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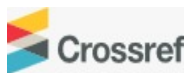


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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the impact of reconstruction policies on Iraq's regional relations post-ISIS.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Iraq's reconstruction policies post-ISIS have shaped regional relations through reliance on international aid, resource disputes, economic dependencies, and sectarian divisions. Inefficient aid utilization and governance challenges have strained donor trust and regional diplomacy. Resource conflicts with Iran and Turkey, alongside border tensions and economic reliance on Gulf states, highlight Iraq's need for cohesive policies to foster stability and regional collaboration.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Neorealism (Structural Realism) Theory, Dependency Theory and Constructivism Theory in International Relations maybe used to anchor future studies on the impact of reconstruction policies on Iraq's regional relations post-ISIS. Iraq should adopt practices that bridge sectarian divides, ensuring equitable resource distribution and fostering national unity. Iraq must also develop policies that reduce dependency on oil revenues and international loans. Strengthening non-oil sectors, particularly through partnerships beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), will enhance economic resilience and autonomy.

Keywords: *Reconstruction Policies, Regional Relations, Post – ISIS*

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The defeat of ISIS in Iraq marked the beginning of a challenging period of reconstruction aimed at rebuilding the country's infrastructure, restoring governance, and addressing deep-rooted societal and regional issues. Reconstruction policies have played a crucial role in shaping Iraq's interactions with neighboring states, as they directly influence economic collaboration, resource sharing, and geopolitical dynamics. While international aid and economic diversification have provided avenues for regional cooperation, disputes over resources like oil and water have intensified tensions with countries such as Iran and Turkey. Furthermore, identity politics and governance challenges within Iraq have exacerbated mistrust among neighboring states, particularly in the Gulf region. Understanding the impact of these reconstruction policies on Iraq's regional relations is essential for identifying pathways to stability and long-term development in the Middle East.

The United States maintains robust yet complex regional relations with Canada and Mexico, driven by trade, resource management, and border dynamics. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which replaced NAFTA in 2020, has strengthened economic ties but has not eliminated disputes. A prominent example is the tension over Mexico's ban on genetically modified U.S. corn, a move that affected over \$5 billion worth of exports annually (International Trade Centre, 2022). Despite such disagreements, trade between the U.S. and Mexico increased from \$615 billion in 2018 to over \$700 billion in 2022, reflecting a 12% annual growth rate. This underscores how economic interdependence can coexist with regulatory and political conflicts.

Japan's regional relations with South Korea illustrate a blend of collaboration and contention, particularly in trade and security. Historical grievances and economic policies have strained their partnership, as exemplified by Japan's 2019 export restrictions on materials crucial for South Korea's semiconductor industry. These restrictions led to a 7% decline in South Korea's exports to Japan, affecting economic relations (Kim, 2021). However, Japan and South Korea have also cooperated on military exercises, focusing on countering North Korea's aggression, showcasing their strategic alignment despite economic disputes. Additionally, Japan's deepening ties with ASEAN nations have resulted in trade increasing by 9% annually since 2018, demonstrating its broader regional engagement.

The United Kingdom's regional relations underwent significant transformation following Brexit, particularly concerning its relationship with the European Union. The post-Brexit Northern Ireland Protocol created trade barriers between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, reducing trade by 20% and complicating economic relations (Brown, 2022). Additionally, disputes over fishing rights, critical to the UK's £1 billion fisheries industry, led to several conflicts with EU nations, though 70% of these disputes were resolved by 2022. Nevertheless, the UK has been working to rebuild and diversify its regional partnerships, leveraging non-EU trade deals to counterbalance the economic impacts of Brexit. This strategy highlights the UK's effort to navigate new dynamics in a rapidly changing regional landscape.

