

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The United States of America is a superpower country that has strong political, military, economic power in the world. After the Soviet Union collapsed during the cold war, the United States became the world's only superpower with its democratic system. The United States' credibility is supported by US government control over domestic and overseas policies that are tightly regulated by the US system. Strong foreign policy has an impact on the United States that makes the United States able to be respected in the international world. The US foreign policy is supported by the national power owned by the United States.

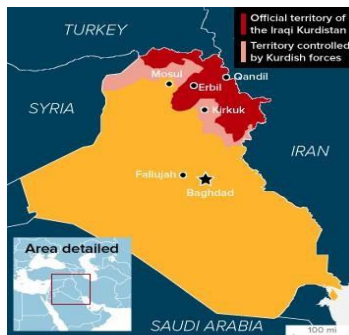
The United States of America is widely known in strengthening its influence by leading a coalition of powerful and independent nations to promote security, prosperity and peace both inside the US and beyond. The United States has an ideological foundation of democracy that prioritizes the existence of a guarantee of the rights to individual freedom. Over time the United States is known as the mother of democracy in the world. With the nickname, the United States feels responsible for the spread of democracy in the world. One of the efforts of the United States in spreading the value of democracy in the world is by supporting countries in the world who want to get the sovereignty of their country through independence.

The birth of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights has made the United States understand that the existence of human rights helps secure peace, prevent aggression, promote rules of law, fighting crime and corruption, strengthening democracy, and preventing humanitarian crises. The Declaration includes guarantees of human freedom especially religious freedom, opinion, ownership, and behavior. That is why the United States is desperate for peace around the world.

However, different thing occurred in the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum on September 2017, implying the differentness of the US attitude to the principle and its commitment to promoting the value of democracy in this phenomena. Shown with US involvement that is more supportive of Iraq than Iraqi Kurdistan who has tried to achieve independence. The freedom that became one of the democratic values that should be defended by the Americans, this incident shows the peculiarities in the American attitude in promoting the value of democracy that is more supportive of Iraq. Iraq sees Iraqi Kurdistan as a region with rich natural resource potential that is vital to the Iraqi economy.

The region of Iraq in this case is divided into two; northern part and southern part. Iraqi Kurdistan possess the northern part while Iraq possess the southern part. Being inside of Iraq made Iraqi Kurdistan did not get the freedom they want. The conflict between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan began from when Iraqi Kurdish tribes were under British colonial rule after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 (BBC, 2017).

Figure 1.0 Map of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan



Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iraqi-kurdistan-set-hold-referendum-its-independence-n803741>

The collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1918 brought hope for Kurds especially in Iraq to have their own nation-state. They began searching for the right homeland to establish a Kurdish state. However, British colonization in some areas of Mesopotamia including Iraq left the ethnic Kurds disappointed because it impeded their aspiration to live in a country of their own without becoming a second-class nation. Bitter reality when the country stood Iraq had to swallow them. The Kurdish people must be willing to share their place and enter the territory of Iraq. A similar fate is experienced by Kurds in Iran, Syria and Turkey. The Kurdish people in Iraq begin to take up arms against the British. The uprising of Mahmud Barzanji in the later year after the Ottoman collapse, in 1919 became a gong of Kurdish people's resistance in Iraq led by Syeh Mahmud Barzanji. This resistance was successfully suppressed by British troops and Kurdish territory was incorporated into the 1926 Iraqi Mandate (Sluglett, 1976). Since then, Kurdish nationalist groups and parties have formed and colored the conflict between Iraqi Kurds and Iraqis.

