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# IRAQ ASSESSMENT 2020: FOREIGN POLICY AND EXPECTATIONS FOR 2021

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## IRAQ ASSESSMENT 2020: FOREIGN POLICY AND EXPECTATIONS FOR 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

**M**ustafa al-Kadhimi, who became the fifth Prime Minister of Iraq in the post-2005 period, after forming the government on May 6, 2020, showed that Iraqi foreign policy would be built upon three basic principles as laid out in the government programme submitted to the Parliament: "sovereignty, balance and cooperation". Accordingly, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, during the first eight months of his tenure, made diplomatic visits to Iran, the USA, Jordan, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Turkey, respectively, and concluded 2020 with another visit to Jordan and met with King Abdullah. In the meantime, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, Minister of Finance Ali Allawi, Minister of Oil Ihsan Abdul Jabbar and Head of Hashd al-Shaabi Council, Faleh al-Fayyad, and other high-profile people, engaged in intense diplomacy and visited, in addition to the aforementioned countries, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, Russia, the Nether-

lands and Belgium. Considering the effects of the current coronavirus pandemic, the fact that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and his Ministers visited 15 different countries in a span of eight months, clearly demonstrates that the Iraqi government pursues an active foreign policy and diplomacy.

In fact, following the formation of the new government, Baghdad became a popular stop for many Foreign Ministers in the Middle East. Within eight months, the Foreign Ministers of Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Finland, France, and Greece paid visits to Baghdad, not to mention the high-profile visits of Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly and French President Emmanuel Macron. During the same period, Iraqi diplomats placed equal importance on communication with regional and global supra-state actors in addition to interstate relations. For instance, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein met with Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, and Josep

Borrell, Vice President of the European Commission, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in Belgium and paid a visit to Egypt to meet with Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary General of the Arab League. He also had a meeting with Dr. Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf, the Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, in addition to bilateral meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and South Korea during the same summit.

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and his ministers usually focused on the ongoing fight against ISIS, the coronavirus pandemic, falling Brent oil prices, the financial recession and other problems affecting Iraq and the regional conjecture. During his meetings with his European peers, al-Kadhimi praised Germany, France and the United Kingdom, all a part of the International Coalition, for their support to Iraq in the fight against ISIS and encouraged those countries to invest in Iraq. During his European tour, Al-Kadhimi shared the details of his economic reform plan with European investors and public. In a similar manner, al-Kadhimi thanked Iran and the USA for their efforts against ISIS and expressed his desire for stronger relations with them. Especially, the dialogues ongoing with the important players of Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for oil and energy, raise the question whether the policy of balance adopted by Iraq is now being tipped in favor of the Arab world. Nevertheless, since the fight against ISIS is not over yet, security issues are still at the forefront of any discussions Iraqi politicians have with foreign players. Despite this fact, it is noteworthy that the al-Kadhimi government opted for an economic diplomacy to encourage investment in Iraq's oil and energy areas during their meetings.

## **FOREIGN POLICY: SOVEREIGNTY, BALANCE AND COOPERATION**

As explained in the government programme approved on May 6, 2020, the Prime Minister promised that the foreign policy would be based on the principles of "sovereignty, balance and cooperation". The Prime Minister paid special attention to the principle of sovereignty and constantly emphasized in his press conferences that the sovereignty rights would be their red line. Indeed, the government programme approved in the parliament states that Iraqi lands cannot be used as a battlefield for global wars and that Iraqi lands cannot be used for any attack on any neighboring country.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Iraq became the basis of escalating tensions between the USA and Iran in late 2019 and early 2020, and how these two countries completely ignored the sovereignty of Iraq, makes the great importance the new government attaches to the sovereignty in foreign policy even more meaningful.

Balance, which is another foreign policy principle, implies that Iraq refuses to position itself according to any regional or international axis and that the country is committed to building positive and constructive relations with the whole world, particularly Muslim countries, and the neighbouring Arab countries. In this way, it was thought that the principle of balance in foreign policy making would pave the way for the cooperation factor, and it was stated that Iraq aimed to cooperate with all international actors in accordance with common interests, regardless of any axis.

The foreign policy principles followed by the Kadhimi government are largely consistent with the foreign policy principles adopted by the governments of Adil Abdul-Mahdi and Haider al-Abadi, the predecessors of Musta-

<sup>1</sup> "Iraq's Parliament Approves Government Programme", Government of Iraq, 2020.

The foreign policy principles followed by the Kadhimî government are largely consistent with the foreign policy principles adopted by the governments of Adil Abdul-Mahdi and Haider al-Abadi, the predecessors of Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

fa al-Kadhimi. Indeed, 'Haider al-Abadi took steps to reposition Iraqi foreign policy after al-Maliki's term in office; he stated that they would pursue a policy of not being part of any axis or alliances in the Middle East, and in this direction, he committed to developing close relations with Iraq's neighbors and partners, especially the Arab countries. Both Haider al-Abadi and Adil Abdul-Mahdi declared that they could not accept any threat of attack on Iran from Iraqi territory, and neighboring Iran is an indispensable partner for Iraq. Nevertheless, both former Prime Ministers pursued a policy of balance between the parties in the US-Iran tension and took steps to keep Iraq out of this conflict. Although such an approach has been met with reactions from Iraq's important partners, such as the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia, in various cases, the Iraqi governments formed in the post-Maliki era tried to stick to their approach of balance by attaching importance to common interests and cooperation in the international arena.

