Iran in Iraq

What is the issue?

\n\n

Iran is strongly growing its presence in Iraq.

\n\n

Why is Iran interested in Iraq?

\n\n

\n
- After the U.S. withdrew its troops from Iraq in 2011, Iraq became increasingly dependent on Tehran on various avenues, from trade to security.
\n
- Iran established a Shia corridor stretching from Tehran (Iran) through Baghdad (Iraq) and Damascus (Syria) to southern Lebanon where Hezbollah operates.
\n
- But Iran’s strategic calculations came under threat when the Islamic State made inroads into north-western Iraq.
\n
- If the IS taken over Baghdad, Iran would not only have lost a friendly regime, but also felt the heat of an anti-Shia jihadist group closer to its borders.
\n
- Iran focus immediately turned to building Shia militia groups, along with the Iraqi government, to fight the IS in Iraq.
\n
- These groups, known as Popular Mobilisation Unites, or Al-Hashd al-Shaabi, have played a major role in the liberation of Iraqi cities, such as Ramadi, Fallujah and Mosul, from IS rule.
\n

\n\n

How did Iran gain entry?

\n\n

\n

- Saddam Hussein’s regime remained a security concern for Iran.
  \n
- In the pre-Iraq war scenario, Syria was the only stable ally of Iran, but both countries were separated by a hostile Iraq.
  \n
- Iran benefited from the United States’ 2003 invasion of Iraq.
  \n
- Iran had started building influence inside Iraq through its cross-border cultural and religious links.
  \n
- But even that had limitations as the Saddam regime turned against Iraq’s Shias in the aftermath of the first Gulf War.
  \n
- The U.S.-led invasion removed this hostile regime and practically opened the gates of Iraq to an ambitious Iran ruled by Shia clergy.
  \n
- Iraq is a Shia-majority country, which Saddam Hussein’s secular Ba’ath party ruled for decades with an iron fist.
  \n
- During the post-Saddam period in Iraq, the Shia parties, rose to power.
  \n
- Ever since, Iran’s influence in Iraq has only grown.
  \n

\n\n

Why is Iraq crucial for Iran?

\n\n

  \n
- Iran doesn’t have many allies in a region which is dominated by hostile Sunni powers.
  \n
- Iran counters this asymmetry in geopolitical arena by building influence with non-state actors.
  \n
- Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia militia, is one of its greatest strategic assets in West Asia.
  \n
- With a friendly government in Baghdad, Iran not only got a buffer between itself and the Sunni bloc, but also direct access to Syria, which has been a conduit for Iranian supplies for Hezbollah.
  \n

\n\n

Will Iran pull back from Iraq?

\n\n

\n
- Given Iran’s strategic ambitions and the recent history of its dominance in Iraq, it’s unlikely to happen.
\n
- At a time when the U.S. and the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf are teaming up against Iran, Tehran would try to deepen its relations with countries such as Iraq and Syria and non-state militias such as Hezbollah and Hashd al-Shaabi.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

