THE 2003 WAR AND ITS INFLUENCE IRAQİ-TURKİSH RELATİONS

Abstract. The end of the Cold War and decline of the bipolar structure of the international relations led to significant changes of the foreign policy strategy and tactic of a large number of countries. During the late 1990’s, especially after the Gulf War, new approaches in relation with the neighbouring countries were being shaped in the regional policy of Iraq and Turkey. After the 2003 War and the post-war years the relations between two countries developed successfully in many spheres despite the existing problems. This became largely possible due to diversification of foreign policy of Iraq and Turkey: the first lost the status of one of the leading states of the region, and the second was confirmed in the status of the leader of the Middle East. The article considers bilateral relations after the war in 2003 and until 2010’s.

Keywords: Iraq, Turkey, The 2003 Iraqi War, regional security, bilateral relations

The two neighboring countries - Iraq and Turkey - have traditionally narrow political and economic relations that have taken root in the depths of history. The period of multi-century coexistence inside the Ottoman Empire ended after the First World War with separation of Iraq and establishment of mandatory state of Iraq. The Lausanne treaty (1923), which established the Turkey-Iraq border, was not able to solve the fate of the disputed Mosul region. In 1926 in accordance with the decision of the League of Nations Turkey was forced to sign a relevant agreement with Great Britain and Iraq on accession of this territory to the territory of Iraq, which was an official recognition of today’s state borders. Uninterested in making the relation with Iraq tense Turkey took steps for establishment of good neighboring relations in the following years. The culmination of rapprochement was cooperation between two countries within the framework of treaties of Saadabad (1937) and
Baghdad (1955). In the following years Turkish-Iraqi bilateral relations underwent the influence of numerous regional and non-regional factors and existing political and economic factors, but the remaining political and economic problems were an obstacle for transformation of their relations into good-neighbour.

During the years of Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the Gulf crisis (1990-1991) both countries have tried to maintain good neighborliness and mutual relations, but they have faced many regional and international challenges.

The war in 2003, which resulted in the replacement of the ruling Ba'athist regime in Iraq, significantly affected bilateral relations. Long and complex process of the post-war settlement in Iraq caused activation of the Iraq policy of Turkey, which was expressed in willingness to establish warm relations with the new leadership of the country and to participate in its restoration. Ruling AKP relied on recommendations of Ahmet Davutoglu and took a course of “zero problems” with neighbouring countries and Iraq was Turkey’s neighbour (Davudoglu). Ankara considered establishment of constructive relations and dialogue with representatives of all national, ethnic and confessional groups of the country as an important aspect of political settlement in Iraq.

One of the results of the Iraqi war for Turkey was a new splash of terrorist activity of PKK and majority of its attacks were carried from bases in the Northern Iraq. In June 2004 PKK ceased its 5-year moratorium on unilateral ceasefire. Ankara appealed to the military leadership of the coalition on numerous occasions requesting to take necessary steps to prevent their activity. The response was usually along the lines such as “the problem will be considered when necessary”, but it was also implied that, the Turkish army cannot carry out any independent actions (Уйсал, 2008). USA was trying to prevent “catastrophic” military intervention of Turkey to the Northern Iraq controlled by Kurds, which, according to them, was a threat for fostering of security in Baghdad. High-level representatives of the Bush administration assured Turkey that, the American troops would increase their attempts to eradicate PKK militia hiding in Qandil Mountains on the border of Iraq, Iran and Turkey (Tisdall, 2007).
Neutralization of terrorist activity of PKK, whose militia acted from the Northern Iraq, was one of the most acute problems in bilateral relations in post-war period. If before the Turkish army was able to hold trans-border operations against them through an agreement with Saddam Hussain, later using lack of authority in the “security zone”, after the war the Kurdish parties took the authority in the North and the leader of KDP Masud Barzani became the leader of the Kurdish Autonomy. It is evident that, Kurds were opposed to periodic presence of the Turkish troops on the territories controlled by Kurds. After change of their status and strengthening of their positions the problem became even more complex. The Iraqi authorities confessed that, the new army and security forces are “currently unfit to carry out full-scale operations against PKK”. The USA was referring to difficulties in Iraq and noted “impossibility to carry out a large operation in the North”, while recognizing PKK as a terrorist organization (Иванова, 2008). During the visit of Iraq’s prime-minister Ibrahim Al-Jafari to Ankara in May 2005 he stated during discussion of security issues that, the government would take steps in order to “the country not remaining to be a training ground for PKK militia”, but no concrete steps were taken to prevent their activity. Moreover, in late 2005 the information bureau of PKK was opened in Kirkuk and neither Iraqi authorities, nor American troops opposed this.

