

T.C.
TURKISH-GERMAN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

AN ANALYSIS OF US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS
KURDS IN IRAQ (1945-2022)

MASTER'S THESIS

Şinasi BATUR

ADVISOR

Assoc. Prof. Dr. BAYRAKLI

ISTANBUL, May 2022

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original work. I also declare that I have acted in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct at all stages of the work including preparation, data collection and analysis. I have cited and referenced all the information that is not original to this work.

Şinasi Batur

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to scrutinize post-1945 US foreign policy towards Kurds in Iraq. The study analyzed post World War 2 US foreign policy under three categories (Cold War, Post-Cold War and Post-Invasion) by taking changes in US foreign policy structure and in relation to that, transforming international system into consideration. The main assumption of the study is that throughout that period activeness of state-like entities, along with their participation in decision-making process and its role in international politics considerably, thus contrary to state-centric approach adopted by both neo-classical realism and neoliberalism when analyzing international relations, state-like entities have the potential of being actors in international politics without meeting all criteria like “sovereignty” and “recognition” for statehood. For being a nation far from having a homogenous structure, defining Kurds in Iraq, and conducting their historical analysis is of great importance. In this regard, in addition to inquiry of state-like entities and conceptual analysis of Kurds in Iraq, the study examined the US foreign policy towards Kurds in Iraq within the framework of IR theories.

Keywords: Kurds, US Foreign Policy, KRG, Northern Iraq

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, 1945 sonrası ABD'nin Irak Kürtleri'ne yönelik dış politikasını irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, değişen uluslararası sistem de göz önünde bulundurularak, 2. Dünya Savaşı sonrası ABD dış politikası Soğuk Savaş Dönemi, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönem ve İşgal Sonrası Dönem olmak üzere üç kategoride incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın temel varsayımı, sözkonusu dönemde devlet benzeri oluşumların uluslararası karar verme sürecindeki rolünün ve öneminin artmış olması, buyüzden devletleri merkeze alan neoklasik realizm ve neoliberalizm gibi yaklaşımlarla taban tabana zıt olarak, devlet olabilmek için önkoşul olan “egemenlik” ve “tanınma” kriterlerini karşılamaksızın uluslararası siyasette aktör haline gelmiş olmalarıdır. Homojen bir yapıya sahip olmaktan uzak olmaları ve içinde buldukları değişken siyasi dinamikler sebebiyle Irak Kürtleri'nin tanımlanması ve tarihsel analizinin yapılması önem arz etmektedir. Bu bakımda çalışma, devlet-benzeri yapılar ile birlikte Irak'taki Kürtler'in de kavramsal analizinin akabinde, ABD'nin Irak'taki Kürtlere yönelik dış politikasını uluslararası ilişkiler teorileri çerçevesinde incelemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kürtler, ABD Dış Politikası, IKYB, Kuzey Irak

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| CPA | : Coalition Provisional Authority |
| IMK | : Islamic Movement of Kurdistan |
| IR | : International Relations |
| ISIS/the IS | : Islamic State of Iraq and Sham/the Islamic State |
| KDP | : Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| KRG/KRI | : Kurdistan Regional Government |
| NATO | : North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NGOs | : Non-governmental Organizations |
| NSAs | : Non-state Actors |
| OPC | : Operation Provide Comfort |
| PKK | : Kurdish Workers' Party |
| PUK | : Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| PYD | : Democratic Union Party |
| SDF | : Syrian Democratic Forces |
| SLEs | : State-like Entities |
| the UN | : United Nations |
| US/USA | : United States/United States of America |
| USSR | : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WMDs | : Weapons of Mass Destruction |
| WW2 | : World War 2 |

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Aside from ongoing debates revolving around the objectivity of history, which renders the phrase -allegedly used by George Graham Vest- of “history is written by victors” problematic, the term “victor” in that statement itself is equally ambiguous, considering the fact that it has been getting more and more difficult to define concepts like victory in face of mercurialness of dynamics in international relations and post-truth tendencies in politics, along with increasing interdependency between countries as result of rapid globalization, which led suffering of one nation to cause a chain reaction amongst others. Furthermore, the way local actors are empowered in terms of both their military capabilities and their roles in state-building (de Guevara, 2010) in last seven decades, following the beginning of the Cold War (Barnett & Zürcher, 2009) and how they adopted diplomatic and political strategies similar to that of states; in addition to international actors’, that of super-powers in particular, use of contradictory standards toward those actors have complicated identification of aforementioned distinction of victors and losing sides even further.

Since the day US President Woodrow Wilson addressed the Congress about the issue of nations’ right of self-determination on February 11, 1918¹, there has been an ongoing debate surrounding the concept of self-determination, which has intensified particularly after the end of Cold War, as the monopoly of deciding what labels are used to describe incidents and actors on the stage of international relations, that is to say, the authority to decide whether an action is merely regarded as “self-defense” or an “act of terror”; as well as where an actor is located on the scale that starts with “freedom fighter” and ends with “terrorist”- had been a singular source for over a decade in unipolar world order. However, especially after September 11 Attack in 2001, as result

¹ See President Wilson's address to congress: analyzing German and Austrian peace utterances, February 11, 1918. (1997, July 12). The World War I Primary Documents Archive. <https://www.gwpda.org/1918/wilpeace.html>

of the combination of technological advancements that rendered world much smaller (and therefore increased interdependency between countries), changing structure of global market and increased importance of smaller actors in world politics, we have been witnessing a non-polar world order, whose presence may be the indicator of the end of Fukuyama's (1992) famous "the end of history" theory.

Judging by aforementioned developments, the need of clarifying concepts and nomenclature used by the field of international relations has arisen. In this regard, apart from theoretical concerns revolving around the concept of state-like entities (SLEs) as result of its longstanding problematic nature, paradoxical co-existence of self-determination doctrine and principle of non-intervention (Beitz, 1979) in practice necessitates the analysis and evolution of that concept.

In countries that can be deemed as "failed states", or in those that suffered from longstanding conflicts (despite partially functioning governments' existence), presence and prominence of local actors is felt even more. As a country, housing variety of ethnic groups and followers of different religions, whose recent past is encompassed by colonialism, dictatorship, two major wars and an ongoing civil war, Iraq stands as one of the emblematic countries which meet all abovementioned criteria to be an ideal habitat for local powers. In the middle of this sectarian and ethnic tension, Kurds, one of the major inhabitants of the country since the beginning of human civilization in that very region, with a turbulent history marked by conflicts with both other regional actors, neighboring countries and among themselves, have been in the center of international community's attention since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, for their role in conflict and their increasing autonomy which turned them from a US proxy to a regional power. Being a nation that live in the same cultural sphere divided by borders of four countries (Turkey-Iraq-Syria-Iran), Kurds have a turbulent history marked by wars, infightings, and massacres. Kurds, those of Iraq in particular, have long been having a struggle for recognition. However, chain of events following September 11 Attacks have opened a new chapter the nation is unfamiliar with since the failed attempt of independence in early 1940s with Mahabad Republic, Kurds were addressed as recognized actors. While throughout the period started with US invasion of Iraq in 2003 until Syrian Civil War, Kurds were perceived as "local partner", a romanticized version of the term "proxy actor", the emergence of the Islamic State organization, on the other hand, has paved the

way for KRG to strengthen their hand in the stage of international politics, which eventually led to independence referendum in 2017

1.1. PURPOSE OF THESIS

Judging by considerable changes in international politics along with political evolution of Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and their administrative bodies, this study seeks to scrutinize role of state-like entities as subjects of (in terms of both affecting and being affected by) state policies, by evaluating the specific case of US foreign policy towards KRG, with the purpose of demonstrating how local actors actively take part in policy-making, with how last two decades of Iraqi Kurds shaped foreign policies of other countries. The analysis is conducted within the framework of international relations (IR) theories.

The study is constructed upon hypotheses that international systems have the potential of determining foreign policy structures of countries; policies of countries with certain influence may be factors in terms of transforming international systems; each international system is bound to be explained by particular IR theories; the role of SLEs can be more than just objects of foreign policies of states, that in some cases, they may involve decision-making processes; and the case of KRG exemplifies evolving roles of SLEs and changing structure of US foreign policy

1.2. THE METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

1.2.1. Methodology Data Collection

In spite of the presence of numerous resources regarding to the topic of KRG, since majority of those resources handle the topic from certain perspectives, it is difficult to conduct the research on the basis of one scholar's writings. In this thesis, a methodology consisting partly of a chronological approach is followed. While writing this thesis, we benefited from articles, books, archive documents, news, and news agencies. In this context, the study offers a twofold analysis, first of which constitutes theoretical framework that consists of typological clarification of concepts like "SLEs" and explanation of US foreign policy structure. The same part also lays the groundwork of IR theories.

The second segment of said analysis offers the evolution of US foreign policy through the case of KRG. As the study is constructed upon the hypothesis that the case of US foreign policy towards KRG is unique in many ways as it: challenges realist theory to a great deal (Charountaki, 2011); represents changing patterns of international relations; reflects emerging role of state-like institutions and their involvement in international decision-making process; proves the ability for state-like entities to determine foreign policies of states considered “superpowers”; and has shown that increasing decentralization of power in some countries highlights the importance of local actors, it is hoped that the study serves two main purposes, first of which is to shedlight on the long overlooked issue of KRG by illustrating their political evolution, and the other being examination of reciprocal relationship between states and state-like entities in terms of influencing foreign policy by verification or falsification of the role of KRG with regards to affecting US foreign policy as well as the US foreign policy’s role in decision-making of regional government that led to referendum and deployment of Patriot Batteries in Erbil.

1.2.2. Significance

What gives the study significance comes from various aspects. To begin with, the scarcity of literature questioning the universality and applicability of IR theories with regards to international systems creates the need of coming up with new theoretical approaches. In this respect, examination of different political stages of history by applying a one-size-fits-all approach may lead one to erroneous outcomes. For example, rigidity of neoclassical realism, when it comes to making sense of a unipolar world, may pose serious challenges to that theory’s adherents.

According to Charountaki (2011), neither neo-classical realism nor neoliberalism are able to address that issue accurately. Furthermore, the case of Kurds in Iraq itself needs clarification. Although recent developments increased academia’s attention to Kurds, the “role of the Kurdish Issue, as the link between the Kurds and regional and international politics, has not so far attracted the academic attention warranted by its de facto importance” (Charountaki, 2011). The study hereof comes up with an analysis that evaluate the case of US-KRG relations from different IR

perspectives. In this context, the study is expected to contribute existing literature by covering the issue and including recent developments on the field.

1.2.3. Limitations

Although the study attempts to eliminate any misconception or confusion by clarifying questions surrounding the issue of KRG as a state-like entity, some aspects still remain problematic. First of all, analysis of KRG as case study is questionable. Even if we are to limit the term with two political parties, the complex and organic relationship between Kurdish groups/parties renders it hard to isolate the issue, meaning that when we look at the history of KDP or PUK, we realize that it is impossible to exclude actors in Turkey, Syria, or Iran. For instance, direct ties between KDP and Republic of Mahabad; or PUK with PKK makes it impossible to analyse the case within the boundaries of Northern Iraq. Another conceptual issue revolving around the topic of Iraqi Kurds becomes evident when analyzing a time period that predates the establishment of KRG. In this respect, using the term “KRG” for pre-Gulf War stage may look anachronistic.

Another problem becomes evident when examining US foreign policy. No matter how detailed a study is conducted, the differing political agendas between governments renders it difficult to talk about a one-size-fits-all policy structure during one presidency term let alone within the same stage. In order to overcome this, the study aims to explain all related major political turning points.

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Köse (2015), Iraq has had an important place in world and regional politics due to its strategic location and having the world's third largest oil reserves. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Iraqi politics developed on the axis of ethnic and sectarian separation, which can be classified as Shiite, Sunni, Arab and Kurdish.

Since the history of Kurds corresponds to the introduction of civilization in Mesopotamia, the study focuses on modern history of Kurds in Iraq. What gives the historical background of Kurds uniqueness comes from both geopolitical circumstances they are in, and their one-of-a-kind political status, considering the fact that in spite of

their substantial population distributed into four countries, regardless of the citizenships they hold, Kurds are considered “stateless” before the eyes of international law. However, the political momentum they gained after the invasion of Iraq, which eventually led them to referendum in 2017, one of many failed independence attempts, in combination with developments in Northern Syria, turned international community’s attention to Kurds more than ever.

Although there are many sources about USA and KRG relations it has never been explained and analyzed well and enough. Most of them are numerous standard works on US foreign policy towards the Kurds in Iraq. On the other hands, there are some important studies as well.

Marianna Charountaki has a serious and standard work which has tempts a lot of archival resources on Kurdish-USA ties. Charountaki (2019), emphasizing the role of non-state entities as (f)actors of change in the formulation of foreign policy. Using a multi-layered (rather than a normative) analysis, it examines the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a novel, non-state case in the international relations and foreign policy analysis literature. It argues that referenda can be pursued by non-state entities, not just state actors. It perceives referenda as tools for the formulation and possible facilitation of foreign policy objectives and claims to the formation of statehood undertaken by a non-state entity. Her study, therefore, pursues a multi-level analysis looking at the contributing dynamics at the domestic, regional, and international levels which demonstrate the impact of referenda on foreign policymaking and examines the catalyst role of the unit level that stands out as a determining factor.

Sarı (2019), claims that it is possible to investigate the impact of Kurdish opposition movements on US foreign policy by understanding how the foreign policy of Kurdish opposition movements as non-state actors is produced in interaction with the international system, local system / order, identity, and power relations.

