

# Iraq 2022

## RCD's Strategic Report

Edited by

**Prof. Dr. Hasan L. al-Zubaydi**

**Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabib**

**Prof. Dr. Ahmad S. al-Mamouri**

**Prof. Dr. Miqdam A. al-Fayyad**



al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue

R . C . D

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# RCD's Forward

**Prof. Dr. As'ad Kāzim Shabīb**

CEO, Al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD

*Iraq 2022: RCD's Strategic Report*, represents a corporate research effort aimed at providing an in-depth and balanced reading of the Iraqi state's trajectory throughout an entire year. This report was produced during a phase characterized by the complexity of challenges and the intersection of political, economic, security, and regional pathways. It does not merely describe events in isolation but adopts a narrative-analytical approach designed to understand the structural interactions governing the political system's performance, public policy options, and both official and social response patterns.

The year 2022 constituted a pivotal juncture in the contemporary Iraqi experience, where the crisis of the political process overlapped with requirements for institutional stability, and economic pressures intersected with environmental and social challenges. This occurred within a fluid security environment and external relations influenced by shifting regional and international balances. Consequently, the report provides a comprehensive treatment of these files as interconnected elements within the public policy system, asserting that none can be separated without compromising the understanding of the overall Iraqi landscape.

The report employs a scholarly documentary-analytical methodology based on data collection from official sources, accredited documents, and national and international reports, alongside a careful analytical reading of public policy outputs and decisions. This approach aims to transition from the narration of facts to the analysis of their implications, and from the description of crises to the deconstruction of their causes, ultimately reaching an understanding of the options available to the Iraqi state in managing its internal affairs and external relations.

Within the framework of public policy, the report focuses on assessing institutional performance, monitoring gaps between planning and implementation, and analyzing the impact of governmental decisions in the fields of economy, governance, integrity, environment, and security. This provides a knowledge base that assists in understanding possible reform paths and the limits of political action within a complex context governed by simultaneous internal considerations and external pressures.

Specialized senior researchers and experts in politics, economy, security, and international relations contributed to the themes of this report, providing a diversity of perspectives and analytical depth. The effort was conducted under the supervision and editorship of a distinguished group of academic professors: Prof. Dr. Ḥasan Laṭīf al-Zubaydī, Prof. Dr. As'ad Kāzīm Shabīb, Prof. Dr. Aḥmad Sāmī al-Ma'mūrī, and Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'Abd-al-Ḥasan al-Fayyāḍ, ensuring methodological unity, adherence to scientific standards, and precision in analysis.

The significance of this report stems from its role as part of an annual strategic series adopted by the al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD. This series aims to build an institutional knowledge memory that regularly monitors Iraq's transformations, providing an analytical reference for decision-makers, diplomats, researchers, and those interested in public affairs. It seeks not only to document the recent past but to support strategic thinking and enhance the ability to interpret future trends in light of accumulated experiences.

The adoption of this report by the al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD reflects its conviction that robust knowledge represents one of the most important tools for stability and state-building. Quiet analysis based on methodology and critical reasoning is viewed as the optimal way to understand the Iraqi reality, distinct from emotional or simplistic readings. Thus, this report is presented as a scholarly contribution to the field of public policy and strategic studies and as a knowledge platform for rational dialogue regarding Iraq's paths, challenges, and opportunities at a critical stage of its political history.

# 1. Year 2022 in Review

**Prof. Dr. Ḥasan Laṭīf al-Zubaydī**

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## I. The Political Process

In 2022, Iraq experienced a significant political crisis that resulted in a protracted delay of one year in forming a government, despite parliamentary elections having been conducted in October 2021. The political landscape was marked by intense turmoil, as influential parties, including the Coordination Framework (al-Iṭṭār al-Tansīqī), faced unexpected losses in parliamentary seats, leading to allegations of electoral fraud and widespread protests. This upheaval caused the dissolution of previous political alliances. Within the Shiite faction, the Sadrist Movement (al-Tayyār al-Ṣadrī), which held the largest parliamentary representation, advocated for the establishment of a majority government, contending that such a system would foster genuine opposition and dismantle the consensual governance that had perpetuated corruption and disorder. Divergences also emerged within Kurdish politics, with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) seeking to assert its numerical dominance over the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Similarly, divisions were apparent within the Sunni faction, particularly between the Taqadum Alliance led by Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī and the 'Azm Alliance led by Khamīs al-Khanjar, until interventions by the United Arab Emirates and Turkey facilitated their unification into the Sovereignty Alliance (Taḥāluf al-Si-yādah), based on a negotiated distribution of positions.

The initial parliamentary session was characterized by intense conflict due to disagreements over the largest bloc. Nevertheless, the Sadrist Movement succeeded in forming the Saving a Homeland (Inqādh Waṭan) alliance, which included the Sovereignty Alliance and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. On January 9, 2022, Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī was elected President of the Council, with Ḥākīm

al-Zāmilī (a Sadrist) as First Deputy and Shākhwān ‘Abd Allāh (KDP) as Second Deputy. Despite being the numerically dominant front, the Coordination Framework leveraged a Federal Court ruling that mandated the presence of two-thirds of deputies to elect the President of the Republic, employing the “blocking third” tactic to obstruct nominations lacking its consent, thereby repeatedly preventing parliamentary sessions from convening. The Sadrist Movement’s attempts to consolidate independent deputies into its political project were unsuccessful, as was an alternative proposal for independents to form a bloc and establish a government excluding the Sadrist Movement. A forty-day deadline granted to the Coordination Framework to initiate government formation, intended to demonstrate Sadrist strength against their opponents’ weakness, also failed. Numerous initiatives by prominent political actors aimed at dialogue, negotiation, and reunification of the Shiite faction—the group entitled to the largest bloc—were unsuccessful, with suggestions that the Kurds nominate an uncontroversial candidate for the presidency.

The leader of the Sadrist Movement, Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, ultimately resorted to a highly controversial decision, unprecedented in Iraqi and global politics, by calling on his 73 deputies to resign. Although the Sadrists withdrew from parliament, they remained politically active, mobilizing public support and rejecting claims that their withdrawal ceded power to corrupt forces. When the Coordination Framework nominated Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī for the premiership in July 2022, the Sadrists opposed the nomination. Sadrist supporters engaged in multiple protests, including storming the Green Zone and the parliament building. Violent clashes occurred during attempts to prevent the election of the President of the Republic in late July, with demonstrators staging a sit-in inside the parliament, deterring deputies from attending. In August, the Ashura Revolution (Thawrat ‘Āshūrā’) unfolded as protesters besieged the Supreme Judicial Council. Al-Ṣadr issued a new initiative calling for the exclusion of all political actors involved since 2003, announcing his retirement from political work and the closure of affiliated institutions.

The situation escalated when protesters entered the Prime Minister’s headquarters, leading to armed confrontations among security forces, rival factions, and members of Sarāyā al-Salām. Street fighting resulted in numerous casualties and the destruction of protest tents. In response, al-Ṣadr publicly condemned violence and urged his supporters to withdraw, a move that garnered praise from both allies and adversaries.

The Coordination Framework sought to consolidate its allied forces, particularly Shiite parties such as the State of Law (Dawlat al-Qānūn), al-Faṭḥ, al-Naṣr, and al-Ḥikmah. Its committees held extensive meetings in Baghdad and al-Najaf al-Ashraf to persuade the Sadrist Movement to ally with them and to engage in dialogue with Kurdish parties in Erbil and al-Sulaymānīyah to unify political visions. However, al-Ṣadr insisted that dialogue exclude the State of Law and specifically Nūrī al-Mālikī, a condition the Framework rejected. The withdrawal of the Sadrist bloc enabled the Framework to form the largest parliamentary bloc,

the State Forces Alliance (Taḥāluf Quwá al-Dawlah), comprising most influential parties, which subsequently led to the establishment of a consensual government. This development followed the resolution of Kurdish disputes, with both the Democratic and Union parties withdrawing their candidates, Rībar Aḥmad and Barham Ṣāliḥ, in favor of the compromise candidate ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Rashīd. Although tensions persisted between the two main Kurdish parties over critical issues such as the regional constitution and power distribution, the conflict was temporarily settled. The Sovereignty Alliance, the largest Sunni bloc, also experienced internal divisions, resulting in the formation of the United Anbar Alliance to redefine political balances.

The Iraqi populace, still recovering from these events, was further unsettled by the release of audio recordings attributed to prominent politicians, notably former Prime Minister Nūrī al-Mālikī, in which he criticized various political figures and factions. These leaks exposed the depth of internal conflicts, eroded public trust, and intensified political animosities, particularly against the Sadrist Movement and its leader. al-Mālikī’s accusations of widespread Kurdish and Sunni treason severely damaged his reputation and sowed discord within the Coordination Framework’s base.

An evaluation of parliamentary activity in 2022 indicates that the Council of Representatives enacted only two significant laws: the Law Criminalizing Normalization and the Law on Emergency Support for Food Security and Development, which served as an alternative to the federal budget. Although Coordination Framework deputies initially opposed the latter, citing the caretaker status of al-Kāzīmī’s government and its limited legislative authority, they ultimately approved the law with amendments following extensive debate.

The Federal Supreme Court and the Supreme Judicial Council maintained a neutral stance in 2022, adhering to constitutional provisions. The Court dismissed the Coordination Framework’s challenge to the parliamentary election results, ratified the legitimacy of the Parliament Presidency, and annulled suspension orders. It rejected appeals concerning the Council’s legitimacy and opposed constitutional violations by political parties, including halting the nomination of former minister Hoshyār Zībārī for the presidency, denying al-Ṣadr’s request to dissolve the Council, and approving the resignation of Sadrist deputies.

The United Nations, represented by Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, actively monitored the political process in Iraq. She engaged with political leaders, religious figures, and influential actors to facilitate dialogue and bridge divisions. Her efforts included briefing the Security Council on the critical situation, advocating for initiatives to resolve the political deadlock, and urging all parties to prioritize national interests over factionalism. Her involvement contributed to the eventual convening of the long-delayed parliamentary session to elect the President of the Republic and commission the Prime Minister to form a government.

The year 2022 marked the first significant participation of independent deputies in Iraq’s political process. These independents largely rejected the dominance

of traditional parties and the consensual system, advocating for justice, equality, and the disarmament of unauthorized militias. However, their inexperience, coupled with external pressures and internal divisions, limited their effectiveness and fragmented them into factions—some seeking government participation, others adopting an oppositional role to monitor government performance.

## II. Climate Change

The report consistently highlights a critical issue, with the editorial board designating climate change as the focal concern for this year, given projections that Iraq will be among the countries most severely impacted by its consequences.

A 2022 report by the World Bank cautioned that climate change, particularly the intensification of water scarcity, threatens the social contract within Iraq, which operates under a growth model heavily reliant on oil revenues. The adverse effects of climate change have become increasingly documented and observable, intensifying in 2022 and anticipated to worsen in the future, with potential further increases in temperature. Iraqi studies indicate that average temperatures have risen by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius since the 1960s, accompanied by recurrent droughts, increased salinity in agricultural lands, and the persistence of inefficient water usage practices predicated on the assumption of continued oil wealth.

According to the Ministry of Water Resources' assessment, 2022 represents the most severe year in the past fifty years. These findings align with those of the World Bank and the Country Climate and Development Report. The Mosul Plain, known as Iraq's "breadbasket" and responsible for supplying approximately 70% of the nation's grain, received only 20% of its typical rainfall during this period. Similarly, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers experienced water levels reduced to 20% of their required volumes. This scarcity precipitated a 75% decline in agricultural production, particularly in wheat, barley, and rice, relative to previous years.

In July and August 2022, Iraq experienced unprecedented dust and sandstorms attributed to climate change, diminished rainfall, and desertification. These storms resulted in numerous fatalities and thousands of injuries due to suffocation, alongside material damages and disruptions to air traffic at several airports. The Ministry of Environment projected that the number of dusty days in Iraq will increase to 272 annually over the next two decades, reaching 300 days by 2050, signaling severe environmental degradation. The frequency and severity of sandstorms are linked to escalating desertification, shrinking agricultural lands, water scarcity, and unlawful encroachments on green spaces.

Social consequences of climate change include the emergence of climate-induced displacement. A report by the International Organization for Migration indicated that, as of March 2022, over 3,300 families were displaced across ten central and southern governorates due to water scarcity, high salinity, or poor water quality. Water shortages impede crop production or cause spoilage, limit drinking water and livestock feed availability, and have forced the closure of numerous agriculture-related enterprises. Concurrently, the marshlands lost

approximately 41% of their area between 2020 and 2022, prompting continued displacement due to economic losses and the death of buffaloes, which require submerged conditions for breeding. The Agriculture Directorate of Dhī-Qār Governorate reported the death of 4,000 buffalo heads in 2022 due to water shortages.

Global studies forecast an increase in Earth's temperature by 2.2 degrees Celsius by 2040, potentially exceeding 3.8 degrees Celsius in some regions by 2100, accompanied by a sea-level rise of approximately 30 cm. This rise threatens to submerge areas surrounding Shaṭṭ al-'Arab, Khawr 'Abd-Allāh, and the marshes in al-Baṣrah Governorate, exacerbating migration and displacement. Such environmental changes jeopardize social cohesion, agricultural lands, and urban development projects in affected regions. According to UNICEF, by 2050, every child in Iraq will be exposed to recurrent heatwaves.

Notably, there were no increases in water releases from Turkey to Iraq in 2022. Turkish dams reduced the Euphrates River flow to Iraq by 60%, contributing to food and energy shortages in Syria and intensifying Iraq's water crisis, potentially depriving at least seven million people of water access. Similarly, dams on Iranian water sources diminished tributaries feeding the Tigris River, causing the cessation of water flow in Diyālā. Lake Ḥamrīn, the primary water source for the governorate bordering Iran, lost approximately 70% of its water, resulting in a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe.

Water management in 2022 revealed significant challenges within central government policies. Overlapping decision-making among central authorities, local governments, and relevant institutions created confusion regarding actual water needs and equitable distribution. Additionally, Iraq's diplomatic efforts with riparian neighbors were weak, particularly the negotiator's capacity, as evidenced by the worsening water crisis despite negotiations. Water revenues decreased due to reduced inflows and tributary cutoffs in the Tigris and Euphrates basins. Governance deficits at the governorate level led to local disputes over water allocation and inadequate assessment of sectoral water needs, compounded by ineffective governance mechanisms.

To mitigate water shortages, the Ministry of Water Resources utilized water storage in 2022; however, declining rainfall reduced storage levels, with dam outflows exceeding inflows. Consequently, the government reduced winter wheat cultivation to 1.5 million dunams in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture. Cultivated areas declined from 33 million dunams to less than 10 million dunams due to the water crisis and agricultural policy adjustments. Iraq's annual water consumption exceeds 50 billion cubic meters, yet 2022 water revenues fell to 21 billion cubic meters, covering only 40% of the country's needs. This shortfall explains the Ministry of Water Resources and Ministry of Agriculture's decision to reduce cultivated areas by 50%.

### III. Corruption and the Theft of the Century

The year 2022 was marked by significant developments concerning corruption in Iraq. Toward the end of the year, one of the largest corruption scandals in history emerged, referred to as the “Theft of the Century,” or more accurately, the “Theft of All Centuries,” given that no previous event in human history had witnessed the theft of an amount estimated between 3.8 and 12 trillion Iraqi dinars.

Iraq’s performance in the realm of integrity and anti-corruption in 2022 was largely stagnant compared to the previous year. The country received a score of 23 out of 100 on the global Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 157th out of 180 countries assessed. This occurred despite the Council of Ministers’ approval of the National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption 2021-2024 via Decision No. 181 of 2021. However, no activities or outcomes related to the strategy’s implementation were publicly disclosed.

Regarding anti-corruption institutions, Judge ‘Alā’ al-Sā’idī, head of the Commission of Integrity, tendered his resignation on November 13, 2022. In his statement, al-Sā’idī emphasized that holding a significant position within national regulatory bodies is not a leisure pursuit but a serious national duty accompanied by numerous challenges and burdens. He expressed that relinquishing this role provided relief from the substantial responsibilities and dangers associated with it, including conflicts with various executive authorities and legislative blocs. Additionally, he highlighted the media’s role in defaming and criticizing efforts to combat corruption and safeguard public funds. On the same day, the Prime Minister announced the conclusion of al-Sā’idī’s tenure and appointed Judge Ḥaydar Ḥannūn Zāyir as acting head of the Commission.

On October 30, 2022, the Prime Minister visited the Commission, after which the Supreme Committee for Anti-Corruption was established. Chaired by the head of the Commission of Integrity and including directors general of the Investigations and Recovery Departments, the committee was tasked with investigating major corruption cases meeting specific criteria related to the amount of embezzled or wasted funds, the accused’s position, and the damage caused to institutions or public funds. The Commission’s head implemented several measures, including forming an investigative team, appointing liaison members to track assets smuggled abroad and extradite judicially wanted fugitives, and requesting the Supreme Judicial Council to transfer selected criminal cases to the specialized al-Karkh Second Investigation Court to expedite resolution and fund recovery. The Council approved this request.

Concerning the “Theft of the Century,” in mid-October 2022, a major corruption scandal surfaced following a document from the General Commission of Taxes revealing that 3.7 trillion Iraqi dinars (approximately 2.5 billion US dollars) had been withdrawn between September 9, 2021, and August 11, 2022, via 247 checks cashed by five companies from tax deposit accounts. An audit confirmed the withdrawal of 3,701,280,882,000 dinars through these checks. A Ministry of Finance

report indicated that these companies lacked tax deposits or authorization to withdraw funds, rendering the transactions unjustifiable. The funds were reportedly withdrawn in cash. The Commission's Accounting Department reported a deposits account balance of 3,531,501,702,289 dinars, with a remaining balance of 145,050,309,732 dinars, concluding that the deposited amounts had been stolen. The report attributed the unauthorized withdrawals to individuals authorized by the five companies and noted that the checks were issued unlawfully by previous administrations and departments within the General Commission of Taxes.

Controversy arose over the release on bail of the primary accused, Nūr Zuhayr, who posted bail of four billion Iraqi dinars and committed to repaying the owed amounts into a designated account at al-Rafidain Bank. Subsequently, the al-Karkh Second Investigation Court lifted the seizure on the al-Āṣimah Company, owned by the accused and his family, citing ongoing deposits into the designated account.

A report published by The Washington Post on December 21, 2022, attracted local and international attention by focusing on the Committee of the Executive Order 29, also known as the "Abū-Raghīf Committee," named after its head, Lieutenant General Aḥmad Ṭāhā Hāshim Abū-Raghīf. Based on 20 interviews with detainees, their families, and officials monitoring the committee, the report accused the committee of extracting confessions through torture, abuse, and humiliation, resulting in the death of one detainee.

The Federal Supreme Court abolished the Committee of the Executive Order 29 on March 2, 2022, declaring it invalid due to violations of constitutional provisions protecting human freedom and dignity (Article 37/First/1), the separation of powers (Article 47), and judicial independence and competence (Articles 87 and 88). The order was also deemed an unconstitutional amendment to the Commission of Integrity Law, which mandates the Commission's exclusive authority to investigate financial and administrative corruption cases.

## **IV. The Economy Amidst Political Instability**

Following the completion of elections on October 10, 2021, under the government of Mr. Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, the inability to form a new government resulted in a caretaker administration that was incapable of preparing the national budget. Consequently, expenditures continued according to the 1/12 principle as stipulated in Article 13, Paragraph 1 of the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019, leading to the conclusion of the 2022 fiscal year without an approved budget. The resigning Minister of Finance, on August 16, 2022, indicated that the 2022 budget had been finalized well in advance but could only be presented by a government with full authority. He further emphasized that reform initiatives were hindered by uncertainty regarding the forthcoming government's priorities and direction, characterizing the financial situation as unreasonable and unacceptable.

An analysis of government expenditures in 2022 reveals non-compliance with the spending principles outlined in the Financial Management Law. Specifically, the government exceeded the 2021 budget by 15.413 trillion dinars, thereby violating the prescribed disbursement regulations.

In response to the absence of an approved federal budget, rising oil prices, and global food price inflation driven by the Russo-Ukrainian War, the government proposed the "Emergency Support for Food Security and Development Law" pursuant to Cabinet Decision 73 of 2022. Table (B) of this legislation enumerated 21 essential items, including allocations for regional development totaling 8 trillion dinars, 678 billion dinars for the Ministry of Labor, 1 trillion dinars for Petro-dollar allocations, and 162 billion dinars designated for contracting Bachelor's and Diploma holders at a rate of 1,000 contracts per governorate, each with a monthly salary of 300,000 dinars for three years. Additional allocations included 250 billion dinars for al-Najaf al-Ashraf Governorate, 200 billion dinars for Karbalā' Governorate, 50 billion dinars for Şalāḥ-al-Dīn Governorate, 700 billion dinars for the Ministry of Agriculture, 150 billion dinars for the Martyrs Foundation, and 100 billion dinars for the Political Prisoners Foundation. Furthermore, funds were allocated for oil production costs associated with the Basra Oil Company and North Oil Company. Article 11 of the law mandated that 50% of border crossing revenues be allocated to the governorates in which they are situated, including the Kurdistan Region. Nevertheless, this legislation functions as a provisional mini-budget, and adherence to Paragraph 3 of Article 13 of the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019 would have been more appropriate.

The year also exhibited significant discrepancies in public revenue estimations. The Ministry of Finance projected oil revenues at 154,038 billion dinars, accounting for 95% of total revenues in 2022, an increase from 89% in 2021. This underscores the government's limited capacity to diversify revenue sources and the predominance of oil rents, which inversely correlated with non-oil revenues. Notably, non-oil revenues declined in absolute terms from 12,459 billion dinars in 2021 to 7,659 billion dinars in 2022, representing a 38.5% decrease.

The Ministry of Oil reported total oil revenues of 167,575 billion dinars, reflecting a discrepancy of 13,536 billion dinars compared to the Ministry of Finance's figures, attributable to the temporal lag between sales and revenue receipt. However, the rollover of revenues from previous years into the budget year was not clarified, necessitating enhanced transparency and detailed disclosure of revenue streams.

## **V. The Security Landscape: Reaching the Brink of the Abyss**

The security Landscape in 2022 was marked by the interplay and synchronization of security incidents with escalating political tensions among various actors. This was compounded by electoral disputes and contentious results, the failure to establish a major coalition among election victors, and the withdrawal

of the Sadrist Movement from the political process despite securing the largest parliamentary representation. The intensification of conflicts between the Coordination Framework and the Sadrist Movement, alongside subsequent severe security incidents, significantly impacted the national security climate. Notably, supporters of the Sadrist Movement stormed the Council of Representatives in July 2022, followed by armed confrontations within the Green Zone involving security forces and armed factions aligned with the Coordination Framework at the end of August 2022. These events precipitated heightened security tensions in Baghdad, culminating in the imposition of a curfew and bridge closures. The capital experienced a period of acute uncertainty and instability, with the nation on the brink of internal conflict until stabilization occurred following al-Şadr's announcement of his supporters' withdrawal from the Green Zone.

Concurrently, ISIS exploited vulnerabilities arising from the preoccupation of military and security sectors with internal tensions, maintaining remote support zones in rural areas to bolster its threat capacity against Iraqi security forces. The organization restructured into small combat units and intensified activities near oil fields and key transportation corridors linking Iraq to Syria, Iran, and Jordan to finance its operations. Throughout the year, ISIS's activities were characterized by increasing isolation from the general population, particularly in remote rural and mountainous regions beyond effective security surveillance. This trend was exacerbated by intensified security operations and intelligence efforts that disrupted ISIS capabilities, resulting in the apprehension of numerous leaders and the prevention of multiple criminal operations.

Simultaneously, organized crime, including drug trafficking, organ trafficking, and human trafficking—particularly of women—escalated, posing significant threats to social security and stability. These developments challenged the capacity and effectiveness of security agencies in addressing non-traditional criminal activities within Iraq. Additionally, recurrent security breaches by members of Iraqi tribes, especially in southern and central regions, manifested in tribal raids and conflicts stemming from social disputes or leadership rivalries.

The prevailing political and security tensions also contributed to multiple attacks in border areas within Iraq, particularly involving incursions from Turkey and Iran. These incidents provided pretexts for external interventions aimed at influencing Iraqi affairs and asserting regional dominance. Collectively, these dynamics profoundly affected Iraq's security and stability, with serious implications for national security overall.

## **VI. Continued Social Instability**

Governmental and private sector initiatives have aimed to establish a secure and stable Iraqi society characterized by prosperity and internal reconciliation amidst ethnic and sectarian diversity. Achieving this objective necessitates national consensus, equitable distribution of economic resources, and the deployment of specialized, professional security forces. The state's resilience was tested

by tribal conflicts; although relative stability was attained, such disputes persisted as significant challenges at both individual and collective levels. Despite reductions in frequency and severity due to enforcement operations, arrests, weapons confiscations, and educational interventions, 2022 witnessed serious security incidents, including recurring acts of public revenge, assaults on law enforcement agencies, and ongoing armed confrontations. These issues are deeply rooted in economic disputes intertwined with smuggling networks, drug trafficking, and criminal activities, underscoring the need for comprehensive security campaigns, social engagement, and judicial empowerment to deter offenders and those threatening social stability.

Domestic violence represented a significant concern within Iraqi society in 2022, with various forms of violence predominating in terms of incidence and manifestation. The country experienced an increase in cases involving violence against women, children, and men, encompassing psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, marital infidelity, eviction of the elderly from their homes, and instances of girls fleeing their families. The vulnerability of affected groups is linked to multiple factors, highlighting the urgent necessity to address legislative deficiencies by expediting the enactment of the Domestic Violence Law and the Child Protection Law. These laws must balance protective measures with respect for social traditions and norms. Governmental awareness campaigns continue to target gender-based violence, aiming to eradicate violence against women. Support has been extended to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to enhance international cooperation, establish safe havens for women in Baghdad, and develop additional centers in other cities to address threats such as family disintegration, juvenile delinquency, and suicide.

Suicide has emerged as a notable phenomenon within Iraqi society, with a marked increase in cases compared to the previous year. Preliminary statistics indicate a significant rise in suicide incidents during 2022, particularly among young men and women in Baghdad, Dhī-Qār, and the Kurdistan Region. However, these figures lack full credibility and accuracy due to underreporting influenced by prevailing cultural norms, fear of repercussions, and the conflation of homicide and suicide cases. Contributing factors include economic deterioration, unemployment, domestic violence, electronic blackmail, and dissatisfaction manifesting as violent protest against life pressures. These circumstances necessitate proactive measures by relevant authorities, including educational initiatives, awareness programs, improvements in living conditions, job creation, and psychological support for individuals experiencing academic failure.

The issue of human trafficking remains a complex and pervasive social challenge in Iraq, transcending geographic boundaries and extending into neighboring countries. This rapidly expanding organized crime manifests in diverse forms and practices, posing significant threats to society. In 2022, the phenomenon diversified and proliferated, with the highest incidence rates observed in Baghdad and Erbil, particularly in nightclubs and densely populated areas. Victims, predominantly women and children, are often lured through social media

platforms, especially fraudulent pages, to neighboring countries and beyond. The year also saw an increase in begging, including electronic begging, exploited by specialized gangs that manipulate vulnerable individuals for material gain through sexual exploitation, servitude, forced labor, and begging.

Governmental responses have fallen short of international standards for eradicating human trafficking, despite considerable efforts and enhanced law enforcement activities by the Central Committee for Combating Human Trafficking. These efforts include the activation of shelters for trafficking victims, victim rehabilitation, and referrals to health institutions.

Displacement remains a pressing social and governmental challenge, requiring decisive action and effective solutions. Although the number of displaced persons decreased compared to the previous year, most continue to endure prolonged displacement due to factors such as lack of livelihood opportunities, inadequate housing in their areas of origin, security concerns in displacement locations, perceived economic and psychological stability in displacement areas, and fear of losing certain benefits upon return.

External migration has also troubled Iraqi society. Due to crises and exceptional circumstances, many individuals have been compelled to migrate in search of improved living conditions and safety. Thousands have migrated to Europe, encountering severe hardships at borders, including criminal acts, deportation, cruelty, torture, and neglect. Governmental efforts persist in managing migration challenges and facilitating the voluntary return of migrants.

## **VII. NGOs and Community Support**

In 2022, civil society and the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations within the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers engaged in intensive activities supporting displaced persons, empowering women, promoting social peace, renouncing violence and extremism, combating corruption, enhancing democracy, and strengthening partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The department implemented programs and workshops to build the capacities of civil society organizations across governorates in violence prevention and extremism countermeasures. Additionally, it facilitated the operations of foreign organizations in Iraq, sponsored humanitarian activities and events for youth, supported charitable and humanitarian projects, and recognized outstanding contributors.

## **VIII. Exchange Rate Policy**

In the realm of economic affairs, the persistent strength of the Iraqi dinar continued to expose the economy to increased vulnerability and a rise in imports until the end of 2020. At the government's request, the Central Bank opted to devalue the dinar, adjusting the foreign exchange rate to 1,450 dinars per dollar. Although this decision was delayed and involved a substantial devaluation of 23%

of the dinar's value, it would have been more appropriate for the bank to initiate a gradual devaluation process, such as the crawling peg system, starting in 2014 to reach this rate by 2020.

It is important to note that internal studies within the Central Bank recommended an exchange rate increase to 1,650 dinars per dollar, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advised a rate of 1,850 dinars per dollar. However, the government, rather than the Central Bank, determined the final rate. This decision was not primarily aimed at enhancing productive sectors or reducing imports but was intended to address the general budget deficit caused by substantial government expenditures. Such political interference undermines the independence of the Central Bank, which has been progressively eroding since 2012. Nevertheless, this intervention correlated with an increase in reserves, with growth rates of 18.15% in 2021 compared to 2020, which had experienced a negative reserve growth rate of -20.12%, and further rising to 51.43% in 2022. By the end of 2021, reserves amounted to approximately 92,526 billion dinars, increasing to 140,086 billion dinars by the end of 2022.

The parallel exchange rate exhibited only slight increases in 2022 compared to 2021, with an annual average rise of 0.7%, except for certain months such as March, which experienced a notable 19.7% increase. This surge may be attributed to the government's substantial dollar sales to the Central Bank, totaling 5,200 million dollars in March—a 70% increase from the previous month. This increase coincided with a significant rise in government spending, which was balanced by stable dollar sales through official channels, thereby generating demand for the dollar and exerting pressure on the foreign exchange rate.

In 2022, dollar purchases increased relative to the previous year, reaching 53,355 million dollars, with a monthly average of 4,446 million dollars—613 million dollars higher than the previous year's monthly average. This increase resulted from improved oil prices, augmented government revenues from oil returns, and the resolution of the compensation file with Kuwait, which facilitated increased oil revenues flowing to the government. Dollar sales reached 46,806 million dollars, with a monthly average of 3,901 million dollars, representing an increase of 810 million dollars over the previous year's monthly average. The expansion in sales aimed to satisfy local demand for dollars, which can be attributed to increased government spending despite the absence of an approved general budget and the financing of government expenditures through allocations under the Emergency Support Law. The difference between the Central Bank's purchases and sales during 2022 amounted to 6,549 million dollars, which was allocated to reserves.

Sterilization operations conducted by the Central Bank through foreign currency window sales to withdraw dinars generated by extensive government spending failed to curb the increase in issued currency and the expansion of the money supply. The issued currency increased during 2021 and 2022, with a more pronounced rise in the latter year. Specifically, issued currency rose from 68,948 billion dinars at the beginning of 2021 to 76,562 billion dinars at the end

of the year, reflecting an annual growth rate of 11%. Similarly, narrow money supply increased by 13.8%, and broad money supply by 14.6%. In 2022, issued currency grew from 78,207 billion dinars at the beginning of the year to 87,562 billion dinars at its end, with an annual growth rate of 12%. Narrow money supply and broad money supply increased by 22.5% and 20.5%, respectively, surpassing the previous year's rates. Overall, the increase in government spending under the Emergency Support Law contributed to the expansion of issued currency, which, amplified by the money multiplier effect, resulted in an increased money supply within the economy. This expansion manifested in inflationary pressures and rising price levels, primarily driven by imported inflation due to the depreciation of the dinar following its adjustment at the end of 2020. As previously noted, increased dollar sales to withdraw dinars from circulation did not succeed in restraining excessive currency issuance; consequently, the monetary authority was compelled to employ alternative measures beyond dollar sales to withdraw excess liquidity from the economy.

The intricate interrelation among economic variables implies that changes in one variable influence others. Excessive government spending inevitably leads to an increase in money supply, which in turn exerts pressure on the foreign currency sale window to meet local demand for foreign currency, driven by increased monetary issuance and imports. The Central Bank's sterilization policy aimed at controlling local liquidity through this mechanism was unsuccessful. Ultimately, the burden of these economic dynamics falls on the final consumer through elevated inflation rates. Inflation in 2022 increased consistently throughout the year, reaching an annual rate of 4.9%. Most inflationary increases were concentrated in specific commodity groups, notably food and non-alcoholic beverages—including vegetables, grains, meat, oils, and fats—as well as electricity and water supply, fuel, restaurants and hotels, and miscellaneous goods and services.

## **IX. Human Rights: Limited Progress**

In 2022, despite some observable progress in human rights in Iraq, as documented by prominent international organizations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), this progress remains limited. Numerous human rights issues require further substantial and practical efforts to achieve stability and meet international standards. This challenge is compounded by the complex interconnections between human rights and various political, social, economic, security, and religious factors, which significantly influence human rights conditions both positively and negatively.

The limited progress noted by international organizations pertains primarily to the Iraqi government's efforts to pursue justice concerning human rights violations and abuses against individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression. Notable advancements include investigations into cases involving demonstrators and the injured, as well as compensation for victims. However, ongoing impunity among certain security forces and armed factions, alongside

violations such as assaults on demonstrators' rights, killings, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, and physical and psychological torture of activists, continue to undermine state authority in addressing human rights violations. Irregular armed groups persist in exercising excessive violence and engaging in acts of personal revenge against activists, their relatives, and those involved in demonstrations, meetings with foreign rights delegations, or providing information to international organizations.

In August 2022, a significant development occurred within the High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq. Political polarization and conflicts among parliamentary blocs culminated in a parliamentary order mandating the retirement of the Commission's head and members. This order retroactively applied from August 3, 2021, effectively leaving the Commission without legal authority during the intervening period. The failure of parliamentary blocs to agree on appointing a new council to replace the expired mandate disrupted the Commission's operations and weakened human rights institutions, which continue to face ongoing violations.

