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Geopolitical Analysis of Iraq-Saudi Arabia Relations in the Last Three Decades

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Abstract

The relationships between countries are fundamentally reflected in their foreign policies. Essentially, a country's foreign policy is influenced by a combination of internal factors and the regional and international environment. In reality, numerous factors affect the decision-making process in the foreign policy of countries, and in particular, there is a strong connection between geographical factors and the policies of governments. Therefore, governments formulate policies according to the geographical situation of their country. More precisely, geopolitical realities have always played a fundamental role in determining the political behaviors and strategic decisions of countries. One of Iraq's important neighbors is Saudi Arabia, and the two countries have had a wide range of relations over the past three decades, from alliance and cooperation to rivalry and tension; although a specific characteristic, namely the mistrust of the two countries towards each other, has been preserved in various political, eco-

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nomic, cultural and other fields.

This research, using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on library resources and field studies, seeks to investigate and analyze the role of geopolitical factors in the relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia over the past three decades and prioritize them. In the library study section, the geopolitical factors affecting the relations between the two countries were identified, and in the next stage, to find out the extent of the impact of these factors on the relations between the two countries, a questionnaire in the form of three dimensions of political-security, economic and cultural was prepared and provided to experts. To examine the research hypothesis, the first type of confirmatory factor analysis method was used in LISREL software, and SPSS software was used for inferential test and descriptive statistics.

The research findings show that there is a significant difference between the degree of influence of each of the main dimensions of security-political, economic, cultural and corresponding geopolitical factors of each dimension, on the relations between the countries of Iraq and Saudi Arabia in the past three decades, and the descriptive findings of the research based on the influence of the variables of the cultural dimension in the first rank, the political-security dimension in the second rank and finally the economic dimension in the third rank, are confirmed. In order to fit the research model and determine the factor load of each of the research items, the first-order factor analysis has been used, the accepted factor load of each of them must be more than 0.3, and the t-statistic, which indicates the significance of the relationship between the item and the main variable of the research, is also more than 1.96. The most important variables affecting the improvement or weakening of Iraq-Saudi relations have been calculated based on descriptive statistics (based on the average score of each variable) and inferential statistics (based on the factor analysis value and t-statistic of each variable).

In the "political-security dimension", the variable "Persian Gulf regional organizations and Arab countries" has played an effective role in improving relations between the two countries, both based on descriptive and inferential statistics. However, based on descriptive statistics, the variable "formation of the Saudi-Iraqi Cooperation Council" has also played a role in improving relations between the two countries, with an average higher than normal. In contrast, the two variables "Saudi support for fundamentalist extremist groups, ISIS, etc." and also the variable "different political ideology of the two countries (Shiite-Wahhabism)" have had the greatest role in weakening relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, both based on descriptive statistics (average criterion) and also based on inferential findings (factor analysis value and t-statistic criterion).

In the "economic dimension", the status of the variables affecting the relations between the two countries is different based on descriptive and inferential statistics. Thus, based on the results of descriptive statistics, the variable "reopening of border crossings

between the two countries" with an average of 3.65 and the variable "re-launching of the communication route between Najaf province with Saudi Arabia (land Hajj project)" with an average of 3.52 have had the greatest impact on improving the economic relations of the two sides. While based on inferential findings, the three variables "supplying Iraq's needs from Saudi Arabia" and the variable "construction of the first free economic zone with Iraq in the Arar border region" and the variable "joint investment of the two countries in energy projects" have had a greater impact on improving relations between the two countries. This difference exists in the output of descriptive and inferential findings regarding the variable weakening relations as well. Accordingly, while the variable "disagreement over the exploitation of shared border resources (water, pasture, etc.)" with an average of 3.15 from the perspective of descriptive statistics has played an effective role in weakening the relations between the two countries. Based on inferential findings, considering that the factor load of the variable "disagreement between the two countries over the exploitation of shared border resources (water, pasture, etc.)" is equal to 0.14 and less than the standard value of 0.3, and also the value of the t-statistic of the variable is also equal to 1.42 and less than the significance level of 1.96, therefore, it can be said that the impact of this variable on weakening the relations between the two countries is not confirmed.

Finally, the results of the field findings in the "cultural dimension" are as follows: the two variables "presence of Iraqis in Hajj ceremonies" and the variable "common culture and language (Arab nationalism)" both based on the output of descriptive and inferential statistics from the perspective of the respondents have played an effective role in improving the relations between the two countries of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In fact, the mentioned variables, due to strengthening cultural and social ties, have had a positive effect on improving the relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In contrast, the status of the cultural variables affecting the weakening of the relations between the two countries is as follows: the variable "Saudi support for Sunnis in Iraq" both based on the findings of descriptive and inferential statistics has had the greatest role in weakening the relations between the two sides. However, the results of descriptive statistics show that the second variable affecting the weakening of the relations between the two countries is the variable "behavior of the Saudi government with Shiites in Saudi Arabia" with an average of 3.69. While based on the results of inferential statistics, the variable "existence of a Shiite majority population in Iraq" with a factor load of 0.75 and a t-statistic value equal to 4.52 has played an effective role in weakening the relations between the two countries. In total, it can be said that Saudi support for specific Sunni groups in Iraq and the majority of the Shiite population in Iraq, due to strengthening religious and ethnic differences, has helped to weaken these relations.

Key words: Foreign policy, international relations, geopolitics, Saudi Arabia, Iraq.