Bozarslan, Güneş ve Yadirgi (2021), *The Cambridge History of the Kurds* is an authoritative and comprehensive volume exploring the social, political, and economic features, forces, and evolution amongst the Kurds, and in the region known as Kurdistan, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Situating contemporary

developments taking place in Kurdish-majority regions within broader histories of the region, it forms a definitive survey of the history of the Kurds and Kurdistan.

There have been also some partial and similar studies by several scholars such as Michael Gunter (2011), Kerim Yıldız (2004). The purpose of each of these studies is to explain a certain aspect of the US Foreign Policy in Northern Iraq. However, our thesis is unique in a way which analyses US foreign policy on based on SLEs.

One of the main factors that renders the subject of Kurds in Iraq important is that despite their unrecognition, the way they act and are treated as “persons” in context of international law and the role they play role in decision-making mechanism makes them separable from any other state-like entity.

As the study is constructed upon the hypotheses that contemporary international system eliminated the monopoly of states, which enabled participation of SLEs and the US foreign policy towards Kurds challenges what classical international theories stipulate, the main purpose of this chapter is to elaborate significant events surrounding Kurds in Iraq to give the reader an insight about the issue. In this regard, in parallel with what is drawn for US foreign policy, the modern history of Kurds is analyzed under three eras that are Cold War Era, standing for the era encompassing Cold War between 1945 and 1990; Post-Cold War Era that corresponds the interval between the end of Cold War until September 11 attacks in 2001; and Post-Invasion Era represents the ongoing era since 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Table-1.1 illustrates timetable of significant events in history of Kurds in Iraq. Following sections intend to take a detailed look at listed events.

Table-1.1. Timetable of Modern History of Kurds in Iraq

| Stage | Year | Event |
|-----------------|------|--|
| Cold War | 1945 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yalta Agreement |
| | 1946 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of Republic of Mahabad on • Collapse of Republic of Mahabad on • Mustafa Barzani establishes KDP |
| | 1958 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coup d'état by Abd al-Karim Qasim in Iraq |

| | | |
|----------------------|------|--|
| Post-Cold War | 1961 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qasim and KDP negotiate for autonomy • First Kurdish War begins |
| | 1963 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qasim is overthrown and executed by Ba'ath Party • Coup d'état against Ba'ath Party |
| | 1966 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battle of Handren |
| | 1968 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ba'athist coup in July ("17 July Revolution") |
| | 1970 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy Accord is signed between central government in Baghdad and Mustafa Barzani (end of First Kurdish War) |
| | 1974 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy Law is published • Second Kurdish War begins |
| | 1975 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran (Second Kurdish War ends) • Mustafa Barzani flees Iraq |
| | 1976 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PUK revolt begins |
| | 1979 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saddam takes over the rule • Iran-Iraq War begins |
| | 1983 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tensions rise between Ba'athist rule and Kurds |
| | 1988 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Anfal Campaign" begins • Approximately 5000 lives claimed in Halabja Massacre • Iran-Iraq War ends |
| | 1990 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iraq invades Kuwait on ... • Sanctions against Iraq is implemented |
| | 1991 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulf War begins → Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq begins → No-fly zone in Northern Iraq is instituted • Safwan Agreement is signed (end of Gulf War) |
| | 1992 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of no-fly zone allows de facto autonomy to Kurds • Election for Kurdish National Assembly is conducted |
| | 1994 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil war erupts between KDP and PUK • IMK seizes Halabja |
| | 1997 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey starts military operations against PKK with the help of KDP |
| | 1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kurdish Civil War ends |
| | 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 11 Attacks |

| | | |
|---------------------------|------|---|
| Post- Invasion | 2002 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings between US and KRG begins |
| | 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasion of Iraq • Paul Bremer becomes the director of Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) |
| | 2005 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional parliamentary elections → Masoud Barzani becomes president of KRG |
| | 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jalal Talabani is elected as the President of Iraq • Al-Maliki becomes prime minister |
| | 2009 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional parliamentary elections → Barzani is re-elected |
| | 2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass protests in the region • Syrian Civil War begins |
| | 2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Erbil Agreement is signed between KNC and PYD with Barzani's KDP as mediator • Baghdad headquarters of KDP is raided |
| | 2013 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional parliamentary elections → Nechirvan Barzani becomes prime minister of KRG • Geneva II Peace Conference on Syria is conducted with the participation of Kurdish organizations/parties/institutions |
| | 2014 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "War Against ISIS" begins • ISIS captures Mosul • ISIS captures Kobani • Peshmerga joins fight against ISIS • Fuad Masum of PUK becomes president of Iraq |
| | 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barzani closes parliament for 2 years |
| | 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosul is taken back from the IS by joint forces of the Coalition, Iraqi Army, Iran Peshmerga, PKK and SDF. |
| | 2017 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referendum of Independence takes place → Majority vote in favor of independence → Offensive against KRG by Iraqi Army begins • Iraqi Army takes over Kirkuk and surrounding areas • Jalal Talabani dies |
| | 2018 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahram Salih of PUK becomes president of Iraq |

| | | |
|--|------|--|
| | 2019 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nechirvan Barzani becomes president of KRG |
| | 2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of Patriot batteries in Erbil |

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter lays the theoretical foundations of the study. Considering the fact that state-like entities is not an agreed-upon concept, the chapter aims to clarify the questions revolving around the concept by both giving its definition and addressing criteria and typologies of SLEs. Similarly, what is meant by KRG is also explained by both giving background information regarding the case and the status of KRG as a state-like entity. Moreover, the chapter gives the reader an insight of about three variants IR theories, being neoclassical realism, neoliberalism and holistic constructivism, their historical evolution, and their approaches towards SLEs. Lastly, US foreign policy, its structure and its historical evolution is presented in this chapter.

2.1. DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGIES

2.1.1 State-Like Entities(SLEs)

Another topic whose definition and explanation deemed essential is state-like entities (SLEs). Despite the concept of SLEs itself is not problematic with regards to defining it, the way it is analyzed under the category of non-state actors, broadness of which cause it to be vague, or is used interchangeably with other terms, this chapter of the study seeks to disambiguate surrounding the concept. In this concern, definitions of SLEs are given first. Furthermore, typology of SLEs is given as some nuances between actors falling into that category requires classification.

According to Grant and Barker (2009), state-like entities are described entities that meet some criteria of statehood, yet fail to fulfil all (Grant & Barker, 2009). In this respect, one can say that the term state-like entity is used in a broad sense, which encompasses terms like quasi-state or de facto state. Also, in some cases, said terms are used as synonym of SLEs. Some scholars define abovementioned actors as those who lack one or more criteria for statehood, no internationally recognized sovereignty, yet independent constitutionally (Jackson, 1990). However, claiming that SLEs' nonexistence within international sphere that is monopolized by nation states (Caspersen, 2012) does not seem accurate, because "as a result of the globalization of international law and of a process of homogenization, the question of which state-like entities have international legal personality comes down primarily to the question of which entities have statehood" (Nicholson, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the amalgamation of SLEs and other actors into the concept of non-state actors can cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The same problem occurs when suggesting and addressing criteria that an actor is expected to meet for being considered as non-state actor. For example, according to Josselin and Wallace, NSAs are entities which are autonomous from central government, existing and operating in more than one country (like Kurds) and act like states with the purpose of obtaining political outcomes (Josselin & Wallace, 2001).

Firstly, regardless of nuances that separate them, what is common between SLEs is that they are unrecognized states which are "the places that do not exist in international relations; they are state-like entities that are not part of the international system of sovereign states" (Caspersen, 2012). In other words, although recent changes have reshaped international relations and how concepts like recognition or sovereignty are in need of redefinition, many scholars, realists in particular, insist on those international relations occur between de jure actors (i.e., sovereign states), so, any actor that does not meet all the criteria for statehood, according to that view, has limited or no role in international system. Based on the strict characterization stipulated by realists, it is possible to say that what is common between different types of SLEs is their inability to meet criteria in their entirety. Those criteria are recognition, sovereignty, personality, and effectiveness.

Concerning to **recognition**, which is one of two norms for statehood, according to Nicholson (2019), it is erroneously regarded as the only criterion for an entity to be considered a state. Recognition norm refers to “an existing state has a power to recognize an entity as a state with the result that the existing state and the entity are defined as states relative to each other” (2019) with two exceptions that are “premature recognition” and “collective non-recognition” (Nicholson, 2019). While former refers to recognition in absentia of an entity’s territorial control, and the latter is observed when a recognized entity demonstrates unlawful acts that may result collective non-recognition by other states. Still, Nicholson’s view regarding to recognition is dubious. There are countries that enjoy statehood without unanimous recognition. For example, Israel or South Korea must be excluded from the list of states in that logic, since their statehood are not recognized by at least one state. Also, the opposite scenario is possible (and present), example of which is Northern Cyprus that is recognized only by Turkey.

As for SLEs, the contrast between the principle of self-determination and factuality renders it difficult for SLEs to obtain the status of statehood in both cases where an actor either is recognized by some states yet cannot fulfil other criteria; or where it meets other standards yet lacks recognition.

Contemporary unrecognized states, in contrast, have their origins in self-determination conflicts and are not denied recognition primarily because of the politics they espouse, or since they have resulted from an external aggression (although this sometimes plays a role as well) or because they lack the empirical capabilities required for statehood. They are denied recognition because they do not meet the criteria for the now very restrictive right to self-determination (Caspersen, 2013)

Another criterion is **sovereignty**. According to Grant and Barker (2009), sovereignty can be examined in two scales: “sovereignty in internal aspects” and “political sovereignty” (Grant & Barker). While sovereignty in internal aspects is interested in who holds the power (Grant & Barker, 2009), political sovereignty, which is “the necessary concomitant of the lack of an effective international order and the constitutional weaknesses of the international superstructures” (Grant & Barker 2009) refers to the degree an entity’s sovereignty is endorsed internationally. The most

important difference between two types is that while the former can be exercised without international recognition, that is to say any party that has the means to establish its dominance can achieve sovereignty in internal aspect, while political sovereignty must be acknowledged by international actors. According to another set of criteria brought forward by Krasner (2001) are international mutual recognition, exclusion of external forces from decision-making process (Westphalian sovereignty), domestic sovereignty and interdependence sovereignty.

As the third criterion for statehood, **personality** refers to entities that possess international rights and capacity (Dixon, 2013). Nijman (2010) distinguishes “legal personality” that is brought forward by proponents of realist theory, from “factual personality”. In this concept, she comes up with the idea that there is a theoretical vacuum in terms of defining characteristics and boundaries of international personality, since existing theories fail to answer questions revolving around SLEs, such as “when an actor should possess rights and duties under international law?” (Nijman, 2010). Judging by what Nijman argues, it can be said that acceptance of SLEs challenges conventional understanding, meaning of which is “as a result of the globalization of international law and of a process of homogenization, the question of which state-like entities have international legal personality comes down primarily to the question of which entities have statehood” (Nicholson, 2019).

The last criterion is **effectiveness**. Coming back to Nicholson’s theory, entities that are capable of controlling “territory, population, government and independence” (Nicholson, 2019) meet the criteria of effectiveness. What renders effectiveness separable from sovereignty is “meeting the effectiveness criteria does not create statehood where the fact that an entity meets the criteria is a consequence of a use of force by an external supporter, at a minimum if the supporter’s conduct is unlawful and at a minimum while the entity’s effectiveness is sustained by the conduct” (Nicholson, 2019).

Besides the need of categorization of aforementioned terms that are de facto state, quasi-state, statelet and prostate, the fact that SLEs are sometimes analyzed under the title of non-state actors in addition to the issue of absence of recognition (which

enables states to adopt different designations about those actors) prescribes presenting typology about that case.

What makes the inclusion of SLEs into NSAs problematic becomes evident when considering that “some non-state actors are only terrorists and warrant arrest and prosecution like any criminal. Others are only freedom fighters, whose organizations abjure terrorism and merit recognition under the laws of war” (Gloss, 2018). Moreover, since NSAs, which contain terrorist organizations, NGOs, and private institutions, are not subjected to international law in oppose to their state counterparts (Nijman, 2010), inclusion of state-like entities with de facto or limited recognition before international law contradicts with the idea that SLEs are in the same state with other NSAs. As the way SLEs meet the criteria of statehood is what demarcate SLEs from other actors, and therefore how/how many of the criteria those actors fulfil is perceived as an indicator for reader to distinguish one from another, it is possible to classify them based on said nuances:

de Facto States: The simplest definition of de Facto states would be entities with temporary recognition and partial sovereignty. de Facto states, “with a certain degree of permanence and also ‘effectiveness’” (Grant & Barker, 2009), may or may not meet the criteria of effectiveness or sovereignty, yet their temporal recognition by state actors distinguishes them from unrecognized states.

Statelets: Statelets are regional actors that are perceived as ‘states within states’. Statelets, like proto-states, generally appear in conflict-driven areas and monopolize their force. In this regard, they are actors benefiting from power-vacuum, which exercise state’s roles in its incompetence or absence.

Proto-states: Proto-states, that “lacked fixed boundaries and exercised sovereignty over limited areas and populations for the purposes of providing protection” (Strakes, 2011) operate “in an environment of extreme instability but also, like the nucleus of an atom, manages to generate cohesion and structural integrity while constantly in flux” (Brown, 2018).

