Iraq and Iran: A Poliheuristic Assessment of the Iraq-Iran War

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Abstract: The Iraq-Iran crisis stands as one of the most intricate conflicts in the Middle East. This study employs the poliheuristic (PH) theory to scrutinize Iraq's decision-making throughout the crisis. Utilizing Mintz's (1993, 2004) PH model, the research aims to uncover the decision-making processes and outcomes during this period by scrutinizing the major policy dimensions and options accessible to Iraq's leadership. In addition, it seeks an answer to the question of why Iraq, as a rising power in Middle Eastern politics, waged war against revolutionary Iran rather than sustaining diplomacy efforts initiated with Pehlevi Iran. The findings align with existing PH literature, revealing that Iraqi decision-makers followed a two-stage decision-making approach during the crisis. In the first stage, Iraqi leaders discarded options that could lead to losses, adhering to a non-compensatory rule. In the second stage, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's decisions were guided by expected utility maximization.

Keywords: Iraq, Iran, Iraq-Iran War, Poliheurestic Theory

Öz: Irak-İran krizi dünyanın en karmaşık çatışmalarından biridir. Bu makale, Irak-İran krizi sırasında Irak'ın karar alma sürecini analiz etmek için poliheuristik (PH) teoriyi kullanıyor. Araştırma, Mintz'in (1993, 2004) PH modelini kullanarak, Irak liderlerinin erişebildiği başlıca politika boyutlarını ve seçeneklerini inceleyerek bu dönemdeki karar alma süreçlerini ve sonuçlarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, Ortadoğu siyasetinde yükselen bir güç olan Irak'ın, Pehlevi İranı ile başlatılan diplomasi çabalarını sürdürmek yerine neden devrim sonrası İran'a savaş açtığı sorusuna bir cevap aramaktadır. Bulgular, mevcut PH literatürüyle uyumludur ve Iraklı karar vericilerin kriz sırasında iki aşamalı bir karar alma yaklaşımı izlediğini ortaya koymaktadır. İlk aşamada, Irak liderleri telafi edici olmayan prensibine bağlı kalarak kayıplara yol açabilecek seçenekleri bir kenara bıraktılar. İkinci aşamada, beklenen fayda maksimizasyonu Irak Devlet Başkanı Saddam Hüseyin'in kararlarını yönlendirdi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Irak, İran, Irak-İran Savaşı, Poliheuristik Teori

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Introduction

The Iraq-Iran war dominated international attention in the 1980s by involving great, middle, and small powers and by leading Iraq and Iran to a war of attribution. The war was costly for Iraq, raising Iraq's external debt from around $2.5 billion at the beginning of the war to over $50 billion at the end (Marr, 2012, pp. 202–203). This situation in Iraq necessitates an analysis of how Iraqi leadership positions evolved, bringing about Iraq's attack on Iran in 1979. The first question I answer in this article is: What were the major policy dimensions and options accessible to Iraq's leadership during the crisis between Iraq and Iran? The second question is why Iraq, a rising power in Middle East politics, waged war against Iran rather than sustaining diplomacy efforts initiated with Pehlevi Iran. The assumptions of the poliheuristic (PH) theory offer a clear explanation of these two questions.

The 1970s marked a significant turning point in the Middle Eastern regional order. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War, one of the crucial events, led Arab OPEC members to impose an embargo against the United States (US) in retaliation for its support for the Israeli military and to gain influence in post-war negotiations. With the soaring oil prices, Iraq emerged as a regional power with some military and financial weight. However, Iraq's economy became dependent on oil revenues: while the share of oil revenues was 30 percent of its gross domestic product in 1970, it jumped around 60 percent before the Iran-Iraq war (World Bank, 1993, pp. 90-91).

