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THE CURRENT TRAJECTORIES OF TURKISH-IRAQI RELATIONS: NEW PROSPECTS IN CONFRONTING OLD OBSTACLES

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INTRODUCTION

The relations between Türkiye and Iraq have always been of imperative importance to both countries, neither of which can afford to neglect or insufficiently care about it. For Türkiye, there are three main motivations for paying attention to and interacting with developments in Iraq. Firstly, there are historical and geographical considerations. Turks and Iraqis have lived together within the framework of one state for nearly a thousand years (the Seljuk Empire, the Ottoman Empire), and they are now neighboring countries with 378 kilometers of shared borders. This heritage is supposed to lay the groundwork for distinguished cooperative paths in their relations. The second motivation is the merit of power, Türkiye is currently a regional power in addition to being an industrial, commercial, and agricultural country. It constantly seeks opportunities for partnership and economic cooperation with regional

states within a win-win framework. Iraq is a rich country but needs everything; all sectors of the Iraqi economy and its current infrastructure require rebuilding and reconstruction, and Türkiye finds itself qualified to participate effectively in these roles. The third motivation is the protection of Turkish national security and interests and the fight against terrorism. The Iraqi arena witnesses the presence of armed organizations that target the security and stability of Türkiye in general, and Turkish interests in Iraq in particular. Foremost among these terrorist organizations is the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is listed as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the US, the EU, and several other international entities.

As for Iraq, among all its relations with neighboring countries and the region, its relations with Türkiye represent a fateful priority, with narrow space for political maneuvers and

disputes. This is because 70% of the water flowing into Iraq originates from Turkish territory, and water is the lifeblood of any country. On the other hand, Türkiye is Iraq's gateway to Europe, both in terms of the strategic perspectives of transporting and exporting Iraqi oil and considering the unique geographical positions of both countries in global trade routes, as they together form the connecting bridge between Asia and Europe.

The Turkish political approach towards Iraq during the post-2003 years, with its challenging circumstances and crises and the successes it achieved at certain stages, represents the optimal period for studying Iraq's position in contemporary Turkish politics. This period truly embodies the most important op-

portunities and the most dangerous challenges and provides a suitable panorama for envisioning the prospects of relations between the two countries.

We can say that the Iraqi-Turkish Development Road Project is an important indicator of the promising new horizons for strategic cooperation between the two countries. In the same context, we can identify the main current obstacles to the development of Iraqi-Turkish relations in three principal issues: the deployment of the PKK in northern Iraq; the issue of water sharing between the two countries; and the issue of exporting oil from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region through Turkish territory and ports without formatting this with the central Iraqi government.

THE NATURE OF CURRENT TURKISH-IRAQI RELATIONS



Iraqi Yazidis staged a protest against the presence of terrorist organisation PKK and other illegal groups in Sinjar District of Mosul, on November 08, 2020, in Mosul, Iraq.

The history of international relations proves that formulating shared relations between neighboring states in a way that resolves all disputes, tensions, and conflicting interests between them is a default state that is difficult to achieve. True and realistic peace, security, and international compatibility are those in which countries recognize their contradictions and disputes and coexist within them. At the same time, these states seek to cooperate through various means to address problems with common dimensions and impacts. This approach can ensure increased opportunities for cooperation and communication while reducing tensions, wars, and conflicts between neighboring states.

The key common issues between Türkiye and Iraq sometimes become factors of strength that enhance relations between the two countries, and at other times, these same issues turn into weaknesses that lead to a decline in relations between them. Therefore, further political will, security, and economic endeavors by Türkiye and Iraq can reduce

the impact of weaknesses and turn them into strengths. Sustaining cooperative paths in the relations between the two countries and moving away from conflicting and confrontational paths is crucial.

On March 21, 2023, Iraqi PM Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani visited Türkiye for the first time since assuming his position in October 2022 and met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The two leaders spoke to the media about the outcomes of the meetings, understandings, and agreements reached between the two parties during that visit with a high degree of optimism. They presented to the public their vision for promising prospects for cooperation between the two countries, particularly in economic and security fields. However, two days after that visit, on March 23, Türkiye decided to suspend the export of Iraqi oil through its territory and ports. This decision came after an international arbitration tribunal ruled on the same day that Ankara must pay compensation to Baghdad for the quantities of oil exported by the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional

The nature of current relations between Türkiye and Iraq are characterized by complexity and the presence of promising opportunities for cooperation at the same time.

Government (IKRG) through Turkish territory and ports between 2014 and 2018. This ruling was based on a previous lawsuit from the central Iraqi government to that tribunal, where it deemed those oil exports illegal.