Quasi-states: Quasi-states, which are thought to be synonymous with SLEs, are actors “independent in law but insubstantial in reality and materially dependent on other states for its welfare” (Jackson, 1990). Quasi-states are “deficient and defective as

apparatuses of power. They are not positively sovereign or naturally free. Instead, they are constitutionally independent which is a formal and not a substantive condition” (Jackson, 1990). In this context, quasi-states can be characterized as state-like entities with high effectiveness, partial sovereignty with limited to no recognition and without status of personality with some exceptions. Hence, they “have internal but not external sovereignty and seek some form of autonomy or independence” (Natali, 2010).

Based on criteria and typology of SLEs, if we are to scrutinize the role of Kurds in Iraq, we see that KRG has shown characteristics of different types of SLEs. For instance, while, according to Jongerden (2019), KRG “can be considered proto-state or statelet” (2019), Natali (2010) designates KRG as a quasi-state that is a “by-product of international aid of which the “benefits of stalemate” are derived— recognition, legitimacy, and development” (Natali, 2010). Likewise, the way they are addressed by international actors indicate that the region, in different stages of its history, obtained the status of de facto state. In this regard, although identifying Kurds by one of given typologies is highly unlikely due to the complexity of the nature of the issue, it is safe to include Kurds into the category of SLEs.

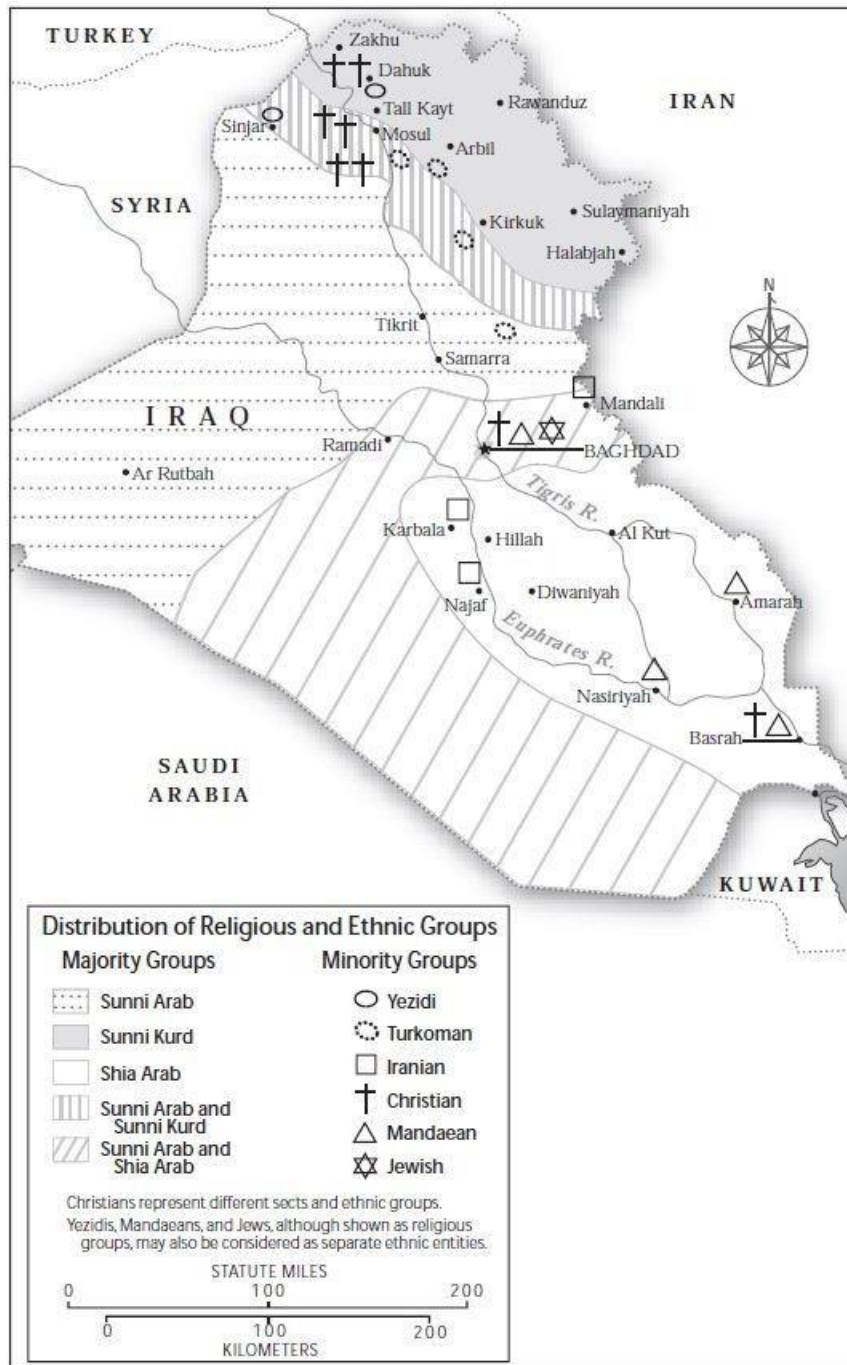
2.1.2 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

With the purpose of avoiding possible misapprehensions that may render the study seem fallacious and anachronistic as mentioned on previous section, this chapter seeks to explain commonly used concepts in this research and exemplify them. In this concern, considering the fact that the establishment of KRG coincides so-called Operation Provide Comfort subsequent to the First Gulf War whereas political history with the nation with the US dates back to the end of WW2, it is essential to lay an etymological groundwork. Although the study does not intend to explain who the Kurds are in general sense since not only would the answer of that question cover hundreds of pages if not thousands, considering the nation’s deep-rooted history; but also, it would be irrelevant with the study’s main purpose. Rather, the subject that this section focuses on is the clarification of what is meant by “KRG” within the study’s context.

To begin with, it is noteworthy to stress that distribution of Kurds in Iraq differs from areas controlled by the Regional Government, meaning that the area under

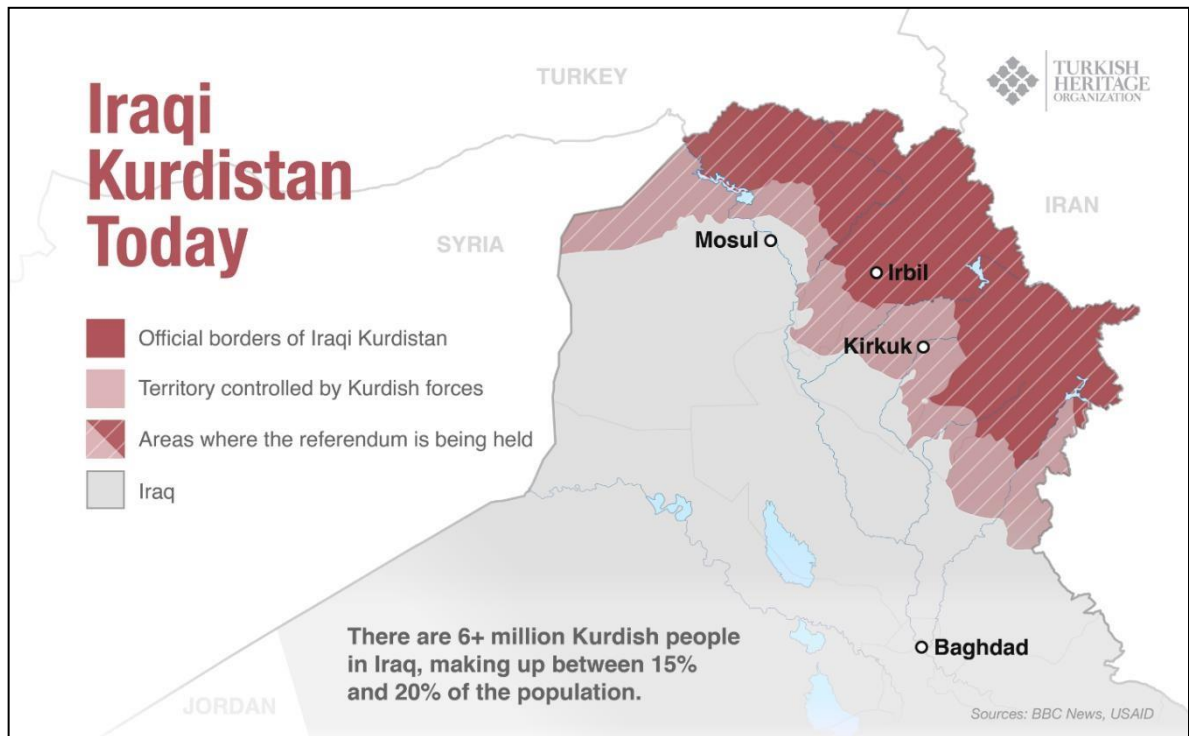
administrative jurisdiction of Regional Government does not cover the entire territory inhabited by Kurds. To illustrate, Figure-2.1 given below shows distribution of religious and ethnic groups in Iraq, whereas Figure-2.2 presents territorial control of KRG after failed attempt of independence referendum in 2017:

Figure-2.1: Distribution of Religious and Ethnic Groups in Iraq



Source: Barker & Hamilton (2006)

Figure-2.2: Territorial Control of KRG



Source: Turkish Heritage Organization

Judging by two figures given above, the study excludes Diyala, Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Nineveh governorates despite considerable Kurdish presence in that section of the country. In this regard, the study limits the US foreign policy concerning to Kurds with those in Duhok, Erbil (also known as Hewler) and as-Sulaymaniyah.

Judging by two figures given above, the study excludes Diyala, Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Nineveh governorates in spite of considerable Kurdish presence in that section of the country. In this regard, the study limits the US foreign policy concerning to Kurds with those in Duhok, Erbil (also known as Hewler) and as-Sulaymaniyah.

Secondly, due to differing nature of groups and parties in that region, it is barely possible to analyse entire region as a single entity, and therefore talking about an exclusive US foreign policy engulfing all Kurds is unlikely. Thus, the study

distinguishes Kurds in KRG into subcategories, which are “political parties”, meaning main actors participating in electoral process; and “organizations”, whose status is disputable and bear no legal basis. As detailed information about selected parties is given on Chapter-3, each main party taking part in Kurdish affairs is explained briefly.

Based on criteria and typology of SLEs, if we are to scrutinize the role of Kurds in Iraq, we see that KRG has shown characteristics of different types of SLEs. For instance, while, according to Jongerden (2019), KRG “can be considered proto-state or statelet” (2019), Natali (2010) designates KRG as a quasi-state that is a “by-product of international aid of which the “benefits of stalemate” are derived— recognition, legitimacy, and development” (Natali, 2010). Likewise, the way they are addressed by international actors indicate that the region, in different stages of its history, obtained the status of de facto state. In this regard, although identifying Kurds by one of given typologies is highly unlikely due to the complexity of the nature of the issue, it is safe to include Kurds into the category of SLEs.

2.1.2.1 Political Parties

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP): Founded by Mustafa Barzani after the failure of Mahabad Republic under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad, KDP is the largest and most influential party along with its on-again-off-again rival/ally PUK. Barzani, who benefited from power vacuum caused by the execution of Qazi Muhammad in 1947, consolidated his power with the support of his tribesmen. In fact, until the end of longstanding revolt, which ended in favour of Iraq and resulted with Algiers Agreement in 1975, it can be said that Barzani barely had political rivals. When Gulf War broke out in 1991, Erbil-based KDP under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani’s son and successor, Masoud Barzani, was one of the main actors that take part in the foundation of KRG. Between 1994 and 1998, the region witnessed a bloody civil war between KDP and PUK, which resulted bicephalous leadership until 2005. After 2005, Barzani has become de facto president of KRG and stayed in the office until failed 2017 referendum. As of 2019, Nechirvan Barzani serves as the head of KDP and president of KRG.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK): PUK is founded in 1975, after Mustafa Barzani's self-exile to Iran, with the purpose of filling power-vacuum after the monopoly that KDP enjoyed for years. PUK is considered the most powerful Kurdish party in Iraq along with its rival KDP. Sulaymaniyah based party's political activeness that threatened KDP's claim of being the only representative of Kurds in Iraq caused severe infighting between two parties. What gives the party significance is that between 2006 to 2018, two senior members of PUK, Jalal Talabani, the founder of the party, and Fuad Masum, the co-founder of PUK, served as president of Iraq consecutively.

Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK): Although it was officially founded in 1987, IMK's history dates back to 1979. As the fourth largest party in the region after Gorran Movement, the Halabja-based was known for its close ties with Iran in early 90s, which is one of the reasons that paved the way to Halabja massacre. Before abovementioned civil war between KDP and PUK "in December 1993, fighting first broke out between the PUK and the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan" (Gunter, 2014).

Gorran Movement: Gorran Movement was established as a splinter faction of PUK by Nawshirwan Mustafa in 2009, "Gorran Movement won an incredible 25 seats based on a reformist agenda almost exclusively built around the fight against political corruption" (Costantini & O'Driscoll, 2021).

2.1.1.2. Organizations

Aside from political parties there are a number of organizations that are influential in political dynamics, most (in)famous of which is Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Although it is a designated terrorist organization, PKK has an on-and-off relationship with state actors. The way international community, the US in particular, have used PKK based on their political agenda, it is important to include PKK into the equation. Those favoritisms, however, made countries fighting PKK, most prominent of which is Turkey, "upset that the United States and Iraq have not targeted the PKK more aggressively" (Baker & Hamilton, 2006). PKK is also known for its rivalry with the Regional Government. Another Kurdish-majority organization is Ansar al Islam. "The roots of Ansar al-Islam extend back to the mid-1990s. The group appears to be — comprised of the various Islamist factions that splintered from the Islamic Movement of

Kurdistan (IMK) in northern Iraq” (Schanzer, 2004). Although it cannot be deemed a Kurdish-dominated organization, considerable Kurdish presence in the IS (formerly known as Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS)) is often overlooked. In spite of the rumors that Arab-dominated IS was prone to discriminate Kurds within its ranks because of their ethnicity (al-Tamimi, 2017), existence of Kurdish militants and commanders within the ranks of the IS is nothing new. Aside from early cooperation between Ansar al-Islam and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’ Jama’at a-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ)(which laid the foundations of the IS) starting from 2002 (Zenko, 2009), according to reports, one of the recruitment sources of the IS was Kurdish population, especially that of Halabja (Hauslohner, 2014).

