



T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi



Doctoral Thesis Evaluation

The Name of the Thesis: Policy of the United Kingdom towards regional and ethno-confessional elites in modern-day Iraq

The Name of the Candidate: Ürper Mehmet

The Name of the University: The Saint-Petersburg State University, Russian Federation

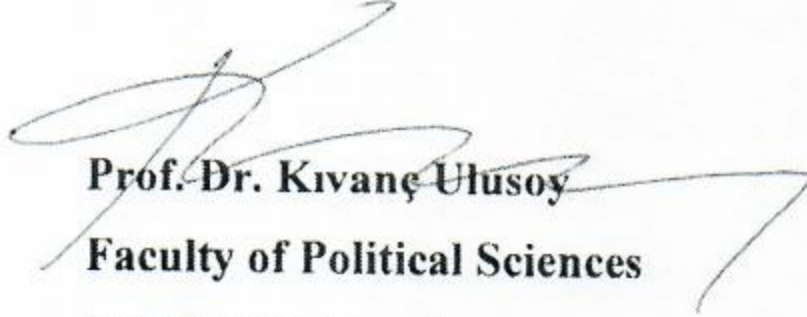
This is a brief assessment of the Doctoral Thesis titled the “Policy of the United Kingdom towards regional and ethno-confessional elites in modern-day Iraq” presented by the doctoral candidate Urper Mehmet from The Saint-Petersburg State University, Russian Federation. The thesis argues that since the foundation of the country in the early twentieth century the United Kingdom (UK) has been able to develop close relations both with the central government in Baghdad and ethnic and confessional groups. Thanks to these meticulously developed relationships with the central and local leaders in the country, the UK has been able to influence and control the political developments without directly intervening in its affairs. The thesis particularly underline the linkages established with the regional leaders, ethnic and religious groups, and associations in the Kurdish region located in the Norther part of the country. In this context, the thesis provides us with a historical background of the ethnic and religious situation in Iraq since the British occupation during the WWI, the mandate and the treaties between the UK and Iraq establishing the country. However, the thesis further argues that despite the fact that the UK had a clear advantage in terms of influencing the political actors in the interest of the country and the Middle East in general, its policies evolved towards a neo-imperial direction detrimentally affecting the overall political situation in Iraq. In fact, for the author of the thesis, the UK lost a great chance of positively influencing the Middle Eastern politics as a result of its self-interested, imperialistic ambitions.

Depending on the documents available particularly in Russian, the thesis reviews the history of the British involvement in Iraq’s domestic affairs from the mandatory administration to post-war political situation, the successive Iraqi governments including the Baath one. In its focus the thesis pays particular attention to the Kurdish issue and its possible solution within the framework of autonomy within Iraq. However, from a critical perspective the thesis claims that after following a realist foreign policy that the British government followed in the post-war period, the idealist turn defined by the concept of "international

community" employed by the Blair government in the aftermath of the intervention in Iraq actually is a form of liberal imperialism. In a similar vein, the American foreign policy carried out by the Bush administration were clearly at odds with the ideas of international community. In this context, as mentioned in the thesis, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's criticism of Bill Clinton's commitment to international declarations as the "naive" concept of "soft power" is particularly telling in terms of revealing the insincere attitudes towards this idea of international community. A realist claim that great powers determine the rules of the game and they do not feel bounded with these rules still prevails. So, the new post-Cold War doctrine of "international community" has been confronted with great skepticism even by the great powers which were supposed to support and consolidate it. Therefore, shortly after it was aired it collapsed. The invasion of Iraq was the clear sign of this collapse.

In brief, in addition to covering a large period of history, the thesis focuses on a critical subject of the British policy in the Middle East in general and in Iraq in particular. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the British policy towards the Kurdistan region on the eve of the independence referendum in 2017 are the particularly crucial sections of the thesis with current relevance. The argument that the British Foreign Office has not been able to cope with the multiple set of challenges affecting the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular is a telling one.

Overall, I consider that the thesis is ready to be defended and the doctoral candidate with his ability to realize a meticulous research as shown in this thesis proves to be ready of a deeper academic endeavors.


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