Despite the five years elapsed since the defeat of the terrorist organization ISIS and the liberation of large areas of Iraq, approximately 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain. Although the government has undertaken various initiatives to facilitate their return—including financial incentives, infrastructure rehabilitation, and service restoration—many IDPs continue to face poverty, unemployment, inadequate livelihood opportunities, and challenges in securing legal rights. Additionally, some areas remain inaccessible due to the unwillingness of displaced persons to return or obstruction by armed groups. Social challenges persist for displaced families, including social rejection and exclusion.

Furthermore, significant segments of the Iraqi population experience marginalization and insufficient governmental and social support. Persons with disabilities, constituting an estimated 15% of Iraq's population in 2022, endure harsh conditions characterized by inadequate healthcare, medical rehabilitation, education, and employment opportunities. Although Iraq possesses a legislative framework supporting this demographic, practical implementation remains insufficient.

Women in Iraq continue to face substantial challenges in achieving empowerment and equitable social participation. Issues such as violence against women, entrenched traditional customs restricting their rights, limited access to education, training, and employment, and a lack of social diversity persist, hindering progress both theoretically and practically.

Other human rights, including freedoms of expression, assembly, demonstration, movement, opinion, and press and media, have also been subject to numerous violations and restrictions. Iraq remains categorized among countries with inadequate observance of these freedoms. Individuals face severe constraints in exercising these rights, including threats of killing, torture, persecution, kidnapping, and enforced disappearance by armed groups wielding power

and influence yet evading accountability and the enforcement of the rule of law. Despite governmental, social, and international efforts to promote justice, the human rights situation remained critically concerning throughout 2022.

## X. Public Services

The production of electric power in Iraq has experienced significant fluctuations and instability in supply over recent years. This instability is attributed to several factors, including the deterioration and obsolescence of infrastructure related to production, transmission, and distribution; financial and administrative corruption; and dependence on imported gas, particularly from Iran. Consequently, electric power generation remains reliant on fuel imports despite Iraq being one of the world's major crude oil producers.

Data from 2022 indicate that the load required to supply governorates with electric power was approximately 33,919 megawatts, whereas the average production volume was about 15,016 megawatts, with losses amounting to approximately 3,048 megawatts. Therefore, the actual production volume was around 18,064 megawatts, resulting in a supply-demand gap of approximately 15,127 megawatts. It is anticipated that demand for electric power will continue to grow at an estimated annual rate of 10%, necessitating immediate and urgent measures and strategic planning to address this increasing demand.

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Electricity announced in 2022 the development of a five-year plan aimed at increasing power production to exceed the 50,000-megawatt threshold. The plan projects an average annual increase of 6,000 megawatts in the first year and 12,000 megawatts in the second year, culminating in an estimated production capacity of approximately 52,000 megawatts after five years.

The government has initiated efforts to eliminate routine gas flaring and utilize the gas for electricity generation. Iraq has committed to the "Zero Routine Flaring by 2030" initiative, launched by the United Nations and the World Bank, which seeks to end the routine flaring of gas produced during oil exploration by 2030. This commitment aims to reduce reliance on imports, cease the burning of all gas released during oil extraction, utilize the gas for power generation, export any surplus, and generate financial revenues for the country. Within this framework, the Ministry of Oil approved increasing associated gas production in the al-Zubayr oil field to 147 million standard cubic feet per day and expanding the number of compressors at the Hammār Mushrif station to 11, thereby raising its capacity from 35 million to 147 million standard cubic feet per day for various uses instead of flaring.

Additionally, the Ministry of Oil announced a contract with the US oil company Baker Hughes to collect and process associated gas from the al-Gharrāf and al-Nāṣirīyah oil fields in Dhī-Qār Governorate. The objective is to increase gas production in these fields from 20 million to 200 million cubic feet by installing advanced processing equipment at the Consolidated Natural Gas Complex. This

equipment will dry and compress associated gas to generate over 100 million cubic feet per day. Furthermore, the al-Nāšīrīyah station is being expanded into an integrated natural liquid gas facility to process 200 million cubic feet per day of dry gas, liquid gas, and condensate, which will supply local power generation stations capable of producing approximately 400 megawatts for the national electricity grid.

In mid-2022, former Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī inaugurated the Maysan Investment Station, a combined cycle electric power plant with an operational capacity of 750 megawatts. This station operates on local gas to reduce dependence on imported gas and represents a qualitative addition to the national grid, particularly benefiting the Maysan governorate.

The ministerial program of the government led by Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī emphasized the urgent need to address the electricity sector's challenges by developing strategic plans to improve its condition. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to developing this sector, which continues to suffer from instability despite substantial government expenditure. This instability has adversely affected key economic sectors such as industry, agriculture, and investment. He also highlighted the government's belief in the importance of the private sector and its potential to contribute to economic growth through successful partnerships.

In this context, the current Minister of Electricity, Ziyād 'Alī Fāḍil, unveiled plans for qualitative projects aimed at resolving the country's energy challenges. The Council of Ministers approved contracts with international companies to transition the electrical system to a smart grid.

The Ministry presented a three-stage plan to address power outages within specific timeframes. The first stage involves projects to be implemented within six months, with teams formed to ensure completion by summer 2023. The second and third stages constitute a strategic plan to address outages nationwide. The Ministry emphasized that the government program includes qualitative projects, notably combined cycle plants expected to add 4,000 megawatts within two years. These projects operate without fuel, potentially reducing the Ministry of Electricity's operational budget by over 4 billion dollars annually. This initiative is considered a significant contribution to solving the energy crisis and lowering operational costs. Furthermore, the Ministry has plans to improve service and revenue collection, having been authorized by the government to contract with major international companies to develop a comprehensive vision and study for transitioning to a smart electrical system to reduce losses in transmission lines. The Minister indicated that a localized plan within governorates will be presented to the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives for discussion in the near future.

To mitigate the chronic deficit in electric power production, Iraq has, over the past four years, entered into agreements with neighboring countries, including Gulf states, the Gulf Interconnection Authority, Turkey, and Jordan. The Ministry of

Electricity announced intentions to establish electrical interconnections with four neighboring countries to address power shortages. Two plans were presented to the Council of Ministers in preparation for summer 2023, aiming to stabilize production at 24,000 megawatts. The Ministry is pursuing energy diversification through electrical interconnection projects, including collaboration with Jordan to establish a transmission line linking the al-Qā'im station with the Rīshah station in Jordan. Interconnection points and transmission routes with Saudi Arabia have been determined, along with the mechanisms and energy quantities to be transmitted. A final interconnection agreement with Turkey was completed to supply 300 megawatts to northern governorates, and a 400-megawatt conversion station was established. However, increased energy prices in Turkey have delayed the implementation of this agreement. Through these electrical interconnection projects with the Arab Gulf states, Turkey, and Jordan, the current government aims to meet Iraq's electric power needs by securing hundreds of megawatts of additional capacity.

Moreover, efforts over the past three years have focused on adopting clean energy by contracting with international companies to establish solar photovoltaic projects. Iraq benefits from a high annual average of solar radiation, which is advantageous for electricity generation. The Investment Commission reported that the government signed agreements with international companies to produce 7.5 megawatts of solar energy. These projects are distributed across Baghdad, al-Anbār, Nīnawá, Wāsiṭ, Karbalá', Dhī-Qār, al-Baṣrah, Maysan, Najaf, Bābil, and al-Diwāniyah. The UAE-based Masdar Company is set to produce approximately 100 megawatts, including 350 megawatts in al-Anbār, 500 megawatts in Dhī-Qār, 100 megawatts in Maysan, and 100 megawatts in Nīnawá. Additionally, Power China will produce 750 megawatts, and Total is expected to produce about 1,000 megawatts in the first phase. The second phase involves assigning projects to Aqua Power Saudi Company and Gulf Power Emirates to produce 7,500 megawatts.

## **XI. The Al-Faw Water Desalination Project and the Chinese-British Struggle**

al-Baṣrah has suffered for years from a range of crises and challenges, most notably the lack of potable water. Successive governments have attempted to solve this problem but faced a set of obstacles, most notably financial and administrative corruption. In June 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the Ministry of Finance's implementation of the third part of the al-Baṣrah Water Pipeline Project (al-Bada'ah Canal) at an estimated total cost of 475 million dollars for the first phase. The decision stipulated the allocation of 275 million dollars from the additional investment account within the framework agreement between the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Chinese Export Corporation (Sinosure) outside the framework of borrowing termed as guarantees. The decision included the implementation of the project by Ministry of Water Resources companies to

save time and reduce costs, utilizing the available capacities of the Ministry of Water Resources as an exception to the Instructions for Implementing Government Contracts No. 2 of 2014.

In this context, there was competition and struggle between Chinese and British companies to win the contract. The British offer submitted by Biwater was based on establishing a seawater desalination plant only using the RO system, with a production capacity of up to one million cubic meters per day, and transmission lines with a total length of 345 km to address the salinity crisis of drinking water in al-Başrah, at a total cost of 5 billion dollars funded by a British loan. Some specialists indicate that this system costs the governorate exorbitant sums in maintenance and filter replacement. Meanwhile, the Chinese offer submitted by Shanghai Electric involves establishing a steam power plant in al-Fāw to implement multi-purpose projects consisting of producing desalinated seawater with a capacity of 1.25 million cubic meters and producing 3,000 megawatts of electric power. The construction of this project is funded either through a Chinese loan or through petrodollar funds, and the project cost was not precisely determined. The Austrian company ILF Consulting Engineers undertakes the provision of consultancy services for the project. In its thirty-fourth regular session held on September 7, 2021, the Council of Ministers decided to authorize the Director General of the General Directorate in the Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works with the authority to sign the contract and disburse funds with the consortium of companies in solidarity between Samsun Makina Sanayi-Biwater-Wood Group and al-Riḍā Group regarding the seawater desalination project in al-Başrah Governorate funded by the British loan, provided it does not exceed five billion dollars, according to the study submitted by the Austrian company, with the project implementation under the supervision and follow-up of the aforementioned consultant.

After the formation of the new government, it discussed the steps for implementing the seawater desalination project in al-Başrah Governorate, accelerating the contracting, financing, and implementation mechanisms. The Prime Minister affirmed the government's determination to involve reputable international companies in implementing the project to deliver an achievement characterized by efficiency that ends the water desalination file radically. The project will also include constructing a new power station, in addition to providing water to increase the capacities of oil reservoirs.

## **XII. Education and Higher Education**

As for the education and higher education file in Iraq for the year 2022, following the repercussions cast by the COVID-19 pandemic with its significant effects on the education sector worldwide and Iraq in particular, children lost a tremendous amount of time allocated for study during the pandemic. Estimates indicated that at the peak of the pandemic, school closures disrupted the education of more than 1.6 billion children in 188 countries. Education systems world-

wide witnessed, on average, during the period from February 2020 to February 2022, a complete closure of direct in-person study for about 141 school days. While some countries, including Iraq, attempted to reopen schools gradually once vaccination procedures began, a number of other countries kept schools completely closed for very long periods. This led to lower learning outcomes compared to pre-COVID-19 times, exacerbating inequalities in education opportunities and increasing dropout rates, resulting in the emergence of social problems affecting the educational process such as poverty, unstable economic situations, child labor, mental health problems, and increasing cases of early marriage and early pregnancy.

The Ministry of Education in Iraq announced the launch of the 2021-22 academic year on November 1, 2021, with student attendance to be in-person for four days a week, suspending the Saturday holiday, provided that the General Directorate of General, Private, and Foreign Education and the General Directorate of Educational Supervision, as well as the General Directorates of Education in all governorates, set the official working mechanisms. The Ministry of Education confirmed that the total number of students enrolled in classes reached more than 12 million male and female students, while the number of first-grade primary students reached more than 1.2 million male and female students, and that the 2021-2022 academic year witnessed in-person attendance for students of all academic stages.

With the significant increase in enrollment, the year 2022 witnessed a clear increase in the number of completed government schools. However, the academic year came amidst a lack of many basic requirements for the success of the educational process for students. There is a shortage of textbooks, as the Ministry of Education was unable to print new books due to the non-approval of the country's federal budget, prompting it to rely on textbooks returned by students from previous academic years. The Ministry's move to develop curricula five years ago and the difficulties it entailed was not suitable for Iraq's situation, which negatively affected the educational sector along with the increasing continuation of official holidays that hinder the educational process, in addition to the lack of financial allocations in the general budget, amidst political, partisan, and bureaucratic interference in that process, with a great deal of cronyism in matters of transfer, appointments, promotions, and selection of positions.

On the other hand, the education sector in Iraq suffered from high rates of educational wastage due to the problems faced by the country. Furthermore, the significant shortage in the number of school buildings created further pressure on educational staff, and Iraq needs 15,000 new school buildings to make classrooms ideal in terms of student numbers according to international standards. The spread of corruption also contributed to the decline of the educational system, along with the deterioration of the economic situation which led to the Ministry of Education's allocations in the general budget being disproportionate to the Ministry's requirements. Additionally, the deterioration of the Iraqi

dinar exchange rate raised the cost of living and the costs of sending children to schools, especially students enrolled in private schools.

Regarding the higher education sector, the (2021-22) academic year, which began on October 11, 2021, witnessed a noticeable decline in the numbers of students admitted to public and private universities within the central admission channel and special application for the first and second rounds, alongside a noticeable increase in the numbers of students graduating from public and private universities. This implies a significant economic, social, and political pressure, given what universities are suffering from regarding the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the exhaustion of their already weary infrastructures.

Despite the noticeable progress of Iraqi universities in some global indicators and rankings such as Times, Webometrics, and QS, and the increase in the number of research papers published in global repositories, universities suffered in 2022 from the effects of political interference in their administrative affairs and weak independence, which still constitutes a major challenge in developing their work. This is coupled with the establishment of many public universities and faculties in the past without observing the minimum requirements for infrastructure, human resources, and labor market needs, and the uncontrolled establishment of a number of private universities and faculties by influential entities, along with the absence of specific criteria for appointing teaching staff and employees and distributing them according to specialization and qualifications. The selection of deans and university presidents remains a major obstacle hindering the development of higher education.

### **XIII. International Relations**

In the realm of international relations, the rapid regional and global developments of 2022 compelled Iraq to adopt strategic and calculated approaches in its foreign policy, engaging with major powers, neighboring countries, and its Arab neighbors. The United States of America emerged as a primary focus due to its longstanding presence and established strategy concerning the control of energy and financial resources, as well as maintaining the security of Israel. Iraq prioritized strengthening economic relations to benefit both parties, culminating in the signing of the executive agreement for the Development Goals Grant in November 2022. This agreement aimed to support Iraq's development efforts by reforming economic, financial, and service sectors, addressing poverty and unemployment, and enhancing service delivery across Iraq, in alignment with the Iraqi-US Strategic Agreement and the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement. Security cooperation further reinforced the strategic partnership through collaboration, training, consultations, and the provision of various forms of aid to Iraqi security forces combating ISIS terrorist groups.

The Kurdistan Regional Government renewed its memorandum of understanding with the US Department of Defense to advance security cooperation,

the Peshmerga reform program, and support efforts to defeat ISIS. The United States condemned Iranian attacks on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, characterizing missile and drone strikes as unjustified violations of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and denounced threats of further assaults.

Bilateral relations were strained by the United States' adverse reaction to the Law Criminalizing Normalization passed by the Iraqi Parliament, which criminalizes any cooperation or dealings with the Israel. While Palestinian movements Ḥamās and al-Jihād al-Islāmī welcomed the law, the United States expressed strong disapproval, and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned it as a setback to the peace agreements initiative with Arab countries.

Iraq undertook significant foreign policy initiatives within its regional context, hosting summits under the auspices of former Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī. Iraq acted as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran, facilitating extensive and repeated dialogue sessions aimed at resolving differences. The current Prime Minister, Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī, continued this mission during visits to Tehran and Riyadh in November and December 2022, resulting in a memorandum of understanding between the two neighboring and traditionally rival countries, encompassing cooperation in trade and efforts to combat crime and terrorism. Additionally, the Iraqi Foreign Minister visited Iran, meeting with its President and Foreign Minister to discuss security and political matters, enhance bilateral relations and cooperation, and address the impact of international developments on Iraq's and the region's security and stability. The minister candidly communicated Baghdad's rejection of Iranian and Turkish interference in Iraq's internal affairs, while emphasizing a commitment to resolving contentious issues through dialogue.

Bilateral relations were further strengthened by the visit of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsi, to Iran in April 2022. The visit reaffirmed commitments to sovereignty and good neighborliness, seeking to replace previous violations and obstacles with cooperation and mutual respect. It also raised hopes for Iranian involvement in resolving Iraq's political deadlock by mediating with certain political blocs with which Iran maintains good relations, facilitating dialogue toward government formation. Discussions also included plans to increase trade exchanges and improve export rates between the two countries.

Iraqi-Turkish relations in 2022 were marked by significant importance due to deep political, military, and commercial interconnections, alongside growing trade relations and Iraq's efforts to secure its food and industrial needs primarily from Turkey. However, relations were strained by Turkish military operations in the Kurdistan Region in July 2022, including a tragic attack on Zākhū District in Duhūk Governorate that resulted in civilian casualties. The Iraqi government condemned these actions and the repeated violations of Iraq's sovereignty and security. Turkey denied responsibility, asserting its adherence to obligations within international organizations and alliances, emphasizing alliance spirit and principles of covenant and sincerity. Turkey also expressed its opposition to terrorist organiza-

tions along its southern borders, implicitly referring to the PKK in northern Iraq and Syria, and its determination to eliminate their presence.

Iraq sought to enhance relations with Arab countries and Gulf neighbors, actively participating in the al-'Aqabah Summit in March 2022, which convened the heads of Jordan, the UAE, Egypt, and Iraq, with Saudi Arabia in attendance. The summit resulted in economic agreements concerning energy, trade, and investment. Discussions also addressed global challenges arising from the Ukrainian War. The newly formed Iraqi government, led by al-Sūdānī, prioritized reassuring Arab partners, initiating this effort through a visit to Jordan to discuss mutual interests and reaffirm Iraq's commitment to prior agreements with Jordan and Egypt, as well as adherence to principles of Arab and regional good neighborliness. Iraq further consolidated these efforts by participating in the Jiddah Summit for Security and Development in July 2022, which included leaders from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Jordan, Egypt, and the United States, aiming to deepen cooperation across various fields. Notably, the Gulf interconnection contract with southern Iraq's electricity grid was signed on the summit's sidelines.

## 2. The Political Process

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### I. Introduction

The early parliamentary elections were conducted as scheduled on October 10, 2021, subsequent to the Tishrīn youth protests that swept across Baghdad and the central and southern governorates of Iraq. These protests precipitated the dismissal of the government led by 'Ādil 'Abd-al-Mahdī in November 2019, as the populace aspired for an improved future distinct from the preceding two decades and sought to facilitate a peaceful transfer of power to avert the prolonged political crises that Iraq had historically endured.

Despite the passage of one year, the government remained unformed, the President of the Republic was not elected, and the ministerial cabinet was not established. Contrarily, political life descended into a crisis more severe than previous ones, marked by violent confrontations resulting in casualties. Consequently, the elections became contentious as the victorious parties failed to agree on a comprehensive governance model.

The Sadrist Movement (al-Tayyār al-Ṣadrī), which secured the highest number of votes, advocated for a departure from the traditional governance style that had prevailed for two decades. On March 23, 2022, it proposed replacing the consensual alliance-based governance with a majority rule system through the formation of a cross-sectarian parliamentary coalition named Saving a Homeland (Inqādh Waṭan).

This proposed shift alarmed certain Shiite political parties accustomed to forming the largest parliamentary bloc through alliances predominantly among Shiite parties, supplemented by other political entities. This bloc customarily distributed sovereign and administrative positions proportionally to political weight, following a top-down approach within the political and administrative hierarchy based on a democracy-consensus-sectarian model established since the 2005 elections.

The outcomes of this consensual governance model over two decades were detrimental to the Iraqi populace, fostering economic, social, and political corruption fiefdoms and precipitating a civil war lasting nearly four years. Subsequently, ISIS controlled a third of the country's territory for three years, compelling the

Iraqi people to make significant sacrifices for liberation. Additionally, poverty and unemployment rates escalated, and drug proliferation—a novel social issue—alongside other social problems, intensified. These conditions incited renewed protests demanding systemic change and the dismantling of the consensual political system.

The post-election protests embodied two primary models: the first comprised a broad spectrum of independents without partisan affiliations and individuals seeking a homeland free from poverty and deprivation, aspiring for security, safety, and a promising future. The second model consisted of partisans and their supporters, termed “authority voters,” who protested against rival parties, exemplified by the conflict between supporters of the Sadrist Movement, led by Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, and those of the Coordination Framework (al-Itḥār al-Tansīqī), established on October 11, 2021, culminating in armed clashes.

Other electoral victors, including Kurdish parties, faced internal challenges and divisions. Notably, the alliance between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Mas’ūd Bārzānī, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Bāfel Ṭālabānī, dissolved. The KDP allied with the Sadrist Movement, whereas the PUK joined the Coordination Framework. Meanwhile, the emergent Kurdish New Generation Movement (Ḥarakat al-Jīl al-Jadīd), under Shāswār ‘Abd-al-Wāhid, emerged as a formidable competitor, securing nine seats and promising a significant future in the Kurdistan Region.

Sunni parties were similarly divided into two factions: the Sovereignty Alliance (Taḥāluf al-Siyādah), aligned with the Sadrist Movement, and certain members of the ‘Azm Alliance, affiliated with the Coordination Framework.

Independent representatives, though limited in number and influence, represented a novel parliamentary phenomenon with potential to form a significant power bloc vis-à-vis dominant coalitions.

Given these political impasses and the failure to reach consensus, a critical question arises regarding the future trajectory of Iraq’s post-2003 political system.

## II. The Government Formation Crisis

Constitutionally, government formation should follow elections within the stipulated periods outlined in the 2005 Constitution. However, post-election developments diverged significantly. The Coordination Framework, suffering substantial and unexpected losses, outrightly rejected the results, alleging electoral fraud. Protests supporting the Framework escalated, including attempts to breach the Green Zone, exposing profound mistrust and divisions among Iraq’s leading political actors.

### 1. Fragmentation of Political Parties’ Positions

Since the inaugural 2005 elections, Iraqi political parties have exhibited divergent perspectives on every aspect of the political process, reflecting disparate identities and visions for Iraq’s future. Consensus is achieved only under duress

or external influence, as democratic principles lack firm institutional foundations. Many parties eschew democracy, peaceful power transfer, constitutional adherence, and state supremacy, resulting in fragmented and internally divided political entities.

Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, securing 73 seats, championed a parliamentary majority approach to government formation, contending that two decades of consensual governance engendered widespread economic corruption, empowered armed groups surpassing state authority, facilitated organized crime and drug proliferation, and destabilized political, social, and moral order. He argued that majority rule would establish an effective parliamentary opposition to oversee the executive, curtail corruption, implement administrative reforms, and centralize weaponry under state control, thereby prioritizing public service.

Conversely, the Coordination Framework advocated maintaining consensus governance by forming the largest bloc with the Sadrist Movement to preserve established political customs, maintain Shiite unity, and resist coerced opposition status.

Kurdish political fragmentation mirrored Shiite divisions. The Kurdistan Democratic Party sought to disrupt the longstanding power-sharing arrangement with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which had allocated the Kurdistan Region presidency to the former and the Iraqi Republic presidency to the latter. Following the death of Jalāl Ṭālabānī in 2017, Mas'ūd Bārzanī proposed consolidating both positions, citing changed political circumstances that nullified prior agreements. This proposal antagonized the PUK, led by Bāfel Ṭālabānī, exacerbating tensions and raising fears of renewed civil conflict reminiscent of the 1990s.

Sunni political factions also experienced discord, particularly between the Sovereignty Alliance's leaders Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī (Taḡaddum) and Khamīs al-Khanjar (ʿAz̄m). Disputes over ministerial appointments, such as the minister of defence, and parliamentary leadership necessitated mediation by the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, culminating in a compromise allocating the Council presidency to al-Ḥalbūsī and the parliamentary bloc leadership to al-Khanjar, alongside increased ministerial representation.

Tensions persisted, exemplified by al-Ḥalbūsī's resentment toward al-Khanjar's suggestion to overhaul the parliamentary presidency following the resignation of the First Deputy Ḥākim al-Zāmilī (Sadrist Movement), with mutual threats underscoring the fraught relations (al-Ḥalbūsī, 2021, July 24).

These fragmented and crisis-ridden positions culminated in a severe parliamentary rift, prolonging the government formation crisis for an entire year.

## **2. Intensification of the Crisis in the Parliament**

The initial parliamentary session on January 9, 2022, prominently revealed divisions and a lack of consensus, particularly concerning the nomination procedures for key positions. Political alliances concentrated their efforts on selecting the Speaker of Parliament and his two deputies, guided by their respective agendas

and partisan or personal convictions. According to constitutional provisions, the eldest member presides over the first session to facilitate the election of the Speaker and deputies (Article 54). Subsequently, the Council elects these officials by an absolute majority (Article 55), after which the President of the Republic is elected by a two-thirds majority of representatives (Article 70). Finally, the President appoints the nominee of the largest parliamentary bloc to form the Council of Ministers within fifteen days of election (Article 76).

Dr. Maḥmūd al-Mashhadānī, the eldest member, chaired the first session attended by 325 representatives. The nomination process for the presidency of the Council of Representatives commenced, with the Coordination Framework asserting its status as the largest bloc. The Age-based Speaker verified this claim, and the Framework nominated MP Aḥmad al-Asadī for the position of First Deputy.

The Sadrist Movement contested this nomination, asserting their status as the largest bloc and proposing MP Ḥākīm al-Zāmilī as First Deputy. This dispute escalated into a violent confrontation, causing tension within the parliamentary hall. The Age-based Speaker declared his inability to continue and adjourned the session due to health issues, necessitating hospitalization. Subsequently, members from the Coordination Framework, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and some independents withdrew from the session. Conversely, Sadrist Movement members, alongside their allies, proceeded with a second session. Khālīd al-Darrājī, the reserve Age-based Speaker, presided over this session, during which al-Ḥalbūsī was elected Speaker with 200 votes. Ḥākīm al-Zāmilī secured the position of First Deputy with 182 votes, and Shākhwān ‘Abd-Allāh of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was elected Second Deputy Speaker with 180 votes. The Sadrist bloc’s head, MP Ḥasan al-Adhārī, subsequently requested the registration of their bloc as the largest in the parliament.

al-Mashhadānī, the Age-based Speaker, refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the second session, asserting that it could not proceed without his consent. Similarly, the Coordination Framework and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan rejected the session’s outcomes, deeming them illegitimate due to procedural irregularities and contested results. The situation escalated when Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, via a tweet, urged the armed faction Sarāyā al-Salām, affiliated with the Sadrist Movement, to remain vigilant (al-Ṣadr, 2022, January 22). The parliamentary environment was unable to contain the intensifying conflict between the Sadrist Movement and the Coordination Framework, particularly during the nomination for the President of the Republic. The Coordination Framework invoked the Federal Court’s decision (Article 70), which mandates the presence of two-thirds of MPs (220 members) to elect the President.

Neither faction met this quorum. The Coordination Framework employed the “blocking third” strategy to obstruct the nomination process. This was evidenced when they submitted a list of 126 MPs boycotting the session, comprising 81 from the Coordination Framework, 18 from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, 12 from the Azm Alliance, 6 from the Ishrāqat Kānūn Party, 5 from the Islamic Union and Islamic Justice, 3 independents, and Bāsim Khashshān. The session on March 26,

2022, was thus disrupted, with only 202 MPs present out of 329. The Coordination Framework replicated this disruption during the subsequent session on March 30, 2022.

The Sadrist Movement endeavored to mobilize the largest possible number of MPs, particularly following al-Şadr's appeal to independent MPs to join their cause and take a principled stand to rescue the nation from corruption, terrorism, occupation, and normalization. He emphasized the necessity of their courageous stance and promised them a role in governance should they unite (al-Şadr, 2022, March 21). Despite these efforts, sessions to elect the President and form the government remained unproductive, perpetuating the governmental formation crisis.

In response, al-Şadr undertook a series of strategic moves aimed at asserting his influence and challenging his adversaries, notably the Coordination Framework. Among these was:

### **Challenge One: The Forty-Day Deadline**

al-Şadr adopted a confrontational approach by advocating for a national majority government rather than a consensual one. He allied with the Sovereignty Alliance (Taĥāluf al-Siyādah) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, diverging from traditional Shiite alliances. He issued a "forty-day deadline" initiative, inviting the Coordination Framework to form a national majority government within this period. He granted the blocking third the opportunity to negotiate with all blocs, excluding the Sadrist bloc, from the first day of Ramadan until the ninth of Shawwal (al-Şadr, 2022, March 31). This initiative aimed to demonstrate that the Sadrist Movement remained politically engaged, opposed consensual government formation, and was willing to cede the opportunity to form a majority government if others could.

Moreover, al-Şadr declared indifference toward ongoing dialogues or initiatives to resolve the crisis, granting the Coordination Framework full freedom, with guarantees, to reach agreements prioritizing national interests within the deadline. Should the deadline lapse without progress, the Sadrist Movement reserved the right to adopt a different stance (al-Şadr, 2022, April 2). This raises the question: Why did Sayyid al-Şadr afford the Coordination Framework this opportunity? Did he doubt his capacity to succeed?

It appears that both objective and subjective conditions were unfavorable, rendering his goal unattainable. He faced a significant obstacle in securing the constitutionally mandated quorum for the presidential election session. His attempts to persuade Coordination Framework and independent MPs were unsuccessful, confronting a resolute opponent equipped with various tactics to impede his efforts. Ultimately, he sought to expose their incapacity. The Sovereignty Alliance and the Kurdistan Democratic Party endorsed al-Şadr's deadline in a joint statement, affirming their commitment to the Saving a Homeland Alliance (Taĥāluf Inqādh Waṭan), regarded as Iraqis' hope (Nas News, 2022, April 1). Former Foreign Minister Hoshyār Zībārī also challenged the Coordination Frame-

work, stating, "Try to form the government... and let us see" (Ultra Iraq, 2022, April 1). Nevertheless, the Coordination Framework unequivocally rejected the deadline, asserting on April 12, 2022, that it neither sought to monopolize power nor exclude others, and thus dismissed time constraints as counterproductive to resolving the political deadlock (al-Arab News, 2022, April 12).

Ultimately, the deadline expired without resolution, and al-Ṣadr's challenge succeeded insofar as the Coordination Framework failed to break the deadlock or form a government. This impelled the proposal of various initiatives aimed at salvaging the political situation and resolving the crisis, including the Coordination Framework's own initiative, which Mas'ūd Bārzanī endorsed contingent upon the election of the Kurdistan Democratic Party candidate, Rībar Aḥmad, as President of the Republic.

### **Challenge Two: Rejection of Initiatives and Calls for Negotiation**

Following the expiration of the forty-day deadline without substantive progress, ten initiatives were proposed over a five-month period by prominent political actors and figures. Each initiative involved a national dialogue with the Sadrist Movement aimed at establishing a roadmap grounded in robust discussions and mutual understanding to extricate the political system from its recurrent crises, ultimately seeking to resolve the impasse between opposing factions. Among these was the initiative presented by Sayyid 'Ammār al-Ḥakīm on April 8, 2022, the "National State Forces Alliance Initiative," which comprised nine points emphasizing the principle of "no victor, no vanquished; everyone wins." The approach was delineated as follows: Initially, the constitution was designated as the primary agreed-upon reference, encompassing provisions such as the concept of the "largest bloc in parliament." Subsequently, all parties were to engage in dialogue without preconditions to discuss solutions and remedies. al-Ḥakīm further elucidated the role and function of the parliamentary opposition under several conditions, including:

1. Any entity wishing to constitute the opposition wing in parliament, whether the Sadrist Movement or the Coordination Framework, must participate substantively in governance.
2. The majority commits to providing a secure environment for the opposition, empowering it within parliamentary committees and independent oversight bodies to fulfill its responsibilities.
3. The opposition is to be granted genuine participation in state administration and recognized as a trusted entity in conflict resolution.
4. There must be an agreement between the ruling majority and the constructive opposition to engage in continuous consultation and periodic deliberation on fundamental national issues, facilitating the adoption of national and social decisions on critical matters and stalled legislation. In exchange, the opposition pledges not to disrupt Council of Representatives sessions and to ensure active attendance (INA, 2022, April 8).

Should these conditions and criteria be met, approval would be granted to sequentially address service and administrative issues, thereby resolving the deadlock between parties and alleviating the political impasse. Nevertheless, this initiative was not endorsed by the Saving a Homeland Alliance.

The Coordination Framework also contributed several initiatives, all predicated on a central tenet: the largest bloc should originate from the Shiite community as the predominant component, asserting that "it is the right of the component and this political custom will not be abandoned."

One notable initiative, announced on May 4, 2022, comprised nine points, including the stipulation that "the Kurds must reach consensus on a candidate with an unblemished character for the presidency of the Republic." This effectively rejected the Kurdistan Democratic Party candidate, former Foreign Minister Hoshyār Zībārī. Furthermore, consensus was sought on appointing a Prime Minister "from the independents," thereby rejecting nominees from political parties, particularly Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, who enjoys support from al-Ṣadr (Ultra Iraq, 2022, May 4). Additional conditions involved forming the three presidencies through intra-component discussions, with the majority pledging to provide security guarantees for the opposition, empower it within the Council of Representatives, and enhance its role in government oversight and accountability.

Concurrently, al-Ṣadr announced an initiative on May 4, 2022, which paralleled and competed with that of the Coordination Framework. He invited independent MPs to join the Saving a Homeland Alliance to establish an independent government within fifteen days, contingent upon the Sadrist Movement's non-participation.

The independent MPs rejected al-Ṣadr's initiative, deeming it unclear and lacking a definitive roadmap to resolve the political deadlock. Instead, they proposed a seven-point initiative centered on forming a government led by independents and adherents to this framework. Their proposal introduced novel concepts, including establishing the largest parliamentary bloc led by independents, appointing an independent Prime Minister, ensuring the government fosters an effective opposition, maintaining a separation between the political majority and opposition, representing minorities in the new government, working to end armed manifestations, enforcing the law impartially, and, if unsuccessful, advocating for the dissolution of parliament and repetition of the political process. However, this initiative was rejected by the Sadrist Movement.