2.2. IR THEORIES

Since the study’s main purpose is to elaborate and investigate US foreign policy in the case of KRG, given the case’s unique nature, it is assumed that explanation of the case with a single theory may retain the study to present the entire picture. In this concern, the study explains 3 variants of prominent IR theories, neoclassical realism, neoliberalism, and holistic constructivism.

2.2.1. Neoclassical Realism

In order to understand Neoclassical Realism, first of all Classical Realism needs to be explained. Classical Realism, while examining the foreign policies of states and their relations with each other, acts with the assumption that the most important factor determining international relations is human nature, intentions, decisions, and behaviors. Although it is known that its emergence as a “new science” within the discipline of International Relations was with Edward H. Carr in the post-World War I period, the origin of classical realism dates back to much earlier periods. The theory, which takes human nature as a reference in explaining state behaviors, argues that there

is competition in the international political environment where there is no central sovereign power. The theory, which reflects the impulses of being strong, governing and dominating in human nature to relations between states, argues that states, like ambitious people, are in a constant struggle to maintain their existence in an environment of chaos. While defining the nature of the international system in Classical Realist theory, it is based on an anarchy environment where there is no higher power and states act in line with their national interests. In this sense, Classical Realists see international relations as a struggle for power and interest between states.

In the analysis of the state, which is based on the structure of human nature, the factors of pursuit of power and national interest are highlighted. From this point of view, Classical Realists focus on the question of how the attitudes of states in international relations can be explained to understand state behavior in a 'realistic' way. Morgenthau, one of the representatives of Classical Realism, also explains the foundations of Political Realism through human nature. According to Morgenthau, "politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their origins in human nature" (Ersoy, 2015: 171). Emphasizing the concept of national interest as the main starting point in politics, Morgenthau argued that the main method shaping international relations is power struggle. Even though previous researchers in realist theory saw the phenomenon of 'power' as an end, Morgenthau defined power as a tool for the provision of national interests and examined the relationship between power elements and policy implementation capacity.

Another contribution of Morgenthau to Classical Realist theory is that the power components are not only material but also leadership or psychological etc. revealed that it also consists of intangible elements and that power is variable according to the position, strength, and material capacity of the other party (Demir, et al. 2013: 73). From this point of view, it is understood that power in Classical Realism does not consist only of material capacity but is defined as the capacity to control the thoughts and behaviors of the other party in order to achieve the goal of survival, which is at the top of the hierarchy of goals. However, it should not be understood that classical

realism puts the military capacities of states in the background. As a matter of fact, according to Morgenthau, states engage in a military power struggle in order to create deterrence and control over the other.

While Classical Realists argue that states will exhibit rational behaviors in line with their aims to maximize their interests, they also state that interstate relations will take place in a hierarchical structure. They argue that the realization of the said balance of power will be realized by the states and statesmen, and that the decisions of the statesmen are effective in the deterioration of the said balance. On the other hand, in Waltz's Structural Realism, the balance of power emerges spontaneously in the anarchic system, independent of the internal characteristics of the units and the leader's decisions. Structural Realism, pioneered by Waltz, differed from Classical Realism in terms of its level of analysis and emerged as a system theory and focused on explaining the bipolar system and the structure formed by great powers.

Structural Realism, which accepts that the most important factor determining international relations is the structure of the international system, claims that it is sufficient to explain the foreign policies of states and their relations with each other, with the international system itself. In this framework, it accepts that the basic unit of the system in question is the state and that states constitute the structures (system). Developing the most comprehensive analysis in theory, Kenneth N. Waltz's Structural Realist approach deals only with the international political structure. Accordingly, states develop foreign policy behaviors in accordance with the principles of the system, and while doing this, they are only affected by systemic variables. In other words, Waltz argues that foreign policy behaviors are shaped and directed by external factors. Therefore, while analyzing the foreign policy behaviors, it is emphasized that the units should be defined independently of their characteristics, behaviors, and interactions. Stating that every actor on the system cannot have the same level of power, Waltz argues that some great powers are independent and other states are dependent on them.

Neorealism's ignoring the internal characteristics of the units - such as leader images, internal institutions, regime systems and traditions - while explaining the changes on the international system only reveals the inadequacy of its system-oriented approach. As a matter of fact, the criticisms towards the Structural Realist theory took

place in this direction. With the need to eliminate the said deficiency, a theoretical search has begun within the discipline. Proposing the necessity of including foreign policy analysis, the authors developed the Neoclassical Realist theory, which will highlight the importance of sub-unit level variables in explaining international relations. As of the 1970s, in the environment where the factors determining international relations and explaining the foreign policy behaviors of states were investigated, debates arose about the change in the said power balance. The effect of sub-unit level factors that brought the end of the Cold War revealed the inadequacy of Structural Realism, which is the current and dominant theory in the discipline, in terms of explaining international relations. The assumption that the bipolar system promoted by Structural Realism provides peace and stability was shaken, and theoretical diversity emerged in order to explain the emerging unipolar world order. Due to the questioning of Structural Realism, a need for a theory to explain international relations has arisen. This situation necessitated the inclusion of foreign policy analysis in the assumptions of Structural Realism, which is dominant at the point of explaining the bipolar system. Accordingly, the researchers claimed that a more comprehensive and explanatory approach should be adopted, which includes the interaction process of unit-level factors with the stimuli of the system when analyzing foreign policy behaviors (Kiraz, 2018: 419). With the end of the Cold War, Neoclassical Realism has been one of the emerging critical approaches to Structural Realism. Neoclassical Realists argue that structural theories are insufficient to explain changes in the behavior of states.

Neoclassical Realism as a concept was first introduced by Gideon in 1998. "Neoclassical" by Rose Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy" (Rose, 1998). In the most general sense, Neoclassical Realism, which examines the intervention role of the "State" in foreign policy behaviors and examines why states within similar systemic structures exhibit different foreign policy behaviors, is considered as a foreign policy analysis approach (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009: 4). According to its basic assumption, the foreign policy behaviors of states are determined by variables at the intra-state level as well as systemic factors. In other words, while explaining the behavior of states in the face of the effects of the system, Neoclassical Realist theory focuses on an interaction mechanism between the international system and the internal dynamics of states (Taliaferro, 2006: 18-21). Gideon Based on the short definition made

by Rose, Neoclassical Realism accepts that the most important criterion determining the foreign policy of a state is the position of that state in the international system and its relative power capacity. Therefore, he is from the Realist family. This view is the basic assumption of Structural Realism. However, the theory argues that the impact of such power elements on foreign policy is indirect and complex because the pressures of the system must be translated into foreign policy through intervening variables at the unit level. He argues that systemic explanations alone will not be sufficient to explain foreign policy behaviors. This is why Rose claims the theory is "neoclassical". Accordingly, it is argued that in order to explain the foreign policies of the states, it is necessary to evaluate both the systemic and the internal characteristics of the states together. Neoclassical Realists, who argue that systemic dynamics alone will not be sufficient in understanding the intentions and behaviors of states, suggest a unifying approach that includes the control and perceptions of statesmen and statesmen (Taliaferro, Ripsman and Lobell, 2016: 27).

Neoclassical Realism, which has been the subject of various debates both in the tradition of Realist theory and in the discipline of International Relations, was initially considered as a limited and complementary foreign policy approach that only aimed to identify and explain some of the limitations of Structural Realism (Rathburn, 2008). Structural Realism, which failed to predict the end of the Cold War, was criticized for its assumptions about the factors affecting international relations. Stating that although states are similar as sovereign political entities, they exhibit different behaviors on the international system, Waltz attributes the said difference to the difference between the power capacities of the big states. According to Waltz, who is based on capacity distribution, while power is a feature of states, distribution of power expresses a feature of the system. Therefore, according to this approach, any change in the international system occurs due to the rise or collapse of great powers and as a result of changes in the balance of power following this process (Kolasi, 2013: 162). However, Neoclassical Realism criticizes Structural Realism for not giving an adequate answer about the factors that determine these capacities that affect the behavior of states on the system. However, he does not entirely reject the effects of the system on state policies. The approach, which accepts the power and security-oriented view on the system, accepts that politics is a struggle between states arising on the grounds of relative power and

security (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009: 4). System pressures have a driving effect on states to increase their security, and they pass through the filters of variables such as statesmen and statesmen while determining their foreign security policies. In this sense, Neoclassical Realist theory emerges as a foreign policy theory that examines the foreign policy making and implementation stages of states.

Structural Realism argues that the intentions and behaviors of states can be understood through systemic explanations that operate outside the control of the states and statesmen, such as the balance of attack-defense, anarchy, and the distribution of relative power. Neoclassical Realists reject this argument (Ertoy, 2019: 11). Opposing the assumption that policy choices are the direct result of systemic structure, they argue that state and intrastate factors are effective factors in explaining state behavior (Taliaferro, Ripsman, & Lobell, 2016: 31). At this point, Neoclassical Realist theory should not be perceived as a complete rejection of Structural Realism or a tendency towards Classical Realism. As a matter of fact, the theory is influenced by both classical and structuralist approaches (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009: 19). Neoclassical Realism also accepts the ideas that anarchy prevails in the power struggle and relations between states, which are among the Realist principles. The point where the theory differs from its predecessors is related to the decisiveness of the anarchic structure in the behavior of the state. In Structural Realism, anarchy is considered as the determining factor of state behavior. On the other hand, in Neoclassical Realism, anarchy alone is not explanatory in terms of explaining the changes in the intentions and behaviors of states (Ertoy, 2019: 12). As Rose stated, the effect of anarchic order on state behavior is shaped by intermediate variables such as leader perceptions (Rose, 1998: 153). In other words, for Neoclassical Realism, in the analysis of state behavior, systemic variables such as power distribution and anarchy have an impact, as well as unit and sub-unit level factors such as the internal policies of states or the perceptions of statesmen (Akgül- Açıkmеше, 2011: 53). -54). In this sense, the basis of Neoclassical Realist theory can be expressed as "bringing back the state" to realist theory in order to develop the external determinist approach of structural realism (Taliaferro, Ripsman and Lobell, 2016: 31). At this point, for Neoclassical Realists, the state is the main intermediate variable between the international system and foreign policy behaviors (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009: 44). Although the state is mentioned as an

intermediate variable here, what is really meant is the effect of state-level elements between the system and foreign policy behaviors. In other words, the theory also deals with unit-level elements in explaining state behaviors, and even includes some concepts foreign to realist theory - such as strategic culture, leader perception - in the analysis in order to achieve specific results (Ertoy, 2019: 12). In this sense, Neoclassical Realism is a theory that combines the relative power capacities of states in the international system with their domestic political limitations. In doing so, it emphasizes the intermediary nature of systemic pressures, intervening variables at the unit level, such as the perceptions of decision makers or the internal political structure of the state.

As “the oldest and most frequently adopted theory of international relations” (Donnelly, 2013), regardless of its “shape-shifting” nature and its different variants, the main premise of realism is shared by all realists. As Mearsheimer (2001) put, international system is anarchic, morality is determined by the interests of the states, states are rational bodies and great powers seek to pole their position in international politics by means of military power and international law is “a system seeking to constrain the powerful” as portrayed by Morgenthau (1948). Still, some nuances distinguish variants of realist theory from each other. For example, “in contrast to classical realism, neorealism excludes the internal makeup of different states” (Elman, 2007). As a variant of realism that has the “softest realist position” (Steinberg, 2002), “neoclassical realism suggests that what states do depends in large part on domestically derived preferences” (Elman, 2007).

One of the features of neoclassical realism (or realism in general), which is the negligence of the role of SLEs renders it insufficient in terms of explaining increasingly important role of SLEs in international politics. Although Josselin and Wallace claim that “only the most determined “Realist” would deny that the balance between states and non-state actors has shifted, over the past 30–40 years” (Josselin & Wallace, 2001), neoclassical realists share the claim of that “states are the principal or most important actors on the international political stage and represent the key unit of analysis” (Kauppi & Viotti, 2020), and SLEs are “always one of lesser importance” (Kauppi & Viotti, 2020). As is elaborated on the following chapter, with the case of US-KRG relations,

after the end of Post-Cold War Era, the proliferation of unconventional actors including SLEs raised some serious questions about the continuation of deeply rooted sovereign state system, whose definition since Westphalia had not been challenged to a great deal. First, “in the post-9/11 period—and particularly since the 2003 invasion of Iraq—it has become increasingly difficult to separate discussions of state building in war-torn states from the ill-fated attempt to stabilize post invasion Iraq” (Paris & Sisk, 2009). According to Josselin, the proliferation of SLEs challenged the common understanding of “only state actors can enforce stable property rights; only they can contain outbreaks of popular unrest, both at home and abroad” (Josselin & Wallace, 2001).

