



Challenges and Opportunities in State-Building in the Kurdistan Region- Iraq (2005_2024)

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ABSTRACT

The Kurds in Iraq have a long history of struggle to establish their state. The Kurds' history underwent a significant transformation with the advent of the turning point in 1991 and the subsequent constitutional recognition of the Kurdistan region. Through an in-depth examination of these significant shifts. The study presents a comprehensive analysis of the state-building process in the region, the significant of the study lies in its emphasis on the challenges and opportunities that the Kurdistan region faced during 2005–2024. Based on a qualitative approach, these challenges and opportunities provide a vital framework for understanding the state-building process during that time. The study aims to identify several challenges, including geopolitical issues and internal challenges particularly the political rivalries that originated during the civil war—continue to influence a fragmented administrative structure, which has resulted in weakened institutional unification, increased corruption, poor governance, and ongoing political fragmentation. This study identifies additional challenges, including regional and international issues. In addition to these challenges, the study highlights key opportunities, including conditions of statehood and rich natural resources like oil and gas. Also, the progress of democracy after the establishment of the KRG and the building of institutions provides another significant opportunity for this process. In addition to international support for the region, the study focuses on conflicts and tensions, such as wars and power struggles, which generally shift at both regional and global levels. The findings suggest that the success of the region's state-building process depends on the capacity of its institutions, entities, and political parties; on how well they can manage those challenges; and on how well they can seize those opportunities and adapt to global changes.



1. Introduction

Despite their longstanding historical presence in the Middle East, the Kurds remain the largest ethnic group in the region without a sovereign state, with an estimated population of forty to fifty million. Throughout the 20th century, Kurds in Iraq have struggled to gain rights and aspirations to build their independent entity. The 1991 uprising, which followed the Gulf War, marked a significant milestone in Kurdish history, despite their continued statelessness. As a result of this uprising and later the establishment of the no-fly zone by international forces, a de facto independent political entity emerged in Northern Iraq¹. In 1992, the first Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established, and in 1992, the first Kurdistan Parliamentary elections were held, marking a historic achievement for the Kurdish people². Also, the major transformation occurred after the fall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003. After the adoption of the new Iraqi Constitution in 2005, the Kurdistan Region was recognized as a federal region, and its legal authorities were expanded³. With the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), it has exercised key state institutions, including an executive, legislature, and judiciary, which are essential for political authority and societal governance⁴. It means that it has established a unique collection of formal institutions as an autonomous region, and these are essential to its attempts at state-building and governance⁵.

This study explores the key challenges and opportunities in state-building in the Kurdistan region of Iraq from 2005 to 2024 based on the conducted research. Despite conducting several academic scientific studies on this matter, due to the political advancement in the Kurdistan region and the shifts that are evolving in the international community, several questions remain unanswered. Also, there's a gap in addressing the important challenges and opportunities together during 2005-2024, so this study fills this significant gap in the literature.

1.1. Research Question

What are the main challenges and opportunities for the state-building process in the Kurdistan region?

1.2. The significance of the study

This study is an attempt to analyze and investigate the challenges and opportunities facing state-building in the Kurdistan region. For this purpose, it has drawn upon multiple studies and academic sources to enrich the research. In contrast to previous research, this study presents an academic and scientific picture of the Kurdistan region

¹ Nuri, Political History of the De Facto Kurdistan Region, 2022. pp.122–143.

² Hadji, The case for Kurdish statehood in Iraq, 2015

³ Seyder, The Iraqi Kurds: Historical Backgrounds of a Nonstate Nation, New York, 2017, pp.25–41

⁴ Abdullah, The Political System in Iraqi Kurdistan: Party Rivalries and Future Perspective, 2018, pp.606–624

⁵ Ala'Aldeen, State-building: A roadmap for the rule of law and institutionalization in the Kurdistan region, 2018.



within the framework of state-building, which there's a gap in addressing the important challenges and opportunities together in this process during specific time, so the significance of this research is that it's an attempt to fill this gap. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it academically and objectively reveals various types of challenges facing the region, whether from geopolitical complexities, broader into internal issues, or regional and international levels, indicating all these challenges are important because highly affect the region's development and progress. while another significant aspect of the study is that it also highlights all those opportunities for this process, whether in terms of the existence of human resources and conditions of statehood, in terms of natural resources, in terms of institutional frameworks and democratic progress, and many others.

1.3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method that provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the research topic. This approach is most appropriate for exploring complex social and political phenomena because qualitative approaches allow the researcher to provide a deeper and more nuanced assessment of the research problems. The objective of the study mainly depends on scientific reports, articles, books, and scientific research for a deeper understanding of the research question and its significance. The study's qualitative research depends on collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to better understand the complex phenomena and examine underlying factors, relationships, and dynamics. By relying on this approach, it aims to highlight several challenges that the state-building process faces. Additionally, it allows for the identification of key opportunities related to this process.

1.4. Research Design

The study includes five parts. The first part is a general discussion of the research framework, the question, the methodology, and the significance of the study. In the second part, the study focuses on the theoretical framework to better understand the state-building theory. In the third part, the study breaks down the main challenges into three sections: geopolitical, internal, and international. Each section explores and analyzes various types of challenges that hinder the state-building process. However, the four-part study highlights five opportunities, which are discussed in detail to provide a balanced standpoint and to determine the region's potential for evolution despite existing obstacles. In the final section, the study addresses the main question, provides answers, and presents the study's conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theory of state-building focuses on the formation and creation of states, including the factors that lead to their success and the characteristics that define them. This theory is based on the ideas of social contract philosophers like Tomas Hobbes. He defines the state as the only authority with the right to use forces, which protect people from living in constant conflict with one another. However, in the contemporary world, the idea of the state is much more than that; Currently, states focus not only on maintaining a monopoly of power and ensuring the security of their citizens but also on delivering additional services, including education and healthcare. What constitutes a



state, or "successful" statebuilding, is its capacity to utilize institutions to provide products or services to its citizens⁶. American political sociologist Charles Tilly presents a different idea of state-building. Tilly's work on statebuilding theory is one of the best-known scholarly contributions to the study of political development. His theory provides a framework for understanding the processes and dynamics involved in state formation. Central to Tilly's ideas is the development of the state. In his work, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, then in other work *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, he examines how war influenced the formation of European states, particularly during the years 1500–1900. He works into detail about how nation-states are formed through the use of violence, war-making, and the preparations for war. He proposes several criteria that should enhance state capability, including the establishment and maintenance of large standing armies, as well as significant financial support for the military sector⁷. Tilly asserted that war made the state, and the state made war which emphasizes the role of conflict and competition in shaping political structures, suggesting that states are not merely territorial entities but also products of historical struggles. he also expands his earlier war-catered theory of state formation by integrating socioeconomic factors into his analysis. According to him, the demands of preparing for war force the rulers to develop administrative infrastructure such as taxation systems, bureaucratic and other institutions, which often become a permanent feature of governance⁸. The development of military force and the infrastructure necessary to sustain, it enabled states to evolve into powerful institutions capable of managing large geographic areas and complex societies⁹. Thus, Tilly's idea of the war-made state is significant for understanding how war contribute to the formation of new states and the development of institutional capacity.

In contrast to Charles Tilly, Samuel Hanington, presented views on the state and emphasizes institutionalization, he believes that the success and strength of states depend more on the systematic institutional framework than on democracy itself. While democratic principles are important, but state with strong institutionalization is capable of effectively managing the interests of its citizens and upholding order. Huntington also posits that political organizations should not merely reflect the interests of specific social groups (like families or clans) but should operate independently to serve the broader public interest. This autonomy is a measure of the state's strength and legitimacy. In essence, institutionalization serving the public interest is the foundation of political stability and development for any political entity¹⁰.

