



# QATAR AND THE UAE JOINING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT: MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS

WATHEQ\_AL-SADOON



## Copyright

Ankara - TURKEY ORSAM © 2024



Content of this publication is copyrighted to ORSAM. Except reasonable and partial quotation and use under the Act No. 5846, Law on Intellectual and Artistic Works, via proper citation, the content may not be used or re-published without prior permission by ORSAM. The views expressed in this publication reflect only the opinions of its authors and do not represent the institutional opinion of ORSAM.

**Publication Date:** 14 May 2024

### Center for Middle Eastern Studies

**Address** : Mustafa Kemal Mah. 2128 Sk. No: 3 Çankaya, ANKARA  
**Phone** : +90 850 888 15 20  
**Email** : info@orsam.org.tr  
**Photos** : Anadolu Ajansı (AA)

According to the second paragraph of Article 5 of the Regulation on Banderole Application Procedures and Principles, the use of banderole for this publication is not compulsory.

# QATAR AND THE UAE JOINING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT: MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS

## About the Author

### ■ **Watheq Al-Sadoon**

Director of the Arabic Studies Department at ORSAM since 2020. Iraq Studies expert at ORSAM since 2015. A faculty member on the permanent staffing at the University of Mosul in Iraq from 2008-2018. Senior researcher in the Regional Studies Centre at the University of Mosul, 2008-2018. A visiting faculty member in the College of Political Science at the University of Mosul from 2008-2017. Holds a Ph.D. in the History of International Relations, and a Master's degree in Strategic and Military Science. His research interests focus on Iraq and Middle East affairs, as well as the security dimension of international and regional relations. He wrote the books "Weakness and Strength Factors in Iraqi-Turkish Modern Relations" in 2017 and "The security dimension in Contemporary Iraqi-Turkish relations" in 2014. His joint books, "Political Decision Making in the Arab Gulf Countries" in 2013, "Studies in Contemporary Caucasus History" in 2011, and "Iraq and Arab Gulf Countries" in 2010. He has more than 30 research papers published in Iraqi, Arab, and Turkish journals and tens of articles published in periodicals, newspapers, and websites. He obtained a research fellowship and scholarship to cover a research programme from the Institute of International Education (IIE) in New York 2014-2017. He is certified as a political analyst at TRT Arabi TV and Anadolu News Agency.

# CONTENTS



- 3** INTRODUCTION
- 5** THE ROLE OF DIPLOMACY IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT
- 10** BENEFITS OF QATAR AND THE UAE JOINING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT
- 14** QATAR AND THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD
- 16** UAE AND THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD
- 18** CONCLUSION



## INTRODUCTION

**T**he highlight on the economic agenda of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Iraq on April 22, 2024, was the signing of a quadrilateral MOU between Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the UAE for cooperation in the 'Development Road' and 'Grand Faw Port' projects. The MOU entails the signing countries committing to establishing the necessary frameworks to implement both projects.

The Grand Faw Port and the Development Road are interconnected projects with intertwined destinies. The economic feasibility of each project depends entirely on the completion of the other. It is planned that these two projects will be the main elements of a new corridor for global trade and economy, connecting Asia and Europe through railways and modern transportation routes to be constructed, extending from the Grand Faw Port and other Iraqi ports to Turkish territories. The

Turkish territories and ports are envisioned to become the new gateway for Asian trade to Europe, originating from Iraqi ports and territories. Similarly, Iraq would serve as the new gateway for European trade to Asia, starting with Türkiye.

The Turkish and Iraqi governments are engaging positively and earnestly with the Development Road project, with a noticeable increase in official visits and meetings regarding this matter. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani and relevant Iraqi officials speak with great optimism and confidence about the future of this project. Al-Sudani stated during the Development Road conference in 2023: 'We see in this project a cornerstone for a non-oil sustainable economy and a knot of connectivity serving Iraq's neighbours and the region, as well as an important step in the path of economic integration efforts'.

The Turkish government, on its part, has been treating this project with great importance and enthusiasm since its inception. President Erdogan stated in mid-February 2024, from aboard his plane returning from his visit to Egypt, 'This project will become a new Silk Road for the region and serve regional peace'.