Another point that makes realism problematic is the problem of its contradictory nature with international law, as “even in its ‘weakest’ version, realism allows for only a very limited impact of international law in some very specific areas of low political significance” (Scott, 2003). Donnelly makes sense of said contradiction by identifying three “theoretical failures” (Donnelly, 2013), that are *failure of the analyst* where “a predicted outcome does not occur because the assumptions of the theory are not satisfied in the case under consideration” (Donnelly, 2013), and the problem lies beneath the error of misreading of the theory instead of theory itself; *failure of the theory* “if the underlying assumptions are satisfied but the predicted results do not occur” (Donnelly, 2013); and failure within *exogenous variables*, which refers to situations, when “the theoretically predicted pressures operate but are overwhelmed by other forces” (Donnelly, 2013), meaning that while neither analyst or theory itself is plausible, rather the claims of realist theory lose their significance due to challenges posed by radically changing circumstances. According to Scott, the most significant example is the invasion of Iraq for its characteristics to “expose as cynical US rhetoric about the importance of compliance with, and support for, international law” (Scott, 2003).

2.2.2. Neoliberalism

When we look at the history of political thought, it cannot be claimed that any theory emerged independently or unaffected by existing theories. For this reason, we cannot think of neoliberalism independently of contemporary or past theories.

Therefore, as Çakmak (2007: 160) stated, liberalism formed the basis of many theories in the discipline of international relations and played a leading role in the emergence of many new theories. Especially after the first world war, the efforts of the states, which suffered more from the damage caused by the wars, to prevent wars and conflicts were observed. This effort has led to the emergence of liberalism as a theory that tends to explain international relations. The failure to achieve peace in the interwar period and the outbreak of the second world war, which resulted in greater destruction, increased the search for peace even more. As a result of these searches, the most important theory that came to the fore as an alternative to Realism in the 1980s was neoliberalism. Because the strict and cruel anarchic environment description of realism and the actual experiences of this description have shown that the world now needs peace, not war. This longing and need for peace and cooperation found itself in neoliberalism.

Although historical roots of liberalism dates back to Enlightenment, it has gained prominence after the Cold War (Burchill, 2013) and post-Cold War eras, partially because of shift of international system from bipolar to unipolar, along with the way democracy and human rights came under spot of international community. The reason for aforementioned sentence included both Cold War and post-Cold War eras comes from the fact that while bipolar international system during the Cold War has challenged some of the base arguments of what proponents of realism bring forward, absence of ideological competition throughout post-Cold War era has caused an ideological vacuum that is filled with liberal democracy, and rendered that system unrivalled (Fukuyama, 1992). In those ideological circumstances, neoliberalism rejected the idea of *realpolitik* and claimed that “states construct international institutions, or regimes” for cooperation with the purpose of obtaining mutual gain between states. Although “both neo-realists and neoliberals imagined humans- and, by extension, states- as atomistic, self-interested, strategic actors” (Reus-Smit, 2013), and “neo-liberals accept that states have to pursue their interests under conditions of anarchy” (Reus-Smit, 2013), the presence of international institutions that seek cooperation, according to neoliberalists, annule the necessity for states to compete at the cost of otherstates’ interests.

When we look at the main features of neoliberalism, which is a new hope for world peace, we first come across "analyzing peace and cooperation". As an approach, neoliberalism analyzes international relations at the unit level. However, neoliberals are concerned with the system-level consequences of unit-level causes (Ari, 2010: 305). According to Ari, the most important difference between neoliberalism and realism, which emerged as a reaction against itself, is that Neorealists, unlike Realists, think that "states continue to be the most important actor of international relations, if not the only actor" (Ari, 2010: 306). At the same time, according to neoliberalism, states are rational actors. However, neoliberals accept the existence of actors other than the state. Other actors that neoliberals accept in international relations other than states are individuals, international organizations, pressure groups, etc. are other groups.

Ari (2010: 305) states that democracy, which is the basic principle of liberalism, continues to be the most basic principle of neoliberalism, in order to show the basic foundations of liberalism and neoliberalism. According to neoliberals who accept this common similarity as their starting point, cooperation between liberal democratic states is possible. Even if this cooperation is possible and the probability is high, there are many factors that will persuade states to cooperate mutually. The main components of this consent-based cooperation are international organizations, international law, rational behavior of states (states are concerned with absolute gains rather than relative gains), etc. such elements.

According to Gürsoy (2004: 8), neoliberals accept the neo-realists' anarchy assumption. However, according to neoliberals, the anarchic nature of the system is not as great an obstacle to achieving cooperation as neoliberals envision. Neoliberals argue that the "interdependence" among states, especially in economic matters, has increased and states have begun to attach importance to the economic dimension of power rather than the military dimension, so cooperation efforts on economic issues are more intense and successful. Therefore, interdependence is an important concept in neoliberalism. In other words, power in neoliberalism does not simply mean military power. Because in neoliberalism, economy, social and cultural wealth, education, and technology are also included in the concept of power. As neorealists argue, geography, population and raw materials have lost their place in the concept of power. Another point where neoliberals differ from neo-realists in the concept of power is that the strength of one state does not

mean the weakness of other states. Because neoliberals' emphasis on power (absolute gains) is on absolute gains. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that neoliberalists do not care about superficial gains.

Neoliberalism aims to update liberalism by acknowledging that the key players in international relations, which is a neoliberal proposition, are states, but it also emphasizes the importance of International Organizations and non-state actors. The theory was influenced by neoliberal economic theory. The increasing interstate dependency during the Cold War was influential in shaping the theory, and therefore it was also called liberal institutionalism. The pioneers of the theory are considered to be Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye.

As for SLEs from the perspective of neoliberalism, we see that like neoclassical realists, neoliberalists fail to address the role of SLEs. Firstly, “both state building and liberal peacebuilding strategies fail to connect with their local target populations” (Richmond, 2013), meaning that the role of local powers such as quasi-states or local governments are ignored by neoliberalists. Furthermore, as mentioned on the next chapter, the way disparity between noninterventionism and self-determination is observed on the field, especially with the apparency in involvement of SLEs in international politics, has rendered the capability of neoliberalism in terms of explaining the role of SLEs.

2.2.3. Holistic Constructivism

There is a fact that the constructivist approach is actually a theory closer to the discipline of social sciences. From here, we can say that this approach is not only within the discipline of international relations. The sociology of knowledge formed the theoretical basis of the constructivist approach with the approach of thinkers such as Kant and Hegel to knowledge. According to these thinkers, knowledge has emerged as a social construction. In other words, constructivist thinkers were highly influenced by philosophy and sociology, which are other branches of science. To give an example at this point; The relationship between the construct and the structure advocated by the thinkers of the constructivist approach has been put forward by Anthony Giddens, one

of the sociological thinkers. According to him, actors, together with their actions and their approaches to the structure, transform the structure. This ability of actors to change puts them in a more effective position in the discipline of international relations. In the most general sense, construction is concerned with who can be the doer, how these agents will be recognized by others and how they can make their identities sustainable (Lebow, 2009: 2).

Before constructivism got into the discipline of international relations, Nicholas Onuf started to form its intellectual infrastructure. The first presentation of constructivism as a theory of international relations was in 1989 with the study of *With World of Our Making*, published by Onuf. Onuf admits that his thoughts on constructivism are inspired by thinkers like Giddens who stand on structures (Ateş, 2008: 215). On top of this philosophical background, Alexander Wendt settled at the center of constructivism discussions within the discipline of international relations with his book *Social Theory of International Politics*, which would make an impact in the late 1990s. As the title of his work suggests, Wendt wanted to bring a social theory to international relations, while criticizing neorealism by stating that it had a one-sided view that could not respond to current problems. Saying that social theories do not directly theorize international relations, Wendt stated that these theories shape our approaches to questioning the political developments in the world and seeking answers to these questions (Wendt, 1992: 422).

The events and new problems that took place in the world with the end of the Cold War revealed the inadequacies of the current theories of the discipline of international relations in dealing with these issues. In the post-Cold War era, states and societies have been caught in the midst of unprecedented identity-based social and cultural conflicts. At the beginning of these topics that started to be discussed were more human-oriented social elements such as ethnic and religious divisions, environmental problems, human rights, culture, and identity. The fact that neo-realist and neoliberal theories cannot provide a satisfactory explanation for these emerging problems in their theories has made the constructivist approach even more popular.

During the Cold War years, analyzing the bipolar international system and its power relations was mostly undertaken by the dominant theories of neorealism and

neoliberalism. With the end of the Cold War, a new order was emerging. And in this new order, we see that the European states have drawn a new path for themselves in a more integrated structure with the end of the old bipolar system. When the Western bloc is mentioned, we see that especially Western European states have emerged with new goals such as the expansion and development of their own unions by getting rid of the influence of the USA. It should be noted that the European states of the 1990s were now different from those in the 1950s and were aware that their union would be with more social elements. It is possible to say that their common interests will be shaped within an organizational structure formed around norms over time (Wendt, 1992: 417-418). There is now a European integration that will be shaped around social norms rather than economic integration. In this new process that emerged after the Cold War, issues such as identity, culture, environmental problems, religion, and language became the center of the European Union's policies in its enlargement efforts. For this reason, the European Union and especially the enlargement policies have emerged as an empirical field of study for the thinkers who support the constructivist approach. As a result, as a result of unexpected developments in the international arena, it is hopeful that normative elements take place in political science.

Today, the place of the constructivist approach in the discipline of international relations has reached an indisputably important position. The years when this importance increased were especially the 1980s. The idea that constructivism is an approach rather than a theory has become a more prominent definition as a result of long discussions. Those who adopt the constructivist thought have differentiated among themselves such as modernist, postmodernist, traditional, critical, moderate, and radical. However, the constructivist approach can gather these different thinkers under a single roof.

After the changes that took place in the international arena after the 1980s, social constructivism has inevitably come to the fore in the point that the discipline of international relations can be understood and even analyzed more easily. It would not be wrong to say that constructivism filled a gap in the discipline of international relations with its innovative approach in the years when it became necessary to determine the place of concepts such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, anarchy, security and especially identity in international relations and to analyze the

relationship of these concepts with the foreign policy of states. The constructivist approach referred to a different point by developing a more social perspective alternative to neorealism and neoliberalism, which were the leading approaches of its time, to their rationalist approaches. According to the constructivist writers, the agent and the structure mutually affect and constitute each other. In addition, according to the authors who adopt this approach, normative elements and structures are at least as important as material elements.

As a relatively new theory, whose “social theoretic foundations formed in the 1980s as a result of a set of critiques of mainstream International Relations (IR) theory” (Barnett, 2018), the main premise of constructivists is that “a combustible mixture of material and ideational forces has created new structures of possibility” (Barnett, 2018). In other words, contrary to what realist and liberal schools, constructivist came up with the idea that international relations “is characterized by an emphasis on the importance of normative as well as material structures, on the role of identity in shaping political action and on the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and structures” (Hopf, 1998). Hence, in case of international cooperation, ideological proximity between actors, according to constructivists, may overwhelm material factors.

In this respect, Reus-Smit (2013) distinguishes constructivism in three forms, which are *systemic constructivism*, *unit-level constructivism*, and *holistic constructivism*. While systemic constructivism focuses “solely on interactions between unitary state actors” (Reus-Smit, 2013), unit-level constructivists, most prominent of which may be Katzenstein, makes sense of international relations by putting domestic determinants in the center. Both of those theories may cause an analyst to come up with the question about interchangeability of those factors, that is to say, if we are to ignore the potential of international balance of power to shape and dominate domestic policies, or vice versa, it means both theories more or less ignore one of those levels. In this regard, holistic constructivists seek to combine two said levels, international and domestic

Those who adopt the rationalist approach, on the other hand, pursue the interests of states and their interactions with other states are independent of identities (Arı, 2013:

504). The place of the concept of “identity” in the constructivist approach is indisputably important in the formation of the interests of states and actions towards these interests in foreign policy. Constructivist writers, who have been criticized for staying normative, have recently come to the level of analyzing the position of elements such as norms, interests, organizations, and identity in foreign policy with an empirical method, especially with their studies on the European Union. What gives holistic constructivism significance comes from the fact that it also makes inclusion of SLEs into international politics possible when analyzing contemporary events. For example, holistic constructivists, such as that of Koslowski and Kratochwil (1994) are able to explain the reason for the US to abandon Twin Pillars doctrine after the invasion of Iraq and adopted and undifferentiating approach towards SLEs and sovereign states.

2.3. POLARITY

Polarity, which is “power distribution amongst international actors” (Cruz, 2019) by definition, is considered as the main driving force behind changing the structure of both internal and international policies of countries; while other pioneers claim that polarity is influenced, if not entirely shaped, by historic-political circumstances as result of policies; whereas some other thinkers bring forward the idea of presence of reciprocity between polarity and policies implemented by major forces on the stage of international politics. Aside from abovementioned scholarly dispute with regards to the way mechanism works between foreign policy and polarity, it is crucial to investigate how circumstantial differences between different types of polarity paves the way for verifying arguments of varying theories, that is to say, while one type of international system (i.e. world order) is explained best, for instance, by neoliberal theory, another type may stand as the perfect exemplification of what neoclassical realism presents. In this context, it is essential to introduce the basic analysis of different types of polarity in order to diagnose what international system type the world is currently going through, since “in a world that is confronted with several rising powers whose precise position in the power ranking and hierarchy is unclear” (Keersmaeker, 2017), relevance of which becomes evident “when many polarity analyses only investigate the power relations within what they call the ‘great power system’ ” (2017); in addition to how changes in

polarity is reflected to US foreign policy, as well as the theoretical explanation of differing eras of polarity within the framework of international relations.

