

The Kurdistan Region's Foreign Relations After the 2017 Independence Referendum

Bakhan A. Najmaldin

Department of Politics and International Relations, College of Political Sciences, University of Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT

Foreign relations remain a significant tool for non-state actors to achieve statehood. The Kurdistan Region (KR) is one of the most prominent non-state actors at the regional and international levels, with its own peculiarities. With the transformation of the ruling system in 2003 and the ratification of the last Iraqi constitution in 2005, the Region has become formally autonomous as a federal unit. The KR, similar to most other regions within the federal country, is exercising paradiplomacy in terms of its legal rights and attempts to achieve the right to self-determination. Since the ISIS insurgency from 2014 onwards, foreign relations in this region have taken a step further and are considered an exceptional opportunity in the form of protodiplomacy oriented towards achieving independent statehood. However, the decision to schedule an independence referendum on September 25, 2017, soon saw Kurdistan's position at both regional and international levels slide back. The purpose of this research is to assess the level of effectiveness of the referendum on the KR's foreign relations. This research seeks to answer the question: to what extent has the referendum affected the KR's foreign relations? In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the research, a qualitative methodology has been employed, along with the use of a quantitative methodology.

KEY WORDS: Kurdistan Region, Referendum, Foreign Relations, Paradiplomacy, Protodiplomacy.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Following the Kurdish uprising during the Gulf War in 1991, the UN No-Fly Zone created independent regional autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan, albeit with limited international recognition. Civil war from 1994 between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led to two regional governments, in Erbil (led by the KDP) and in Sulaimani (led by the PUK). Following the 2003 regime change, these administrations were formally unified in early 2006.

Since then, the balance of power has tilted domestically and regionally, whereby the KR can be described as a semi-independent state, inspiring the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to seek to employ foreign relations and paradiplomacy as a tool for promoting ties with other countries, in order to obtain more international recognition and achieve its desire for an eventual independent state in the future. Since ratifying the last Iraqi Constitution in 2005, the KR has

become formally autonomous as a federal unit, but without giving noteworthy powers in the exercise of foreign relations. Therefore, the regime changes and framing of the new constitution have not solved the heightening tensions between Baghdad and Erbil concerning oil rights and foreign affairs, leading to the autonomous decision by the KRG to hold Kurdistan's independence referendum in 2017.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study explores the KRG's foreign relations since the 2017 referendum through to April 2024, seeking to explore the impacts of the referendum using qualitative semi-structured interviews. This approach provided flexibility in exploring interviewers' viewpoints while retaining consistency throughout interviewing process. Analysis of the interviews was triangulated with discourse, text, and constitution analysis, enabling the examination of statements made by decision-makers on this topic in a panoramic context. Interviewers were selected based on purposive sampling to guarantee answering the research questions. The specific discussion topics, as reflected in the guiding interview questions, were: "to what extent has the referendum affected the KR's foreign relations with regional and international states?"; "how do you see the KR's foreign relations prior to and since the

¹. Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (KUJHSS) Volume 9, Issue 2, 2026.

Received 6 August 2025; Accepted 8 September 2025

Regular research paper: Published 25 August 2026

Corresponding author's e-mail: bakhan.najmaddin@univsul.edu.iq

Copyright ©2026 Bakhan A. Najmaldin. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.



referendum?”, and “has the referendum caused the KR’s position to decline from protodiplomacy to paradiplomacy?”. All interviews were conducted in Kurdish and were later translated into English for analysis.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants as adumbrated below:

- Saman Sorani, political advisor in the DFR of the KRI, 9 July 2023, Erbil (approximately 25-30 minutes).
- Aydin Ostan KRG deputy representative in Spain, 7 February 2024, call (approximately 25-30 minutes).
- Mohamed Saber Ismail, Kurdish politician and diplomat, 20 February 2024, Sulaimani (approximately 45-50 minutes).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature related to the scope of this study can be grouped into three discernible clusters. The first group of the literature deals with the conceptual framework of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy. Such studies focus more on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the research topic, providing the reader with a comprehensive and broad view of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy, but they are not specific to the KR itself (Aguirre, 2013; Czapiewski, 2011; Gorango, 2018; Ismail, 2021; Keating, 2013).

The majority of available sources and academic debates fall within the second group of literature, related to the impacts and consequences of the referendum on the KR. Abundant literature has focused on the reasons for the unsuccessful the referendum process and emphasize the risks of it on rollback the KR’s position regarding diminished political leverage, autonomy, and territorial losses (Mirkhan, 2018; Mohammed & Alrebh, 2020; O’Driscoll & Baser, 2019; Parelo-Plesner, 2017; Shamsi, 2020). The importance of this study is that it attempts to link the two groups of the literature together.

The third group of literature is more relevant to the research topic than the previous two groups, which is the impact and consequences of the referendum on the KR’s relations and foreign activities. However, little has been written on this subject, which is this research aims to fill the gap.

One of the most precise theoretical and conceptual works on foreign relations and its development is Paradiplomacy in Theory and Practice by Yasin Mahmood Chomani (2022). The author undertakes to compare the concepts of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy scientifically and clearly and explain their main elements. The book attempted to answer the question of whether the development of Kurdish paradiplomacy reveals a trend towards adopting

protodiplomacy, and why. However, the consequences of the referendum on the KRG’s relations are not the focus of the study.

As an essential reference on this subject, Kurdish Diplomacy and Political Thought was prepared by the KRG Representation in France (2023). The book addresses three core dimensions: Kurdish diplomacy, Kurdish political thought, and the concept of Kurdishness. A major part of the book indicates the process of institutionalizing Iraqi Kurdistan’s foreign policy, in particular since becoming a constitutionally recognized region in 2005. The KRG has established deep-rooted foreign relations ties with neighboring countries and the international community. Since the establishment of the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) in 2006, the KRG has had an overwhelming amount of success in regional and international activities. Despite that, the consequences of the referendum on the KRG foreign relations have not discussed.

After reviewing related literature, it is evident that academic research on the foreign activities and relations of subnational units requires more developed studies. In particular, studies about the KR are still lacking, despite the Region’s importance. Relatedly, there are limited comparative studies that allow comparing the KRG’s foreign activities in the pre- and post-independence referendum; many gaps in this regard remain to be explored. Consequently, the current study seeks to contribute to research by addressing the identified gaps.

4. AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to put the KRG’s foreign relations into particular focus and aims to observe the pre- and post-referendum period’s foreign activities in comparative terms. In order to quest for a precise finding, the research is divided into three main parts: (1) a review of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy; (2) the historical background of the KRG’s foreign relations (2014-2017); (3) and securing Kurdistan’s foreign relations after the post-referendum era and its consequences.