Iraqi governments promised autonomy to the Kurds after the 1988 revolution, but nothing worked until the anti-Saddam international coalition established a partial no-fly zone in northern Iraq in 1991 after the first Gulf War. This allowed the Kurdish leaders and their Peshmerga armed forces to consolidate their grip in the north after the Iraqi forces withdrew, providing the basis for the 2005 constitution settlement. This later become the term of Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), has been recognized by Iraqi constitution as a region of official authority covering Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Halabja. They have their own parliament including the armed forces called Peshmerga. Erbil was appointed as the capital and headed by President Massoud Barzani and his deputy Kosrat Rasul Ali. The establishment of the autonomous region of Kurdish Regional Government in 2005 has gone through decades of process. Through a referendum in 2005, 98.8 percent of the vote calls for a separate Kurdish region, although its

status does not mean being completely separated from Iraq (Galbraith, 2005).

The struggle for independence of Iraqi Kurdistan sparks again in 2017. Almost all the people of Kurdistan in Iraq who took part in the referendum decided to separate from Baghdad. 92.73 percent said 'Yes' in response to the question “Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistan region outside the regional administration to become an independent state?” (BBC, 2017). The poll result on September 25, 2017 was announced two days after by election officials in Erbil, semi-autonomous capital of Kurdish Regional Government. Unfortunately, not only is the Iraqi government angry over a referendum, the United States also did not acknowledge the outcome of the referendum as it is considered as unilateral. US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson implied that:

“The United States does not recognize the unilateral referendum of the Kurdistan Regional Government held on Monday. Those elections and results are illegal and we will continue to support a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq. The United States called on all parties, including Iraq's neighbors, to take unilateral action and not resort to violence.” (USAGOV, 2017)

The position of the United States on Kurdish aspirations for independence from Iraq has become contradictory. Historically, the United States has supported self-determination in places like South Sudan, Kosovo and East Timor as they seek independence. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt make this value important to the war effort. The United Nations perpetuates the principle of "equal rights and self-determination of the people" in its charter. Tillerson emphasized these values in a speech at a meeting of the Democratic Community in Washington stating that the United States should support new democracies in the struggle to become countries that respect human rights irrespective of ethnicity (USAGOV, 2017).

As the main ally of the United States against Saddam Hussein in the 1990s and against the insurgency and Islamic state of Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds have been trying since to convince the United States to apply this view to their territory. Hopes sped as the White House issued a statement on saying that the United States does not support the intentions of the Kurdistan Regional Government to hold a referendum. The United States' Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition To Counter ISIS, Brett McGurk went further in a press conference in Erbil, stating that there was no international support for the referendum. He described the referendum as "not timely" and "risky" (USAGOV, 2017). This shook the fact that the United States has taken this decision, when the US can remain silent on this issue, as has been done controversially referendum in Catalonia.

From what has been described, America has a strange attitude in the conflict of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdistan already has requirements to become a country with the existence of a leader, communities, languages, territories and recognition from other state or other parties. However, as a country that upholds the values of democracy and freedom, United States still shows an attitude of rejection of Iraqi Kurdistan's efforts in becoming a free country from Iraq. Hence, this emerged a question on why the United States decide to reject the independence referendum.

B. Research Question

Based on the background of the topic, this paper has one research question:

“Why does the United States rejects the Iraqi Kurdistan’s independence referendum in 2017?”

C. Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question, the writer will use this following theoretical framework as below:

1. Theory of Securitization

Securitization is overly focused in terms of the security of a state and considered to be a political act rather than neutral act. This tends to view the cause of why a state decides to make certain policy, particularly in the name of security. Securitization according to Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde is:

“Securitization is the process of state actors transforming subjects into matters of security: an extreme version of politicization that enables extraordinary means to be used in the name of security”
(Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998)

According to this theory of securitization, political issues constituted as extreme security issues when they have been labelled as ‘dangerous’, ‘menacing’, ‘threatening’, ‘alarming’ and so on by a ‘securitising actor’ who has the social and institutional power to move the issue ‘beyond politics’ (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). The actors here are not merely just the government but also security professionals like the police, intelligence services, customs, immigration services, border guards and the military all play an important role in defining the security matters. The security issues are articulated as problems by securitising actors. Referring an Arab as a threat to national security, for instance, shifts identity from a low priority political concern to a high priority issue that requires action, such as surveillance to the Arab community as the suspiciousness of increasing terrorism regarding Arab community.