Francis Fukuyama is another one, within the framework of state-building theory, he presents a theoretical contribution that extend the evolution of state theory. In his book on state-building, governance, and the global system in the 21st century, Fukuyama, like

⁶ Sloot, How the American invasion of 2003 affected Kurdish statebuilding in Iraq, 2023, p.10

⁷ Tilly, *The Formation of National States*, 1975,

⁸ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 990

⁹ Young, *Testing Tilly: Does War Really Make States?*, 2022.

¹⁰ Huntington, *Political order in changing society*, 2006, 2nd edn.



Samuel Huntington, highlights the vital importance of strategic institutions. He identifies the absence of institutional traditions as a primary cause of weak and failed state-building. Weak or failed states contribute to many of the world's most pressing problems, making the strengthening of state institutions a priority for international security and development. He argues that in the early stages of state-building, it is essential to prioritize the establishment of police, security, and systematic institutions to ensure stability, after which the expansion of democratic freedoms and institutions can follow¹¹. Thus, the ideas of Huntington and Fukuyama regarding state-building are crucial for building a capable government that can navigate challenges and transform them into opportunities. Also, seize, develop, and utilize all opportunities for state-building.

3. Key Challenges to Statebuilding in the Kurdistan Region

3.1. Geopolitical challenges

3.1.1 Landlocked and strategically located region

Positioned strategically between the borders of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, the Kurdistan Region holds a significant geopolitical position in the Middle East. It is a buffer zone, especially between Turkey and Iran, which affects the dynamic power of the region¹². However, apart from the importance of the geopolitical position of the Kurdistan Region, it is widely overlooked as one of the main reasons why the Kurdish people remain a stateless nation. Furthermore, because it is a landlocked region and lacks access to the sea, the region's reliance on land routes for international trade has made it vulnerable to geopolitical challenges¹³.

3.1.2. Other Geopolitical Issues

The region's wealth in natural resources, particularly oil and gas, has impacted the region's geopolitical importance. However, despite its importance, the oil factor has become a major point of conflict and tension with the Iraqi central government, and it's a key factor in regional and international attention¹⁴. On the other hand, the issue of the disputed areas, particularly Kirkuk, which is the region's richest oil area, has always been a point of tension between the KRG and the central government¹⁵. This has become

¹¹ Fukuyama, State-Building, Governance and World Order in The 21st Century, 2004.

¹² Sardashty, the development of Kurdish national identity and the possibilities of establishing an independent Kurdish state, 2015, P.44.

¹³ Sommer, Geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan: A role of external and internal actors in the Kurdish issue, 2021.

¹⁴ Wahab, Tipping Point of the Iraq-KRG Energy Dispute, 2023.

¹⁵ Purr & Mubarak Shahi, Barriers to the annexation of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan regional government, 2020, pp: 69_70



a major challenge to the region, particularly after the events of October 16, 2017, which dealt a devastating blow to the geopolitics of the Kurdistan Region, because Kirkuk province is the backbone of the geopolitical energy of the Kurdistan Region. Before October 16th, it produced 60% of the region's total oil, with more than 400,000 barrels of Kirkuk oil being exported daily to Ceyhan port. However, after the loss of Kirkuk, according to the announcement of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the region exports less than 400,000 barrels

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At the internal level, the political divisions among the main parties in the region have weakened unity and Cohesion, preventing the region from dealing with internal and external issues with one voice. The lack of compliance with government decisions by political and social forces, as well as the plurality of decision-making centers, becomes a constant threat². Also, the spread of corruption in the oil files, the absence of a national project, and non-compliance with implementing parliamentary decisions regarding the oil issue have all played a negative role in the region's geopolitics³. Therefore, all these threats have put the region's security and stability at risk, as without a unified national vision, the region constantly faces internal problems. As Fukuyama emphasizes, "A state that cannot enforce rules, protect property, or deliver basic services is a weak state"⁴. However, countries whose territories are subject to interference or control by external forces encounter difficulties in their state-building process. This means that the solution to the territorial issue is not only related to internal affairs but also to the neighbors who interfere in it. So, as noted earlier, the region has always been important; for centuries, it has been the battleground for conflict between regional and international forces. Additionally, the issue has various purposes and forms, and it persists in the present day.

3.2. Internal Challenges

3.2.1. Civil War and Two Administrations

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region has a multi-party system that is an important indicator of political pluralism and democracy in the region. The modern history of Kurdish political parties' dates back to the post-World War II period and extends until the mid-20th century, during which the dominant political party in Iraqi Kurdistan was the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). However, later, due to divisions and party fragmentations, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded in 1975 as an alternative party⁵.

¹ Roberts, Turkish and the Kurdistan region of Iraq: strained relations, 2019.

² Faqe, Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region. Region.

³ Heshmati & Auzer, The Role of Natural Resources in Kurdistan Regional Government's Government's Economic Development, 2018

⁴ Fukuyama, State-building: governance and world order in the 21st century, 2004

⁵ Hama & Mamshai, The Nature of Political Parties in the Kurdistan Region, 2020, Sulaymaniyah, p.6.



Before the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992, the KDP and the PUK fought against the Iraqi regime to determine the right to self-determination. Simultaneously, they engaged in a competition for revenue, perceiving each other's increase in financial resources as a threat to their survival. This income issue developed into open violence (civil war) in 1994¹. Both sides killed, displaced, tortured, and injured thousands of Kurds². The situation continued until the Washington agreement in 1998, which was mediated by the US between the two parties, ending the civil war after both parties agreed to unify their administrations and agreed to unify their armed forces—the Peshmerga—within the Kurdistan Regional Security Forces³.

Despite the agreement, however, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region was essentially divided into two zones, each with its administration: one in Sulaymaniyah led by the PUK and the other in Erbil and Duhok led by the KDP⁴. The legacy of the civil war still has an effect on the political and social structure of the region. This weakened the region's sovereignty, allowing regional countries to intervene in its internal affairs. So, it was the main reason for the absence of a unified national force and the existence of two separate military and security forces⁵. So, all the evidence indicates that the KDP-PUK civil war has had a devastating impact on the process of state-building, infrastructure, development, and the nature of its governance.

As previously mentioned, the political party system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq indeed has a typical multi-party system, like democratic countries because several political parties are participating in elections. However, measuring what sort of system exists, it is in reality a two-party system because the PUK and the KDP have controlled the government since the early 1990s⁶. Since 2005 up until now, it has been strained by misgovernance, inability to manage the political economy of the region, and widespread corruption that became a distinctive feature of the political elite's behavior⁷. This means that the conflict and complications between these two main parties have caused the greatest damage to the governmental system and have prevented unable from protecting the political system from fragmentation. Internationally, this conflict has weakened the image of the regional government. More importantly, it has weakened the legal support for the governance institutions⁸.

As Rasul says, the conflict between the two main forces has a significant impact on the position of the Kurdistan Region on the one hand, as well as on political, social, and economic stability on the other hand, whether at the internal level or with Baghdad and neighboring countries. The Kurdistan Region was fundamentally established based on a political agreement between the two forces. This situation has made it extremely difficult

¹ Kakarash, the challenges of Nation-Building in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2020, p.30

² Sadoon, The Kurdish De Facto State: Foreign policy transitions and trends, 2021.

