools such as classical realism and neorealism; the third one is the realism which is specific theories such as the balance of power, the security dilemma (Wohlforth, 2008: 131.). So to speak, there is no single realism. In this study, the US and Iraqi Kurds relations will be examined with the perspective of general realist thought and specific realist theories like the balance of power and hegemonic stability theory.

Realism is "a combination of an often loosely related set of beliefs, a way of thinking and responding, a sometimes desperate desire to preach to the uncomprehending heathen, and a pantheon of canonical exemplars or saints whose very diverse intellectual and practical lives are seen to embody the virtues of the religion" (Coady, 2005: 122). There is also other definition of realism. But it has to be mentioned that four basic points which all realism schools or definitions of realism have in common. First one is groupism. Because "politics takes place within and between groups" (Wohlforth, 2008: 133). People have established states only because they can survive in the group. Although realism is generally a theory that is sought among states, this study will also be used to explain the relationship between a state and an ethnic group. Second one is egoism. As mentioned earlier, human nature is moving in the direction of interest and is selfish in this sense. Because the groups are also people-managed, human nature also manifests itself in the group and in the state (Wohlforth, 2008: 133). Third one is anarchy. The absence of any authority in international relations causes anarchy. (Wohlforth, 2008: 133). Because all states and groups use their power to maximize their own interests. Fourth one is power politics. "The intersection of groupism and egoism in an environment of anarchy makes international relations, regrettably, largely a politics of power and security" (Wohlforth, 2008: 133). States or groups use their power either make social influence or control resources (Wohlforth, 2008: 133). Some of the realist schools bring anarchy to the fore, while others bring power to the fore. Some are highlighting the group while others are highlighting the interest. In other words, points pointed out from the four mentioned subjects vary according to the realistic schools. This study suggests that four points must be taken into account in order to explain the relations of the US and Iraqi Kurds. However if we have to include it in a realistic school, this will be classical realism. Because the relations of the US and Iraqi Kurds are predominantly in the direction of power and interest. In particular, this relations is shaped by balance of

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power theory and hegemonic stability theory. The US sees the Iraqi Kurds as an element of balance that they can use whenever they want by using their power. In addition, the US wants to dominate the resources in the region by using the hegemonic dominance in the international system.

Realism has risen to the position of a theory often used to explain relations between states after the Second World War. While issues of national security in realism are called high politics, other issues such as commercial are called low politics (Keohane & Nye, 2012: 19). Today, states apply to realism as a low political tool in the direction of their national interests. For this reason, low policies based on the interests are particularly adapted to penetrate commercial areas.

Relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds can be examined within three periods. The first period is between the 1950s and 1990 when the Gulf War started. The second period is between 1990 and 2003 when the US - Iraq War broke out. The third period is from 2003 to Arab Spring. Although the time spanning the Arab Spring and ISIS actions can be considered a fourth period during which to examine the US-Iraqi Kurd relations, this article focuses mainly on general developments between the US and Iraqi Kurds, rather than on current issues following the Arab Spring.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, Middle East has been one of the most important issue of US foreign policy due to economic, military, geostrategic and political considerations (Dodge, 2012: 198-205). While the USA is an independent state, the decision-making mechanisms have been influenced by various actors in the historical process. The United States has been highly influenced by lobbying and regional countries in determining its policy towards the Middle East in general and its policy towards the Iraqi Kurds in particular. In this context, it is necessary to mention Israel which is engaged in the most effective lobbying on the Middle East. Israel, as a result of its powerful lobbying activities, is very effective in determining the US policy towards the Middle East and thus Iraqi Kurds.

[1] In fact, Israel's relations with Iraqi Kurds have historical ties. Jews and Iraqi Kurds lived together in the northern Iraq region, but after the establishment of Israel, the majority of Jews went to Israel. (Minasian, 2007: 16-19). In addition, when determining policy towards the Middle East and Iraqi Kurds, the US has to take into account Turkey, Iran and Iraq Central Government (ICG).

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the US and Iraqi Kurds between the Second World War to the Arab Spring from the perspective of realism. The research question of this work is that "how have the relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the U.S. evolved from the Cold War up until Arab Spring?" While searching for the answer to this question, the ups and downs in their relations and landmark events between these two actors are mentioned.

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[1] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt's famous book The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy clearly illustrates this situation. However, Israel's role in the US decision-making mechanism is discussed in a superficial manner, as it may be the subject of a separate article. For more information see: Mearsheimer J. J. and Walt S. M. (2007), *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy,* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

## 2. THE US – IRAQI KURDS RELATIONS DURING COLD WAR

Relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds date back to the end of the Second World War. After the First World War, the US returned to an isolation policy. By adopting this policy, the US chose not to involve themselves in any conflict outside of the homeland, especially in Europe and the Middle East. However, things changed after Second World War when the US abandoned this isolation policy and became actively involved in world affairs, a move which made it clear that the US would indeed be an active player in world affairs, especially in the Middle East. Before this point, the US was not a major actor in Europe and the Middle East. After the Second World War, however, the US began to fill the vacuum of power created by the departure of England from the Middle East. So, the period after the Second World War marked the beginning of relations between the US and Iraq, along with Iraqi Kurds. The Middle East policy of the US during this period was formed by the effect of the Cold War.