On September 18, 2023, during his participation in the 13th annual "Concordia" Summit in New York City, President Erdogan stated: "The Turkish-Iraqi Development Road Project will provide an opportunity to build a new world." On the same day, unidentified drones launched an attack on Arbat Airport in the city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq. Some of the PKK terrorists were killed in that airstrike, and side by side with three members of the anti-terrorism forces affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), were also killed. The Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesperson, Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, issued a statement condemning the attack, describing it as "a violation of Iraq's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity." Without specifying who carried out this attack in that statement. Meanwhile, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the incident, with a statement mentioned in it: "Members of the Counter-Terrorism Group affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan were training alongside members of the terrorist PYG/PKK organizations at Arbat Airport... This is a serious development that shows

the security forces affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan openly cooperated with these terrorist organizations". Two weeks after this incident, Iraqi Defense Minister Thabit Al Abbasi made an official visit to Ankara, leading a large military and security delegation. During that visit, several meetings and discussions were held between the Turkish and Iraqi sides to discuss ways to develop security and military cooperation, including in the fields of armaments and military industries.

These inconsistent trajectories of Turkish-Iraqi relations, changeable from cooperation to tension at any moment, may give the impression of instability or uncertainty in their relations. However, they show the nature of current relations between Türkiye and Iraq, which are characterized by complexity and the presence of promising opportunities for cooperation at the same time. International, and regional factors and circumstances and some Iraqi parties often placed restrictions and limitations on efforts to develop and improve relations between the two countries. The irony is that these factors largely involve foreign influences unrelated to the common interests of both countries, yet they have been capable of undermining the momentum of relations between Türkiye and Iraq and forcing them into a tunnel of rivalry and disputes.

In Iraq today, there are political lobbies with media arms that oppose any Iraqi-Turkish rapprochement, with different agendas. Some Shiite political-militant factions target Türkiye in service to Iran, so Türkiye doesn't bother Iranian influence in Iraq; some do so just for sectarian reasons. Additionally, certain Iraqi Kurdish parties and figures oppose closer ties between the two countries due to their alignment with PKK propaganda. Even among Sunni Arab politicians in Iraq, there are some vehemently criticizing Türkiye, especially those biased towards Arab nationalist ideologies or affiliated with Gulf media platforms that still target Türkiye, despite the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Arab Gulf states.

Therefore, the relations between Türkiye and Iraq need a new start, based on a genuine willingness to reassess their common interests according to a realistic and objective vision of the challenges they face and the opportunities available for cooperation. This explains the new policies pursued by the governments of both countries towards each other, which can be based on two main aims: (1) Enhancing opportunities for cooperation based on a win-win principle. (2) Containing disputes to the extent possible, not allowing them to hinder opportunities for cooperation.

In light of the above, we can say that there are predominant dynamics in current Turkish policies towards Iraq and that the best available options for Türkiye to develop its relations and protect its common interests with Iraq are crystallized by regulating the interactions of those dynamics within the balance criterion between opportunities and challenges. In this context, the optimal choices are:

1. It is certain that as the influence, spread, and activities of anti-Turkey armed organizations in northern Iraq increase, Türkiye becomes more determined and resolute in protecting its national secu-

rity and combating those organizations. Türkiye will not retreat or relent from this task. However, it is beneficial for the future of Turkish-Iraqi relations for Türkiye to increase its attention to revealing the risks posed by the presence of those armed organizations on Iraqi national security as well, and to clarify this to all segments of the Iraqi population. Additionally, it is better to balance this Turkish determination and resolve with an increased focus on political understanding with the Iraqi government and the IKRG and to increase caution against Türkiye falling into the traps set by those armed organizations to tarnish Türkiye's reputation among Iraqis.

2. The appropriate Turkish response to political lobbies opposed to it in Iraq is intensifying economic, social, and cultural initiatives that enhance rapprochement between Türkiye and the Iraqi people. Türkiye should always prioritize considering the potential reaction of the Iraqi people to any political or security step it intends to take towards Iraq. Of course, we are talking about the reaction of independent, ordinary Iraqis, not those affiliated with foreign or domestic agendas opposed to Türkiye.
3. It is beneficial for Turkish policy towards Iraq to adopt more flexibility and "strategic patience," and a policy of "crisis containment between the two countries," leading to a greater understanding of the nature and conditions of the political process in Iraq, the factors influencing that political process, the nature of international and regional competition in the Iraqi arena, and the nature of decision-making in Iraq's security sector and the actors involved in it. One of the most important requirements of flexibi-

lity is understanding the limited political and security roles of the central government in Iraq compared to the roles and capabilities of other power centers in the country.

4. When there is a setback or tension in the political or security dimension of

Turkish-Iraqi relations, Türkiye must work to avoid allowing the rest of its relations with Iraq to be affected by this tension. It should strive to ensure the continuity of relations between the two countries in economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT: ECONOMY SHAPES POLITICS AND SECURITY



A meeting between the Iraqi and Turkish Ministers of Transport in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on February 2, 2024, in the presence of officials from the two ministries, to discuss the affairs of the development road project.

Iraqi PM Al-Sudani officially announced the launch of the “Development Road” project in late May 2023 during a conference held in Baghdad at that time. The conference was attended by government delegations concerned with transportation affairs from Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. This project entails a large network of highways and high-speed railway lines (reaching up to 300 km/hour), along with a series of industrial cities on both sides of this road. It starts from the grand port of Al-Faw in southern Iraq, overlooking the Gulf, and extends to the Iraqi-Turkish border, aiming to connect Asia in general, and the Gulf region in particular, with Europe.