The Ba'ath Party, which rose to power in 1968, used these oil revenues to strengthen its position in Iraqi domestic politics and increase its leverage in Middle East politics. To ensure national interests, the Ba'athist leaders also sought an alliance with a Great Power and friendly relations with neighbors. For ideological reasons, the Ba'ath political circles initially chose the Soviet Union as Iraq's ally rather than a Western power. Furthermore, Iraq has begun to distinguish economic and political objectives in its relations with the US since the Soviet Union followed a détente policy with the US (Khadduri, 1978, pp. 174–175). On the other hand, independent economic power, thanks to oil revenues, opened the possibility of Iraq's escape from the binary opposites of the Cold War. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein regarded Egypt's pursuit of negotiations with Israel during 1978 as an opportunity to assert Iraq's role as a potential leader of the Arab world, resulting in the Iraqi government's calling of the Baghdad Summit in November 1978. Iraq's ambition for regional supremacy peaked using military force against Iran (Tripp, 2003, p. 208).

Although there are several studies on the Iraq-Iran war in the context of Iraqi foreign policy, there is little focus on the decision-making process of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Scholars make two predominant arguments for Iraq's invasion of

Iran in September 1980. One argument is that Saddam struck Iran for geopolitical gains. Another is that Saddam saw war as a means to neutralize the promoting effect of the Islamic revolution on Iraq's restless Shi'a majority. Some scholars have been content with one factor or the other,[1] while others have ascribed both motivations to Saddam's decision to invade Iran.[2] A recent study accounts for Saddam's decision to attack Iran in connection with neoclassical realism theory (İpek, 2023).

The PH theory has mainly been applied to the analysis of decisions by US presidents: Eisenhower's decision not to use force in Vietnam in 1954, Eisenhower's decision regarding Guatemala in 1954, Kennedy's approval of the Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, Johnson's de-escalation of the US engagement in Vietnam, Reagan's decision regarding Grenada in 1983, Bush's decision regarding Iraq in 1991, and Clinton's decision regarding Kosovo (DeRouen, 2003; Taylor-Robinson et al., 2003; DeRouen, 2001; Redd, 2000; Dougherty, 2013). Additionally, the theory has been used to analyze decisions by leaders in the democratic and non-democratic polity: Pakistan's Decision to Test the Bomb, Arafat and Sharon's policy alternatives and dimensions during the intifada, decision-making in Iran's foreign policy, introduction of non-compensatory principle to coalition formulation in Israel, and Türkiye's decisions over the Cyprus crisis (Mintz, 2005, p. 95; James & Zhang, 2004; Mintz, 2004; Astorino-Courtois et al., 2000; Sathasivam, 2003; Mintz & Mishal, 2003; Maleki, 2002; Clare, 2003; Mintz, 1995; Özdamar & Erciyas, 2020). Against the backdrop of the literature, the PH theory is one of the theoretical approaches to shed light on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's decision-making environment related to the Iran-Iraq crisis.

This article will contribute to the literature by investigating the Iraqi leader's decision-making processes in the Iraq-Iran crisis. The subsequent sections explore the literature on Iraq's war decision on Iran, a discussion of the PH theory, and an analysis of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's decision during the Iraq-Iran crisis from the perspective of the PH theory. The concluding section discusses the importance of the analysis for Iraqi foreign policy studies by laying bare limitations and future research directions.

Poliheuristic Decision Model

1   For accounts that underline the geopolical gain, see (Makiya, 1998, pp. 262–276; Marr, 2012, pp. 180–182; Parasiliti, 2003). For those that stress domestic threat to Iraq, see (Cleveland & Bunton, 2013, pp. 405–406; F. G. Gause, 2002, pp. 63–69; G. Gause, 2010, pp. 63–64; Karsh, 1990).

2   For example, see (Bakhash, 2004, pp. 21–22; Brands, 2011; Cordesman & Wagner, 1990, pp. 31–33; Ramazani, 1988, pp. 62–69; Workman, 1994).

Despite the rational choice school's assumption that decision-makers are rational, scholars seek alternative theories because policymakers pursue "irrational" policies (Below, 2008, p. 3). Although rational choice focuses on decision-maker choices, and cognitive psychology focuses on processes and beliefs, the PH theory builds a bridge between the two schools (Özdamar & Erciyas, 2020, p. 459). The theory's characteristics, such as dimension-based and non-compensatory, distinguish it from other theories (expected utility theory, cybernetic theory, and prospect theory) (Mintz, 2004, p. 7; Mintz & DeRouen Jr, 2010, p. 80). The PH theory suggests that foreign policy decisions are frequently based on eliminating unfavorable alternatives based on at least one criterion (Mintz, 1993, p. 596). While the expected utility and the cybernetic models use compensatory decision-making strategies, the PH theory uses a non-compensatory strategy as a search pattern (Mintz, 1993, p. 596). The PH theory stretches beyond "rational actor" or "bureaucratic politics" models to predict foreign policy decisions.