5. PARADIPLMACY AND PROTODIPLMACY

5.1 Conceptual Framework

Paradiplomacy refers to national governments operating in the diplomatic realm in parallel with the nation state’s central government (Fathun, 2022, p. 299), etymologically ‘beside diplomacy’ (Aguirre, 2013, p. 195). Conventional state diplomacy concerns persuasion for defined state interests in the international arena,

while paradiplomacy is more targeted functionally, often experimental, and opportunistic (Keating, 2013, p. 11). Despite this general understanding, experts in the field of international relations do not agree about a specific definition of paradiplomacy, but they agree to some extent about the grass-roots principles and conditions of this concept.

For instance, Noe Cornago mentions that paradiplomacy means subnational governments' involvement in international relations with the purpose of promoting cultural, socioeconomic, environmental, and political issues (Corango, 2018, p. 1). Some experts define paradiplomacy within a federal system framework. Tomasz Czapiewski presents it as an international action of entities or regions of federal systems (Czapiewski, 2011, p. 18). Even Godfrey Baldacchino calls paradiplomacy one of the advantages of autonomy without sovereignty (Baldacchino, 2006, p. 861). However, one of the disadvantages of paradiplomacy, as Michal Keating reiterates, is that regions are not able or even do not have to have a unified definition of regional interest and implement it in a coherent manner (Keating, 2000). Even paradiplomatic activities and actions can be restricted by the relevant sovereign states (McHugh, 2015, p. 7).

The notion of protodiplomacy is more applied to foreign activities and the diplomatic efforts of the so-called 'quasi' or 'de facto' states (Corango, 2018, p. 5). Louis Balthazar presented a different argument by defining protodiplomacy as an effort by sub-state entities to gain a sovereign state, which is practiced through diplomatic efforts by representatives (Danilovich & Abdulrahman, 2017, p. 51).

The term protodiplomacy is applied to the activities of these regions or sub-state governments that endeavour to pave the way for achieving sovereign statehood by collecting international opinion and making alliances that might aid them in obtaining recognition at an early stage (Czapiewski, 2011, p. 22).

What all these definitions have in common is that, contrary to protodiplomacy, paradiplomacy does not have a structurally determined repercussion (Corango, 2018, p. 5). Paradiplomacy mutates into protodiplomacy when the activities and initiatives of a regional government abroad graft separatist messages onto its social, cultural, and economic links with foreign nations (Corango, 2018, p. 5). It can be reaffirmed that protodiplomacy is a more advanced level in the foreign activities of non-state entities than paradiplomacy and is an earlier step towards achieving independence (Chomani, 2022, p. 340). Duchacek and Soldatos differentiate between the terms "paradiplomacy" and "protodiplomacy", incorporating these notions into the complex dialectical processes of federation foreign policy-making, which involve the interplay of internal

and external dynamics as well as centralization and decentralization (Aguirre, 2013, p. 196).

Regarding the rate of success of protodiplomacy in achieving its purpose, experts in the field have not hidden the fact that protodiplomacy rarely produces the expected results by its proponents, particularly in terms of gathering international support for a secessionist process, being more frequently conducive to isolation internationally with the subsequent political, economic, and social costs (Corango, 2018, p. 7).

In this study, we embrace the understanding of paradiplomacy as encompassing all foreign relations activities practiced by noncentral governments and summarise its goals based on previously provided literature on social, cultural, and economic issues without enthusiasm for declaring separatism. At the same time, the idea of protodiplomacy is a step ahead of paradiplomacy; it is not limited to practicing foreign activities of a region or sub-state entity. Rather, it is the attempt of a national region within a federal state to promote its accelerating development, secure international recognition, and, above all, seek sovereign statehood.

5.2 Measuring Paradiplomacy in the Kurdistan Region

Specific metrics of paradiplomacy are lacking, because each country and federal system has its own distinguishing characteristics. For example, Ivo D. Duchacek (1987) depends on three main variables to investigate the level of paradiplomacy being practiced by noncentral governments: (1) direct contacts with foreign centres of power; (2) influencing external relations from within; and (3) transborder regionalism (Duchacek, 1987, p. 241). Fitz Ikome Nganje (2013) added other variables to understand the paradiplomacy of Gauteng in South Africa, including: (1) the signing of international cooperation agreements; (2) foreign visits; (3) membership in multilateral organizations and networks; (4) collaboration with the national government; (5) exchanges with foreign communities; and (6) international destination marketing or branding (Nganje, 2013, pp. 146-177).

KR is the only 'federal' region in Iraq, according to the 2005 Constitution. In order to achieve a precise finding in this study, we relied on four main dimensions to compare the KR's position before and after holding the independence referendum: (1) diplomatic delegations; (2) foreign representatives and consulates; (3) the KRG's representatives abroad; and (4) foreign investment.

6. KURDISTAN'S FOREIGN RELATIONS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For understanding the trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan's foreign relations, three main stages are fundamental, as adumbrated below, following the 2003 US-led invasion (2003–2013), the ISIS insurgency period (2014–August 2017), and the post-Referendum era (since September 2017 to the present). The first two stages form the essential historical background to comprehend the recent phase, and are explained in this section; the post-referendum era is analysed in the following section.

6.1 Kurdistan's Foreign Relations from 2003-2013

Iraqi Kurdistan's foreign relations between 1991 and early 2003 were more in the context of solidarity and humanitarian assistance; however, the post-Iraqi liberation period and the drafting of the current 2005 Constitution are considered major turning points in the KR's foreign relations and diplomacy, advancing them from a theoretical to a more pragmatic stage (Mustafa & Mustafa, 2023, pp. 77-78).

Foreign relations were officially established after 2005; since then, the Kurdish authorities and the representatives have purposefully worked on reaching out to the outside world and gaining a measure of regional and international recognition (Danilovich & Abdulrahman, 2017, p. 49). In this stage, the KRG opened seven representation offices (unofficial embassies) in Poland in 2004, in the United Kingdom in 2005, in France and Germany, in Sweden, in Spain, and in Austria (Jasim, 2023, p. 137). This time period marked the KRG's entry into miracle progress and its consolidation with the outside world. The transition phase of the Iraqi government was an instigator of this progress; Baghdad could not impede the KRG from practicing foreign relations, and the KRG had a robust case in the milieu of the regime change in Iraq.

Within this framework, the current status of Iraqi Kurdistan came about through the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL), which entered into force on March 8, 2004. Article 53 of the TAL drew attention to recognizing the KRG as an official government ('Law of 2004 of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Translational Period, 2004). The current status of Iraqi Kurdistan is rooted in the Transitional Law for the Administration of Iraq, signed in 2004, followed by the new Iraqi Constitution, which came into effect after holding the referendum on October 15, 2005, Article 117 of which first recognised the KR as a legal region of the Federal State of Iraq (Mohammed & Owtram, 2014, p. 68).