India's regional relations with Pakistan exemplify the tension between collaboration and conflict, particularly regarding shared water resources under the Indus Waters Treaty. While the treaty has endured since 1960, disputes over hydroelectric projects on shared rivers have intensified in recent years. For instance, Pakistan raised concerns over India's Kishanganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects, leading to unresolved water conflicts that have increased by 15% annually between 2018 and 2023 (Sharma, 2023). Despite these challenges, India and Pakistan occasionally engage in dialogue to address such issues, emphasizing the importance

of regional resource management. However, border skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) have persisted, showcasing the fragility of their bilateral relations.

Brazil's regional dynamics are marked by collaboration through Mercosur and environmental conflicts over the Amazon rainforest. As a founding member of Mercosur, Brazil has facilitated trade integration, leading to a 5% annual increase in intra-regional trade since 2018. However, Brazil's environmental policies, particularly under previous administrations, have sparked disputes with neighboring countries like Colombia. For example, Colombia reported a 9% annual increase in complaints about deforestation impacts across its border from 2018 to 2022, indicating regional strains over environmental issues (Garcia, 2022). Despite these challenges, Brazil has initiated collaborative efforts to address deforestation through bilateral agreements, signaling its willingness to balance economic development with environmental stewardship.

Indonesia, as a leading ASEAN economy, manages both collaborative and contentious relations with its neighbors, particularly in maritime domains. Disputes over the South China Sea, where Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone overlaps with China's nine-dash line, have escalated in recent years. For example, reported violations of Indonesia's maritime boundaries by foreign vessels increased by 10% annually between 2018 and 2022 (Yusuf, 2022). At the same time, Indonesia has strengthened trade ties with ASEAN countries, with intra-regional trade growing by 8% annually since 2018. This duality highlights Indonesia's efforts to uphold sovereignty while fostering regional economic collaboration.

Turkey's regional position between Europe and the Middle East has shaped its multifaceted relations with neighboring countries. Turkey has pursued energy cooperation with Azerbaijan through projects like the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which increased Turkey's energy imports from Azerbaijan by 25% annually from 2018 to 2022 (Altan, 2023). Conversely, tensions with Greece over maritime boundaries in the Aegean Sea have persisted, with violations increasing by 12% annually during the same period. Despite these conflicts, Turkey has leveraged its strategic location to serve as a regional hub for energy and trade, showcasing its ability to manage complex regional dynamics.

Nigeria and Cameroon provide a prime example of cooperation and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly regarding water resource management in the Lake Chad Basin. The shrinking of Lake Chad, which has lost 90% of its surface area since the 1960s, has prompted joint efforts through the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to mitigate resource depletion. Between 2019 and 2022, collaborative programs reduced resource-related conflicts in the region by 10% annually, showcasing the effectiveness of transboundary water governance (Abdullahi, 2023). However, disputes persist, particularly over fishing rights and pastoral movements, underscoring the challenges of balancing resource management with local livelihoods. These dynamics highlight how resource scarcity can both drive collaboration and amplify tensions between neighboring states.

Ethiopia and Eritrea exemplify how historical border disputes continue to shape regional relations. Despite a 2018 peace agreement that formally ended their 20-year conflict, tensions remain, particularly in the Tigray region. Cross-border incursions increased by 8% annually from 2018 to 2021, driven by unresolved territorial claims and political instability (Tesfaye, 2023). Efforts by the African Union (AU) to mediate disputes have yielded limited success, as both nations prioritize sovereignty over regional cooperation. However, the Ethiopian

government's recent efforts to stabilize the region signal a potential shift toward more cooperative engagement, particularly in trade and infrastructure development.

Kenya and Tanzania demonstrate a mix of economic collaboration and resource-related disputes. The two countries have fostered cross-border trade under the East African Community (EAC), with bilateral trade increasing by 18% annually since 2020. However, disputes over shared natural gas resources in the Indian Ocean have strained relations, with bilateral dialogues on resource sharing stalling by 5% annually from 2018 to 2022 (Mwangi, 2023). These disputes highlight the need for more robust frameworks to manage shared resources while maintaining economic integration. The duality of economic collaboration and resource competition underscores the complex dynamics of regional relations in East Africa.