Prior to his appointment as head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service in 2016, Prime Minister Kadhimî closely followed issues such as democracy, Iraqi politics and human

rights for nearly fifteen years as a journalist and editor, and thus had the chance to personally observe and analyze the change in Iraqi foreign policy after the Maliki era. Indeed, in some of the articles he wrote on *Al-Monitor* during his term, Mustafa al-Kadhimi criticized the foreign policy approach based on the personal feelings of the political elites and strongly opposed the axis politics.<sup>2</sup> During the same period, Kadhimî stressed that "in order for Iraq to become an important actor in the international arena, it should pursue a policy of balance, but it should also show that it can take independent decisions without being influenced while implementing this policy".<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, Mustafa al-Kadhimi appreciated that the Abadi government began to repair relations that had deteriorated in previous periods with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Turkey. In contrast to the understanding that reduces foreign relations to official visits between governments or conflict resolution, Kadhimî considers diplomacy an opportunity for regional and global cooperation, particularly in the fields of economics, culture, and education, and he believes that, if close and sustainable inter-community coop-

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa al-Kadhimi, "Iraq Should Use IS War to Rebuild Foreign Relations", *Al-Monitor*, 2014. Accessed on January 2, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Mustafa al-Kadhimi, "Iraq Maintains Neutrality in Regional Conflicts", *Al-Monitor*, 2015. Accessed on January 2, 2021.



eration is achieved in these areas, the path to wider integration including security will be opened in the region. Therefore, it can be argued that Mustafa al-Kadhimi adopted a foreign policy approach based on international common interests by working with all parties, not on a single axis, years before he came to power.

## IRAQ-IRAN RELATIONS

Prime Minister Kadhimi, like his predecessor Adil Abdul-Mahdi, who made his first overseas visit to Egypt, wanted to make his first foreign contact with a visit to Riyadh from neighboring Arab countries, but due to the health problems of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz of Saudi Arabia, this visit was postponed indefinitely to a later date, and he made his first overseas visit to Tehran on July 21. Two days before this visit, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif visited Iraq and held extensive contacts in Baghdad and Erbil. With this visit, Javad Zarif became the third foreign minister to pay a visit to Baghdad during Kadhimi's

term after the foreign ministers of Kuwait and Jordan. Javad Zarif's trip to Baghdad just one day before Prime Minister Kadhimi's planned visit to Riyadh was interpreted by some circles as Zarif's visit was aimed at indoctrinating Prime Minister Kadhimi prior to his contacts with Saudi Arabia, and Iran wanted to send a message to Saudi Arabia via Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to such speculations, official sources noted that Zarif's Baghdad contacts were intended as a preparation for Prime Minister Kadhimi's upcoming visit to Tehran.

Kadhimi described the relations between Iraq and Iran as deep and friendly in some of his articles during his time as a journalist and editor but stated that this friendship between the two countries should not have any negative impact on Iraq's foreign relations. Maintaining such an approach, Mustafa Kadhimi made his first international visit to Tehran with his delegation on July 21, 2020. During this visit, Iran attached special importance to the protocol and President Hassan Rouhani welcomed



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is welcoming Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi with an official ceremony at the Sa'dabad Complex.

<sup>4</sup> "Zarif Delivers Message To Saudi Arabia From Baghdad: Report", *Tehran Times*, 2020, Accessed on January 2, 2021.



**Khamenei adopted a sharper style in his statements compared to President Rouhani, and although he stated that Iran never had any desire to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs, he devoted most of his speech to suggestions about the American presence in Iraq.**

Prime Minister Kadhimi with a state ceremony, and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who did not meet face-to-face with anyone other than President Rouhani for five months due to the Coronavirus outbreak, accepted him in his office, privileging Prime Minister Kadhimi. In addition to such symbolic gestures, the parties' referring to the closeness of Iran-Iraq relations and their characterization of relations between the two countries as brotherly drew attention. Kadhimi stressed that Iran was one of the first states to come to help in the fight against ISIS, and this would always be remembered, noting that they would not allow any threat targeting Iran from Iraqi territory. President Hassan Rouhani announced that Prime Minister Kadhimi's visit marked a turning point in Iran-Iraq relations. At this point, Prime Minister Kadhimi emphasized during the joint press conference which he held with President Hassan Rouhani that the Iraqi people always wanted a special cooperation with Iran within the framework of mutual respect and non-interference in domestic affairs, and Kadhimi's rhetoric resonated widely, especially among Western media and think tanks.

Iran's spiritual leader Khamenei, like President Hassan Rouhani, stated in his meeting with Kadhimi that the relations between Iran and Iraq were

brotherly, noting that the two countries had similar historical, religious, and cultural ties. However, Khamenei adopted a sharper style in his statements compared to President Rouhani, and although he stated that Iran never had any desire to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs, he devoted most of his speech to suggestions about the American presence in Iraq. Underlining that Iran did not interfere with the US-Iraq relations, Khamenei said that, on the contrary, the US opposed the development of Iran-Iraq relations, suggesting that the American presence in any country only brought degeneration and destruction. Noting that the non-binding resolution taken in the Iraqi Parliament to expel American troops from the country should be implemented, Khamenei stated that, unlike Iran, the USA is against an independent and powerful Iraq.

Therefore, it can be said that during his visit to Tehran, Prime Minister Kadhimi reaffirmed the importance of Iran as a regional partner for Iraq once again and that he did not ignore the importance of economic and social cooperation between the two countries. Nonetheless, Kadhimi's declaration in Tehran that the Iraqi people have always wanted to cooperate with Iran within the framework of mutual respect and non-interference in domestic affairs can be interpreted as Kadhimi's desire

to establish relations between the two countries as two equal and sovereign states in the new era.

## IRAQ-US RELATIONS

Relations between Iraq and the United States have reached a problematic point last year due to the presence of American troops in Iraq and the transfer of the Iran-US conflict to Iraqi territory. In particular, the US assassination operation that resulted in the killing of General Qassem Soleimani, the Head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Head of pro-Iranian Kataib Hezbollah, in Baghdad in January 2020 was strongly condemned by the Iraqi administration. In response to this attack, the Iraqi parliament, which described the assassination as an act violating Iraqi sovereignty, adopted a resolution for the US forces to leave Iraq, making US-Iraqi relations extremely difficult. So much so that President Trump, known for his reflexes against the presence of US forces in the Middle East, threatened sanctions that would collapse the Iraqi economy in response to the resolution taken at the Iraqi parliament.<sup>5</sup> Rocket attacks by pro-Iranian militias against US forces in Iraq and the failure of Iraqi security forces to prevent these attacks have also raised the possibility that the Trump administration would close the US Embassy in Baghdad.<sup>6</sup>

After the assassination, Iran's rocket attacks targeting US forces in Iraq brought Patriot missile defense systems to the agenda.