2.3.1. Types of Polarity

Unipolarity: Besides its simple definition of “one state possessing unambiguous preponderance in all relevant dimensions” (Wohlfort, 2008), the concept of unipolarity “has spawned numerous interpretations emphasizing the quasi-imperial position” (Phillips, 2007) of the US, especially after early 1990s that coincides the downfall of Soviet Union. What gives unipolarity significance is the fact that it does comply with what neoclassical realism argues. According to Ikenberry et al (2011), as result of absence of competition and power struggle between two or more centers of power, both power transition theory and neorealism argues that the least war-prone international system is unipolarity.

Bipolarity: With regards to bipolar international system that dominated international politics over four decades, is a problematic concept when it comes to coming up with a precise definition (Wagner, 1993), because of the fact that much older the existence of the concept is, its proliferation as a term corresponds to the Cold War, as it was coined to conceptualize the international system. Still, if we are to accept the simplest definition of an international system in which distribution of power amongst two centers of powers, what we get is an international system, challenging realist idea that world system is anarchic. In other words, as Waltz (1979) claims, bipolarity offers “stability of two-party balances” that tends to abide by liberal school’s stance.

Multipolarity: Multipolarity, which stands for a system where “no power dominates, or the system will become unipolar. Nor do concentrations of power revolve

² What’s meant by “stages” is explained further in the following sections on this chapter

around two positions” (Haass, 2008), although it is debatable whether to consider it an international system since “multipolarity is identified with a rather chaotic and unstable situation, marked by violence and turmoil caused by non-state actors³” (Keersmaecker, 2017). Hence, multipolarity is often observed as transitional process where the world goes through from one international system to another (Ikenberry et al, 2011), and that observation demonstrates harmony with what classical realism offers:

Realists observe that the structure of world power has followed different patterns and believe that these patterns naturally have consequences, since security is the preeminent issue of an anarchic world, and thus the distribution of capabilities to attack and defend should matter. (Ikenberry et al, 2011)

Nonpolarity: As a term that is coined by Haass (2008), nonpolarity differs from multipolarity in terms of the function of international actors, despite their common attribute that in both systems, there are multiple centers of power. According to Haass, “In a multipolar system, no power dominates, or the system will become unipolar. Nor do concentrations of power revolve around two positions, or the system will become bipolar” (Haass, 2008), whereas in nonpolar world system, in addition to recognized nation states, unconventional entities such as SLEs are also considered centers of power. What renders nonpolarity so important is the fact that that system challenges both neoliberal and neoclassical realism at a couple of points, first of which is the inclusion of actors that do not have state status:

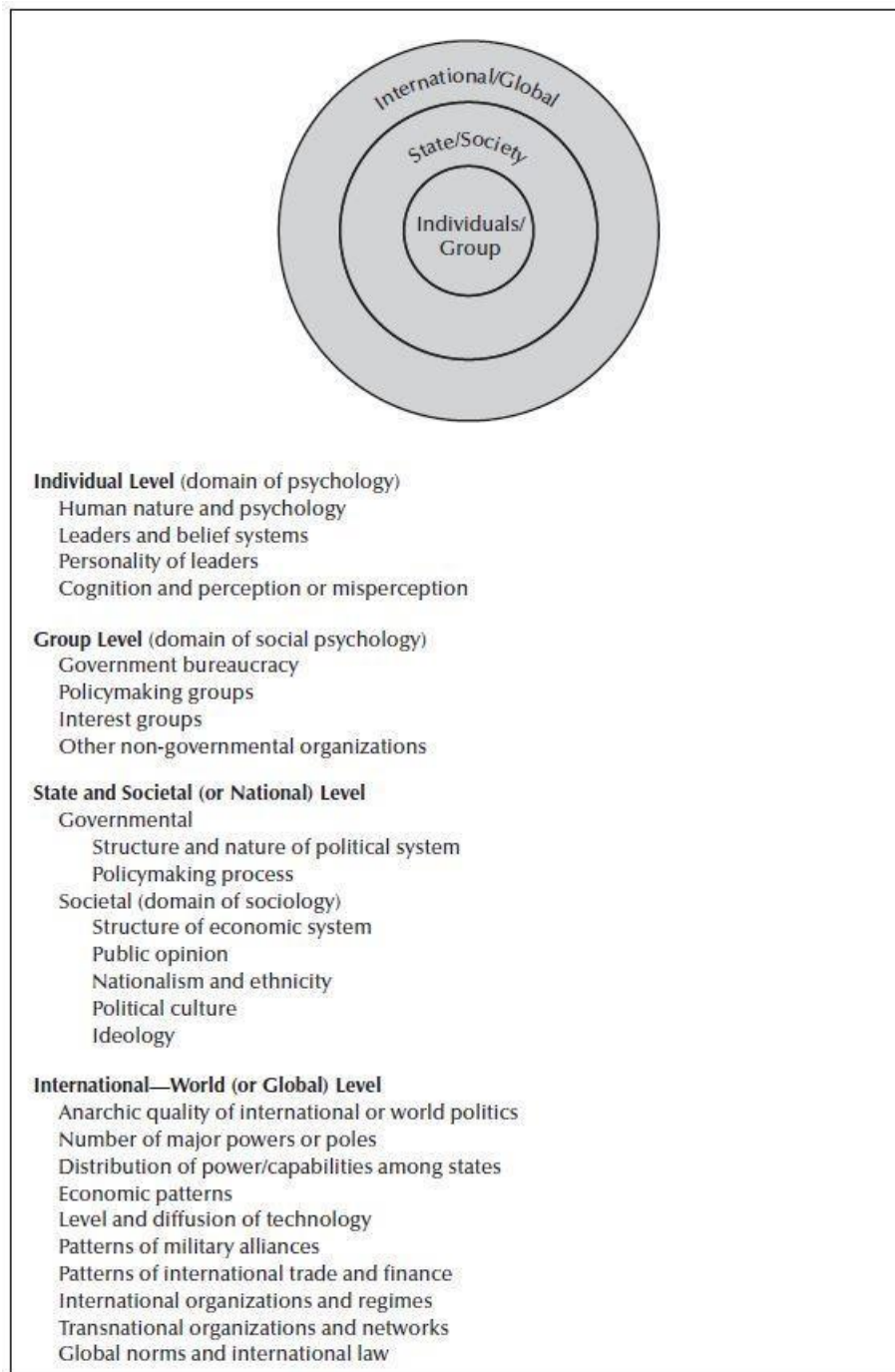
One certainly can think theoretically when it comes to explaining foreign policy processes in general or the foreign policy of a particular state. IR theorists, however, tend as well to be interested in patterns of behavior among diverse states and non-state actors acting internationally or globally. In identifying patterns, the stage is set for making modest predictions about the possible nature and direction of change. To think theoretically, however, is not to engage in point predictions— “A will attack B the first

³ When we analyse the role of state-like entities, classification of which differs within a wide spectrum from scholar to scholar, that is to say while one scholar analyses them under the concept of “non-state actors”, others give them a distinct role other than NGOs and terrorist organizations. For instance, typology drawn by Ikenberry scrutinizes the involvement of state-like entities in decision-making process. Those actors are not distinguished by other type of actors classified as non-state actors.

week of the year”—regardless of how much foreign policy, national security, and intelligence analysts may aspire to such precision. (Kauppi & Viotti, 2020)

Despite both realist and liberal theories do not completely ignore actors like state-like entities, their role is relatively limited if not non-existent. In other words, considering the fact that states are always “subjects” in international politics except for the cases where they are rendered “objects” solely by other states, one can mention about the presence of hierarchy respectively between superstates, states, institutions and individuals. According to Kauppi and Viotti (2020), there are different levels of analysis such as “the international system, the state, groups and individuals” (Kauppi & Viotti, 2020). In this respect, concerning to what aforementioned hierarchy looks like, Figure-2.3. illustrated below shows international theory in classical sense:

Figure-2.3: Levels of Analysis in IR Theory



Source: Kauppi & Viotti, 2020

What makes Figure-2.3 significant is that the notion of “level of analysis” decidedly distinguishes actors in international political sphere in accordance with classical theories and there is no intersection between each level. Still, if we are to examine the role of actors from different levels today, it becomes evident that drawing such strict distinctions in the age of nonpolarity does not seem compatible with factuality of that stage.

If we are to summarize the role of state-like entities by IR theories, it becomes evident that in contemporary international system, the world is “dominated not by one or two or even several states but rather by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power” (Haass, 2008) does not concur with what conventional theories draw. While realists perceive states as the “principal and most important actors on the international stage” (Kaupii & Viotti, 2020), liberals (and neo-liberals alike) while not ignoring SLEs like realists, limit the role of SLEs to auxiliary agents. Constructivists, on the other hand, “see states and non-state actors not as mere products of world politics, the international system, or an international or world society, but rather as actually playing a decisive role in shaping it” (Kauppi & Viotti, 2020)

In addition to absence of consensus on role and legitimacy of state-like entities, there is also an apparent change with regards to status of SLEs within the context of self-determination since “they propose intervening in the decision-making processes of the governmental organizations that govern international order” (La Porte, 2012) and they want to apply these decisions or put them into practice among their supporters (2012); along their changing function, particularly in state-building, considering “the increased internationalization of the non-Western state and its informalization” (de Guevara, 2010).

Concerning to function of state-like entities in the process of state-building, the fact that obvious disparities between the role IR theories stipulate for SLEs to play in state-building and the way SLEs act in the process of state-building within nonpolar international system necessitates addressing the root causes of said disparities. In this respect, as “majority of studies share the broad consensus in Western, i.e., liberal democratic, policy circles over the last ten years that state building is a necessary

strategy to stabilize the international system and to protect the people of weakly institutionalized non-Western states from fear and want” (2010), increasing role of “others” in conventional sense poses challenge to classical IR theories.

According to Kopalyan (2017), what is common between world systems is that it is made of sovereign and autonomous actors, and the changes in balance of power between those actors determine the structure of polarity.

Furthermore, unorthodox approaches fall short in explaining inclusion of SLEs in state-building. For instance, critical approaches

argue that the international state building discourse and practices trigger an interlinked internationalization and depoliticization of the non-Western state. Since Western states and international institutions determine increasingly what a ‘modern state’ ought to be like, the content of the non-Western state is not the principal result of local power struggles and negotiations between social groups and state representatives (de Guevara, 2010)

In this context, it would be safe to claim that in nonpolar world order, “state building, like liberal or neoliberal peacebuilding, is failed by design” (Richmond, 2013). As for the concept of self-determination, addition of SLEs changing role to already-present ambiguity surrounding the subject of self-determination has arisen the need reformulating.

While the discipline of international relations in its early years “combined explanatory, normative, descriptive, and interpretative understandings of international relations” (Brown & Eckersley, 2018), “over the last few decades the mainstream discipline has focused on explanation, relegating normative and interpretive issues to a secondary status within the field” (Brown & Eckersley, 2018). In this respect, the way US foreign policy is handled by IR theories is of great importance.

2.4. US FOREIGN POLICY

Although constantly changing political discourse affects the weight of decision-making bodies of the US, it has been observed that the actors in the official policy-making mechanism remain unchanged: the President who is supposedly “at the top of

the decision-making hierarchy” (Charountaki, 2011); the Congress who “ratifies treaties, confirms diplomatic and military appointments, declares war, appropriates funds for military forces and investigates the implementation of foreign policy” (Spanier & Uslaner, 1975); the Senate; and House of Representatives. Albeit, as stated above, the role and function of those actors along with their “weighting factors” have been in constant evolution. For example, early isolationist stance adopted by the US left its place to non-interventionist doctrine until the beginning of the Second World War. After that phase, the presence of American exceptionalism had started to be felt more evidently, and it dominated the Cold War period. After the Cold War, the country has enjoyed unipolarity, which allowed it to switch between different doctrines by circumstances. Finally, after September 2001 Attacks, it can be said that the best term that describes US foreign policy would be interventionist. what makes the evolution of US foreign policy significant for SLEs is that during each phase not only approaches towards the concepts like state building and self-determination, but also the very role of SLEs have changed.

When analyzing the eras US foreign policy has been through after the end of WW2, within the context of its approach towards SLEs in terms of state building and self-determination, it is possible to mention about three eras, in accordance with changing international system, where US foreign policy has changed dramatically.

Table-2.1: 3 Era of US Foreign Policy After WW2

| Eras | Time Interval | Type of International System | Status of SLEs | Theoretical Compatibility |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Cold-War Era | 1945-1990 | Bipolar | Domestic Level Limited Participation Limited Recognition | Neoliberalism |
| Post-Cold War Era | 1991-2001 | Unipolar | Domestic Level Limited Participation Partial Recognition | Neoclassical Realism |
| Post-Invasion Era | 2003-Ongoing | Nonpolar | International Level Equal/Partnership Participation De Facto to Full Recognition | Holistic Constructivism |

CHAPTER 3: US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS KRG

The chapter scrutinizes foreign policy of the United States towards KRG in three eras, based on the presumption that each era that is given on Table-2.1 represents steep turns in US foreign policy. The first era corresponds the beginning of the Cold War because that era, which introduced a new international system (bipolar) witnessed both dramatical changes in US foreign policy structure and the early interactions between the US and Iraqi Kurds. The second era starts with the collapse of the Soviet Union until September 11 Attacks in 2001, when the US enjoyed unipolarity. The last era starts with 2003 US invasion of Iraq until present day.