### **Challenge Three: The Becoming of the Sadrist Movement - Resignation Does Not Mean Isolation from Political Work**

On June 12, 2022, al-Ṣadr surprised observers by calling for the collective resignation of Sadrist Movement MPs from parliament, justifying this by stating, "If the survival of the Sadrist bloc is an obstacle to forming the government, all members are ready to resign from the Council of Representatives and will not disobey me." He further asserted, "We have two options: either opposition or withdrawal..."

and expressed his view that Iraq “needs a majority government serving its people” (al-Şadr, 2022, June 9).

Despite his numerous justifications for the resignation, the announcement elicited diverse reactions. Sayyid Aḥmad al-Şāfi, representative of the religious authority (marjiʿiyah), remarked, “The marjiʿiyah is monitoring the scene and warned of many matters concerning the country,” cautioning against “the illusion of believing that the sedition has ended” (al-Mayadeen Tv, 2022, May 16). The Coordination Framework issued an official statement expressing its hope to proceed with all political forces but respecting the Sadrist bloc’s decision to resign from the Council of Representatives (Nas News, 2022, June 13). Conversely, the Kurdistan Democratic Party strongly opposed the resignation, attributing responsibility for ensuing consequences to the Coordination Framework. A KDP leading member, Bangīn Rikānī, clarified, “The withdrawal of the Democratic Party is not ruled out. We are not employees in the hands of Iran, and we are masters on our land. We will not pose a threat to anyone, and we will not allow anyone to pose a threat to us. The party’s priority is to form a government within a written and specific time agreement that addresses Iraqi issues and solves the region’s problems, and the Framework must choose a non-provocative candidate supported by Sunnis and Kurds” (Ultra Iraq, 2022, June 20).

Although the Sadrist Movement withdrew from parliament, questions arose regarding whether this withdrawal signified a complete disengagement from political activity. What is the Sadrist Movement’s perspective? Does it possess a clear vision of the outcomes? Does it have future plans? Subsequent events demonstrated that the Movement maintains a clear strategy comprising several steps to achieve its objectives, including:

- **Mobilizing the Political Street**

Following its parliamentary withdrawal, the Sadrist Movement adopted a dual political strategy. On one hand, it assumed the role of a rejecter and boycotter of the political process; on the other, it remained an influential actor in the intricate details of the political process. In essence, it refused participation and engagement within the official parliamentary framework while simultaneously exercising control as the official “winner” of the elections. Moreover, it exerted influence over political forces through threats and intimidation, asserting, “Some imagine that the withdrawal decision is handing Iraq over to the corrupt. No, rather it is handing over to the will of the people and their decision, and tomorrow is near for those waiting” (al-Şadr, 2022, July 2).

It is axiomatic that popular legitimacy constitutes the most effective means of threatening and intimidating opponents compared to other methods, a tactic the Sadrist Movement employed effectively throughout 2022. This was evident when the Coordination Framework nominated Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī for the premiership on July 25, 2022. Şāliḥ al-ʿIrāqī encapsulated this sentiment in a tweet: “Sūdānī shakes hands with his shadow,” signaling the party’s rejection of the candidate and serving as a call for popular opposition.

Recognizing their pivotal role, supporters of the Sadrist Movement engaged in multiple incursions into the Green Zone, including repeated storming of the parliament, notably on July 27, 2022, to manifest their rejection of al-Sūdānī's nomination. Subsequently, al-Ṣadr addressed his adversaries, stating, "It is a pinch of the ear... and tomorrow?" The protests were repeated to obstruct the parliamentary session scheduled for July 30, 2022, intended to elect the President of the Republic. This was signaled via a tweet exchange between Sadrist leaders Aḥmad al-Rubayī and Ḥāzim al-A'rajī, confirming their readiness.

Consequently, the street was mobilized, with Movement supporters assembling at dawn on July 30 in Tahrir Square, central Baghdad, before storming the parliament building. Clashes with Green Zone security forces ensued, resulting in numerous injuries. Protesters insisted on staging a sit-in within the parliament dome, compelling the Speaker of the Council of Representatives to postpone the voting session.

- **The Ashura Revolution**

al-Ṣadr designated his followers as revolutionaries and termed their movement the "Ashura Revolution" (Thawrat 'Āshūrā), drawing a parallel to the revolution led by Imam al-Ḥusayn, thereby imbuing it with significant moral implications. This designation also entailed a complete severance of dialogue, meetings, or any form of understanding with other political entities, exemplified by his unequivocal refusal to attend meetings convened by the outgoing Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzimī on August 17 and 25, 2022.

He further articulated his stance by rejecting the convening of parliamentary sessions, a position he had previously asserted when demanding the dissolution of parliament by judicial authorities. The judiciary responded by asserting its lack of authority to dissolve parliament. In response, al-Ṣadr demanded the separation of the Public Prosecution from the Judicial Council through amendments and called for the depoliticization of the judiciary, alongside his earlier conditions. Consequently, the Ashura Revolution manifested in three distinct dimensions:

**First Dimension: Pressure on the Judicial Authority**

Supporters of the Sadrist Movement proceeded to besiege the Supreme Judicial Council building and enter it forcibly, following their occupation of the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the Republican Palace. However, they were met with a strong reaction from the security agencies, leading to a clash between them that resulted in a number of injuries on both sides.

In retaliation, the Supreme Judicial Council suspended its operations in protest against unconstitutional and illegal actions. Legal proceedings ensued, including the issuance of arrest warrants for certain Sadrist Movement leaders implicated in attacks on the judiciary. For example, Sheikh Ṣabāḥ al-Sā'idī's tweet, This included, for instance, the tweet by leader Sheikh Ṣabāḥ al-Sā'idī, which was considered an insult to the judicial authority, stating that the revolution of Muharram is renewing... and the distance has never been equal, for the revolutionary people's

measure is truth, and the corrupt parties' measure is falsehood, and whoever equates them has a defective scale of wisdom (al-Sā'idī, 2022, August 23).

Subsequently, al-Ṣadr instructed his supporters to withdraw and establish a sit-in around the judiciary building. Ṣāliḥ al-'Irāqī, the "Minister of the Leader," explained that regardless of whether this action was deemed a success or failure, it signified the potential for further unexpected measures should the populace choose to continue the revolution against corruption (al-'Irāqī, 2022, August 24).

### **Second Dimension: Raising the Ceiling of Demands**

The Sadrist Movement leader proposed a new initiative advocating for the exclusion of all parties and figures involved in the political process since the 2003 American occupation, including his own movement. He expressed willingness to formalize this agreement within seventy-two hours, warning that failure to do so would preclude any possibility of reform (al-Ṣadr, 2022, August 28). 'Alī al-Fatlawī, a leader within the Coordination Framework, dismissed this demand as unrealistic, emphasizing that these parties represent broad constituencies and cannot be excluded arbitrarily. He further questioned whether this demand targeted only the Coordination Framework or all political parties, including Kurdish parties and the Taqaddum Party (al-jazeera Net, 2022, August 28).

### **Third Dimension: Raising the Slogan "The People Want the Fall of the Regime"**

al-Ṣadr announced his final retirement from political affairs and instructed the closure of all affiliated institutions, including the suspension of the Central Committee for Demonstrations. The Central Committee for the "Ashura Revolution" subsequently prohibited the use of al-Ṣadr's name and the Sadrist Movement's name in political slogans, chants, media, and social media. In response, Sadrist supporters mobilized, advancing to the presidential square within the Green Zone, the locus of state institutions and diplomatic missions. They chanted "The People Want the Fall of the Regime," dismantled the concrete barriers surrounding the Green Zone, and forcibly entered. Security forces, including special units and local police, attempted to repel the protesters using water cannons and tear gas. The confrontation escalated as protesters entered the Republican Palace, prompting security forces to attempt eviction despite the large influx of Sadrist supporters.

Violence intensified, with live ammunition deployed, tents set ablaze, and casualties on both sides. The conflict escalated to the use of RPG shells, missiles, and medium weapons, effectively transforming the situation into urban warfare. Consequently, a curfew was imposed in Baghdad, accompanied by the declaration of maximum alert "C" by the Baghdad Operations Command. Clashes extended to eastern Baghdad neighborhoods, where Sadrist supporters burned headquarters of parties allied with the Coordination Framework. The unrest spread to southern governorates, leading to a nationwide curfew.

Amid these events, al-Ṣadr initiated a hunger strike demanding cessation of violence and weapon use, asserting that the removal of corrupt elements does not

justify violence by any party. The confrontations persisted for twenty-four hours, instilling terror among Baghdad residents. Official reports indicated twenty fatalities and three hundred injuries, though actual figures were likely higher.

Nationally, the three presidencies and various political, religious, and tribal entities condemned the violence, calling for an end to the conflict. Regional and international actors echoed these calls, urging cessation of hostilities and engagement in national dialogue to prevent escalation into civil war.

Unexpectedly, al-Şadr held a press conference in al-Ḥannānah, apologizing to the Iraqi populace for the previous day's unrest and expressing remorse. He criticized his supporters, condemning the revolution's descent into violence and bloodshed. He noted that the Popular Mobilization Forces (al-Ḥashd al-Sha'bī) refrained from firing upon civilians, attributing violence to impudent militias and admonishing the Movement against such behavior. He ordered demonstrators to withdraw within sixty minutes, warning that failure to do so would result in non-recognition of the Movement's parliamentary presence. He also declared his complete withdrawal from political engagement, deeming it final and legitimate. He attributed the crisis to the existence of armed factions, asserting that their dissolution would have averted the situation, and demanded their removal from the Green Zone to restore security control to official forces (INA, 2022, August 30).

This marked the eighth withdrawal of the Sadrist Movement from the political process over the past decade. al-Şadr's resolute stance and courage in calling for withdrawal to prevent bloodshed were widely praised. His supporters complied within the stipulated timeframe, bringing the violent episode to an end.

Subsequently, political forces including the Coordination Framework, the Sovereignty Alliance, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party renewed calls for dialogue, political participation, and the return of Sadrist members to Parliament. These overtures were categorically rejected. Conversely, al-Şadr proposed an initiative urging his allies in "Saving a Homeland" to withdraw from Parliament as a means to resolve the crisis (al-Şadr, 2022, September 8). The alliance rejected this proposal, affirming in a joint statement their commitment to the Council of Representatives' continuation until a fully empowered government is formed under a national program enjoying broad confidence and acceptance. The government would then undertake constitutional preparations for elections.

This rejection prompted extensive analysis and raised questions regarding the true nature of the Saving a Homeland Alliance. Former MP Ḥaydar al-Mullā suggested that al-Şadr's request for withdrawal from partners al-Ḥalbūsī and Bārzānī was a test of their political commitment versus personal ambition, asserting that time would reveal their true intentions (al-Mullā, 2022, September 8). Former Foreign Minister Hoshyār Zībārī emphasized the alliance's significance, urging compliance with the withdrawal request on constitutional grounds and warning of potential disappointment for the Sadrist Movement.

### III. Audio Leaks and Loss of Trust

In July 2022, Iraqi blogger 'Alī Fāḡīl, president of the American-Iraqi Anti-Corruption Association, released audio recordings purportedly from a private meeting involving former Prime Minister Nūrī al-Mālikī. In these recordings, al-Mālikī expressed personal opinions regarding various Iraqi political figures and factions, revealing underlying tensions and attitudes. These disclosures heightened public awareness of the severity of internal political conflicts and the erosion of trust among political actors, provoking significant domestic and international reactions.

The leaked audio addressed several key issues, including a harsh critique of al-Ṣadr and the Sadrist Movement. It recalled the 2008 unrest in al-Baṣrah and the Charge of the Knights (Ṣawlat al-Fursān) military operation led by the Iraqi army against the Mahdī Army (Jaysh al-Mahdī), affiliated with the Sadrist Movement, which resulted in approximately 1,500 casualties. al-Mālikī attributed responsibility to the Sadrist Movement for the civil war and sectarian violence in Iraq between 2006 and 2008. He further accused them of betraying the Shiite community by aligning with Kurdish and Sunni factions within the Saving a Homeland Alliance. Additionally, he criticized the Popular Mobilization Forces, labeling them a "nation of cowards," and accused Hādī al-Āmirī, leader of the Badr Organization allied with the Coordination Framework headed by al-Mālikī, of financial corruption related to allocations to the Popular Mobilization Forces. Other political figures within the Framework alliance were also accused of prioritizing personal interests. Moreover, Mas'ūd Bārzānī and Sunni leaders were accused of conspiring through a Western scheme to marginalize Shiites, necessitating a heavily armed military force for defense. These revelations constituted the most significant disclosures in the audio recording.

The leaks attributed to al-Mālikī conveyed negative messages that damaged both his reputation and that of the Coordination Framework alliance, undermining public confidence in their political leadership. Conversely, they portrayed al-Ṣadr as a triumphant popular leader, a perception reinforced by al-Ṣadr's public admonition via Twitter, urging al-Mālikī and corrupt associates to submit to judicial authorities, asserting that al-Mālikī lacked the legitimacy to lead Iraq (al-Ṣadr, 2022, July 18).

### IV. Parliamentary Performance

The Council of Representatives' oversight and legislative functions were largely ineffective and unconvincing between the first session following the early elections on January 9, 2022, and October 13, 2022. During this period, the Council was unable to elect the President of the Republic due to political disputes between the Coordination Framework and Saving a Homeland alliances, resulting in suspended sessions amid demonstrations and sit-ins.

According to the Council's internal regulations, the legislative year should comprise 64 sessions, divided equally between two terms. However, only 27 sessions were convened in the first year, predominantly in November 2022. Consequently, the parliament enacted only two laws during this critical period. The first, the Law Criminalizing Normalization with the Zionist Entity, was passed on May 26, 2022, proposed by Sadrist Movement members and supported by a majority of attending members. Although President Barham Šāliḥ refrained from signing it, the law was published in the Official Gazette of Iraq, Issue 4680, No. 1 of 2022, following the expiration of the ratification period.

The second law, the Emergency Support for Food Security and Development Law, was enacted on June 8, 2022, as an alternative to the Federal Financial Budget Law, allocating approximately 17 billion dollars. This legislation aimed to ensure food stability amid the government formation crisis, enabling expenditures on poverty alleviation, job creation through investment, electricity provision, and ration card support. It was published in the Official Gazette of Iraq, Issue 4681, in July 2022.

Both laws were passed by a majority of present MPs, including members of the Coordination Framework who had initially opposed the Food Security Law, citing the caretaker status of Prime Minister Mušṭafá al-Kāžimī's government and concerns that the law might substitute for the federal budget. After extensive debate and amendments, the Framework MPs consented to the law. Shibl al-Zaydī, Secretary-General of the Katā'ib al-Imām 'Alī, noted that the law had garnered support from half of the parliament and would have passed regardless of the Framework's position. He emphasized the role of popular and media pressure, alongside citizens' urgent needs for food and electricity, in influencing the decision (al-Sumaria TV, 2022, June 9).

The upcoming legislative term beginning in January 2023 faces numerous challenges, including enacting approximately 170 deferred laws from previous terms, revitalizing oversight functions, and implementing ministerial curricula. These tasks necessitate political will and consensus.

## **V. Performance of the Federal Supreme Court**

The Federal Supreme Court emerged as a resilient and authoritative institution amid the year's political turmoil. It adopted a prudent and measured approach to minimize damage, issuing rulings that contributed to stabilizing the political environment. Serving as a neutral arbiter, the Court managed tensions among rival political factions by providing a legal framework to address conflicts between political realities and constitutional mandates. Its role was pivotal in maintaining internal political security and upholding the state's institutional integrity, as evidenced by several critical decisions during the period of unrest.

The Court commenced its work by dismissing a lawsuit filed on December 27, 2021, by the Coordination Framework challenging the early election results and seeking to halt ratification procedures (Letter No. 83/Federal/1497). This ruling

compelled the convening of parliament to elect the President of the Republic, nominate the Prime Minister and deputies, and implement Article 54 of the Constitution. Subsequently, the Court issued a decisive ruling on January 3, 2022, affirming Article 70 in response to disputes over the designation of the largest parliamentary bloc during the presidential election session.

On January 25, 2022, the Court upheld the legitimacy of the Parliament Presidency and annulled a suspension order following an appeal by Dr. Maḥmūd al-Mashhadānī, who contested the Council's legitimacy due to his emergency absence and hospitalization. The Court consistently opposed constitutional violations by political entities, exemplified by its February 13, 2022, decision invalidating the nomination of former minister Hoshiyār Zībārī for the presidency, based on allegations of financial and administrative corruption during his tenure.

The President of the Supreme Judicial Council, Judge Fā'iḳ Zaydān, advocated for constitutional amendments to address outdated provisions, particularly those concerning parliamentary session validity and legislative majorities. He highlighted constitutional obstacles impeding electoral processes, emphasizing the need to amend Article 72 (Second) to establish definitive timelines for appointing the President of the Republic and Prime Minister (al-Sharḳiya TV, 2022, June 9).

Throughout the year, the Supreme Judicial Council maintained a neutral and constitutionally grounded stance, including its response to al-Ṣadr's August 10, 2022, request to dissolve the Council of Representatives and the issue of Sadrist Movement MPs' resignation. The Court clarified that dissolving parliament is beyond its jurisdiction and outlined two constitutional mechanisms for dissolution under Article 64: first, with the approval of the absolute majority of the number of parliament members (165 votes) based on a request from one-third of its members; and second, based on a request from the Prime Minister and with the approval of the President of the Republic.

Regarding the resignation of Sadrist MPs, the Court emphasized on September 7, 2022, that parliament members represent the people rather than themselves or their political blocs. It underscored the necessity for parliament members to fulfill their electoral mandates to safeguard public interests and political stability. The Court warned against indefinite constitutional violations and power imbalances, which threaten the political process and national security (INA, 2022, September 7).

In conclusion, the constitution's authority has been undermined by frequent violations and manipulations by dominant political forces, characterized by imposed wills, selective interpretation of constitutional articles, and power imbalances.

## VI. The Role of the United Nations

The United Nations representative in Iraq, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, was recognized for her proactive and diligent engagement with political forces and parties throughout various political events, particularly during the tumultuous episodes that undermined confidence in Iraq's fragile democratic system in 2022.

Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert commenced her tenure as the UN representative in Iraq during the government of Ḥaydar al-'Abādī in 2017 and continued through the administrations of 'Ādil 'Abd-al-Mahdī and Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, maintaining her role under Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī's government. She engaged with all leaders of active and ruling political parties in Iraq without exception, facilitating dialogue to bridge divergent perspectives. Additionally, she met with influential religious scholars, notably Sayyid 'Alī al-Sīstānī, whom she met twice in 2022. Her outreach extended to writers, intellectuals, and prominent civil society figures, including visits to the Tishrīn protest youth at Tahrir Square, where she listened to their demands and urged the government to address the populace's concerns.

Additionally, she endorsed the early elections and emphasized their significance to the Security Council. However, the post-election period was marked by political crises and dramatic developments. Despite her efforts to foster understanding among adversaries and calls to set aside personal grievances, no initiatives succeeded in resolving the impasse. Consequently, she appealed to the Security Council, with Ms. Hanā' Adwar, a human rights defender and head of the Iraqi al-Amal Association, providing testimony on Iraq's dire conditions on May 17, 2022.

In her address, Ms. Adwar delineated the prolonged suffering of the Iraqi people over nearly two decades, characterized by deteriorating health, economic, and social conditions. She attributed these challenges to political parties lacking national will and genuine commitment to Iraq's welfare, instead prioritizing factional interests. She urged the international community to initiate a deliberate and timely intervention to pressure Iraqi authorities and political leaders to overcome political deadlock and prioritize national interests over narrow factionalism (UNIC, 2022, July 15).

In her seventh periodic report to the Security Council on October 4, 2022, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert provided a comprehensive review of Iraq's situation one year after the early elections. She attributed responsibility to political parties and influential actors, noting that discord and political maneuvering had overshadowed collective responsibility. She highlighted pervasive corruption as a fundamental cause of systemic dysfunction.

She identified existing solutions contingent upon political will and willingness to compromise. She described the Kurdish parties' positions, noting the absence of regional elections and lack of consensus on a presidential candidate. Regarding Sayyid Muḥtadā al-Ṣadr, she observed his calls for reform contingent upon excluding established political figures.

The UN representative's persistent engagement was met with criticism from some political factions. For instance, Fālih al-Fayyāḍ publicly asserted that Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert had exceeded her professional mandate, becoming a political instrument within Iraq. He appealed to the UN Secretary-General for professional support in backing Iraq (Ultra Iraq, 2022, March 23).

The UN's exposure of Iraq's social hardships to the international community played a significant role in resolving political deadlock, facilitating the convening

of parliament nine days after her address, the election of the President of the Republic, and the appointment of Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī to form a government, which parliament approved two weeks later. This sequence underscores Iraq's integration into international political dynamics.

## VII. Performance and Positions of Political Parties on the Political Process

Key actors include the Coordination Framework (al-It̄ār al-Tansīqī), Kurdish parties, and the Sovereignty Alliance (Taḥāluf al-Siyādah).

### 1. The Coordination Framework: The Stubborn Opponent

The complete withdrawal of the Sadrist Movement from the political arena enabled the Coordination Framework to ally with Kurdish parties and the Sovereignty Alliance, shaping the political process according to prevailing internal dynamics. The Coordination Framework's policy was characterized by outright rejection of the Sadrist Movement's call for a majority government without consensus, adhering to principles that included:

- Refusal to concede the formation of the largest bloc.
- Opposition to coercive tactics, emphasizing that such measures would not benefit Iraq.
- Warnings against political exclusion.
- Rejection of opposition through force.
- Upholding the constitutional institutions by opposing parliamentary dissolution, which could precipitate armed conflict.

Formed on October 11, 2021, immediately following early elections, the Coordination Framework sought to unify Shiite political forces and affiliates. Its constituents included the State of Law Coalition (I'tilāf Dawlat al-Qānūn), al-Faḥ Alliance, the Islamic Virtue Party (Ḥizb al-Faḍīlah al-Islāmī), the State Forces Alliance (Taḥāluf Quwā al-Dawlah), the 'Aṭā' Movement, the Ḥuqūq Movement, and the Rayyān al-Kildānī Alliance.

The Framework contested the early election results due to significant losses, demanding a manual recount. Supporters staged a sit-in at the Green Zone gates, resulting in clashes with security forces, causing casualties. Following leadership directives, protesters withdrew and pursued legal challenges to annul the election results, which were ultimately rejected by the Federal Court, affirming the results as final.

Confronted with limited options, the Framework either had to ally with the Sadrist Movement or pursue dialogue and alliances with other political forces. It chose the latter, adhering to its principles while accommodating internal factions: the "Hawks," led by Nūrī al-Mālikī and Sheikh Qays al-Khaz'alī, and the "Doves," led by Hādī al-Āmirī, Sayyid 'Ammār al-Ḥakīm, and former Prime Minister Ḥaydar

al-'Abādī. Subsequently, it implemented a strategy to persuade major electoral victors to join its alliance and resolve the political deadlock.

A Framework committee was established to negotiate with other blocs, forming three delegations: one led by Hādī al-'Āmirī to engage Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr in al-Najaf al-Ashraf; another led by Nūrī al-Mālikī to negotiate with Mas'ūd Bārzānī in Erbil; and a third led by Sheikh al-Khaz'alī to dialogue with the Sovereignty Alliance. This approach was particularly active during the forty-day constitutional deadline.

Following the Sadrist Movement's parliamentary withdrawal, the Framework capitalized on the opportunity to form the largest parliamentary bloc through the accession of substitute MPs, securing 130 seats.

The Framework's efforts included shuttle diplomacy between Baghdad and Najaf, aiming to persuade al-Ṣadr to negotiate. However, al-Ṣadr maintained his stance, agreeing to dialogue only if the Framework dissolved its alliance with the State of Law Coalition and excluded its leader, Nūrī al-Mālikī, a condition that was rejected. The Framework also engaged Kurdish parties, conducting multiple negotiations in Erbil, culminating on October 10, 2022, with efforts to present a unified presidential candidate or reach consensus between the two major Kurdish parties.

An agreement with the Kurdistan Democratic Party facilitated the parliamentary session's convening, nominating Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī as the Framework's prime ministerial candidate and proposing a consensual Kurdish presidential candidate, 'Abd-al-Laṭīf Rashīd, an early Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader. The PUK's refusal to withdraw its candidate, Barham Ṣāliḥ, led to a parliamentary session on October 13, 2022, where the presidency contest was between the two Kurdish candidates.

The Framework was divided in its presidential support, with factions backing either Ṣāliḥ or Rashīd. The election concluded with Rashīd winning 164 votes against 99 for Ṣāliḥ. Supporters of Rashīd included the Sovereignty Alliance, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the State of Law Coalition, the Ṣādiqūn Bloc, part of the Faṭḥ Alliance, and part of the State Administration MPs. Subsequently, the new president tasked Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī with forming the cabinet, which he did without the Sadrist Movement.

The Coordination Framework successfully achieved its objectives, forming a broad alliance, establishing the largest parliamentary bloc, and forming a consensual government. This outcome, shaped by objective and subjective factors and supported by regional and international conditions, presents both an opportunity and a critical challenge to restore the Iraqi people's trust after two decades of turmoil.

## **2. Kurdish Parties and Their Deep Disagreements**

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) secured a significant victory with the election of Mr. 'Abd-al-Laṭīf Rashīd as President of the Republic, thereby displacing

former President Barham Şālîh. According to Hoshyār Zībārî, this outcome represented “a victory for his party and his leader Mas’ūd Bārzānî,” demonstrating that the locus of Kurdish decision-making remains with President Mas’ūd Bārzānî in Erbil. Furthermore, the Democratic Party and its legacy embody the experience and professionalism necessary to “turn the table on all those with malicious intent” (Zībārî, 2022, October 13).

This victory was underpinned by several indicators of KDP’s strength, including its possession of the largest number of parliamentary seats (31 seats), constituting approximately 50% of the Kurdish parliamentary bloc. Strategically, the party operates on the principle of forming alliances with entities that advance its objectives. Consequently, it allied with al-Şadr, the primary parliamentary victor and the dominant popular force. Together, they established the “Saving a Homeland” (Inqādh Waṭan) alliance alongside the Sovereignty Alliance (Taḥāluf al-Si-yādah), agreeing upon a set of principles to realize their shared goals.

One year subsequent to the early elections and the failure to form a government, shifts in both objective and subjective circumstances prompted a change in KDP’s political stance. The party severed its alliance with al-Şadr and promptly reached an agreement with the Coordination Framework, culminating in the formation of the State Administration Coalition (I’tilāf Idārat al-Dawlah) on September 2, 2022, notably excluding the Sadrist Movement.

Regarding its relationship with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which holds 17 parliamentary seats, tensions were pronounced, reaching a peak of discord. Both parties articulated various reasons and justifications for the strained relations. The disagreement over the Presidency of the Republic serves merely as an external manifestation of deeper tensions within the Kurdistan Region.

The Democratic Party articulated its position on the presidency by asserting that “the continuation of the Presidency of the Republic for the fifth consecutive term for the benefit of the Patriotic Union Party is illogical because its popularity has declined and it is witnessing major internal divisions” (al-jazeera Net, 2022, October 11). Conversely, PUK rejected these claims, further elucidating that the conflict extends beyond the Presidency of the Republic to encompass the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region and ministerial appointments (Ultra Iraq, 2022, February 26). The underlying issues are more profound, with a crisis of trust at its zenith. These differences likely trace back to unresolved strategic interests dating to 1991, which have since accumulated, intensified, and eroded trust.

A recent manifestation of these tensions was the failure to conduct the Region’s parliamentary elections, scheduled for October 2022, due to multiple factors. These included demands by most Kurdish parties to replace the High Electoral Commission in Kurdistan and PUK’s insistence on amending the election law to adopt a multi-district system for legislative elections. This demand is motivated by the demographic and geographic prominence of al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate, PUK’s stronghold. Additionally, the voter registry has not been updated since 2009.

The most critical and fundamental dispute concerns the Region's constitution. PUK accuses "Bārzānī of evading the entitlement of amending it by raising the card of drafting the Region's constitution." Despite the Region's autonomy since the 1990s, no constitution has been ratified due to partisan disagreements over the approval mechanism. Consequently, the Region's administration has relied on parliamentary legislation for governance (al-Arab News, 2022, September 23).

This issue was highlighted by UN Representative Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert during a speech at the University of Kurdistan, noting that "a debate has re-emerged regarding the possibility of having a regional constitution now... If I am not mistaken, a preliminary draft was presented in 2009, followed by a few attempts, but it stalled at various stages due to a lack of political consensus" (UNIC, 2022, May 19)

Concerning the State Administration Coalition, Bārzānī is credited with skillfully leveraging his political position by joining the coalition to extricate the political system from crisis, contingent upon the implementation of specific conditions within an agreed timeframe.

MP Bangīn Rīkānī clarified that the State Administration document comprises not merely agreed-upon ideas but a set of explicit conditions and demands from the Kurds to the Coordination Framework. These include postponing the oil ban until legislation is enacted, scheduling resolutions for the Sinjār issue, Article 140 and all Kirkuk-related matters, reinstating Kurdish party offices, and increasing the Region's budgetary share within a defined period. Although the government program allocated six months to resolve disputes between the Region and the federal government, and a committee was established accordingly, significant differences between the two Kurdish parties have impeded unified negotiations. For instance, the budget item, which should have been promptly approved to include the Region's share, was delayed, partly due to the absence of a unified Kurdish negotiating delegation.

The dispute is predominantly political rather than administrative, evidenced by the withdrawal of PUK's ministers from the Regional government in protest against perceived discrimination toward al-Sulaymānīyah. This discrimination manifests in the obstruction of budgetary funds, resulting in severe financial constraints in al-Sulaymānīyah. Additionally, Dr. Iḥsān al-Shammarī noted that "PUK has formed, since last August [2022], committees regarding the subject of al-Sulaymānīyah's separation from the Region, and several meetings were held to that effect" (IMN, 2022, December 12).

The policy of Kurdish leaders, particularly KDP, is characterized by pragmatism. This stance was succinctly expressed by its member 'Abd-al-Salām Barwārī, who stated: "My party's readiness to participate in a government with any party that forms a majority and asks us for help, we will be with it... The opposite of what is imagined, that we are in an ironclad and entrenched alliance... And if the alliance fails to form the government, KDP will wait for the other party, whoever it is, and we will enter into negotiations with him" (Nas News, 2022, April 26).

### 3. The Sovereignty Alliance: Prospects and Challenges

For the second occasion, the Sovereignty Alliance (Taḥāluf al-Siyādah) secured the presidency of the Parliament through one of its prominent leaders, Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī. This alliance, under the leadership of Khamīs al-Khanjar, positions itself as the representative body of the Sunni component in Iraq.

A primary issue confronting the Sunni component is the absence of a unifying religious authority (marjīʿyah) or a political reference that functions as a guiding framework for its diverse parties and groups. This lack hinders the consolidation of the majority under a coherent vision and methodology aligned with their collective aspirations. Observations on the ground reveal two fundamental factors concerning the Sunni component: first, no single bloc, party, or alliance can comprehensively represent the component due to the heterogeneity of intellectual and political orientations, as well as regional and tribal distinctions across Iraq. Second, political influence is predominantly determined by either the presence of a “charismatic” and esteemed leader whose personal stature confers prestige and authority or by the acquisition of the largest number of parliamentary seats. These criteria confer centrality in power dynamics and representation.

Politically, following 2003, numerous forces and parties have vied for leadership within the Sunni component. Initially, the “Accord Front” (Jabhat al-Tawāfuq), formed by the Islamic Party in coalition with the Dialogue Front, led the component during the 2005 elections. Subsequently, various political entities emerged, competing for dominance, with the Sovereignty Alliance currently holding 61 seats and regarded as the most influential, asserting itself as the legitimate representative of the Sunni electorate. The government and its institutions acknowledge the declarations and activities of the Sovereignty Alliance’s leadership.

The Alliance’s electoral success underpins its political significance. Notably, Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr’s visit to al-Ḥalbūsī and the invitation to join his alliance symbolized a pivotal moment, signaling the Sunni community’s transition from a peripheral role to active consultation in government formation. Consequently, a cordial and robust relationship developed between them, with the Sovereignty Alliance endorsing all charters proposed by al-Ṣadr aimed at enhancing national security and stability. However, the political alliance landscape shifted on September 28, 2022, with the establishment of the State Administration Coalition (I’tilāf Idārat al-Dawlah), wherein Kurdish and Sunni factions allied with the Coordination Framework under specific, albeit undisclosed, conditions.

Leaked information, as reported by MP Ra’d al-Dahlakī, outlined these conditions, including the return of displaced persons, compensation for victims, clarification of the fate of the disappeared, and the transfer of the Accountability and Justice dossier to judicial authorities (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, September 27). Additional stipulations involved repealing Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law, withdrawing military and Popular Mobilization Forces from Sunni governorates in favor of local security forces, and permitting local inhabitants to join security services.

Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī affirmed the existence of this agreement, describing it as the governing framework for certain political actors' participation in the political process. He cautioned that failure to achieve the agreement's objectives would necessitate a change in strategy, including potential withdrawal from the political process. He emphasized the significance of 2023 as a critical juncture in Iraq's political trajectory (al-Awla TV, 2022, December 7).

al-Ḥalbūsī's use of threatening rhetoric invites inquiry into the underlying motivations and implications for his political future, especially amid internal challenges within the "Taqaddum Alliance," which he leads. His position appears precarious, with risks of fragmentation impacting the broader Sunni political landscape, particularly in al-Anbār Governorate. Some analysts attribute these divisions to Sunni leaders themselves, suggesting that the Coordination Framework bears no responsibility, and that the Taqaddum Alliance inadvertently fostered its own competition, in reference to al-Ḥalbūsī himself

An illustrative sign of this fragmentation is the emergence of the "Unified al-Anbār Alliance" (Taḥāluf al-Anbār al-Muwaḥḥad), which aims to counter the Sovereignty Alliance and reshape the political balance by uniting traditional Sunni parties and figures in al-Anbār Governorate. The alliance convened its inaugural meeting on August 21, 2022, where Dr. Ghāzī Fayṣal articulated its political agenda centered on principles such as respecting judicial independence, addressing national challenges through dialogue, fulfilling constitutional rights, and implementing comprehensive reforms. He criticized the suppression of dissent in al-Anbār by certain political parties and condemned the marginalization and exclusion policies attributed to the Taqaddum Party (Independent Arabia, 2022, August 23).

al-Ḥalbūsī publicly dismissed the Alliance, citing their prior ministerial failures and vowing not to reinstate them to governmental positions. The fragmentation within Taqaddum is further evidenced by the withdrawal of MP Ra'd al-Dahlakī, the resignation of MP Layth al-Dulaymī, and the departure of the esteemed religious figure Sheikh Shams-al-Dīn Qādir al-Kasnazān. The latter justified his withdrawal by expressing disappointment in the Taqaddum's failure to demonstrate genuine national partnership and collaborative commitment to serving Iraq.