The PH theory examines why decision-makers make these decisions and how they make them (Mintz, 2004, p. 7). The primary of the theory is that decision-makers use a mixture of decision strategies when making decisions (Mintz, 2016, p. 101). The theory posits that decision-making is a two-stage process. In the first stage, policymakers adopt the "non-compensatory" decision-making strategies by considering various aspects of the issue and eliminating unacceptable policy alternatives that are in a critical dimension. In the second stage, policymakers adopt a more rational approach and select an alternative from the subset of remaining alternatives while maximizing benefits and minimizing risks. During the first stage, leaders tend to focus most on the "political dimension." Each political actor is primarily concerned with remaining in power (Patrick and Zhang, 2005, p.35).

The PH theory assumes that domestic politics is "the essence of the decision." Politicians value success and failure in political terms. Leaders consider policy alternatives to remain in power (Mintz, 2016, p. 101; Kinne, 2005, p. 118). This premise is significant for many Middle East and North Africa states. To choose a policy alternative, the model defines a key dimension(s), and the alternatives are rated according to their total scores. The non-compensatory decision process alludes that there is no "substitution effect" between dimensions (Dacey and Carlson, 2004, p. 40). The non-compensatory choices will remove any decision that would endanger the leader's political survival (Özdamar & Erciyas, 2020, pp. 459–460). Due to time constraints and the complexity of the decision environment, decision-makers rely on cognitive heuristics to filter out unacceptable policy options, comparing policy options in several dimensions during international crises (James & Zhang, 2005, 35; Ye, 2007, p. 319).

While constructing the model, the researcher needs to define the policy alternatives available to the leader, the dimensions that will be used to evaluate the matrix, the implications of each dimension, the ratings for each option in each dimension, and the total weight of each dimension (Brulé, 2005, p. 102). Political, economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions appear important in decision matrices. Therefore, the first stage of decision-making eliminates policy alternatives in terms of key dimension(s). Cognitive political heuristics are also important in the first stage of decision-making. Decision-makers reduce the set of alternatives while using cognitive shortcuts (Mintz & DeRouen Jr, 2010, p. 78). In the second stage of the decision, decision-makers turn to the rational approach to opt for the remaining policy alternatives (Below, 2008, p. 4). In evaluating the alternatives, irrespective of nationality or ideology, every leader makes non-compensatory choices to streamline the decision-making process (Brulé, 2005, 100). In this context, the case analysis below showcases that the Ba'ath ideology had no dramatic effect on Saddam's evaluation of the policy alternatives regarding Iran.

How do we measure the above-noted assumptions? A high score on one dimension (e.g., military) can compensate for a low score on another dimension (e.g., political) when a political leader makes a decision based on the overall score. Nonetheless, compensatory strategy seldom captures the cognitive processes involved in decision-making. In the non-compensatory decision-making model, when a certain alternative is unacceptable in a given dimension, a high score in another cannot compensate for it. That is why the alternative is eliminated. For instance, political leaders review alternatives, consider a political dimension, and reject all alternatives that may damage them politically. Then, they move to a substantive dimension and reject alternatives that are low on this dimension.

Against the backdrop, an alternative that damages the leader's political prospects is rejected before evaluating the score on the other dimension(s). The remaining options are evaluated depending on how they score on a substantive dimension (e.g., economic, strategic, diplomatic, etc.). There are often at least two distinct dimensions (sets of calculations) nested in the calculus of political leaders' decision-making (Mintz 1993, 597–602). It is important to analyze the hierarchy and order in which dimensions and/or alternatives play a role in decision-making calculus (Mintz 1993, 602). The hierarchy of information and the order in which it was processed are significant for understanding the decision. It is, therefore, crucial to examine the order and hierarchy of dimensions and alternatives in decision-making calculus (Mintz, 1993, pp. 597-602).