Through this project, Iraq aspires to become a key route for transporting goods between the Middle East and Europe. Al-Sudani stated during the “Development Road” conference that this project would be a cornerstone for Iraq’s sustainable non-oil economy and serve

Iraq’s neighbors and the region. The Iraqi government announced that the planned road will start from the grand port of Al-Faw in Basra province (southern Iraq) and traverse 10 Iraqi provinces to connect Iraq to Türkiye in the north and reach European countries. The road, stretching for 1200 km, is expected to be completed by 2028¹.

The Iraqi government says that the Development Road project will provide more than 100,000 job opportunities and generate revenues for the country of around \$4 billion annually. The final cost of completing it is estimated at \$17 billion, with \$5 billion allocated for high-speed railway lines and freight trains, and \$6.5 billion for highways. Additionally, this project will contribute to reducing the transit time for goods from the Gulf and Asia to Europe and vice versa from 30 days to just 15 days. The World Bank’s representative in Iraq, Richard Abdul Noor, said during his speech at the

¹ Fadel Al-Nashmi, “Iraq announces the development road project for land connectivity between the Gulf states and Turkey,” *Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper*, 27 May 2023.

Development Road conference in Baghdad: "Building infrastructure is essential to unlocking Iraq's geographic potential," expressing the bank's readiness to support the Development Road project. Abdul Noor also said: "Iraq needs to invest more than \$21 billion in the next five years in the transport sector alone. He mentioned that the transportation sector contributed 9% to Iraq's GDP, with an annual growth rate of 7.4% over the past ten years." It is worth noting that a railway line connecting Iraq to Berlin via Türkiye was proposed in 1903 but was not opened until 1940. During Britain's occupation of Iraq, this line was named the BBB or "Three Bs" (referring to Baghdad, Byzantium-Istanbul, and Berlin), and it passed through Syrian territories. This railway served passengers and was also used for transporting commercial goods, especially grains and petroleum products. The BBB line was closed in the late 1970s, shortly before the Iraq-Iran War. In the late 1990s, Iraq reopened the BBB line after restoring relations with Syria and Türkiye. Then, just days before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Türkiye requested that Iraq cease operations on this line².

"The Grand Faw Port" in southern Iraq and the "Development Road" project between Iraq and Türkiye are two interrelated projects built on the idea of creating a new corridor for global trade and economy connecting Asia and Europe through railways and modern transportation routes that are planned to link the Grand Faw Port with Turkish territories. This would make Turkish lands and ports the new gateway for Asian trade towards Europe, starting from Iraqi ports and territories. Similarly, Iraq would become the new gateway for

European trade towards Asia, starting in Türkiye³.

The construction of the Grand Faw Port project began with its groundbreaking ceremony in April 2010, aiming to become the largest port in the Gulf and one of the world's major ports. The project was estimated to cost around \$5 billion, with an expected completion time of 4-5 years. However, this project faced delays from 2010 to 2021 due to several interrelated factors, with corruption being at the forefront, internal political conflicts, a lack of transparency and clarity in the Iraqi government's contracts with implementing global companies, and the instability of these contracts.

On December 30, 2020, the Iraqi government signed a new contract with the South Korean company Daewoo worth \$2.62 billion to complete the first phase of this project within 4 years. The default design of the Grand Faw Port project, upon completion of all its phases, includes several maritime facilities with international standards, including:

50 container berths spanning 17 kilometers with a capacity of 25 million TEU containers annually,

20 bulk berths spanning 5 kilometers with a capacity of 50 million tons annually,

20 general cargo berths spanning 5 kilometers,

A RO-RO berth for shipping and unloading cars with a capacity of 400,000 cars annually,

6 oil product terminals with a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day and tanks for oil pro-

2 Sinan Mahmoud, "Iraq showcases \$17-billion Development Road project that will link Asia to Europe", *The National*, 27 May 2023.

3 Watheq Al-Sadoon, "The Middle East and the Race for Global Economic Corridors: Economic Competition or Geopolitical Scramble?", *ORSAM*, 14 September 2023.

duct imports with a capacity of 300,000 cubic meters⁴.

The Iraqi government, through its spokesperson, Basim Al-Awwadi, announced that the Development Road will not pass through the territories of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Instead, it will traverse Iraqi territories to reach Turkish territories through the area of "Fishkhabour."⁵ This area is a narrow border strip that connects Iraq to Türkiye outside the Kurdistan Region territories. The Iraqi government justified this for technical reasons, as the rugged geography of Kurdistan, full of mountains and valleys, would require tunneling through mountainous areas and building bridges over valleys for the network of railways and highways that will constitute the Development Channel between Iraq and Türkiye to pass through. This will add \$2 billion to the project's cost, and it will also add an extra two years to the project's completion time. It will be connected to the region's project after its completion in 2028 by land routes.

The presumed border section of the Development Road crossing from Iraq to Türkiye poses a significant challenge for both countries. It is known that this area is currently under constant threat from the PKK, if not directly under their control. They will certainly target this project during its construction or operation, as they have done with the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline over the past years. Therefore, the success of the Development Road project is inevitably linked to resolving the issue of the PKK presence in northern Iraq.