After the Second World War, the US adopted new foreign policies that significantly affected the Middle East. These policies were adopted for a number of reasons. First, the rich oil reserves of Middle Eastern countries, especially Iraq caught the attention of the US (Jones, 2012: 208). Second, given its pivotal role in the Second World War, the Middle East had proven to be of considerable geostrategic importance (Persson, 1998: 71). The third and most important reason for the US' active involvement in international affairs involved the need to limit USSR expansionism (Salep, 2012: 337-338; also see, Erkan, 2010: 183-194). For these reasons, the US approached world affairs on a general level in the Middle East, and on a specific level in Iraq and with Iraqi Kurds. General explanations of the US policies and its approaches to the events were mentioned above. During this period, two significant developments influenced the US policy in the Middle East. The first development was a vacuum of power caused by the departure of England from Iraq. The US started to fill this vacuum of power. The second development was Iraq's liberation from the British mandate. So, the US began to establish relations with the Iraqi Central Government (ICG) during the Cold War.

With the beginning of the Cold War, the US had no direct involvement with the Kurdish movement until after the 1958 coup in Iraq' – or something to that effect (Erkmen, 2008: 74). There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, the US did not want to risk losing its allies, such as Turkey and Iran. If the US had had relations with Iraqi Kurds, it would most probably have lost its allies at the beginning of the Cold War. Secondly, at the beginning of the Cold War, the US did not want to lose Iraq and its administration, for Iraq was very important to the US in the region. It was too risky for the US to advocate any threat to the integrity of Iraq (see, Hahn, 2012). Thirdly, the US regarded Kurdish movements as pro-USSR because of the Mahabad Kurdish Republic in Iran and Mullah Mustafa Barzani's actions in Northern Iraq (Kutschera, 2001: 232; also see, Westermann, 1946: 675-686). The US confirmed the accuracy of its assessment about Kurds when Mullah Mustafa Barzani escaped to the USSR after the collapse of the Mahabad Kurdish Republic (Eller, 1999: 166). In light of these developments, the US considered the Kurdish movement to be a pro-USSR one. However, Kurds were

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willing to work with the US and other Western countries because of the USSR's indifference to Kurds following the collapse of the Mahabad Kurdish Republic. Nevertheless, since the US did not want to lose its allies or its position in Iraq, and considering the conclusion that the Kurds represented a pro-USSR movement, the US did not establish any relations with Iraqi Kurds until the 1958 coup in Iraq. So, we can say that the 1958 coup is the first turning point in relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds.

In 1958, the monarchy in Iraq collapsed as a result of the coup. While few changes were made in domestic politics, much was changed in foreign politics. With the establishment of a republic in Iraq and the accompanying new government, Iraq left the Baghdad Pact, started to establish close relations with the USSR, nationalized petrol companies, etc. In general, the US–Iraq relations started to deteriorate. To prevent further deterioration, the US made a number of operational initiatives (Becker, 2003: 20-21). Until 1975, when Iraq and Iran made an agreement about Shatt al-Arab, the US and Iran's relations with Iraq were not good and Iraqi Kurds were just a pawn for the US and Iran.

Although relations between the US and Iraq worsened following the 1958 coup, the US did not want to support Iraqi Kurds (Erkmen, 2008: 80) because of the three previously mentioned reasons. Also, reports about Iraq and Iraqi Kurds made by the US officials advised against supporting Iraqi Kurds since it was believed that supporting Iraqi Kurds would lead to the collapse of Iraq's integrity, along with that of other the US allies, such as Turkey and Iran. Another crucial reason for the American reluctance to support Iraqi Kurds was that Iraq would most likely have established closer relations with the USSR (Office of the Historian, 1963), a move which would work directly against the US attempts to limit Soviet expansion. Also, reports suggested that the problems between Iraq and Iraqi Kurds were domestic ones, in which the US should not intervene (Office of the Historian, 1966). In light of these reports, the US did not intervene in relations between Iraq and Iraqi Kurds until the late 1960s.

In 1969, however, the US indirectly intervened in relations between Iraq and Iraqi Kurds, a decision that was hugely influenced by Israel and Iran. Israel directly supported Iraqi Kurds' attempts to weaken Iraq, its main rival in the region. Iran also supported Iraqi Kurds because, after the 1958 coup, relations between Iraq and Iran had deteriorated because of the Shatt al-Arab issue. Specifically, Iraq had suspended the Shatt al-Arab agreement, while Iran's main aim was to regain the privileges related to Shatt al-Arab. So, Iran acted like Israel and supported the Iraqi Kurds' attempt to weaken Iraq in order to compel Iraq into a new agreement on Shatt al-Arab. Iran had the strongest influence on the US' decision to support Iraqi Kurds. Moreover, there were a number of coups in the 1960s in Iraq and the balance of relations changed. Still, though, the US kept its decisive policy of non-intervention, since the US assessments of the situation lead to the conclusion that any intervention would result in closer relations between Iraq and the USSR.

Contrary to the US' hesitance to establish relations, the Iraqi Kurds were eager to enter into close relations with the US. Moreover, Iraqi Kurds wanted to be a strategic ally to the US. The leader of the Iraqi Kurds, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, attempted a number of initiatives aimed at establishing direct or indirect relations with the US. It was clear that the Iraqi Kurds were willing to do whatever the US

wanted, including providing intelligence, returning to the Baghdad Pact, and promising the US' using of Iraq's oil reserves (Kıran, 2006: 44). In spite of all of the Iraqi Kurds' efforts, the US did not abandon its policies of non-intervention until the late 1960s.