Right after the Iraqi constitutional referendum approval and the passage of the Constitution, the KRG promulgated several laws and established an institution

to manage the KRG's foreign affairs. The fifth cabinet under the KRG's Executive Order No. 143 in September 2006 started a new era in institutionalised foreign relations by establishing the department of foreign relations (DFR) in order to develop relations with the international community. The DFR is an official and integral part of the KRG, with a wide-ranging portfolio of duties and responsibilities. The key objectives of the DFR are to promote and protect the interests of Kurdish citizens and the Region abroad, as well as assistance for the KRG's official representatives and ministers to involve the international community (KRG-DFR Official Website, 2024).

Parallel to the DFR, in the same year, in 2006, in order to coordinate foreign activities, the KRG Protocol Office was formed to coordinate the protocol work and etiquette of foreign delegations visiting and ceremonies of international political meetings and conferences in the Region (Sultan, 2017, p. 17).

Despite the legal gap and limitations in the current Iraqi constitution, in practice, the KR is one of the few sub-state actors that has developed its foreign affairs and international activities in parallel with its position within a federal framework. Even the federal government has allowed the KRG to practice limited foreign activities within the constitutional framework. However, in reality, the KRG has modified its responsibilities and duties on matters dealing specifically with foreign affairs. Throughout this period, the KRG, after opening political bureaus, ascended to diplomatic and official levels. The KRG opened nine representation offices from 2004 to 2013, including Poland, Switzerland, Iran, Australia, Italy, Sweden, Spain, Austria, and Russia.

Opening foreign consulates is essential to creating a direct link to the outside world, and maintaining KRG foreign interests without relying on the Iraqi federal government alone. Between the ten years before the rise of ISIS (2003–2013) and its onslaught on the KR, Kurdistan foreign activities developed tremendously, in particular activities related to the spike of activity to opening foreign consulates. During the mentioned period, 22 consulates were officially opened in Erbil at the levels of consulate, consulate general, embassy office, consulate office, and honorary consul, including Poland, Czech, Austria, Iran, Russia, Japan, Germany, France, Denmark, Egypt, US, Korea, Sweden, Turkey, UK, Belarus, Jordan, Sudan, Slovakia, UAE, Romania, and Netherlands.

In the meantime, the recognition of Kurdistan as a federal region constitutionally opened a new phase in relations with the outside world, and beside Baghdad, Erbil became a second political capital in the country (Sharif, 2015, p. 130). The number of top diplomats and foreign missions to the KR considerably increased to over 250 missions (Figure 1).

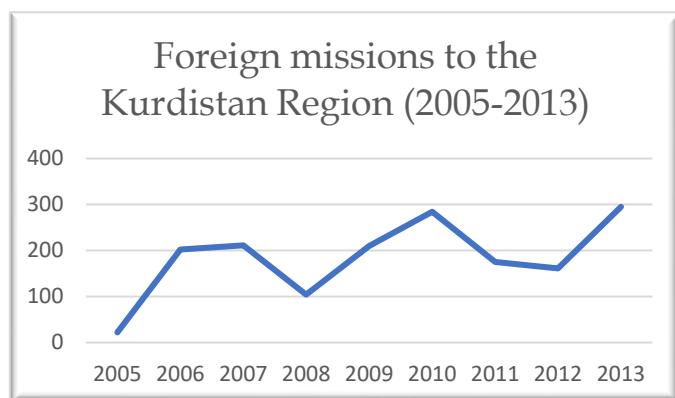


Figure 1. Foreign missions to the KR (2005-2013)

Sources: Sultan, 2017, p. 12; Chomani, 2022, pp. 367-399

From an investment standpoint, since the fall of the Ba'ath regime, the KRG strongly endorsed trade, business, and investment in the Region through the maintenance of a liberal investment law and pursuing general liberalization and openness toward international companies. In addition, the DFR promotes international and regional events and conferences designed to encourage investment and business in the KR (KRG-DFR Official Website, 2024). Testimony to this progress is the increasing number of international companies, particularly in the oil investment sector. KRG officials disclose that the presence of international companies in the KR is a reason to introduce the Region to the world, and help it become an independent state. The then head of the DFR, Falah Mustafa, stated that 'When businesses come and companies come, it means you have more and more interaction with the outside world' (Sadoon, 2017, p. 412).

In essence, the availability of oil resources in the KR is a major factor in attracting foreign investment in this field. Relatedly, promulgating Kurdistan Region Investment Law No. (4) of 2006, which provides a conducive environment for foreign investment in the Region. The objective for issuing this law was to promote investment in the KR and contribute effectively to the economic development process through the removal of any legal obstacles, providing necessary facilities, and providing tax exemptions (Kurdistan Regional Investment Law No. 4 of 2004). Parallel to this, the Kurdistan Board of Investment (BOI) was established in the middle of 2006. Its mission statement is to provide new opportunities to investors as well as professional services in order to rebuild the KR (Invest in Group, 2014, p. 44).

According to a BOI report, between 2006 and 2013, the BOI granted 583 licenses to investment projects in the KR's three provinces (Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok); 526 of them were national investments, 35 were foreign investments, and 22 were joint investments (Figure 2) (KRG-Board of Investment, 2023).

The number and types of investments in the Kurdistan Region (2006-2013)

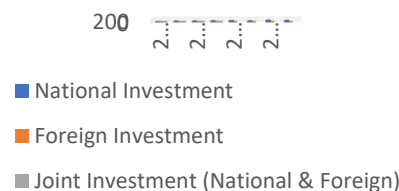


Figure 2. Number and types of investments in the KR (2006-2013)

Source: KRG-Board of Investment, 2023

Juxtaposing foreign activities, the exportation of hydrocarbons and the opening up of varied markets resulted in economic growth ranging from 8 percent in 2004 to 25 percent in 2009 (O'Driscoll & Baser, 2019, p. 7). During the same period, international investment in the Region was ascending rapidly, and the annual foreign investment in licenses grew by about 400 percent, from USD 3.1 billion to USD 12.4 billion (Mohammed & Alrebh, 2020, p. 6).

With the boost in trade transactions between the KRG and most regional and international countries ushered in a new stage, foreign investment in the KR made considerable headway. The energy sector constituted a remarkable part of the KRG's relations with the outside world.

6.2 Kurdistan's Protodiplomacy from 2014 to August 2017

Against the threat of ISIS assaults, the KR provided shelter to over 1.8 million refugees and internally displaced persons, compounding the pre-existent challenges of a fragile economy and security situation (Palani, 2023, p. 65). However, to a large extent, the KR demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of such challenges, and the heroic defence of Iraq in general from the ISIS onslaught after the Iraqi army fled Mosul in 2014 greatly bolstered the case of the Kurdish nation. The KRG was poised for the next logical step in foreign relations, and the Region remained under international auspices and has ample opportunity to step up to protodiplomacy and the declaration of independence.