Consequently, the Patriot missile defense system was deployed and activated at Ayn al-Assad Airbase in April 2020 to prevent future Iranian attacks.<sup>7</sup> Patriot missile systems, the failure of Iraqi security forces to prevent Iranian attacks and the US killing one of Iraq's leading military leaders on Iraqi soil have impeded negotiations between the Trump administration and the Abdul-Mahdi government over Patriot systems, making it difficult to reach a compromise.

On the other hand, the US administration, which sees Iraq in a central position in the fight against Iran, has also taken steps to keep Iraq on its side. For instance, the US, which reintroduced sanctions targeting the Iranian economy in November 2018, granted Iraq an exemption on energy trade, taking into account Iraq's energy dependence on Iran. Since November 2018, the Trump administration has renewed its sanctions exemption to allow Iraq to pay Iran in line with its energy needs, first at four-month intervals, then at gradually decreasing intervals.<sup>8, 9</sup>

Reviewing the government programme presented to the parliament by Mustafa al-Kadhimi who founded the government in May 2020 will give an idea about his stance towards the USA. As stated in the government programme, the priority of the Kadhimi administration is the protection of Iraqi national sovereignty and the security of the Iraqi people. His stance parallels the foreign policy vision of the Abdul-Mahdi adminis-

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gabriel Hernandez, "Trump Warns Iraq of Sanctions if US Forces Expelled", *Anadolu Agency*, 2020, Accessed on December 31, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Betül Yuruk, "US Threatens to Shut Down Baghdad Embassy Over Attacks", *Anadolu Agency*, 2020, Accessed on December 31, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Lolita Baldor, "Patriot Missile Defense Systems Now Active In Iraq, Say US Officials", *Defense News*, 2020, Accessed on December 31, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmed Rasheed and Humeysra Pamuk, "U.S. Extends Sanctions Waiver For Iraq To Import Iranian Gas, Power", *Reuters*, 2018, Accessed on January 1, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Lando, "Iraq Receives 90-Day Iran Sanctions Waiver from Outgoing U.S. Administration", *Iraq Oil Report*, 2021, Accessed on January 3, 2021.

**The main concern of the US administration in maintaining its military presence in the region has been the reactivation of the terrorist group ISIS after the US withdrawal, and the increased influence of pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.**

tration and shows that the Iraqi administration's preference is that the US forces leave the region in the long term. While all these developments bring to mind the thoughts that the US withdrawal from the Middle East is approaching and Iran's influence in the region will increase, the Iraqi and US administrations have taken important steps in developing bilateral relations and fighting terrorism in the past year. The visit of Prime Minister Kadhimi and senior ministers to the USA in August 2020 was instrumental in taking these steps. Indeed, the Ministerial Delegation headed by Iraq's Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul Jabbar, who accompanied Prime Minister Kadhimi, met with US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette and negotiated bilateral energy cooperation, signing an additional \$8 billion trade agreement in addition to the previous trade agreements between the two countries.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, both US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein stressed the importance of the Iraqi state maintaining its sovereignty over its territory and controlling pro-Iranian militias.<sup>11</sup> Mike Pompeo stated that the US would support the Iraqi government in this regard.

The Trump administration refrained from giving a specific date for the full withdrawal of US forces from Iraq after Kadhimi's visit. However, shortly after Kadhimi's US contacts, it was announced that the number of US forces stationed in Iraq would be reduced from around 5,000 to 2,500. The main concern of the US administration in maintaining its military presence in the region has been the reactivation of the terrorist group ISIS after the US withdrawal, and the increased influence of pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. Therefore, although the preference of both the Iraqi administration and the US President Trump is that American troops leave the region, it is highly likely that the American military presence in Iraq will continue in the region, although gradually decreasing. Because structural factors such as Iraqi security institutions' weaknesses and strategic priorities of the USA in the region are signs that this situation will continue.

There are comments regarding this situation that with Joe Biden coming to power, the United States will reduce its presence in Iraq to manage relations with Iran, which will increase the influence of pro-Iranian militias in

<sup>10</sup> "Secretary Brouillette Participates in Official Visit for Iraqi Delegation", *U.S. Department Of Energy*, 2020, Accessed on January 3, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi of the Republic of Iraq Before Bilateral Meeting", *The White House*, 2020, Accessed on January 4, 2021.

**The Biden administration seems to continue to support the Kadhimi government in the fight against pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and to relieve economic sanctions against Iran in order to strike a balance in managing tensions with Iran.**

the region.<sup>12</sup> It is alleged that the Biden administration may abandon sanctions on Iran and soften its stance toward the militia in Iraq to re-sign a nuclear deal with the Iranian administration. Nevertheless, it is possible for the US administration to maintain its tough stance on Iranian proxy forces in the region while continuing to negotiate with Iran on denuclearization, just as in the Obama era. In fact, the agreement signed in 2015 was limited to Iran's nuclear weapon production capacity and did not include other disputes between the two countries.

If the Biden administration wants results on the nuclear deal, it must also get the vote of the "Iran hawks" in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. This indicates that politicians such as Mike Pompeo will continue to influence US-Iran relations in the coming years. The political faction in the USA which prefers to take more drastic measures against Iran will not agree to a political solution in which Iran has a free presence in Iraq. Consequently, the Biden administration seems to continue to support the Kadhimi government in the fight against pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and to relieve economic sanctions against Iran in order to strike a balance in managing tensions with Iran.

Looking at the issue from the Iranian perspective, harsh sanctions preferred by the Trump administration have strained the Iranian economy, and Iran is open to negotiations with the new American administration. In other words, the Biden administration's move to ease economic sanctions may be enough to bring Iran to the table on denuclearization, even if it does not change its position in Iraq. The challenge the Kadhimi administration faces in this regard is that its attitude towards Iran and the US is contradictory. On the one hand, it wants US forces to leave the country, but on the other hand, it wants to control pro-Iranian militias. But when it comes to the US-Iran rivalry, the influence of the other will inevitably increase if one of the two forces leaves the country. This is because Iraq's independent military capacity is not enough to drive foreign forces out of the country. This troubled situation pushes Kadhimi to find a balance between the two forces.