As an example of the non-compensatory decision rule, the decision of the United States to attack Iraq was a result of the non-compensatory decision rule. Mintz showed

that the domestic political economy served as a crucial dimension in the calculus of the decision to use force against Iraq. Mintz concluded that the US president eliminated two policy alternatives, the withdrawal and the containment, because it would have hurt him in both the military and political dimensions. However, Mintz's analysis did not clearly distinguish between the first and second stages of decision-making (Mintz, 1993, pp. 605-614). Instead, I base the case analysis on selected books, chapters, and articles on the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi foreign policy, as well as the Middle Eastern regional system. Additionally, I use secondary sources based on primary sources to uncover the decision-making processes of the Iraqi leadership.

The Domestic Decision-Making Environment of the Saddam Hussein Regime

Two weeks after the July 17 coup in 1968, the Ba'ath Party consolidated its position on the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the new fulcrum of power (Batatu, 1978, p. 1088), and constructed a totalitarian state that held a monopoly on institutions of violence (Holden, 2012, p. 212). The formal publication of a new constitution brought a strong hold on the country's executive and legislative organs. The constitution bestowed dominant power on the RCC, including the authority to declare war and conclude peace. The RCC controlled and eliminated opposition within the government, the military, and society (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008, p. 112; Perlmutter, 1977, p. 136). As the head of the RCC, the president had the authority to appoint, promote, and dismiss judiciary, civil, and military personnel (Marr, 2012, p. 141).

Hasan Bakr and Saddam Hussein supported the "Iraq First" policy, which prioritized the country's unity, regime stability, and economic independence over everything else (Belmonte, 2012, p. 872). Bakr presented the regime with a paternal face, while Hussein, careful not to challenge Bakr's leadership, took the blame for removing Bakr's rivals. President Bakr permitted Hussein to establish an independent power base in the security services (Kelidar, 1975, p. 9). The process in which Hussein became the principal decision-maker in the fields of both domestic politics and foreign policy formulation was a cumulative one (Abdelsalam, 1984, p. 113). In order to ensure regime survival, the Ba'ath rule set to remove the military from decision-making positions at the time the regime was faced with internal pressures from the military, the Communist Party, the Kurdish and Shiite groups, and external challenges from Iran (Marr, 2012, p. 139). The years from 1968 through 1973 lasted with waves of secret arrests of Communists and left-wing Baathists. In June 1973, when President Bakr was in Eastern Europe concluding a series of economic and cultural agreements, Nazem Kazzar, the Director General of Public Security,

reportedly intended to remove the Ba'ath rule. The coup attempt guaranteed that the military was ultimately excluded from top-policy-making positions in the government (Belmonte, 2012, pp. 858-859).

With the elimination of key military and civilian competition from 1974 through 1977, the domestic balance of political power in Iraq turned out overwhelmingly to the Ba'ath Party. The influence competition between Bakr and Hussein shifted on behalf of the latter. Bakr retired from politics, and Hussein became the primary decision-maker (Marr, 2012, pp. 149–150). There were three main opposing groups: the Kurds, particularly the Barzani faction, the Iraqi Communists, and Shi'i Islamist groups, especially the Da'wa Party of Baqir al-Sadr. The Kurds challenged the internal security and stability of successive governments of Iraq (Marr, 2012, p. 169; McDowall, 2000, p. 343). The Barzani faction maintained its relations with Israel by receiving Israeli aid in return for distracting and undermining the Ba'ath in the June 1967 war (McDowall, 2000, p. 331). Therefore, the Ba'athist political circles viewed Barzani as an American "agent" (Khadduri, 1978, pp. 173–174).