The changing conditions in Basra Bay in 1969 necessitated direct cooperation between the US and Iraqi Kurds along with the involvement of Iran in that area. This was the first instance in which the US provided direct aid to Iraqi Kurds, which involved just sending advisers to the Iraqi Kurds (Yavuz, 1993: 95). In 1972, Iraq and the USSR signed the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement. This agreement was the second turning point for the US because, after this agreement, the US started to give arms and money to Iraqi Kurds. There were two main reasons why the US changed its policies towards Iraqi Kurds. Firstly, the US concluded that Iraq was moving in the direction of establishing a USSR base/satellite (Pelletiere, 1984: 167). Secondly, after the 1958 coup, Iraq nationalized oil companies and adopted parallel policies with the USSR on energy (Pelletiere, 1984: 166). Additionally, Iran's encouragement of the US dealings with the Iraqi Kurds and Barzani's willingness to have good relations with the US affected these policy changes. It is important to note, however, that all of these negotiations, and all cooperation and aid involving these parties, were secretly conducted (see Kissinger, 1999: 576-596).

Between 1972 and 1975, the US adopted parallel policies with Iran. In this period, the US and Iraqi Kurds had close relations. Barzani stated that Iraqi Kurds were willing to become the 51$^{st}$ State of the US and provide the US with access to Iraq's oil reserves (Meho & Nehme, 2004: 22). Iraqi Kurds had blind confidence in the US' promises that they would not be abandoned by the US or by Iran (Meho & Nehme, 2004: 22). Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary of State between 1973 and 1977, "worked closely with Israel and Iran to arrange for the Kurds a large shipment of weapons, including antiaircraft and antitank missiles" (Gibson, 2015: 177). In 1975, Iran and Iraq signed the 1975 Algiers Agreement which ended many disputes and conflicts between the two states, including the Shatt al-Arab issue. After signing this agreement, Iran and stopped supporting Iraqi Kurds against the Iraqi government. According to CIA reports, with the withdrawal of support from Iran and also Israel, Iraqi Kurds would have little chance against the ICG (CIA Report, 1975: 2). The US had prepared itself for this situation because nearly all intelligence reports forecasted this outcome. So, the US also changed its policy about Iraqi Kurds to parallel that of Iran. Both the US and Iran utilized Iraqi Kurds as a pawn against the ICG. In fact, the main aim of the US in supporting Iraqi Kurds was to distance the Iraqi government from the USSR and solve the region's problems (Erkmen, 2008: 89). In light of these developments, the ICG started to gain the upper hand in the war against the Iraqi Kurds. The Iraqi Kurds sent messages to the US for help and demanded the US fulfill their pledges. But the US neither replied to these messages nor sent their support to the Iraqi Kurds. Later, when asked about this policy, Henry Kissinger, just replied "covert action should not be confused with missionary work" (Gibson, 2011). So, we can conclude that the US applied a realist theory which is balance of power theory between the years of 1969 and 1975

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against Iraqi Kurds. In this period, the US had good relations with Iraqi Kurds in order to weaken the ICG. The US wanted to balance the ICG with Iraqi Kurds.

After the 1975 Algiers Agreement, the new situation was the US's close relations with the ICG and poor relations with Iraqi Kurds. The US and the ICG started to cooperate after signing this agreement. But this new situation did not last long. There were three important developments that changed the balance of power in the Middle East. Two of them, i.e., the Iranian Revolution and the USSR invasion of Afghanistan, occurred in 1979, and the third, namely the Iraqi-Iranian War, started in 1980. These three important developments changed the US policy towards the ICG and Iraqi Kurds. With the Iranian Revolution, the US lost one of its loyal allies, Iran, and this situation brought the US closer to the ICG. During the invasion of Afghanistan, the US supported the Afghan mujahedin against the USSR (Şahin, 2008: 45). In retaliation for this US policy, the USSR supported the Iraqi Kurds against the Iraqi government and the US. Additionally, with the Iraqi-Iranian War, Iran started to support Iraqi Kurds just like they had done before the 1975 Algiers Agreement (Pelletiere, 1984: 182-185). In this period, the US did not support Iraqi Kurds because the US did not want to lose the ICG. The main development affecting the US policy towards northern Iraq was the start of the Iraq-Iran War. This is because after their revolution, Iran declared, the US to be Great Satan, a force that threatens regimes in the Middle East, and became a much greater threat than Iraq, which was ruled by the Baath party. So, the US swiftly mended relations with the ICG which had started to fight against the Iranian threat. Thus, Washington-Baghdad relations improved in the face of a common enemy, Iran, and, in a sense, an alliance was formed.

The US' support of the ICG took various forms, including cooperation, selling food, and later, providing arms and intelligence. Furthermore, the US was indifferent to the ICG's use of chemical weapons and voted against a proposal that says the ICG used chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds, at the United Nations Security Council (King, 2003). Later, however, the US changed its policy towards the region. The new US policies emphasized protecting oil reserves, becoming more powerful and active in the region and providing stability in the region (Erkmen, 2008: 92). This policy changes can be explained by hegemonic stability theory and basic classical realism thought such as interest. The US uses her hegemonic power to dominate in the Middle East. The result of this US' action is to get benefit and control resources in Iraq.

