

Iraq – US Relations: Between Importance and Effectiveness

The Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) signed between Iraq and the United States in 2008 is considered an important milestone in the history of relations between the two countries. However, the challenges faced by Iraq, after the fall of the dictatorial regime in 2003, have so far not been met adequately by the implementation of the terms of the agreement. The investment of this agreement in line with Iraq's need for a strong and strategic ally, such as the United States, requires us to provide an atmosphere that can absorb internal and regional factors, and its impact on relations with the United States and other regional and international powers, as well as identifying important capabilities and tools necessary to take advantage of those relationships.

The need to build a strong alliance with the United States is gaining great importance in light of what the region is witnessing in terms of political and security developments and the situation of instability, which is represented by the growing phenomenon of terrorism and the breadth of its constituency as a result of sectarian conflicts led by extremists. This is causing the area to turn into a war zone and adversely affecting political, security and development of Iraq. Despite the Iraqi government's efforts to strengthen relations with the United States, there are issues, many of which are related to the legacy of Saddam Hussein's regime or the recent regional situation, which has not been considered as Iraq's priority in its relations with the US. However, they have adversely affected those relations at a time when Iraq needs US and international efforts to rebuild its institutions, develop its economy and enhance its capabilities to face terrorist organizations. Therefore, it is important to develop a plan that looks to address these issues, through an objective assessment of the causes and effects, with the objective of enhancing these relations in the interest of Iraq and its people.

For instance issues such as Camp Ashraf residents, the Jewish Archive, Iraq's position on the crisis in Syria, relations with Iran and others have had a significant impact on the relations between the two countries, especially on the arms programs and security cooperation as stipulated by SFA.

The Iraqi government along with international parties, such as the UN, have made great efforts to resettle Camp Ashraf residents. However the attacks suffered by the

camp's residents led to accusations that the Iraqi government failing to provide the necessary protection for the camp's residents. This sparked an extensive media frenzy with political reverberations in the United States and some EU countries that have been sympathetic towards Camp Ashraf residents. Also supporters of the camp's residents used several means, including the use of pressure groups known in Congress and the U.S. media, to take advantage of those attacks in order to influence the position of the U.S. Congress with the Iraqi government. These developments reveal the importance of media's role in directing positions, as well as the importance of communicating with different powers and decision-makers in the United States to uncover the circumstances of events, which enhances these parties' confidence in the Iraqi government.

The Jewish Archive is another issue also gained interest among a wide range of members of Congress and some US non-governmental organizations, especially the Jewish organizations, which oppose the return of the Archive to Iraq. This matter requires caution from us when dealing with it, with emphasis on its historical significance, as it is part of the cultural heritage of Iraq, and trying to find a solution that would satisfy all parties and would ensure the archive's ownership for Iraq.

On the other hand, some decision-making stakeholders in the United States criticize the Iraqi government for its position on the Syrian crisis because it did not join the US and some other countries, which called to oust President Bashar al-Assad from power. As a result, we were considered among those who are supporting the Syrian regime. Therefore, it is important to remind the world about the terrorists who are targeting Iraqis and considered Syria, for many years, as a base for them to initiate their attacks against Iraq. These attacks caused the Iraqi government to file a complaint against the Syrian regime at the United Nations in 2009. Nevertheless, many countries, including the United States, did not support that complaint, instead they provided protection for Assad's regime at the Security Council.

In this aspect, we have to clarify Iraq's position to decision-makers in the United States, Congress and think tanks in particular, which is: calling to settle the dispute in Syria through negotiations and the selection of a free elected government that represents the will of the Syrian people, with the participation of all segments of

society, capable of ending the bloodshed and controlling terrorist organizations, which have a direct impact on the situation in Iraq.

Building state institutions requires great efforts, openness in relations with the developed countries of the world and an accurate understanding of reality. Including institution-building aspects on legislative and technical levels, so it can meet the Iraq's need for foreign expertise to contribute to the reconstruction process. On this matter, it is necessary for Iraq to consolidate its relations with the United States, especially with the presence of a strategic agreement, which many countries in the world wish to have.

Today, Iraq is witnessing significant economic growth and rapid population growth, which constitute important factors in attracting international companies. However due to the rigidity of some laws that cannot keep pace with the development with enticing investment, in addition to the security situation in some parts of Iraq, preclude the provision of a suitable environment to attract international companies, especially the U.S companies, to enter the Iraqi market.

The partnership with international organizations, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, will play an important role in supporting the process for our development; therefore, it is necessary to develop a strategy to deal with these organizations to make the most of it in achieving the goals that Iraq aspires to reach. Civil society organizations, such as human rights groups and others, are important in promoting values of democracy and consolidating concepts of human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals. Activating the role of these organizations and supporting their activities is a measure of the extent of the country's progress in democracy and human rights sectors. It also enhances the political system's strength in its relationship with the people and the international community, and supports the state's efforts to counter manifestations of financial and administrative corruption, to adopt standards of integrity, and to promote transparency and accountability within the state's institutions and with its citizen.

Iraq seeks to establish positive relations with all countries, especially with the United States, based on common interests, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs. Sometimes there may be some differences in our policies with the

United States and other countries. This is normal in international relations and should not be considered as a decline in the relations as it sometimes may converge in goals and diverge in others, but it always requires a clarification of positions and communication of our real motives, in line with the principles of partnership between the two countries. Iraq has been able to come out of guardianship to become a reliable partner in the international arena, in a region fraught with variables that threaten regional and global security and stability.

In addition, the relationship with the United States has developed to be one of friendship as described by President Obama as a "normal relationship based on common interests and mutual respect." Therefore, we have to invest in this important relationship more effectively.