Indeed, Iraq's foreign policy served the regime's efforts to control regime rivals by aiming to neutralize political threats from them (Stein, 2021, pp. 104–105). The Soviets' insistence on Iraqi communists participating in the Iraqi government paved the way for a political alliance with them due to Iraq's reliance on Soviet technology and military support (Belmonte, 2012, p. 870). The Communists sided with the ruling Ba'ath government when relations between Kurds and the central government deteriorated in 1972 and 1973 (Smolansky & Smolansky, 1991, pp. 16–17). However, hostility between the Iraq Communist Party (ICP) and the Ba'ath Party recurred in 1978, when Iraqi purchases of military equipment from Western countries were criticized by the ICP, as was its soft attitude towards the Camp David Accords (Smolansky & Smolansky, 1991, p. 131; CIA, 1984, pp. 3-4). By 1978, the Iraqi government charged the communists with "subservience to Moscow." The ICP leadership fled to other countries abroad, and the ICP was driven underground by mid-1979 (Aburish, 2001, pp. 123–124; Tripp, 2003, p. 192).

By the late 1970s, the Shi'a succeeded the Kurds as the primary concern of the Saddam Hussein regime. The Shi'ite groups did not pose a severe threat to the central authority in Baghdad until Ba'athist secularism deepened Shi'ite hostility in the mid-1970s. The most severe Shi'ite disturbance in Iraq became the bloody incidents in the Shi'ite holy cities of al-Najaf and Karbala that occurred in February 1977 (Abdelsalam, 1984, p. 66). The Saddam regime suppressed Shi'i scholars, culminating in the Shiite leader Muhammad Bakir al-Sadr's execution due to his fatwa forbidding Muslims from joining the Ba'ath Party. These moves were accompanied

by continued deportations of Shi'i Iraqis beginning in 1980 (Marr, 2012, p. 195; Chubin & Tripp, 1988, p. 101; Nelson, 2018, p. 252).

Iran-Iraq Crisis

Iraq's most significant challenge came from Iran. In February 1969, Iran demanded that the border between the two countries be drawn along the *Thalweg*, the deep-water channel in the middle of the river since Iraq had not met its 1937 obligations. Iraq rejected it, and the two countries backed their dissidents (Marr, 2012, p. 145). Iraq's main rival in the Persian Gulf, Iran, was disturbed by the 1972 Iraqi-Soviet treaty and proclaimed its disagreements with the Iraqi regime in terms of its essential role in the US-led security system in the Middle East. The Iraqi-Soviet treaty led to American support for Barzani and the KDP from 1972 at a time when armed clashes between the government and Kurdish forces broke out almost immediately after the negotiations continued (Mufti, 1996, pp. 205–206; Tripp, 2007, p. 203). The direct and indirect assistance of the US to the Kurdish groups, upon request of the Shah of Iran, provided Iran with an instrument of exerting pressure on Iraq (Belmonte, 2012, p. 605).

Ultimately, the USRR's unwillingness to help Iraq and Iran's military primacy as a result of the flow of US arms to Iran because of the two Gulf pillars of US policy caused a stalemate in Iraq-Iran ties in 1975 (Acharya, 1989, p. 29; Marr, 2012, p. 144). The Iraqi leadership was obliged to make several concessions to Iran, as embodied in the Algiers Accord of 1975 (Tripp, 2003, pp. 205–206). In return, Iran pledged to stop backing Baghdad's Kurdish opponents in return for Iraqi acceptance of Iranian territorial demands along the Shatt al-Arab, including Iraq's abandonment of its claim to Iran's province of Khuzistan (F. G. Gause, 2002, p. 49; Tahiri, 2007, p. 113). This agreement resolved the Shat'ul Arab waterway issue in favor of Iran. The agreement gave Iran shipping rights on the waterway and expanded Iranian territory (Marr, 2012, pp. 46–48, 150–154).

The First Stage of Decision-Making

In the first stage, "diplomatic efforts" were the most favorable option for the Iraqi leader. After engaging in the "diplomatic" ways of solving problems with Shah's Iran, the Saddam regime eliminated the "diplomatic" dimension, which did not satisfy his regime's interests. After evaluating the available options, the article argues that Saddam's regime dismissed "do nothing" as a policy alternative. In the first place, the temporary settlement of the Kurdish problem following the Algiers agreement with the Shah and warming relations with the West decreased Ba'ath's need for