The rise of ISIS had a positive repercussion on the growth of the KR's paradiplomacy in a way that is considered the golden age of foreign relations for the KRG. The KR was a diplomatic apex, as well as augmenting the process of Kurdistan secession. Fighting ISIS further oriented the KR toward further developed security and military cooperation with global actors (Palani, 2023, p. 31). During this period alone, before the referendum, ten countries (Canada, India, China,

Hungary, Italy, the Hellenic Republic, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) opened their consulates in Erbil at the level of the embassy office, honorary consulate, consulate general, consulate, and commercial office. This is more than 30 percent of the total number of consulates that have existed since the establishment of the KRG.

The rise of ISIS dictated the revival of cooperation between the KRG and the international community, and energised security relations between Erbil and Washington. There was a major development in the paradiplomacy of the KR after the US dispatched military aid directly to the KRG, without awaiting a rubber stamp from the Iraqi government, in accordance with US Congress Resolution 1654, which included providing material assistance to the Peshmarga (Kurdish armed forces) to the amount of USD 415 million (Chomani, 2022, pp. 210-211). As observed by Karwan Jamal Tahir, representative of the KRG in the United Kingdom, after 2014 the KR's relations and its position in the international community saw a marked development, especially in comprehensive relations within the framework of the international coalition, namely the rise of ISIS and Kurdish participation in the fight against terrorism and the active and effective participation of the Kurds and the Peshmerga forces in the war against the common global enemy (Kurdistan Regional Government Representation in France, 2023, p. 139).

In the meantime, the KRG's inclination to improve its foreign activities worked through diplomatic preparatory activities by spending millions of dollars on the diplomatic field, more than any other area of operation, including training its diplomats and representatives on etiquette and protocol in addition to diplomatic communications (Mansour, 2015). The foreign missions to the KR were notably boosted, in particular during the prelude of the ISIS war (Figure 3). As Sherzad Azad Sultan, director of the Protocol Office of the KRG, claimed, 'Since the beginning of the ISIS war in 2014, Kurdistan has been plagued by diplomatic traffic and the movement of politicians and senior officials from around the world' (Sultan, 2017, p. 88).

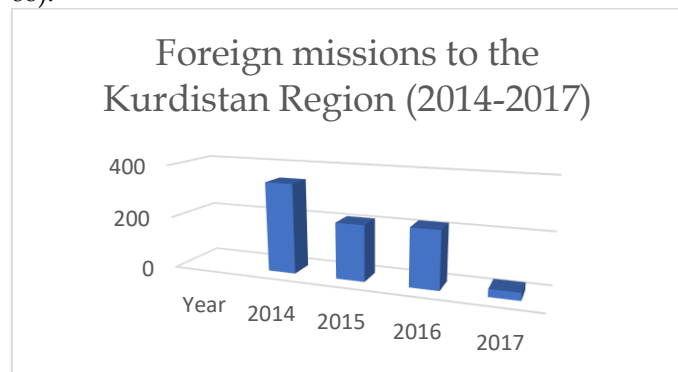


Figure 3. Foreign missions to the KR (2014-2017)

Sources: Sultan, 2017, p. 12; Jalil, 2023, pp. 53-54

It is important to mention that, in this period of time, non-representative offices were opened by the KRG, because there was not a conducive environment for opening foreign offices in particular after the KRG faced an economic crash due to the large number of refugees, the ISIS war, and the falling oil price. At the same time, the level of foreign investment in the Region decreased significantly due to security instability associated with ISIS, even after it had been contained (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Number and types of investments in the KR (2014-2017)

Source: KRG-Board of Investment, 2023

Based on the assessment of the calculation of foreign relations and based on all four variables (foreign missions, foreign representatives and consulates, the KRG's representatives abroad, and foreign investment), the KR's foreign relations were undergoing a tangible upgrade during this period, in particular in both the first and second variables. This was the main reason for the move towards protodiplomacy, and then the announcement of a referendum for separatism.

7. PROTODIPLOMACY TO PARADIPLOMACY, FROM SEPTEMBER 2017 TO THE PRESENT

7.1 Overview

Kurdish political leaders insist that the decision on the independence referendum and self-determination is a legal and constitutional right of Kurds. For this purpose, the then President of the Region issued Decree No. 106, dated 8 June 2017, which affirms that, in view of the public interest and grounded in the principle of the right to self-determination-a right recognized by the United Nations General Assembly and enshrined in international law for all peoples and nations-the Kurdish people, as a distinct nation, are entitled to exercise their full human and international rights to determine their own political future (Aziz & Shaikhah, 2021, p. 199). A

new chapter in the KR's economy, politics, geopolitics, and diplomacy began since the announcement of the independence referendum in the KR in 2017 (Shamsi, 2020, p. 4). Regarding domestic disunity in tandem with external denouncement, the referendum was held, and the result was overwhelmingly in favour of independence, with 92.7 percent of about 3.3 million votes (a 'national' turnout of 72 percent of the KR's adult population) (O'Driscoll & Baser, 2019, p. 2).

The announcement of the independence referendum sparked strong reactions regionally and internationally. In particular, the anti-ISIS coalition, under the leadership of the United States, staunchly criticised the referendum, claiming that it would have adverse impacts on the ongoing fight against ISIS (Parello-Plesner, 2017). The most vociferous objections came from the federal government of Iraq (which absolutely refused to recognise the legitimacy of the referendum from the outset), and from neighbouring countries (particularly Iran and Turkey). Given the array of entrenched hostile interests against it, the referendum incurred severe blowback, including acute geopolitical losses. The KR was deprived of most political and economic privileges, including handing over half of its disputed territories outside its official jurisdiction, including Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and Sinjar. On October 16, 2017, an Iraqi force backed by militia group Hashd al-Shaabi recaptured and seized all disputed territories (with ethnically and religiously diverse populations), which had been hard won by the Peshmarga from ISIS since late 2014 (Palani, 2023, p. 41). Contemporaneously, the KR was overwhelmed with a financial crisis due to the ongoing sharp decline in oil prices from USD 115 per barrel in 2014 to about USD 45 by 2017 (Palani, 2023, p. 31).

In the circle of foreign relations and the diplomatic sphere, since holding the referendum, the position of the KRG has shifted radically from protodiplomacy in post-2014 to obviating its position in regional and international arenas. The following subsections assess the extent of the impact of the referendum on the level of relations and foreign activities of the KR in more detail.