#### **4. Independent MPs: The Root of Iraq's Political Future**

One significant outcome of the October 2019 protests (Tishrīn) was the adoption of the individual electoral system, which played a crucial role in the election and rise of 64 independent MPs to parliament during the early elections. Approximately forty of these MPs emerged directly from the Tishrīn protests, while the remaining MPs represented a spectrum of political orientations, including the independent civil movement and adherents of traditional political parties and their affiliates.

The success of independent MPs is regarded as a positive development within the parliament, as it challenged the dominance of traditional parties that had maintained legislative authority for two decades without substantial opposi-

tion. This phenomenon is notable for its bold challenge to the status quo and for establishing a parliamentary opposition capable of monitoring government performance, thereby strengthening Iraq's nascent democracy and facilitating progress toward improvement.

Initially, the Tishrīn protests articulated demands reflecting the grievances of youth who felt deprived of their rights within their homeland, encapsulated by the slogan "I am going down to take my right." The widespread public support and participation in these protests empowered the movement to elevate its demands, culminating in the rejection of the ruling partisan class with the slogan "I want a homeland." Over time, the protests intensified, adopting the call for the "fall of the political regime" as the optimal solution to address grievances and remove corruption from governance. However, the independent MPs' electoral victory and subsequent participation in legislative governance for one year appear to have postponed the regime's fall, replacing it with a commitment to work within the system to evaluate and reform the democratic political structure.

During the fifth parliamentary session, the MPs' engagement in legislative oversight reflected their core values and principles, particularly their rejection—most notably among the MPs of the civil movement and Tishrīn youth—of both dictatorial and theocratic systems.

Grounded in these principles, the independent MPs defined their political stance as independent from traditional ruling parties. They advocated for justice and equality, the elimination of uncontrolled weapons, and notably rejected sectarian and national political quotas, expressing skepticism toward the so-called "consensual democracy." This position was publicly articulated by MPs 'Alā' al-Rikābī and Falāḥ al-Hilālī of the Imtidād bloc during the ministerial portfolio distribution for Muḥammad al-Sūdānī's government. Their stance resulted in physical assault and verbal abuse within the parliamentary chamber, and their parliamentary participation was suspended for several days by a decision of the Parliament Presidency. They argued that the consensual model had fostered corruption and allowed corrupt individuals to flourish, undermining public rights due to a lack of oversight and accountability.

The independent MPs committed to abstaining from government participation, limiting their role to monitoring and opposing government performance. They sought to establish a unified independent parliamentary bloc comprising no fewer than 25 MPs to facilitate collective requests, discussions, and interrogations. The Tishrīn MPs affiliated with various independent political parties, including the Imtidād Movement and the New Generation Movement (al-Jīl al-Jadīd), which formed the "Alliance for the People" (Taḥāluf min ajl al-Sha'b), the Independent Popular Bloc, Ishrāqat Kānūn, and Voice of Independents (Ṣawt al-Mustaḥillīn), which allied to form the "al-Ishrāqah Bloc." On December 13, 2022, a new alliance of six independent MPs was established, named the "Homeland Bloc" (Kutlat Waṭan).

The election and parliamentary presence of independent MPs represented the aspirations of the majority of the Iraqi populace, embodying hope for political change and renewal. Nevertheless, after a year of parliamentary experience, this hope has somewhat diminished. Contributing factors include their lack of experience in political and parliamentary work, which demands knowledge and insight into the MP's role and parliamentary functions. Additionally, internal competition for leadership within the alliance weakened their collective influence, compounded by pressure, threats, and inducements from traditional parties seeking to co-opt or marginalize them. Most critically, their failure to unify a coherent parliamentary strategy resulted in confusion regarding their guiding principles.

This disunity led to missed opportunities for meaningful political participation. For instance, during the conflict between the Sadrist Movement and the Coordination Framework, both parties sought to resolve the political deadlock by nominating a neutral independent MP as prime minister. However, the independent MPs' lack of consensus and fragmentation thwarted this initiative. The *Imtidād* Movement experienced a significant split, with several members opposing Secretary-General 'Alā' al-Rikābī, accusing him of unilateral decision-making and collaboration with corrupt parties. Consequently, the *Imtidād* Movement's General Secretariat relieved al-Rikābī of his position, and he subsequently announced a six-month renewable suspension of his membership.

The independent MPs' division was also evident in their stance toward Muḥammad al-Sūdānī's government. One faction expressed willingness to participate and engaged in dialogue with the prime minister, while another resolved to remain in opposition within parliament.

Thus, it is evident that independent MPs struggled to unify and remained in a state of confusion. 'Alī Maḥmūd, a member of the "I Am Going Down to Take My Right" movement (*Ḥarakat Nāzil Ākhudh Ḥaqqī*), emphasized this fragmentation, stating, "Talking about independent MPs representing one body is impossible; thus, they cannot be relied upon."

Despite the political turmoil and parliamentary stagnation, some MPs demonstrated resilience and commitment. The exposure of corruption scandals, termed the "Theft of the Century," highlighted the efforts of certain MPs, particularly within the Parliamentary Integrity Committee. Their dedication to uncovering corruption entrenched in state institutions, coupled with their sincere intentions and respect for parliamentary responsibilities, earned them commendable reputations.

Among the significant initiatives by some *Tishrīn* forces, both inside and outside parliament, was the formation of an opposition political alliance named the "Forces of Democratic Change" (*Quwā al-Taghyīr al-Dīmuqrāṭī*). This alliance positions itself as an alternative political project to traditional parties and comprises eight political parties alongside various civil society organizations, including The National House (*al-Bayt al-Waṭanī*), The Iraqi House (*al-Bayt al-'Irāqī*), The Iraqi Communist Party, The Social Democratic Current, The Iraqi

Promise (al-Wa'd al-Irāqī), The Democratic Collective Current, I Am Going Down to Take My Right, and the Tishrīn Democratic Movement. The alliance convened its inaugural national conference in Baghdad on October 15, 2022, establishing an executive body and political bureau. Its objectives include advocating for change and striving to build a robust Iraqi state founded on citizenship principles, majority governance, and a categorical rejection of the consensual model based on any subnational quotas.

## VIII. Future Vision

Drawing upon the trajectory of the current situation combined with historical events, a prospective vision for the State Administration Coalition (I'tilāf Idārat al-Dawlah) government can be articulated. This vision encompasses multiple interpretations grounded in the principle of probabilities, spanning a spectrum from relative success to failure.

### 1. al-Sūdānī's Government: Reform or Change?

On October 27, 2022, the Parliament granted absolute majority approval to the ministerial program and the appointment of 21 ministers within Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī's government. This government comprises 23 ministerial portfolios allocated as follows: 12 ministers representing the Shiite component, predominantly nominated by the Coordination Framework (al-Iṭṭār al-Tansīqī); 6 ministers representing the Sunni component; 4 ministries allocated to the Kurdish component, with two approved during this session and the remaining ministries ratified following an agreement between the two Kurdish parties; and one ministry designated for minorities.

#### Government Program

The Prime Minister delineated his ministerial program into two principal axes:

- The first axis encompasses 23 items related to reforms, service delivery, and economic measures aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions. This axis prioritizes critical sectors such as electricity, municipal services, combating financial and administrative corruption, agriculture, and industry, articulated through short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans.
- The second axis reflects the consensus of the political blocs, comprising two sub-axes: the executive axis with 29 items and the legislative axis with 11 items. These represent the demands of the political blocs participating in the State Administration Coalition. Implementation of some points is contingent upon specified timeframes, necessitating the initiation of corresponding actions.

al-Sūdānī expressed his full readiness to engage in dialogue with the Sadrist Movement, acknowledging their vision and reform agenda. He also prioritized addressing contentious issues with the Kurdistan Region, aiming to resolve them

within Iraq's interest. Furthermore, he recognized the legitimate demands of the Tishrīn youth, whom he described as the "cry of a homeland."

The most formidable challenge identified by al-Sūdānī is his commitment to combating corruption, which he characterized as a "pandemic." He emphasized the necessity of accountability based on the principle of "Where did you get this from?" The most severe challenge anticipated is the issue of uncontrolled weapons outside state authority, for which he asserted possession of a plan to first resize and subsequently eliminate these arms. To ensure success, the Prime Minister mandated that each minister develop a detailed roadmap for their ministry's work within three weeks, outlining specific objectives. The Council of Ministers would then review these plans and monitor progress according to defined benchmarks within the first one hundred days. Demonstrating determination, al-Sūdānī's government initiated several decisions within weeks concerning service provision, organizational, and administrative matters.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the ministerial program falls short of addressing these challenges comprehensively and does not constitute a strategic plan. Moreover, it resembles previous plans of former prime ministers, consisting of general and vaguely defined ideas that cannot be deemed a roadmap for a state plagued by entrenched mafias of financial, political, and administrative corruption. Additionally, Iraq's sovereignty remains compromised due to multiple aggressions, military interventions by neighboring countries, and infringements on its territorial waters and restrictions on its seaports.

Furthermore, the ministerial program lacks a clear economic identity and strategy for developing the Iraqi economy in terms of production, employment, and the role of the private sector, as well as a coherent political strategy.

Amid this turbulent context, positive attributes are associated with Muḥammad al-Sūdānī's persona. He is the first Prime Minister since the initial post-2003 government to originate from within the country, having lived and worked there. This aspect resonates positively with the Iraqi populace, as he shares their experiences of hunger, economic sanctions, injustice, and the devastating consequences of wars.

Moreover, al-Sūdānī possesses administrative expertise and political, partisan, and parliamentary experience, alongside a reputation for integrity and public acceptance. These qualities have afforded him preference over previous politicians and partisans, complemented by his self-esteem.

Additional positive aspects include his approach to governance, granting ministers, deputies, governors, and advisors a six-month period for substantive work, after which their performance will be evaluated. He also established committees within the Council of Ministers to oversee the implementation of the government program according to specified timelines.

On the international front, al-Sūdānī emphasized during his visits to regional, Arab, and Gulf states the importance of strengthening relations while adhering to principles of respecting state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

However, the positive perception of al-Sūdānī's leadership is insufficient without the necessary tools for success: competent ministers, loyal directors, and specialized advisors who constitute his immediate circle for managing executive authority. The secondary circle comprises specialized advisors—including economists, technicians, military personnel, media professionals, legal experts, and administrators—whose competence will either bolster or undermine his leadership, potentially leading to success or failure as experienced by his predecessors.

al-Sūdānī's strength and acumen were expected to become evident after one hundred days in office, based on two commitments:

- First, the dismissal of any failed or incompetent minister regardless of partisan affiliation, particularly given that some ministers were appointed according to the political quota system.
- Second, the implementation of promises outlined in his government program within specified timeframes. Although many objectives require extended periods beyond months, these include recovering smuggled funds estimated in billions, distributing 500,000 residential plots to eligible recipients as an initial step, activating the Article 140 committee within one month, and preparing the federal budget law for 2023, among others.

## **2. The Role of the US Embassy**

The US Embassy in Iraq has played an active and supportive role in relation to the government of Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī. This is evidenced by the notable engagement of the US Ambassador, Alina Romanowski, since her appointment in Baghdad on June 2, 2022. Her frequent visits, participations, and meetings have surpassed expectations, with her visits to al-Sūdānī reaching ten within forty-five days of his inauguration—a precedent not observed with post-2003 prime ministers.

The Ambassador's activities have elicited discontent and criticism from certain leaders within the Coordination Framework alliance, who have demanded clarification regarding the rationale behind the rapprochement with US officials and the specific frequency of the US Ambassador's visits. Some have speculated about an "international project to overthrow the government" (Nas News, 2022, December 20), while others interpret these actions as manifestations of American concern over the Coordination Framework's relationship with Iran, which conflicts with US interests. The United States is perceived as the "benefactor" of Iraq and its democratic system, a favor that the Iraqi political system is expected to reciprocate by safeguarding American interests.

Amid these internal and external pressures, the question arises whether al-Sūdānī's government can assert its independence and endeavor to establish a transformative government that prioritizes the aspirations and interests of the Iraqi populace, or whether it will instead serve external interests while limiting itself to modest domestic services.

## **IX. Agenda for the Year 2023**

The new government has committed to a series of entitlements outlined in its ministerial program. The realization of these commitments will determine the government's success or failure; success will foster cohesion and stability, whereas failure may precipitate the government's downfall. Many of these commitments are legacies from previous administrations that failed to reconcile divergent political interests. Their fulfillment requires political will for reform and modernization, as well as constitutional and legislative amendments necessitating cooperation among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The principal commitments for 2023 include:

### **1. Conducting Early Local Elections Within a Year**

The government has pledged to hold provincial council elections within one year, contingent upon amendments to the election law and changes to the High Electoral Commission, involving legislative, legal, and executive actions. These elections evoke apprehension among ruling parties due to the risk of electoral defeat, while opposition forces, including the Sadrist Movement, Tishrīn youth, and democratic groups, advocate for their conduct. The prevailing expectation is that elections will occur in October 2023, preceded by amendments to the councils' law. The Prime Minister has established a specialized committee to evaluate governors' performance and has requested comprehensive assessments from MPs about their governorates.

### **2. Return of Displaced Persons**

Displacement resulted from ISIS's control over a third of Iraqi territory in June 2014. The ministerial program mandates the return of displaced persons to their original residences within six months of government formation. Approximately 37,000 families reside in 28 camps across various governorates, enduring prolonged hardship for eight years. Addressing this issue entails significant financial, security, and social challenges. The government, through the Ministry of Migration and Displaced Persons and in collaboration with international organizations, aims to resolve this issue and facilitate permanent returns. Reconstruction efforts focus on liberated and terrorism-affected governorates, notably Salāḥ-al-Dīn, Diyālā, Kirkūk, and Nīnawá.

The Jurf al-Ṣakhr area, historically a military headquarters for al-Qaeda (2006) and ISIS (2014), is a key concern for the Sovereignty Alliance, which insists on its reconstruction and the return of approximately 2,400 displaced families following security verifications. The complexities surrounding Jurf al-Ṣakhr necessitate a comprehensive political agreement among all parties.

### **3. Oil and Gas and Labor Laws**

The ministerial program addresses longstanding disputes with the Kurdistan Region, particularly concerning oil and gas resources. Article 111 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution designates oil as the property of the Iraqi people, mandating federal

management of oil fields. The Oil and Gas Law, pending since 2005, proposes management by a national oil company overseen by a federal council.

Conversely, the Kurdistan Oil Law of 2007 asserts the Region's Ministry of Natural Resources' authority over oil operations, limiting Baghdad's role to fields discovered before 2005. Baghdad has expressed dissatisfaction with the Region's lack of transparency regarding oil exports, as the agreement allocates 12.67% of the federal budget to the Region in exchange for 250,000 barrels per day delivered to Baghdad.

Tensions escalated following the Federal Court's decision No. 59 (February 15, 2022), which declared the Kurdistan Regional Government's Oil and Gas Law unconstitutional. This precipitated the withdrawal of foreign oil companies and suspension of federal salary payments to the Region's employees. Consequently, al-Sūdānī's government aims to draft and legislate a new Oil and Gas Law within six months.

#### **4. The Sinjar Problem**

The Sinjar district, located northwest of Nīnawá Governorate and inhabited predominantly by Yazidis alongside Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmens, presents another challenge. The ministerial program emphasizes resolving this issue through the Sinjar Agreement (October 10, 2020) between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region, aimed at restoring security and stability following ISIS's 2014 genocide against the Yazidis. The agreement includes deploying Iraqi army and federal police forces after peacefully resolving the presence of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants, followed by reconstruction efforts.

al-Sūdānī's government demonstrated goodwill by granting ownership of 11 residential complexes to Yazidi families deprived of their property since 1975. However, expelling PKK militants remains complex due to the group's strategic role in regional conflicts, involving local, regional, and international dimensions.

#### **5. Article 140**

Article 140, concerning disputed territories between the Kurdistan Region and neighboring governorates, is included in the ministerial program. It mandates reconstituting the Higher Committee to implement normalization, census, and referendum processes to resolve territorial disputes, particularly in Kirkūk Governorate.

A committee was formed since 2006, but it stalled in 2014 due to technical, political, and financial complexities, especially regarding Kirkūk Governorate, which is a subject of dispute due to its complex demographic composition. The duty of the committee intended to be formed is to work on applying the tripartite mechanism stipulated in Article 140, which is: First, normalization, meaning remedying the changes that occurred in the demographic composition in Kirkūk and the disputed territories during the era of the former regime; Second, conducting a census in those areas; and Third, a referendum to determine what its inhabitants want.

This issue is considered one of the most difficult issues and carries within it many problems if not solved with calm and patience, especially since the recent clash that occurred between Arab and Kurdish farmers on December 7, 2022, in Kirkūk Governorate due to the dispute over the ownership of agricultural lands—which will not be the last—warns of the probability of the situation exploding and is an indicator that should be taken into account again.

## **6. Expected Economic Problems for the New Year**

Economic challenges, particularly the depreciation of the Iraqi dinar against the US dollar, have emerged as significant concerns. This trend, evident since January 2022, has led to sharp increases in food prices. The US Federal Reserve's stricter controls on Iraqi banks' dollar dealings, aimed at curbing money laundering and smuggling, have restricted 80% of daily financial transfers, causing a 10% currency devaluation and inflation in imported goods.

Experts advocate for internal solutions, including establishing a database to monitor dollar movements, enforcing security measures against monopolists and speculators, and adhering to global anti-money laundering standards. The economic difficulties are expected to impact the 2023 general budget approval and may precipitate unforeseen crises, posing a substantial threat to al-Sūdānī's government unless timely remedies are implemented.

## **X. Scenarios for the Political Scene**

This section explores potential future scenarios for the political landscape in 2022, based on the internal dynamics of the political process.

### **1. Scenario One**

If the focus is placed on Prime Minister Muḥammad al-Sūdānī's leadership qualities and his capacity to govern effectively, it is imperative that he be granted unrestricted authority to execute his governmental duties. Should the State Administration Coalition view this as its final opportunity, it must capitalize on it by fostering understanding and dialogue to resolve internal conflicts, avoiding strategies that exploit opportunities or threats. Specifically, if the emphasis is on the Coordination Framework alliance, efforts should be directed toward unifying the coalition, refraining from tactics that involve displacement or control imposition. The State Administration Coalition faces a binary choice: either support al-Sūdānī's government patiently until it fulfills its political agenda incrementally or face chaos.

Provided the government accurately diagnoses issues and implements reform plans, improvements in economic and social conditions are expected, which would positively influence foreign policy and gradually enhance public satisfaction and support. This scenario represents the most favorable outcome, contingent upon the fulfillment of the aforementioned conditions, ultimately leading to stability in Iraq. However, a significant obstacle for al-Sūdānī's government lies in the alliances and political parties intended as its support base, particularly the

State Administration Coalition, which is characterized by discord and lack of cohesion. Moreover, this coalition is tactical and provisional, susceptible to collapse, especially given the internal fractures among Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish political factions.

The visible divisions within the Coordination Framework and among its leadership risk the dissolution of the alliance, which would critically undermine the entire political process. Additionally, concerns exist regarding the potential bifurcation of the Kurdistan Region between the Patriotic Union and the Democratic Party into the Erbil and al-Sulaymānīyah regions, respectively, which could impact the regional configuration of a unified Iraqi state.

Furthermore, divisions within the Sunni faction, particularly between al-Ḥalbūsī and other political entities opposing his representation, may lead to concerted efforts to remove him from the presidency of the Council of Representatives, raising fears of escalating tensions among Sunni tribes amid political disputes.

## **2. Scenario Two**

This scenario hinges on the persistence and exacerbation of internal conflicts, which would adversely affect the Iraqi populace, potentially inciting protests. It is plausible that the Sadrist Movement, Tishrīn youth, and Forces of Democratic Change could mobilize support from various social segments, as observed in 2019, resulting in governmental collapse and perpetuating a cycle of elections, disorder, and instability across all levels.

## **3. Scenario Three**

Contingent upon the developments of Scenario Two, further deterioration and turbulence could be exploited by actors benefiting from chaos, particularly given the availability of weapons and financial resources to certain political and tribal groups. This may culminate in the overthrow of the political regime by Iraqi factions with external backing, motivated by perceived threats to their interests. Consequently, Iraq's stability—both social and territorial—would remain elusive as long as internal divisions continue to fragment its political structure.

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# 3.

## Climate Change

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Climate change represents a prolonged global issue that profoundly and directly impacts all facets of life on Earth. This phenomenon, accompanied by an unprecedented acceleration in rising temperatures, declining precipitation rates, and alterations in their spatial distribution, will yield varied consequences across different regions worldwide; however, the overall outcome is predominantly adverse, particularly concerning desertification and water resources.

In Iraq, climate change poses a significant challenge to sustainable development across all its dimensions. The manifestations of climate change have become increasingly apparent annually, with 2022 marking one of the most severe and impactful years due to reduced water flows, heightened desertification rates, and elevated frequencies of dust storms.

Several studies suggest that anticipated climate changes will induce substantial modifications in the hydrological cycle, including altered rainfall patterns and, consequently, diminished precipitation reaching river sources. Moreover, these changes are expected to be accompanied by novel rainfall patterns and more extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts.

Undoubtedly, examining the impact of climate change on actual irrigation requirements or water allocations for crops serves as an immediate strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change on water resources, given that water is a vital natural resource. This necessitates the preservation and management of water resources to fulfill their intended purposes. The World Bank estimates that, in the absence of appropriate water management policies, Iraq may experience a 20% reduction in available freshwater resources by 2050. Furthermore, the World Bank emphasizes the necessity of allocating 180 billion dollars over twenty years to construct new infrastructure and dams and to develop irrigation projects.

### I. Evidences of Climate Change

Iraq has been identified as one of the most vulnerable countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. Iraqi territories have witnessed clear and tangible climatic disturbances and changes in recent years, including significant temperature increases, decreased rainfall, heightened drought levels, water scarcity, and

desertification. Although Iraq, similar to other developing countries, contributes less than 5% of total greenhouse gas emissions, it remains among the countries most susceptible to the detrimental effects of climate change. This vulnerability is particularly pronounced given that Iraq—excluding the Kurdistan Region—features a semi-arid climate with annual rainfall not exceeding 150 mm, rendering it entirely dependent on transboundary rivers originating in Iran and Turkey, which restrict Iraqi water access through extensive irrigation projects.

## 1. Water Scarcity

A 2022 World Bank report warned that climate change, especially the exacerbation of water scarcity, threatens the social contract within a growth model heavily reliant on oil. The report highlights Iraq's challenge of transitioning from complete dependence on oil to a more diversified economy led by the private sector, characterized by its capacity to generate employment and develop human capital, while concurrently building resilience to confront climate change impacts (World Bank, 2022).

The adverse effects of climate change in Iraq are well-documented and increasingly evident, having intensified in 2022 and projected to worsen with potential further temperature increases. Iraqi studies indicate that average temperatures have risen by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius compared to the 1960s—although some global studies report less severe increases—accompanied by recurrent drought episodes, increased salinity in agricultural lands, and the persistence of inefficient water usage practices predicated on the assumption that the era of oil and its rentier resources will persist. According to a statement by former Minister of Environment Jāsīm al-Falāhī in October 2022, Iraq incurs daily losses of 10 billion dinars (approximately 7 million dollars) due to climate change.

Till 2022, 54% of Iraq's land has experienced degradation, with desertification affecting 39% of the country's area. The construction of dams on the sources and tributaries of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has resulted in reductions in both the quantity and quality of water reaching Iraq. Consequently, the saline intrusion from Gulf waters has penetrated southern Iraq, adversely impacting agricultural production and causing significant challenges in al-Basrah, particularly regarding drinking water shortages. The potential human costs of these changes are substantial, with seven million Iraqis already affected by drought and displacement. The Ministry of Water Resources projects that Iraq will face an annual water deficit of up to 10.8 billion cubic meters by 2035. This deficit reflects the gap between agricultural water needs and the water expected to be available, excluding reductions due to rising temperatures, evaporation, and anticipated drought crises linked to climate change.

## 2. Rising Temperatures

Heatwaves exceeding 50 degrees Celsius during summer have increased, exerting devastating effects on food and water security and threatening the livelihoods of numerous individuals (CBI, 2022, p. 33). The government designated certain days when temperatures surpassed the fifty-degree threshold as

official holidays. The year 2022 experienced heightened frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, droughts, and sand and dust storms, which have exacerbated environmental degradation and intensified social and economic impacts nationwide (Ultra Iraq, 2022).

In response, a workshop held in 2021 in Beirut, endorsed by the United Nations as part of the Iraq National Adaptation Plan (NAP) project funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF), aimed to enhance institutional capacity to support decision-makers by providing climate forecasts, scenarios, risk assessments, and data. This initiative enables institutions and policymakers to integrate medium- to long-term adaptation measures into national development planning. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) representative and Regional Director for West Asia affirmed that the National Action Plan project for Iraq, supported by UNEP, has strengthened the institutional capacities of teams involved in developing Iraq's National Action Plan (al-Turk, 2021).

Based on these considerations, climate change constitutes a primary challenge for southern Iraq, where desertification advances at a rate of 250 square kilometers annually. Drought episodes have increased by 30%, alongside a sharp temperature rise of 4 to 5 degrees Celsius above the general average. Additionally, approximately one thousand individuals migrate annually from rural areas to urban centers due to water scarcity, environmental degradation, and climate change. The southern governorates have witnessed the emergence of slums resulting from displacement and a notable increase in pollution from various sources, including liquid industrial waste and untreated sewage discharged directly into tributaries and streams feeding the main rivers, as well as agricultural drainage water and saline intrusion in al-Basrah. Consequently, the average concentration of dissolved salts has increased tenfold compared to the 1970s, accompanied by a marked rise in contamination from bacteria, parasites, and viruses, chemical pollution from heavy metals such as arsenic, and physical pollution characterized by increased water turbidity, sediments, suspended matter, and elevated water temperatures.

### **3. Increase in Dust Storm Rates**

During July and August 2022, Iraq experienced unprecedented dust and sand storms attributed to climate change, reduced rainfall, and desertification. These storms resulted in numerous fatalities and thousands of injuries due to suffocation of varying severity, as well as material damages and disruptions to air traffic at several airports.

Iraq ranks among the five countries worldwide most vulnerable to dust storms induced by climate change. The Ministry of Environment announced that the number of dusty days is projected to increase to 272 days annually over the next two decades, reaching 300 by 2050. This trend signals severe environmental degradation, as the frequency and intensity of sandstorms correlate with escalating desertification, shrinking agricultural lands, water scarcity, and unlawful encroachments on green spaces.

#### **4. Climate Migration in Iraq in 2022**

Climate migration has become a significant issue in Iraq. According to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of March 2022, over 3,300 families were displaced due to climatic factors across ten governorates in the central and southern regions. This displacement was primarily attributed to water scarcity, high salinity, and poor water quality. These conditions have adversely affected crop production, caused spoilage, limited the availability of drinking water and livestock fodder, and compelled the closure of numerous agriculture-related businesses (al-'Arabī al-Jadīd, 2022).

The population analysis report issued by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) highlights that continuous migration has resulted in an unbalanced population distribution, with approximately 70% of the population residing in urban areas, thereby negatively impacting agricultural development. It is anticipated that women and girls will be required to travel longer distances to obtain water, increasing their exposure to gender-based violence. Moreover, the loss of livelihoods may contribute to a rise in child marriage and the emergence of conflicts among local communities. According to UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index, children and youth in Iraq face medium to high climate risks, with vulnerable groups and certain regions experiencing heightened exposure (UNFPA, 2022).

#### **5. Recurrence of Drought Waves**

Drought is recognized as a critical indicator and contributing factor to desertification, which manifests through successive drought years in a region, a phenomenon termed "Drought Sustainability." This process poses a severe threat as it leads to persistent desertification that may be irreversible. Such conditions damage agricultural lands, rendering their cultivation and restoration challenging or, at times, impossible. It is important to note that drought does not invariably result in desertification; drought may be temporary and linked to rainfall patterns, with land productivity recovering following the cessation of drought conditions. Desertification, however, occurs when drought frequency and intensity increase, leading to the degradation of land productivity and vegetation cover (Kassas, 1995).

In Iraq, drought serves as a primary cause and clear indicator of desertification. This is evidenced by studies of thermal and rainfall ranges, evaporation/transpiration rates, and wind speed models, which reveal shifts in these parameters both northward and southward, accompanied by increased drought frequency and intensity.

Globally, climate change is accelerating, characterized predominantly by rising temperatures. This warming trend varies regionally and temporally, influenced by diverse causative factors.

## II. Government Measures to Confront Climate Change

The Iraqi government has undertaken measures to mitigate climate change impacts, including ratifying the Paris Agreement and seeking financing through the Green Climate Fund, contingent upon compliance with the Agreement's stipulations. Iraq aims to attract foreign investment in clean energy sectors to enhance food security and production (al-Naşrāwī, 2022). Former President Barham Şālīh articulated Iraq's commitment at the (Climate Ambition Summit) on December 12, 2020, emphasizing a transition toward renewable energy, carbon emission reduction, pollution control, private sector investment, youth engagement, and the empowerment of women in economic development and climate action. Subsequently, Iraq developed its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) document, establishing a green and sustainable economic policy aimed at curbing carbon emissions. The Paris Agreement targets limiting global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius, with efforts to restrict it to 1.5 degrees Celsius. These targets are subject to review every five years, with emission reduction goals set to be non-increasing. An annual climate aid minimum of 100 billion US dollars has been pledged to developing countries, with a review scheduled by 2025.

Iraq finalized its NDC with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), committing to a voluntary emission reduction of 1-2% by 2030, with potential reductions up to 15%. The plan prioritizes the oil, gas, electricity, and transport sectors, which collectively account for 75% of Iraq's greenhouse gas emissions.

Reports suggest that the NDC development may facilitate investments totaling up to 100 billion US dollars over the next decade to shield the economy from climate change impacts.

Additionally, the Presidency of the Republic introduced the (Revitalization of Mesopotamia) project to address climate change effects, which was approved by the Council of Ministers. The Presidency underscored the necessity of prioritizing climate change nationally, noting that 54% of Iraq's lands face degradation, 39% are affected by desertification, and 7 million Iraqis have been impacted by drought and displacement. Projections indicate an annual water deficit of up to 10.8 billion cubic meters by 2035. The project's vision is to transform the current emergency into an opportunity for adaptation through a business-oriented action plan aimed at securing improved conditions for future generations.

The project comprises nine substantive steps designed to effectuate tangible change. It aligns with and reinforces the government's broader climate objectives, reaffirms Iraq's commitment to the Paris Agreement, and seeks regional solutions to shared climate challenges. Successful implementation requires a unified national effort involving all state sectors, enabling relevant ministries to formulate and enforce policies and legislation. This necessitates establishing specialized institutions dedicated to climate change issues. Funding will combine state expenditures, green funds, private capital markets, and international donors to support significant new investments (Presidency of the Republic of Iraq, 2021).

Despite governmental efforts, substantial work remains to mitigate climate change severity, including:

- Enhancing community awareness regarding climate change dangers and consequences through targeted strategies that actively involve civil society, particularly environmental and climate activists.
- The most important factor is the necessity of developing a green financial system that leverages contemporary financing mechanisms for environmentally sustainable and low-emission projects, such as green bonds, green shares, and eco-friendly investments. This includes establishing regulatory frameworks and organizations to oversee these activities. The Iraq Stock Exchange should incentivize investments in green sectors, facilitate the listing of companies trading green shares, and collaborate with international financial institutions to secure green financing, while adapting successful global practices to the Iraqi context.

### **III. The Water Crisis and the Decline of Water Storage**

The management of water resources in Iraq is of critical strategic importance due to its direct connection to numerous vital sectors and its fundamental role in shaping future development plans. The rapid population growth in Iraq, the impacts of climate change, the reduction of water inflows caused by upstream countries controlling water sources, and the prolonged political instability experienced by Iraq are among the primary challenges affecting water resource management. Addressing these challenges necessitates a coordinated and strategic framework involving all stakeholders, with collective efforts aimed at establishing a unified and comprehensive vision that effectively supports the institutional integrated management of water resources.

According to the Ministry of Water Resources' assessment, 2022 was the most severe year in the past fifty years. This assessment aligns with findings from international organizations; for instance, the Mosul Plain, known as the "breadbasket of Iraq" and responsible for supplying approximately 70% of the country's grain, received only 20% of its usual rainfall during this period. Similarly, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers experienced a reduction in water levels to 20% of the required amount. This shortage resulted in a 75% decrease in agricultural production, particularly in wheat, barley, and rice, compared to previous years.

The scarcity of rain and snow, coupled with adverse policies from some neighboring countries in recent years, has led to a decline in both the quantity and quality of water in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, as well as in Shaṭṭ al-'Arab, the marshes, and other rivers and tributaries, including the Khānaqīn area. These conditions have had catastrophic effects on agricultural and livestock production and the overall living conditions.