Communist support. In fact, Saddam was uncomfortable with the Communists seeking a place for a communist party in Iraq. Iraq never became a client state in its relations with the Soviet Union as the Iraqi Ba'ath leadership tried to follow an independent course in foreign policy (Aburish, 2001, pp. 123–124; Fukuyama, 1980, p. V). Soviet-Iraqi relations cooled partly because Iraq pursued closer ties with Saudi Arabia and cultivated military and economic relations with the West and partly because Iraq was dissatisfied with the poor quality of Soviet goods. Iraq also barred Soviet planes from overflying Iraqi territory during Moscow's intervention in the Horn of Africa in 1978 (Marr, 2012, p. 146; Walt, 1990, p. 141). Last but not least, President Saddam Hussein denounced the USSR for its failure either to restrain Iran in its assistance to the Kurds or to present Baghdad with adequate ammunition to defeat the Kurds overwhelmingly (Marr, 2012, pp. 153–154; McDowall, 2000, pp. 38–39, 330).

In the second place, Iraq reduced its dependence on the Soviet Union and diversified its sources of arms purchases by benefiting from its oil income. Accordingly, President Saddam Hussein made a trip to France in September 1975 in order to diversify the sources of Iraq's military and industrial purchases (Mufti, 1996, pp. 205–206). The two countries signed contracts worth around $4 billion for agricultural projects and steel plants. France agreed to provide Iraq with scientific and technical assistance in improving an Iraqi nuclear energy program (Smolansky & Smolansky, 1991, p. 24; CIA, 1984, p. 9). While Iraq sought military supplies from France, Italy, and even the US, the Soviet share of its imports decreased from 95 percent in 1972 to 63 percent in 1979 (Dawisha, 1980, pp. 136–137). Saddam's crackdown on the Communists in 1977 and expulsion of Khomeini, the man threatening the pro-West Shah, earned him credit in Western capitals (Aburish, 2001, p. 163). Diversifying major trading partners gave Saddam increasing economic independence to ensure the autonomy of the Iraqi political system under his own direction (Chubin & Tripp, 1988, pp. 200–215). Iraq did not occupy a central place in American Gulf policy before 1979. The Iranian revolution, however, undermined the US's twin pillar strategy. The American hegemonic position in the Gulf required Iran's containment and maintaining a regional balance of power. The survival of the Iraqi regime, thus, became a foremost American priority until George W. Bush. The US came to support Iraq in protecting the Gulf countries against Iran (Hurst, 2009, p. 84).

The Second Stage of Decision-Making

President Saddam eliminated the "do nothing" and "diplomatic efforts" options in the first stage and had one remaining policy choice: military intervention. I begin an evaluation of the Saddam regime's foreign policy reformulation and threats to

the survival of the regime. Following the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, which pushed Iraq into the mainstream of Arab politics, Iraq led the radical anti-Sadat front and put the Saudis under pressure to join this front (Helms, 1984, p. 185). Saddam cooperated with Saudi Arabia and Jordan with a view to sustaining Iraq's position in the Arab world and the Persian Gulf and balancing the increasing threat from Khomeini's Iran. In other words, the transnational implications of the Iranian revolution left the strategic vacuum to be filled by Iraq, the protector of the smaller Arab Gulf States against the Iranian threat (Dawisha, 1980, p. 145; Walt, 1990, p. 145). In this context, Saddam Hussein took steps to mend fences with Jordan and signed a series of agreements ensuring the expansion of the Aqaba port and the improvement of the road system between Amman and Baghdad (Marr, 2012, p. 166). Besides, Iraq signed an internal security agreement with Saudi Arabia in February 1979. Consequently, Iraq considered gaining over the Arab Gulf countries, the international community, and the Great Powers about the humbling of the Iranian government (G. Gause, 2010, p. 50; Tripp, 2007, p. 243).

There was growing discontent within the Ba'ath Party, especially its national (pan-Arab) leadership, over Saddam's rapprochement with the West and conservative Arabs. A failed coup plot against Saddam's regime by senior members of the Ba'ath Party helped Saddam consolidate his power through a complete purge of the armed forces and the Ba'ath Party in the summer of 1979. A 250-member National Assembly elected by some 7 million Iraqis will no longer intervene in defense and internal security (Mufti, 1996, p. 217). The Shi'ite groups did not pose a serious threat to the central authority in Baghdad until Ba'athist secularism deepened Shi'ite hostility in the mid-1970s. The most serious Shi'ite disturbance in Iraq became the bloody incidents in the Shi'ite holy cities of al-Najaf and Karbala that occurred in February 1977. Baghdad endeavored to circumscribe the power of Shi'ite *mullahs* by controlling their corporate revenues. In doing so, responsibility for the upkeep of Shi'ite shrines and tombs was transferred from the *ulama* to the government (Abdelsalam, 1984, p. 66).