It should be said that Iraq-US relations are full of contradictions due to the increasing Iran-US tensions and restrictions in Iraqi domestic politics. When domestic policy balances in the US are added on top of this, it can be said that the new Biden administration will neither fully withdraw from Iraq nor increase

<sup>12</sup> "Iraq's pro-Iran Factions See Smoother Sailing with Biden At Helm", *France 24*, 2020, Accessed on January 5, 2021.





Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi signing the White House guestbook during his visit to Washington.

its military activities. Therefore, although the Kadhimi government has to pursue a balance policy between the US and Iran, the Biden administration will seek a balance in Iraq due to the Iran hawks in US politics and the possibility of ISIS to be on the rise again.

## TURKEY-IRAQ RELATIONS

During the 2003 invasion, Turkey, the US, and Iran were three of the countries which tried to keep their embassies in Iraq operational, and although the political and social situation in Iraq became increasingly complex and dangerous during this period, Turkey did not reduce its contacts with Iraq, especially in terms of economic relations. Indeed, a High-level Strategic Cooperation Council was established between Turkey and Iraq in 2008, and 48 agreements were signed between the two countries a year later. In 2009, the trade volume between the two countries was around \$ 5 billion, and today it has exceeded \$17 billion.

Especially in the late 2000s, when the debates on the division of Iraq into three parts

gained momentum, Turkey adopted the policy of Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity, which it still maintains today, and considered a scenario such as the division of Iraq into three parts as the only threat that could trigger a possible civil war in the country. In accordance with the Strategic Framework Agreement signed between Iraq and the US in 2008, the US ended its military presence in Iraq as of December 31, 2011, thus, the doors were opened to Nouri al-Maliki's pursuit of a policy closer to Iran in foreign policy and a more dominant sectarian policy at home after 2011. Indeed, relations between Turkey and Iraq continued in an increasingly tense atmosphere after 2011, but they were revived when Haider al-Abadi formed Iraq's new government in September 2014. Abadi made a visit to Turkey after only three months and declared that Iraq wanted to improve relations with Turkey in all areas. Accordingly, the Turkey-Iraq High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council was reconvened in the last days of 2014.

After Haider al-Abadi declared victory over ISIS in 2017, Turkey came to the forefront as

one of the most important actors who could contribute to Iraq's reconstruction process. In this direction, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu participated in the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq held in Kuwait in 2018, and Turkey pledged \$5 billion in loans and \$50 million in project assistance to Iraq at the conference. Unlike Iran, which did not attend this conference for the reconstruction of Iraq, and the United States, which announced \$3 billion in incentives for American companies investing in Iraq rather than any financial aid, Turkey attracted attention for its approach to Iraq. Former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, who paid a visit to Ankara in May 2019, noted that Turkey did not leave Iraq at a time when people were afraid and left Iraq, noting that Turkey was on Iraq's side even in the most difficult times. Explaining that they were grateful to Turkey for embracing Iraqi refugees, Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi also stressed that they would not allow any security threats targeting Turkey from Iraqi soil.

Following the formation of Iraq's new government by Mustafa al-Kadhimi on May 6, 2020, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called Kadhimi and became one of the first leaders to wish success in his new post. The most important test in bilateral relations in the new period, was the Claw-Eagle and Claw-Tiger Operations launched by the Turkish Armed Forces against the PKK presence in Northern Iraq in June 2020, as the operations were interpreted by the Iraqi side as an attack on the country's sovereignty. At this point, France and the Arab League's major members, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, tried to position Iraq on an anti-Turkey axis by sharing statements that referred to Iraq's sovereignty. However, none of the countries

condemning the Paw-Eagle and Paw-Tiger Operations mentioned the PKK as a terrorist organization in their statements, on the contrary, it was suggested that the United Arab Emirates, which did not recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization, provided financial assistance to the organization in Northern Iraq<sup>13</sup> and intelligence and training support in Syria during the same period.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Turkey's Ambassador to Iraq, Fatih Yildiz, summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, clearly explained to the Iraqi authorities that Turkey would continue to fight the PKK wherever it was, unless steps were taken to end the PKK presence in the country.

During his visit to Ankara, Prime Minister Kadhimi, like his predecessor Adil Abdul-Mahdi, stated at the joint press conference held on December 17, 2020, that Iraq's position was clear and that they would not allow any formation that threatens Turkey's national security in Iraqi territory. Although Kadhimi did not mention the name PKK, he stated that they wanted to cooperate with Turkey against ISIS and other terrorist organizations and that they took this step in Sinjar. Kadhimi, who made a statement of non-interference in internal affairs and mutual respect during his visit to Iran, declared that contrary to such a statement, they wanted to improve cooperation between Turkey and Iraq during the talks in Ankara. As part of the visit, a "Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation between Turkey and Iraq" and "The Treaty on Avoiding Double Taxation and Tax Evasion" were signed, and the reconvention of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two countries was announced.

Turkey is a gateway to Europe for the Iraqi energy sector, and Iraq is a gateway to the Gulf

<sup>13</sup> "UAE Supports PKK Terrorist Group, Report Says", *Middle East Monitor*, 2020, Accessed on January 6, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Mohamad Misto and Mohammed Hocaoglu, "UAE Spy Agents Train PKK Terrorists in Syria", *Anadolu Agency*, 2020, Accessed on January 6, 2021.



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is welcoming Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi with an official ceremony at the Presidential Complex

Turkey is a gateway to Europe for the Iraqi energy sector, and Iraq is a gateway to the Gulf markets for Turkey. Despite the tensions in Turkey-Iraq relations and the turbulent periods in Iraq from time to time in the post-2003 period, Turkish companies have not given up on their investments in Iraq, and the volume of trade between the two countries has tripled in the last decade.

markets for Turkey. Despite the tensions in Turkey-Iraq relations and the turbulent periods in Iraq from time to time in the post-2003 period, Turkish companies have not given up on their investments in Iraq, and the volume of trade between the two countries has tripled in the last decade. Therefore, it will not be wrong to suggest that the economic ties between Turkey and Iraq have developed resistance to political or social internal and external crises. Judging from the security perspective, Turkey considers the protection of Iraq's unity and integrity as an essential element for regional stability and, on the other hand, maintains its resolute position in preventing terrorist activities originating from Iraqi territory and threatening Turkey. In addition, the Turkmen population in Iraq, where Turkey has historical, cultural, and social ties, continued to be one of Turkey's

most important concerns in the region, and President Erdogan thanked Prime Minister Kadhimi for including a Turkmen minister in his cabinet.