It is important to note that there were no increases in water releases from Turkey to Iraq in 2022. Turkish dams reduced the flow of the Euphrates River into Iraq by 60%, which also contributed to food and energy shortages in Syria and

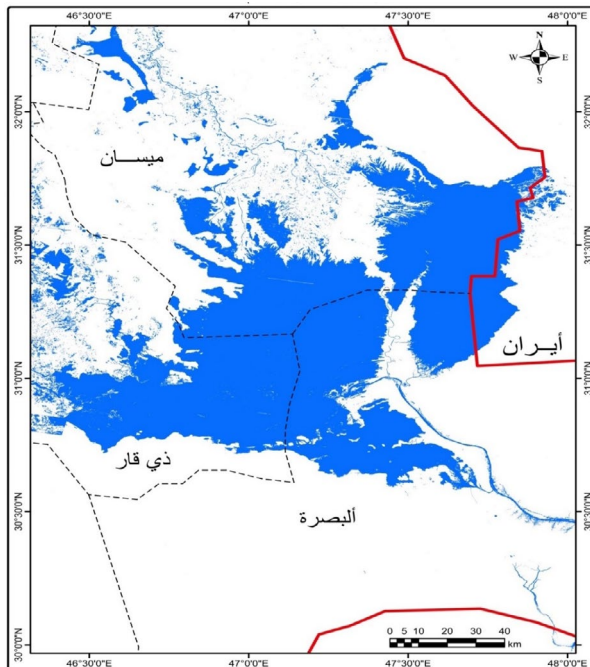
exacerbated the water crisis in Iraq. This situation threatens to deprive at least seven million people of access to water. Concurrently, dams on water sources in Iran have diminished the tributaries feeding the Tigris River, resulting in the cessation of water flow in Diyālā. Lake Ḥamrīn, the primary water source for the governorate bordering Iran, lost approximately 70% of its water volume, posing a significant humanitarian and environmental threat to this governorate.

The water management situation in 2022 revealed several problems and obstacles within the policies implemented by the central government. Decision-making related to water resources is fragmented among central authorities, local governments, and relevant institutions, leading to confusion in accurately assessing water needs and distributing resources equitably. Additionally, Iraq's diplomatic efforts with neighboring riparian countries have been weak, particularly in negotiations, as evidenced by the worsening water crisis in 2022 despite ongoing talks. Water inflows from upstream sources into the Tigris and Euphrates basins have decreased, and governance at the governorate level is deficient, resulting in local disputes over water allocation and failure to assess the specific water needs of each governorate across different sectors. Furthermore, governance techniques have not been effectively applied in managing the water sector.

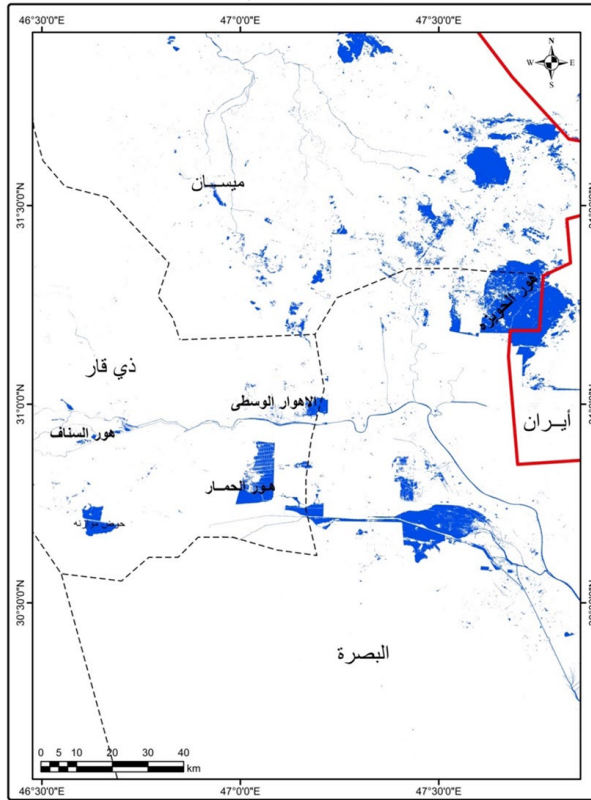
### Shrinking Marshland Areas

Between 2020 and 2022, the marshlands lost approximately 41% of their area, leading to continued displacement of populations dependent on these ecosys-

Map 2-1: Iraq's Marshes in 1973.



Map 2-2: Iraq's Marshes in 2022.



tems due to the loss of economic resources and the death of buffaloes, which require submerging in water for breeding. The Agriculture Directorate of Dhī-Qār Governorate reported the death of 4,000 buffalo heads in 2022 due to water scarcity (Ministry of Agriculture, 2022). Historically, the marshes covered 19,788 km<sup>2</sup> in 1973, which decreased to 10,453 km<sup>2</sup> in 1991 following the drying policies of the former regime. Although there was a slight recovery to 11,455 km<sup>2</sup> in 2003 due to government restoration efforts, the marshes sharply declined again due to climate change impacts and reduced water flow in 2022, reaching only 1,852 km<sup>2</sup>. This represents a loss of over 90% of the marshland area between 1973 and 2022, highlighting the severity of drying and associated water pollution.

Maps 2-1 and 2-2 illustrate the decline in water inflows to the southern Iraqi marshes during 2022, providing a comparative cartographic representation of marshland areas over different years.

### Impacts of the Water Crisis

Climate change represents a global challenge, with Iraq identified among the five countries most severely affected (al-Mashhadānī, 2012, p. 1). The absence of strategic planning to address water scarcity has resulted in significant ecological damage, particularly threatening wetlands such as marshes and natural lakes.

Anthropogenic activities, including oil extraction, mining, and industrial waste disposal, combined with inadequate policy enforcement, have led to the contamination of surface and groundwater resources. This situation necessitates substantial future investments for environmental rehabilitation. Consequently, the environmental conditions in southern Iraq are deteriorating, exacerbated by increased emissions of gases, notably carbon dioxide, from oil industry operations (al-'Ajamī, 2008, p. 123). Additionally, over the past two decades, there has been a marked rise in water salinity, elevated temperatures, intensified desertification, and a reduction in vegetation cover. Groundwater depletion has become increasingly evident, as demonstrated by well drilling operations where the depth to access water has tripled from 15 meters to 45 meters. Furthermore, water quality has generally declined, with salinity levels rising. The Minister of Water Resources, 'Awn Dhiyāb, reported that water storage in 2022 was approximately 50% lower than the previous year, attributable to reduced rainfall and diminished inflows from neighboring countries. Dhiyāb also highlighted the consecutive drought years of 2020, 2021, and 2022, which have significantly impacted the water situation. By mid-April 2022, drought conditions compelled Iraq to halve its cultivated land for the winter season. He predicted that 2023 would be among the most severe drought years experienced since 1930 (Dhiyāb, 2022).

Water storage in 2022 was 60% less than the prior year, prompting governmental measures to reduce winter wheat cultivation to 1.5 million dunams in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture. Cultivated areas decreased from 33 million dunams to under 10 million dunams in 2023 due to the water crisis and agricultural policy adjustments. Iraq's annual water consumption exceeds 50 billion cubic meters, yet water inflows declined to 21 billion cubic meters in 2022. Consequently, current water reserves suffice for only 18% of domestic consumption. These figures are based on Ministry of Agriculture data; however, previous United Nations statistics indicate a 73% reduction in water inflows, suggesting actual inflows may be closer to 27%, or less than 17 billion cubic meters annually (General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, 2022).

### **Government Measures to Address the Water Crisis**

The Ministry of Water Resources characterized 2022 as the most challenging year for Iraq's water resources, outlining initiatives to mitigate water scarcity, including the extraction of stagnant water storage and its diversion to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Technical reports indicate that floating pumps were installed in Lake al-Tharthār, with over 55% completion as of May 24, 2022. The project involves excavating a 2,200-meter canal within Lake al-Tharthār, dredging the pump basin, and reinforcing the embankment of the floating pump basin. Additionally, sediment removal from the main canal of the al-Tharthār regulator is underway using specialized multi-purpose machinery to optimize the lake's storage capacity for augmenting water flow in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Minister of Water Resources noted the formation of a specialized team in 2022 to address water

scarcity and efforts to establish a permanent solution to supplement the Tigris River with water from Lake al-Tharthār.

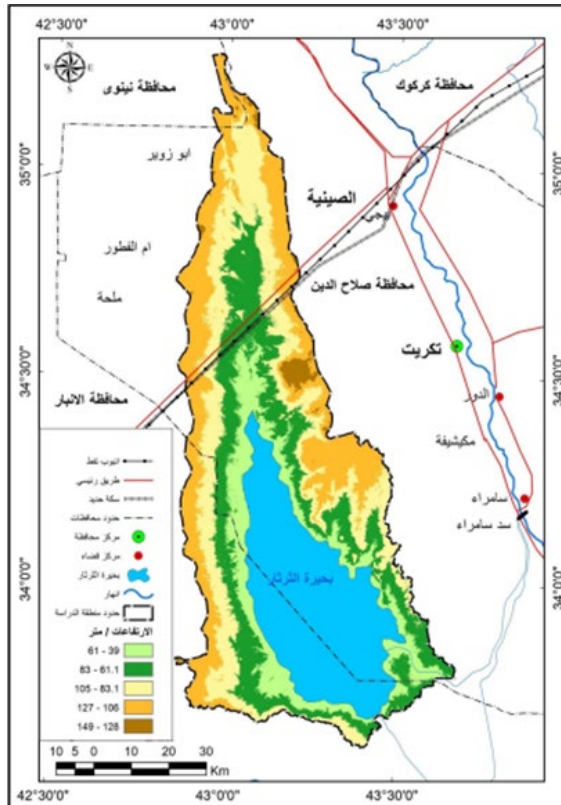
On October 4, 2022, the River Dredging Directorate announced significant progress in sediment and aquatic plant removal operations. Maḥmūd 'Abd-Allāh, Assistant Director General of the Directorate, reported that while 17.78 million cubic meters of dredging were planned for 2022, 13.697 million cubic meters had been completed by the end of August.

A notable issue involves the proliferation of aquatic plants obstructing water flow from the tails of Shaṭṭ al-Ḥillah to Shaṭṭ al-Dīwānīyah and al-Daghārah, as well as Shaṭṭ al-Rumaythah in al-Samāwah Governorate. These plants grow from early February through the summer, impeding water movement. Scientifically, water scarcity exacerbates sediment accumulation and aquatic plant growth, thereby increasing the effort and duration required for river dredging and sediment removal.

### Reduction in Lake al-Tharthār Surface Area

To illustrate the decline in water inflows to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, an analysis of Lake al-Tharthār—the largest lake in Iraq and the world's second-

Map 2-3: Decline in Lake al-Tharthār Area until 2022.



largest artificial reservoir, covering 2,710 km<sup>2</sup>—was conducted. This lake is a critical control and storage infrastructure in Iraq. Examination of annual, seasonal, and monthly inflow and outflow rates revealed a consistent decrease in water volumes entering the lake from the Tigris River. This trend is attributed to upstream reductions in water allocations by Turkey and Iran, climate change effects, population growth, increased water demand, and inefficient water resource management. The lake's challenges extend beyond quantity reductions to include deteriorating water quality, poor resource management, and a lack of strategic development planning. Laboratory analyses indicate that while the lake's water remains suitable for most uses, certain industrial applications are affected. Satellite imagery and surface area measurements confirm a continuous retreat of the lake's water surface, reflecting diminished inflows due to both natural and anthropogenic factors. This decline undermines the lake's significance and efficacy as a major water reservoir in Iraq (Yāsīn, 2019, p. 23).

### **Drying of Lake Sāwah**

Lake Sāwah represents a distinctive landmark within Iraq, notable for its unique formation and associated natural phenomena. Historically, the lake served as a habitat for approximately 31 bird species and functioned as a center for hunting and recreational activities. Presently, the lake has largely desiccated, leaving behind cracked soil and a small central pond, with abandoned hotels and tourist facilities scattered along its periphery. Unlike other lakes, Lake Sāwah lacks inflow from rivers or surface water channels.

Geologically, the lake is situated in a tectonically distinct region, intersected west to east by subsurface reverse faults formed through block faulting movements predating the Miocene epoch. The area is characterized by a network of faults and fractures resulting from vertical block movements, defining fault planes oriented north-south, southwest-northeast, and northwest-southeast, including the Abū-jīr Fault (al-Jawād & al-Miqdādī, 2015, p. 2023). The year 2022 continued the trend observed over the preceding five years, with intensified drying of the lake, leading some observers to declare its disappearance. Others have suggested that seismic activity in eastern Iraq contributed to the closure of groundwater sources sustaining the lake.

Aerial imagery has identified at least eight groundwater springs on the lakebed, which supply water from local geological formations or, more plausibly, from the West Euphrates springs line. This inference is supported by the alignment of the lake's springs with the West Euphrates springs along the Abū-jīr Fault. Water levels from these springs correspond to the lake's surface and to levels recorded in four surrounding monitoring wells. Conversely, wells situated west of the lake exhibit significantly lower water levels, indicating potential recharge from the lake toward these formations via hydraulic pathways influenced by water level gradients.

Climatic factors also contribute to water loss through high evaporation rates, which may equal the rate of recharge. These losses increase the concentration of

dissolved substances in the water; however, evaporation alone has not elevated total dissolved salt concentrations to critical levels. This suggests the presence of additional mechanisms that maintain or limit the rise of these concentrations, likely through continuous recharge and evaporation processes (al-Başrāwī, 2017).

Lake Sāwah functions as a groundwater discharge zone. Agricultural investors near the lake have installed unauthorized irrigation systems, and non-Iraqi drillers have conducted unregulated drilling without official approval from the General Commission for Groundwater. These activities have disregarded regulations concerning well spacing and pumping volumes, with over 1,000 unauthorized wells monitored, some equipped with pumps operating at capacities up to 25 liters per second.

Traditional flood irrigation methods have been employed by farmers extracting substantial water volumes from wells along the lake's recharge pathways. Additionally, climate change in Iraq, characterized by rising temperatures and reduced precipitation, has significantly contributed to declining lake water levels. Iraq's vulnerability to climate change is evident in rapidly decreasing rainfall, which has fallen between 25% and 65% below normal levels, resulting in prolonged drought periods (Ḥasan, 2017, p. 87).

The implications of the lake's desiccation extend beyond the loss of a natural landmark and tourist attraction; they include the depletion of a strategic water reservoir amid a drought crisis exacerbated by global climate change.

Given these conditions, water from Lake Sāwah and its springs should be reserved for potable and irrigation uses employing modern techniques, due to increased salinity and pollutant concentrations exceeding permissible limits unless treated appropriately. A geophysical-electrical survey is recommended to monitor groundwater movement surrounding the lake. Furthermore, caution is advised near the lake's suction eye, located 100 meters west of the lake's cliff, where high-velocity water suction presents hazards to boaters and swimmers.

#### **IV. Future of Climate Changes: Future Scenarios**

Global studies project an increase in Earth's average temperature to 2.2 degrees Celsius by 2040, potentially exceeding 3.8 degrees Celsius in some regions by 2100. This warming is anticipated to cause a sea-level rise of approximately 30 centimeters, threatening to submerge areas surrounding Shaṭṭ al-'Arab, Khawr 'Abd-Allāh, and the marshes in al-Başrah governorate. Such changes may precipitate migration and displacement, disrupt social cohesion, and damage agricultural lands and urban developments in affected regions. According to a UNICEF report, by 2050, all children in Iraq will be exposed to recurrent heatwaves.

During the twentieth century, sea levels rose by 20 centimeters. Accelerated Antarctic ice sheet melting poses significant risks, potentially raising sea levels by several meters even if global warming remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Worst-case projections estimate sea-level rise between 52 and 190 centimeters by 2100, though uncertainties persist due to limited global modeling and interactions

within the Gulf region. Environmental organizations have warned the Ministry of Water Resources that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers may experience complete desiccation by 2040 if current trends continue.

Should these scenarios materialize, additional areas of al-Başrah governorate, including marshes, villages near the Karmat 'Alī River, Būbiyān Island, and lands adjacent to the East al-Ḥammār Marsh, will be submerged. These fertile lands are vital for cultivating key agricultural crops, and their loss would significantly diminish food and agricultural resources essential for sustaining populations and livelihoods.

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Conduct comprehensive studies adhering to international standards within the Lower Mesopotamian Basin region.
2. Develop collaborative plans with neighboring countries, including Kuwait and Iran, to address climate change challenges.
3. Promote the utilization of construction materials that are compatible with climate change adaptation.
4. Advocate for the adoption of alternative energy sources in place of fossil fuels and implement measures to reduce pollutants contributing to global warming.
5. Facilitate the development of technologies aimed at purifying air from existing carbon emissions and enabling its reuse.
6. Encourage modifications in consumer lifestyles and enforce stringent penalties on factories and plants that violate environmental regulations.
7. Replace traditional fuel-dependent transportation with vehicles powered by gases or environmentally sustainable materials.
8. Formulate emergency response plans for cities affected by climatic fluctuations and provide training for Civil Defense personnel to prepare for natural disasters.
9. Implement waste recycling programs that convert waste into electrical energy, avoiding incineration or landfill disposal.
10. Promote the rational use of natural resources and educate citizens on sustainable development principles to ensure resource availability for future generations.
11. Support individual and collective environmental initiatives and disseminate awareness programs.
12. Utilize environmental taxes to fund projects mitigating the effects of climate change, preferably through regional and international initiatives with comprehensive positive impacts, such as sand dune stabilization and modern irrigation technologies.
13. Transition from treating drought as an emergency to adopting long-term strategic plans, including permanent measures to mitigate its adverse

effects. This requires serious administrative and technical efforts in specific countries to develop national strategies, supported by advanced global environmental action programs addressing extreme climate events like floods and droughts, and empowering communities to reduce associated risks.

14. Assist in establishing projects related to climatic and environmental changes, strengthening governmental readiness with support from international organizations, including the United Nations, its Environment and Education Programme, and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD).

### **Agenda for 2023**

The geographical analysis of climate change realities and the water crisis, particularly the desiccation of water bodies such as the marshes and Lake Sāwah in Iraq in 2022, has led to the following recommendations:

1. Establish additional climate monitoring stations in Iraq to address the insufficiency and uneven geographical distribution of existing stations.
2. Conduct detailed studies on rainfall patterns for rain-fed agriculture using long-term data series to identify changes and forecast future trends to mitigate economic risks.
3. Investigate desertification in other physiographic regions of Iraq due to its significant environmental impacts.
4. Enhance environmental awareness among citizens to emphasize the severity of environmental degradation caused by desertification and sand encroachment, and promote government, private, and cooperative projects aimed at improving the economic conditions of affected populations and encouraging their retention in these regions.
5. Encourage scientific research focused on combating desertification, sand encroachment, and drought, including the development and modernization of research centers and institutions dedicated to these phenomena, as well as the establishment of governmental and non-governmental organizations committed to environmental preservation and combating desertification.
6. Implement sustainable irrigation programs for both crops and livestock, coupled with educational initiatives on appropriate farming methods.
7. Employ multiple methods to halt and stabilize sand dunes, including mechanical barriers perpendicular to wind direction and vegetative barriers using plant species selected for their height, branching, root strength, and resilience to harsh environmental conditions; afforestation is considered the most effective method.
8. Utilize laser land leveling technology to reduce water loss and enhance crop germination by leveling agricultural land.

9. Establish a Higher Council for Water in each governorate, linked to the highest national authority, comprising specialists, university professors, and irrigation engineers. This council would develop short- and long-term water policies, coordinate with the central Higher Council for Water, liaise with international water organizations, prepare national plans based on early warning systems, and provide decision-makers with information on natural phenomena such as drought and water scarcity, in addition to evaluating emergency reserves and relief for affected areas and diagnosing the most affected areas.
10. Prioritize the study and rational exploitation of groundwater reservoirs as strategic water reserves, employing modern technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing to differentiate fresh water reservoirs from saline ones, thereby preventing ineffective drilling.
11. Advance the desalination industry by leveraging Arab experiences, particularly those of Gulf states, selecting appropriate desalination methods based on salt concentration, prevailing water temperatures in Iraq, and cost considerations.
12. Promote in-depth scientific and field studies to develop rapid, well-researched procedural plans to prevent drought conditions threatening various regions of Iraq.
13. Enforce legislation to limit the dumping of solid waste, rubble, and sewage into rivers, which pose significant health risks due to fecal coliform bacteria and other pollutants. This includes imposing fines on violators and raising public awareness about the importance of preserving water resources.
14. Pursue diplomatic efforts and mediation by international and regional organizations to resolve shared water resource issues with neighboring countries, establishing official agreements based on river traversal distances and dependent populations, recognizing these as international rivers.
15. Promote the reuse of agricultural drainage water for irrigation and farming to alleviate water scarcity.
16. Utilize water from the General Outfall for cultivating salt-resistant crops and for flooding dried areas of the southern marshes, particularly in the upper Hawr al-Ḥammār within Dhī-Qār Governorate.
17. Conduct comprehensive hydrological studies to characterize Lake Sāwah's water, including reclamation, purification, and potable water development.
18. Remove illegal encroachments on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers related to industrial, commercial, and service activities, especially sewage stations, slaughterhouse waste, thermal energy, and car wash stations, enforcing strict laws to prevent dumping of solid and liquid waste.

19. Implement river lining projects to prevent water seepage and conserve water resources.
20. Strengthen legislation and enforcement to rationalize water consumption and impose stricter penalties on violators.

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## 4. Anti-Corruption Efforts

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### I. Introduction

The year 2022 was marked by significant events within this context. Shortly after its conclusion, one of the largest corruption scandals emerged, known as the “Theft of the Century.” In fact, it represents the “Theft of All Centuries,” as no comparable theft of such magnitude—estimated between 3.8 and 12 trillion Iraqi Dinars—has been recorded in human history. Additionally, 2022 witnessed another scandal involving the smuggling of Iraqi funds to Beirut, the full details of which remain undisclosed.

This chapter provides a concise overview of corruption-related events in 2022, emphasizing the Theft of the Century and other notable incidents within this framework. Furthermore, it includes a case study on corruption in Higher Education, a sector that has not been sufficiently analyzed or critiqued.

### I. Integrity and Anti-Corruption in the Ministerial Program of the New Government

The government led by Mr. Mohammed Shia’ al-Sūdānī received the confidence of the Council of Representatives on October 27, 2022, following a year-long delay after the parliamentary elections and the withdrawal of the Sadrist Bloc, the largest winning faction. The ministerial program of this government contained strong commitments to “combating administrative and financial corruption, and stopping the waste of public money, in a manner ensuring the establishment of good governance” (al-Sūdānī, 2022, pp. 1-2). The government prioritized anti-corruption efforts (p. 2) and dedicated Item Seven to the “Combating Corruption and Waste of Public Money” axis by implementing several reforms (p. 8):

- Supporting and activating oversight bodies, including the Commission of Integrity and the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, to fulfill their mandates.
- Reviewing previous contracts, particularly large ones, to address concerns of public money waste and evaluating them in accordance with the law.

- Implementing a stringent plan to recover smuggled funds and pursuing international legal actions to ensure their return.
- Emphasizing preventive measures as part of the future anti-corruption program by establishing mechanisms and instructions to limit corruption and promptly initiating governance reforms within government departments.
- Committing to develop effective tools to combat corruption within 90 days from the government's formation (p. 23).

## II. Corruption Indicators 2020-2022

Perceptions of political corruption in Iraq have remained high since 2018. Gallup polls indicate that 88% of Iraqis perceived government corruption as widespread in 2022, ranking sixth globally after Nigeria (94%), Lebanon (91%), Kenya (90%), Puerto Rico (90%), and Ghana (88%) (Gallup, 2023).

A 2022 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study revealed that participants identified corruption as Iraq's primary problem, viewing it as inherent to the political system. Focus group and survey participants emphasized that addressing corruption should be a top government priority. They reported that corruption and its deep entanglement with the governance system significantly hinder political participation. Moreover, daily difficulties in accessing services due to pervasive corruption were noted across all social strata (UNDP, 2022).

According to the Arab Barometer 2022, corruption remains the foremost challenge for Iraqis, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ninety-three percent of citizens believe corruption is widespread within national institutions; however, only 32% perceive the government as actively combating corruption. Although this reflects an improvement from 2018, it remains below the 40% reported in 2013 (Arab Barometer, 2022).

Iraq's performance in integrity and anti-corruption in 2022 stagnated compared to the previous year, achieving a score of 23 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 157th among 180 countries evaluated. This occurred despite the approval of the "National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption 2021-2024" by the Council of Ministers Decision No. (181) of 2021. However, no activities or implementation results related to this strategy were published during 2022.<sup>(1)</sup>

Table 4-1: Iraq's Rank According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (2020-2022).

Year	Score	Rank
2020	21	160
2021	23	157
2022	23	157

Source: Transparency International, 2023.

(1) None of the activities were published on the Commission of Integrity's website despite the existence of a link regarding strategy activities. ([https://nazaha.iq/news\\_FA.asp?page\\_namper=p26](https://nazaha.iq/news_FA.asp?page_namper=p26)) Accessed on March 20, 2023.

### III. The Role of the Federal Commission of Integrity

The Federal Commission of Integrity (FCOI) is the principal institution responsible for combating corruption and promoting integrity in Iraq. Its role has evolved, particularly following the abolition of the Offices of Inspectors General in 2019. The year 2022 was marked by numerous activities initiated by the Commission.

On November 13, 2022, Judge Judge 'Alā' al-Sā'idī, Head of the Commission of Integrity, tendered his resignation. He was the seventh judge to hold this position since the Commission's establishment in 2004. In his resignation statement, al-Sā'idī emphasized that holding a significant position in national oversight bodies entails substantial responsibilities and challenges. He described relinquishing the role as a relief from the burdens and dangers associated with the position, including difficulties with various executive authorities, legislative blocs, and exposure to media criticism and defamation orchestrated by influential entities opposing anti-corruption efforts (al-Araby al-Jadeed Newspaper, 2022, November 13).

On the same day, Prime Minister Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī announced the termination of al-Sā'idī's assignment as Head of the Commission of Integrity and appointed Judge Ḥaydar Ḥannūn Zāyir al-Ruwayshdāwī as acting head.<sup>(1)</sup>

On October 30, 2022, al-Sūdānī visited the Commission of Integrity. Subsequently, the High Anti-Corruption Committee was established, chaired by the Head of the Commission of Integrity and comprising the Directors General of the Investigations and Recovery Directorates within the Commission. The Committee's mandate is to investigate major corruption cases submitted to the Commission's directorates and investigation offices that meet specific criteria: the magnitude of embezzled or wasted funds, the seniority of the accused, and the extent of damage inflicted upon the institution or public funds. These investigations are to be conducted within a designated timeframe utilizing the most legally accessible methods. The Head of the Commission implemented several measures, notably (FCOI, 2023, p. 14):

- Establishing a team of investigators tasked with examining these cases.
- Forming a team of detectives responsible for inquiries into these cases.
- Appointing two liaison members from the Commission's investigators: one specializing in tracking assets and funds smuggled outside Iraq, and the other focusing on the extradition of judicially wanted persons fleeing abroad, to facilitate the recovery of smuggled funds and the handover of fugitives.

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(1) Judge Ḥaydar Ḥannūn was born in Maysān Governorate in 1969. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Law from the University of al-Baṣrah (1992-1993), then joined the Judicial Institute and graduated in the academic year (1998-1999). In October 1999, he was appointed as a fourth-grade judge in Iraqi courts. In 2004, he became a First Judge in the al-Amārah Investigation Court. In 2010, he was assigned as Head of the Maysān Federal Appeal Court, then Head of the al-Diwānīyah Federal Appeal Court (2015), and a member of the Supreme Judicial Council (2010-2016). He then became Head of the Maysān Appeal Court (2021).

- Requesting the Supreme Judicial Council to transfer criminal cases selected by the High Anti-Corruption Committee to the Second al-Karkh Investigation Court, which is competent to hear these cases; this aimed to expedite case resolution and the recovery of seized funds. The Council approved the Commission's request.

The Commission of Integrity's annual report identified corruption as a persistent issue in Iraq. According to the 2022 report (FCOI, 2023):

- The Commission received 2,960 communications alleging corruption. The total registered reports in 2022 amounted to 10,840, of which 7,670 (70.8%) were completed. Of these, 5,565 reports were converted into criminal cases, while 6,765 were resolved by the Commission.
- The number of accused individuals during this period reached 12,537, including 56 ministers or individuals of equivalent rank, and 370 persons of special grades and Directors General. The Commission issued 8,485 summons orders, with an execution rate of 87%, and 1,531 arrest warrants, of which 856 (70%) were executed, in addition to 1,382 arrest warrants carried over from 2021. Judicial detention orders numbered 1,687.
- The Commission issued 258 travel ban decisions outside Iraq through competent courts, including three concerning ministers or individuals of equivalent rank, and 22 concerning holders of special grades, Directors General, and their equivalents.
- The Commission conducted 953 "caught in the act" operations across the governorates. These operations involved 575 accused individuals charged with crimes related to damage to public funds (189 accused), bribery (90 accused), employees exceeding their job limits (60 accused), embezzlement (34 accused), forgery (21 accused), and other offenses (181 accused).
- The number of persons included in the general amnesty reached 1,168 accused, comprising 981 accused in 213 criminal cases and 187 convicted individuals in 121 judicial decisions. In 2022, an amount of 21,931,823,376 Dinars was repaid.
- The number of criminal cases referred to trial courts—covering misdemeanors and felonies—totaled 3,923 cases in 2022, involving 6,647 referral orders for 5,123 accused individuals, including 13 ministers or individuals of equivalent rank, 143 persons of special grades and Directors General, and 4,967 individuals below these ranks.
- The total funds the Commission was able to identify and prevent from being wasted through preventive or deterrent measures during investigative procedures in various corruption cases amounted to 2.148 trillion Dinars.
- The total funds actually returned to the state treasury amounted to 32.859 billion Dinars.

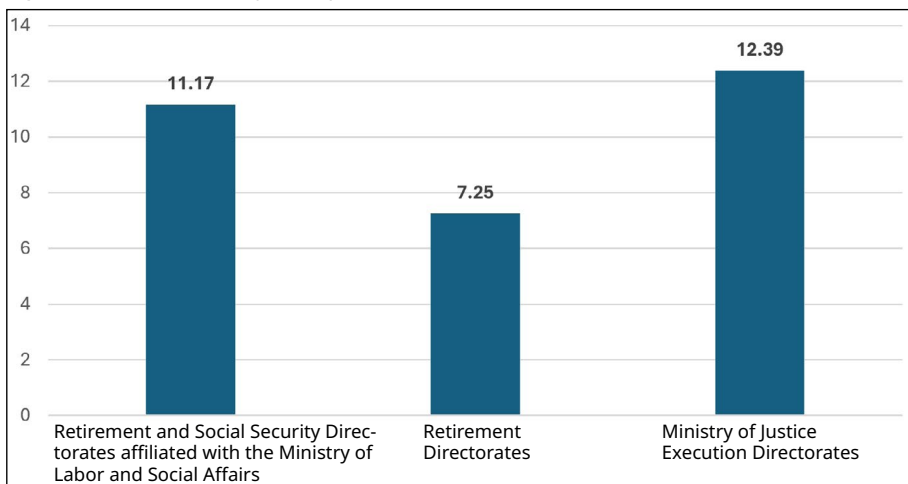
- The total funds for which judicial judgments were issued for return amounted to 67.888 billion Dinars.
- Funds seized during seizure operations totaled 626.291 million Dinars.
- The number of judicial judgment decisions (conviction or release) not yet finalized in corruption cases reached 1,544, while the total finalized judgments numbered 734.

In addition, the Commission conducted an annual survey on bribery perceptions within public sector institutions in the governorates, excluding the Kurdistan Region. The survey included perceptual questions directed at visitors to specific government departments, namely:

- Execution Directorates of the Ministry of Justice in 102 offices across Baghdad and the governorates.
- Retirement Commission Directorates in 22 offices across Baghdad and the governorates.
- Workers’ Retirement and Social Security Directorates affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in nine offices across Baghdad and the governorates.

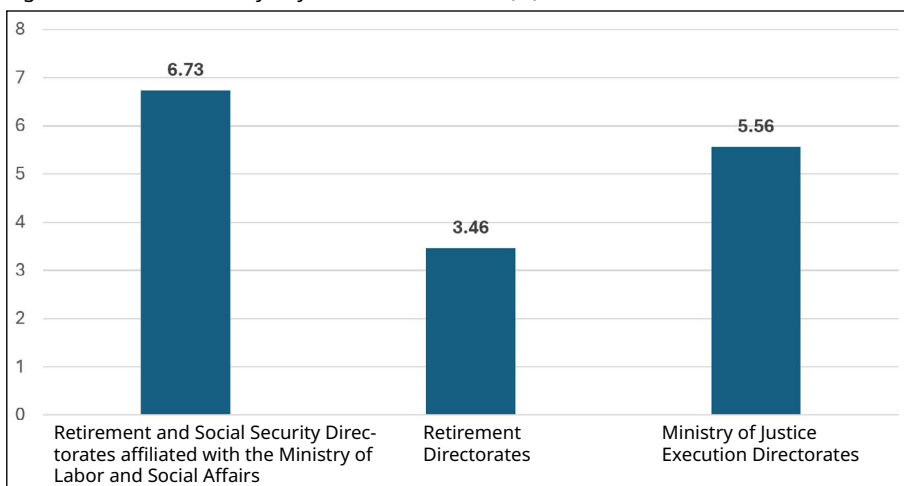
As illustrated in Figures 4-1 and 4-2, The highest rates of bribery perception were reported in the Ministry of Justice Execution Directorates (12.4%), followed by Workers’ Retirement and Social Security Directorates affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (11.2%), and Retirement Directorates (7.3%). However, actual bribery payments were more prevalent in Workers’ Retirement Directorates than in the Ministry of Justice Execution Directorates and Retirement Commission Directorates (6.7%, 5.5%, and 3.5%, respectively). The primary motivation for bribery payments was to expedite the completion of procedures. The

Figure 4-1: Rate of Bribery Perception in 2022 (%).



Source: FCOI, 2023, p. 17.

Figure 4-2: Rate of Bribery Payment Cases in 2022 (%).



Source: FCOI, 2023, p. 17.

Table 4-2: Number of Stalled Projects, Their Value, and Criminal Cases Initiated Regarding Them by the Commission of Integrity (2018-2022).

Year	Number of Stalled Projects	Value of Projects		Number of Criminal Cases
		Dinar	Dollar	
2018	2736	16,455,290,348,823	16,227,930,298	644
2019	1600	12,261,957,481,362	1,941,398,559	363
2020	26	576,867,456,420	348,388,432	26
2021	290	1,882,277,319,387	1,142,332,885	64
2022	164	480,375,834,627	507,589,932	82
<b>Total</b>	<b>4816</b>	<b>31,656,768,440,619</b>	<b>20,167,640,106</b>	<b>1179</b>

Source: FCOI, 2023, p. 16.