³ Sommer, *Geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan: A role of external and internal actors in the Kurdish issue*, p.31.

⁴ Abdullah, *The Political System in Iraqi Kurdistan: Party Rivalries and Future Perspective*, p.607.

⁵ Hama & Ali, *De-politicization of the partisan forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 2019, p.2

⁶ Hama & Mamshai, *The Nature of Political Parties in the Kurdistan Region*.

⁷ Hama, *Kleptocratic rule in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 2024.

⁸ Ala' Aldeen, *State-building in a fragmented Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 2016, Erbil



to implement political reforms and changes unless these two forces reach an agreement. So, this demonstrates that these two forces are responsible for the future of a semi-state and the destiny of the political issue of a nation¹.

Since 2005, there have been several attempts to unite the two Kurdish administrations into an integrated government based in Erbil. The Kurdistan Region's first unified government, formed in 2006, included ministers from both parties; nevertheless, real unification was never accomplished. For example, the security agencies of the two Kurdish parties have stayed independent². Several deficiencies are observed in the security sector, such as: The Ministry of Peshmerga and the Interior have provided a large number of bodyguards and security personnel to numerous parties, officials, and social figures. This has led to the phenomenon of armed proliferation in many places. Also, this high number of guards has created pressure on the budget³. The KRG Security Council Law No. 4 of 2011, which unified the security agencies, marked a significant step in the institutional development of the security forces by placing some security and intelligence agencies under the Security Council's framework.

3.2.2. Weak Institutions and a Lack of Good Governance

The development of any country is inherently tied to the progress in its political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Therefore, to avoid challenges, the process of state building requires the establishment and management of all institutions, such as strong and stable security institutions, education, and health, improving the living standards of the people, and implementing their rights and aspirations.

This is definitely true for the Kurdistan Region, where the governance process has constantly been troubled, unstable, and marked by decline. The Kurdistan Region's institutions have not been able to function as they should, nor have they succeeded in addressing these deficiencies and challenges. In addition to this, there is the issue with the independence of parliament, judiciary, and civil society institutions, which are influenced by the dynamic of the relationship among ruling parties and forces⁴. Moreover, widespread corruption has significantly undermined citizens' trust in government institutions. The absence of a constitution, on the other hand, has created a legal vacuum, resulting in unclear limits on authority and ambiguous legality.⁵ ⁶This lack of a constitution raising questions about the legitimacy of government actions and laws. despite the problems in providing basic public services, such as health, education, and social security. Also, there is an inflation in the number of employees, many of whom are not appointed based on their expertise and capabilities. It means that they

¹ Rasul, Another Round of Conflicts between the PDK and PUK, 2020

² Abdullah, The Political System in Iraqi Kurdistan: Party Rivalries and Future Perspective, p.613

³ Sadiq & Sharif, Political and social obstacles to the Nation-Building process in the Kurdistan region, 2023.

⁴ Hama, KDP and PUK: Outdated Political Party Model. Modern diplomacy, 2024.

⁵ Pring et al, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption, 2015. corruption, 2015.

⁶ Aziz & Veen, The crisis of representation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2023.



have failed to properly utilize human resources and capital, which are considered fundamental pillars of state-building¹.

As Fukuyama believes, having a population rich in knowledge and capacity is one of the most effective ways for the Kurdistan Region to build a state line, which we call the state's capacity. These people should not be part of the political functions but rather be independent and selected based on their skills and potential to manage and operate state institutions².

As Salam argues, effective governance should be prioritized. However, the intense competition among Kurdish political groups for control of the region's economic resources and political power has led to corruption, hindering the establishment of effective governance, while excellent administration has been the primary political demand of the people, the ruling political parties prioritize their interests³. The problems and deficiencies in the region pose significant internal challenges to the state-building process, closely related to various factors, including the foundational structure of Kurdish society. This structure is largely influenced by tribal and religious relations that often dominate legal and official institutions. As a result, institutional development is undermined, and conflict and instability are increased.⁴ Also, political forces have not yet been able to fully transform from a revolutionary mindset to one of governance and institutional responsibility⁵. The legacy of civil war continues to influence the development of the region's institutions and its dual administration system as mentioned earlier. These factors pose significant major obstacles to aligning successful governance and strengthening institutions with democratic principles.

3.3. Regional Challenges

The territory of the Kurdistan Region extends across the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. The Kurdish nation exists within each part of these countries. In particular, regional countries like Iran and Turkey have a great impact on the region, and they consider any progress there a threat to their national security and integrity, leading to their opposition. Although there has been a relative shift in the attitude of these states toward the Kurdistan Region, it has not yet reached the level of accepting an independent political entity for the Kurds.

3.3.1 Turkey

Turkey-KRG relations have economic, security, and geopolitical dimensions. All these dimensions are related to Turkey's internal shifts, so the Kurdistan region constitutes a critical point in Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East⁶. While the most significant point here is that after 2008, relations between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey

¹ Faqe, *Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region*.

² Fukuyama, it is necessary for Kurdistan to have its own state, 2023.

³ Salam, *The interrelationship between sovereignty, state building, and good governance: the case of the Kurdistan region*, 2024.

⁴ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: political development and emergent democracy*, 2003.

⁵ Al Omari & Wahab, *KRG and PA: Reprioritizing Governance over Symbolism*, 2022.

⁶ Ustan & Dudeen, *Tukey-KRG mutual interest, geopolitical challenges*, 2017.



entered a new phase¹. To determine the nature of relations between them, the following factors must be considered: The diversity of economic relations, particularly the presence of energy resources in the region, the common border with the Kurds of Turkey, and the presence of the PKK armed forces². The region holds significant importance for Turkey from multiple perspectives. In his book "Deep Strategy," Ahmet Davutoglu outlined a roadmap for Turkey to become a regional leader and an influential international force. One of the mechanisms is to zero problems with the neighbors. To achieve this goal, Turkey faces two challenges: security and energy. The Kurdish issue is the source of these two obstacles, but the Kurdistan Region can play a role in solving them. Laying an oil and gas pipeline in the Kurdistan Region can provide Turkish energy at the lowest cost³.

So, since 2008, the nature of policy toward the region has been dual. On the one hand, it has significant commercial ties and is an important source of investment. This is especially true in the oil and gas sector. And Turkey is the region's oil and gas export route to the global market⁴. Conversely, Turkey's approach to the Kurdistan Region involves both political and military pressure. It believes that the process of development and progress of local authorities in the Kurdistan Region towards state-building has influenced the Kurdish population of Turkey. However, it is known that the Kurdistan Region has only one-fifteenth of Turkey's population. So, this development is considered a threat to Turkey⁵.

The issue of the PKK adds another layer of complexity, as the ongoing tensions and conflicts with this group in the Kurdistan territory have resulted in significant security and political challenges for the Kurdistan Region. However, the primary objective of the movements by these regional forces and their interventions in the Kurdistan Region extends beyond merely suppressing opposing parties; it also includes undermining the overall security of the region⁶. For example, after the 2017 referendum, fearing the announcement of Kirkuk's annexation to the Kurdistan Region, they showed a harsh anti-referendum stance and strongly supported Abadi, Iraq's prime minister at the time, to advance with the army and Popular Mobilization Forces into Kirkuk⁷. Therefore, Turkey aims to increase its influence in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region by conducting airstrikes and military operations. Despite the gradual change in Turkey's attitude and dealings towards the Kurdistan Region *since 2005, Turkey has not yet accepted the region as an independent political entity, which remains the main challenge for the region in pursuing independence and state-building.*

¹ Dalay, Evolution of Turkey-Iraqi Kurdistan's relations, 2017

² Sommer, Geopolitics of Iraqi Kurdistan: A role of external and internal actors in the Kurdish issue.