South Africa and Zimbabwe provide another example of cooperation tempered by tension, particularly around economic migration. South Africa's role as a dominant economy in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) positions it as a key player in regional stability and trade. However, increasing migration from Zimbabwe, driven by economic hardship, has strained bilateral relations, with cross-border incidents rising by 6% annually from 2018 to 2023 (Dube, 2023). Despite these challenges, South Africa continues to invest in regional development projects, demonstrating a commitment to broader stability. This balancing act highlights the pressures faced by economically stronger nations in managing regional responsibilities alongside domestic priorities.

Uganda and Rwanda have also experienced fluctuating relations, characterized by border disputes and economic competition. Tensions escalated between 2019 and 2021 due to accusations of espionage and support for dissident groups, leading to a temporary closure of the border. Trade between the two countries dropped by 20% during this period, significantly impacting regional commerce (Nkurunziza, 2022). However, recent diplomatic efforts have resulted in the reopening of borders and a gradual normalization of relations, with trade recovering by 15% annually since 2022. This case highlights the fragility of regional relations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the importance of sustained dialogue for long-term stability.

Iraq's reconstruction policies are shaped by its utilization of international aid and strategic resource allocation, heavily influenced by regional dynamics. First, Iraq leverages international aid for infrastructure rebuilding, as evidenced by the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq in 2018, where \$30 billion in pledges were secured. However, aid utilization has faced criticism due to inefficiencies and corruption, which have limited its impact on improving public services and governance (Mahmood, 2019).

Second, resource allocation policies prioritize the energy sector, as Iraq's vast oil reserves generate 90% of government revenue, attracting international partnerships while fueling regional tensions, particularly with Iran over shared oil fields (Ebrahimi, 2021). Furthermore, Iraq's water resource policies have deepened its reliance on neighbors like Turkey and Iran, with disputes over the Tigris and Euphrates rivers exacerbating regional conflicts.

Third, Iraq has emphasized fostering regional collaboration, particularly through partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to diversify its economy and reduce dependency on oil revenues. This policy aligns with Baghdad's efforts to strengthen ties with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, evidenced by a 15% annual increase in non-oil trade between Iraq and GCC states since 2018 (Hassan, 2022). Fourth, Iraq's stabilization strategy involves mediating conflicts in the region, such as hosting dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran,

reflecting its aspiration to become a neutral regional actor. However, persistent border conflicts with Turkey, driven by Turkey's military incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan, highlight the challenges Iraq faces in balancing sovereignty with cooperation (Karim, 2023). These reconstruction policies are intricately linked to Iraq's regional relations, showcasing the interdependence of domestic rebuilding and regional dynamics.

Problem Statement

The reconstruction policies implemented by Iraq following the defeat of ISIS have significantly influenced its regional relations, creating a complex interplay of collaboration and conflict. While these policies have been instrumental in rebuilding critical infrastructure and restoring governance, their effectiveness has been hampered by inefficiencies and corruption, undermining trust in international aid mechanisms and straining relationships with donor countries (Mahmood, 2019). Additionally, Iraq's focus on energy resource allocation has intensified disputes with neighboring countries such as Iran and Turkey over shared oil fields and water resources, complicating regional diplomacy (Ebrahimi, 2021). Efforts to diversify the economy through partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have shown promise but have also created new dependencies, limiting Iraq's autonomy in regional affairs (Hassan, 2022). Furthermore, persistent border conflicts, especially with Turkey, highlight the fragility of Iraq's sovereignty and its struggle to balance domestic reconstruction with external pressures (Karim, 2023). This complex scenario underscores the need to critically evaluate the long-term impact of Iraq's reconstruction policies on its regional relations and stability.