7.2 The KRG's Foreign Activities: Between Constitutional and Unconstitutional

The Iraqi Constitution gives constitutional legitimacy to the KRG, and the Region is considered to have legal and constitutional rights to perform foreign relations, and practicing its paradiplomacy and foreign relations does not contravene Iraqi sovereignty. However, ambiguity and the lack of a precise definition of the external authority of the Region are the central points for intensifying disagreements between both the KRG and central Iraqi governments. For instance, the Constitution distinguishes between the extensive powers of the

federal government and the concluded powers of the KR in foreign affairs and diplomacy. While Article 110/First underscores 'formulating foreign policy and diplomatic representation; negotiating, signing, and ratifying international treaties and agreements; and ratifying debt policies; and formulating foreign sovereign economic and trade policy', the powers of the KR are minimised to the cultural, social, and development areas, as mentioned in the fourth paragraph of Article 121 (Iraqi Constitution of 2005, 2005).

In terms of foreign affairs, the current Iraqi Constitution essentially accords the main responsibility for conducting foreign policy in the hands of the federal government, while according limited concurrent powers to the KRG in the foreign affairs framework alongside larger scope for cultural, social, and developmental autonomy. Therefore, whenever the foreign activities of the KR remain within the framework of cultural, social, and development activities, Kurdistan practices go into the paradiplomacy framework; however, whenever the activities move towards political activity, they no longer remain within the constitutional framework (Jalil, 2023, pp. 53-54).

The referendum incited the federal government to accuse the KRG's foreign activities of being deemed unconstitutional. On September 25, 2017, the House of Representatives issued a decision declaring the referendum unconstitutional, and demanding that the government summon ambassadors and representatives of foreign countries with representations in the KR to find out their explicit position on the referendum. They also closed Kurdistan frontier crossings, and considered goods entering the KR to be smuggled (Chomani, 2022, pp. 296-297). Despite the Iraqi Parliament's request to close foreign consulates and representations in Erbil, no case of the closure of a consulate or representation in Erbil has been recorded (Chomani, 2022, p. 329).

When the issue came up for debate, the KRG asserted that Baghdad's centralised policy and dysfunctional action with the KRG led to a failure to treat Kurdistan as an equal partner based on power sharing. The Constitution is depicted as jeopardizing the KR through enforced punishment. In the post-referendum era, the KRG cited 55 articles of the Constitution not honoured by the federal government. The practice of the splintering between Erbil and Baghdad extended to the realm of foreign relations and traces its roots back to prior to the referendum. Iraq has a total of 69 embassies, 15 consulates, and two other diplomatic missions in about 70 countries around the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq Official Website, 2023). Regarding the Kurdish share in the Iraqi representatives and ambassadors, the Federal Republic of Iraq had 167 ambassadors from 2003 to 2017; even if

the Kurdish percentage is 17 percent, about 30 of their ambassadors must be Kurds, but only 23 of them are in fact of Kurdish ethnicity, which is about 13 percent (Sultan, 2017, p. 111).

The Iraqi Constitution could not alleviate tensions between central and regional governments, but instead prolonged crises between them. Regarding foreign relations, there are skirmishes between Erbil and Baghdad regarding some of the Constitution's articles. The tangible example is the non-implementation of Article 121's clause 4 (Zangana, 2020, p. 6). This provision employs vague terms in order to address the representation of the KR abroad, and binds the Region's representation inside Iraq's embassies. This is a constitutional article that the federal government relies on to prove the unconstitutionality of the KR's foreign relations, while the KRG demands its abolition. The Kurdish leaders accuse the federal government of endeavouring to control the entire foreign policy, and have averted cooperating with the DFR, in particular in areas of regional policies and Iraqi activities. In response, the federal government accuses the KRG of pursuing foreign policy autonomously; this is corroborated by the Constitution (El-Dessouki, 2012, p. 11). When the Kurdish leaders asked for this article to be drafted into law, the federal government officially rejected it, based on the Federal Supreme Court-issued Decision No. 46 of 2011, which states that the main stumbling block to executing this article is a financial issue; the government is not able to provide sufficient budget for opening representative offices for the KRG (Zangana, 2020, p. 6).

KRG officials claim that the Iraqi Constitution does not prevent the opening of representatives abroad, according to the fourth paragraph of Article 121. In this regard, Saman Sorani, a political advisor in the DFR of the KRI, reasoned that the provision enables the KR to open diplomatic institutions for the purpose of overseeing 'political, economic, cultural, and social' activities between foreign nations and the KR. The Kurdish politician and diplomat Mohamed Saber Ismail argued that the KRG can legitimately operate cultural and commercial institutions within Iraqi embassies, whereby Iraqi embassies can be leveraged by the KRG to establish foreign relations (Ismail, 2021, p. 670). Conversely, Aydin Ostan, the KRG's deputy representative in Spain, claimed that resorting to Iraqi representations (as opposed to autonomous KRG ones) would result in undermining the position of the KRG.

The issues between Erbil and Baghdad in the field of foreign relations are not only unresolved, but are deepening, and KRG officials claim that the federal government is adversarial (Mirkhan, 2018, pp. 17-18). Hoshyar Zebari, the former foreign minister of Iraq,

stressed at a conference of KRG representatives in January 2024 that there are continuous efforts by the Baghdad government to weaken the role and position of the KR at the international level (Kurdistan24, 2024). More recently, according to the judgment of the Federal Supreme Court No. 224 (of 21/2/2024) regarding the salaries of the KRG employees, which emphasises the constitutional articles that their foreign relations are only the jurisdiction of the federal government.

7.3 Referendum and Weakening of the KRG's Foreign Activities and Investments

After the Kurdish independence referendum, almost all countries stopped their diplomatic relations with the KR (Jalal, 2020). The referendum led to the creation of asymmetric power between central and regional governments regarding foreign activities, and left an indelible mark on the performance of the KRG's representatives abroad. In this regard, Mohamed Saber Ismail stated that 'the referendum was the biggest historical mistake of the Kurdish people', and affirmed that after it, most of the KRG's representations abroad were functioning poorly (Ismail, 2021, p. 669).

After the outbreak of the referendum crisis, the level of foreign relations in the KR decreased, and foreign diplomatic missions to the Region were strained. The main reason was that all international flights to and from the Region stopped, because of the imposition of an international flight ban on the KR at Iraq's behest, in addition to the closure of the border crossings between the Region and Iran. The Iraqi government also asked Iran, Turkey, and others to deal exclusively with the federal government. This impacted the Kurdistan diplomatic movement negatively, serving the direct relationship between the KR and the outside world and preventing some foreign delegations from visiting the Region (Chomani, 2022, p. 326). According to Niyaz Barzani, the head of Foreign Policy & Diplomacy in the presidency of the KRI, the diplomatic impasse on the KR was so tough that when France, on December 2, 2017, asked to meet Nechirvan Barzani, he could travel neither from Baghdad nor Erbil; he had to travel to Turkey by car, and then from there take a flight to France (Sadoon, 2023, p. 348).