Attempting to solve the issue of the PKK presence in northern Iraq through focused discussions on its historical complexities would likely be an unfruitful endeavor. It would lead the involved parties into an endless maze of sterile debates. This problem now requires a fresh initiative to produce a realistic and objective approach to the solution. This approach should entail a strong sense of responsibility towards the potential risks of exacerbating or neglecting this problem. To mature such an initiative and turn it into a practical roadmap for solving this issue, there are important foundations that must be relied upon and emanated from. Among the most important are⁶:

1. Clearly defining the direct parties involved in this issue and responsible for finding solutions to it, namely the Turkish government, the central Iraqi government, and the IKRG, excludes any international or regional party attempting to intervene in or take advantage of this problem for interests and agendas that do not serve the interests of both Iraq and Türkiye and their peoples.
2. The parties involved in this issue should adopt balance and rationality in their demands and objectives when seeking real solutions to this problem. The primary criterion for the desired solution should be to achieve the maximum possible preservation of Iraq's sovereignty and security, including the security of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and to safeguard Türkiye's security while also protecting the interests of both

4 Watheq Al-Sadoon, "The Grand Al-Faw Port and Dry Canal projects.. opportunities for partnership between Türkiye and Iraq", *TRT Arabic*, 26 December 2022.

5 "Bassem Al-Awwadi: The path of development will not pass through the Kurdistan Region for technical reasons," *Rudaw*, 27 May 2023.

6 Watheq Al-Sadoon, "Turkey and Iraq: Missed Opportunities for Collaboration", Policy Brief No. 189, *ORSAM*, 20 September 2021, pp 5-7.

the Turkish and Iraqi peoples, including the interests of the Kurds in Iraq. Efforts should be made to bring these objectives together in one solution basket, without linking these solutions to the situations and futures of Kurds in countries other than Iraq.

3. The central Iraqi government and the IKRG must fully recognize and publicly acknowledge as terrorist organization to the PKK poses the greatest threat to the security and unity of the Turkish state. Türkiye cannot afford to compromise or appease at the expense of its national security, and the Turkish government and people, regardless of their political affiliation, are united in their stance on this issue. Furthermore, the activities of the PKK have become a threat to the security of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This is evidenced by the situation in Sinjar and the participation of some PKK militants in fighting against Iraqi security forces when Baghdad began to regain control of Kirkuk in October 2017, as well as the repeated PKK attacks against Kurdish Peshmerga forces.
4. Any new serious initiative to solve this problem must be realistic and take into account the political and security agreements and understandings between the central Iraqi government and the IKRG. It should also understand the nature of their relations in post-2003 Iraq, which still imposes limitations on the Baghdad government's security role in northern Iraq. Given the current political, security, and economic conditions in Iraq, new solutions should not expect these limitations to disappear shortly.

It has become known through confirmed information or positions that there are Iraqi

parties, both political and armed, linked to Iran, providing logistical, political, and media support to PKK elements in northern Iraq. The actions of these parties' stem from alignment with Iran's regional agendas, sectarian motives (for some Shiite groups supporting the PKK), or nationalist motives (for Kurdish groups supporting the PKK). It is up to these parties to choose between narrow sectarian and nationalist interests and the broader interests of Iraq and its people, as well as the potential significant benefits of activating strategic economic cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye and removing obstacles hindering this cooperation.

The past few months of 2023 and the first two months of 2024 have witnessed a growing diplomatic and security momentum, with intense meetings and dialogues between Iraq and Türkiye. During this period, Iraq was visited, sequentially, by the Turkish (Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chief of Intelligence, and the Minister of Defense). Likewise, Türkiye was visited by Iraqi diplomatic and security delegations of similarly high levels. The PKK issue is certainly the main topic on the agenda of this momentum.

It is worth noting that there is now significant awareness among the Iraqi public regarding the risks posed by the PKK to the security and stability of Iraq. Many Iraqis have begun to question through media and social media platforms the justifications for the presence of camps for a foreign terrorist organization (PKK) targeting neighboring countries within Iraqi territory, especially since Paragraph (2) of Article 7 of the current Iraqi Constitution states: "The Iraqi state is committed to combating terrorism in all its forms and works to protect its territories from being a headquarters, passage, or arena for terrorist activity." Additionally, Article 8 stipulates: "Iraq adheres to the principle of good neighborliness, commits to

non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, seeks to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, establishes its relations based on common interests and reciprocity, and respects its international obligations."

In today's world, characterized by scarce economic opportunities and exacerbating security risks, the economy shapes politics and constructs common security among economically cooperating countries. It is certain that the path to achieving a strategic partnership between Iraq and Türkiye, based on the projects of the Grand Faw Port and the Development Road, will not be strewn with roses. These efforts will face various challenges. There is a fear that corruption and political conflicts may resurface to obstruct these two projects. Similarly, in Iraq, there are political entities with media arms that oppose any Iraqi-Turkish rapprochement or cooperation, due to their affiliation with regional competition agendas in the Iraqi arena. However, if there is a strong will among decision-makers in Iraq and a responsible awareness of the people's interests, then priority will undoubtedly be given to the interests of the people over narrow interests.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the risks of foreign factors influencing Iraqi-Turkish relations. The Iraqi arena witnesses several competitions/conflicts among foreign actors that can hinder cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye. For example, in the most critical section of the presumed path of the Development Road, northwest Iraq, there are several competitions: American-Iranian competition, American-Turkish competition, and Turkish-Iranian competition. As for the Americans and Iranians, they compete among themselves and with Türkiye through armed organizations that receive their support and operate under their directives, such as the PKK and its affiliates, as well as various militias. The US is not

enthusiastic, if not opposed, to any Iraqi-Turkish rapprochement. However, perhaps the Americans consider this rapprochement an opportunity to balance Iranian influence in Iraq. As for Iran and their proxies in Iraq, they are undoubtedly against any Iraqi-Turkish rapprochement.