In the mid-1970s, there were two Kurdish parties. One of them was the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the other one was the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). During the Iraqi-Iranian War, the KDP supported Iran and the PUK supported the ICG. But later, when Iran seized the lead in the war, the KDP and PUK joined forces and supported Iran. The US did not approve of the Iraqi Kurds' approaches to warfare. Since the US and Iran were no longer allies after the Iranian Revolution, the US became indifferent to any actions made by the ICG against Iraqi Kurds. Towards the end of the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam Hussein started the Anfal Operation, which involved systematic attacks that mainly targeted Iraqi Kurds in Northern Iraq. During the Anfal Operation, many villages in Northern Iraq were

destroyed. The Halabja Massacre, which was a part of the Anfal Operation, took place on 16 March 1988 and caused many deaths (Ciment, 1996: 161). This conflict continued until the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990. Relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds remained acrimonious until that time. The US followed dominantly the ICG and even stayed silent on the genocide of Iraqi Kurds, considering them only as a backup plan for achieving their goals in the region.

It is necessary to open a separate paragraph to Israel. Israel has tried to establish effective cooperation with non-Arab groups in the Middle East region with the "peripheral strategy" adopted since the late 1950s (Minasian, 2003: 309). In this context, Israel tried to disrupt the Arab unity by making Iraq and the Arab countries in the region engage with the Kurds. Until the 1975 Algiers Agreement, Israel has consistently provided assistance to Iraqi Kurds, particularly in the military and intelligence fields. However, with this treaty, Israel's aid to Iraqi Kurds via Iran was hampered as it had no direct border with Iraq. With the revolution that took place in Iran, Israel started to use the Iraqi Kurds against Iran in addition to the internal conflicts in Iraq.

## 3. THE US – IRAQI KURDS RELATIONS FROM THE GULF WAR TO THE IRAQ WAR

After the Iraq-Iran War, relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds were not close. In these years, another turning point came to the fore. That turning point was the Gulf War which started with the Iraqi attacks on Kuwait on 2 August 1990. After this war began, the United Nations (UN) started to take actions against Iraq, and the US was the leading actor in these kinds of decisions.

At the beginning of the war, the US wanted the Iraqi Kurds to act against the Iraqi army in Northern Iraq. However, the Iraqi Kurds did not act or rise up against the ICG because they were afraid of the ICG's use of chemical weapons, as in the Anfal Operation against Iraqi Kurds (Entessar, 1992: 50). But, when Iraq was defeated in 1991, Iraqi Kurds rose up against the ICG at the instigation of CIA by a radio channel in Saudi Arabia (Kılıç, 2010: 230). During the uprising, many Jewish organizations engaged in propaganda and lobbying to prevent Iraqi Kurds from being harmed (Minasian, 2007: 25). With the invasion of Kuwait, the good relations between the US and the ICG, which were created during the Iraq-Iran War, deteriorated. The US changed its policy towards the ICG for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Cold War had ended and there was no longer any strong power supporting these states like the USSR did in the Cold War. Secondly, it was no longer possible for the US to use Iraq against Iran after the Iraq-Iran War. Thirdly, the US was troubled by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a move which threatened oil-rich countries in the Gulf which were in close cooperation with the US. So, unlike in the 1980s, Washington saw Saddam's Government as a new threat in the Middle East and started to cooperate with some of the actors in the region against this government. During this process, Northern Iraq, and more specifically, the Iraqi Kurds, was rediscovered by the US. This US action can be explained by hegemonic stability theory. The US used her international power to protect her situation in the region. So the US acted against ICG.

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In a short time during the Gulf War, the Iraqi Kurds seized control of some cities in Northern Iraq. With this accomplishment, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani made speeches proclaiming that they had won the war (Gunter, 1993: 50). But, these speeches were premature because, at the end of the war, Saddam Hussein sent Iraqi troops to Northern Iraq to punish the Iraqi Kurds for their uprising. The US, which encouraged the Iraqi Kurds' uprising, did not take any action against Saddam for this move. The Iraqi Kurds were defeated by Iraqi forces and were once again used by the US as a pawn.

There were at least four factors that contributed to the US' decision not to defend the Iraqi Kurds. Firstly, the US administration feared that any kind of intervention could lead to harmful consequences in domestic politics (Gunter, 2001: 97). Secondly, the US administration thought that if not Saddam won the war, it could lose Iraq entirely (Gunter, 2011: 97). Thirdly, the US concluded that the success of Iraqi Kurds could threaten regional allies of the US such as Turkey and Syria. Since there is also a high Kurdish population in these countries, the US was concerned that this population would rise up against its allies (Gunter, 2011: 97). Fourthly, the US did not want to damage Iraq's integrity because the US believed that if Iraq collapsed, Iran would benefit from this outcome. For these reasons, the US left the Iraqi Kurds to fend for themselves against Saddam. Again the US policy can be explained by the balance of power theory. The US used Iraqi Kurds as a balancing tool in Iraq and region and wanted to protect the balance of power in the region.

Based on the initiatives of the President of Turkey, Turgut Özal, and the Prime Minister of England, John Major, safe heavens were created (Gunter, 1993: 56). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) intervened in the crisis and approved Resolution 687 which passed on 3 April 1991 and contained an armistice. On 5 April 1991, the UNSC also approved Resolution 688, which contained humanitarian aid especially to the people on the borders of Turkey and Syria. Resolution 688 was very important for Iraqi Kurds because once it was adopted, it became possible for Iraqi Kurds to survive in war conditions and to go back home unharmed. Additionally, with Resolution 688, no-fly zones were established in Northern Iraq to protect Iraqi Kurds and also in Southern Iraq to protect the Shiite people. These Resolutions were enacted with Operation Provide Comfort I and II (Ministry of Defense, 2009). The no-fly zones are shown below (Beauchamp, Fisher & Matthews, 2014):

**Figure 1.** No-Fly Zone of Iraq



**Source:** Beauchamp, Z.; Fisher, M. & Matthews, D. (2014). 27 maps that explain the crisis in Iraq. http,//www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-crisis-iraq. (16.08.2016).