³ Faqe, Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region, p.54

⁴ Dağdeviren, The energy relation between Turkey and Kurdistan region-Iraq, 2022, p.65.

⁵ Sanyourak, the politics of international and regional actors toward Kurdistan region, 2020, p.79

⁶ Sadoon, The Kurdish De Facto State: Foreign policy transitions and trends, pp.118_130.

⁷ Uyanik, Turkey and the KRG After the Referendum: Blocking the Path to Independence, 2017, pp.1_2



3.3.2. Iran

Iran's policy toward the Kurdistan Region is part of its policy toward Iraq and the region. In general, analysts must examine Iran's policy towards the Kurdistan Region within the context of Iran-Iraq relations. Since the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iran has expressed its concerns and fears about the potential development of the region. Iran has never hidden its concerns and fears about the potential development of the region. And has always opposed Kurdistan's statehood¹. The 2017 independence referendum is one of the clearest examples of Iran's influence on the state-building process in the Kurdistan Region, which was strongly opposed and announced. The fundamental and clear attitude of Iran is to support the territorial integrity of Iraq, and the Kurdistan region is a part of Iraq². And Iran announced that the decision regarding the referendum was unilateral. It even closed its border crossing, threatened military action, and assisted Baghdad in retaking the disputed Kurdish areas. Iran's first concern about the progress of the political process in the Kurdistan Region and its steps towards state-building is that any such progress would have a direct impact on raising the demands of the Kurds in that country. Generally, it has a fear of transferring the KRG to Kurds in Iran³.

Another Iranian concern is that the region's statehood scenario will harm Iran's security because it would be closer to the West, particularly after Israel had a positive stance toward the referendum, which was considered a major threat from Iran's perspective. Another reason is the presence of Iranian armed opposition bases in the Kurdistan Region as a threat to its security⁴.

There is also fear that the division of Iraq would result in a strong Arab Shiite state in southern Iraq, which might eventually develop Arab nationalism that breaks out from Iranian influence, thereby undermining Iran's regional hegemony. Although Iran benefits economically and commercially from the region, it prioritizes broader geopolitical considerations through interference in internal affairs and exploitation of political divisions to expand its influence and hegemony⁵. In addition to these points, the relationship between Tehran and Erbil has undergone numerous delicate and significant stages. Iran was the initial country to assist the region during the war against ISIS⁶. However, during the Trump administration, with increased disputes and conflict between the US and Iran, Shiite militias increasingly threatened the Kurdistan Region, and Iran worried that the Kurdistan Region had strong ties with the United States. This is in addition to claiming that the region has relations with Israel, and based on this justification, there have been several instances of Drone and missile attacks and drone attacks on the region. Also, its proxy groups are targeting Harir military bases, Erbil airport, and bases of Kurdish political parties' opposition through the justification of

¹ Abdullah, Iran's policy toward the Kurdistan region (strategy-hegemony), 2024, pp. 26-28.

² Saleem, Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan: heading toward confrontation, 2017.

³ Itzchakov, Iran and the Kurdish Challenges, 2017.

⁴ Koç, Fluctuating relations between Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government since 1958, 2021, pp. 311-315.

⁵ Faqe, Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region, pp. 56-57.

⁶ Saleem, Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan: heading toward confrontation.



attacking US forces. Hoshyar Zebari in the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper on February 19, 2024, mentioned that Iranian leaders have requested Kurdistan Region officials to become part of the resistance front against America and its allies¹. All of the above indicate that despite maintaining trade and economic ties between both sides since the shifts after 2005, Iran has always tried to impose its hegemony in the area. Iran has emerged as a significant obstacle to the autonomous authorities, opposing any efforts towards independence and state-building.

3.4. International Challenges

3.4.1. International System

The international system, with its formation and evolution, has gone through several different stages and has faced numerous significant and crucial transformations. Each change within it leads to shifts in the behavior of international actors and international values, and these shifts have an impact on the situation and issues like the Kurds in the Kurdistan Region². For instance, during World War I and the shifts of the international system, as well as during World War II and the shifts of the international system, there was an opportunity for the Kurdistan region to emerge at the international level³. However, the division of power and the shape of new polarization have not been in the interest of the Kurdish issue as an independent entity. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world order did not lead to the establishment of a Kurdish state. At the same time, along with the chaos that was created due to the changes, the interests of regional countries in coordination with international forces have become an obstacle to the formation of the Kurdish state⁴. So, this remains a realist perspective that says that the characteristic of the international system is anarchy, so all states prioritize their interests⁵.

3.4.2. Double Standard Policy (Time-oriented)

As mentioned above, the interests and decisions of the powers play an important role in the international system, which is often reflected in the implementation of double-standard policies (time-oriented) by the international community. Double standard policies (time-oriented) mean that these countries use or implement the principles of democracy, human rights, and self-determination according to their strategic interests and not based on legality and justice. In other words, the same case may be supported at one of the historical moments but rejected at another time⁶. This was noticeable in the experience of the KRG's referendum in 2017, where this issue was tied to this policy. Although the Kurdish people expressed their desire for independence through this

¹ Hetuti, Iran and the Kurdistan region: is it. A friendly relationship or a proxy force, 2024, p.3.

² Cowley, the evolution of the international system: surrender sovereignty or fight to the death, 2011

³ Najim, The future of the international system and Kurdistan region, 2022, pp.51_54.

⁴ Nore, International politics and the right to self-determination: the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, 2022

⁵ Hama, Theory of structure realism in international relations, 2019, Sulaymaniyah

⁶ brahim, Double Standard in International Politics, 2015, pp.168_170.



democratic mechanism, and the process was conducted very democratically and peacefully, with over 92% voting in favor, the lack of international recognition further weakened the referendum's legitimacy. The world's major powers prioritized Iraq's territory and integrity over the Kurdish right to self-determination. Previously, in similar cases, such as South Sudan and Kosovo, the international community supported their right to self-determination by referring to human rights and democratic demands. The international community recognizes the right to self-determination for some nations but does not support it for others. In this case, the nation-states or sovereign states stand united to prevent division among others. During the referendum in the Kurdistan Region, Canada, Britain, and France did not support the people's desire for independence and the immediate integrity of Iraq. These countries have regions with similar issues to those in the Kurdistan Region, so they considered that if Kurdistan becomes independent, those regions might also demand the same right. Additionally, the Kurdistan Region is currently under British influence, and its independence could lead to a division of that influence.¹

In addition, despite the Kurds in Iraq having the right to self-determination because they have their language, culture, territory, characteristics, and will, and have experienced genocide and international crimes, there are no obstacles in international law that prevent them from determining their right to self-determination. However, the international dimension is the major challenge, which has caused them to remain stateless.

4. Opportunities for State-Building in the Kurdistan Region

4.1. Conditions of statehood

Marx believed that a nation is a group of people who have a shared history; on this basis, they have a common language, territory, economic way of life, customs, and psychological forms. Lenin also said a nation should have a defined territory and a common language. Generally, a nation consists of people who share a common language, origin, history, culture, and land where individuals have emotional bonds towards each other and form a social, political, economic, and historical unity. According to these criteria, the Kurdish people have all the conditions and elements of a nation².