One of the main factors that renders the subject of KRG important is that despite their unrecognition, the way they act and are treated as “persons” in context of international law and the role they play role in decision-making mechanism makes them separable from any other state-like entity. As the study is constructed upon the hypotheses that contemporary international system eliminated the monopoly of states, which enabled participation of SLEs and the US foreign policy towards Kurds challenges what classical international theories stipulate, the main purpose of this chapter is to elaborate significant events surrounding KRG to give the reader an insight about the issue. In this regard, in parallel with what is drawn for US foreign policy, the modern history of Kurds is analyzed under three eras that are ‘Cold War Era’, standing for the era encompassing Cold War between 1945 and 1990; ‘Post-Cold War Era’ that corresponds the interval between the end of Cold War until September 11 attacks in 2001; and ‘Post-Invasion Era’ represents the ongoing era since 2003 invasion of Iraq.

3.1. COLD WAR ERA

Although the end of Second World War and beginning of the Cold War brought revolutionary political changes, including waxing self-determination discourse, little had changed for Iraqi Kurds.

When analyzing the era, in which Mustafa Barzani distanced himself from Qazi Muhammad's Soviet-backed Republic of Mahabad, considered as a puppet-state by many, it is important to take the rising Kurdish ethno-nationalism into consideration (McDowall, 2004). What makes the establishment of KDP unique comes from the fact that in spite of the long existence of pan-Kurdism amongst Kurds in Iran and Iraq, and despite Mustafa Barzani "spent a decade in the Soviet Union" (Gunter, 2008), it was the first Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement that was founded without foreign support or directive. As result, Kurds, during Cold War, were forced to choose between communism and Kurdish nationalism (Güneş, 2021) in the region with deeply rooted tribal system led by aghas. In fact, "it was the Communists, rather than the KDP, who first took on the aghas" (McDowall, 2004). In such political climate, one can even claim a hidden power struggle between Kurdish nationalist led by Barzani, who himself was of tribal origin (for which he would later be criticized by PUK as feudalist (McDowall, 2004)), and communists supported by Soviet Union.

The political status of KRG after Abd al-Karim Qasim took power had not changed much despite Qasim's willingness of autonomy talks. It is worthy to question the reason for Kurds to revolt against Qasim in 1961 in the face of his seemingly softer approach than that of his counterparts in other countries. First, the motives of Qasim were questionable. In face of US-favored Iran as neighboring country, rising Ba'ath-led Arab nationalism and longstanding danger of communism may have pushed Qasim to lessen the fronts he felt he obliged to fight (McDowall, 2004). While tensions between nationalists and leftist communists have arisen in the capital, the Northeastern part of the country was equally affected as "conflicts between Turcomans, communists, Arabs, and Kurds erupted in Kirkuk in 1959, encouraging sectarian distinctions between the Kurdistan Region and Arab Iraq" (Natali, 2010).

The political instability caused by overthrowing and execution of Qasim by Ba'ath royalists after coup d'état in 1963 and another coup that toppled Ba'ath Party helped Barzani's forces gain ground during ongoing First Kurdish War, most significant of which was Battle of Handren in 1966, where Kurdish forces, supported by Israel and Iran, have defeated Iraqi army, and forced central government to bring a temporary and "uneasy truce" (Gibson, 2015). With so-called 17 July Revolution, a second coup by Ba'ath Party in 1968, the First Kurdish War started losing its momentum. Surprisingly, Ba'ath Party adopted a relatively more compromising policy, to the extent that in 1970, Ba'ath Party and representatives from Kurdish region signed Autonomy Accord. However, a "new autonomy agreement with reduced terms was proposed on 11 March 1974, which was refused by the Kurdish side, leading to the resumption of armed conflict soon after" (Bozarslan, Güneş & Yadırgı, 2021). The Second Kurdish War, unlike its predecessor, did not long much, as Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq in 1975 rendered continuation of armed struggle impossible for Kurds. As result, Barzani had to flee from Iraq and left power vacuum in the area, soon to be filled by Talabani's PUK. Highly critical of Barzani's policies, PUK started gaining ground and started an unsuccessful minor revolt against central government.

1979 marked as a stern turn for Iraqi Kurds: in Iran, Shah was overthrown by so-called Islamic Revolution. Saddam Hussein started his infamous purge that allowed him to eliminate all his potential political rivals and opposition. Unhappy with the regime change in Iran, US started arming Saddam's forces, and eventually, Iraq attacked Iran with Western support. Ba'ath's Arabization project on minorities as result of Saddam's uncompromising politics towards minorities pushed Kurdish leaders to form close ties with Iran. In 1983, tensions between Kurds and central government started to rise, which paved the way to "Anfal Campaign" that claimed thousands of lives, including those who were killed by Halabja chemical attack. It is crucial to note that little had been done by international community against atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein.

By 1990, the course of Iraq's history, along with that of Kurds, has changed when Iraqi Army entered Kuwait, which resulted wide sanctions against Iraq that

indirectly killed half a million children. Kurds, already affected by sanctions against Iraq, were subjected to “internal embargo” (Natali, 2010).

In order for one to understand the dynamics that shaped American foreign policy throughout the Cold War, it is important to examine two related cases, both of which occurred in 1946, that are Iran Crisis and Republic of Mahabad, as they are believed to be two cornerstones in the political history of the USA during the Cold War. The reason for their significance comes from the fact that two events triggered the Cold War. After the end of the Second World War, the USSR began adopting more expansionist attitudes, and “the Truman administration was alarmed” (Sarı, 2019). This magnitude of Soviet intentions and the crude threat of force the USSR was using to fulfill them came as a distinct shock to Washington, for American policy until that time had been under the influence of Yalta and Potsdam (Rossow, 1956)

Notwithstanding the US politics were constructed upon Wilson’s self-determination doctrine, which stipulated nonintervention, the aggression of USSR caused the US to abandon said principles. As result, that prompted Truman to announce that the US would support democratic countries against “totalitarian elements” (Gomes, 2016) which would be called the Truman Doctrine.

In those circumstances, the situation of Kurds was naturally affected. Although the US, during that period, followed a distant policy towards Kurds, it also tried to prevent the USSR to influence Kurds (Sarı, 2019). In other words, Kurds in Iraq and Iran played an indirectly role in terms of shaping American politics that started Cold War.

In 1970’s, however, as part of the US’ political equilibrium strategy, Kurdish revolts against Iraq, as a favor to then-ally Iran, were supported (Ghareeb, 1981), as Kissinger unfolded that “Nixon agreed also to encourage the Shah in supporting the autonomy of the KRG. The Kurdish affair and its tragic outcome in the 1973-1975 period” (Kissinger, 1979). It is important to acknowledge that the US, during that period, had never perceived KRG as potential autonomous actors. In fact, while supporting Kurds against the central government in Iraq, it was seen as a staunch ally of

⁴ Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would later deem it as a “price worth it” during CBS television broadcast “60 minutes”

Turkey against Kurdish movements, both because Turkey was of great importance as a NATO member with critical geopolitical situation (which became evident with Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962); and because Kurdish independent movement was led by Marxist students, supported, and funded by the USSR (Garapon & Çelik, 2021). After 1979, however, with Iranian Revolution, the US foreign policy towards KRG has changed. “In the 1980s, the United States’ silence to the atrocities that the Iraqi Kurds were subjected to stemmed from the attitude against the strengthening of revolutionary Iran in the region” (Sarı, 2019). Thus, Saddam Hussain’s so-called “Anfal Operations” received little backlash from US government (Stansfield, 2021). As further information is given on Analysis section of this chapter, inquiry of US foreign policy during Cold War Era is crucial for understanding how the role and status of KRG Iraq were addressed throughout that period. One may claim that the mercurial nature of US foreign policy may withhold the classification of Cold War Era as a singular period. Still, it is important to take into consideration that the status of Kurds, regardless of their favorability or antagonism before the eyes of the US, it is possible to say that the way they were perceived by international actors, including the US was consistent.

3.2. POST-COLD WAR ERA

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the end of bipolar international system started to be felt. In consequence, enjoying liberty coming from unipolarity, the US started to exhibit aggression more comfortably. Hence, it started the First Gulf War in 1991, when Iraq, undiscouraged by sanctions, continued its military campaign and expansion. Perhaps the most significant breakthrough occurred during that Era: as Operation Provide Comfort stipulated Northern Iraq became no-fly zone, and Safwan Agreement between Iraq and the USA was signed in 1991. As a consequence, Kurds declared their de facto autonomy. It was followed by Kurdish National Assembly elections in 1992. Still, implementation of no-fly zone, de facto autonomy and regional elections could not stop (and maybe their very existence ignited) bloody civil war between Masoud Barzani’s KDP and Jalal Talabani’s PUK from 1994 until 1998. Furthermore, Kurdish Civil War staged unlikely alliances when PUK was reinforced by PKK and Turkish Army jointly operated with KDP’s Peshmerga against PUK and PKK.

In 2001, on a seemingly ordinary September morning in New York, two passenger airplanes hit and destroyed both towers of World Trade Center while another plane hit the West wall of the Pentagon. As result, under the leadership of the-president Bush's America, coalition forces with numerous countries invaded Afghanistan in the same year. One year later, the US envoys started a series of talks with Kurdish leaders in Iraq. Under the false pretense of Iraq's chemical weapon facilities (which found to benonexistent), the US Army and its allies invaded Iraq.

After 1990, a weakened Soviet Union facilitated the US to exercise "democracy" with then-unrivaled NATO. Still, for several reasons, the US decided to remain neutral towards internal affairs of Iraq (Gunter, 2011) as it would "lead, it was feared, to an unwanted, protracted U.S. occupation that would be politically unpopular in the United States" (Gunter, 2011). In those circumstances, invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990 followed by the defeat of Iraq in Gulf War provided Kurds an opportunity to sustain their struggle against the government (Sarı, 2019). As of 1990, "US fears of Saddam's rhetorical threats against Israel and the Gulf States, along with US awareness of Iraq's aspiration for regional domination, resulted in the US foreign policy objective of restraining Saddam" (Charountaki, 2011).

One year after implementation of sanctions against Iraq, followed by the Gulf War, Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) was launched in 1992. "The underlying policy of OPC was that U.S. intervention was a short-term measure and that U.S. programs would eventually be transitioned to the United Nations." (Natali, 2010). While the short-term outcome of OPC was preventing military aggression against KRG and establishment of no-fly zone as part of "humanitarian intervention" (Rudd, 2004), the long-term results of the series of operations were declaration of de facto Kurdish autonomy in region, elections for KRG and eventually civil war between Kurdish factions. Eventually, at the cost of public trust, Barzani demanded military assistance from Saddam Hussein, which eventually resulted with the destruction of CIA bases in the region (Romano, 2006)

In response to the attack, Clinton administration ordered a series of missile attacks in 1996. Again, it is not possible to talk about a homogenous policy towards all Kurdish factions by the USA during 1990s.

Throughout the 1990s, US interaction with Iraq's Kurds was clearly at an unprecedented level. The role of both Turkey and France, without whom the creation of the KRG in Iraq would have been unlikely, strengthened the US–Kurdish relationship in the aftermath of Gulf War II. There is a certain irony in the Turks having contributed to the renaissance of Iraq's Kurds while at the same time Turkey's own Kurdish policies were so restrictive. The US foreign policy need for a close relationship with Iraq's Kurds brought about a proper US 'Kurdish policy' within the Iraqi framework in the twenty-first century (Charountaki, 2011)

To begin with, while the US ameliorated socio-political conditions of KRG, and openly supported autonomy, let alone the possibility of supporting independence, the US did not even acknowledge Kurds as an actor until 2001. Also, Janus-faced policies of the US caused mistrust amongst Kurdish leadership. Therefore, we observe that Kurdish parties in Iraq were in need of a “protecting power”.

After September 11 Attacks in 2001, a new chapter has opened for KRG. The relations between KRG and the US did “evolve into an institutionalized and stable connection” (Charountaki, 2011).

3.3. POST-INVASION ERA

This section aims to give keep information about KRG as summarily as possible, since, in many ways, the United States is an inseparable element of Kurdish history during Post-invasion Era, which is elaborated in the following chapter.

Even though the era started from US invasion of Iraq in 2003 to present day is analyzed as a single era as the study's main motive is to analyze US foreign policy, specific to KRG, and that the course of US foreign policy throughout that era has not been through radical changes, the same cannot be said about KRG. At first, Kurds were perceived merely as regional partners. In fact, regardless of the independence-decorated rhetoric that Mustafa Barzani used, the role Kurds saw fit for themselves could be understood from his words of “let the Americans give us military aid, openly or secretly, so that we can become truly autonomous, and we will become your loyal partners in the Middle East” (Gunter, 1992). After 2003, however, the role of Kurds has

evolved into several stages, which can be understood from the case that “the United States openly displayed its support for the Iraqi Kurds but continued to insist on the territorial integrity of Iraq” (Bishku, 2019).

Therefore, Kurds, during early stages of Iraq’s invasion were not more than de facto partners if not simply proxies for the US. From the efforts of the US about ensuring Kurdish participation in state building in Iraq, one can derive that at the early stages of the conflict, the US did not intend to complicate its relations with its fellow NATO member, Turkey, and Iran who remained silent (if not secretly supportive) against the invasion. In fact, Coalition Provisional Authority’s (CPA) first draft on the general principles ensured little security comparing to what Kurdish leaders expected (Stansfield, 2021).

What turned the tables for Kurds was 2006 elections, in which a Kurdish politician, Jalal Talabani was elected as president while a member of Shi’a party, Nouri al-Maliki as prime minister. That symbolic distribution of power was the second phase for Iraqi Kurds as their status was shifted from an ethnic group with limited rights to constituent element of a country.