The Iranian Revolution in February 1979 had a profound effect on the internal development of neighboring countries, mostly Iraq. In the first days of the revolution, Baghdad sought to engage with the new Iranian government following its withdrawal from the Western-aligned Central Treaty Organization, inviting its leader to visit Iraq to improve bilateral relations (Khadduri, 1988, p. 81; Ramazani, 1988, p. 58). In Saddam's view, "Islamic Iran" posed a greater threat to his regime than Israel since Iran had an ideological weapon able to annihilate Iraq as both a political system and a nation-state (Jabar, 2003, p. 226). The Iraqi leadership initially distinguished

between the Bazargan government and clerical forces in Iran. However, the two states did not forge a burgeoning tie, as the Bazargan government could not contain the clerical forces who outmaneuvered Iran (Nelson, 2018, p. 252).

From June 1979, relations between the two states deteriorated, especially after the Bazargan government resigned in November 1979 on the Iranian side and Hussein's rise to the Presidency on the Iraqi side. The new Iranian leadership began Arabic-language radio broadcasts into Iraq, forcing Iraqis to topple Saddam Hussein. As part of its anti-Baathist campaign, Iran maintained support for the Iraqi Kurds and supported the Iraqi Shi'ite social movements, which changed from clandestine to open political struggle (Chubin & Tripp, 1988, pp. 105–106). At this point, Mufti writes, "Dealing with the Kurds and the Shi'a meant dealing with an increasingly aggressive Iran, and he [President Saddam] began shoring up his alliances in preparation for the coming battle" (Mufti, 1996, p. 214).

Iranian dominance in the 1970s characterized the Iran-Iraq competition. Iraq strived to destabilize Iran by using Iranian opposition to overthrow the regime from the inside (Henderson, 1991, pp. 104–105; Nelson, 2018, p. 248). In 1980, pro-Shah forces attempted two coups, both of which were unsuccessful, marking a turning point for Iraq to take the initiative itself (Marr, 2012, p. 181; Hiro, 1991, p. 36). On the other hand, there was an assassination attempt on then-deputy Prime Minister Tariq 'Aziz, a plot Iraq considered Iran's hand in (Nelson, 2018, p. 248). At any rate, Saddam had the perception about the weakening of Iran in conventional power terms owing to a purge of the armed forces in Iran during the revolutionary chaos (G. Gause, 2010, pp. 58–59). Nevertheless, the Iranian leader Khomeini had the power to call the Shi'ites in Iraq and the Gulf to revolt against their rulers (Dawisha, 1980, p. 146).

The Iran-Iraq Crisis Decision

In the second stage, the Saddam regime evaluated the remaining policy alternatives according to their expected consequences. Using the decision matrix, I show that the most favorable decision overall became "military intervention." Under the diplomatic dimension, "diplomatic efforts" emerged as the most favorable option. Solving the question by peaceful methods ranked higher than other alternatives since this option would not cause a war between Iraq and Iran. Thus, this option would ease the pressure from third parties, especially the US and the USSR. However, the US public was preoccupied with issues such as the Iran hostage crisis and the implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Brands, 2012, p. 319). The rising power of Iran prompted Iraq to seek support from the Soviet Union, and security ties expanded

rapidly. Iraq's intention to invade Iran could lead to a temporary stoppage of arms deliveries from the USSR, yet Iraq's diversification policy would figure out this standoff. As noted earlier, the USSR replaced the US and France in arms supplies (Sluglett, 2016, p. 63; Walt, 1990, p. 124).