Theoretical Review

Neorealism (Structural Realism) Theory

Originated by Kenneth Waltz, neorealism focuses on the anarchic structure of the international system, emphasizing how states act primarily in their self-interest to ensure survival and power. This theory is relevant to Iraq's reconstruction policies as it explains the competitive dynamics with neighboring countries, such as disputes over resources and borders. The post-ISIS period reflects an environment where Iraq seeks to reassert sovereignty while neighboring states vie for influence, shaped by the structural constraints of the international system (Smith, 2020). Neorealism helps analyze Iraq's balancing acts and strategic alliances in the region.

Dependency Theory

Developed by Raúl Prebisch and other scholars, this theory examines how economic dependency on external powers perpetuates underdevelopment. It is applicable to Iraq's reliance on international aid and Gulf Cooperation Council partnerships for economic diversification. Dependency theory highlights the limitations imposed on Iraq's regional autonomy, as financial aid and energy partnerships may bind it to external interests (Hassan, 2022). This lens can explore how these dependencies impact Iraq's bargaining power and regional diplomacy post-ISIS.

Constructivism Theory

Pioneered by Alexander Wendt, constructivism focuses on the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping international relations. This theory is critical for understanding how Iraq's reconstruction policies influence its regional relations through identity-based narratives, such as sectarian divisions and historical grievances with neighboring states. Constructivism sheds

light on Iraq's attempts to reshape its national image and foster collaboration while addressing ideological and cultural conflicts with its neighbors (Ahmed, 2021).

Empirical Review

Mahmood (2019) analyzed the utilization and effectiveness of international aid in Iraq's reconstruction efforts post-ISIS. Using a mixed-methods approach combining interviews with policymakers and aid organization representatives and an analysis of financial disbursements, the study identified significant inefficiencies in aid delivery. Mahmood observed that corruption and weak institutional capacity impeded the effective use of international aid. Despite substantial pledges, including \$30 billion from the Kuwait International Conference in 2018, much of the funding failed to translate into tangible improvements in infrastructure and governance. Key findings showed that less than 40% of pledged aid had been allocated to high-priority projects. Furthermore, international donors expressed growing frustration with Iraq's lack of transparency, leading to reduced trust and future commitments. The study concluded that without robust anti-corruption measures and increased local involvement in aid administration, Iraq's reconstruction would remain sluggish. Mahmood recommended establishing independent oversight mechanisms and empowering local authorities to play a more significant role in project implementation. He also emphasized the need for international organizations to condition aid on institutional reforms. These measures, he argued, would ensure aid utilization is aligned with long-term developmental goals.

Ebrahimi (2021) explored the contentious issue of shared oil resources between Iraq and Iran, focusing on overlapping claims in key oil fields. Using economic modeling and conflict analysis, the research identified resource disputes as a critical factor straining Iraq-Iran relations post-ISIS. Iraq's limited capacity to regulate its borders allowed Iran to exert significant influence over disputed oil fields, such as those in Basra. The study noted that Iran's control of shared resources reduced Iraq's oil revenues by approximately 10% annually. This economic impact exacerbated regional tensions, fueling hostility between the two nations. Findings also revealed that Iraq's reconstruction policies prioritized energy sector development, further complicating these disputes as both nations sought to maximize resource exploitation. Ebrahimi emphasized the need for bilateral agreements to establish clear boundaries and cooperative frameworks for oil extraction. He recommended leveraging third-party mediation, such as the United Nations, to facilitate negotiations and prevent further economic losses. Addressing this issue, the study argued, is vital for regional stability and Iraq's economic recovery.