## IRAQ'S RELATIONS WITH THE GULF STATES AND THE ARAB WORLD

Despite the gradual normalization of Iraq's relations with neighboring Arab countries in the post-2003 period, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia at the time considered Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as a leader who was very close to Iran and who pursued Shiite sectarian policies, thus the normalization of relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia was only possible when power changed hands in the two countries. Indeed, a new era began in Iraq-Saudi Arabia relations with the formation of the new government by Haider al-Abadi in 2014 and King Salman bin



The summit between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, and the relations that gained momentum with Saudi Arabia brought along the axis debate in Iraqi foreign policy. This was to the extent so much that some Iraqi politicians drew attention to the alignment of Iraqi foreign policy with Arab countries, and some scholars argued that Iraq returned to the Arab world again.

Abdulaziz becoming the King of Saudi Arabia in 2015. In this direction, Saudi Arabia appointed an ambassador to Baghdad in the last days of 2015 for the first time since the Gulf War, and a Saudi Foreign Minister visited Iraq after the war for the first time in 2017. While he was a journalist and editor, Kadhimî supported Iraq's developing relations with the neighboring Arab world and described Saudi Arabia-Iraq relations as an undeniable geographical and cultural necessity in an article he wrote during this period<sup>15</sup>, and while he was the head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, he proved to be a figure who could work with Saudi Arabia. The opening of the Jadidah-Arar border crossing between Saudi Arabia and Iraq in November 2020 after 29 years constituted therefore one of the most concrete steps of Kadhimî's term for the development of relations between the two countries.

In contrast to its relations with Saudi Arabia, Iraq's relations with other actors in the Arab world have recovered more rapidly in the post-2003 period, except for a few momentary fluctuations. While Egypt became the first Arab country to appoint an ambassador to Baghdad in 2005, Egypt did not appoint a new one until 2009 following the assassination of Ambassador Ihab

al-Sharif in Baghdad in the same year. Although Jordan, like Saudi Arabia, was uncomfortable with the sectarian policies pursued by Prime Minister Maliki and the growing Iranian influence in Iraq, King Abdullah visited Baghdad in 2008 and became the first Arab leader to visit Baghdad in the post-2003 period, announcing his desire to improve cooperation between the two countries. In fact, it was not until December 2008 that Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Syria reopened their representative offices in Iraq, and in the same year Kuwait appointed an ambassador to Baghdad for the first time since the Gulf War. In 2012, Sabah Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait at the time, visited Baghdad as part of the Arab League summit and opened a new page in Iraq-Kuwait relations.

Iraq has adopted a policy of not being a party to the alliances between neighboring Arab countries due to the policy of balance and respect for the country's sovereignty, and in this respect, it has not been involved in the Qatar blockade that began in the Gulf in 2017. Similarly, Iraq remained silent towards the Gulf countries normalizing their relations with Israel, and Ahmed Mulla Talal, the government spokesman at the time, announced that Iraq would not interfere in an issue concerning

<sup>15</sup>Mustafa al-Kadhimî, "Could Saudi-Iraqi Ties be Key to Defeating Islamic State?", *Al-Monitor*, 2015, Accessed on January 4, 2021.



other countries' sovereignty. In light of these principles, Kadhimi, who desired deeper economic and social integration with Arab partners in the Middle East, attended the Egypt-Jordan-Iraq trilateral summit held in Amman on August 25, 2020. Likewise, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein met with his Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts in Cairo on October 13, 2020. In fact, the trilateral summit between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq first began with the meeting of the parties in Cairo in March 2019, and in the same year, representatives of the three countries held talks in New York after the regular annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in September. The summit between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, and the relations that gained momentum with Saudi Arabia brought along the axis debate in Iraqi foreign policy. This was to the extent that some Iraqi politicians drew attention to the alignment of Iraqi foreign policy with Arab countries, and some scholars argued that Iraq returned to the Arab world again.

Before his visit to Jordan on August 25, 2020, Kadhimi declared that they adopted a cooperative attitude in Iraq's Middle East approach, and in this regard, he described the summit as the meeting of brothers in his post on his social media account after the Amman Summit. In the same post, Kadhimi evaluated the summit between Iraq-Jordan-Egypt as "a gateway to the future in terms of development and prosperity that will revive the spirit of dialogue, understanding, and security in the region." Given the fact that oil prices are lower than expected and Iraq's financial crisis, Iraq's rapprochement with its Arab neighbors stands out primarily with its commercial, diplomatic and cultural cooperation. In this direction, agreements were signed for cooperation in the fields of energy, trade, education and health in the trilateral summit held between Iraq, Jordan and Egypt in 2020. Considering

that Iraq is unable to meet domestic consumers' demand for electricity, especially in the summer, and wants to diversify Iranian hegemony in electricity imports, the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Jordan and Iraq in September 2020 to connect the two countries' electricity grids is noteworthy. Parallel to this, The Saudi-Iraqi Coordinating Council convened in Riyadh, co-chaired by Saudi Arabian Investment Minister Khalid al-Falih and Iraqi Minister of Planning Khaled Battal Al-Najm, in October 2020. As part of the council meeting, the Saudi minister of investment, who stated that they examined investment opportunities in Iraq, especially in the fields of energy, industry and agriculture, noted that Saudi Arabia's investment in Iraq already reached \$530 million, and announced that the kingdom aimed to increase its investment in Iraq by almost fivefold to \$2.6 billion. Indeed, one month after this meeting, Prime Minister Kadhimi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed the economic opportunities between Iraq and Saudi Arabia by video conference.