Returning to the affairs of the Development Road project; Certainly, there are now Iraqi governmental committees with broad powers to monitor the affairs of the Development Road project. However, it may be beneficial for the Iraqi government to establish a high-level authority for this project (at the ministerial level), similar to the "Suez Canal Authority" in Egypt, to avoid draining effort and time with traditional bureaucratic obstacles. In this context, the Iraqi Minister of Transport, Razzaq Al-Saadawi, visited Türkiye in early February 2024 and agreed during the visit with his Turkish counterpart, Abdulkadir Öztürk, to open offices to monitor the implementation of the Development Road project in both Baghdad and Ankara. On February 12, a Turkish delegation, including the Director-General of Turkish Railways and the Director-General of Roads and Infrastructure at the Turkish Ministry of Transport, visited Iraq. The Turkish delegation was briefed on the progress of work on the "Grand Faw Port" and the "Development Road" projects.

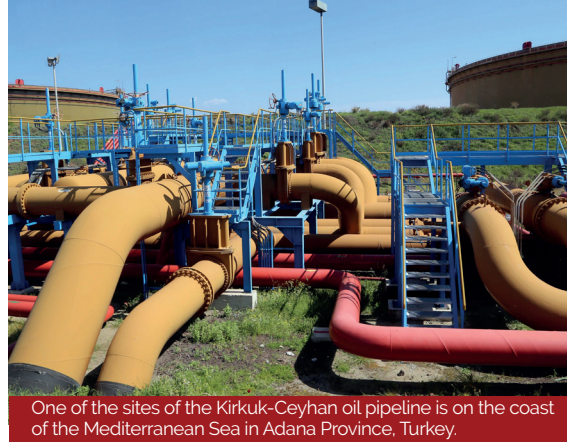
The G20 Summit, held in India in September 2023, announced the establishment of a global economic corridor connecting India to the Middle East and towards Europe. Observers have seen that this corridor will pose significant competition for the Iraqi-Turkish Development Road. This development should be an incentive for Türkiye and Iraq to work together with greater determination and seriousness, aiming to shorten the time required to complete the projects of the Grand Faw Port and the Development Canal. Especially con-

sidering that US President Joe Biden, during the announcement of their new project at the New Delhi Summit, estimated the time required for its completion to be ten years. However, the Grand Faw Port project is supposed to be completed in 2024, and the Development Canal project in 2028. Additionally, there is still a preferential advantage for the Grand Faw Port and the Development Canal projects over the new global economic corridor. This is because transporting goods from Asia to Europe via the Development Canal requires only one shipping process at Asian ports, and then one unloading process, one at the Faw Port, and another at its final destination in Europe. Whereas, in the India-Middle East-Europe project, such goods need shipping in Asia, unloading at ports in the UAE, shipping from Israeli ports, and then unloading in Europe⁷.

The Turkish and Iraqi governments are currently interacting positively and seriously with the Development Road project, with a noticeable escalation in official visits and meetings on this issue. The Iraqi PM and members of his government speak with great optimism and confidence about the future of this project, as does the Turkish government. Therefore, it is highly expected that this project will provide solid ground for solving all the outstanding issues between the two countries, foremost among them being the issue of common security. President Erdogan stated in mid-February 2024, aboard his plane returning from his visit to Egypt: "The main active parties in the Development Road project are Turkey, the UAE, and Iraq, and this project will become a new Silk Road for the region and will serve regional peace."

7 Al-Sadoon, "The Middle East and the Race ...", Op.cit.

THE EXPORT OF IRAQI OIL THROUGH TÜRKİYE.. PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY?



One of the sites of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in Adana Province, Turkey.

On March 23, 2023, Türkiye decided to halt the export of Iraqi oil through its territory and ports, following a decision on the same day by the arbitration body of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris ordering Ankara to pay compensation to Baghdad amounting to \$2.6 billion. This compensation is for the quantities of oil that the IKRG exported through Turkish territory and ports between 2014 and 2018, based on a previous invitation from the central Iraqi government to that court, considering those oil exports illegal. This issue dates back to 2014, when the Iraqi federal Oil Ministry filed a complaint with the arbitration body of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris objecting to the Kurdistan Region's export of its oil via the Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline without the Iraqi federal Oil Ministry's approval. At that time, IKRG benefited from the instability of the federal government in Baghdad due to its preoccupation with the war against the terrorist organization ISIS, as well

as at that time, agreements and deals were concluded between the main Kurdish political forces and the dominant political forces in Baghdad on this issue. Additionally, IKRG benefited from the network of political alliances and relations it established with the US, EU, and Türkiye and advanced economic relations with major oil companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Gazprom. All of these factors made it easier for IKRG to construct a pipeline extending from its main oil fields to the Turkish border, connecting this pipeline in November 2013 to the main Iraqi-Turkish pipeline (the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline)⁸.