Moreover, it has all the conditions that the international community considers necessary for granting a people the right to self-determination and statehood. In the press conference, Salaheddin Bahaden stated that while Kurdistan possesses all the principles of statehood, it is not yet independent. Kurdish people have the right to be independent. They have been waiting for many years to determine their destiny in their own hands and achieve their independence³. So, the Kurdistan region satisfies all the criteria set by the Montevideo Convention in 1933 for becoming a state. These criteria include: (1) a permanent population; (2) a defined territory; (3) a government; and (4) the capacity to

¹ Sadeq, Nations Referendum for Independence (Catalonia and Kurdistan Region), 2024

² Kurda, Kurds and the State, 2020, pp.23

³ Kurdistan TV, Salaheddin Bahaden: There is no excuse for neglecting the referendum, 2017



enter into relations with other states¹. Firstly, the Kurdistan area satisfies the permanent population requirement. According to the latest census statistics in Iraq in November 2024, the total population of the region consists of 6 million 370 thousand 668 people². This is more than enough people to qualify as a state, considering countries with populations of less than 300,000 people are recognized by the United Nations³. Secondly, it possesses a territory, even if the region does not have a defined border; it is not a legal concern, because there have been several countries that were recognized, even though their border with neighboring countries was not clearly defined⁴. Also, the region has a government, and its political system is parliamentary and democratic, similar to European democratic countries. Article 117, along with other articles in the Iraqi Constitution, acknowledges the Kurdish region and grants the KRG significant authority over it. The KRG has the right to cancel federal laws and determine the tax rates of people living in the Kurdish region⁵. Additionally, the KRG has developed diplomatic and economic relations with several states. When the head of state visits Baghdad, they also visit Erbil, or when the president of the region visits other countries, the head of that state welcomes them. It means that, today, the Kurdistan region is treated as a semi-state by most states and is regarded as a de facto state⁶.

In addition to the points mentioned above, according to the UN Charter, Vienna Convention and etc., the Kurdish people have the right to self-determination⁷ Because they have their language, culture, territory, characteristics, and will, and have experienced genocide and international crimes, that's why there are no obstacles in international law that prevent the Kurdish people from determining their right to self-determination. As KR president Nechirvan Barzani stated at the third Erbil Forum, "Kurdish people have an issue, and as a nation, everything has been done against us. We witnessed the destruction of our villages and the use of chemical weapons against us. They did everything to us. But we did not eliminate it. Those who have an issue cannot be easily eliminated"⁸. As well as, the KDP president believes "Self-determination is a natural right granted by God; this right should not be denied or prevented under any pretext or justification"⁹. At the same time, PUK ex-president Jalal Talabani argued that "the Kurdish people have the right of self-determination like every other nation in the world."¹⁰.

Packard argues that the Kurdish people share the same elements and features as those of other recently independent countries, such as Southern Sudan, Kosovo, and East Timor¹¹. As the Turkish thinker and writer Ismail Beşikçi declared at the Third Erbil Forum, the Kurds are the only nation with a population of approximately 60 million

¹ Packard, *Earning Independence in Iraqi Kurdistan*, n.d., p179

² Kurdistan Regional Government GOV.KRD, *The preliminary Results of the General Population Census of Kurdistan Region* have been published, 2024

³ Bradosti, *Chapter 5: Why it is time for an independent Kurdistan*, n.d., p.48

⁴ Hadji, *The case for Kurdish statehood in Iraq*, pp 525-526.

⁵ Bradosti, *Chapter 5: Why it is time for an independent Kurdistan*, n.d.

⁶ Hadji, *The case for Kurdish statehood in Iraq*, pp 525.

⁷ Kurdistan think tank, *State and Nation*, 2017, p.125. Erbil

⁸ Rudaw Media, *Nechirvan Barzani answers the significant question*, 2025

⁹ Kurdistan24, *Barzani releases statement on independence referendum*, 2016

¹⁰ Gurski, *Kurdish political party targeted in Iraq bombing*, 2021

¹¹ Packard, *Earning Independence in Iraqi Kurdistan*, n.d., p192



people, yet they have not been recognized as an identity in the international community, Today the Kurdistan Region has a strong legitimate position and should have an independent state¹ In addition, according to international law, the conditions of statehood are one of the primary opportunities for state-building, which the Kurdistan region satisfies. Thus, these elements have enabled KRG to function with a significant degree of autonomy. Also, it enabled Kurdish people to show their desire for independence and self-determination through the referendum of 2017. "The Kurdish nation voted for the referendum and independence of Kurdistan with 93.8%, so the referendum is like a black cadaster held in the collective memory of every Kurd. Whenever they want the right to self-determination, they do not need another referendum or to return to the issue. It's a pure and immaculate history forever for the Kurds and Kurdistan. This is why we view our commitment to the referendum as the greatest achievement of our nation. Muhamad Haji Mahmoud².

4.2. Natural Resources

Oil and gas are two significant natural resources that have a significant impact on the political and economic position of a country. From a political perspective, they provide power and authority for their survival, while from an economic perspective, they play an important role in strengthening their economic infrastructure. The Kurdistan Region is also rich in these natural resources and constitutes 25% of Iraq's energy, with estimated oil reserves of 45 billion barrels. Overall, the natural gas reserves in the Kurdistan Region make up 3% of the world's reserves³.

In addition, the Kurdistan Region possesses several other natural resources, particularly copper, and is one of the most mineral-rich regions in the region. Most of this mineral exists in the Mawat area⁴. However, according to a CIA report in 1949, 40% of the raw material of Mount Hero in Qaladze is copper. According to this report, this high percentage of copper doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. Only 1% to 4% of copper is found even in the US. In general, natural resources play a significant role in the economic, political, and strategic position of the Kurdistan region⁵.

Historically, efforts to pursue and implement oil and gas policies began after the turning point in 1991. This was a significant shift for the revival of the Kurdistan Regional economy and was the first step towards self-governance. But due to these unfavorable conditions at the time, such as the international block on Iraq, Saddam Hussein's blockades, and later civil war, this sector was harmed, and its development and expansion were limited. It means that at that time, oil extraction was limited to only two wells in the Taq Taq field area⁶. But after the fall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 and later

¹ Rudaw, Beshkchi: the Kurdistan region is a legitimate position, but it cannot represent represent all Kurds,2025

² Kurdistan TV, Muhamad Haji Mahmoud published a message on the anniversary of the independence referendum decision,2020

³ Muhammad, The impact of oil and gas on the position of the Kurdistan region-Iraq after 2003,2015,p.59

⁴ Sissakian, The mineral wealth in the Kurdistan region,2018,p.28.

⁵ Rudaw, A CIA Report reveals a large amount of Copper Raw Material in The Mountains of Qaladze,2025

⁶ Mills, Under the mountains: Kurdish Oil and Regional Politics,2016,p.7



after Iraq's permanent constitution in 2005, the Kurdistan Region became a new energy market because it began drilling oil wells. Multinational international companies have flocked to the Kurdistan Region to invest in the sector¹. The work also progressed rapidly because KRG's oil policies advanced this sector by leveraging the provisions of Articles 111, 112, 115, and 121 of the Iraqi constitution. Then, the passing of Law No. 22 of 2007 regarding oil and gas in the region by the Kurdistan parliament in 2007 enabled the government to have full authority and all rights to deal with it². Nevertheless, the KR oil and gas sector is a major source of conflict between Erbil and the Iraqi federal government. Despite political differences with Baghdad, it has tried to act independently and export oil, which has significantly affected the revival and development of the region's economic infrastructure. It even affected its relationship at the regional level, particularly with Turkey, after Turkey signed an agreement with the Kurdistan Region to build an oil pipeline (KRG-Turkey) to reach the world port³.