In 2007 the situation in this sphere started to change for better – during the visit of the prime-minister of Iraq Nuri Al-Maliki to Ankara in August, 2007 the Memorandum of agreement was signed, which underlined importance of neutralization of activity of all terrorist organizations on the Iraqi territory, including PKK. In September the foreign ministers signed an agreement of cooperation against terror and ensuring of security on common border. Signing of these documents opened new possibilities for Ankara – on 17 October 2007 the parliament accepted the request of the government to grant authority to hold operations against PKK in the Northern Iraq for a year. During official visits to Turkey by the president of Iraq Jalal Talabani in March 2008 and by the prime-minister Al-Maliki in December of the same year importance of cooperation in the sphere of security, including resistance against PKK, was reiterated. Talabani even promised to put pressure on
the leadership of the Kurdish Autonomy to make them leave that region. “The Northern Iraq problem” was closely linked to ensuring of political rights for Turcoman population within united Iraqi state, including the question of status of Kirkuk for Ankara (Saaatçı, 2007). Kurds wanted to make it a capital of the Kurdish Autonomy, while Turkey supported provision of a special status to this city, which made its entrance to the Kurdish Autonomy impossible.

Special attention was paid to development and fostering of economic cooperation between the countries in the post-war period. Creation of a solid base for fruitful and mutually beneficial partner relations met their interests. Iraq was interested in economic cooperation with Turkey, which is quite integrated to the global market. Successful development of regional cooperation allowed Turkey to broaden export markets and attract additional investments, along with fostering its regional positions in general (Свистунова). It shall be noted that, their bilateral economic relations in the given period had the tendency of growth. The commodity of circulation between two countries was merely 940 million USD in 2003, became 3.5 billion USD in 2007 and 6 billion USD in 2008. In June 2003 Turkey renewed supply of oil products to Iraq and its volume was 10 million tons in 2006, along with food, water, electric energy etc. In late 2004 branches of Turkish Ziraatbank and Vakifbank were opened in Iraq. In 2005 Turkish subcontractors participated in 110 projects, which had the total cost of 1.5 billion USD (Свистунова).

Visit of the governmental delegation led by the prime-minister Al-Maliki to Ankara in 2008 was highlighted by a number of important statements with regards to economic cooperation between two countries. During negotiations with the president Abdullah Gul and the prime-minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan the sides stated about intention: to sign an agreement on free trade and creation of free trade zones in the bordering regions; open the second checkpoint on the border; cooperate in the sphere of agriculture and water resources; involve Turkish companies in restoration of trade infrastructure of Iraq; encourage creation of joint enterprise in the sphere of finance and banking; increase the passage capability of the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline; fasten the process of opening of the Turkish Consulate in Basra.
Visit of the Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari to Ankara in January, 2009 was dedicated to the problems of PKK in the North. He was met by the highest leadership of the country and held talks with his Turkish colleague Ali Babacan. The parties decided to create a joint center in Erbil in connection with trilateral (Turkey-USA-Iraq) mechanism of fight against terrorism, which would coordinate its actions and organize exchange of intelligence. Establishment of a center in the capital of the Kurdish Autonomy Erbil meant involvement of the Iraqi Kurds to solution of the problems linked to PKK. Baghdad and Ankara were interested in creation of a new format of cooperation without waiting for withdrawal of the American troops from Iraq. It was not by accident that, Zibari stated that, they intend to realize achieved agreements in the nearest future. Babacan stated that, “the certain condition of normalization of bilateral relations is liquidation of the PKK activity on the territory of Iraq” and that, Ankara expects concrete steps in that direction, first of all, by the leadership of the Kurdish Autonomy.