The US undertook guardianship of the Iraqi Kurds by means of Operation Provide Comfort placed Turkey to protect safe haven. Thus, the effect of the US in northern Iraq began increasing. This was the first time in history that the Iraqi Kurds had protection against Saddam's government. As a result, relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds started to institutionalize and Iraqi Kurds became the closest ally of the US among all ethnic groups in Iraq. These situations also led Iraqi Kurds, especially the KDP and PUK, to institutionalize their own controlled area in northern Iraq (Uzgel, 2006: 263).

After the war, Saddam removed all official institutions from Northern Iraq and left the Iraqi Kurds to fend for themselves (Stansfield, 2003: 181). Saddam's aim was to punish the Iraqi Kurds for what they had done during wartime. But this goal was frustrated by the fact that western powers supported the Iraqi Kurds in the establishment of their own system of government. So Saddam's aim to punish Iraqi Kurds by removing official institution led to Iraqi Kurds' building their own system of government and this result was just a coincidence (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004: 172).

After the war, the US adopted a Dual Containment Policy aimed at isolating Iraq and Iran from the world (Demir, 2007: 198). The policy was foregrounded by Martin Indyk on 18 May 1993, who emphasized that the US policy was to eliminate the Iraqi regime, in other words, Saddam's government (Özdağ, 1999: 110). In actuality, though, the US did not want to damage Iraq's integrity. Their aim was to design a less powerful and less dangerous Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds, however, had the specific aim of separating from Iraq. Although the aims of the US and Iraqi Kurds were different, *de facto* situation in

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Iraq was acceptable for both sides at the time. With the adoption of the Dual Containment policy, the importance of Iraqi Kurds increased in the eyes of the US, who used every minority and actor in Iraq and Iran to weaken the central government of these two states. In Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds were the most powerful of these actors. Many states, with encouragement from the US, began implementing an embargo against Iraq. However, Turkey and Syria worked against this embargo because of the numerous trade agreements that existed between these countries and Iraq. So, Turkey, Syria, and Iran wanted to reintegrate Iraq into the international community because of their economic loss and *de facto* situation in northern Iraq (Sever, 2000: 350). Upon pressure from the international community, the US eased embargo conditions in 1996 and later, the international community wanted the embargo to be lifted entirely (Sever, 2000: 350). These points highlight some of the key obstacles to this embargo. Firstly, states which had trade relations with Iraq wanted the embargo to be lifted because of the economic loss they faced. Secondly, neighboring states, especially those that were not satisfied with Saddam losing power over Iraqi Kurds and the subsequent strengthening of Iraqi Kurds, wanted to reintegrate Iraq into the international community. Thirdly, the cooperation of Baghdad and the KDP in 1996 showed the impossibility of the Dual Containment policy (Sever, 2000: 354). So, in 1996, this policy was steadily moving closer to abandonment.

Some disputes and clashes arose between the KDP and PUK which greatly concerned the US, which wanted to use the Iraqi Kurds against Saddam's government within the framework of the Dual Containment policy. To reconcile the KDP and PUK, the US tried to mediate between both sides on 27 July 1995 in Lisbon, but an agreement could not be reached. Following this attempt, the US again brought the KDP and PUK together, this time in Dublin in August 1995. One of the neighboring states, Turkey, participated as an observer in the Dublin process. Despite the US efforts to reconcile the KDP and PUK, terms acceptable to both parties could not be established (Uzgel, 2006: 264). There were similar kinds of meetings in the following months, each unsuccessful. However, on 11 October 1995, the KDP and PUK announced that they had reached an agreement on some points (Özdağ, 1996: 100). While these negotiations were going on, clashes erupted from time to time and Iran began strengthening its position in northern Iraq.

In August 1996, with support from Iran, the PUK took control of Erbil. In September 1996, the KDP and Saddam acted together in retaliation. The KDP gave many supporters of the PUK to Saddam's forces in Erbil (Kutschera, 1996: 8). The US, who at that time was bombing the southern area of Iraq, did not intervene in this development (Arı, 2007: 474) because they wanted to prevent Iran from strengthening in northern Iraq. With the help of Saddam's forces, the KDP took control of Erbil, and soon after, they took control of Sulaymaniyah which was a known PUK stronghold. Many PUK supporters fled to Iran. In the meantime, 6700 Iraqi Kurds were sent to Guam, a Pacific island belonging to the US (Uzgel, 2006: 265). These Iraqi Kurds had been working for the US, i.e., the CIA in northern Iraq.