The participation of Qatar and the UAE, two countries with strong economies, in the

agreements and understandings between Iraq and Türkiye regarding the Development Road project will give this project new momentum and a strong push forward in its implementation paths. Moreover, this step has dispelled many doubts that were raised about the future of this project and increased the level of confidence in its feasibility. So, what are the motivations for these two countries to join this project? And what are the benefits of their joining the project?

## THE ROLE OF DIPLOMACY IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT



In April 2010, the Iraqi government (at that time) laid the foundation stone for the Grand Faw Port project, aiming to construct a commercial port on the coast of the city of Faw, located in the Basra Province in southern Iraq, overlooking the northern Gulf. It was planned to be the largest port in the Gulf and one of the world's major ports. The estimated cost of this project at that time was around \$5 billion, with an estimated completion time of 4-5 years. However, this project faced delays from 2010 to 2021 due to several intertwined internal factors, including economic, security, and political issues. By 2021, only the "Western Breakwater" had been completed, executed by the Greek company "Archirodon," which entered the Guinness World Records as the longest breakwater in the world at 14.52 kilometres<sup>1</sup>, in addition to some rockfill works carried out by the South Korean company "Daewoo".

The real breakthrough for the Grand Faw Port project occurred on December 30, 2020, when the Iraqi government signed a contract worth \$2.62 billion with the South Korean company Daewoo to complete the first stage of this project within 4 years. The conceptual design of the Grand Faw Port project, after completing all its phases, includes several world-class maritime facilities, the most important of which are <sup>2</sup>:

- 50 container berths with a length of 17 kilometres and a capacity of 25 million TEUs (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units) annually.
- 20 bulk berths for non-containerised cargo with a length of 5 kilometres and a capacity of 50 million tonnes annually.
- 20 general cargo berths with a length of 5 kilometres.

1 "Longest breakwater", Guinness World Records, 02 April 2020.

2 Watheq Al-Sadoon, "Grand Faw Port and the Dry Canal Project: Partnership Opportunities Between Türkiye and Iraq," TRT Arabic, December 26, 2022.

**Türkiye and Iraq realised that the race for global economic corridors is a new pattern of global and regional geopolitical competition/struggle.**

- A RO-RO (Roll-On/Roll-Off) berth for loading and unloading vehicles with a capacity of 400,000 cars annually.
- 6 oil product terminals with a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day, along with tanks for oil product imports with a capacity of 300,000 cubic metres.

It is well known that the activity and liquidity of global trade increase annually, and in the context of the transformation that began in global supply chains with the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions have spread in political, economic, and intellectual circles worldwide about the need to find a new corridor for global trade between Asia and Europe, parallel to the Suez Canal. The seriousness of this issue increased after the incident of the blockage of the Suez Canal and the suspension of maritime navigation for a week in March 2021, due to the grounding of the container ship "Ever Given," which resulted in the formation of a long queue of ships in the canal consisting of about 150 ships waiting for the problem to be resolved<sup>3</sup>. Then, the process of change accelerated in the logistics map of the Middle East due to the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian

war that began in February 2022.

In May 2023, Iraq officially announced the launch of the "Development Road" project during a conference held in Baghdad at that time. The conference was attended by government delegations concerned with transportation affairs from Türkiye, Iran, Syria, Jordan, and all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The project aims to establish a new trade and economic corridor connecting Asia and Europe by constructing a 1200-kilometre network of railways and modern transportation routes passing through 10 Iraqi provinces. These routes will link the Grand Faw Port to Turkish territories. The estimated cost of this project is \$17 billion, and it will be completed in three phases, with the first stage ending in 2028, the second in 2033, and the third in 2050.

At the 18th summit of the G20, held in New Delhi in September 2023, a new global economic corridor project was announced, connecting India to the Middle East and then to Europe, named IMEC. The main partners in this project, according to the announcement, are India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, France, Italy, Germany, and the United States. However, US President

<sup>3</sup> "Suez Canal: Suspension of Navigation in the Waterway and Owner Company of the Stranded Ship Apologizes for Disrupting Trade Movement," BBC News Arabic, March 24, 2021.



Joe Biden mentioned in his remarks during the announcement of this project that it would connect India to the UAE, then to Saudi Arabia, then to Jordan, then to Israel, and finally to Europe. Additionally, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the project a day after its announcement, affirming that Israeli ports would be a key station in this global economic corridor.