This has become a strong political and economic point for the region's position as a non-state actor at the regional and international stages. Even against the federal government, because Turkey strengthened its economic relations with the region without returning to the federal government⁴. At the international level as well, the oil and gas factor are used as an effective weapon in the arena of international relations⁵. Despite the negative aspects of the sector, such as deficiencies and problems in the management of the sector, reliance on oil revenues has led to the creation of a one-dimensional economy, weakening other sectors⁶. Also, the Iraqi government's continued opposition to the Kurdistan Regional Government's oil exports has been a major problem, leading to legal problems and budget disputes, particularly after the Iraqi Federal Court passed a law in 2022 that deemed an oil and gas law regulating the oil industry in the Kurdistan region unconstitutional⁷. However, at the same time, the development of the oil and gas sector since 2005 is closely related to the state-building process in the region, meaning it is considered a significant opportunity for state-building because it is the backbone of the Kurdistan Region's economy and the main source of government revenue⁸. In addition to its importance for local economic development, it is also considered a pillar of the Kurdistan Region's relations with foreign countries because it increases international attention to the region. This leads to strengthening the region's legitimacy both regionally and internationally.

¹ Khidr, the impact of oil on Kurdistan region of Iraq, 2015, p.52_56.

² Faraj & Khorshed, the impact of oil and gas factors on the position of the Kurdistan region-Iraq, 2022, p.16

³ Muhammad, The impact of oil and gas on the position of the Kurdistan region-Iraq after 2003, 2015, pp.80_90

⁴ Qadir, The impact of energy on the relationship between Turkey and the Kurdistan region, 2021, p.84, Sulaymaniyah.

⁵ Faraj & Khorshed, the impact of oil and gas factors on the position of the Kurdistan region-Iraq, 2022, p.17

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Reuters, US energy firms' deals with Iraqi Kurdistan are "null and void," Baghdad says, 2025

⁸ Frappi, The Energy Factor: Oil and State Building in Iraqi Kurdistan, n.d.



4.3. Democracy and Institution Building

The form of democracy that emerged in the Kurdistan Region was the result of Kurdish liberation movements that fought and advocated democracy against the dictatorial Ba'athist regime. Kurds believed that democracy is the best option or solution for both establishing a democratic government and gaining national rights¹. Therefore, after many years of oppression and genocide, principles of governance have emerged, including the separation of powers, a multi-party system, and political participation, which allow political parties to exist, compete, hold elections, criticize one another, and contribute to the development of civil society. However, due to corruption and the dominance of the two main parties, democracy has not yet reached a mature level². Thereby, Since the establishment of the KRG in 1992, the region has experienced a gradual democratization process³. The region held its first election in May 1992, marking a significant milestone in Kurdish history because established a parliamentary tradition, replacing revolutionary rule with civil governance and giving rise to multi-party competition. Thereby, this election can be interpreted as the first significant step that the Kurdish people took toward establishing an autonomous democratic system of government in Iraq⁴. Following this election, Kurdish revolutionary groups became political parties that supported democratic governance⁵.

In addition to election process in the region during that time, the referendum of 2005 and 2017 is another example that witnessed democratic processes in the region, particularly, the 2017 independence referendum which is the most prominent instance, where a resounding majority of voters favored building their state. While Baghdad and many international actors refused to recognize the referendum, it remained a significant statement of public will. It underlined the region's dependence on democratic processes to decide its political destiny⁶. Thus, in addition to the representative system of regular elections, the referendum presented another instrument of direct democracy in the region. Moreover, the coexistence of ethnic, religious, and even language and cultural differences in the Kurdistan Region has become central to the principles of peace, freedom, tolerance, and democratic culture. In this regard, the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Coexistence, after the enactment of Law No. 5 of 2015 on the rights of communities, is a serious effort by the government to respect the rights of other religious communities in Iraq⁷.

In parallel with the democratic progress, with the adoption of the new Iraqi constitution and the recognition of the Kurdistan Region as a federal region, the KRR has also taken key steps toward institution-building and established a unique collection of formal institutions as an autonomous region, and these are essential to its attempts at state-building and governance⁸. It means that the autonomy of the KRI is guaranteed by the

¹ SpeeMedia, Is what exists in Kurdistan a democracy?, 2019

² Ibid

³ Kurdistan Parliament, History of Parliament, 2025

⁴ Hamad, Elections and Democracy in The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2011, p.19

⁵ MacQueen, Democratization, elections and the 'de facto state dilemma': Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, 2015, p.10

⁶ Rudaw, Kurdistan independence referendum, 2017

⁷ The law of protecting the rights of components in the Kurdistan region-Iraq, 2015 Law No.5 of 2016. Erbil: Kurdistan region Parliament.

⁸ Ala'Aldeen, State-building: A roadmap for the rule of law and institutionalization in the the Kurdistan region



Iraqi constitution, namely under article 121¹ which gives the region the ability to build core state institutions such as the Kurdistan Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and various ministries that allow the region to autonomously exercise its legislative, executive, and judicial branches². So, the process of building and developing institutions in the Kurdistan region after 2005 went through a significant stage because it has progressed these important state institutions that are necessary for the development of the state-building process. Despite all the shortcomings, the KRG has a reasonably good ability to govern itself and has implemented human rights standards, democracy, and successful governance to some extent, which play a significant role in supporting the international community in the building of the new state³. As the US ambassador to Iraq Iraq argues, the Kurdistan region is considered a model of democracy in the Middle East⁴.

4.4. International Support

The support of the international community plays a significant role in the success of the independence movements. In this regard, the long history of relations between the Kurdish liberation movements and foreign countries laid the foundation for the KRG to establish diplomatic ties. Thus, since the establishment of the Kurdistan Region, international support has played a crucial role in the region's development. This support began with the United Nations Security Council resolution, which established No-fly zone that provided critical protection for the people of the Kurdistan Region⁵. Moreover, it laid the subsequent formation of the first cabinet of the KRG⁶. Also, several international organizations provided humanitarian assistance to the region during that time⁷.

More importantly, the outbreak of the civil war and the US mediation to end the conflict through the Washington Agreement demonstrate the important role of the international community in the development of the region⁸. This support continued even during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Kurds participated in the process of liberation and rebuilding of Iraq, which was a golden opportunity for the Kurds because they played a great role in rebuilding the new Iraq and establishing external relations with the international community⁹. The support also aided the participants in drafting the new Iraqi constitution in 2005, and it was recognized as a federal entity¹⁰. As a result, the

¹ Iraq 2005 Constitution – Constitute,n.d.

² European Union Agency for Asylum, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG),n.d.

³ Faqe,Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region,p.85

⁴ Kurdistan24,Kurdistan region a model of democracy', the US ambassador stated,2024

⁵ Voller,From rebellion to de facto statehood: International and transnational sources of of the transformation of the Kurdish, national liberation movement in Iraq into the Kurdistan regional government,2012,p.75

⁶ Stansfield,Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq,p.96

⁷ Ibid,p.52

⁸ Caspersen,Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System,2012,p.81

⁹ Palan&Fazil,Fluid State-Building in the Kurdistan region of Iraq: Taking advantage of of the 2003 U.S.-Led invasion,pp.650_651

¹⁰ Ababakr,Iraqi Kurdistan Region: from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy,2020,p,310



region expanded foreign relations, opening its representative offices abroad and hosting foreign consulates in the region. These steps enabled the region to further strengthen its foreign relations based on legitimate and semi-autonomous actors at the global level¹.