According to news published by Reuters on January 24, 2011, IKRG issued a statement published on its website at that time indicating that Barham Salih, the Prime Minister of IKRG at that time (former President of Iraq), had agreed with the Iraqi Prime Minister at that time, Nouri al-Maliki, to resume oil

⁸ Rearranging the Papers and Relations: The Repercussions of the International Arbitration Decision Illegalizing the Export of Oil from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq via Turkey.» *Iraqi Studies Unit at the Emirates Center for Policy*, 30 March 2023.

exports from the Kurdistan region by February 2011. During that time, al-Maliki had very good relations with the leadership of the Kurdistan region. In another piece of news published on the BBC News Arabic website on February 5, 2011, it was reported that Nouri al-Maliki confirmed in an interview with the "France-Presse Agency" that his government's approval of the oil contracts signed by the IKRG with foreign oil companies.

The official reason announced by the Turkish government for halting operations in the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline is the damage caused to the pipeline as a result of the recent earthquake that occurred in Turkey in February 2023, and its need for maintenance. Türkiye's six-month ban on Iraqi oil exports through its territory and ports has destabilized the crucial Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, which is very important to regional and global economic stability. This pipeline is used to transport about 10% of Iraq's total oil exports, equivalent to 0.5% of global oil production, note that Iraq is the second-largest producer in OPEC. Moreover, oil export revenues account for about 80% of the annual budget of the IKRG, meaning the continued suspension of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline posed a significant risk of collapse to the entire administration of the Iraqi Kurdistan region⁹.

The head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq, Safeen Dizayee, stated that by the end of August 2023, Baghdad had incurred losses estimated at around \$5.5 billion due to the halt of Iraqi oil exports through Türkiye¹⁰.

In September 2023, the Turkish government filed a lawsuit against the Iraqi government in the Columbia County Court in Was-

hington, D.C., rejecting any compensation payments to Iraq. Instead, Ankara demanded compensation from Baghdad for the value of oil transportation fees through Turkish territory, which Iraq had not paid since the 1990s. Türkiye argues that considering the interest rate set by the International Arbitration Tribunal in Paris for the amounts each country must pay to the other, the amount Iraq owes to Türkiye becomes greater than what Türkiye owes to Iraq. The compensation determined by the Paris court for Iraq from Türkiye is \$2.6 billion, after calculating accrued interest on the original compensation amount. However, in the same case, the court also awarded over \$500 million to Türkiye due to its counterclaims regarding compensation for the decreased capacity of pipelines and oil transportation fees that Iraq has not paid to Türkiye since the 1990s. However, Türkiye argues in its lawsuit in the Columbia County Court that the \$500 million should become \$3.5 billion according to the calculations of accrued interest adopted by the same Paris court since the 1990s. Therefore, according to the Turkish calculations attached to the lawsuit in the Columbia Court, Iraq receives \$2.6 billion in compensation and interest from the compensation, while Türkiye receives \$3.5 billion in compensation and interest, making Ankara the beneficiary of a net compensation of \$919 million as of the date of the Paris court ruling in March 2018. Additionally, \$37.7 million is added for the interest for the months following the Paris court decision, bringing the total to \$956 million. Türkiye believes that Iraq is obligated to pay this amount to them within the framework of this case¹¹.

Türkiye decided to resume operations of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline and allow the export of Iraqi oil through its territory and ports

9 Emir Gurbuz, "Turkey's Halt on Iraqi Oil Exports Is Shaking Up Global Markets", *Foreign Policy*, 25 August 2023.

10 "Iraq loses \$5.5bn due to halt in oil exports through Türkiye", *Middle East Monitor*, 31 August 2023.

11 Ragıp Soylu, "Turkey seeks \$950m damages against Iraq over IKRG oil dispute", *Middle East Eye*, 8 September 2023.

in October 2023. This decision came after a series of mutual visits and meetings between energy officials of both countries, which seemed to lead to an understanding between Ankara, Baghdad, and Erbil regarding freezing the compensation issue and counter-compensations for the time being.

The main source of problems related to the export of oil from the IKRG stems from the gaps and ambiguities in the articles of the current Iraqi Constitution of 2005 regarding the nature of the relationship between the central government and the IKRG in general, and how to manage oil resources in particular. The conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over this issue existed before the compensation issue in a Paris court. It revolves around both sides adopting different interpretations of the constitutional texts related to the production and export of oil and gas. While Baghdad maintains the view that the federal government has the authority to be involved in managing oil policies and the producing oil fields in the Iraqi Kurdistan region and its exclusive authority over exports outside of Iraq, IKRG believes that the constitution gave it the authority to exploit the fields within its territories and to sign contracts with foreign companies to export its oil independently from Baghdad. In the face of the differing positions of the two parties and their inability to reach a consensus formula, IKRG resorted to imposing facts on the ground by signing contracts with international oil companies to exploit its fields and subsequently building infrastructure to facilitate the export of this oil through Türkiye¹².