Struggle with PKK and broadening of the bilateral trade-economic cooperation was in the center of attention of the official visit of the president of Turkey Abdullah Gul in Baghdad in March 2009. Complex agreement on economic partnership was signed with regards to its results, according to which the sides were obliged to ensure the most favourable regime of transit transportation to each other, abolishment of tariff and non-tariff barriers in trade and investment. This created good perspectives for recovery of business and investment climate, easing of conditions of activity of private companies, increase of cooperation in the energy sphere etc.

One of the other steps of deepening of bilateral relations was the visit of the Turkish prime-minister R.T.Erdogan to Baghdad in July, 2009. Its main result was signing of an agreement on establishment of the Council of Strategic Cooperation of the high level. According to Erdogan, bilateral relations would base on four principles: common security area; political dialogue on the highest level; economic interdependence; common culture, which “would be a new model of strategic partnership” envisaging “full integration of the state and society within the framework of the aforementioned directions” (Turunc, 2011).
In August, 2009 the Turkey’ foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited Baghdad together with the state minister on foreign trade Zafar Caglayan. During the talks with the Iraqi leadership the questions concerned with organization of the first meeting of the Council of Strategic Cooperation. The minister of foreign affairs Zebari stated about willing of Iraq to encourage investments to the economy of the country and creation of more favourable atmosphere for activity of foreign investors. Most of them were Turkish citizens, who participated in realization of the contracts for the sum of more than 7 billion USD in the sphere of restoration of infrastructure objects, schools, hospitals, houses etc.

According to the reached agreement, the first meeting of the Higher Council of Strategic Cooperation was held in Istanbul on 17-18 September 2009, which was a new format of deepened cross-state cooperation. More than 40 agreements and memorandums of understanding with the aim of realization of cross-state projects in various spheres, including energy, production and transportation of oil and gas, creation of free trade zones, launching of joint agricultural, healthcare and protection of environment projects were signed as a result of the aforementioned meeting.

On 15 October 2009 the Turkey’ prime-minister Erdogan visited Baghdad together with the ministers of foreign affairs, internal affairs, foreign trade, energy, construction, healthcare, transportation, agriculture and environment, where he participated at the second meeting of the Higher Council together with the prime-minister of Iraq Al-Maliki. The sides signed approximately 50 memorandums of understanding in various spheres (Türkiye ve İrak arasında imzalanan Yüksek Düzeyli).

The visit Davutoglu together with delegation of representatives of Turkish business circles in 2009 was interesting due to the fact that, the for the first time the minister of foreign affairs of Turkey visited the capital of the Kurdish Autonomy Erbil, where he held talks with Masud Barzani and other Kurdish leaders. Davutoglu also took part in the official ceremonies of opening of consulates of Turkey in Basra and Mosul. During the talks Barzani mentioned the role of Ankara in the process of stabilization and economic development of the country. He also stated his support for actions of the Turkish government in solution of Kurdish problems in the context
of politics of “democratic breakthrough”. Davutoglu stated that, the future of Turkish-Iraqi relations is linked to common approach to the issues of security, economic integration, peaceful coexistence of ethnic and religious groups. He also called the Iraqi Kurds to help in neutralization of PKK since “the threat of terrorism is the only factor able to overshadow bilateral relations and cause obstacles for development of the region”. Davutoglu stated about intention of Turkey to open a consulate in the capital of autonomy Erbil, along with Kirkuk (Cвистунова).