Immediately after the referendum, the DFR sent out letters to almost all 14 countries where the KRG is represented, in order to relinquish the diplomatic blockade with the KR, and many did not respond. Only France actively expressed its sympathy for the Region (Sadoon, 2023, p. 348). Regarding the referendum's repercussions, Masrour Barzani underlined that 'the independence referendum has bolstered the Kurds internality but has increased outside pressure and hostility' (Parello-Plesner, 2017). The negative

consequences of the referendum periodically lasted until the flight ban was lifted. The KRG responded by returning federal government employees to Erbil and Sulaimani international airports, and as a result, the rapprochement between the Region and the outside world gradually returned (Chomani, 2022, p. 326). However, it is an undeniable fact that the number of visits of the KRG delegations to foreign countries has decreased significantly compared to the pre-referendum era.

For example, in the period from November 1, 2017 until the end of January 2020, Nechirvan Barzani, as head of the KR, made only 15 official diplomatic visits to ten countries. In the same period of time, Nechirvan Barzani received only about 136 foreign delegations (Chomani, 2022, pp. 326-328). Even KRG officials do not deny that Kurdistan is currently practicing its foreign relations and activities within the framework of paradiplomacy, not protodiplomacy. As Saman Sorani pointed out, 'what we are practicing today is a kind of parallel diplomacy, but what we aim for in the future is a wider diplomatic space'.

The KRG has attempted to regain diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries, but they have minimal foreign policy interest toward the KR. Nazim Dabakh, representative of the KRG in the Islamic Republic of Iran, revealed that relations between the KRG and Iran have faded since the referendum, and that the KRG representation in Iran should be in contact within a narrow framework, although the KRG representation is given courtesy invitations to Iranian government events (Kurdistan Regional Government Representation in France, 2023, pp. 214-215). In an interview, Aydin Ostan noted that the duties and activities of the KRG representations in most countries were reduced or stopped, including in Spain.

Since the referendum, only a few countries have opened consulates in Erbil. In the immediate post-referendum process, Sri Lanka opened its honorary consulate (Chomani, 2022, p. 329). A year later, in 2018, Cyprus announced its consulate in the KR; and both Spain and the Philippines opened their consulates in 2020. More recently, both Armenia and Qatar opened their consulate general in Erbil in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

The KR faced legal and constitutional accountability not only in terms of foreign relations but also in terms of oil production and exports. Since it has substantial reserves of oil and natural gas. Following the enactment of Law No. 22 of 2007 by the Kurdistan Parliament, the KRG decided to extract and market oil and gas. According to sections 4 and 5 of Article 3 of the law, the KRG is responsible for supervising and regulating the

entire oil and marketing process. According to the first paragraph of Article 24 of the law, the Minister of Natural Resources is authorised to sign energy agreements and contracts with domestic and international companies for the purpose of exploration and development of the energy sector with the approval of the Council of Ministers. However, the federal government declared this decision unconstitutional, based on Article 110 of the Constitution, since the sale of oil is within the exclusive authority of the federal government (Jalil, 2023, p. 75).

The aftermath of the referendum swelled international investment in oil sector in the KR unexpectedly (Figure 5). Soon after the referendum was passed, the curve of KRG hydrocarbon production and sales dramatically decreased from 650,000 to 250,000 barrels per day. This was due to two main reasons: first, the KRG lost all disputed rich oil areas that had been under its control since 2014 (Jalal, 2020). Second, Baghdad intensified its efforts to declare unconstitutional all foreign contracts signed by the KRG with countries in the oil sector. Due to this impasse, the KRG has faced legal limbo, and its action regarding the oil sector was paralyzed.



Figure 5. Number and types of investments in the KR (2018-2022)

Source: KRG-Board of Investment, 2023

The difficulties between Baghdad and Erbil have been piling up further since. In a judgment of February 15, 2022, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq ruled on the unconstitutionality of the 2007 Oil and Gas Law of the KRG, and asked for the repeal of the law. The Court decided that the KRG must hand over all oil production from their fields to the federal government and also allow audits over all their oil contracts regarding the sale and export of hydrocarbons in order to determine its financial liability to the federal government (Smeekens & Keil, 2022, p. 2).

On March 23, 2023, the decision handed down by the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce's International Court of Arbitration ruled that the "Iraqi

national oil company SOMO is the only entity authorized to manage oil export operations through the Turkish port of Ceyhan". On March 25, in response to the court's ruling, Turkey stopped the flow of Kurdistan Iraqi crude oil through Ceyhan (Policy Briefs Program, 2023). As a result, Turkey stopped pumping approximately 450.000 barrels per day (bpd) of Iraqi oil, comprising 75.000 bpd from the federal and 370.000 bpd of the KRG's oil (Dahan & Rasheed, 2023). The inability to sell its crude has severely impacted the KRG domestically and internationally, as it is heavily reliant on these revenues to finance regional governance. Consequently, the KRG has failed for years to pay more than a million civil servants fully and on time (Rudaw, 2023). Internationally, the decision has reduced foreign investment in the KR. Those factors have weakened the KRG's capability for attempting to achieve independence and decreased desire for independence among the Kurdish people.

It can be said that, since the holding of the referendum, the KR's foreign activities have significantly diminished. In addition, the Erbil-Bagdad crisis has entered a new stage, and the KRG is forcefully adhering to the decisions of the Federal Supreme Court. The Iraqi government is attempting to completely limit the authority of the KRG by leveraging the Constitution and its control over oil and gas resources.

7.4 Steps Towards Reviving the KRG's Foreign Relations

From 2020 onwards a new phase of attempted normalization of the KRG's foreign relations has been undertaken. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 limited diplomatic relations and visits by diplomatic delegations around the world. It was an important stage for the KRG to overcome the diplomatic crisis that occurred after the referendum. On February 13, 2020, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani traveled to Munich to attend the 2020 Munich Security Conference, which is a global gathering of the world's most senior and influential foreign and security policy leaders and experts. The KRG's PM held a wide range of meetings with heads of government, foreign, and defence ministers, and security and intelligence chiefs from Europe, North America, and the Middle East, in order to discuss the situation in the KR and the wider region. In the same year, the KRG's PM received 15 diplomatic representatives at the level of ambassadors and consuls from 10 countries (Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website, 2024).

In 2021, the KR's foreign relations and activities went a step further when the KRG's PM took part in the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain. He met with a number of key officials from different countries, including the King

of Bahrain, the US Secretary of Defense, Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Minister of Greece, and Singapore's Minister of Defence. In the same year, the KRG's PM received 51 diplomatic representatives at the level of ambassadors and consuls from 28 countries. In addition, the US built its biggest consulate in the world in Erbil (Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website, 2024).

Regarding diplomatic activities and relations in 2022, in March, the KRG's PM attended the Atlantic Council Global Energy Forum in Dubai. He delivered a speech and stressed strengthening energy relations with countries around the world. In the same year, the KRG's PM received 49 diplomatic representatives at the level of ambassadors and consuls from 21 countries (Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website, 2024).