Although Article 112 of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 stipulates the necessity of enacting a federal law for oil and gas to regulate the management of oil resources throughout the country, mechanisms for their export, and

the distribution of their revenues, such a law has not been enacted until now. The Iraqi government drafted this law in 2007, but ongoing political disputes, and sometimes political agreements, have repeatedly prevented its passage in the Iraqi Parliament. The absence of a federal oil and gas law in Iraq has resulted in different interpretations between Baghdad and Erbil regarding the concept of partnership in managing oil resources in northern Iraq, and how to export and share their revenues. The federal oil and gas law was supposed to be enacted since the first year of the Iraqi Constitution's approval in 2005. However, successive Iraqi governments, encouraged by political forces, delayed its enactment, like other laws outlined by the Iraqi Constitution, leaving the parliament the authority to detail them through special laws. On the other hand, political motivations have played a significant role in periodically stirring controversy within the judiciary regarding the issue of managing oil resources in the Kurdistan Region. Influential political forces in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region have often used this issue as a bargaining chip for political negotiations and deals between them. This issue is typically brought up before the formation of any federal government, as well as when any dispute arises between the political forces in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region. At the same time, this issue is often frozen, and no solutions are sought when there is a convergence between the political forces in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region.

Indeed, the recent economic and political repercussions of the latest issue regarding the export of Iraqi oil through Türkiye, which have affected all parties involved in this issue, could be an opportunity to reach an agreement and expedite the enactment of Iraq's oil and gas law.

12 Rearranging the Papers and Relations...», Op.cit.

Iraq remains a rentier state, its national income is heavily reliant on oil sales revenues, and it is not expected, based on current indicators, that the Iraqi economy's dependence on oil production and exports will decrease shortly. All oil-producing countries have been striving for years to increase their oil export outlets, anticipating any contingencies that might lead to the closure of a particular outlet. Currently, Iraq has two outlets for exporting its oil, one of which is the main outlet through the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, where Iraq exports the majority of its oil. Due to the tensions between the US, Iran, and the Gulf states, the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz are now described as areas of high-security risk, and it is expected that there may be closures and interruptions of international navigation at any stage of potential escalation in the US-Iranian confrontation. The other secondary outlet for exporting a lesser portion of Iraqi oil is through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, which passes through Turkish territory and reaches the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea. The Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, which is 970 kilometers long, consists of two pipes, one of which was opened in 1977 with a design capacity to transport 1,100,000 barrels per day, and the second was opened in 1987 with a design capacity to transport 500,000 barrels per day. However, neglect of this pipeline over the past years, failure to undertake any effe-

ctive projects for its development and maintenance, in addition to numerous attacks and acts of sabotage targeting this pipeline by the PKK, have led to its current transport capacity not exceeding 400,000 barrels per day¹³.

The ideal option for Iraq to establish an alternative outlet for exporting its oil is to reach an agreement with Türkiye on a strategic project to develop the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline and increase its transport capacity to accommodate all of Iraq's oil exports. This would be utilized in the event of navigation disruptions in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. As for the financial cost of such a project, it is certain that the Turkish government and companies, which possess extensive experience in the field of energy transportation through their previous giant projects in cooperation with the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries, will show great flexibility with Iraq in the financial affair, as such a project will bring significant benefits to the Turkish economy.

As for the benefits to Iraq from such a project, they will extend beyond the economic benefits and the significant flexibility that Iraq will have in exporting its oil, including security and political benefits. The security and stability of Iraq, especially in northern Iraq and the areas through which this project passes, will become vital for the Turkish economy, as well as important for Turkish national security.

13 Al-Sadoon, Turkey and Iraq: Missed, Op.cit, pp 8-9.

WATER ISSUE



An aerial view of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the city of Qurna, southern Iraq. Their meeting forms the Shatt al-Arab River in Basra Governorate, southern Iraq.

This issue may be one of the most serious obstacles to improving Turkish-Iraqi relations, as the worsening water crisis in Iraq inflicts serious harm on Türkiye's image in the Iraqi public. It also puts the efforts of both countries to develop their relationship in an uncomfortable atmosphere. Moreover, it places Iraqi elites who support rapprochement and cooperation between the two countries in an embarrassing situation as well.

The danger of this issue lies in its exploitation by Iraqi political and media entities opposed to the Turkish-Iraqi rapprochement. They use it to launch "organized" campaigns to tarnish Türkiye's reputation on traditional media/social media platforms. The greatest harm caused by these anti-Türkiye media campaigns regarding the water issue, which recur from time to time, is their ability to gain new voices from the Iraqi public opinion. These voices may have initially supported the Turkish-Iraqi rapprochement but then turned against it under the influence of such campaigns.

Of course, the Iraqi public is also resentful towards Iran regarding the water crisis. In recent years, Iran has diverted more than 42 rivers and tributaries away from Iraqi territory, redirecting their paths towards Iranian lands. However, there is a well-known fact among most Iraqis that the majority of the water flowing into Iraq comes from Türkiye (around 65-70%), and there has been a noticeable decrease in the water levels coming from Türkiye.