President Erdogan stated from aboard his plane on his way back from the G20 summit in India, commenting on Türkiye's exclusion from the IMEC project: "There is no corridor without Türkiye. Türkiye is a significant base for production and trade. The most appropriate route for traffic from east to west should pass through Türkiye. The crucial step in this process is the step taken by the Gulf countries with us. We are talking about a corridor, a route to Europe through Iraq, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and through Türkiye".<sup>4</sup>

After being excluded from the IMEC project, Türkiye and Iraq realised that the race for global economic corridors is a new pattern of global and regional geopolitical competition/struggle. They understood that the Middle East region, as usual, has become the main arena for this new phase of competi-

tion/struggle. The IMEC project threatens the economic viability of both projects, the Grand Faw Port and the Development Channel.

Therefore, the announcement of the IMEC project served as an incentive for Türkiye and Iraq to work together with greater seriousness and determination to complete the Grand Faw Port and Development Channel projects. Especially since President Biden, during the announcement of the IMEC project at the New Delhi summit, estimated the time required for its completion at ten years, while the first stage of the Grand Faw Port project is supposed to be completed by the end of 2024 and the first stage of the Development Channel project by 2028.

Turkish and Iraqi diplomats have adopted promotional campaigns for the Development Road project to attract new partners from the region. This is because the project is strategic, with high costs on the one hand, and to enhance confidence in the future of the project on the other. These diplomatic campaigns have focused on informing potential regional partners about the comparative advantages of the Development Road project compared to other global economic corridors.

**Turkish and Iraqi diplomats have adopted promotional campaigns for the Development Road project to attract new partners from the region. This project is strategic with high costs.**

4 Burhanettin DURAN, "G20 Yeni Delhi Zirvesi ve Erdoğan'ın uçaktaki mülakati", SABAH, 12 Eylül 2023.

In the Development Channel project, goods transported from Asia to Europe require only one shipping process at Asian ports, followed by one unloading process at the Port of Faw and another at their final destination in Europe. Whereas, in the IMEC project, such goods require shipping in Asia, followed by unloading at ports in the UAE, then shipping from ports in Israel, and finally unloading in Europe.

After the outbreak of war in October 2023, the risks to maritime navigation through the Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Red Sea increased, making the Suez Canal route less desirable for global shipping companies. Instead, they began turning to the Cape of Good Hope route. Ships departing from China pass through the Cape of Good Hope and arrive in London in about 45 days instead of the usual 35 days, resulting in approximately a 30% increase in costs and a significant time difference. Additionally, insurance costs for ships using this route increased significantly. Therefore, if the Development Channel project is completed, the 45 days will be reduced to 25 days, also reducing costs<sup>5</sup>. These facts reinforce the belief that the Development Channel is the best and shortest option for establishing a global economic corridor parallel to the Suez Canal.

Two days later, after returning from the 18th G20 Summit in India, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan made important statements regarding the Development Road project, revealing the Turkish diplomatic orientations on this issue. According to Anadolu Agency, during a joint press conference held on September 13, 2023, with his British counterpart

James Cleverly, who was on an official visit to Ankara at the time, Fidan announced "intensive discussions between Türkiye, the UAE, Qatar, and Iraq regarding the Development Road project." Fidan also pointed out that "economic corridors do not only mean meeting trade requirements, but they also reflect geostrategic competition." He said, "When we look at the recently signed IMEC project at the G20 Summit in India, we see doubts among experts about its primary goal, rationality, and efficiency, and these doubts are more related to geostrategic concerns." Fidan revealed that President Erdogan discussed the Development Road project with the leaders participating in the G20 Summit during the meetings held with them during that summit. Fidan stated that Türkiye is currently deeply engaged in the Development Road project, and he mentioned that President Erdogan agreed with his Emirati counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, during a meeting at the G20 Summit, to complete the final official procedures for partnership in this project within a few months, at least in terms of drafting it on paper and putting it into effect. Fidan clarified that Türkiye informed the Iraqi side about the contents of this meeting<sup>6</sup>.