As mentioned earlier, Prime Minister Kadhimi considers cooperation in these areas as the beginning of a path that can evolve into deeper integration in the region, including security, in the future. Mustafa al-Kadhimi, known as a pragmatic figure, has established close relations with Iraq's Arab partners, especially Saudi Arabia, for the foreign capital investment that Iraq urgently needs. However, any agreement to be signed with the Arab countries, like any other agreement, must be approved by the Iraqi House of Representatives. Therefore, the attitude of the blocs closer to Iran in the Iraqi parliament against the bills that involve deeper cooperation with the Arab world will play a significant role at this point. Because the State of Law Coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki opposed Saudi investments



Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi are at the Jordan-Egypt-Iraq Trilateral Summit held in Amman on August 25, 2020.

in Iraq and called these investments as colonialism. Nevertheless, for Iraq whose sovereignty is violated due to the US-Iran conflict and which has a very fragile socioeconomic structure at home, the Gulf and Levant regions provide an opportunity to diversify its trade partners, balance an important actor like Iran in foreign policy, and to emphasize that sectarianism has ceased to be a policy-making element in contrast to the Maliki era.

## IRAQ-EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONS

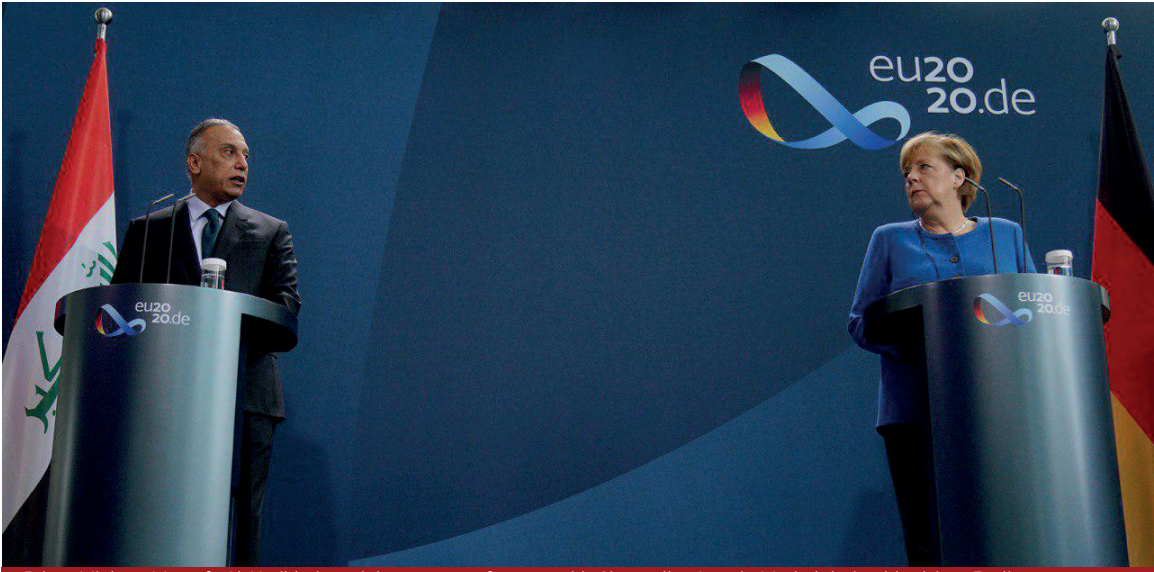
On 18 October 2020, Prime Minister Kadhimi travelled to Paris and began his four-day visit to European countries starting from France, Germany and then the United Kingdom. During his visit to Europe, Kadhimi was accompanied by the Iraqi ministers of finance, petroleum, defense and foreign affairs as well as the head of the Central Bank and the chairman of the Investment Commission. In this regard, Prime Minister Kadhimi met with his counterparts Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Boris Johnson on his European tour and discussed many issues with European leaders from fighting ISIS and coronavirus

to energy and economic cooperation opportunities.

In Paris, Kadhimi's first European stop, President Macron said French experts would continue their work within the United Nations Mine Action Service in Iraq, noting that France would contribute to the return of displaced people to their homes in Iraq. Macron also announced that France would provide €1 million in aid to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. A letter of intent was signed between the French company Alstom and the Iraqi Ministry of Transport for the construction of a tram line in Baghdad, and the parties expressed their satisfaction with the efforts of the French companies to rehabilitate the Iraqi electricity infrastructure. Kadhimi's visit to France took place approximately one and a half months after Macron's visits to Baghdad. After the bilateral meeting at the Élysée Palace, Macron shared a photo of himself with Prime Minister Kadhimi on his Twitter account, saying in Arabic that "France will continue to respect Iraq's sovereignty and support Iraq in the fight against terrorism."

Thus, it would not be wrong to say that Kadhimi repeated the messages emphasized by Macron during his visit to Baghdad. At this point, it is noteworthy that French companies have recently increased their activities in the reconstruction process of Iraq and have participated in large-scale public project tenders in Iraq, including Mosul Airport.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, who was in Germany about a month before Kadhimi's visit to Berlin, stated at a joint press conference with his German counterpart Heiko Maas that Iraqi security forces still needed the assistance of International Coalition countries, including Germany, in the fields of training, intelligence and guidance in the fight against ISIS. Indeed, during Kadhimi's



Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi at a joint press conference with Chancellor Angela Merkel during his visit to Berlin.

meeting with Angela Merkel, Germany's support for Iraqi security forces was discussed, and Merkel underlined that ISIS continued to be a threat to Germany as well as Iraq. In this context, Merkel stated that although Germany would reduce its military presence in the region, it would continue to contribute to the fight against ISIS as part of the International Coalition and NATO. At a joint press conference, Merkel praised the Iraqi government's will to reform, describing the Kadhimî government programme as quite ambitious, and Kadhimî called on German companies to invest in Iraq in the country's reconstruction process.

After Berlin, Prime Minister Kadhimî went to London, where he held talks with Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Prince Charles. During Kadhimî's visits to Europe between 18 and 22 October 2020, issues of economic co-operation and the fight against ISIS came to the fore. During his European Tour, Prime Minister Kadhimî introduced the economic reform

plan prepared by his government to investors and leaders and found support from Europe for the reforms he wanted to implement in domestic policy, such as implementing a state monopoly over arms in the country. Kadhimî's visit to Europe came shortly after the brutal murder of a teacher named Samuel Paty in France by an extremist militant on October 16, 2020, hence it was once again confirmed that the fight against ISIS sympathizers and the ideology represented by the organization remained important to Europe. Nevertheless, Kadhimî's statements during his visit to Europe, especially in London, that he was trying to maintain an impossible balance between the United States and Iran, made an impact. Prime Minister Kadhimî likened the balance policy he tried to implement between the two countries to "riding a bicycle on a rope between two skyscrapers", stating that he danced with snakes every day and looked for a flute to control these snakes.<sup>16</sup> In response to criticism that he remained too cautious about reforms, Kadhimî stated that "debating

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Wintour, "Iraq's Prime Minister Says Country On Tightrope Between US And Iran", *The Guardian*, 2020, Accessed on January 5, 2021.