When the eruption of violence in Dara’s streets in Syria turned into civil war, the status of Kurds in Iraq became a subject of matter once more. The atrocities committed by Asaad’s forces in combination with the increasing presence of foreign fighters gave Syrian Kurds an opportunity to satisfy longstanding orientalist dreams of the West. The significance of that era comes from the reason that KRG, the first time in history, acted and treated like a state, taking their role in Erbil Agreement and Geneva II Peace Conference into consideration. When ISIS declared its so-called caliphate and began expanding its borders in both Iraq and Syria in 2014, KRG and Syria were ironically given the objective to protect borders drawn by Sykes-Picot Agreement. By 2017, the combination of international support and recognition, along with increasing sovereignty of KRG in Iraq surfaced a more-confident-than-ever Kurdish independence demands, which resulted with the Independence Referendum. As manifestation of the ethno-nationalistic nature of Kurdish movements in Iraq, with majority of votes Kurds declared that they no longer wanted to be a part of Iraq. In Masoud Barzani’s words, “from World War One until now, we have not been a part of Iraq,’ before going on to

declare, ‘We refuse to be subordinates’” (Chulov & Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, the status of Iraqi Kurds comparing to that of in 1990s have improved even further: perhaps first time in history, the Western government unprecedentedly started favoring KRG over states in some cases, most prominent of which may be the placement of Patriot missile batteries in Erbil.

The War on Terror rhetoric starting from September 11 Attacks served “a long desired neo-con objective” (Owtram, 2019), which paved the way to invasion of Iraq. Prior to speculations about nonexistent weapons of mass destructions (WMD) in 2003, US officials conducted a series of visits to Northern Iraq. In 2002, “a secret US invitation to the Kurdish leaders” (Charountaki, 2011). In December 2002, one month after George W. Bush threatened Saddam Hussein with “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq”, “a delegation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee toured Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq” (Chivers, 2002), which includes Joe Biden, who is as of 2021 the current president of the USA. Biden, during that visit announced that the mountains are not the only friend of Kurds (2002), referring to common saying among Kurds, “mountains are the only friends of Kurds”.

As the US troops entered Iraq in 2003, KRG may had been the only group that perceived the invasion positively without any precondition, as the partnership that the US provided along with ‘no-fly zone’ opened the door for Kurds to establish de facto autonomy (Gurses & Romano, 2021)

What distinguishes the case of KRG from other actors in cases of invasions, who acted as the proxies of invading army was that unlike proxies who are generally replaceable, in the case of Kurds, “US open-ended presence in Syria and Iraq and its heavy reliance on the Kurdish groups in these countries to achieve its strategic objectives has fundamentally changed the prospects for the Kurds” (Gurses & Romano, 2021). According to Charountaki (2011), after the invasion, “official US–Kurdish interaction was transformed into an institutionalized relationship of strategic importance” (Charountaki, 2011). In parallel to that, Charountaki (2011) claims that Massoud Barzani’s invitation to the White House in 2005 “can also be considered as an official declaration of a US Kurdish policy” (Charountaki, 2011).

In other words, one can claim that the uniqueness of the case of KRG symbolizes the beginning of a new international system where the borders between SLEs and states are diluted.

Not only has this course of events proved beneficial for Iraq's Kurdish Issue and for US-Kurdish relations per se; development of the KRG, as a unique example of a non-state entity in the region, is also remarkable for Kurdish history. It is interesting, too, how Iraq's Kurds have, since the 1990s, played an effective role in US foreign policy that is culminating in the twenty-first century with the application of various foreign policies, based on an institutionalized system of foreign policy decision-making (Charountaki, 2011)

After then-president Obama declared that the US army would retreat from Iraq, Kurds had already elected a president to the office and enjoyed their widened political autonomy in addition to increased financial benefits from oil revenues. Therefore, facing a power-vacuum situation seemed to be unlikely. During that stage, the US continued its partnership in its campaign of “stabilizing the region”. However, with the emergence of Syrian Civil War, the “safe haven” for Kurds was at stake.

After US invasion of Iraq in 2003, multiple insurgent organizations emerged. One of them was Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's at-Tawhid Wal-Jihad, founded in 1990s. After changing many names, the organization declared its so-called caliphate in 2014. Soon after Mosul fell to the organization. With “the collapse of the Iraqi army facing the Islamic State in 2014, the greater part of the areas considered to be part of Iraqi Kurdistan came under the control of the two parties, which effectively extended their territorial control.” (Jongerden, 2018). During that period, the expansion of the IS “mercilessly showed all the limits of the state building intervention and forced the Barack Obama administration to conduct and lead another military coalition in the country.” (Belloni & Costantini, 2019). However, the ground war against the IS was conducted mainly by Peshmerga. The combination of incompetence of Iraqi government, Maliki's close ties with Iran and the hanging threat of the IS upon Western states have culminated perfect ground for KRG. In this context, when we examine the US foreign policy, we see that KRG, unlike their Syrian counterparts, are far more than proxies of the US in its “war on terror”. Rather, diplomatic visits, commercial bilateral

agreements and bills indicate that KRG were treated no different from state partners of the US.

In 2017, with the confidence it gained from its success in the field against the IS, Barzani's KDP organized an independence referendum, in spite of collective protests and threats from both Turkish and Iraqi governments. It is noteworthy to mind that the referendum in 2017 was not the first independence attempt since the beginning of the invasion. For example, in 2005 another referendum was organized, and although 98.88% of voters supported independence, they could not reach their desired outcome (Özoğlu & Hanso, 2017)

Although that attempt, like those before has failed, it would be erroneous to analyse it with the previous referendums. What rendered the referendum, different from previous ones? First, instead of another failure of KRG, "referendum symbolized the failure of the development of a federal Iraq" (Jongerden, 2018). Moreover, the open US support to Kurdish independence of Iraq in face of opposition from Iraq, Iran and Turkey cannot be compared to those that took place during the Cold War for various reasons. First, Iraqi government's alliance with Iran barely poses threat to territorial presence of the US. Also, considering that state building process of Iraq was operated by the US, and that the very country defended territorial integrity of Iraq, it is not possible to analogize the case of 2017 Referendum with the US support to independence attempts in other countries during earlier stages. In this regard, what makes the US foreign policy significant in the case of 2017 referendum is that "a multi-layered analysis, focused on the behavior of a specific non-state actor, namely the KRI, is also possible beyond traditional approaches confined to the analysis of referenda predominantly as state policies" (Charountaki, 2019)

In April 2020, the US officials declared the placement of Patriot missile batteries in Erbil (Baldor, 2020), after declaring the possibility of a large-scale attack from Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (al-Hashd al Sha'abi) militias and Iran itself. In October 2020, KDP headquarters in Baghdad was raided by the supporters of Popular Mobilization Forces (Saleh, 2020). Taking into consideration of increasing US support to KRG, the grand scheme of things, another attempt of independence may not be far from possibility.

CONCLUSION

Aside from ongoing debates revolving around the objectivity of history, which renders the phrase -allegedly used by George Graham Vest- of “history is written by victors” problematic, the term “victor” in that statement itself is equally ambiguous, considering the fact that it has been getting more and more difficult to define concepts like victory in face of mercurialness of dynamics in international relations and post-truth tendencies in politics, along with increasing interdependency between countries as result of rapid globalization, which led suffering of one nation to cause a chain reaction amongst others. Furthermore, the way local actors are empowered in terms of both their military capabilities and their roles in state-building (de Guevara, 2010) in last seven decades, following the beginning of the Cold War (Barnett & Zürcher, 2009) and how they adopted diplomatic and political strategies similar to that of states; in addition to international actors’, that of super-powers in particular, use of contradictory standards toward those actors have complicated identification of aforementioned distinction of victors and losing sides even further.

⁵ See President Wilson's address to congress: analyzing German and Austrian peace utterances, February 11, 1918. (1997, July 12). The World War I Primary Documents Archive. <https://www.gwpda.org/1918/wilpeace.html>

Judging by developments, the need of clarifying concepts and nomenclature used by the field of international relations has arisen. In this regard, apart from theoretical concerns revolving around the concept of state-like entities (SLEs) as result of its longstanding problematic nature, paradoxical co-existence of self-determination doctrine and principle of non-intervention (Beitz, 1979) in practice necessitates the analysis and evolution of that concept.

In countries that can be deemed as “failed states”, or in those that suffered from longstanding conflicts (despite partially functioning governments’ existence), presence and prominence of local actors is felt even more. As a country, housing variety of ethnic groups and followers of different religions, whose recent past is encompassed by colonialism, dictatorship, two major wars and an ongoing civil war, Iraq stands as one of the emblematic countries which meet all abovementioned criteria to be an ideal habitat for local powers. In the middle of this sectarian and ethnic tension, Kurds, one of the major inhabitants of the country since the beginning of human civilization in that very region, with a turbulent history marked by conflicts with both other regional actors, neighboring countries and among themselves, have been in the center of international community’s attention since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, for their role in conflict and their increasing autonomy which turned them from a US proxy to an effective power. Being a nation that lives in the same cultural sphere divided by borders of four countries (Turkey-Iraq-Syria-Iran), Kurds have a turbulent history marked by wars, infightings, and massacres. Kurds, those of Iraq in particular, have long been having a struggle for recognition. However, chain of events following September 11 Attacks have opened a new chapter the nation is unfamiliar with since the failed attempt of independence in early 1940s with Mahabad Republic, Kurds were addressed as recognized actors. While throughout the period started with US invasion of Iraq in 2003 until Syrian Civil War, Kurds were perceived as “local partner”, a romanticized version of the term “proxy actor”, the emergence of the Islamic State organization, on the other hand, has paved the way for KRG to strengthen their hand in the stage of international politics, which eventually led to independence referendum in 2017.

In this respect, his study sought to make an analysis of US foreign policy towards Kurds in Iraq (which evolved into KRG in early 1990's), starting from the end of the Second World War until present day, within the framework of contemporary international relations theories namely neoclassical realism, neoliberalism, and holistic constructivism. The first chapter gave an insight in terms of purpose of the thesis along with the rationale that led the conduction of the research. In the same chapter, methodology and structure of the study is given, as data collection regarding the case of Iraqi Kurds along with the structure of US foreign policy is deemed essential for the nature of both cases have found to be challenging what classical IR theories prescribe. Also, the chapter stressed the factors that give the study significance and factors that may be perceived as limitations. Finally, the chapter presented literature review, in which the way background of the issue is handled in existing literature.

Chapter-2 laid the theoretical foundations of the study by clarifying definitions of the key subjects of the study that are KRG and SLEs. It was aimed to eliminate possible ambiguity surrounding the concept of KRG, taking into account that the analysis encompassed a period starting from 1945, the establishment of KRG corresponds to so-called Operation Provide Comfort in 1991. The concept of SLEs, on the other hand, was addressed for various reasons, first of which is comes from the complex status of KRG, which renders it hard to categorize it. The other reason was the increasing significance and noticeability of the role of SLEs in international politics. In order to achieve that, both definition and criteria were identified. It has been found that while officially recognized states meet every criterion listed, meeting either one of them or a combination of some is sufficient for an entity to be called SLE. In fact, it was stated that what distinguished one type of SLE from another (de facto state, statelet, etc.) is the said nuances. The second part of the chapter illustrated IR theories, their historical roots, ideological backgrounds, and their stances towards SLEs. It has been underlined that although each of those theories lack at completely explaining a particular era of US foreign policy, premises of some of theories show relatively closer proximity with a certain era and international system it represents. Finally, the chapter scrutinized the structure and evolution of US foreign policy structure. As result, theoretical conformity, status of polarity and status of SLEs in each era of US foreign policy starting from 1945 were presented.

The third and the last chapter analyzed US foreign policy's aforementioned evolution within the framework of the case of KRG. It was found that while on the early eras, we witnessed a conventional relationship between a state actor and local entities, by the last era, the way the US interacted with KRG in both ways, that is to say how both parties have shown potential of affecting each other's policies can be perceived as an indicator of an era that challenges IR theories as we know.

Although claiming that the world is on the brink of an era in which we witness the end of sovereign state system as we know would be unrealistic, it is a fact that states are not alone in international politics anymore. Quasi-states, de facto entities and unrecognized regional powers today are not actors who are merely affected by foreign policies of countries. Instead, they started gaining the capability of influencing foreign policies of states. Relevantly, as result of nonpolar international system, the absence of state dominance caused an international-scale power-vacuum.

Kurds, a nation with history of conflicts, uncertainties, and internal rivalries, had been through many phases throughout the history. They had always been caught between two fires as result of conflicting interests of states until invasion of Iraq in 2003. In this regard, this study intended to verify if the case of Kurds in Iraq and their relations with the US is compatible with contemporary political circumstances. It has been found that foreign policy of the US towards Kurds in Iraq indeed verifies what holistic constructivists bring forward. Still, from the perspective of Kurds, who are still living within the borders of Republic of Iraq, it can hardly be defined as success. While the current status in Northern Syria leaves no room for doubt that stability in the region in near future is highly unlikely, whether or not Kurds in Iraq will establish an independent state over time still remains unclear. 2017 Independence Referendum has shown that the idea of independence can render many international actors restless. The ameliorating relations with the US, along with failure of Iraq's central government in terms of providing goods and services, the country's sectarian and ethnic instability and increasing presence of Kurdish politician on the stage of politics of would certainly seem to give Kurds in Iraq a considerable advantage. Still, the validity of arguments given by this study will not be completely proven until political uncertainty surrounding the subject is clarified.

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