Commission prepared an analytical report on these survey results and submitted it to the relevant ministries (FCOI, 2023, p. 17).

Among the Commission's activities is the monitoring of stalled projects in the governorates. Since 2018, the Commission's Investigations Directorate has managed this issue through investigation directorates and offices in Baghdad and the governorates. In 2022, the number of stalled projects reached 164, with a total value of 480,375,834,627 Iraqi Dinars, equivalent to 507.6 million US Dollars. Consequently, the cumulative number of stalled projects since 2018 amounts to 4,816, with contract values totaling 31,656,768,440,619 Dinars (over 20 billion US Dollars). A total of 1,179 criminal cases have been initiated concerning these projects (FCOI, 2023, p. 16).

It is noteworthy that the "Theft of the Century" case was referred to the Commission for investigation, and the main accused was handed over to the Commission following arrest. However, the Commission has yet to publicly disclose its procedures or the outcomes of its investigations regarding this case.

## IV. The Federal Board of Supreme Audit

The Federal Board of Supreme Audit (FBSA) plays a critical supervisory role over the financial and administrative operations of state institutions. However, its website has not been updated with recent data on the Board's achievements since 2020. Additionally, there is an absence of information concerning the progress made in implementing the Board's 2018-2022 strategic plan (FBSA, n.d.), as the Board has not disclosed results or accomplishments related to its activities. Therefore, the researcher was unable to evaluate the Board's role in combating corruption in 2022.

## V. Cancellation of the Diwani Order 29 Committee

On December 21, 2022, The Washington Post published a significant report concerning the Executive Order 29 Committee, also referred to as the "Abū-Raghīf Committee" after its head, Lieutenant General Aḥmad Abū-Raghīf. The report was based on 20 interviews, including five detainees, nine family members of prisoners, and 11 Iraqi officials who monitored the committee's activities. The newspaper accused the committee of extracting confessions through torture, abuse, and humiliation, which resulted in the death of one detainee (Loveluck & Salim, 2022).

Since its establishment, the committee attracted attention by arresting several senior administrators and politicians, raising public expectations regarding its effectiveness and the government's capacity to address corruption irrespective of its source. Notable detainees included politician and head of the Solution Party (Ḥizb al-Ḥall), Jamāl al-Karbūlī; former governor of Nīnawá, Nawfal al-Ākūb; former member of the Najaf Provincial Council, Jawād al-Gar'āwī; and businessman Bahā' al-Jūrānī, accused of corrupt contracts in the Ministries of Industry and Electricity.

On March 2, 2022, the Federal Supreme Court annulled the Executive Order 29 Committee and declared the order invalid. The court issued decision No. 169/Federal/2021 on March 2, 2022, invalidating Executive Order No. (29) of 2020, which had established a permanent committee to investigate corruption and major crimes. This ruling was effective immediately due to violations of Article (37/First/1) of the Constitution, which guarantees protection of human freedom and dignity; Article 47, which stipulates the separation of powers; and Articles 87 and 88, which affirm the judiciary's independence and competence in investigation and trial. The order was also deemed equivalent to an amendment of the Integrity Commission Law, a constitutional body specialized in investigating financial and administrative corruption cases (INA, 2022, March 2).

## VI. The First Theft of the Century: The Tax Deposits Case

In mid-October 2022, one of the largest corruption scandals in history emerged following a document issued by the General Commission for Taxes. The document

Table 4-3: Opening and Closing Balances of the Tax Account at Al-Rafidain Bank (Dinars) (2018-2022).

Branch	Year	Opening Balance	Closing Balance	Change
Taxes Branch	2018	140,000	516,745,301,281	516,745,161,281
	2019	516,745,301,281	3,001,296,210,666	2,484,550,909,385
	2020	3,001,296,210,666	3,397,676,615,849	396,380,405,183
	2021	3,397,676,615,849	3,074,983,206,476	-322,693,409,373
	2022	3,074,983,206,476	145,050,309,732 (*)	-2,929,932,896,744
al-Aḥrār Branch	2019	2,633,709,290,237	-	-
	2022	-	2,179,038,990 (**)	-

(\*) Until September 26, 2022.

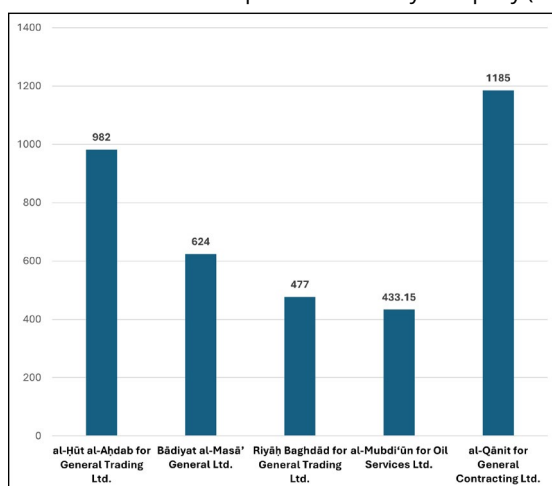
(\*\*) Until August 18, 2022.

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2022, October 10.

revealed that 3.7 trillion Iraqi Dinars (approximately 2.5 billion US Dollars) were paid between September 9, 2021, and August 11, 2022, through 247 checks cashed by five companies from tax deposit funds held in the Commission's account. The investigation was initiated after the Acting Minister of Finance, who also held the Oil portfolio, received a complaint from an oil company unable to recover its tax deposit from the Tax Commission (Sky News Arabia, 2022, November 22).

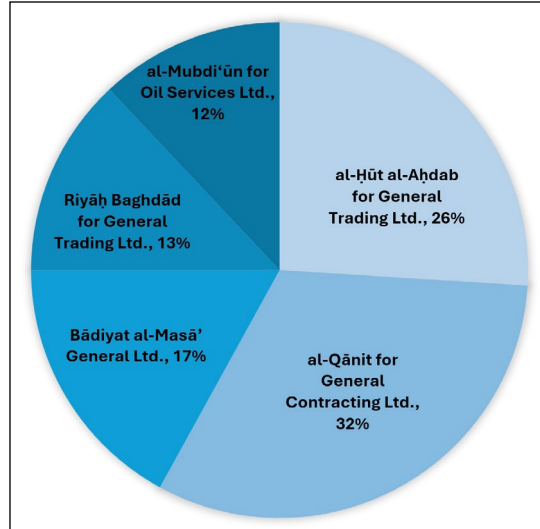
Subsequently, the Second al-Karkh Court received a report alleging corruption and theft. The court's First Judge halted disbursements from the account pursuant to letter No. 2375 dated August 21, 2022, addressed to the Ministry of Finance, Minister's Office. The letter stated that the court was investigating allegations of corruption in the disbursement of customs and tax deposits and ordered a suspension of disbursements until the investigation concluded and the court was informed of the results (Supreme Judicial Council, 2022, August 21).

Figure 4-3: Funds Withdrawn from Tax Deposits Account by Company (Billion Dinars).



Source: Ministry of Finance, 2022, October 10.

Figure 4-4: Funds Withdrawn from Tax Deposits Account by Company (%).



Source: Researcher's compilation based on Ministry of Finance data.

The Tax Commission maintains two deposit accounts under number 60032 at Al-Rafidain Bank: one at the al-Aḥrār Branch and another at the Taxes Branch. Table 4-3 presents the opening and closing balances of the Taxes Branch account from 2018 to 2022.

Table 4-4: Information on Companies Involved in the Theft of the Century.

Detail	al-Qānit for General Contracting Ltd.	al-Mubdi'ūn for Oil Services Ltd.	Riyāh Baghdād for General Trading Ltd.	Bādiyat al-Masā' General Ltd.	al-Hūt al-Ahdab for General Trading Ltd.
Establishment Date	Unknown	March 9, 2006	July 28, 2021	July 28, 2021	July 6, 2021
Establishment Certificate No.	Unknown	30382	14912	14919	14779
Company Capital	Unknown	10 Billion	1 Billion Dinars	1 Billion Dinars	1 Billion Dinars
Activity	Unknown	Services	Commercial	Commercial	Commercial
Owner	Unknown	Ḥusayn Kāwah	Ḥusayn Kāwah	'Abd-al-Rahmān Muḥammad Ibrāhīm	Qāsim Muḥammad
Managing Director	Nūr Zuhayr Jāsīm	Nūr Zuhayr Jāsīm	'Abd-al-Mahdī Tawfīq Mahdī	'Abd-al-Mahdī Tawfīq Mahdī	'Abd-al-Mahdī Tawfīq Mahdī
Account Opening Date	Sept. 7, 2021	Oct. 28, 2021	Nov. 23, 2021	Nov. 16, 2021	Nov. 16, 2021

Source: Researcher's compilation based on multiple sources.

An audit revealed that 247 checks issued by the General Commission for Taxes, totaling 3,701,280,882,000 Dinars, were withdrawn, all payable to only five companies. Figure 4-1 illustrates the amounts withdrawn by each company, totaling 2,517.335 billion Dinars.

According to the Ministry of Finance report, the five companies “do not have tax deposits, nor a power of attorney from a third party to withdraw tax deposits; therefore, the withdrawal operations cannot be justified in any way.” Furthermore, “the check amounts were withdrawn in cash by the companies,” and the checks are not recorded in the Tax Commission’s accounts. The Accounting Department’s financial report within the Commission indicated that the deposits account balance was 3,531,501,702,289 Dinars, while the remaining balance was 145,050,309,732 Dinars. The report concluded unequivocally that “the deposit amounts held in the General Commission for Taxes’ deposits account were stolen.” The withdrawals were executed “by authorized representatives of the five companies, and these checks were issued unlawfully and without entitlement by previous administrations and specialized departments within the General Commission for Taxes” (Ministry of Finance, 2022, October 10).

Although the Federal Board of Supreme Audit audited these funds upon withdrawal pursuant to the Prime Minister’s Office letter (M.R.W/5/3047) dated February 26, 2017, the Finance Committee in the Council of Representatives proposed that refund transactions for tax deposits be audited solely by the General Commission for Taxes without involving the Board (Council of Representatives, 2021, July 13). The former Minister of Finance approved the Director General of the Tax Commission’s letter restricting audit processes for refund transactions to the General Commission for Taxes, excluding the Federal Board of Supreme Audit (Ministry of Finance, 2021, August 1). Haytham al-Jubūrī, Head of the Finance Committee, justified this decision by stating, “If I returned as head of the Parliamentary Finance Committee ten times, I would do the same thing, because I am convinced by the principle that whoever monitors should not participate in execution. My connection to the project is limited to being a legislator and observer who can propose what he sees fit, and whoever receives the proposal has the right to accept or reject it” (Nāhī, 2022).

Returning to the details of Tables 4-3 and 4-4, we find that:

- The “Theft of the Century” was confined to two figures managing the five companies: Nūr Zuhayr, who manages al-Qānit and al-Mubdi’ūn companies, and ‘Abd-al-Mahdī Tawfiq Mahdī, who manages al-Ḥūt al-Aḥḍab, Riyāḥ Baghdād, and Bādiyāt al-Masā’ companies.
- The total amount obtained by Nūr Zuhayr through the two companies is 1,618.15 billion Dinars, i.e., about 43.7% of the total stolen amount. Meanwhile, the total amount obtained by ‘Abd-al-Mahdī Tawfiq through his three companies was 2,083 billion Dinars, or equivalent to 56.3% of the total amount. Nevertheless, the media focused only on the figure of Nūr Zuhayr, who was arrested at Baghdad Airport while attempting to

leave Iraq on a private plane. Whereas Tawfīq has not been arrested up to the time of preparing this report.

- Information regarding Tawfīq was not available despite him possessing the larger portion of the stolen amount, and media outlets did not circulate any news about him except for his involvement in the case. Meanwhile, the arrest of Ḥusayn Kāwah, owner of Riyāḥ Baghdād Company, was announced in Kurdistan, Aḥmad Ṭāhā al-Rubayī, a member of the Parliamentary Integrity Committee, considered the second most important figure after Zuhayr in the theft operation (Shafaq News, 2023, February 8).
- According to MP Ḥanān al-Fatlāwī, Tawfīq worked before his retirement as a manager of the al-Rāfidayn Bank branch where the funds were deposited, and after his retirement, he established the companies that committed the theft (al-Rabīaa.tv, 2022, December 14).
- Although the aforementioned Ministry of Finance report did not hold the General Commission responsible for the theft, the Second al-Karkh Investigation Court ordered a travel ban on five Ministry of Finance employees accused in the case (al-hurra, 2022, October 24) and the seizure of their movable and immovable assets (CBI, 2022), who are:
  - Supervisor of the Financial Section in the General Commission for Taxes (Ḍiyā' 'Abd-al-Khāliq 'Alī al-Zaydī).
  - Director of the Financial Section in the General Commission for Taxes (Zuhayr Jum'ah Ḥammādī).
  - Director General of the Economic Directorate in the Ministry of Finance (Usāmah Ḥusām Jūdah).
  - Deputy of the Financial Section in the General Commission for Taxes (Qays Maḥmūd Maḥdī al-Zubaydī).
  - Assistant Director General of the General Commission for Taxes (Sāmīr 'Abd-al-Hādī Qāsim al-Rubayī).

Controversy was raised regarding the release of Zuhayr on bail of four billion Iraqi Dinars with his pledge to pay off the amounts he owes, in an account opened for this purpose at al-Rāfidayn Bank, Main Branch. This was followed by the decision of the Second al-Karkh Investigation Court to lift the seizure signal on al-Āṣimah Company owned by Zuhayr with his wife and children. This was “due to the continuation of deposits in the aforementioned account by the accused” (Supreme Judicial Council, 2023, January 16).

Perhaps the exciting matter in the case was the arrest of the Advisor to the Prime Minister and former Head of the Finance Committee, Haytham al-Jubūrī. According to a government source, on November 30, 2022, “a security force affiliated with the High Anti-Corruption Committee managed to arrest and detain former MP Haytham al-Jubūrī.” And that “the arrest operation came based on the inflation of al-Jubūrī’s funds, through unknown and illegal sources,” confirming

that “the arrest warrant is also related to confessions made by Nūr Zuhayr” (Shafaq News, 2023, January 11).

Judge ʿĪyā’ Ja’far, the First Judge of the al-Karkh Investigation Court, revealed procedures for lifting the seizure on some of Zuhayr’s properties, stating that “the letter that circulated regarding lifting the seizure on the properties of the accused (Zuhayr) is clear, and indicates that the accused paid financial amounts deposited in the state treasury, and consequently, the seizure was lifted from the real estate or the company whose amount he paid in full to the state treasury.” He added that he has “paid so far approximately 400 billion Dinars out of 1 trillion and 600 billion Dinars,” and that “the remaining amount will be paid according to a schedule, and we are proceeding towards it, and it is supposed to be completed quickly” (al-Rasheed Media, 2023, January 26). The judge added that “the accused Nūr Zuhayr will be referred to the competent court to conduct his trial properly after he pays all the amounts in his possession,” and that “handing over financial amounts is considered one of the mitigating circumstances for judicial sentences” (Sail News Agency, 2022, November 28).

## **VII. The Second Theft of the Century: The Case of the Billions Lost in Lebanon**

In November 2022, information was leaked concerning Iraqi funds held in Lebanese banks. According to press reports, these funds “belong mostly to partisan economies and corrupt Iraqi figures who concealed their money in Beirut and receive annual interest on it.”

It is important to note that these funds were lost due to the bankruptcy of Lebanese banks, which transformed millions of dollars into assets of diminished value. It appears that these corrupt individuals sought an opportunity to recover their funds, which they attempted through the Iraqi banking system via “an agreement sought by influential parties concluded between Lebanese banks and al-Rāfidayn Bank in Beirut and the al-Rashīd Bank account at the Central Bank of Lebanon to transfer funds belonging to Iraqi private banks, individuals, and companies to the Iraqi al-Rashīd and al-Rāfidayn banks in Beirut and consider them a debt on Lebanese banks to be paid directly by al-Rāfidayn and al-Rashīd banks in Iraq as obligations on their branches in Lebanon.”

This arrangement entailed transferring funds from Lebanese banks in digital form to al-Rashīd and al-Rāfidayn banks as unpaid debts, reflecting the reluctance and inability of Lebanese banks to fulfill their obligations toward Iraqi depositors, who consequently became creditors to al-Rāfidayn and al-Rashīd banks. However, media exposure of the matter appears to have compelled the corrupt parties to withdraw from completing the theft operation. Subsequently, al-Rāfidayn Bank issued a statement affirming that “transfers from Lebanon have been stopped by the judiciary” (al-Journal Newspaper, 2022).

## VIII. The Third Theft of the Century: Funds of the Foreign Currency Selling Window, Taxes, and Customs

On June 1, 2022, the Federal Commission of Integrity (FCOI) disclosed that the public treasury suffered damages amounting to nearly 4 trillion Iraqi dinars due to suspected corruption in the Foreign Currency Selling Window. The Commission reported “clear corruption in the currency Selling window resulting in damage to the public treasury amounting to (3,919,218,099,521) dinars,” further noting that “private banks were the beneficiaries of transfer operations in the currency selling window, as the majority of documents submitted by those banks were forged.”

FCOI also indicated that the Director General of the General Commission for Taxes approved referring the issue of defaulting private banks and taxpayers to FCOI, due to the realization of damage amounting to nearly 4 trillion dinars in the treasury following the loss of files in the al-A'zamīyah Tax Department. FCOI recommended establishing a joint committee comprising the Legal Department of the Ministry of Finance and the General Commissions for Customs and Taxes to audit names with incomplete information in the General Commission for Taxes' Computer Section. It further advised obliging the Computer Section to refrain from entering any file or name of a taxpayer or company with incomplete information, noting that the similarity of names, resulting from incomplete data, contributed to extortion and bribery within the Commission's branches. Additionally, it recommended that the General Commission for Customs identify customs branches lacking complete information for taxpayers and companies, including tax numbers for importers and companies, and refer these cases to the Legal Department of the Ministry of Finance. It also suggested including the taxpayer's tax number in customs declarations to prevent citizens from bearing additional burdens.

Moreover, the report highlighted the failure to publish professional and real estate tax regulations for taxpayers and legal allowances, which misleads some taxpayers into believing they owe high tax amounts. This situation facilitates bargaining with assessors to reduce tax liabilities in exchange for specific sums. The report also noted the absence of clear communication regarding the documents required to complete transactions, exposing citizens to potential exploitation or extortion (INA, 2022, June 1).

In response, the General Commission for Taxes issued a clarification. The Director General, Usāmah Ḥusām Jawdat, stated in an official communication to the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that “the hard currency auction follows the monetary policy of the Central Bank to control the exchange rate,” and that “transfers abroad must be matched by imports because the transfer is made at the official exchange rate rather than the market rate.” He added that it is assumed invoices, names, and complete information are submitted to private banks, which then send a SWIFT message to the Central Bank to authorize the transfer. He identified the problem as residing in the Central Bank's database, which contains similarities, single names, or unclear entries, even at the company level. He emphasized

that the Central Bank must check the currency auction and verify the validity of names (INA, 2022, June 6).

The significance of this mechanism in facilitating suspicious activities related to foreign currency smuggling and money laundering should not be underestimated. According to the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office in Iraq, in 2021, 649 cases of suspected money laundering or terrorist financing were monitored, with 82% related to transfers, 9% to account openings and cash deposits, and the remaining 9% involving various instruments including checks and electronic payments (Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office, 2022, p. 19). “Black transfers” constitute a critical mechanism employed by various entities for money laundering and smuggling foreign currency out of the country.

## **IX. Agenda for the New Year 2023**

The year 2023 is expected to be marked by ongoing challenges stemming from the significant events of 2022 related to corruption. The government will need to address several key issues, including:

- Continuing reforms and enhancing governance within state institutions, with an emphasis on increasing transparency and integrity.
- Supporting anti-corruption institutions, particularly the Federal Board of Supreme Audit and the Commission of Integrity, by providing them with the necessary capabilities and resources to fulfill their mandates effectively.
- Implementing the reform plan promised by the ministerial program of al-Sūdānī's government.
- Completing investigations into the Theft of the Century and recovering stolen funds.
- Developing an appropriate solution to address losses in the currency selling window caused by the significant disparity between parallel and official exchange rates.
- Prioritizing fighting and uprooting corruption in the legislative efforts promised in the the ministerial program, especially concerning the Oil and Gas Law, the Civil Service Law, and the Public-Private Partnership Law.

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## 5. Economy

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### I. Introduction

The Iraqi economy witnessed a clear disparity in its performance due to political conflict and the inability to form an Iraqi government until October 27, 2022, by Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī. As such, the government was unable to correct the economic path during the remainder of 2022, and the year ended without a budget amidst a state of uncertainty regarding the economic policy pursued by the government.

### II. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The economic growth rate rose significantly as a result of high oil prices due to the Russo-Ukrainian war, which deepened the rentier nature of the Iraqi economy. The growth rate reached 27.1% in 2022 compared to 2021 at current prices, and economic growth reached 4.9% at constant prices. However, growth excluding the oil sector was negative (-0.08), indicating the continued dominance of oil rent and the failure to benefit from the rise in oil revenues to diversify the economy. Instead, the impact was negative; the contribution of the manufacturing industry—the basis of a country's development—decreased from 2.1% in 2021 to 1.76% in 2022. Other sectors were in no better condition, as shown in Table 5-1.

### III. The Federal Budget

The government of al-Kāzīmī succeeded in conducting elections on October 10, 2021. According to the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, his government became a caretaker government; thus, it was no longer able to prepare the budget, so spending continued according to the 1/12 principle, and the year 2022 ended without a budget. On August 16, 2022, the Minister of Finance ('Alī 'Abd-al-Amīr 'Allāwī) submitted his resignation, stating that he had completed the preparation of the 2022 budget, but it could not be approved due to the constitutional status of the

Table 5-1: Contribution Ratios of Economic Sectors to GDP for 2021-2022 (%).

Sectors	2021					2022				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing	2.8	5.58	4.1	3.2	4.0	2.11	4.91	1.56	2.54	2.85
Mining and Quarrying	44.3	44.2	45.9	47.1	45.8	57.82	58.80	58.14	54.08	57.32
Crude Oil	44.24	44.18	45.9	46.9	45.7	57.77	58.76	58.09	54.00	57.26
Other types of Mining	0.06	0.05	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.05
Manufacturing Industry	2.29	1.81	2.1	2	2.1	1.42	1.40	2.34	1.91	1.76
Electricity and Water	2.17	2.81	3.4	2.1	2.6	0.88	1.21	2.04	1.25	1.36
Construction	2.57	2.26	2.6	5.7	3.4	1.96	1.96	2.01	3.33	2.29
Transport, Communications, and Storage	9.88	9.77	9.9	9.9	9.9	8.72	8.72	8.72	8.72	8.72
Wholesale/Retail Trade and Hotels	8.94	9.03	8.6	7.9	8.6	6.40	5.41	5.92	6.74	6.08
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	8.2	7.3	6.9	6.5	7.2	5.09	4.36	4.76	5.31	4.85
Banking and Insurance	1.95	1.93	2	2	2	0.58	0.58	0.58	0.58	0.58
Ownership of Dwellings	6.23	5.34	5	4.6	5.2	4.51	3.78	4.17	4.73	4.27
Social and Personal Development Services	18.9	17.2	17.7	16.9	17.7	16.00	13.52	14.92	16.50	15.14
General Government	15.24	14.05	14.54	14.1	14.6	12.46	10.53	11.64	12.79	11.78
Personal Services	3.63	3.19	2.97	2.8	3.2	3.54	2.99	3.27	3.72	3.36
Total by Activity	101.05	101.2	101.2	101.2	101.2	100.39	100.39	100.39	100.39	100.39
minus: calculated Service Charge	1.05	1.24	1.25	1.2	1.2	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on GDP data from the National Accounts Department, Central Statistical Organization.

government. He mentioned: "There are extremely limited measures that a caretaker government can take without legal authority. work on the 2022 budget has been completed for a long time, but it can only be submitted by a government with full powers. Furthermore, our reform efforts are stalled due to uncertainty regarding the future direction and priorities of the next government. We can say that the financial situation is illogical and unacceptable."

Table 5-2: Comparison of Actual Expenditures between (2021-2022) (Billion Dinars).

Item	2021	2022	Difference
Compensation of Employees	42,447	43,614	1,167
Service Requirements	660	1,142	482
Commodity Requirements	6,311	14,321	8,010
Maintenance of Assets	670	613	-57
Grants, Subsidies, Interest, and Other Expenses	13,391	11,246	-2,145
External Obligations and Contributions	38	40	2
Social Welfare	18,979	24,783	5,804
Capital Expenditures	365	261	-104
Indebtedness (Debt Service)	5,792	8,060	2,268
Special Programs	874	860	-14
<b>Total</b>	<b>89,527</b>	<b>104,940</b>	<b>15,413</b>

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on state accounts (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

When auditing what was spent in 2022, we find that the outgoing government did not adhere to the 1/12 spending principle. As Table (5-2) indicates, the government exceeded the 2021 budget by 15,413 billion Dinars; this is a violation of the specified spending principle according to Article 13/First of the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019. It is worth noting that the highest excess was in "commodity requirements," which reached 8,010 billion Dinars.

## IV. Emergency Support Law

The failure to approve the 2022 Federal Budget and the rise in oil prices on one hand, and the rise in global food prices due to the Russo-Ukrainian war that broke out in February 2022 on the other, forced the government to submit the draft "Emergency Support Law for Food Security and Development" pursuant to Cabinet Resolution 73 of 2022. Among the justifying reasons for the law were "to achieve food security, alleviate poverty, and achieve financial stability in light of urgent global developments and the continuation of providing services to citizens." It set a spending ceiling of 25 trillion IQD to be spent as shown in Tables (A and B) attached to the law.

The law was rejected after the Federal Court's interpretation of a "government for conducting daily affairs" via its decision 121/Federal/2022 on May 15, 2022. On May 17, 2022, the Federal Court clarified in its letter 909 that conducting daily affairs includes "food, medicine, electricity and its requirements, and providing security in all its aspects..." while maintaining adherence to Article 13 of the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019. This prompted more than fifty MPs to submit a draft different from the one submitted by the government. The bill was read for the first and second readings, and the law was voted on in the 11th session of the Council of Representatives on Wednesday, June 8, 2022. During the preparation to refine the law, the First Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives sent a letter to the Minister of Finance, No. 1440 on May 31, 2022, including a number

Table 5-3: Allocations Attached to the Emergency Support Law for Food Security and Development (Billion Dinars).

Entity	Amount
<b>Ministry of Trade:</b> Enhancement and procurement of food ration card items, acquisition of local wheat followed by imported wheat, local rice, strategic reserves, and settlement of farmers' dues from previous years.	5,000
<b>Ministry of Electricity:</b> Settlement of external debts and liabilities related to the importation and purchase of gas and energy.	4,000
The Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Finance are mandated to implement necessary measures to convert all lecturers, administrators, daily-wage workers, contractors, and meter readers across all ministries and entities not affiliated with a ministry, in accordance with Cabinet Resolution 315, as amended by Resolution No. 337 of 2019. The Ministry of Finance is committed to appointing top graduates and postgraduate degree holders.	1,000
Reinstatement of personnel with rescinded contracts from the security and military apparatuses.	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,300</b>

of proposals requesting their potential inclusion in the Emergency Support Law, most of which concerned workers under contracts according to Resolution 315. Proposals also included hiring graduates of science colleges in coordination with the Ministry of Health and creating job grades for the Ministry of Industry. On June 2, 2022, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party bloc submitted proposals via letter 91, including the inclusion of the Kurdistan Region's share at (13.9%) of the operational, governing, investment, and regional development allocations, as well as a proposal for the dues of farmers in the Region for the years 2014-2015 and converting election contracts into operational contracts. On June 7, the Second Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives directed the Finance Committee via letter 299 to allocate 1.5 trillion from regional development allocations to build housing units for the families of martyrs from the Iraqi Army, Peshmerga forces, the Popular Mobilization Forces, and security agencies. On Monday, June 7, 2022, the Minister of Finance stated that the total amount of the law reached 26 trillion after adding one trillion Dinars for contractors under Resolution 315 of 2019, and that the total amount is subject to change as the Finance Committee finished the final wording. The Minister added that there is no share for the Kurdistan Region from the law's allocations because it has not handed over any revenues to the federal government.

The total budgetary allocations stipulated by the law amounted to 25 trillion Dinars, with 10.3 trillion Dinars allocated as detailed in Table (A) appended to the legislation (Table 5-3).

Table (B) appended to the law encompassed 21 fundamental items, notably including regional development with an allocation of 8 trillion Dinars, 678 billion Dinars designated for the Ministry of Labor, one trillion allocated for Petro-dollar expenditures, and 162 billion Dinars earmarked for contracts with Bachelor's and Diploma holders, at a rate of 1,000 contracts per governorate, each receiving a monthly salary of 300,000 Dinars over a three-year period. Additionally, alloca-

tions include 250 billion Dinars for al-Najaf al-Ashraf Governorate, 200 billion Dinars for Karbalā' Governorate, and 50 billion Dinars for Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Governorate. The Ministry of Agriculture was allocated 700 billion Dinars, the Martyrs Foundation received 150 billion Dinars, and the Political Prisoners Foundation was granted 100 billion Dinars. Furthermore, funds were allocated for oil production costs for the al-Baṣrah Oil Company and North Oil Company, amounting to 100 billion Dinars. According to Article (11) of the law, 50% of border crossing revenues are to be allocated to the governorates in which they are situated, including the Kurdistan Region. Table 5-4 illustrates the allocations detailed in Table (B) of the aforementioned law.

Table 5-4: Annex to the Emergency Support Law for Food Security (Billion Dinars).

No.	Entity	Amount
1.	Regional development for governorates not organized into a region, distributed according to population and poverty ratios for each governorate, provided that 30% of the allocations for Baghdād Governorate are allocated to Mayoralty of Baghdād.	8,000
2.	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Social protection coverage and people with special needs, to be distributed according to population ratios), including funding the Survivors Law with an amount of 25 billion Dinars.	678
3.	Contracting with degree holders (Bachelor's and Diploma) for all specializations to work in governorate departments and local administrations for governorates not organized into a region, at a rate of 1,000 contractors per governorate with a monthly salary of 300,000 Dinars for three years for training and development.	162
4.	Petro-dollar allocations, distributed to oil-producing or oil-refining governorates according to the production ratio. The 2019 production average is used to calculate ratios between governorates; the governorate may choose between production or refining.	1,000
5.	Ministry of Agriculture	700
	a. Wheat, barley, rice, fodder barley, and yellow corn seeds.	150
	b. Fertilizer support.	300
	c. Fodder purchase support.	65
	d. Combating desertification.	5
	e. Pesticide support.	40
	f. Veterinary medicine support.	25
	g. Support for irrigation systems and agricultural aircraft.	40
	h. Settlement of previous dues for wheat, fodder barley, rice, and yellow corn seeds.	75
6.	Ministry of Oil	500
	a. Settlement of production costs for al-Baṣrah Oil Company.	400
	b. North Oil Company.	100

Table 5-4 (continued)

7.	Ministry of Construction, Housing, and the General Authority for Roads and Bridges (new and ongoing projects).	500
8.	Ministry of Water Resources.	100
9.	Ministry of Education / Maintenance of school buildings.	125
10.	Added to item 1 of this table and distributed to governorates according to: (20% al-Dīwāniyah, 20% al-Muthanná, 15% Bābil, 15% Maysān, 15% Wāsiṭ, 15% Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn).	500
11.	Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terrorism and the Dhī-Qār Reconstruction Fund, distributed as:	750
	a. Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terrorism, including North Bābil.	550
	b. Dhī-Qār Reconstruction Fund.	200
12.	Law for Compensation of Victims of Military Operations, Military Errors, and Terrorist Operations No. 20 of 2009 (Amended).	300
13.	Martyrs Foundation: Grants, financial transfers, purchasing land for housing complexes, and mass grave opening costs.	150
14.	Political Prisoners Foundation and political dismissal cases.	100
15.	Border Guard Command.	25
16.	Allocation of 50% of border crossing revenues to governorates, including Kurdistan Region governorates where crossings exist, for services, investment/operational projects, or ongoing projects, effective Jan 1, 2022.	—
17.	Ministry of Health: Purchasing medicine for cancer and hereditary anemia patients.	150
18.	Federal Board of Supreme Audit: Digital transformation and electronic auditing program.	10
19.	Security and military apparatuses, distributed by Cabinet decision.	400
20.	Regional Development	500
	a. al-Najaf al-Ashraf Governorate.	250
	b. Karbalā' al-Muqaddasah Governorate.	200
	c. Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Governorate (Sāmarrā').	50
21.	Ministry of Migration and Displaced for relief of displaced persons.	50

Source: Official Gazette of Iraq, July 4, 2022, No. 4681.

An examination of the law reveals that its scope extended beyond addressing the immediate crises that prompted its enactment, such as electricity shortages, wheat imports, and food ration card provisions. The legislation also encompassed provisions unrelated to food security or development, including the payment of oil production costs and the allocation of funds for new service initiatives as well as stalled or delayed projects. Additionally, the law authorized the Minister of Finance to undertake domestic and foreign borrowing. Notably, while the Council of Ministers' draft imposed a borrowing ceiling of 10 trillion Dinars, the version ratified by the Council of Representatives omitted this limitation.

This legislation may be characterized as a “mini-budget.” A more appropriate course of action would have been to implement Article 13/Third of the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019, which mandates: “Spending at a rate of (1/12) (one/twelfth) or less of the total actual expenditures for current expenditures for the previous fiscal year, after excluding non-recurring expenditures, on a monthly basis until the approval of the federal general budget.” The underlying issue pertained to the status of al-Kāzīmī’s government following the elections is whether it functioned as a caretaker government or a resigned administration, and the preparation of a budget based on 2021 data that did not exceed 102 trillion Dinars, excluding advances.