The Iraqi government began promoting the Development Road project following a visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani to Ankara in March 2023. This was followed by the organisation of a regional conference in Baghdad to officially announce the launch of the project on May 27, 2023, attended by transportation ministers from neighbouring countries. According to a report published in *The National*, an English-language Emirati newspaper, an Iraqi

5 Kemal Ozturk, "Turkish Minister of Transport speaks to Al Jazeera Net about the strategic importance of the Development Road", *Al Jazeera*, May 8, 2024.

6 "Turkish Foreign Minister: Holding Intensive Talks with Arab Countries Regarding the Development Road Project", *TRT Arabic*, September 14, 2023.

government official (whose name was not mentioned in the report) stated the following: "During the Baghdad conference on the Development Road project in May 2023, only delegations from Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia expressed interest in this project and wanted to verify all the details through their inquiries, mainly concerning technical and financial issues." The same official stated: "After the conference, only Qatar and the UAE continued to communicate with the Iraqi side and

sent their delegations to Baghdad to discuss this project," explaining: "They were serious, unlike others, especially after they witnessed significant progress in railway designs, highways, and soil testing." The same official revealed: "Several meetings were held among the four countries - Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the UAE - during 2023 regarding this project," and the Iraqi official reported: "Türkiye played a role in including the UAE and Qatar in the Development Road project"<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Neil Halligan & Sinan Mahmoud, "What is Iraq's Development Road and will it challenge US and China trade routes?", *The National/Business*, Apr 26, 2024.

## BENEFITS OF QATAR AND THE UAE JOINING THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT



Photo from the signing ceremony of the quadrilateral memorandum of understanding between Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates for cooperation on the "Development Road" and the "Grand Faw Port" projects at the Government Palace in Baghdad during President Erdogan's visit to Iraq on April 22, 2024.

When the Iraqi government launched the Development Road project, it estimated its initial cost at \$17 billion and presented three financing options. The first option was for the Iraqi government to finance the project solely from its general budget; observers dismissed the Iraqi government's ability to do so, given the significant deficit in the Iraqi general budget.

The second option involves partnerships between the Iraqi government and the private sector, which also faces the challenge of raising the necessary funds for this high-cost strategic project, given the diminished capabilities and role of the private sector in the Iraqi economy after 2003.

The third option proposed financing through investment from a group of global companies in partnership with local entities from the Iraqi public and private sectors. This option is the most logical solution for implementing the project within the designated

timeframes for its stages. This option became feasible after Türkiye declared itself a principal partner in the Development Road project and after Qatar and the UAE announced their participation in the agreements and understandings regarding the implementation of this project. The economic capabilities and expertise of these three countries are highly advanced. Turkish companies and banks, in the public and private sectors, are qualified to play an active role in implementing this project. Similarly, Qatar and the UAE possess strong, efficient, and dynamic economies, with successful investments globally and regionally.

The UAE ranks second among Arab countries (after Saudi Arabia) in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), estimated at \$507 billion, and second in per capita GDP, averaging \$50,000. Qatar ranks fifth among Arab countries in GDP, estimated at \$236 billion, but ranks first in per capita GDP, averaging \$81,000<sup>8</sup>.

8 Sameh Al-Siddiq, "Qatar ranks first among Arab countries in per capita Gross GDP" - Al Arab Newspaper, December 31st, 2023.

The International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Switzerland annually releases a report to assess the economies of countries based on their efficiency in managing their resources to achieve prosperity for their people. This report covers 64 countries and is called the annual World Competitiveness Yearbook. The methodology for preparing this report relies on surveys (business leaders' opinions) accounting for 33.33% and statistical data accounting for 66.67%. The report classifies countries based on four main axes, including economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency, and infrastructure. Under these axes, there are 20 sub-axes in the report covering 334 indicators. In the 2023 World Competitiveness Yearbook, the UAE ranked tenth globally, while Qatar ranked twelfth globally<sup>9</sup>.

These encouraging indicators about the Qatari and Emirati economies highlight the importance of these two countries joining the partnership in the Development Road project and the expected positive effects of this step on financing this project.

In the context of regional policies, the joining of Qatar and the UAE to the Development Road project, where the two countries are known for their successful economic planning, will give a positive impression of the project's feasibility and returns. This will encourage other Gulf countries to join the project as well, either out of economic competitiveness or to enhance their interests. Saudi Arabia remains another potential partner for the project. Türkiye seeks to persuade Saudi Arabia of the importance of investing in this project without conflicting with Saudi Arabia's partnership with the United States in the IMEC

project, similar to what the UAE has done.