Since the priorities of the Chinese administration in the region are limited to the fields of economy and energy, it is in a more advantageous position than other global actors in maintaining stable relations with Iraq.

for a thousand years is far better than a momentary conflict," underlining that he would rather persevere than be plunged into chaos.

## IRAQ-CHINA RELATIONS

China-Iraq relations have developed significantly since the early 2000s, especially in the economic field. Economic relations reached an unprecedented level during Kadhim's term in office. China's policy in Iraq should be understood as an extension of its foreign policy vision, which it also implements in some Latin American and Gulf countries. China's international lending strategy is called a "debt-driven foreign policy" by some analysts.<sup>17</sup> With this strategy, China makes prepaid oil deals with oil-rich countries through state-controlled banks and investors, while providing financial aid to these countries and purchasing cheaper oil. Indeed, in times of recession and crisis in Iraq's oil-based economy in recent years, there has been a need for the flow of investment and money that China can provide.

Regardless of the upheavals in Iraqi domestic politics and the government changes, the Iraqi administration welcomed

Chinese investment. In fact, the first steps to ensure the participation of Iraq in the One Belt One Road Project, which will carry the Iraqi-Chinese relations to a higher level, were taken by the Abdul-Mahdi government in September 2019. In this case, it is expected that the activities of China-based companies in Iraq will increase in the coming periods as part of the reconstruction and strengthening of Iraq's infrastructure.

Just like former Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi, Prime Minister Kadhim welcomes China's interest in the Middle East oil market and sees China as an important partner for Iraq's economic development. For this reason, China's oil purchase from Iraq, which has been on the rise in recent years, has reached a record of 7 million tons per month in 2020<sup>18</sup>, making Iraq the third largest oil supplier to China.<sup>19</sup> Chinese state-owned ZhenHua Oil Company won the tender of the Iraqi state-owned oil marketing company and reached a five-year deal worth billions of dollars.<sup>20</sup> According to the agreement, ZhenHua commits to buying four million barrels of oil per month from Iraq over five years, making a payment of \$2 billion in advance. Given the

<sup>17</sup> Mark Green, "China's Debt Diplomacy", *Foreign Policy*, 2019, Accessed on January 6, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Hurst et al., "China Set To Bail Out Iraq With Multibillion-Dollar Oil Deal", *Bloomberg*, 2020, Accessed on January 6, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Martelli, Maryelle Demongeot and Dawn Lee, "Iraq: Indebted To China", *Energy Intelligence*, 2020, Accessed on January 7, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Salma El-Wardany, "Iraq Picks Chinese Firm for \$2 Billion Oil Prepayment Deal", *Bloomberg*, 2021, Accessed on January 7, 2021.



decline in oil demand in markets due to the global coronavirus pandemic and the fragile nature of the Iraqi economy, China acts as a lifeline for the Iraqi economy with this oil deal. As a result of this agreement, China has both signaled that its economic cooperation with Iraq will be a long-term one and guaranteed to buy a significant amount of Iraqi oil cheaply through an advance payment. In the short term, there does not seem to be an obstacle to the continuation of the China-Iraq cooperation with the momentum it has gained. Since the priorities of the Chinese administration in the region are limited to the fields of economy and energy, it is in a more advantageous position than other global actors in maintaining stable relations with Iraq. Therefore, it is possible to say that the administrative changes that will take place in Iraq in the near future will not greatly affect China's approach towards Iraq. Although there are rumors that the elections will be postponed in Iraq, the government that will be formed after the parliamentary elections scheduled for June 6, 2021, is likely to need Chinese investment to keep Iraq's economy alive and to want to maintain economic relations with China. In the same way, tensions between the two countries are not expected to affect China's priorities in the region unless the US-Iran conflict turns into a hot conflict affecting the whole region.

Considering both the economic focus of China's presence and the priorities of the USA in the region, the US administration has two possible expectations for the acceleration of China-Iraq relations.

Firstly, the incoming Biden administration can be expected to take no preventive stance against the increasing Chinese influence in

the region. Joe Biden, referred to as the heir to the Obama administration, is expected to appoint key names of American foreign policy of the period 2008-2016, or names with the vision of those names, to the new administration. This group considers that the Middle East, Europe and Africa regions are of secondary importance and believes that military, political, diplomatic and economic resources should be concentrated in the southeast and East Asian regions.<sup>21</sup> In addition, although China's strengthening of economic relations with Iraq has played an important role in Baghdad's economic survival, China has traditionally had a low profile in the region and remained timid, especially on security and military issues. In other words, it is predictable that the USA will not be an alternative to Chinese investment due to the international economic and political priorities of the USA, and the economic focus of China's presence in Iraq. This, in turn, indicates an increase in China-Iraq economic cooperation in the coming years.

Secondly, and alternatively, an increase in American investment in Iraq can be observed when the Biden administration comes to power. President Biden may concentrate the investment power of European countries in Iraq and the Middle East to balance the Chinese economic power by revitalizing the Atlantic alliance that had been weakened under the Trump administration. At this stage, the economic activities of European countries in the region may gain momentum with the growing US leadership. The most important signs of such a future are the French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Iraq and the award of the reconstruction tender of Mosul Airport to French companies.<sup>22</sup> In short, the US adminis-

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<sup>21</sup> This stance, which came to the forefront in the second term of President Obama, has been mentioned in the literature as Obama's "Asian Pivot". See: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>

<sup>22</sup> John Lee, "French Firm Approved to Rehabilitate Mosul Airport", *Iraq Business News*, 2020, Accessed on January 7, 2021.