After ongoing negotiations and with the Iranian threat weakened, the US wanted to ensure continued unity between the KDP and PUK and to use this unity against Saddam. So, the Ankara process began in October 1996, when Turkey, the US, England, the KDP, the PUK and the Turkmens came together in Ankara. Four meetings were held in there between October 1996 and May 1997. Unfortunately, though, these parties could not establish any agreements. The US was not satisfied with this outcome, so, they kept these initiatives going. In September 1998, the KDP and PUK met in Washington and agreed on some issues (Shenon, 1998) and signed the Washington Agreement on 17 October 1998. The Washington Agreement aimed to stop clashes, start a normalization period, establish elections etc. (Özkan, 2004: 310-311). The main goal of the US was to reunite the Iraqi Kurds against Saddam Hussein, but the US could not achieve this goal at all because after signing the Washington Agreement, the KDP started to establish their own government in Erbil and PUK started to establish their own government in Sulaymaniyah. The US and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) helped this institutionalization process. The NGOs were very helpful in introducing Iraqi Kurds to the international arena (Natali, 2004: 111). This situation continued until the 2003 Iraq War which changed the situation in the region. It has to be mentioned that the US used Iraqi Kurds as a balancing tool again. The US wanted to protect the balance of power and her hegemonic power in Iraq and the region. The map below shows the areas controlled by the KDP and PUK (University of Texas Libraries, 2003):

**Figure 2.** Kurdish Areas of Northern Iraq



**Source:** The University of Texas Libraries. Map of Iraqi Kurdish Areas. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/iraq_kurdish_areas_2003.jpg. (17.08.2016).

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The reasons for these disagreements and fragmentations between the KDP and PUK should be noted. The first reason involved the sociological and ideological distinctions between the KDP and PUK, which were influenced by Northern Iraq's two regions. One of these regions is called the Bahtinan region, where people speak the Kırmanci dialect of Kurdish and support Barzani; the other is called Soran, where people speak the Sorani dialect of Kurdish and support Talabani (Özmen, 1996: 50). These two regions also differ in that they support a different kind of sheik and Tariq, so, we can say that even their way of Islamic life is different. The second reason for the conflicts between the KDP and PUK was the rivalry between their respective leaders, Barzani and Talabani. Massoud Barzani was the son of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, leader of the most powerful tribe in the region and leader of the KDP (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004: 173). Jalal Talabani was a well-known person in the Kurdish movement for many years, a very talented politician and a favorite of the urban people (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004: 173). While people live in mainly urban areas support Talabani, others live in mainly rural areas support Barzani. The third reason for the problem between the KDP and PUK was the disproportionate allocation of resources among the Kurds in Northern Iraq, especially where oil income was concerned. Since the KDP controlled oil-rich areas, they received the lion's share of the income from this resource (Kılıç, 2010: 231). These three main reasons can be seen as the root of the problem between the KDP and PUK.

When George W. Bush was elected President of the US, Barzani, and Talabani wrote him a letter that made clear Iraqi Kurds' willingness to cooperate with the US. In this letter, Barzani and Talabani first mentioned their appreciation of the aid to Iraqi Kurds which the US had been providing since the First Gulf War (Şahin, 2006: 284). Secondly, they expressed their willingness to be part of any intervention against Saddam (Attar, 2004, 292, cited in Şahin, 2006: 285). Thirdly, they requested U.S. protection especially in safe havens (Attar, 2004, 292-293, cited in Şahin, 2006: 285). Fourthly, they wanted some amount of oil income to be sent to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (Attar, 2004: 292-293, cited in Şahin, 2006: 285). Lastly, they reaffirmed their commitment to the Washington Agreement (Attar, 2004: 292-293, cited in Şahin, 2006: 285). The aims of the Iraqi Kurds were to protect the gains that they had made following the First Gulf War and to take advantage of the opportunity to become a natural and mutual ally of the most powerful actor in the world, the US.

In this period, the Iraqi Kurds made two important gains. The first was the establishment of their own institutions, and the second one was to meet governing experience of these institutions through the first gain. Iraqi Kurds achieved from these two gains by means of international support, especially from the US. As previously mentioned, by using the Iraqi Kurds against Saddam's government, labeled by the US as a rogue state, the aim of the US was to render Saddam's government dysfunctional, powerless and harmless. There was a win-win situation in this case. Both sides, Iraqi Kurds, and the US needed each other even though they had different aims. Both of them acted in the direction of their interest.

## 4. THE US – IRAQI KURDS RELATIONS AFTER THE IRAQ WAR

After the 9/11 attack, which took place on 11 September 2001, the US changed its Middle East policy and adopted a Preventive War policy. So, we can say that 9/11 was the fourth turning point in relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds. In Iraq, the US wanted to remove Saddam Hussein, so they started making allies on both the international and regional levels (Şahin, 2006: 284). With this policy, the Iraqi Kurds started to become a natural ally of the US, who needed to gain the support of dissidents of Saddam's government, especially the Iraqi Kurds. The strategic necessity of dissenters' coming together was undeniable, as this would serve to protect them from possible attacks by Saddam and ensure their survival.

Additionally, the Iraqi Kurds wanted some guarantees as they had twice been betrayed after becoming allies with the US, first after signing the 1975 Algiers Agreement and then again during the Gulf War in 1991. During these periods, Iraqi Kurds were used as a pawn by the US and they wanted to avoid this in the upcoming war. So, the Iraqi Kurds wanted some guarantees from the US. Barzani said in a newspaper interview, "First of all, we have to know who the alternative is if there is one. Of course, so far there is no alternative . . . and we don't see one," (Schneider, 2002) and, during an appearance on a TV show Talabani said, "We do not know what will happen . . . we will not enter adventures whose end is unclear" (Schneider, 2002). These statements made by two powerful leaders in northern Iraq show that the Iraqi Kurds were very wary of being deceived for the third time. However, the US and Iraqi Kurds needed each other, since the US wanted to overthrow Saddam and the Iraqi Kurds aimed to protect its de facto situation in northern Iraq. So, talks between the US and Iraqi Kurds continued for some time. During this process, the US sent aid to many of Saddam's dissidents, not just the Iraqi Kurds. When the Iraqi Kurds were convinced of the US commitment to their agreement, they started to trust the US again and actively participated in the US actions in the region. The US had achieved their goal of restoring unity among the Iraqi Kurds, who then established their parliament.