After the attacks on the US embassies and the foremost incident of 9/11, several terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS became a high priority on security agenda from the presidential period of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and latter Donald Trump. These terrorist groups has been presented as a threat to the security of the US, to the security of individuals within the state and more broadly as a threat to the Western society. This means that the securitisation of these terrorist groups affects at least three sectors: the societal, the military and the political. Securitisation theory

observes that sometimes in a democracy the government must justify the suspension of normal politics to the public (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). Therefore, if these groups securitised in the US, which regarded as democratic, it seen that securitising moves from government officials; a rhetorical justification of why intervention, for instance, is the only way to remove the threat of these terrorist groups.

A noticeable example for this case study, for instance, during several days before Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum in 2017, Donald Trump decided to not to intervene or support the referendum as he implied that the referendum would hamper its goal of eliminating ISIS in the area of Iraqi Kurdistan. Hence, that is a case of successful securitisation. It is important to note that when arguing that the terrorist groups securitised, securitisation theorists do not challenge the existence of the group, or that the group has indeed coordinated attacks in the US (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). The securitisation, instead, questions the processes by which this group has come to be viewed as a threat and argues that by naming the group a threat, leaders of the US are also implicated in the making of war. In that sense, securitisation highlights how each president's securitising act does not merely describe a state of affairs 'out there', but constitutes the attacks as an act of war and by doing so, brings war into being (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). Afterwards, the US also perceived that the independence referendum will cause instability in the region that would affect to its one of the main interests in the region, oil exports with Iraq, which create the economic securitization of the United States. The instability, which in this means the instability in oil exports, is the key threat here as the US perceived the referendum will disturb its oil exports stability.

2. Concept of National Interest

The concept of national interest was put forward by Hans. J. Morgenthau in his book titled Politics Among Nations. In his book, the concept of interest is expressed closely with the term power or power. In his book also Morgenthau states that

interest is a standard where political action should be judged and directed because the objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of national interests. Although he acknowledges that at a given time the interests of the nation must be demonstrated in a political and cultural context, defining interests in the context of power would be better in addressing the subject of subjectivity (Morgenthau H. J., 1978). The relative strength of the nation-state can be assessed and measured, and it is an important objective reality. National interests are usually defined in terms of economic and security capabilities because international politics is viewed primarily as power struggles between nations. However, Morgenthau acknowledges that the definition of power will change over time on several occasions economic power will be crucial, other times military or cultural forces will determine.

Morgenthau sees two levels of national interest, namely vital and secondary interests (Morgenthau H. J., 1962). The vital interest is an interest concerning the basic life of the state that cannot be compromised because it concerns the survival or life-and-death of a country. Vital national interests are more easily expressed by the creation of security as a free and independent nation and the protection of institutions, people, and fundamental values (Roskin, 1994).

Meanwhile, according to Jack C. Plano and Roy Olton the concept of national interest is given the following limits:

“The fundamental aims and the most decisive factors that guide decision-makers in formulating foreign policy. National interests are a very common conception and are elements of a vital need for the State to include maintaining the viability of nation and state, independence and sovereignty, territorial integrity, military security and economic prosperity.”
(Plano & Olton, 1969)

In the sense of the national interest concept according to Jack C. Plano, there are elements of national interest which consist of:

- a) Self-preservation, namely that the state needs to defend itself against any potential threats that could disrupt the stability of the state;
- b) Independence, namely that a country has the right not to be colonized or subject to another country and disobey or be in the influence of another, this independence and sovereignty need to be achieved and maintained;
- c) Territorial integrity, namely the need of each country to maintain its territorial integrity;
- d) Military security, namely that states have an interest in safeguarding their country from interference or military threat from other countries;
- e) Economic welfare, in which the state must ensure economic stability to create prosperity.