These growing international ties have become even more pronounced during the fight against ISIS, because the region has received more support from some Western countries, particularly the United States and its European allies. When the international community provides military and humanitarian assistance to the region, it consequently bolsters not only defense capabilities but also enhances its international legitimacy². Numerous states in the world backed the Kurdistan region and established their consulates in Erbil before the referendum. However, the United States and other foreign allies obviously denied support to the referendum. Nonetheless, their actions always had a major effect on Kurdistan's growth and steps toward state-building³. In contrast, only Israel and Russia clearly support them; their support is crucial for the region. Israel clearly said we are following the Kurds to independence. Netanyahu declared that Israel supports the establishment of a state for Kurds. Also, we must support the Kurds' aspirations for independence; they deserve it. And Russia said Russia respects the Iraqi Kurds' desire for self-determination and respects Kurdish independence⁴. Overall, international support since 2005, whether direct or indirect, has played a significant role in promoting the KRG's state-building process.

Indeed, the international community responded by isolating the region from the referendum, which put significant pressure on the region, and severe economic blockages were imposed due to the closure of airports and borders⁵. However, despite initially opposing the referendum, a close ally like France was the first country that welcomed the Kurdistan Region after isolation⁶. France played a key diplomatic and strategic role in breaking the blockages in the Kurdistan Region and facilitating dialogue between Baghdad and that region. It continued to support the region by taking gradual steps to help lift the sanctions and revive international engagement. This means that the region once again gained international backing⁷. During COVID-19, the region received several international aids. For instance, in October 2020, an isolation ward was constructed in Duhok province by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)⁸. In 2021, the World Health Organization supported the Ministry of Health in the region with medical equipment and pharmaceuticals worth over US\$2.5 million. Also, in January 2021, the United States delivered medical and laboratory aid to the Kurdistan

¹ Stansfield, Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq, p.4

² Palani et al, The development of Kurdistan's de facto statehood: Kurdistan's September 2017 referendum for independence, 2017, p.2275.

³ Palan & Fazil, Fluid State-Building in the Kurdistan region of Iraq: Taking advantage of the 2003 U.S.-Led invasion

⁴ Pichon, Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum, 2017, p.7_8

⁵ Holland & McCowan, The Kurds After the 'Caliphate': How the Decline of ISIS has Impacted the Kurds of Iraq and Syria, 2018, pp.10_13.

⁶ Kurdistan regional government, President Macron emphasizes the requirement to ensure Kurdistan's constitutional rights, 2017

⁷ Ava News, Kurds and France: a long-term relationship, 2025

⁸ Kurdistan24, Top international aid organizations build COVID-19 isolation ward in Duhok, 2020



Region's health sector to fight against COVID-19. As US Consul General Rob Waller stated, "This assistance reflects our deep appreciation of and commitment to the people of the Kurdistan Region."¹ Thus, the region received the grant and many other assistances, which reaffirmed the strong international backing for the region.

4.5. The Influence of War on State-Building Opportunity

Despite its negative aspects, war has a significant influence on the emergence of states and the type of political system. Charles Tilly argues that war played a crucial role in the formation of states. Wars between powers were the main reasons for the development of the nation-state, and this situation continues to this day. The fate of the Kurdish nation, like many other nations in the world, depends on global wars and external forces. War has repeatedly paved the way for building their state² For example, World War II resulted in the establishment of the Mahabad Republic in 1945-1946; however, the interests of neighboring countries and powers posed significant obstacles. The Cold War and the Iraq-Iran War also affected the Kurdish national movement³ The end of the Cold War and the Gulf War significantly improved the international situation for nations seeking independence. This created opportunities for many nations to assert their right to self-determination, which resulted in the declaration of several new nation-states. The Kurdish nation in South Kurdistan has not become a state. However, the establishment of a no-fly zone and the situation of that time opened the way for Kurdish self-governance. With the US military invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kurdistan Region entered another stage⁴

Additionally, the war against ISIS was another opportunity to develop military and diplomatic capabilities for the region. The Peshmerga was recognized as a skilled military force, and the region's international relations were expanded⁵. In addition, the Kurds capitalized on the collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces in northern Iraq during the ISIS war in mid-2014. As a result, Kurdistan was able to expand its territory and take control of long-coveted Kirkuk and other areas⁶. Throughout each of these phases, the Kurdish stance and concerns have undergone significant transformation. The situation revealed the Kurdish issue's complete interdependence with regional and international dynamics. Therefore, the Kurdish position in the Middle East is constantly changing due to the influence of the policies of regional and international actors⁷. The evidence indicates that the wars and changes in the Middle East have a direct correlation with any situation arising from the Kurdish issue. Although these wars did not lead to state-building for the region due to various factors—such as powerful states' interests during the world wars and internal issues like conflicts and power divisions among the main parties during the ISIS war. However, each war developed its political landscape.

¹ Rudaw, The United States sends COVID-19 aid to the Kurdistan Region, 2021

² Faqe, Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region. Region.

³ Gunes & Finotello, *Kurds in a New Middle East*, 2019

⁴ Nuri, Political history of the de facto Kurdistan Region, Iraq, 2022, pp. 123_125.

⁵ Ababakr, Iraqi Kurdistan Region: from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy, 2020, p. 324.

⁶ palani et al, The development of Kurdistan's de facto statehood: Kurdistan's September 2017 referendum for independence, 2017, p. 2273.

⁷ Kurdistan think tank, State and Nation, 2017, p. 134



In addition, the establishment of a state for the Kurds is related to the redrafting of the political map of the Middle East. In this process, all the economic and political interests of the powerful countries will be taken into account¹ So, the future of the Middle East's political map depends on the region's situation, which indicates major changes and the formation of a new geopolitical map in the area. The Kurdistan Region, being a strategic area, will play a significant role in this situation, which is continually shaped by the policies of neighboring and powerful countries. So, the study leaves an open question: whether new situations in the future or the occurrence of a war in the region will lead the Kurdistan region to a more advanced stage? Or will it lead to the establishment of an independent state for the Kurdistan Region?

5. Conclusion

In addition, the study concluded that the existence of a political entity without the foundation or development of a functional state does not guarantee national survival and security. The history of crimes, oppression, and political and economic blockages throughout the 20th century against the Kurds in Iraq is the greatest witness to this reality. In the last decade of the 20th century and in the early 21st century, the Kurdistan region entered a phase of political stability. It took advantage of these new shifts by providing opportunities for building infrastructure and developing relations with countries, as well as creating several formal state institutions. This evidence indicates that the region is in the process of state-building. However, several key challenges and opportunities confront the region, as the study mentioned.