With the establishment of their parliament, the Iraqi Kurds officially reunited on 4 October 2002 and declared unity among Iraqi Kurds, promised not to act against each other, not to aim an independent state etc. (Hürriyet, 2002). The US expected to benefit in a number of ways from bringing Iraqi Kurds together. Firstly, in Iraq, the peshmerga forces of the Iraqi Kurds were well organized and could be used by the US in pursuit of their own interests. Secondly, the US wanted to use the peshmerga and other Kurds as a means of obtaining intelligence in the region. Thirdly, because of Saddam's actions against Iraqi Kurds, the US could use the Iraqi Kurds to legitimize any possible interventions on their part in the region. At the same time, Iraqi Kurds made some demands in return. Firstly, the main aim of the Iraqi Kurds had been, for many years, to establish an independent state. In the past, and now, there have been many obstacles to the achievement of this aim. Conditions in the region are very fickle and many states have had a number of different allies over the years. Still, though, many states wanted to protect the integrity of Iraq including the US, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Secondly, the Iraqi Kurds wanted to get

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rid of Saddam's government. To achieve this aim, it was necessary to be allied with the US. Thirdly, Iraqi Kurds wanted to get revenue from oil resources in the region. This income was necessary to meet the needs of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Meanwhile, a key decision taken by Turkey impacted the US and Iraqi Kurds' need for each other. Specifically, on 1 March 2003, Turkey did not send their troops to fight in the Iraq War, making the Iraqi Kurds the only ally of the US in the northern area of Iraq.

On 20 March 2003, the US-led coalition declared war on Iraq and began to invade Iraq. The US named this war Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Katzman, 2009: 7), also known as the Iraq War and the Second Gulf War. In the Iraq War, the US and Iraqi Kurds acted together in the northern area of Iraq. With the support of the Iraqi Kurds, the US opened the northern front in Iraq (Şahin, 2006: 297). The US sent troops to Northern Iraq with the help of air forces. These troops acted with the Peshmerga and captured Kirkuk in a short time. The Iraqi Kurds plundered Kirkuk and took many actions against the people of the city, especially Turkmens and Arabs, which were fiercely condemned by the regional and international communities. Turkey, a neighboring state of Iraq, was especially vocal in their disapproval of the Iraqi Kurds' actions in the region and started initiatives to end the violence. With these initiatives, Turkey managed to expel the Iraqi Kurds from Kirkuk. The main reason why Kirkuk is important is that it is very rich in oil. According to the 1957 census, the population distribution of Kirkuk consists of 39.8% Turkmens, 35.1% Kurds and 23.8% Arabs (Gunter, 2008: 46). However, especially after the Iraq War, the Kurds pursued an ethnic cleansing policy, especially against the Turkmens and secondly against the Arabs (Gunter, 2008: 45-49). In the 1960s and 1970s, the ICG predicted that Kirkuk's occupy of the Kurds meant that the United States, Israel, and pro-western Iran had taken over the city (Gunter, 2008: 46). The ICG was just wrong at one point in this prediction: Iran's exiting from the Western orbit with the revolution. But it was right about the US and Israel. Also in 2004, Israeli media reported that there was a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, and that the relations were good (Minasian, 2007: 26).

After Saddam's collapse, the US started to establish a new governmental system in Iraq. During this transition process, Iraqi Kurds received many privileges because of their alliance with the US. Iraqi Kurds' goal of overthrowing Saddam and his government was achieved. These developments were especially significant for Iraqi Kurds because of Saddam's actions against them in the past. The Iraqi Kurds became one of the most powerful actors in Iraq. They strengthened their position in Northern Iraq and started to be part of the central government. Being an ally of the US during Iraq War had brought much to the Iraqi Kurds.

During the transition process, the US tasked Jay Gayner, a retired the US General, to reconstruct Iraq. But, at the same time, the US wanted to give authority to the Iraqi people and establish elections as soon as possible. To this end, the Transnational Administration Law (TAL) was adopted on 8 March 2004. The aims of the TAL were to hold elections on 31 January 2005 for a 275 seat transitional National Assembly, to draft a permanent constitution on 15 August 2005 and to hold national elections for a

permanent government on 15 December 2005 (Katzman, 2009: 10). With the TAL, the Iraqi Kurds had finally gained their autonomy. However, it should be noted that although the Iraqi Kurds' main aim was to be an independent state, the US did not support any destabilizing action in Iraq (Katzman & Humud, 2016: 19). During the transitional election, Iraqi Kurds won 75 of the 275 seats in January 2005 and won 53 seats in December 2005, i.e., during the full term election. The terms of the TAL were implemented in 2005, including a constitutional referendum and full-term election. The next full term election was held in 2009. In the following years, relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds continued along the same lines.

On 7 April 2009, Barrack Obama, president of the US, stated that "It is time for us to transition to the Iraqis. They need to take responsibility for their country and for their sovereignty" (The White House, 2009). While establishing new governmental system was taking place in Iraq, the intention of the US was not to leave Iraq to its people. The US wanted to control oil rich areas of Iraq.