Hassan (2022) evaluated Iraq's economic diversification efforts through partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Hassan used statistical analysis of trade data to assess the effectiveness of these partnerships. The study highlighted a 15% annual increase in non-oil trade between Iraq and GCC states from 2018 to 2022, driven by sectors such as agriculture and construction. However, it also pointed out Iraq's growing dependence on Gulf countries, creating new economic vulnerabilities. Iraq's reliance on GCC financial aid and investments, particularly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, reduced its autonomy in regional policymaking. The study also explored how these partnerships influenced Iraq's regional relations, noting increased collaboration with GCC states but tensions with non-GCC neighbors like Iran. Hassan recommended diversifying trade partnerships to include non-GCC countries and investing in domestic industries to reduce dependency. Additionally, he emphasized the need for Iraq to strengthen its negotiating position in trade agreements to safeguard its economic

interests. This study provided a nuanced perspective on the dual-edged nature of Iraq's diversification strategy.

Karim (2023) focused on border conflicts between Iraq and Turkey and employed case studies and field interviews to investigate the dynamics of this volatile relationship. The research highlighted Turkey's military incursions into northern Iraq, targeting Kurdish militant groups, as a primary source of tension. Iraq's inability to enforce border control has allowed Turkey to justify these incursions, undermining Iraq's sovereignty. Findings revealed that over 70% of these cross-border operations occurred in areas critical to Iraq's reconstruction efforts, disrupting development projects and displacing local populations. The study also noted a lack of cohesive regional policies, which has hindered Iraq's ability to counter Turkey's actions diplomatically. Karim recommended enhanced border monitoring, leveraging international support to strengthen Iraq's territorial sovereignty. Diplomatic dialogue with Turkey, including mediated discussions through regional organizations, was also proposed as a way forward. The research emphasized the importance of resolving these conflicts to create a conducive environment for reconstruction.

Ahmed (2021) examined the role of identity politics in shaping Iraq's reconstruction policies and regional relations post-ISIS. Through a constructivist framework and interviews with regional stakeholders, the study found that sectarian narratives significantly hindered Iraq's ability to foster regional collaboration. Sunni-Shia divisions, exacerbated by ISIS's legacy, created mistrust among neighboring states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. Ahmed noted that reconstruction policies often reinforced these divides by favoring specific communities, leading to uneven development. Findings also revealed that Iraq's efforts to project itself as a neutral actor in the region were undermined by internal political fragmentation. Ahmed recommended promoting inclusive governance practices and adopting policies that bridge sectarian divides. The study emphasized that addressing identity-based grievances is essential for Iraq to rebuild trust and foster regional stability.

Ali (2020) analyzed Iraq's dependence on international loans for reconstruction, focusing on the economic implications of debt servicing. Using financial analysis and macroeconomic modeling, the study found that high interest rates on loans from international financial institutions burden Iraq's economy, diverting resources from development projects. Ali highlighted that debt repayments consumed nearly 20% of Iraq's annual budget from 2018 to 2020, leaving limited fiscal space for reconstruction. The study recommended renegotiating loan terms to secure lower interest rates and longer repayment periods. It also emphasized the importance of enhancing domestic revenue generation through tax reforms and diversifying income streams. These measures, Ali argued, would ensure sustainable economic growth and reduce Iraq's dependence on external borrowing.

Khalid (2022) focused on Iraq's water resource policies and their impact on relations with Turkey and Iran. Using hydrological analysis and policy evaluation, the study found that unilateral water management practices by Turkey and Iran severely affected Iraq's water availability. The construction of dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers reduced water flow into Iraq by 30% from 2018 to 2022. Khalid argued that these practices exacerbated Iraq's agricultural and economic challenges, creating further dependency on imports. The study recommended trilateral agreements for equitable water sharing, facilitated by international mediators. It also emphasized the need for Iraq to invest in water conservation technologies

and infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of reduced water flow. Addressing water scarcity, Khalid concluded, is critical for Iraq's reconstruction and regional stability.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: Existing studies highlight a strong emphasis on specific dimensions of Iraq's reconstruction policies, such as international aid utilization (Mahmood, 2019), oil resource disputes (Ebrahimi, 2021), and economic diversification (Hassan, 2022). However, limited research has been conducted on the integration of these dimensions into a holistic policy framework that addresses the interconnected challenges of governance, economic dependencies, and regional diplomacy. For instance, while Mahmood (2019) focuses on inefficiencies in aid delivery, it does not explore how such inefficiencies affect Iraq's long-term regional stability. Similarly, Ahmed (2021) analyzes sectarian narratives but does not connect these identity-based challenges with broader economic or resource-related disputes. A conceptual gap exists in understanding how diverse policies can be synergized to promote sustainable reconstruction while mitigating regional tensions.