Table 5-5: Amounts Spent from the Emergency Support Law for Food Security and Development During the Year (2022)

Ministry / Entity	Current Budget (Million IQD)	Investment Budget (Million IQD)	Total of Both Budgets (Million IQD)	Current %	Investment %	Total %
Council of Representatives	10,348	0	10,348	0.08	0.00	0.04
Council of Ministers	723,833	550,000	1,273,833	5.51	5.05	5.30
Finance	11,214	531,901	543,115	0.09	4.88	2.26
Interior	175,000	20,000	195,000	1.33	0.18	0.81
Labor and Social Affairs	670,029	0	670,029	5.10	0.00	2.79
Health and Environment	154,038	0	154,038	1.17	0.00	0.64
Defense	140,021	0	140,021	1.07	0.00	0.58
Justice	59	0	59	0.00	0.00	0.00
Education	309,087	0	309,087	2.35	0.00	1.29
Youth and Sports	82	0	82	0.00	0.00	0.00
Trade	4,564,980	0	4,564,980	34.76	0.00	19.00
Culture	12	0	12	0.00	0.00	0.00
Construction, Housing, and Municipalities	28,280	500,000	528,280	0.22	4.59	2.20
Agriculture	70,000	0	70,000	0.53	0.00	0.29
Water Resources	114,978	0	114,978	0.88	0.00	0.48
Oil	500,000	0	500,000	3.81	0.00	2.08
Planning	186	0	186	0.00	0.00	0.00
Industry and Minerals	745	0	745	0.01	0.00	0.00

Table 5-5 (continued)

Higher Education and Scientific Research	152	0	152	0.00	0.00	0.00
Electricity	4,020,523	0	4,020,523	30.61	0.00	16.73
Communications	37	0	37	0.00	0.00	0.00
Migration and Displaced	50,016	0	50,016	0.38	0.00	0.21
Entities not linked to a ministry	60,711	339,964	400,675	0.46	3.12	1.67
al-Başrah Governorate	547,809	1,016,062	1,563,871	4.17	9.33	6.51
Nīnawá	74,637	1,056,953	1,131,590	0.57	9.70	4.71
Baghdád	106,551	1,285,272	1,391,823	0.81	11.80	5.79
Dhī-Qār	73,200	811,184	884,384	0.56	7.45	3.68
Diyálá	106,538	405,238	511,776	0.81	3.72	2.13
Bābil	62,612	531,195	593,807	0.48	4.88	2.47
al-Anbār	252,720	420,197	672,917	1.92	3.86	2.80
Maysān	35,294	531,854	567,148	0.27	4.88	2.36
Wāsiṭ	57,126	447,033	504,159	0.43	4.10	2.10
Najaf	44,257	592,332	636,589	0.34	5.44	2.65
al-Dīwāniyah	81,833	499,497	581,330	0.62	4.58	2.42
al-Muthanná	19,072	365,220	384,292	0.15	3.35	1.60
Karbalá'	24,954	476,894	501,848	0.19	4.38	2.09
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	43,676	514,229	557,905	0.33	4.72	2.32
State Council	23	0	23	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,134,633</b>	<b>10,895,025</b>	<b>24,029,658</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2023.

The question that arises at this juncture is whether the government possesses the capacity to effectively allocate and expend funds. To date, the government has not disclosed any data or information concerning actual expenditures or the achievement rates associated with the allocations under the Emergency Support Law. Empirical evidence suggests a limited capacity for expenditure; for instance, the execution rate of the 2021 budget (excluding advances) was approximately 78.8%. This figure indicates either inefficiency within the executive apparatus or that the Council of Representatives sanctioned a budget exceeding the government's execution capabilities.

From this, it can be inferred that augmenting spending limits beyond those established by the Financial Management Law may raise concerns about potential corruption during the execution process. Another explanation for the low execution rates is that the Ministry of Finance does not fully disburse funds to spending units as approved in the Budget Law. Additionally, there has been a

significant increase in allocated amounts; for example, Regional Development allocations rose from 4 trillion in the 2021 budget to 8 trillion in the Law, despite actual spending in 2021 amounting to 1.459 trillion Dinars. Similarly, the Ministry of Trade allocations increased from 794 billion Dinars to 5 trillion Dinars. These figures cast doubt on the capacity of the executive bodies.

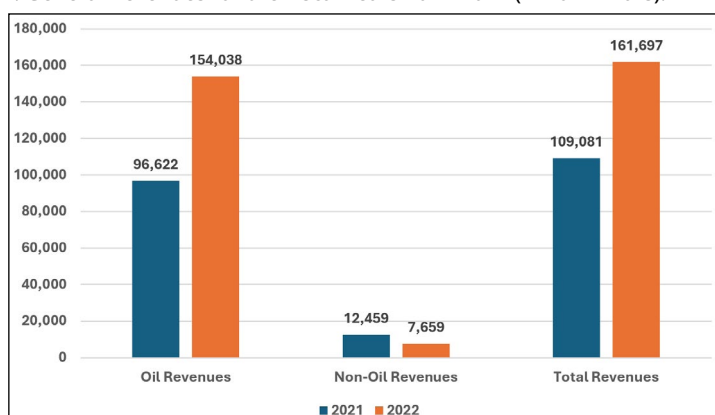
Moreover, Article (9) of the Law mandated the Ministries of Planning and Finance to release funds and finance spending units. Any remaining funds that were disbursed but not expended, or those not disbursed from the allocations specified in the Law, were to be restricted to the Trusts Account for continued expenditure in 2023. An examination of the Emergency Support Law reveals a lack of coherent economic vision, as it represents an overextension of the Budget Law and deviates from its justificatory purposes, including provisions unrelated to development or emergency support.

## V. State Accounts for the Year 2022

Figure 5-1 illustrates revenues categorized into oil and non-oil components. Oil revenues reached 154,038 billion Dinars, constituting 95% of total revenues in 2022, compared to 89% in 2021. This underscores the government's inability to diversify revenue sources and highlights the predominance of oil rent, with non-oil revenues inversely proportional. Furthermore, the absolute value of non-oil revenues declined from 12,459 billion Dinars in 2021 to 7,659 billion Dinars in 2022, representing a decrease of 38.5%. It is important to note that general revenues, specifically the oil revenues cited, exclude oil exports from the Kurdistan Region.

According to the Ministry of Oil, oil revenues amounted to 167,575 billion Dinars in 2022, reflecting a discrepancy of 13,536 billion Dinars compared to figures reported by the Ministry of Finance. This discrepancy is attributed to the temporal lag between sales and receipt of returns. However, there is a lack of transparency regarding revenues carried over from previous years that were

Figure 5-1: General Revenues for the Fiscal Years 2021-2022 (Billion Dinars).



Source: State Accounts for the months of December 2021 and 2022 (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

Table 5-6: Revenue Structure for the Years 2021-2022 (Billion Dinars).

Type of Revenue	2021	2022	Difference
Oil Revenues and Mineral Wealth	95,270	153,623	58,353
Taxes on Income and Wealth	3,252	2,778	-474
Commodity Taxes and Production Fees	1,284	1,133	-151
Fees	1,138	1,258	120
Budget share of Public Sector profits	1,514	641	-873
Transfer Revenues	4,990	1,042	-3,948
Other Revenues	1,562	1,124	-438
Capital Revenues	71	97	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>109,081</b>	<b>161,696</b>	<b>52,615</b>

Source: State Account until December 2022 (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

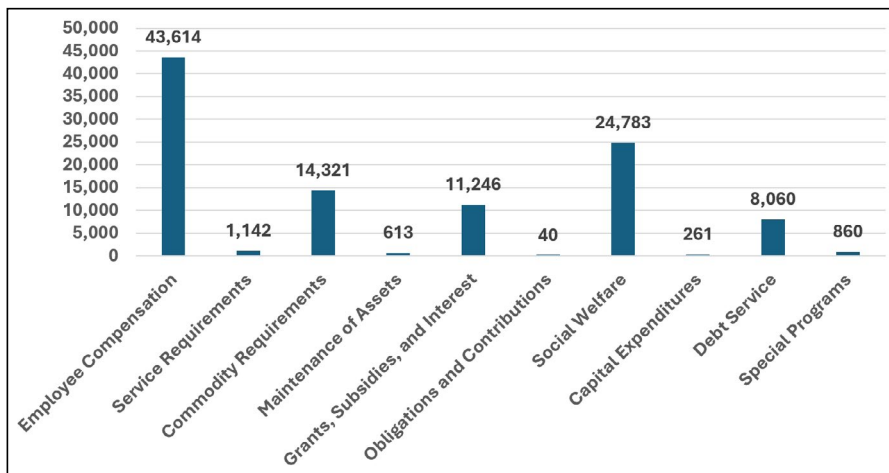
received during the budget year, necessitating enhanced disclosure and clarity concerning revenue details.

The state account details indicate that all revenue categories decreased except for Fees and Capital Revenues. The most significant decline occurred in Transfer Revenues, which decreased by 3,948 billion Dinars. The Ministry of Finance did not provide clarification regarding the imbalance in the revenue structure.

Total expenditures amounted to 116,960 billion Iraqi Dinars, comprising 104,941 billion Dinars in current expenditures and 12,081 billion Dinars in investment expenditures. Including advances totaling 14,864 billion Dinars, the aggregate expenditure reached 131,824 billion Dinars. These total expenditures represent 89.7% of the budget, with investment expenditures constituting 10.3%.

Figure 5-2 delineates current expenditures, which totaled 104,940 billion Dinars. Compensation of employees accounted for 41.6%, followed by social welfare at 23.6%, and commodity requirements at 13.7%.

Figure 5-2: Details of Actual Public Expenditures for the Year 2022 (Billion Dinars).



Source: State Account for the years 2021 and 2022 (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

Table 5-7: Iraqi Oil Sale Price, Monthly Oil Revenues, and Daily Export Rate for 2022.

Month	Average Price (USD/Barrel)	Oil Revenues (Million USD)	Daily Export Rate (Million Barrels)	Oil Revenues (Billion IQD)
January	68.637	8,322.7	3.203	12,067.88
February	94.936	8,809.2	3.314	12,773.34
March	108.503	10,913.2	3.244	15,824.14
April	104.637	10,609.3	3.380	15,383.42
May	112.191	11,477.5	3.300	16,642.37
June	112.209	11,354.5	3.373	16,464.09
July	101.268	10,368.4	3.303	15,034.11
August	95.120	9,688.9	3.289	14,048.91
September	89.560	8,845.4	3.292	12,825.85
October	88.539	9,281.6	3.382	13,458.39
November	82.004	8,189.6	3.329	11,874.92
December	74.636	7,708.6	3.329	11,177.41
<b>Total/ Average</b>	<b>94.353</b>	<b>115,568.8</b>	<b>3.3115</b>	<b>167,574.8</b>

Source: Data Sets (Ministry of Oil, n.d.).

Compensation of employees and social welfare collectively comprised 65% of current expenditures, a proportion that is considerably high and inconsistent with the government's economic reform objectives. This situation necessitates exceptional measures aimed at economic diversification, including fostering private sector growth or implementing a partnership model between the government and the private sector. A comparison of actual public expenditures between 2022 and 2021 reveals non-compliance with the 1/12 spending principle stipulated in the 2021 budget, due to the absence of approval for the 2022 budget. Assuming all expenditures were non-recurring, the observed increase lacks a clear justification. It can be inferred that the rise in public spending corresponded with the increase in oil prices, which averaged \$94.35 per barrel, peaking at \$112.209 per barrel in June 2022, as detailed in Table 5-7.

Table 5-8 presents the calculation of the realized surplus, which amounted to 29,855 billion Dinars. When accounting for the allocations under the Emergency

Table 5-8: Surplus Calculation for the Year 2022 (Billion Dinars).

Details	Actual
Total Revenues	161,679
Total Expenditures	116,960
Total Advances	14,864
Advances + Total Budget	131,824
Surplus	29,855
Emergency Support Allocations	25,000
Final Surplus	4,855

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the State Account for 2022. (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

Table 5-9: Investment Expenditures at the Governorate Level (2021-2022) (Billion Dinars).

Governorate	2021	2022	Increase
al-Başrah	862	1,456	594
Nīnawá	116	379	263
Baghdād	66	404	338
Dhī-Qār	87	0	0
Diyálá	78	178	100
Bābil	106	184	78
al-Anbār	388	952	564
Maysān	62	136	74
Wāsiṭ	83	255	172
al-Najaf al-Ashraf	101	153	52
al-Dīwānīyah	57	94	37
al-Muthanná	86	168	82
Karbalá' al-Muqaddasah	107	237	130
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	83	110	27

Source: State Account for the years 2021-2022 (Ministry of Oil, n.d.).

Support Law for Food Security and Development, totaling 25 trillion Dinars, the residual surplus is 4,855 billion Dinars.

Analysis of Table 5-9 reveals a significant increase in investment expenditures in specific governorates. The most substantial rise was observed in al-Başrah Governorate, reaching 594 billion Dinars, followed by al-Anbār Governorate with an increase of 564 billion Dinars. In contrast, the smallest increment was recorded in al-Dīwānīyah Governorate, which increased by only 37 billion Dinars. Other governorates with relatively low increases include: al-Najaf al-Ashraf (52 billion), Maysān (74 billion), Bābil (78 billion), and (82 billion) for al-Muthanná, the poorest governorate. The aggregate increase for these five governorates totaled 323 billion Dinars, which is 271 billion Dinars less than the increase in al-Başrah alone, 241 billion Dinars less than that of al-Anbār, and 15 billion Dinars less than the increase in Baghdād. This disparity indicates an unequal distribution of investment expenditures across governorates, potentially influenced by political factors.

## VI. The Central Bank and Political Fluctuations

Political movements aimed at influencing the Central Bank and attempts to interfere with its policies became evident during the years when government budget deficits emerged, beginning in 2009. The government directed its attention toward the Central Bank's reserves; however, Dr. Sinān al-Shabībī, the former Governor of the Central Bank, maintained his independence throughout this period, consistently resisting government demands and attempts to compromise that autonomy. Subsequently, the government shifted its focus toward seeking the dismissal of the Governor or legally compelling the Central Bank to submit its

monetary policies for government approval. It is important to emphasize that the executive nature of the Central Bank's functions necessitates its independence from governmental authority to prevent susceptibility to electoral pressures, thereby establishing the Central Bank as an autonomous monetary institution, insulated from partisan quotas and political or partisan influences.

Indeed, an arrest warrant was issued against al-Shabībī and his deputy, Dr. Maẓhar Ṣāliḥ, while they were abroad, alongside the detention of several Central Bank employees, excluding al-Shabībī, who remained outside Iraq. Dr. 'Abd-al-Bāsiṭ Turkī al-Ḥadīthī, the head of the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, was appointed as acting Governor of the Central Bank in October 2012. This appointment constituted a significant violation, as it is impermissible for one individual to simultaneously lead the largest financial institution (the Central Bank) and the Federal Board of Supreme Audit. Despite this conflict of interest, al-Ḥadīthī continued to serve as Governor of the Central Bank and President of the Board of Audit until his retirement in September 2014.

The outgoing caretaker government subsequently appointed Mr. 'Alī Muḥsin Ismā'īl al-'Allāq as Governor of the Central Bank. He maintained this position throughout the administrations of Ḥaydar al-'Abādī and 'Ādil 'Abd-al-Mahdī until Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī assumed the Prime Ministership and appointed Muṣṭafá Ghālib Mukhīf as Governor in September 2020. Following the establishment of the government led by Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī, Mr. Muṣṭafá Ghālib Mukhīf was dismissed, and Mr. 'Alī Muḥsin al-'Allāq was reappointed as Governor in January 2023. This reappointment occurred amid disturbances affecting the foreign exchange rate against the Iraqi Dinar and challenges related to the "Foreign Currency Selling and Buying Window" (the Currency Auction). Additionally, the implementation of the transfer monitoring system mandated by the U.S. Federal Reserve, which audits and enforces financial oversight of foreign currency flows through global financial channels, was a significant factor. These circumstances indicate that the Central Bank became subject to partisan quotas and political interests, despite the economic experts' characterization of it as the "Court of the Economy," which should remain independent.

## VII. Exchange Rate Policy amidst Weak Independence

The strength of the Iraqi Dinar continued to expose the economy to increased imports until the end of 2020. At that time, under government pressure, the Central Bank decided to devalue the Dinar, adjusting the foreign exchange rate to 1,450 IQD/USD. Although this decision was delayed and involved a substantial devaluation of approximately 23%, it was a necessary measure. Ideally, the Bank should have adopted a Crawling Peg System beginning in 2014 to gradually reach this devaluation by 2020.

It is noteworthy that internal studies within the Central Bank recommended raising the exchange rate to 1,650 IQD/USD, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advised a rate of 1,850 IQD/USD. However, the government, rather than

Table 5-10: Development of Foreign Reserves (2021-2022) (Billion Dinars).

2021			2022		
Month	Reserves	Exchange Rate (IQD/USD)	Month	Reserves	Exchange Rate (IQD/USD)
January	80,286	1,450	January	90,658	1,450
April	86,408	1,450	April	102,112	1,450
July	87,085	1,450	July	114,949	1,450
October	90,985	1,450	October	123,811	1,450
December	92,526	1,450	December	140,086	1,450

Source: CBI, n.d.

the Bank, determined the final rate. The primary objective was not to enhance productive sectors or reduce imports but to address the budget deficit resulting from extensive government expenditures. This intervention exemplifies political interference that has progressively undermined the Central Bank's independence since 2012.

Nevertheless, this policy contributed to a direct increase in reserves, with a growth rate of 18.15% in 2021 compared to 2020, when reserves had declined by -20.12%. The growth further accelerated to 51.43% in 2022, as detailed in Table 5-10. Reserves amounted to 92,526 billion Dinars at the end of 2021 and increased to 140,086 billion Dinars by the end of 2022.

It is observed from Table 5-11 that the increases in the parallel exchange rate during 2022, compared to 2021, were minimal, with an annual average increase of 0.7%. This excludes certain months characterized by abrupt spikes, notably March, where the year-on-year difference reached 19.7%. This surge is attributable to a substantial rise in government dollar sales to the Central Bank, amounting to \$5,200 million in March—a 70% increase relative to February. This

Table 5-11: Parallel Exchange Rate (2021-2022) (IQD/USD).

Month	2021	2022	Change (%)
January	1444	1482	2.6
February	1452	1471	1.3
March	1229	1471	19.7
April	1474	1480	0.4
May	1486	1480	-0.4
June	1487	1485	-0.1
July	1475	1485	0.7
August	1475	1485	0.7
September	1474	1478	0.3
October	1474	1471	-0.2
November	1480	1480	0
December	1480	1512	2.2
<b>Annual Average</b>	<b>1471</b>	<b>1482</b>	<b>0.7</b>

Source: Consumer Price Index and Inflation Rates in the Iraqi Economy (2021, 2022) (CSO, n.d.).

phenomenon explains the significant monthly escalation in government expenditure, which was met with a stable supply from the Currency Window. Consequently, this imbalance generated heightened demand for the dollar and exerted pressure on the foreign exchange rate during that month.

The Central Bank should maintain its current policy stance by upholding the exchange rate at 1,450 IQD/USD and subsequently consider a gradual increase after a period of four to five years. This adjustment would serve to counterbalance changes enacted by neighboring countries or trade partners, particularly those from which Iraq imports goods and services.

The regulation of transfers and the implementation of monitoring systems on foreign remittances do not necessitate a devaluation of the exchange rate. The core issue is not in the exchange rate itself but in the escalating demand for the dollar driven by its smuggling to countries subject to U.S. sanctions (Russia and Iran). From an economic standpoint, when faced with increasing demand for a currency, should the response be to lower its price (revaluation) or to raise it? Devaluing the exchange rate without rigorous economic analysis, or for political motivations, is primarily aimed at achieving electoral gains.

## **VIII. The Foreign Currency Window and International Pressures**

During 2021, the purchases from the Foreign Currency Window through demonstrated relative stability. The peak purchase value was recorded in August at \$4,810 million, as detailed in Table 5-12, while the lowest occurred in January at \$2,000 million. Purchases maintained a consistent balance throughout the year, except for January 2021 (very low). The total annual purchases amounted to \$45,997 million, averaging \$3,833 million per month.

Total Window sales in 2021 reached \$37,097 million, with a monthly average of \$3,091 million. The highest sales value was \$4,824 million in June, and the lowest was \$492 million in January. Similar to purchases, sales remained steady except for the initial month of the year. Consequently, a surplus of purchases over sales contributed \$8,900 million to reserves in 2021.

In 2022, Window purchases increased relative to the previous year, totaling \$53,355 million with a monthly average of \$4,446 million. This represents a monthly increase of \$613 million compared to 2021, attributable to improved oil prices, augmented government oil revenues, and the resolution of the compensation file with Kuwait, which facilitated greater oil revenue inflows.

Sales in 2022 amounted to \$46,806 million, averaging \$3,901 million monthly—an increase of \$810 million over the prior year's monthly average. This expansion in sales was driven by heightened domestic demand for the dollar, linked to increased government expenditure despite the absence of a formal budget, and funding provided through the Emergency Support Law. A total of \$6,549 million was added to reserves in 2022.

The substantial sales over the two-year period, totaling \$83,903 million, elicited concern from the United States, particularly following the tax trust fund scandal known as the “Theft of the Century,” involving approximately \$2,500 million. Additionally, extensive trade with countries under international sanctions—including Iran and Russia—and the U.S. intent to impose stricter measures on Russia following the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, prompted the U.S. Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury to require Iraq to implement a system for precise tracking of fund movements. This requirement impeded the Window’s operations, especially sales conducted through remittances, which finance trade and constitute approximately 90% of the Window’s daily sales. The resulting obstruction compelled merchants to resort to the cash market to fulfill their dollar demand, significantly elevating the exchange rate in late 2022. However, following an agreement

Table 5-12: Window Purchases and Sales (2021-2022) (Million USD).

Month	Gov. Purchases	Remittance Sales	Cash Sales	Total Sales
<b>2021</b>				
January	2,000	490	2	492
February	3,290	1,175	1	1,176
March	3,773	1,441	0	1,441
April	4,355	2,836	273	3,109
May	3,050	2,206	433	2,639
June	4,319	4,067	757	4,824
July	3,050	2,336	607	2,946
August	4,810	3,730	983	4,713
September	4,150	3,537	912	4,449
October	4,100	2,356	792	3,147
November	4,350	3,110	937	4,047
December	4,750	3,190	924	4,114
<b>2022</b>				
January	5,405	3,132	969	4,101
February	3,050	2,862	798	3,660
March	5,200	3,134	859	3,993
April	4,950	3,270	710	3,980
May	5,750	2,845	604	3,449
June	5,000	4,507	810	5,317
July	4,500	3,411	543	3,954
August	6,500	4,715	834	5,549
September	2,500	3,971	753	4,724
October	3,500	4,094	758	4,852
November	1,000	1,478	577	2,055
December	6,000	312	860	1,172

Source: CBI, n.d.

with the U.S. Treasury and Federal Reserve regarding the adoption of a financial transfer platform, the increase in the dollar's price was partially mitigated, and sales through remittances compliant with the system's conditions began to rise.

## IX. Issued Currency and Money Supply amidst Excessive Government Spending

The sterilization operations implemented by the Central Bank through foreign currency window sales—aimed at withdrawing Dinars generated by expansive government expenditure—proved ineffective in curbing the increase in issued currency and the expansion of the money supply. As demonstrated in Table 5-13, issued currency consistently increased throughout 2021 and 2022, with a more pronounced rise in the latter year. Specifically, issued currency amounted to 68,948

Table 5-13: Monetary Base and Money Supply for the Years 2021 and 2022 (Billion Dinars).

Month	Gov. Purchases	Remittance Sales	Cash Sales
<b>2021</b>			
January	68,948	105,363	122,037
February	70,743	108,926	125,762
March	74,576	111,604	128,693
April	73,675	112,444	129,860
May	76,010	115,377	132,950
June	74,648	115,632	133,547
July	75,363	116,885	134,911
August	75,429	117,216	135,604
September	75,186	116,314	135,101
October	76,166	119,015	137,855
November	76,851	117,793	136,915
December	76,562	119,944	139,886
<b>2022</b>			
January	78,207	119,550	139,567
February	79,292	121,578	141,848
March	80,895	122,636	143,176
April	81,439	125,249	146,019
May	83,348	125,098	146,009
June	82,970	128,861	150,010
July	82,638	130,607	151,762
August	82,781	132,909	153,983
September	81,671	132,769	153,728
October	82,586	136,166	157,418
November	84,309	140,357	161,714
December	87,562	146,399	168,203

Source: CBI, n.d.

billion Dinars at the beginning of 2021 and escalated to 76,562 billion Dinars by year-end, reflecting a growth rate of 11%. Correspondingly, the narrow money supply increased by 13.8%, while the broad money supply expanded by 14.6%.

In comparison, 2022 exhibited further increases: issued currency rose from 78,207 billion Dinars at the start of the year to 87,562 billion Dinars at its conclusion, representing a growth rate of 12%. The narrow money supply grew by 22.5%, and the broad money supply by 20.5%, surpassing the previous year's rates.

The expansion of government expenditure under the Emergency Support Law resulted in an increased issuance of money, which was further amplified by the Money Multiplier. This expansion of the money supply within the economy manifested in inflationary pressures and rising price levels. These inflationary trends were predominantly driven by imported inflation, stemming from the depreciation of the Dinar against foreign currencies following exchange rate adjustments in late 2020. As previously noted, efforts to curb excessive money issuance through increased dollar sales to withdraw Dinars from circulation were unsuccessful, necessitating the adoption of supplementary measures by the monetary authority to absorb the monetary surplus.

The Central Bank faced multiple challenges, including undisciplined government spending, unregulated foreign trade not aligned with actual economic needs, and international pressures influenced by U.S. interests in the Middle and Far East. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war exacerbated these difficulties by contributing to rising food prices. Additionally, Iraq encountered pressures to restrict trade with certain countries and comply with stringent regulations governing financial transfers. Amidst these challenges, and within a monetary authority characterized by limited independence from the government—a trend that has intensified since 2012 and continues to affect monetary and exchange rate policies—the Central Bank endeavored to regulate the money supply and domestic liquidity through the aforementioned sterilization policy.

## **X. Inflation: The Culmination of Monetary Issuance**

The interrelationship among economic variables ensures that each influences the others. Excessive government expenditure inevitably results in an expansion of the money supply. This expansion subsequently exerts pressure on the Foreign Currency Selling Window to satisfy domestic demand for foreign currency, driven by increased monetary issuance and import activity. Consequently, the sterilization policy, implemented by the Central Bank to regulate domestic liquidity, has proven ineffective.

The ultimate result of this sequence of variables manifests in elevated inflation levels experienced by consumers. As demonstrated in Table 5-14, inflation rates increased throughout 2022. The most significant rise occurred in June compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, reaching 5.5%, whereas the lowest increase was observed in November at 4.2%. The annual average inflation rate for 2022 was 4.9%, compared to the prior year.

Table 5-14: Consumer Price Index (CPI) with Base Year 2012 for 2021 and 2022 (%).

Month	2021	2022	Annual Inflation
January	108.8	114.6	5.3
February	109.6	115.1	5
March	110.3	116	5.2
April	110.4	116.2	5.3
May	110.4	116.4	5.4
June	111.1	117.2	5.5
July	111.8	117.8	5.4
August	113.1	118.1	4.4
September	112.3	118.3	5.3
October	112.7	117.8	4.5
November	113.3	118.1	4.2
December	113.6	118.5	4.3
<b>Annual Average</b>	<b>111.5</b>	<b>117.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>

Source: Consumer Price Index and Inflation Rates in the Iraqi Economy (2021, 2022) (CSO, n.d.).

These inflationary spikes primarily originated from specific categories of goods and services, notably:

- Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages: Vegetables, cereals, meat, oils, and fats.
- Utilities: Electricity, water supply, and fuel.
- Services: Restaurants, hotels, and various miscellaneous goods and services.

It is noteworthy that the increases in the electricity and water supply category occurred during the seven-month period from March to September 2022, coinciding with rising temperatures. Additionally, the education sector experienced inflationary pressures during the first half of the year, alongside moderate increases in other commodity groups.

## XI. What about 2023?

In 2022, Iraq realized a financial surplus attributable to the global increase in oil prices. However, the economic outlook for 2023 differs, as oil prices are projected to decline. Although preliminary information regarding the 2023 Budget indicates an adopted oil price of \$70 per barrel, this presents a significant challenge for the Iraqi economy, potentially resulting in a budget deficit.

To address this challenge, several measures are imperative:

- Budget Recalibration: The budget size must be adjusted to align with fiscal realities.
- Spending Reform: Operational expenditures require stringent control, whereas investment expenditures should be expanded, provided this does not adversely affect the private sector.

- **Legislative Expediency:** Prompt approval of the general budget is essential, given its critical role as the primary economic driver at this juncture.

The disparity between the nominal exchange rate and the parallel exchange rate remains substantial, exceeding 100 points despite governmental and Central Bank interventions. This gap persists due to smuggling, fraud, and money laundering activities. The Central Bank could mitigate this issue through more effective strategies, including:

- Establishing an appropriate mechanism to finance trade with Iran.
- Mandating small merchants to utilize the official transfer platform rather than resorting to the parallel market.

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## 6. Security

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### I. Introduction

The security landscape in Iraq throughout 2022 was marked by intensified threats stemming from escalating domestic political tensions. These tensions were primarily a consequence of the outcomes of the early elections held on October 10, 2021, and the subsequent failure of Shiite factions to establish a comprehensive coalition encompassing all parties. This political impasse precipitated heightened conflicts between the Coordination Framework (al-Iṭār al-Tansīqī) and the Sadrist Movement (al-Tayyār al-Ṣadrī). Significant escalations included:

- July 2022: Supporters of the Sadrist Movement forcibly entered the Council of Representatives.
- August 2022: Armed confrontations peaked within the Green Zone, involving Sarāyā al-Salām (the military wing of the Sadrist Movement) and armed factions aligned with parties in the Coordination Framework. These clashes involved the use of various medium and heavy weaponry.
- The perimeter of the U.S. Embassy in the Green Zone was targeted by rocket fire, which was successfully intercepted by the C-RAM defense system.

The Joint Operations Command mandated the withdrawal of both parties, imposed a curfew in Baghdād, and closed bridges. On October 27, 2022, the Coordination Framework established a government led by Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī, which subsequently received the confidence of the Iraqi Parliament.

Within this complex milieu, the ISIS terrorist organization secured remote rural support zones to launch attacks against security forces, reorganizing its fighters into small, mobile combat units to circumvent operational restrictions. Concurrently, organized crime and drug trafficking networks expanded, posing significant threats to social stability. Moreover, the absence of unified strategic decision-making facilitated the involvement of international and regional powers (USA, Iran, and Turkey) in transforming Iraq into a theater for geopolitical rivalry and conflict.

## II. Internal Threats

Internal security threats in 2022 diverged from previous years, encompassing sectarian-political conflicts alongside persistent threats from ISIS and organized criminal activities.

### 1. The al-Sarkhī Crisis

During the first quarter of 2022, a novel internal threat to civil peace emerged, characterized by discord incited through Friday prayer sermons. Specifically, the sermon delivered by the mosque preacher 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, affiliated with the cleric Maḥmūd al-Sarkhī al-Ḥasanī, in the al-Ḥamzah al-Gharbī area south of Bābil governorate on April 8, 2022, exemplified this phenomenon. Termed the "Shrines and Graves" sermon, it advocated for the prohibition of construction over graves, eliciting adverse reactions and widespread public and official condemnation. Consequently, on April 11, 2022, the security services initiated a campaign of arrests targeting al-Sarkhī's supporters following the issuance of an arrest warrant by the Supreme Judicial Council against Maḥmūd al-Sarkhī on charges of "assaulting the belief of a religious sect" and "disparaging its rituals." These events culminated in clashes between security forces and protesters aligned with al-Sarkhī. Security forces subsequently stormed his headquarters in Karbalā', detaining dozens of followers. After two days of bombardment, approximately 400 adherents were arrested, while al-Sarkhī himself disappeared from public view. Concurrently, opponents of al-Sarkhī's views incited the burning of over 40 ḥusayniyahs and mosques affiliated with the al-Sarkhī group in Baghdād and several central and southern governorates (al-Hurra, 2022).

The intensity of the official response toward al-Sarkhī's followers suggests underlying political and economic motivations. Furthermore, the demolition of mosques and the arrests of the group's members have brought increased attention to the group and its doctrines, prompting scholarly inquiry into its principles and practices (al-Kifā'ī, 2022). Such religious and sectarian conflicts underscore the fragility of Iraq's social fabric and represent a significant threat to civil peace.

### 2. The Threat of ISIS and Operational Patterns

Despite the loss of most of its senior leadership in 2022, including two of its "caliphs": 'Abd-Allāh Qardāsh, successor to Abū-Bakr al-Baghdādī, killed in February 2022 during a security operation by the International Coalition in the Syrian governorate of Idlib, and Abū-al-Ḥasan al-Hāshimī, killed in November 2022 in combat with anti-ISIS forces in the Syrian governorate of Dar'ā, the terrorist organization ISIS managed to establish a cumulative operational presence in targeted areas. These areas were perceived by the organization's leadership as conducive to rebuilding and organizing social incubators to facilitate the reconstitution of its ranks. ISIS exploited tensions between the regional Tribal Mobilization Forces (al-Ḥashd al-'Ashā'irī) and the Popular Mobilization Forces (al-Ḥashd al-Sha'bī), particularly where the latter operated outside their traditional territories, thereby garnering support from local residents dissatisfied with these forces. Neverthe-

Table 6-1: ISIS Terrorist Operations in Iraq during 2022.

Month	Baghdād / al-Ṭarīmīyah	Ṣalāh-al-Dīn	Diyālā	Kirkūk	Nīnawā	al-Anbār	Bābil / Jurf al-Naṣr	Karbalā' / al-Nukhayb	Total
January	5	3	7	7	2	6	-	-	30
February	-	2	11	4	3	6	-	-	26
March	-	5	2	4	1	6	3	-	21
April	7	10	31	25	7	18	5	-	103
May	1	12	16	17	-	8	-	-	54
June	4	3	9	7	4	1	2	1	30
July	16	5	15	8	5	-	1	-	50
August	5	8	14	25	3	2	-	-	57
September	6	6	10	12	3	2	-	-	39
October	7	3	7	12	-	2	1		32
November	2	3	5	3	1	1	1	-	16
December	4	4	6	7	1	5	-	-	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>484</b>

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on news websites and issues of the weekly al-Naba' newspaper published by the Central Media Office of the terrorist organization ISIS.

less, ISIS encountered unequivocal rejection from Sunni Arab and Kurdish tribes, who had suffered extensively from the organization's atrocities since 2014 (BBC News Arabic, 2022).

