
Iran in the Era of Raisi: What will change towards Iraqi Kurdistan?

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Introduction

The important question for Kurdistan region is that with the new Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi taking office in Tehran, how that will impact the Iranian policy in Iraq and Kurdistan region?

It's clear that due to the nature of Iranian political system and authority, changing president does not mean complete new internal and foreign policy of Iran.

In Iran-Iraq relations, there are many important different issues that not necessarily will list them all here in this analysis, but at the moment there are certain issues that more important for Kurdistan region on the top is to stop the militia attacks that sometimes under pretext of American presence they launched on Erbil and its surrounding, also stabilize relations with Baghdad is very important. Some of the KRG officials consider more openness towards Iran as solution of these issues. And for Iran the internal power balance in Iraq in general, future of the internal Shia conflict are important. This is to protect its leverage and economic interests and for this reason needs Kurdistan region.

Iranian foreign policy in the era of Raisi

The Iranian foreign minister Mohammed Zavad Zarif in the side meeting of Rohani cabinet said that Iran does not have any ally. Although his statement came during talking about a topic in International relations theory which says in international relations nobody can save other one. But despite that it show reality regarding to Iraq that in the past sometimes Iraq been called by Tehran as one of the capitals of Iran!

In Iraq there will be stronger voices against Iranian leverage, even some of the old Shia ally of Tehran through protection of Iraqi interests discourse they will less like the role of Iran. If Iraq in the long term build balanced relations with US and Iran and open door to Arab and European countries, also if there is stability and its economy booms then will it need Tehran as before? On the base that need to work in order not to lose your ally, now Iran is preparing for the new era in Iraq. Another issue is revival of Taliban in Afghanistan even if not in the short term but in the long term will damage Tehran. Because as Sunni rival will build a wall on the eastern borders of Iran. Therefore Iraq will become more important for the Iranian regional policies.

The Iranian foreign policy is more under supreme leader and IRGC influence and control rather than government. Since 2003 Iran had three Ambassadors in Baghdad which all of them whether openly affiliated with al-Quds force or seen like that. In the past month at least three senior Iranian security officials from intelligence minister to Hussein Taib head of IRGC Intel have visited Iraq and this show how much Iran is keen in Iraq. From this point we have to see the position of KRG for Iran.

Conclusion

Despite general policy related issues the Kurdish question, economy, US-Iran relations, Turkey-Iran, the importance of Kurdistan region position to Iran at the Iraq level is related two short term and long term factors. In the long term Kurdistan region can become a factor to make balance of power inside Iraq, the country that always has potential to become regional rival to Iran again, but this time through power of a Shia-Arab through Najaf seminary Iraq can become second political Shia bloc in the Islamic world.

In the short term, the Kurds are more willing to become part of the internal Shia conflict in Iraq. PUK talks with al-Fatih coalition and KDP with Sadr are indicators of this. If the KDP-Sadr alliance after the elections worked out, this can become a game changer factor in the balance of Shia house and formation of next cabinet, which Iran may not happy with that or want to control it. However as much as we get closer to the early elections and with consideration of the internal PUK situation, KDP particularly and Erbil in general is more important for Iran.

For Kurdistan region, most urgent issue is stop militia groups attacks under pretext of the American presence. The missile and stray drones created big security problem in the region. And this is not only for this region but for others too, as earlier U.S. Central Command boss USMC General McKenzie said " For the first time since the Korean War, we are operating without complete air superiority" [1] according to McKenzie commercially available drones that can be outfitted to drop weapons, is the most "persistent and dangerous" threat to troops. This factor and obscurity of US policy in the region pushed the Kurdistan region to knock the door of Iran to stop the attacks on Erbil.

Indeed the Kurdistan region has to have relation with Iran, but most importantly need to continue in making balanced relations with neighbors, EU and US.

[1] -<https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/21042021>