The development of diplomatic relations and activities in the KR continued in 2023. The KRG's PM headed to the United Arab Emirates to attend the World Government Summit in Dubai, scheduled for February 13-15. The World Government brought together over 20 presidents and prime ministers, 250 ministers, and thousands of government officials. On October 23, the KRG's PM received an official invitation letter from the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE to attend the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, which was scheduled for December 1st and 2nd in Dubai. In the same year, the KRG's PM met 33 diplomatic representatives at the level of ambassadors and consuls from 20 countries (Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website, 2024).

Regarding the KRG's foreign and diplomatic activities in 2024 up to the time of preparing this research, the most essential diplomatic activity was the attendance of the KRG's PM at the World Governments Summit 2024 in February. More recently, on February 24, 2024, the PM commenced his official visit to Washington, DC, upon receiving a formal invitation to engage in a series of high-level meetings with key officials at the White House, the Department of State, and Capitol Hill. The primary focus of the meeting was to strengthen bilateral relations between the KR and the United States (Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website, 2024).

Since 2020, KR President Nechirvan Barzani actively participated in several international conferences, including the World Economic Forum's 50th Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters in 2020. In 2023, the President participated in the 59th annual Munich Security Conference and the World Climate Action Summit and attended the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in 2023. More recently, on February 16, 2024, the President attended the Munich Security Conference.

During those international conferences, President Nechirvan Barzani met with a number of leaders, high officials, and ministers around the world. The meetings were primarily focused on strengthening KR's relations with the international community (The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region – Iraq, 2024).

8. CONCLUSION

The KR has developed and culminated diplomatically after the rise of ISIS in 2014. The turning point came, and all achievements regressed after the Kurds bid for independence in 2017. The KR has faced regional and international accusations that it desires to endanger the security of the region in general and Iraq in particular.

When the Iraqi Constitution took effect, the standoff between Baghdad and Erbil could not be terminated. Legally, the Iraqi Constitution has various gaps concerning the rights of the KRG's rights to engage in foreign relations, and the constitution does not grant the Region the right to secession, from which collisions between Erbil and Baghdad primarily stem. In response, most of the KRG's foreign activities are not under the aegis of the constitution. Kurdish national suppression under the auspices of the Constitution fuelled the desire of Kurdish politicians and stakeholders for a referendum to express the will of the Kurdish people. However, the international community and neighbouring countries refused to countenance the right of Kurdistan's residents to express their democratic will, and all had shared material interests in the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq and the status quo.

After the referendum, the KR was forced to relinquish its international and regional position, and it lost the goodwill and political capital it had achieved with its containment of ISIS. The referendum created significant strains on the KRG's foreign activities and diplomacy in terms of the opening of consulates, visits of foreign delegations to the KR, welcoming delegations from the KR, and foreign investment, all of which are bad indicators of stagnating the Region's foreign role and position.

At the present juncture (2024), the KR has become untenably weak compared to its position a decade ago. The referendum took the KR several steps backwards at the local, regional, and international levels. However, becoming an independent state remains the constant dream of the Kurdish people, and they continue to strive to achieve it.

Figure Captions

Figure 1: Foreign missions to the KR (2005-2013)

Figure 2: Number and types of investments in the KR (2006-2013)

Figure 3: Foreign missions to the KR (2014-2017)

Figure 4: Number and types of investments in the KR (2014-2017)

Figure 5: Number and types of investments in the KR (2018-2022)

Notes

- i. Sorani, Saman (2023). Interview with Saman Sorani.
- ii. Ostan, Aydin (2023). Interview with Aydin Ostan.
- iii. Ismail, M. S. (2024). Interview with Mohamed Saber Ismail.
- iv. Sorani, Saman (2023). Interview with Saman Sorani.
- v. Ostan, Aydin (2023). Interview with Aydin Ostan.

9. REFERENCES

- Aguirre, Iñaki (2013). Making Sense of Paradiplomacy? An Intertextual Inquiry about a Concept in Search of a Definition. In Aldecoa, F. & Keating, M. (Eds.), *Paradiplomacy in Action the Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments* (pp. 185-209). London: Routledge.
- Aziz, Gazang A. & Shaikhah, Rebwar. J. (2021). مافی چارەى خۆنوسىنى گەلى كورد [The Right of Self-Determination of Kurdish People in Iraq and A Legal View to The Kurdistan Region Referendum in 2017]. *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 191-203. <https://doi.org/10.14500/kujhss.v4n2y2021.pp191-203>
- Bakir, Falah Mustafa & Mustafa, Sara D. (2023). Legal Framework, Institutionalization, Tools, and Motives of Kurdistan Iraq's Paradiplomacy. In Gürbey, G., Hofmann, S. & Seyder, F. I. (Eds.), *Between Diplomacy and Non-Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine* (pp. 75-91). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey (2006). Innovative Development Strategies from Non-Sovereign Island Jurisdictions? A Global Review of Economic Policy and Governance practices. *World Development*, 34(5), 825-867. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.10.004>
- Chomani, Yasin Mahmood (2022). الدبلوماسية الموازية بين النظرية والتطبيق [Paradiplomacy in Theory and Practice]. Erbil: Al-Tafseer.
- Corango, Noe (2018). Paradiplomacy and Protodiplomacy. In Martel, G. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Diplomacy* (pp. 1-9). London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Czapiewski, Tomasz (2011). Modern Approach to Paradiplomacy: Conceptualizing the External Activities of Regions. *Reality of Politics*, 2, 18-31. <https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/2139012>
- Dahan, Maha El & Rasheed, Ahmed (2023). Explainer: What is stopping the Iraq-Turkey oil pipeline restarting?. *Reuters*. [Explainer: What is stopping the Iraq-Turkey oil pipeline restarting? | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/explainer/what-is-stopping-the-iraq-turkey-oil-pipeline-restarting-2023-09-14/)
- Danilovich, Alex & Abdulrahman, Huda S. (2017). Aiming at Secession: The KRG's Activism in the International Arena. *UKH Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1), 48-59. <https://doi.org/10.25079/ukhss.v1n1y2017.pp48-59>
- Duchacek, Ivo D. (1987). *The Territorial Dimension of Politics Within, Among, and Across Nations*. New York: Westview Press.
- El-Dessouki, Ayman I. (2012). Structural Contexts and Paradiplomacy of Iraqi Kurdistan. *Al-Nahda*, 13(2), 1-38. [Structural contexts and paradiplomacy of Iraqi Kurdistan \(emarefa.net\)](http://www.emarefa.net/structural-contexts-and-paradiplomacy-of-iraqi-kurdistan)
- Fathun, Laode Muhamad (2022). The Role of Paradiplomacy and The Potential Proto-Diplomacy in The Unitary State. *Journal of Islamic*