Indeed, contacts between the ministries of the two countries increased in 2020 compared to previous years, and progress was made in cooperation between Iraq and Russia, particularly in the military field.

tration may deepen the economic dimension of China-US rivalry in the near future by redefining the historic Atlantic alliance system and mobilizing the capital of European countries for the Middle East. Such an attitude could lead the Iraqi administration to rethink the steps it has taken on relations with China and to balance Chinese dependence with European and US capital.<sup>23</sup> The reactions to Abdul-Mahdi's visit to China in Iraqi domestic politics and the claims that the Abdul-Mahdi government resigned because of this visit indicate the presence of groups in Iraq who are positive towards this search for balance.

### **IRAQ-RUSSIA RELATIONS**

Relations between Russia and Iraq were strengthened during the years of the fight against the terrorist organization ISIS, and different Iraqi governments attached importance to Russia's role in clearing ISIS from the region. In recent years, relations between the two countries have expanded and there have been developments in the economic and military fields. There are indications that this cooperation has an opportunity to develop during the Kadhimi gov-

ernment, albeit small. Indeed, contacts between the ministries of the two countries increased in 2020 compared to previous years, and progress was made in cooperation between Iraq and Russia, particularly in the military field.<sup>24</sup>

Correspondingly, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov met in Moscow on November 25, 2020. During the talks, the two countries' attitudes towards problems in the region and steps to be taken to improve bilateral relations were discussed. After the talks, both ministers stated that cooperation on oil sales and military technology sharing would be improved. Both Hussein and Lavrov stated that they were in favor of diplomatic and political means to improve bilateral relations, as well as to solve problems in the region. At the end of the negotiations, an agreement was reached to sign 14 agreements in 2021 in the fields of education, health, oil trade and transportation that would support the cooperation between the two countries. It is predicted that these agreements will make it easier for Russian companies to invest in Iraq.

<sup>23</sup> At this point, it should be noted that China will continue to be the biggest actor in the oil markets according to the industrial and economic growth projections today, and the steps to be taken by the rival countries will not decrease China's interest in Iraqi oil. However, the steps taken by the North Atlantic alliance in the near future may lead to a more balanced Iraq-China economic cooperation.

<sup>24</sup> "Foreign Minister Sergey 'Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq Fuad Hussein, Moscow, November 25, 2020", The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of The Russian Federation, 2020, Accessed on January 8, 2021.

As for ensuring Iraq's internal security, Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that Russia supported steps taken by the Kadhimi government to bring stability to Iraq and neutralize radical terrorist elements. Lavrov even stated that they were ready to meet any demand for Russian-made military products to meet the needs of Iraqi security forces in this fight. In connection with this, it was announced that Iraqi Defense Minister Jumaah Enad would visit Russia in the near term to coordinate the necessary needs. On the other hand, an agreement was reached on the continuation of the activities such as training Iraqi security forces and sharing intelligence between the two countries, which began in previous years for the fight against ISIS.

Although both ministers wish to increase the opportunities to develop bilateral rela-

tions after the last visit, it would be wrong to say that Russia can carry its political investments in Iraq beyond the current level. The presence of Iran and the USA on the territory of Iraq and the tensions between these two countries leave Russia no room for action worth its political and military investments. Therefore, outside the economic sphere, cooperation between Iraq and Russia seems to be limited, especially to sales of weapons and military technology, military training and intelligence sharing.<sup>25</sup> Russia must restrict its military activities in the region, especially due to its presence in Syria. In other words, the future of Russia's political and military activities in Iraq does not seem to be set to evolve as an alternative to the Iranian or US presence in the region in the near term.

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Bodner, "What was Russia's Putin up to After the Death Of Iran's Soleimani?", Defense News, 2020, Accessed on January 5, 2021

## CONCLUSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR 2021

Within the framework of the above-mentioned developments and principles, it can be suggested that Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi will try to maintain the balance adopted in foreign policy and the approach of not being a party to any axis until the early elections to be held on June 6, 2021. The most important issue that can force Mustafa al-Kadhimi to implement such a foreign policy approach will be the re-escalation of US-Iranian tension. Because the assassination of Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis by the USA on January 3, 2020, and installation of air defense systems on bases where its troops are stationed and at the Baghdad embassy, without consulting the Iraqi authorities, have shown that the United States acts unilaterally in its security policies in Iraq. Similarly, Iranian-linked militia groups in Iraq have carried out rocket attacks throughout the year targeting the U.S. military presence in the country. Although Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, who found support from both the United States and Iran in the process of forming a government, stated that he would not allow Iraq to be an area where regional actors have a reckoning with each other, the initiatives in this regard seem to be in the hands of the USA and Iran, which have significant influence and power in the country. Hence, preventing US unilateralism on the one hand, and preventing Iran from intervening in Iraq's internal affairs with various mechanisms, especially through militia forces, on the other hand, will constitute Mustafa al-Kadhimi's most important challenge in 2021. In this sense, it seems possible for Iraq to continue its foreign policy approach based on balance and cooperation in 2021. It can be expected that this balance

will lead to different approaches on a global and regional basis for Iraq.

The attitude of the new US administration will be decisive in the future of China-Iraq relations. China's need for Iraqi oil will not decrease anytime soon, and Iraq's need for Chinese investment is critical for its fragile economy. At this point, how much the Biden administration will care about the Middle East dimension of the China-USA rivalry will be decisive. President Biden's mobilization of the capital of North Atlantic allies for this purpose will have a positive effect on the Iraqi administration's balancing of Chinese dependence without eliminating the Chinese alternative for Iraq.

For 2021 and the short-term future, it can be said that the potential has been reached in Russia-Iraq relations, which both sides are satisfied with. It would not be right to say that Russia's political and economic activity in Iraq will go beyond the level achieved in 2020 in the coming year. This is due to the fact that the investments of other major actors in the region in Iraq are far more extensive than Russia, and Russia's influence in Iraq is limited.

On the other hand, it may be possible that Iraq will continue its cooperation efforts with Arab countries. Likewise, it is possible that Iraq will continue its balance policy and pursue cooperation with neighboring countries. It can be expected that Iraq will continue to take steps towards creating a balanced relationship, particularly in relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Plans for a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council meeting between Turkey and Iraq, the last of which was held in Baghdad in January 2017, to be held in Iraq again in 2021, could re-accelerate a development of Turkey-Iraq relations.







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