Based on the above, it can be understood that the interests of the United States behind its policy toward the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum in 2017 was not separated from the national interests of this country. Interventions that are carried out in principle become part of the implementation of foreign policy that has been arranged systematically, related to the existence of the United States as a country with a modern political-government system.

The foreign policy run by the United States is part of a formal decision whose legitimacy has taken a series of discussions and considerations, both at government level, in this case Donald Trump's leadership to the US Department of Defense, as well as the approval of the country's parliament (congress). All of the implementation of foreign policy is run to support the national interest. This attempt to break away from Iraq by Iraqi Kurdistan is considered to disturb US national interests in military security, which in term of counter-terrorism. The United States urges to do counter-terrorism by focusing in defeating ISIS in Iraq and its surround so that their country will be safe from any terrorist threats, as the US has trauma with their past with that since 9/11 tragedy. Thus, the United States give its full efforts and power to counter any act

of terrorism. Recognizing the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum would disturb the US focus on eliminating terrorism in the region thus would hamper the US interest in military security.

Then the interests of the United States further relate to economic interests and security, namely the effort to secure exports from Iraq to the United States. When viewed from the economic factors of Iraq after the invasion of 2003, Iraq is a country that experiencing an interesting economic development. In 2004, the growth rate of domestic gross product (GDP) reached as highest in history with 54.16 percent (Economics, 2018). The development of Iraq's economy is supported by mainly oil production. This economic achievement will be disrupted if the internal security of Iraq and the Middle East region is not conducive. This is the meeting point for the decision of the United States in the referendum of Iraqi Kurdistan in 2017.

D. Hypothesis

In order to provide a temporary landscape to answer the research question, this research has set 2 of hypothesis describes as follows:

1. United States preserves its interest in military security as the United States sees the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum would hamper the US national interest in countering terrorism in the region for the sake of their country.
2. United States preserves its interest in economic welfare as an effort in securing export cooperation with Iraq. Thus, the Iraqi Kurdistan's referendum is considered as a threat in securing export cooperation with Iraq.

E. Research Purpose

Every academic paper has its purpose of writing, hereby the writer has several objectives in order to achieve coherent understanding about the case. The objectives are:

1. To identify and to explain why United States choose to oppose the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum

in 2017 and sided with Iraq despite of the harmonious cooperation relationship the United States and the Iraqi Kurdistan had.

2. This research is also intended as the fulfillment to achieve the undergraduate degree in International Relations program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta.

F. Scope of Research

In order to focus on the research, the writer provide limits on the research to be more specific to the policy of the United States in rejecting the Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum on September 2017. The writer would observe in advance the conflict between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan in previous years to know the dynamics of the conflict. Thus, this limitation of research is intended to avoid further complexity of analysis.

G. Research Methodology

This research used qualitative research method by data collecting. The method of data collecting is conducted through the library research and also through the media; printed and electronic media, internet, articles or journals and some reference books. After the data was collected, the research comes in to the data analysis. Here, the writer check for the relevancy in order to use as the sources in final paper arrangement. This thesis will use the descriptive analysis. After describing the main problem, we will go to the deeper analysis in order to prove the hypothesis.

H. Structure of Writing

As for the systematic of this writing, the writer would outline as follows:

Chapter I describes the general aspects which comprises of background of the issue, theoretical framework, research question, hypothesis, the scope of research, research methodology and the structure of the paper.

Chapter II explains general view about the country of United States of America as well as the general views of its foreign policy toward Iraq.

Chapter III discusses about the United States involvement in the Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan conflict, how the conflict between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan occurred; including what efforts has the United States done toward the conflict under its interest.

Chapter IV focuses on factors and interests that underlie the United States' foreign policy in rejecting the Iraqi Kurdistan's 2017 independence referendum.

Chapter V contains the conclusion of all the explanation that has been analyzed in the previous chapters.