To discuss this issue within an objective framework aimed at reaching real solutions, must address all its dimensions: humanitarian, environmental, climate change, political, and economic.

In the humanitarian dimension, we must have a clear understanding of the most vulnerable group affected by water scarcity among the Iraqi population, namely farmers and small-scale agricultural project owners. These struggle to maintain their livelihoods, as agriculture is one of the sectors of the Iraqi economy most affected by the deteriorating

To discuss water issues within an objective framework aimed at reaching real solutions must address all its dimensions: humanitarian, environmental, climate change, political, and economic.

ration following the US invasion and occupation in 2003. This is due to water scarcity on the one hand, the absence of government support, and poor planning for the development of this sector, along with sustained crises in electricity and other services on the other hand, in addition to the widespread corruption at all levels of the Iraqi state currently.

The people affected by water scarcity constitute a large segment of Iraqi society, and most of them are not affiliated with the political and armed groups that control power in Iraq. This is evidenced by their lack of access to government jobs that would alleviate their suffering from the challenges of farming in Iraq today. This segment of Iraqis is characterized by simplicity, kindness, and spontaneity in their emotions. Türkiye could quickly win their hearts by providing water for their agriculture. At the same time, the anti-Türkiye lobby in Iraq could swiftly influence their minds and mobilize their positions against Türkiye if there is a water shortage. In other words, the water crisis in Iraq can continuously undermine Türkiye's soft power in this country.

Additionally, there is a security aspect stemming from the humanitarian dimension of this issue. There is a noticeable phenomenon in the farming community across most parts of Iraq, where some disillusioned youth, seeing no prospects in conti-

nuing with agriculture, become easy prey for the temptations of joining terrorist groups and militias spread throughout Iraq. The stance of these organizations is known to be against Turkish interests.

In the environmental dimension, the challenges of climate change facing most regions of the world, including Türkiye and Iraq, must be taken into account in any technical discussions regarding water sharing between the two countries. Just as Iraq faces problems of desertification, drought, and water scarcity, Türkiye also experienced a sharp decrease in the amount of snowfall in recent years. It is well known that the melting of accumulated snow is the primary source of major rivers. Mosques in Türkiye have recently held rain-seeking prayers occasionally, which is unfamiliar in this water-rich country.

During a TV speech in February 2024, Iraqi PM Al-Sudani strongly recommended that Iraqi farmers utilize modern irrigation sprinklers that reduce water waste. Al-Sudani stated that Iraqi farmers should not expect water abundance to return as it did in the past due to climate change affecting the entire world.

In the political dimension, both countries should strive to transform this issue from a factor of dispute into a factor for enhancing cooperation between

them. It is well known that Iraq urgently needs to improve its management of water resources and reduce the significant waste currently present in those resources by adopting a more governed policy in water resource utilization and modern irrigation methods. Türkiye, as an advanced country in these fields, can be a strategic partner for Iraq in efforts to develop water resource management if the political will exists in both countries' decision-makers. On the other hand, Türkiye must make a greater effort to make Iraqi public opinion understand its water policy and change the

stereotypical image promoted by the parties of anti-approach between the two countries, which suggests that reducing water allocations to Iraq is a political decision or a pressure tactic on Iraq. Türkiye can pay greater attention to highlighting the technical and natural factors that lead to reduced water flows to Iraq.

Economically, Türkiye and Iraq are facing promising prospects for economic cooperation between them, and the availability of water in Iraq is certainly a necessary condition for any type of economic activity, as water is the essence of life.

CONCLUSION

The current stage of Turkish-Iraqi relations is at a pivotal historical juncture, requiring strong political will and carefully calculated balances from decision-makers in both countries to capitalize on the new prospects in the relations between their countries. These prospects, which history may not repeat, offer a real opportunity to bring about a genuine transformation in relations between the two countries. Throughout previous decades, these relations have oscillated between only two paths: either the "traditional" path of cooperation or the "limited" path of disputes leading to dormant relations.

There is a real opportunity at present to move the relations between the two countries onto advanced tracks and strategic steps in cooperation, especially in the economic and security domains. Despite the complexities of the current international and regional situations, characterized by instability, it may indeed be the right time to transform the factors that weaken Turkish-Iraqi relations into sources of strength and to invest in enhancing the common interests between the two countries and their peoples.



The construction of the Sunken Tunnel, which will provide the sea-land connection of the Development Road Project in Iraq.

The future of Iraqi-Turkish relations can be seen as a confrontation between the promising new prospects for enhancing cooperation and rapprochement between the two countries on the one hand and the traditional old obstacles that generate tensions between them on the other hand. It is clear that the leadership of both countries currently possesses a genuine political will and desire to enhance cooperation between them, and there is now a high level of awareness of mutual interests. Therefore, the two countries are moving towards promising new prospects for cooperation. Only regional factors and influences, and perhaps international ones as well, can hinder this cooperation if they can disrupt the political, security, and possibly economic situations in the Iraqi arena.

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