What further increases the expectation of Saudi Arabia joining the Development Road project is the announcement by the Saudi government in 2023 of plans to construct a railway line from the Red Sea to northern Iraq, to transport pilgrims to the holy lands in the Hijaz. This railway line could be part of the Development Road. Saudi Arabia might join the Development Road project for geopolitical reasons as well, related to balancing Iranian influence in Iraq<sup>10</sup>.

Six days after Qatar and the UAE announced the joining of the Development Road project, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shiaa Al-Sudani visited Saudi Arabia on April 28, 2024, to participate in the World Economic Forum in Riyadh. Upon Al-Sudani's arrival in Saudi Arabia, Iraqi government spokesman Bassam Al-Awadi announced that Al-Sudani would meet with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Amir of Kuwait, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and a group of international companies. Al-Awadi highlighted the main topics discussed by Al-Sudani with these leaders, stating: "The Iraqi Prime Minister carries in his briefcase the Development Road project, considering it the most accurate expression of the forum's theme (international cooperation, growth, and energy for development)." Additionally, Kuwaiti deputies expressed their dismay on April 24 about the "exclusion" of Kuwait from the Development Road project, considering that the political instability in Kuwait had hindered developmental projects in the country, resulting in significant losses across various levels, especially economically<sup>11</sup>.

9 "The report of the World Competitiveness Yearbook issued by the International Institute for Management Development", Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs in the United Arab Emirates.

10 Neil Halligan & Sinan Mahmoud. Op.cit.

11 "Saudi Arabia Hosts Al-Sudani... Joining the Development Road through the World Economic Forum Gateway" - Info Plus, April 28, 2024.

**Iran's stance towards the Development Road project will be a crucial test for all the regional cooperation slogans adopted by Iran in its official discourse to the region.**

Qatar and the UAE's participation in the Development Road project will help alleviate the "phobia" of "Iranian dominance over Iraq," which has been the main factor in Gulf and Arab countries avoiding investment in the Iraqi economy and preventing their companies from operating in the Iraqi market. Iran's final stance towards the Development Road project cannot be determined, but given the current regional and international circumstances, it can be expected that Iran will not obstruct the completion of this project or the participation of more regional countries in it, for several reasons, the most important of which are:

Firstly, the growth of the Iraqi economy is currently in Iran's interest. Iraq has become Iran's economic lifeline due to the sanctions imposed by the United States and the West on Iran. After the repercussions of the war in Gaza and the recent armed actions carried out by Iran and its proxies against Israel, the United States, and the West, it is expected that these sanctions will continue for a longer period against Iran.

Secondly, the Iranian economy itself would benefit from the Development Road project if Iran dealt with it based on principles of integration rather than competition or conflict. There are currently two prevailing opinions in decision-making circles and the public opinion in Iran regarding the Development Road project:

The first view looks positively at the returns of completing and operating this project, expecting an increase in the volume and movement of Iranian foreign trade. The second view is negative, considering the Grand Faw Port project will diminish the importance of Iranian ports in the Gulf and that the Development Road will undermine Iran's significance in other international corridors, which connect Asia and Europe through Iran and Türkiye, or connect the Gulf countries to Europe via Iran and then Türkiye, or connect the Gulf countries to Central Asia and the Caucasus through Iran.

Thirdly, the four countries currently engaged in the project have significant considerations for Iranian foreign policies

- Iraq: It holds the utmost geopolitical importance for Iran, and Iran's official discourse "alleges" support for Iraq's stability and prosperity.
- Türkiye: It holds regional significance equivalent to Iran in terms of power and influence. Iran avoids any direct confrontation with Türkiye and delegates such matters to its proxies in the region when necessary. Iran "alleges" support for cooperation and coordination of regional policies and positions with Türkiye.

- Qatar: It is now politically and economically close to Iran. Relations between the two countries have grown, reaching an advanced stage of convergence, especially during the crisis between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours from 2017 to 2021.
- The UAE: It is Iran's second-largest trading partner after China, with a volume of trade exchange between Iran and the UAE totaling around \$34 billion.