- World and Politics*, 6(2), (2022), 298-319. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v6i2.15677>
- Invest in Group, 'Kurdistan Review Opportunities Unlimited'. (2014). *Kurdistan Review*. <https://us.gov.krd/media/1462/kurdistan-review-dec2013-jan2014.pdf>
- Iraqi Constitution of 2005 (2005). [Iraq_2005.pdf\(constituteproject.org\)](http://Iraq_2005.pdf(constituteproject.org))
- Ismail, Mohamed Saber (2021). دیپلوماسیەت: چەمک، مێژوو، بنەماکان [Diplomacy Concept: History and Principles]. Sulaymaniyah: Shivan Publication.
- Jalal, Hussein Dalsooz (2020). 'Hydrocarbons Support the Global Diplomacy of the Kurdistan Region'. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.25136/1339-3057.2021.2.34661>
- Jalil, Muhammed Ismael (2023). کاریگەری جەنگی داعش لەسەر پەیوەندیەکانی دەرەوەی. [The Impact of the ISIS War on the Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Region - Iraq], MA Thesis submitted to the Council of the College of Political Science at Salahaddin University, Erbil.
- Jasim, Dastan (2023). Kurdistan-Iraq and EU. In Gürbey, G. Hofmann, S. & Seyder, F. I. (Eds.), *Between Diplomacy and Non-Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine* (pp. 135-156). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Keating, Michael (2000). Paradiplomacy and Regional Networking. *Forum of Federations: An International Federalism*. <https://www.forumfed.org/libdocs/ForRelCU01/924-FRCU0105-eu-keating.pdf>
- Keating, Michael (2013). Regions and International Affairs: Motives, Opportunities and Strategies. In Aldecoa, F. & Keating, M. (Eds.), *Paradiplomacy in Action the Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments* (pp. 1-16). London: Routledge.
- KRG-Board of Investment, 'Licensed Project' (2023). CDN. <https://govkrd.b-cdn.net/OtherEntities/BoardofInvestment/English/Publication/LicensedProjects/ListofLicensedProjectsInKurdistanRegion.pdf>
- KRG-DFR Official Website. (2024). Services' DFR. <https://gov.krd/df-en/services/>
- Kurdistan Regional Government Official Website (2024). 'Prime Minister Activities'. KRD. Activities|KurdistanRegionalGovernment
- Kurdistan Regional Government Representation in France (2023). دیپلوماسی و هزری سیاسی کوردستان [Diplomacy and Kurdistan's Political Thought]. Erbil: FAM Publication.
- Kurdistan Regional Investment Law No. 4 of 2004. (2013). *Investpromo*. <https://investpromo.gov.iq/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/kurdistan-regional-investment-law-no-4-of-2006-En.pdf>
- Kurdistan24. (2024). پانێلی پێگهی سیاسی و ئابووری هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراقی فیدرال: [Panel on Political and Economic Position of the Federal Iraqi Kurdistan Region: Opportunities and Challenges]. <https://youtu.be/MZtVSsTdVYw?si=mY4Zm9222wFvC3Nl>
- Law of 2004 of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Translational Period (2004). *Refworld*. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/en/39004>
- Mansour, Renad (2015). 'How the Kurds Helped Draw the United States Back to Iraq'. *Carnegie Middle East Center*. <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/06/29/how-kurds-helped-draw-united-states-back-to-iraq-pub-60522>
- McHugh, James. T. (2015). Paradiplomacy, Protodiplomacy and the Foreign Policy Aspirations of Quebec and Other Canadian Provinces. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 21(3), 238-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2015.1031261>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq Official Website (2023). 'Diplomatic Missions', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. <https://mofa.gov.iq/>
- Mirkhan, Hemin H. (2018). Iraqi Kurdistan Referendum and its Implications. *UKH Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(1). 17-18. <https://doi.org/10.25079/ukhjss.v2n1y2018.pp17-18>
- Mohammed, Herish Khali & Owtram, Francis (2014). Paradiplomacy of Regional Governments in International Relations: The Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (2003-2010). *Iran and the Caucasus*, 18(1). 65-84. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1573384x-20140106>
- Mohammed, Jihan A. & Alrebh, Abdullah F. (2020). Iraqi Kurds: The Dream of Nation State. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 29(2). 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12216>
- Nganje, Fitz Ikome (2013). *Paradiplomacy: A Comparative Analysis of the International Relations of South Africa's Gauteng, North West and Western Cape Provinces*. University of Johannesburg.
- O'Driscoll, Dylan & Baser, Bahar (2019). Referendums as a Political Party Gamble: A Critical Analysis of the Kurdish Referendum for Independence. *International Political Science Review*, 1(15). 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512119858367>
- Palani, Kamaran (2023). *Kurdistan's De Facto Statehood: A New Explanatory Framework*. London: Routledge.
- Parello-Plesner, Jonas (2017). A Report from the Kurdish Independence Referendum: Perspectives and Policy Implications for Stabilizing Iraq After ISIL. *Hudson Institute*. <https://www.hudson.org/human-rights/a-report-from-the-kurdish-independence-referendum-perspectives-and-policy-implications-for-stabilizing-iraq-after-isil>
- Policy Briefs Program (2023). Iraqi-Turkish Oil Arbitration Case. *Middle East Policy Council*. [Iraqi-Turkish Oil Arbitration Case - Middle East Policy Council](http://Iraqi-TurkishOilArbitrationCase-MiddleEastPolicyCouncil)
- Rudaw. Iraq Wins a Case Against KRG's Independent Oil Exports. [Iraq wins case against KRG's independent oil exports](http://IraqwinscaseagainstKRG'sindependentoilexports)
- Sadoon, Hajar Bashir (2023). The Islamic State and the Independence Referendum: The Role of Foreign Policy in Maintaining the De Facto Kurdish Entity in Iraq. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 23(3). 336-354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12404>
- Sadoon, Hajar Bashir Kalari (2017). *From Foreign Relations to Foreign Policy: Transformation of the Kurdish De Facto State into an Independent Foreign Policy Actor* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Exeter.
- Shamsi, Pishko (2020). The Future of the Kurdistan Region after the Defeat of ISIS and the Failure of the 2017 Independence Referendum. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/the-future-of-the-kurdistan-region-after-the-defeat-of-isis-and-the-failure-of-the-2017-independence-referendum/>
- Sharif, Sardar Mosa (2015). *An Analysis of Kurdistan Region of Iraq Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Objectives* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Duhok University.
- Smeekens, Daan & Keil, Soeren (2022). The Iraqi Oil and Gas Dispute between Baghdad and Erbil. *IFF Working Paper Online*, 31. 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.51363/unifr.diff.2022.31>