The Maliki government acted against the Sunni community, which led to Sunni unrest in Iraq. In the meantime, The Islamic State of Iraq and The Levant (ISIL) also known as ISIS or Daesh rose up against the ICG. ISIS is the so-called Islamic group whose goal is the establishment of a caliphate in Iraq and Syria. In late 2013, ISIS started to capture some of the Iraqi cities. The US did not want to leave Iraq to ISIS and supported the ICG and Iraqi Kurds in their campaigns to stop ISIS from capturing cities.[2]

To do so, the US gave support to the Iraqi Kurds by advising and training the Peshmerga, conducting air strikes against ISIS and giving weapons to the Peshmerga to fight ISIS (Katzman & Humud, 2016: 31). However, it should be noted that the weapons owned by ISIS were produced by Western countries, mainly the US, UK, Russia, China, Germany and France (Amnesty International UK, 2018). When ISIS was in control of the region, it came into its possession. However, at a later date, the necessary weapons were provided to ISIS, especially by the US and Saudi Arabia, and even the EU stated that it should be paid attention to the sale of weapons (O'Connor, 2018).

After the Iraq War, the US and Iraqi Kurds became key partners in Iraq and this partnership was crucial to the success of campaigns against ISIS. In dealing with ISIS, the US gave huge support to the Iraqi Kurds, making them more powerful than ever before. Fight of Turkey, which is one of the major power in the region, against ISIS also needs to be mentioned. According to the UN, Turkey has hosted 3.6 million Syrian refugees and 142 thousand Iraqi refugees (UNHCR, 2019). In order to end terrorism and return these people to their homes, Zeytindali and Peace Spring Operation is organized in Syria (TRT Haber, 2019). Turkey's main purpose here is to create a safe zone in Syria (TRT Haber, 2019).

It should be mentioned once again that all official announcements made by the US reinforced their commitment to protecting Iraq's integrity. So, the independent state which the Iraqi Kurds have been striving for does not seem to be possible at the time being. Also, states in the region, especially

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[2] For more information on ISIS and the US Policy, Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, The Islamic State and the US Policy, CRS Report for Congress, 27.07.2016

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Turkey, oppose the Kurdish independent state and want to protect Iraq's integrity (Hürriyet, 2015). In this period, the US and Iraqi Kurds acted in direction of their interest again. For them, there is a win-win situation again. But when there is no win-win situation, the winner was always the US.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds date back to the end of the Second World War, this relationship has largely been ignored in attempts to understand the region's issues. It is essential to consider all the factors that have an impact on the issues of the region. In order to understand the regional dynamics of today, the Iraqi Kurds' past and current relations with other states, especially with the US, need to receive more careful attention.

Throughout history, the US and Iraqi Kurds have had fluctuating relations, which were influenced by four turning points, mentioned in the above. These were the 1958 Coup in Iraq, the Iraqi government's approach with the USSR in the 1960s, the First Gulf War, and the 9/11 attack. These developments initiated changes in the US policies towards Iraq and Iraqi Kurds. Based on their own interests, at times, the US established alliances with Iraq, and at other times with Iraqi Kurds. Additionally, relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds were also were influenced by the perspective of other states in the region, such as Turkey, Iran, Syria and the ICG. The US tried to balance its relations with the Iraqi Kurds with its relation with Ankara and Baghdad. Between the years of 1945 and 2011, the US' policy can be explained by arguments of classical realism. The US used her power to protect her interest. Specifically, it should be applied two theories which are a balance of power and hegemonic stability. Firstly, the US always wanted to protect the balance of the region. If relations with Iraqi Kurds threatened this balance, the US abandoned Iraqi Kurds. Because the balance of the region makes the US gainful. Secondly, the US wanted to protect her hegemonic power in the region. With this aim, the US, sometimes, used international power and acted with another state to intervene in Iraq. By doing so, the US always protected her interest and became gainful.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Arab Spring changed the balance of politics in the whole region. So, then, it may be possible to add a fifth turning point in the relationship between the US and Iraqi Kurds, namely ISIS affect. Following ISIS's attacks on cities in Iraq, the US intervened in Iraq and needed the Iraqi Kurds to assist in the fight against ISIS. Their mutual cooperation is now observable even in the modern world and is likely to continue along these lines in the future. The historical relations between the US and Iraqi Kurds shed light on the understanding of the alliances that occurred in today's world. The relations after the spring of Arab were not taken into account because of exceeding the size of the study.

The main aim/dream of the Iraqi Kurds has been to establish an independent state. Today, with the help of the US, they are gaining territory in both Iraq and Syria. They want to create a Kurdish corridor to the Mediterranean through the northern border of Iraq and Syria. This territory, which is south of Turkey, is of great interest to Turkey who opposes Kurdish independence. Relations in the

region are very complicated at the moment and, as always, they are very fragile and fickle. To understand what was, and is currently, going on in the region, it is essential to examine the relations among all groups involved in the region. Relations between Iraqi Kurds and the US are a big part of this and should not be overlooked.

To sum up, the answer to the research question is the relations between the two actors have been quite fluctuating. While the US pursues a policy of interest, the Iraqi Kurds have chosen to consent to the US. The Iraqi Kurds have succumbed to the hegemony of the United States. In addition, Israel is quite effective in the relationship between the US and Iraqi Kurds, both with lobbying activities in the US decision-making process and direct military, intelligence, technical etc. support to Iraqi Kurds. Iraqi Kurds see the US as their only chance to survive in the region. However, the US' main aim is to protect its own interest in the region.

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