Fourthly, the completion of the Grand Faw Port and the Development Road projects has become a national demand, supported by most Iraqi people of all sects and ethnicities. If Iran or its proxies attempt to obstruct these projects, they will lose much of their popularity and soft power in Iraq.

Iran's stance towards the Development Road project will be a crucial test for all the regional cooperation slogans adopted by Iran in its official discourse addressed to the countries and peoples of the region.

## QATAR AND THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD



The visit of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, to Iraq in June 2023.

Qatar expressed early interest in participating in the Development Road project. During his visit to Iraq on May 15, 2023, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, signed several economic agreements between the two countries, the most important of which included expanding the prospects of investment and trade cooperation, especially in the Development Road project. Additionally, they aimed to enhance investment and economic cooperation in the energy sector, including oil, gas, and renewable energy.

During that visit, three Qatari companies signed agreements with the Iraqi National Investment Commission to implement projects in Iraq worth \$9.5 billion. The Qatari company "Urbacon" signed an agreement to build two power stations in Iraq for \$2.5 billion. The Qatari company "Estithmar" signed three memoranda of understanding with the Iraqi side worth \$7 billion to manage hospitals, develop two new cities with a modern integrated

model, and build a chain of new 5-star hotels.

One month after that visit, in July 2023, the state-owned Qatar Energy Company acquired a 25% stake in a contract signed between the Iraqi Ministry of Oil and the French company "Total Energies" for projects to develop and increase oil, gas, and renewable energy production, worth \$27 billion. This contract is considered one of the largest energy contracts in Iraq's history<sup>12</sup>.

From these economic agreements between Qatar and Iraq, it is evident that Qatar's interest in investing in the Iraqi arena focuses on the energy, infrastructure, housing, and services sectors. Therefore, we can infer the main motives for Qatar's participation in the Development Road project:

Firstly, to enhance the economic agreements and understandings that Qatar had made with Iraq before joining the Development Road project.

12 "Iraq... Signing a \$27 Billion Energy Agreement with Total," AL Jazeera, July 10, 2023.



Secondly, to capitalise on the facilities of the Grand Faw Port and the transportation network of the Development Road as a new outlet for exporting Qatari oil and gas (even if in limited quantities) to Europe, through Iraqi and then Turkish territories, thus mitigating the impact of tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Suez Canal on Qatar's energy exports. Perhaps in the future, Qatar might encourage its partners in the Development Road project to establish pipelines for transporting oil and gas from the Gulf states along the same route as the Development Road.

Thirdly, there is the opportunity to capitalise on investment prospects in the infrastructure, housing, and services sectors that the Development Road project will present. Especially considering that the Development

Road will not solely be a network of highways and railways but will also involve the establishment of industrial cities near this route and new residential cities located at least 10 to 20 kilometres away from major urban centres. These cities will accommodate a large population, addressing the housing crisis in Iraq caused by population density. Additionally, there are plans to construct 15 modern railway stations for freight and passengers along the line, stretching from Basra in the south, through Baghdad, and reaching the Turkish border.

Fourthly, undoubtedly, the strategic partnership between Qatar and Türkiye, and Qatar's trust in Türkiye's policies and stances were significant motives that prompted Qatar to participate in the Development Road project.

## UAE AND THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD



The meeting between President Erdogan and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the President of the United Arab Emirates, took place at the G20 Summit in India in September 2023.

After the announcement of the UAE's participation in signing a memorandum of understanding and cooperation regarding the Development Road project, a question arises: How will the UAE participate in the Development Road project while being a key partner in the IMEC project? Many consider these two projects to be competing, if not contradictory!

To understand the UAE's policy towards the Development Road and IMEC projects, it is essential to note that one project does not necessarily lead to the hindrance of the other. These global economic corridors will serve as diverse products with the same purpose, available to global exporters and importers. Preference among them will depend on transportation costs, the quality of logistic services provided in each corridor component (such as ports, railways, highways, etc.), and the degree of efficiency in terms of effort and time required for cargo transportation, as well as the degree of protection of goods from weather factors and damage during shipping and unloading operations. The UAE's pres-

ence as a station on both corridor routes will be an economic advantage for this country.

On the other hand, the recent conflict in Gaza revealed the extent of security risks threatening the presumed part of the IMEC corridor in Israel.