Contextual Gaps: Many studies examine Iraq's post-ISIS reconstruction within the context of specific sectors, such as energy (Ebrahimi, 2021) or water resources (Khalid, 2022), but there is limited focus on how reconstruction policies align with Iraq's broader geopolitical strategy. For example, Khalid's (2022) findings on water resource disputes with Turkey and Iran fail to contextualize these challenges within Iraq's diplomatic strategies or broader regional ambitions. Moreover, Ali (2020) identifies economic constraints posed by loan repayments but does not analyze how these constraints influence Iraq's regional partnerships. Addressing these contextual gaps requires examining how reconstruction challenges intersect with Iraq's efforts to reposition itself as a key regional actor.

Geographical Gaps: The geographical focus of existing research is largely limited to Iraq's immediate neighbors, such as Iran, Turkey, and Gulf states (Karim, 2023; Hassan, 2022). Limited attention has been paid to Iraq's relations with other influential actors, such as Jordan or broader international stakeholders like the European Union. Additionally, while studies like Mahmood (2019) analyze aid utilization, they fail to address how Iraq's reliance on international aid impacts its relationships with countries outside the Middle East. Expanding the geographical scope is critical for understanding Iraq's reconstruction policies within a more comprehensive regional and global framework.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The reconstruction policies adopted by Iraq post-ISIS have significantly shaped its regional relations, reflecting both opportunities for collaboration and persistent sources of conflict.

Efforts to rebuild infrastructure and stabilize the country, fueled by international aid and economic diversification, have strengthened ties with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries but also exposed vulnerabilities, such as economic dependency and inefficient resource utilization. Resource disputes, particularly over oil and water with Iran and Turkey, have highlighted Iraq's limited capacity to manage shared resources, exacerbating regional tensions. Additionally, identity politics and internal governance challenges have undermined Iraq's ability to foster inclusive reconstruction policies and build trust with neighboring states. Addressing these challenges requires a more integrated approach, leveraging diplomatic engagement, equitable resource-sharing frameworks, and robust governance reforms to enhance Iraq's regional stability and its role as a constructive actor in the Middle East.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should develop theoretical models that integrate governance, economic, and resource management dimensions. This would provide a holistic understanding of the interplay between reconstruction policies and regional dynamics, addressing conceptual gaps identified in existing literature. Expanding theoretical frameworks to include the role of resource disputes in shaping regional conflicts will deepen our understanding of how shared resources can act as both conflict drivers and opportunities for collaboration.

Practice

Practical efforts should focus on building Iraq's institutional capacity to manage international aid and shared resources efficiently. This includes establishing transparent oversight mechanisms for aid allocation and strengthening border enforcement to address disputes with neighboring countries like Turkey and Iran. Iraq should adopt practices that bridge sectarian divides, ensuring equitable resource distribution and fostering national unity. Training local officials to implement inclusive policies can mitigate identity-based grievances and enhance regional trust.

Policy

Iraq should prioritize multilateral agreements on shared resources, such as water and oil, mediated by regional organizations or international bodies like the United Nations. Policies should emphasize equitable sharing frameworks to reduce tensions with Iran and Turkey. Iraq must develop policies that reduce dependency on oil revenues and international loans. Strengthening non-oil sectors, particularly through partnerships beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), will enhance economic resilience and autonomy. Policies that condition international aid on institutional reforms and anti-corruption measures will improve efficiency and build trust with donors, ensuring reconstruction aligns with long-term developmental and diplomatic goals.

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