Under the political dimension, the "military intervention" option ranked, as the best choice as the Iraqi leadership had been expecting some action for years because the dissidents of the Saddam regime were receiving much-needed support from Iran. For instance, when Baghdad and Damascus agreed to cease backing each other's opposition forces, the Kurds compensated for the loss of Syrian aid by turning to Tehran (Mufti, 1996, pp. 209–214). Politically, not focusing on the "Iranian revolution" would have set off Iraq's uneasy Shi'ite bloc to revolt against the Saddam regime (Tripp, 2007, p. 244). Under the military dimension, the "military intervention" option scored as the best policy alternative. In Hussein's mind, three opportunities could be realized: to reverse the 1975 decision on the Shatt al-Arab, to end the threat of revolutionary Iran by toppling the regime, and to control the Arab population of Khuzistan, the Iranian territory, which spells to constitute a new political entity at the head of the Gulf (Marr, 2012, p. 181). Table 1 summarizes Saddam's decision matrix.

Table 1

President Saddam's decision matrix during the Iran-Iraq crisis

Dimensions				
Policy Options	**Diplomatic**	**Political**	**Military**	**Total (Average)**
Military Intervention	3	4	2	**9 (3)**
Diplomatic Efforts	4	2	-	**6 (2)**
Do nothing	1	1	-	**2 (0,6)**

Conclusion

This study analyzed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's decision-making process during the crisis between Iraq and Iran by employing Mintz's PH decision-making model. It contributes to the decision-making and Iraqi foreign policy literature. First, the study supports that the Iraqi leader's decision during the Iraq-Iran crisis coincides with the PH theory's expectations of a two-stage decision-making process. In the Iran-Iraq crisis case, the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, eliminated the options that appeared too costly to pursue. After eliminating non-compensatory options, the Iraqi leader engaged in a "rational" calculation, weighing the pros and cons of different

alternatives, and engaged in the action he thought would yield the highest rewards. The expected utility operated in the second stage, in which the most important key dimensions were systemic and domestic politics. Table 1 summarizes Saddam's decision matrix. In evaluating the alternatives, irrespective of nationality or ideology, President Saddam Hussein makes non-compensatory choices to streamline the decision-making process. Ba'ath ideology, thus, did not affect Saddam's decision to go to war with Iran.

Second, this study shows interesting results regarding Iraqi foreign policy studies. Iraq's foreign policy was far from being autonomous during the 1960s, yet it set out to be a regional leader in the 1970s by virtue of its huge oil resources, particularly during the talks between Egypt and Israel. The US and Iran acted as a constraining factor on Iraq's foreign policy, like on other regional countries. During the 1970s, the direct and indirect assistance of the US to the Kurdish groups, upon request of Pehlevi Iran, provided Iran with an instrument of exerting pressure on Iraq (Belmonte, 2012, p. 605). On the other hand, the burgeoning relationship with the USSR did not bear fruit for Iraq's supremacy over Iran. By 1975, Iran's military primacy over Iraq led the latter to reach a deadlock (Marr, 2012, pp. 153–154). Pehlevi Iran was able to bring Iraq to the line it favored. Therefore, Iraq acted alone in the face of Pehlevi Iran. Once the Pehlevi regime was overthrown, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein minded that the new regime in Iran that was isolated in the international system would be fragmented if Iraq went to war to keep the revolution's sweeping effect away from the Iraqi Shi'ite groups in Iraq. As the PH analysis suggests, diplomatic efforts by Iraq reveal that the diplomatic dimension is a major factor in leaders' decisions.

Finally, Iraq has been deeply concerned about sub-systemic developments. The Iraqi leader believes that his country is losing territory and power to Iran. The "Iranian revolution" left a power vacuum in Iran, with purges of the Iranian army, and Iraqi President Saddam believed that disarray would bring Islamic Iran to its knees. He aimed to put an end not only to the Shiite challenge but also to the Kurdish one. I argue that strategic calculations related to the balance of power in the region played into Saddam's decision to use force. I conclude that sub-systemic and domestic factors, as constraining influences on Iraq's behavior, were sources of the Iraqi leader's decision-making. The study has limitations that confine his case study to the Iraqi context, rather than the broader Middle Eastern countries. Scholars can employ the PH theory to conduct further comparative research on Arab countries' decisions on the Arab-Israeli wars.

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