Geopolitically, the region occupies a strategically important position. However, it poses a major challenge to state-building because the region's landlocked nature has led it to dependent on other countries. The existence of geopolitical importance of disputed areas and oil geopolitics has always been a point of ongoing tension with the central government of Iraq. The study also concluded that the state-building process in the region has faced several internal obstacles, such as political divisions between the main parties, which have harmed the governance process and institutional development in the region. Also, neighboring countries such as Iran and Turkey have always considered the region's development as a threat to their national security. Their rejection of the region's aspirations for statehood remains a significant challenge. However, this issue is not just shaped by internal and regional dynamics but also by international dynamics, where the environmental circumstances and tensions of powerful countries in the international system play a significant role.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights several opportunities, concluding that Kurds of the Kurdistan region, according to international law, have the right to claim statehood. In addition to having human resources, the region also possesses important natural resources, such as oil and gas, which have played an important role in the region's economic development and strengthened its position at the regional and international levels. The establishment of formal state institutions has also facilitated the progress of the democratic process and the building of its institutions. More significantly, since 1991, the Kurdistan Region has received international support, which is considered an important opportunity for state-building. The study also concluded that the outbreak of war, along with the shifting interests of countries in the region,

¹ Faqe, *Political and Constitutional Challenges to the Statehood of the Kurdistan Region.*



consistently impacts stateless entities and the broader state-building process. In addition, I conclude that there are challenges and opportunities in the region. Ultimately, the success of the state-building process depends on the institutions, entities, and political parties in the Kurdistan Region, as well as their ability to navigate challenges and transform them into opportunities. It also relies on how effectively they can seize, develop, and utilize these opportunities for state-building. Most crucially, how effective the region's ability to adapt and capitalize on global paradigm shifts is of utmost importance.

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ئالنگارى و دەرڤتەکانى بنیاتنانى دەولەت لە هەريمی کوردستان-عێراق (۲۰۲۴-۲۰۰۰)

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پوختە

کوردەکان لە عێراق مێژووێکی دوور و درێژی خەباتیان هەیه بۆ بنیاتنانی دەولەتی خۆیان. بەلام خالی وەرچەرەخان و گۆرانکاری گرنگ لە مێژووی کورد 11 لە دوای راپەڕینی سالی 1991، دوای دانپێدانانی دەستووری هەريمی کوردستان لە سالی 2000 دەستپێککرد. ئەم توێژینەو هیه لە رێگەي قوولبوونەو هەم گۆرانکارییە بەرچاوانەدا، شیکارییەکی گشتگیر دەکات بۆ پرۆسەي بنیاتنانی دەولەت لە هەريم، گرنگی توێژینەو هەم لەو دایە کە جەخت لەسەر ئاستەنگ و دەرڤتەتەنە دەکات کە هەريمی کوردستان لە ماوەي سالی 2000-2024 12 رۆوبەرپووی بوو تەو. بە پشت بەستن بە رێبازی چۆنایەتی، ئەم ئالنگاری و دەرڤتەتەنە چوارچۆیەکی گرنگ نیشان دەدەن بۆ تێگەشتن لە پرۆسەي بنیاتنانی دەولەت لە هەريمی کوردستان لە ماوەيەدا. هەرۆهە ئەم توێژینەو هیه ئامانجیەتی ئاماژە بە چەندین ئالنگاری گرنگ بکات، وەک ئالنگاری جیۆپۆلەتیکی. هەرۆهە، ئالنگاری ناوخی بەتایەتی رکا بەرپە سىياسىيەکان کە لە شەري ناوخۆدا دەستپێککرد، بەردەوامن لە دەرڤتەتەنە پێکەتەيکی ئیدارەي دابەشکراو، کە ئەم دابەشبوونە بوو هۆی لاوازبوونی یەگەرتنی دامەزرانووی، گەندەلی، لاوازی حوکمرانی و پارچەبوونی سىاسی. ئەم توێژینەو هیه ئاماژە بە ئالنگاری تر دەکات، وەک ئالنگاری هەريمی و نێودەولەتی. هاوکات لەگەڵ ئەم ئالنگاریانە، توێژینەو هەم ئاماژە بە دەرڤتە سەرەکییەکانی وەک مەرڤەکانی دەولەتداری دەکات. دەولەتمەندی سەرچاوە سەرشتییهکان، بەتایەتی نەوت و گاز، دەرڤتە دیکەن. هەرۆهە پێشکەوتنی پرۆسەي دیموکراسی دوای دامەزراندنی حکومەتی هەريم و بنیاتنانی دامەزرانوکان کە دەرڤتە تری بەرچاویان بۆ ئەم پرۆسەي رەخساندو. جگە لە خستنی رۆوی پالپشتی نێودەولەتی بۆ هەريم، توێژینەو هەم تیشک دەخاتە سەر کێشە و ئالۆزییەکان، لەوانە شەري و مەملەتی هەژموون و بالادەستی، بە گشتی کاریگەري گۆرانکارییە بەردەوامەکان لە سەر ئاستی ناوچەي و نێودەولەتیهکان. دۆزینەو هەم ئاماژە بەو دەکەن کە سەرکەوتنی پرۆسەي بنیاتنانی دەولەتی بەندە بە توانای دامەزرانو، پارت و لایەنە سىياسىيەکانییهو هەم کە تا چەند دەتوانن ئەو ئالنگاریانە بەرپۆهەبن، و تا چەند دەتوانن ئەو دەرڤتەتەنە بقۆزنەو و خۆیان لەگەڵ گۆرانکارییە جیهانییهکان بگونجین.

وشە سەرەکییەکان: بنیاتنانی دەولەت، هەريمی کوردستان، دەرڤتەکان، ئالنگاری ناوخی، و ئالنگاری نێودەولەتی.



التحديات والفرص في بناء الدولة في إقليم كردستان - العراق (2005-2024)

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الملخص

للكورد في العراق تاريخ طويل من النضال من أجل إقامة دولتهم الخاصة. وبينما شكلت عام 1991 نقطة التحول، ثم الاعتراف الدستوري بإقليم كردستان في عام 2005، كان تحولاً هاماً في تاريخ الكورد. ومن خلال التعمق في هذه التحولات الهامة، تمثل هذه الدراسة تحليلاً شاملاً لعملية بناء الدولة في الإقليم، والتي تحدد التحديات والفرص التي واجهتها إقليم كردستان خلال الفترة 2005-2024. تعتمد ذلك على المنهج النوعي، توفر هذه التحديات والفرص إطاراً حيوياً لفهم عملية بناء الدولة خلال الفترة. وتهدف الدراسة إلى الإشارة إلى العديد من التحديات، مثل التحديات الجيوسياسية. كما أن التحديات الداخلية، وخاصة التنافسات السياسية التي بدأت في الحرب الأهلية، لا تزال تشكل هيكلاً إدارياً منقسماً، مما أدى هذا الانقسام إلى إضعاف الوحدة المؤسسية، والفساد، وضعف الحكم، والتفتت السياسي. تُشير هذه الدراسة إلى تحديات أخرى، إقليمية ودولية. إلى جانب هذه التحديات، تُشير الدراسة إلى فرص رئيسية، مثل شروط إقامة الدولة. كما تمثل الموارد الطبيعية الغنية، وخاصة النفط والغاز، فرصاً أخرى. كما أن تقدم الديمقراطية بعد إنشاء حكومة إقليم كردستان وبناء المؤسسات يوفر فرصة أخرى مهمة لهذه العملية. إلى جانب الدعم الدولي للمنطقة، تركز الدراسة على الصراعات والتوترات، بما في ذلك الحروب وصراعات القوة، التي تتغير بشكل عام على المسرح الإقليمي والعالمي. وتشير النتائج إلى أن نجاح عملية بناء الدولة يعتمد على قدرة مؤسساتها وكياناتها وأحزابها السياسية على مدى قدرتها على إدارة تلك التحديات، ومدى قدرتها على اغتنام تلك الفرص والتكيف مع التغيرات العالمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بناء الدولة، إقليم كردستان، الفرص، التحديات الداخلية والتحديات الدولية