One day after the conclusion of the 18th G20 summit in India, UAE Minister of State Khalifa Shaheen Almarar visited Iraq on September 12, 2023. During his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani, Minister Almarar expressed his country's "serious" desire to participate in the Development Road project. This visit represents a rapid Emirati response to the understandings reached between President Erdogan and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed regarding the Development Road project during their meeting at the 18th G20 summit in India. This swift response reflects the level of trust and the positive nature of the current relations between Türkiye and the UAE. It's an important example of the ability of common economic interests to shape regional relations.

The motivations for the UAE to join the Development Road project are diverse and varied. On one hand, it shares with Qatar the goal of benefiting from the opportunities that this project will provide for investment in the energy, infrastructure, housing, and services sectors. On the other hand, there are some steps that the UAE took before joining the Development Road project, indicating an additional incentive: seeking to leverage the project to expand its investments in the maritime sector. This includes operating ports, commercial and leisure maritime transport, cruise ship terminals, and fishing.

On April 4th, 2024, the Abu Dhabi Ports Group, owned by the Emirati government, signed a preliminary agreement with the General Company for Iraqi Ports (which manages all Iraq's ports) to invest in the management and operation of Iraqi ports, economic zones, and associated infrastructure in various cities in Iraq, foremost among them being the large port of Al-Faw. Under this agreement, the two parties will develop a joint operational policy for the Al-Faw port, including forming partnerships with major international shipping lines, to achieve the project's objectives. The

Abu Dhabi Ports Group has investments in the maritime and port sectors in more than 40 countries across different continents worldwide, in addition to its significant stakes in major global maritime transportation companies. It is also the primary operator of industrial cities and free trade zones in Abu Dhabi <sup>13</sup>.

In recent years, the UAE has notably focused on expanding its foreign investments in the maritime transport and port sectors to enhance its national income sources. Both Abu Dhabi Ports and DP World (Dubai's port company) have been leading these efforts. In the same context, the UAE sees the Development Road project as a significant opportunity to develop its tourism sector as well. Some economic analyses indicate that the UAE aims to leverage the modern transportation network planned in the project to attract more European tourists to the UAE. This would involve transporting them from Europe to Iraqi ports via modern trains and then ferrying them to the UAE using tourist ships and ferries. This is one of the reasons why the UAE is interested in investing in Iraqi ports. In 2023, Dubai welcomed 17.15 million international visitors <sup>14</sup>.

---

13 Alkesh Sharma, "AD Ports joins Iraq to develop Al Faw Grand port and its economic zone", The National/Business, Apr 03, 2024.

14 "Dubai Soars to New Heights with Record-Breaking 17.15 Million International Visitors in 2023," Dubai Government Media



Construction Works Continue at the Grand Faw Port Project in Basra, Southern Iraq.

## CONCLUSION

The participation of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the Development Road project will contribute to overcoming the financial, political, and security obstacles that may hinder its completion, as well as opening up new horizons for the future of this project and adding new dimensions to it.

When this project was launched, its primary idea was to create a new passage for global trade. However, with the participation of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates and the possibility of additional partners from the region joining, this project will evolve into a new corridor for transporting global energy resources. It will become a new global hub for exchanging industry, logistics, construction, infrastructure development, and service expertise. Additionally, it will serve as a new route for the global tourism movement and a new avenue for cultural and civilizational exchange between the peoples of the region and the world. The Development Road project will become a project for achieving regional security and stability.

These significant strategic objectives of the Development Road project and the great benefits that will accrue to the peoples of the participating countries require commitments and impose responsibilities on the partner states to formulate their economic, political, and security policies in service of the goals of this project. This applies to both their domestic and foreign policies.

The largest and most crucial part of these commitments and responsibilities falls on Iraq, as it is the fundamental basis of this project. Its ports and territories are the main stations for this global corridor, and the security, stability, and protection of its economy from internal political interventions are the keys to the success of this project. Therefore, Iraq is required to achieve the necessary security, political, and social conditions to accomplish this project, as well as to implement advanced reforms in financial, tax, and customs systems in Iraq to meet the requirements of completing the Development Road project.





 [www.orsam.org.tr](http://www.orsam.org.tr)

    [orsamorgtr](https://www.youtube.com/orsamorgtr)