


Pragmatism in Iraq's Foreign Policy (2005-2023): Features and Consequences

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Abstract

Objective: The attack of the international coalition led by the United States of America on Iraq in 2003 led to the establishment of a new political system based on ethnic divisions in this country. Due to the lack of formation of a powerful government behind these agreements and the approval of the country's constitution in 2005, the country's foreign policy has been affected by various actors. This issue has caused a kind of pragmatism in Iraq's foreign policy. In this regard, the present research seeks to investigate the characteristics and results of this pragmatism in Iraq's foreign policy.

Method: This research has done a scientific investigation of this issue using documentary sources and with a descriptive-analytical approach.

Findings: The authors of this article have come to the conclusion that the pragmatism formed in the behavior of Iraqi politicians based on the opinion of Charles Chao Rong Fua was based on small pragmatism. In this regard, the interests, goals and strategies formed in the foreign policy of this country are also affected by this.

Conclusion: The pursuit of small pragmatism has made the interests, goals and strategies of Iraq's foreign policy to be pursued in order to maintain the survival of the system. In this regard, the interests and objectives of the foreign policy are: getting out of isolation and rebuilding foreign relations, getting rid of territorial occupation, providing security and countering terrorism with the cooperation of foreign actors, providing and developing weapons and military power of the country, revitalizing the oil economy and expanding the routes Energy transfer, provision of needed domestic goods and increase in foreign investment. The foreign policy strategies of this country also include creating a balance between regional and extra-regional powers present in Iraq, mediation, neutrality towards crises and joining alliances and coalitions.

Keywords: Pragmatism, Foreign Policy, New Iraq, Policy Structure.

Article type: Research

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Introduction

This research explores the pragmatic nature of Iraq's foreign policy from 2005 to 2023, a period defined by significant political, economic, and security challenges. The U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and the subsequent restructuring of Iraq's political system created a fragile government, marked by ethnic and sectarian divisions. The adoption of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 formally solidified these divisions, which shaped the direction of Iraq's foreign policy. This study is grounded in Charles Chao-Rong Fua's concept of "small pragmatism," emphasizing the strategic flexibility of political actors navigating structural constraints and security threats. The research aims to answer two main questions: How has pragmatism manifested in Iraq's foreign policy post-2005? What factors have influenced Iraq's foreign strategies, and how have these factors reflected the country's efforts to secure political survival? The hypothesis posits that Iraq's foreign policy has been largely defined by "small pragmatism," allowing Iraqi policymakers to navigate internal and external challenges while prioritizing stability and regime survival.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, combining qualitative research methods and documentary analysis to examine Iraq's foreign policy from 2005 to 2023. The research draws on a range of sources, including official documents, foreign policy reports, academic articles, and key diplomatic events. The study investigates Iraq's domestic political structures, such as government, political parties, and Shiite religious authorities, while also evaluating interactions with major international actors, including the U.S., Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The case study approach examines key events such as Iraq's relations with neighboring countries, the U.S. military presence, the fight against ISIS, and Iraq's energy and economic partnerships. This allows the research to identify patterns in Iraq's foreign policy decisions, driven by both internal fragmentation and external geopolitical pressures.

Results

The findings reveal that Iraq's foreign policy from 2005 to 2023 has been largely characterized by pragmatism, particularly the form of "small pragmatism" defined by Fua. This pragmatic approach is driven by the need for survival amidst internal divisions and external security threats. Iraq's foreign policy has primarily focused on securing international recognition, maintaining national security, rebuilding the economy, and managing relations with regional and global powers. Iraq's foreign policy has been more reactive than proactive. The lack of centralized control, compounded by sectarian divisions and security threats, led to a flexible, opportunistic approach to diplomacy. Iraq has sought pragmatic alliances with both regional powers (such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) and global powers (such as the U.S. and the EU), balancing their

interests while attempting to assert national sovereignty and avoid foreign dominance.

The study identifies several key objectives in Iraq's foreign policy:

Securing International Recognition: Following the U.S. invasion, Iraq worked to re-establish itself on the world stage, rebuilding diplomatic ties with neighboring states, the U.S., and international organizations like the UN.

National Security and Counterterrorism: Given the rise of groups like ISIS, Iraq's foreign policy emphasized cooperation with foreign powers, particularly the U.S. and Iran, to combat terrorism and ensure security.

Economic Revival and Energy Security: Iraq, heavily reliant on oil exports, focused on revitalizing its energy sector, securing energy routes, and attracting foreign investment to rebuild infrastructure.

Mediating Regional Conflicts: Iraq attempted to maintain a neutral stance in regional conflicts, particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia, while seeking to avoid becoming a battleground for proxy wars.

Domestic political factors, including the influence of Shiite religious authorities (marja'iya), political parties, and tribal leaders, have played a crucial role in shaping Iraq's foreign policy. These actors, each with their own ideological and political agendas, have contributed to the fragmentation of Iraq's foreign policy decision-making. For example, the Shiite-led government's ties with Iran have created tensions with Sunni-majority states and the U.S. The persistent issues of corruption, political instability, and weak governance have hindered Iraq's ability to pursue a consistent foreign policy. The prime minister, as the principal decision-maker, has faced challenges in navigating these obstacles, leading to a fragmented policy. Despite these challenges, pragmatic decision-making has enabled Iraq's leaders to maintain strategic alliances with key powers while addressing internal challenges.

The research highlights several key factors that have shaped Iraq's foreign policy:

Domestic Actors: The influence of Shiite authorities, political parties, and tribal leaders has significantly impacted foreign policy, often complicating the decision-making process.

External Powers: Relations with the U.S., Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have played a central role in shaping Iraq's diplomatic strategies.

Security Concerns: Iraq's foreign policy has been shaped by the need to address terrorism, insurgency, and broader regional security issues.

Economic Interests: Iraq has prioritized energy security and economic revival, particularly in the context of its dependence on oil exports.

Geopolitical Balance: Iraq has sought to mediate regional conflicts and maintain neutrality in the face of regional rivalries, notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Iraq's foreign policy from 2005 to 2023 has been heavily shaped by a pragmatic approach, driven by both internal fragmentation and external pressures. The study supports the notion that Iraq's foreign policy is primarily defined by "small pragmatism," focused on securing the political system's survival amidst ongoing security threats and geopolitical instability. The findings show that Iraq's policymakers have prioritized national stability, security, and economic growth, while carefully balancing the interests of regional and global powers. The study also emphasizes the significant role played by domestic political actors—Shiite religious authorities, political factions, and tribal leaders—in shaping Iraq's foreign policy. Political fragmentation has led to a reactive, often inconsistent foreign policy, but the pragmatic approach has allowed Iraq to navigate a complex geopolitical landscape. Iraq has managed to forge strategic alliances while maintaining sovereignty and avoiding domination by external powers. In conclusion, the research suggests that Iraq should continue to prioritize pragmatic foreign policy strategies focused on national stability and economic development. Future studies should explore the evolving role of domestic actors in shaping Iraq's foreign policy and assess the long-term implications of the "small pragmatism" approach for Iraq's future in the international arena. By addressing internal challenges, strengthening governance, and managing external relations, Iraq can secure its position on the global stage, navigating the rapidly changing dynamics of the Middle East.

Conflict of interest

Author declared no conflict of interest.

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