Active involvement of Turkey in Iraq made Turkey one of the most significant mediators in the issue of regulation of a political crisis after the parliamentary elections in Iraq in March, 2010. It had a stance of equal distance from all groups, but the intensive visits of practically all important figures of the Iraqi political establishment to Ankara showed that, its support is very important and might give additional chances in new political alignment (Duman). In brief, the position of Ankara with respect to formation of a government in Iraq was based on respect to balance of powers able to have good relations with its neighbours and other states of the region, ensure security and political stability, achieve national reconciliation and economic development. Along with that, Ankara was against a government in Iraq, which could be established in line with ethno-confessional principle. During negotiations with the Turkish leadership Al-Maliki emphasized the economic factor trying to stress that, by supporting him Ankara can rely on deepening of bilateral relations in this sphere and participation in important economic projects, including in oil-gas sphere (Erkmen).

After formation of a new government in Iraq, Turkey continued to increase its activity in Iraq. In January, 2001 the minister of foreign affairs Davutoglu visited Baghdad for preparation of a meeting of the Higher Council of Strategic Cooperation, along with going to Najaf and Kirkuk (Duman). It was the first visit of a high ranking Turkish politician to Turkey in the last 35 years, which is rightly considered to be a political and cultural center of Iraqi Turcoman. The main point of Davutoglu’s visit was to show that, the Kirkuk problem has become one of the high-priority directions of the Iraqi policy of Ankara. It was especially important since Turkomans, who were not playing an important role in socio-political life of
the country, won 10 seats in the parliament in the 2010 elections and got 3 ministerial posts in the new government. Turcoman-MPs visited Ankara in accordance with the invitation of the president of Turkey Gul, where formation of a Turcoman fraction in the Iraqi parliament was declared. This demonstrated strengthening of Turkey’s role on the internal processes of Iraq and slow rise of Turcoman activity in the political life of country, which further increased the activation of the Turcoman factor in the Iraq policy of Ankara (Yıldız, 2010). In March, 2011 the prime-minister of Turkey Erdogan visited Baghdad and the capital of the Kurdish Authority Erbil.

The focus of negotiations with Baghdad was the problems of economic cooperation, along with the joint struggle against terrorism. He spoke at the meeting of the Turkish-Iraqi business forum calling businessmen to put effort in order to increase the trade circulation up to 20 billion USD. It shall be noted that, the amount of bilateral trade showed the tendency of rise during the past 5 years, but there was a significant misbalance in favour of Turkey, which only in 2010 exported goods for up to 6 billion USD. It became the second economic partner of Turkey after Iran in the Middle East according to the trade volume. Erdogan stated about importance of creation of a new border checkpoint in connection with this, since increased trade volume exceeded the passage capability of the sole custom’s point Khabur.

Erdogan made a speech in front of the MPs in the parliament and by this, became the first prime-minister of a foreign state, who made a speech at the Iraqi parliament. He called for solidarity of various ethno-confessional groups on the base of common Iraqi identity, which was fostered by meetings with the representatives of Sunnis, Shias, Turkomans and Kurds. It emanated from the endeavor of Ankara to have “equally fraternal relations with all groups of population of Iraq” without any preference based on any ethnic or religious belonging. Erdogan visited the holy Muslim-Shia city Najaf, where he went to the shrine of Imam Ali and met the leader of the Iraqi Shias As-Sistani, which was unprecedented for a Sunni leader. Visit of Erdogan to Erbil was the first visit of a Turkish prime-minister to the capital of the Kurdish Autonomy, which was a symbolic event. In Erbil he met with Barzani and took part in the ceremony of opening of the Turkish consulate and the airport built by the Turkish subcontractors.
Visit of the Turkish prime-minister to Iraq when the Arab world was being shaken by the events of the Arab Spring. It also coincided with the final stage of the American military presence in this country. Intensification of multi-faceted cooperation between two countries became not only a tool of realization of economic and political interests, but also helped to strengthen the positions of the official Baghdad. Aspiration of Turkey to improve relations with the Iraqi Shias and demonstrated the attempts to give the Turkish-Iraqi rapprochement an irreversible character and weaken the influence of other regional and global players in the Iraqi matters.

References:
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