### 3. Objective of Terrorist Operations

ISIS has consistently sought to leverage the proximity of its cells to oil fields and major transportation routes connecting Iraq to Syria, Iran, and Jordan to finance its terrorist activities. Intelligence reports estimate that the organization generates between 3 and 4 million U.S. dollars monthly through royalties and the smuggling of weapons, medicine, oil, drugs, and other commodities. Additional funding is derived from internal and external investments, which facilitate the payment of salaries to its cell members within Iraq. According to a report by the United Nations Security Council dated July 21, 2021, the strategic objectives of ISIS include undermining vital infrastructure projects, fomenting sectarian divisions and grievances, and maintaining media visibility and relevance (Home Office, 2022). Table 6-1 presents an overview of the organization's activities and terrorist operations throughout 2022.

### 4. Analysis of Operational Method

Following the defeat of the terrorist organization ISIS in both Iraq and Syria, its remnants can be categorized into four distinct groups (U.S. Central Command, 2022):

1. Cells and detachments of ISIS elements actively engaged in combat within Iraq and Syria.

2. ISIS members detained in Iraqi and Syrian prisons and detention centers, estimated to number over 10,000 leaders and fighters in Syrian facilities and more than 20,000 in Iraqi detention centers.
3. The prospective next generation of ISIS, encompassing over 25,000 children residing in the al-Hawl camp, who are considered the future of ISIS extremism.
4. ISIS women, particularly those affiliated with the al-Khansā' Brigade, estimated to number between 2,500 and 3,000. This group poses the most significant long-term threat due to their direct influence on ISIS children.

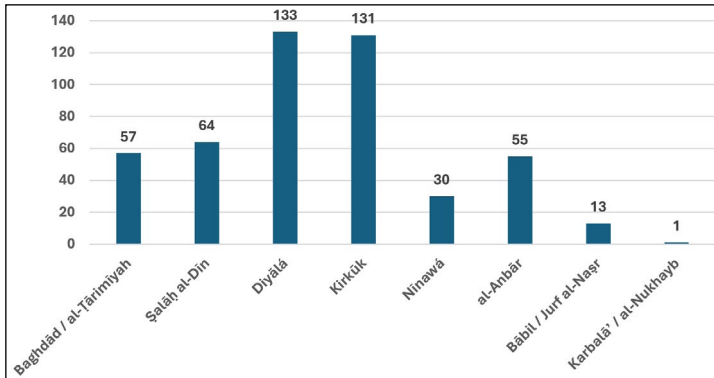
Notable events such as the attack on Ghwayrān prison in al-Ḥasakah, Syria, on January 20, 2022—which resulted in the deaths of over 420 ISIS members and the forced killing of more than 120 collaborators—the massacre of 11 Iraqi soldiers in Diyālā on January 21, 2022, and the assault on a Federal Police personnel carrier near the village of al-Ṭarfāwī in the al-Riyāḍ area southwest of Kirkūk on January 18, 2022, may suggest a potential resurgence of the organization. However, a comprehensive analysis of attack metrics over an extended period, as reflected in Table 6-1, indicates a weakening of ISIS in Iraq. The organization conducted only 484 terrorist operations in 2022, a significant decline compared to 1,527 attacks in 2021, as documented in a study titled “The Islamic State at Low Ebb in Iraq: The Insurgent Tide Recedes Again,” published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point in January 2022 (Knights & Almeida, 2022).

This reduction in both the frequency and severity of terrorist activities, coupled with the loss of key leaders—including two caliphs, Abū-Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī (also known as ‘Abd-Allāh Qardāsh) and Abū-al-Ḥasan al-Hāshimī—within a short span in 2022, suggests increasing isolation and disconnection of the organization from the general population. Its presence is now largely confined to remote rural and mountainous regions characterized by difficult terrain, which limits security surveillance. Concurrently, intensified operations by the Iraqi Armed Forces and other security agencies have expanded governmental control in these areas, further constraining ISIS activities.

## **5. Quantitative and Qualitative Trends of ISIS Attacks at the Provincial Level**

Provincial-level analysis, as presented in Table 6-1, reveals that Diyālā and Kirkūk governorates experienced the highest number of ISIS terrorist attacks in 2022, with 133 and 131 operations respectively, marking them as the most active regions for such activities in Iraq (Knights & Mello, 2016). Furthermore, in December 2022, both governorates witnessed coordinated attacks involving direct engagements with light weapons and hand grenades, deployment of forces to intercept support units, and the placement of explosive devices on routes used by reinforcements or Iraqi patrols. These operations reflect a tactical shift back to guerrilla warfare, emphasizing “infiltrator detachments” (mafāriz al-inghimāsīyīn) operating deep within target areas. Figure 6-1 illustrates the distribution of ISIS terrorist operations by governorate throughout 2022.

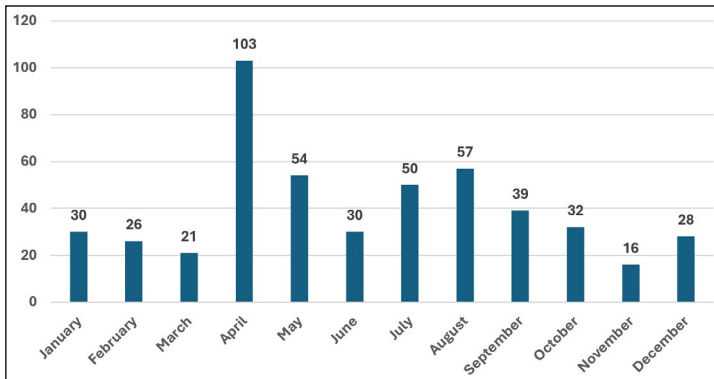
Analysis of Figure 6-1 further confirms that Diyālā and Kirkūk governorates exhibit the highest levels of terrorist activity, followed by Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn with 64 operations. Additionally, the Baghdād Belt, particularly the northern districts of al-Ṭārimīyah, al-Tājī, and al-Mashāhidah, recorded 57 operations, indicating an escalation in terrorist activities aimed at penetrating the capital, Baghdād. This area serves as a strategic transit corridor connecting Diyālā, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and



Map 6-1: Location of al-Ṭārimīyah District North of Baghdād.



Figure 6-2: Volume of ISIS Terrorist Operations by Months of 2022.



al-Anbār governorates, the latter experiencing 55 terrorist operations in 2022. Map 6-1 depicts the location of the al-Ṭārimīyah district north of Baghdād.

Figure 6-2 demonstrates a notable increase in ISIS terrorist operations during April 2022, particularly in Diyālā, Kirkūk, and al-Anbār governorates. This surge coincides with the “Revenge of the Two Sheikhs” campaign (Tha’r al-Shaykhayn), launched in retaliation for the deaths of former leader Abū-Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī and official spokesperson Abū-Ḥamza al-Qurashī on February 3, 2022. Another operational peak occurred in August 2022 in Diyālā and Kirkūk, exploiting adverse weather conditions and reduced visibility caused by dust storms.

## 6. Pattern of ISIS Operations

The combat tactics employed by the ISIS organization in Iraq are characterized by the strategic principle of “Exhaustive Alertness.” This approach involves the deployment of ISIS operatives into small cells or “security detachments,” each comprising a few members. These cells are strategically positioned within regions and along the supply routes of security forces. Their operational methodology aligns with the principles of Guerrilla Warfare, encompassing targeted assassinations utilizing sniper weaponry, kidnappings, and the deployment of explosive devices and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. Additionally, they target thermal surveillance cameras and economic infrastructure, engage in the destruction of agricultural crops, and sabotage electricity transmission towers in rural locales beyond the reach of security monitoring. These actions aim to establish fortified positions and “no-go zones” within these areas.

Intelligence assessments indicate that the combat deployment of ISIS units in Iraq is organized into approximately eleven combat battalions, each comprising roughly 350 members. Each battalion is subdivided into six to seven companies, with each company consisting of approximately 50 members. Further division within companies results in five detachments, each containing nine to ten members. The organization has progressively adopted a decentralized command and control structure to facilitate its terrorist operations. These battalions, companies, and detachments predominantly operate in geographically rugged terrains that are remote from security surveillance, thereby enhancing their capacity to conduct operations and training (Lead Inspector General, 2022, p. 11) undetected. The majority of ISIS activities are concentrated in areas including Makhmūr, northwest of al-Ḥawījāh, the left bank of al-Sharqāṭ district, Jabal al-Khānūkah, Wādī Zaghaytūn, Wādī al-Shāy southwest of Kirkūk, northern Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn regions, the Ḥamrīn and Makhūl mountain ranges, and northeastern Diyālā. The organization persistently targets the outskirts of Kan’ān and the Buhriz sub-district southeast of Ba’qūbah, as well as the periphery of Dāqūq, where it frequently attacks security units and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

ISIS operatives exploit environmental conditions to execute operations such as the burning of crops and the abduction of shepherds and fishermen. The Makhmūr mountain region, situated at the intersection of four governorates—Erbil, Kirkūk, Nīnawá, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn—constitutes a significant locus of ISIS presence and

activity. ISIS consistently targets thermal surveillance and monitoring equipment to facilitate surprise attacks and infiltration. The outskirts of al-'Azīm (60 km north of Ba'qūbah) adjacent to Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn governorate, experience continuous assaults due to security lapses between the Sāmarrā' and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Operations Commands. Similarly, the outskirts of Dāqūq and Ṭūz Khūrmātū districts endure frequent nocturnal attacks and incursions, owing to security gaps between Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn and Kirkūk and the incomplete clearance of ISIS strongholds.

In 2022, the Baghdād Belt areas—rural zones adjacent to but outside the city limits of Baghdād—demonstrated recovery from terrorist activities following an enhanced presence of government security forces. Nonetheless, ISIS continues efforts to augment its operational effectiveness in the northern areas of al-Ṭārimīyah, al-Tājī, and al-Mashāhidah near the capital.

## 7. Solid Will Operations

Several significant operations conducted by ISIS in Syria and Iraq during 2022—including the assault on Ghuwayrān prison in al-Ḥasakah (January 2022), the attack on a military barracks in Diyālā (January 2022), and the assault on a Federal Police personnel carrier in Kirkūk (December 2022)—have raised concerns regarding the potential resurgence of ISIS in Iraq. This concern is heightened by the country's susceptibility to various internal factors and the apparent reluctance of the United States to spearhead renewed international support for Baghdād's counter-terrorism initiatives and the effective suppression of ISIS activities.

Building upon prior operations such as Heroes of Iraq and Will of Victory, the Iraqi Armed Forces initiated a comprehensive campaign termed "Operation Solid Will." The operation aimed to dismantle the operational infrastructure that ISIS sought to reconstruct in remote, rugged areas following its defeat in Iraq. Throughout 2022, Operation Solid Will yielded substantial outcomes, including the elimination of 311 terrorists—213 by air force strikes and 98 through various ground operations. Notably, many of those neutralized were key leaders within ISIS (Youm7, 2023).

The operation encompassed five governorates: Diyālā, Kirkūk, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, Nīnawá, and al-Anbār, and unfolded over eight phases from March 28, 2022, to November 21, 2022. Table 6-2 delineates the stages of Operation Solid Will alongside the principal results achieved during each phase:

Table 6-2: Results of Operation Solid Will Stages.

Participating Forces	Targeted Area	Operation Results
<b>Phase 1 (March 28-30)</b>		
Sectors of al-Jazīrah, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and West Nīnawá Operations Commands in participation with PMF sectors for Nīnawá, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and West al-Anbār, and forces from the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) with support from Army Aviation and the Air Force.	Areas south of al-Ḥaḍr, al-Jazīrah desert in North Euphrates, and areas west of Wādī al-Tharthār.	Destruction of 19 hide-outs, 6 tunnels, finding 2 explosive-rigged vehicles, 2 booby-trapped houses, and 8 IEDs.

Table 6-2 (continued)

Participating Forces	Targeted Area	Operation Results
<b>Phase 2 (April 23)</b>		
Forces from the Army, Border Guards, Rapid Response, and PMF, and CTS supported by Army Aviation and the Air Force.	al-Anbār, Nīnawá, Şalāh-al-Dīn, Diyālá, and Kirkūk governorates.	Seizure of 4 hideouts, 3 mortar shells, destruction of 1 explosive-rigged vehicle, destruction of 11 IEDs and 4 rockets, destruction of 4 hideouts, finding a factory for IED manufacture, 1 IED and thermal goggles, finding and destroying 1 explosive-rigged vehicle, and finding medical supplies.
<b>Phase 3 (June 15)</b>		
Iraqi Army (1st Division), PMF in Diyālá, a force from Rapid Response, and a force from the CTS supported by Army Aviation and the Air Force.	North al-Miqdādiyah areas and the Diyālá River basin.	Finding 7 hideouts of ISIS, 2 IEDs, 1 explosive belt, a rifle, 5 ammunition depots, 3 motorcycles, and a vehicle.
<b>Phase 4 (July 19)</b>		
Sectors of the 14th and 16th Divisions, tank reinforcement units, Peshmerga forces sectors (including Zerevani and the 6th sector), and forces from the CTS supported by the Air Force and Army Aviation.	Qarah Chūkh Mountains.	Killing one ISIS terrorist.
<b>Phase 5 (August 18)</b>		
Sectors from Diyālá Operations Command, the Control Headquarters of Tūz Khūrmātū operations, Peshmerga forces (1st, 2nd, and 3rd) axes, and forces from the CTS supported by Army Aviation and the Air Force.	Joint operations area between Federal Forces and the Kurdistan Region within Diyālá Operations Command sector and the Control Headquarters of Tūz Khūrmātū operations.	Inspection of the joint operations area between Federal Forces and the Kurdistan Region within Diyālá Operations Command sector and the Control Headquarters of Tūz Khūrmātū operations.
<b>Phase 6 (August 27)</b>		
The 8th Division within the Advanced Headquarters for Joint Operations Command in Kirkūk, the 3rd Division of the Federal Police, Commando Battalions, and CTS forces with support from Army Aviation and the Air Force	al-Zāb areas and the borders separating the sector of the Advanced Headquarters for Joint Operations Command in Kirkūk and the sector of the Nīnawá Operations Command.	Killing 2 terrorists, destroying 12 hideouts, and seizing 5 caches. Neutralizing 63 explosive devices, finding 70 mortar shells, neutralizing 17 launcher rockets, seizing 2 explosive belts, and finding 2 launchers.

Table 6-2 (continued)

Participating Forces	Targeted Area	Operation Results
<b>Phase 7 (September 3)</b>		
1st Division and the 62nd PMF Brigade, Diyālā and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Operations Command sectors forces, and CTS, supported by Army Aviation and the Air Force.	Ḥāwī al-'Aẓīm areas at the borders between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Diyālā, and Sāmarrā' Operations Commands.	Destruction of 6 ISIS hideouts in 'Ā'ishah camp, containing an explosive belt, locally-made IEDs, 2 motor-cycles, various foodstuffs, medical supplies, and a generator.
<b>Phase 8 (November 17)</b>		
West Nīnawā Operations Command/15th Infantry Division and sectors, Nīnawā Operations Command, 14th and 16th Infantry Divisions, PMF Operations Command in Nīnawā, Nīnawā Police Directorate, 54th and 55th PMF Brigades, al-Anbār Operations Command, and CTS, supported by Army Aviation and the Air Force	West Nīnawā Operations Command sector and West Nīnawā and the borders between them, and inspection of al-Anbār desert and the governorate's border areas.	Arrest of 2 suspects wanted under Article (4) Terrorism and 3 others under various legal articles, finding 9 155mm projectiles, 2 120mm mortar shells, an 81mm mortar shell, a cylinder explosive device, detonation cords, detonators, and a damaged fighter jet rocket.

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on data from the Security Media Cell regarding Solid Will operations.

## 8. Counter-Terrorism Service Operations

It is important to highlight that forces from the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) participated in all eight phases of Operation Solid Will. Furthermore, the Service conducted numerous additional operations targeting residual elements of the ISIS terrorists that were not included in Solid Will. CTS reported statistics concerning its operations against ISIS during 2022, predominantly concentrated in eastern Diyālā, southern Kirkūk, and Mosul, as detailed in Table 6-3.

The data presented in Table 6-3 suggest that reconnaissance activities constitute the primary function of the Counter-Terrorism Service, consistent with its role as an intelligence agency as defined by the Counter-Terrorism Service Law No. (31) of 2016. This emphasis on reconnaissance is intended to gather intelligence on the movements and activities of ISIS terrorist factions, corroborate information obtained from other security and intelligence entities, and assess the outcomes of airstrikes and combat operations targeting ISIS headquarters, hideouts, or operatives. Notably, the total number of activities conducted by the Counter-Terrorism Service forces reached 2,017.

Table 6-3: Activities of the Counter-Terrorism Service during the Year 2022.

Number of Combat Operations	Arrest Operations	ISIS Fatalities	Reconnaissance Operations	Operations to Destroy Hideouts	Air Support
269	139	75	1342	141	51

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on (CTS, 2023).

### III. Internal Security Challenges

#### 1. Security Incidents

The year 2022 experienced the highest increase in homicide crimes, with an annual rate exceeding 11.5 per 100,000 people. This rate represents the highest level among the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey. Security analysts attribute the elevated crime rate in Iraq to the failure to modernize investigative methodologies, the persistent reliance on violent techniques in criminal investigations, and the outdated punitive legislative framework. According to statistics derived from data collected by the Ministry of Interior up to November 2022, more than 5,300 homicide cases were recorded (Ultra Iraq, 2022), marking the highest incidence since 2015, as depicted in Figure 6-3, which illustrates a consistent escalation in criminal homicides within Iraq. These homicides are frequently perpetrated using firearms, which are widely accessible throughout the country. The increasing prevalence of domestic violence provides a significant context for the majority of these homicides. Table 6-4 delineates the most notable homicides that occurred during 2022.

Figure 6-3: Criminal Homicides for the Years 2019–2022.

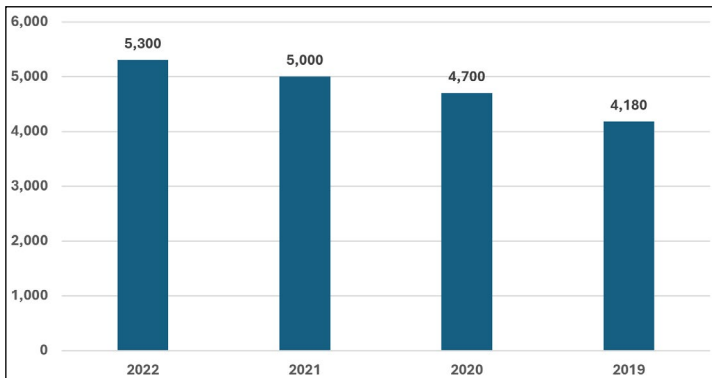


Table 6-4: Most Prominent Crimes Witnessed in Iraq during the Year 2022.

Date	Location	Type of Crime	Number of Victims	Details
31/12/2021	Bābil Governorate, Jablah District	Killing of about 20 members of one family, including children, by a security force from Baghdād led by a high-ranking officer related to the victims.	20 people	The National Security Service took over the investigation.
18/1/2022	Baghdād Governorate	A father kills his daughter, her mother, and her grandmother, then commits suicide by shooting.	4 people	Motivated by family disputes.

Table 6-4 (continued)

Date	Location	Type of Crime	Number of Victims	Details
2/2/2022	Baghdād Governorate, Abū-Gharīb District, al-Dhahab al-Abyaḍ Village	A man kills his wife, 14-year-old daughter, and 1-year-old infant. He also tried to kill his wife's parents.	3 people	Motives remain unknown.
24/3/2022	Baghdād City, al-Baladiyāt Neighborhood	A wedding host shot and killed a man.	1 person	Caused by a quarrel over a dinner meal not served to a guest.
30/4/2022	al-Dīwāniyah Governorate	A woman planned and incited the killing of her husband with the help of an accomplice.	1 person	The suspect confessed during the investigation.
11/5/2022	Bābil Governorate, al-Ḥillah City	A child under two years old was found slaughtered with a sharp tool in a neighbor's backyard.	1 infant	The killer was arrested; motives were not announced.
29/6/2022	Erbil Governorate	A student named Ālās Mahdī shot and killed the Dean of the Law Faculty, Dr. Kāwān Ismā'īl, and Professor Idrīs Ḥamah Khān.	2 people	Motive: Expulsion for cheating and refusal of transfer due to a "troublemaker" tag in his file.
2/7/2022	Bābil Governorate	A university professor named 'Alā' 'Abbās Khiḍr was killed by a colleague.	1 person	The killer confessed to an illicit relationship with the victim's wife.
9/7/2022	Maysān Governorate, al-'Amārah City	A beggar in his fifties was slaughtered by a tea seller following a market brawl.	1 person	
11/8/2022	Dhī-Qār Governorate	A 22-year-old man stabbed his brother to death.	1 person	Cause: A dispute after changing the Wi-Fi network password.
4/9/2022	Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Governorate, Tikrīt City	Two sisters killed their mother and a man who was with her.	2 people	The girls were arrested in Erbil.
4/10/2022	al-Dīwāniyah Governorate, al-Shāmīyah District	A woman in her thirties killed her husband while he was asleep, using a wooden hammer and a concrete block.	1 person	Caused by family disputes.

Table 6-4 (continued)

Date	Location	Type of Crime	Number of Victims	Details
2/11/2022	Kurdistan Region, Erbil City	A woman killed her husband with a hammer and burned the body.	1 person	Due to family problems.
29/11/2022	Kirkūk City	The top student in Kirkūk Governorate for Kurdish studies at the intermediate level, Aḥmad Āzād, was killed after he went out to purchase an electronic device. This followed his receipt of \$2,600 as a gift from the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masrūr Barzānī, as a reward for his academic excellence.	1 person	The killer was apprehended in the city of Chamchamāl on December 8, 2022.

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on newspapers, news sites, and (Ultra Iraq, 2022).

## 2. Traffic Accidents

The increase in traffic accidents during 2022 elicited significant concern among both the public and policymakers. There were widespread calls for enhanced collaboration between the executive and legislative branches, alongside coordination with all relevant authorities, to mitigate these incidents. Official statistics reported a total of 11,523 traffic accidents in 2022.

Traffic accidents were categorized into four types: run-overs, collisions, roll-overs, and Complex accidents. Fatalities resulting from these accidents reached 3,021, with males constituting approximately 82% (2,474 individuals) of the deceased. The number of injured persons totaled 12,677, with males comprising about 83% of this figure (CSO, 2023).

## 3. Tribal Conflicts

In 2022, tribal conflicts escalated, involving various weapon types. According to a security source, approximately 360 individuals involved in these conflicts were arrested during the early months of 2022 across multiple cities nationwide. By mid-August 2022, the command of the Rapid Response Division, affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, announced the resolution of 787 tribal conflicts in Maysān governorate alone (Ghazwān, 2022).

In al-Baṣrah governorate, over 200 armed tribal conflicts occurred in 2022, resulting in more than 300 fatalities. Investigative authorities issued nearly 5,000 arrest warrants targeting the instigators and participants of these conflicts. Governmental efforts to curb the threat posed by armed tribal struggles led to the seizure of approximately 7,000 medium and light weapons during the year.

The majority of these conflicts were concentrated in the southern governorates of al-Baṣrah, Maysān, and Dhī-Qār.

Dhī-Qār governorate recorded over 30 conflicts in the first half of 2022. Notably, on April 21, 2022, Brigadier General 'Alī Jamīl 'Abd Khalaf (Director of the Intelligence Department for the Sūmar Operations Command) was fatally shot by a sniper while attempting to intervene in an armed conflict between two tribes northeast of al-Nāṣirīyah. This incident also involved the burning of houses and tribal guest houses (maḍāyif) and resulted in multiple casualties (Shafaq News, 2022, April 23).

In Maysān governorate, approximately 13 armed tribal conflicts were recorded in the early months of 2022. Among these was a particularly violent conflict in early April between two tribes in the al-'Uzayr sub-district, which resulted in 8 deaths and several injuries. In Baghdād, security forces documented 11 armed tribal conflicts up to May 2022, causing 35 casualties (both fatalities and injuries). These figures likely represent only a fraction of the actual conflicts, as governmental presence and enforcement remain limited. Many large-scale tribal confrontations do not reach police stations, and minor conflicts without casualties often go unreported.

#### 4. Organized Crime

Organized crime in Iraq during 2022 posed a severe threat to national security and stability. Despite concerted efforts by security agencies, criminal organizations and networks continued to operate. Their activities encompassed:

- Drug trafficking and distribution within Iraq.
- Human trafficking (al-Quds al-'Arabī, 2022).
- Migrant smuggling.
- Arms trafficking.
- Petroleum derivatives smuggling.

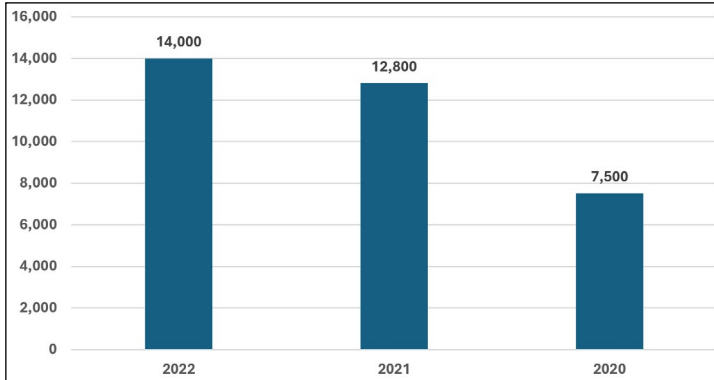
The proliferation of these groups was attributed to widespread corruption, ongoing domestic and regional geopolitical instability, the effects of climate change, and economic stagnation following the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### Drug Crimes

Drug trafficking and consumption reached unprecedented levels in 2022, severely impacting Iraqi society and jeopardizing future generations. The problem was particularly acute among youth. Official data indicated that 14,000 individuals (including users and dealers) were arrested in 2022, among them 500 women and juveniles (Fākhir, 2023). This represents an increase from 7,500 arrests in 2020 and 12,800 arrests in 2021. Trafficking networks exploit these individuals for promotion and transportation purposes. Drug use among youth in impoverished areas has reached approximately 70% (Shafaq News, 2022, December 5).

The most prevalent drugs in Iraq include "Crystal" and "Ḥashīshah," common in central and southern regions, as well as Captagon pills, widespread in western and northern Iraq and particularly favored by youth. According to the Ministry of

Figure 6-4: Evolution of the numbers of those accused of drug crimes (2020-2022).



Interior, most “Crystal” drugs enter Iraq from Iran, targeting the governorates of al-Baṣrah and Maysān. Conversely, Captagon pills and Ḥashīshah are smuggled into al-Qā’im via Syria (Iran International, 2022).

Iraqi officials report that drugs are concealed in vehicles, fake fruit shipments, and even transported by drones. Women, subject to less stringent inspections than men, are often involved in trafficking. The Ministry of Health noted that since early 2022, 4,500 drug addicts have received treatment, predominantly individuals aged 15 to 30. However, due to insufficient treatment facilities, many young people remain vulnerable to drug addiction (Shafaq News, 2022, December 11).

## IV. External Threats

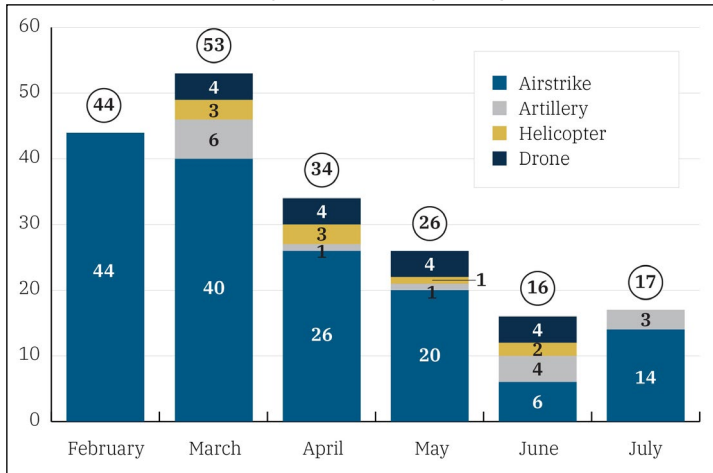
Cross-border external threats directly impacted Iraq’s internal security and stability throughout 2022. The majority of these threats originated from neighboring regional states, specifically Iran and Turkey, which justified their actions by citing the presence of armed opposition groups within Iraqi territory:

- Turkey rationalizes its military interventions by targeting the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) operating in northern Iraq, which it designates as a terrorist organization.
- Iran justifies its operations by referencing several Kurdish groups, including the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, the Komala Party, the Kurdistan Freedom Party, and the Sarbastī Kurdistan Party. Iran classifies these groups as terrorist entities aiming to destabilize the country and secede Kurdish regions from Iranian territory.

### 1. Turkish Military Intervention

Beginning in early 2022, Turkey intensified its military operations in northern Iraq. On February 2, 2022, Turkish air forces conducted sixty sorties, destroying eighty targets across three regions in northern Iraq and Syria. Turkey established commando bases within Iraqi territory at depths ranging from 32 to 48 kilome-

Figure 6-5: Turkish Bombardment Operations in Iraq during the First Half of 2022.



Source: Knights (2022). Precise Strike data for the month of January is unavailable.

ters. Moreover, the use of Bayraktar drones expanded the reach of Turkish strikes beyond border areas and the Qandil Mountains, extending up to 281 kilometers into Iraqi territory, including federal regions such as Sinjār and Mosul.

Bayraktar drones have been employed to monitor and target PKK leaders during their movements south of the border. A notable violation of Iraqi sovereignty occurred with the assassination of Farhād Shiblī (known as Farhād Dīrk), a prominent leader and deputy head of the Autonomous Administration affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), along with several aides, in a Turkish drone strike in the town of Kalār, south of al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate.

Figure 6-5 illustrates the number of Turkish bombardment operations during the first half of 2022. Specifically, the Turkish Air Force launched a total of (150) airstrikes during the first half of 2022 (Knights, 2022). Meanwhile, the Turkish Ground Forces executed (15) artillery strikes on sites believed to belong to the PKK party or militias linked to it. Turkish helicopters carried out (9) raids on sites or targets inside Iraqi territory, while Turkish drones of the Bayraktar B2 type executed a total of (16) strikes. Consequently, Turkish forces violated Iraqi sovereignty (190) times during the first half of 2022.

Since May 27, 2019, Turkey has conducted a series of military operations under the codename “Claw,” involving deep incursions into Iraqi territory accompanied by artillery and aerial bombardments. The first operation in this series for 2022, “Claw-Lock,” commenced on April 18, involving Turkish special forces, warplanes, helicopters, and drones targeting PKK positions in Mētīnā, al-Zāb, and Avāshīn-Basyān in northern Iraq (al-Arabiya, 2022, April 18).

The latest operation, “Claw-Sword,” launched on November 20, 2022, entailed airstrikes on Kurdish militant bases in northern Iraq, destroying 89 targets. This operation was a response to a bomb attack in Istanbul on November 13, 2022,

which resulted in six civilian deaths. Turkish strikes continue against PKK sites in towns including Sūrān, Sīdakān, al-Zāb, Qandīl, Sinjār, and Makhmūr.

Turkish military activities, including missile and artillery shelling, have frequently caused civilian casualties in Iraq. On July 20, 2022, Turkish shelling of the Parakh tourist resort near Zākhū in Duhūk Governorate resulted in the deaths of nine tourists and injuries to 33 others (al-Arabiya, 2022, July 20). In response, the Iraqi government summoned the Turkish Ambassador, Ali Rıza Günay, on July 21, 2022, to issue a formal protest. Additionally, a parliamentary committee was established to investigate the incident, and an official complaint was submitted to the United Nations Security Council on July 23, 2022.

A study by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy revealed that Turkish military centers and checkpoints now occupy approximately 1,553 square kilometers in northern Iraq, representing about 3.5% of the Kurdistan Region and 0.3% of Iraq's total land area. These conditions have precipitated significant displacement among Iraqi civilians due to the ongoing warlike conflict (Knights, 2022).

## 2. Iranian Military Intervention

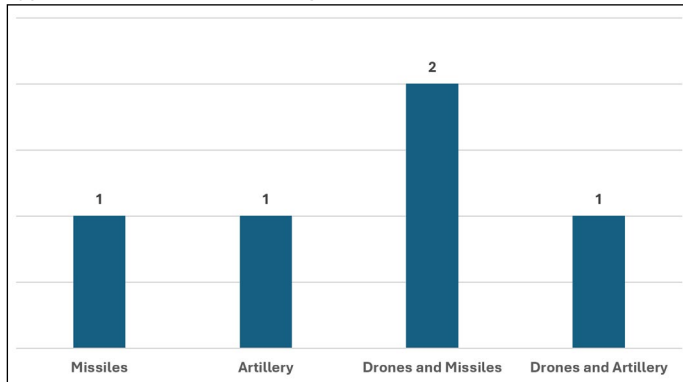
In 2022, Iraqi national security faced external threats not only from Turkish military interventions but also from escalated Iranian military operations along the northeastern borders. These operations were conducted under the justification of targeting the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish opposition parties located within the Kurdistan Region. This situation has increasingly challenged the Iraqi government, which has struggled to develop effective domestic solutions to address the presence of Iranian and Turkish Kurdish opposition groups on Iraqi territory. Consequently, Tehran and Ankara have continued to violate Iraqi sovereignty. Since 2018, Iranian military actions have targeted border towns and areas within the Kurdistan Region, which Iran claims harbor Kurdish groups designated as "terrorists". These groups are purportedly involved in armed activities within the Iranian Kurdistan province adjacent to Iraq.

The initial shelling operation in 2022 occurred on March 13, when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed to have targeted the U.S. consulate under construction and a satellite channel in Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, using missiles. This attack was reportedly in retaliation for the killing of Iranians by Israeli shelling in Syria. Subsequent investigations revealed that the missile strikes targeted the residence of Kurdish businessman Sheikh Bāz al-Barzanjī, owner of the KAR oil company.

Table 6-5: Iranian Shelling Operations Inside Iraqi Territory (2012–2022).

September 9, 2018	October 18, 2018	January 10, 2019	January 8, 2020	June 28, 2020	October 30, 2020	October 15, 2021
Missiles	Artillery	Artillery	Missiles	Drone	Missiles	Artillery
March 13, 2022	May 2–11, 2022	June 9, 2022	September 25, 2022	September 27, 2022	September 28, 2022	-
Missiles	Missiles	Drone	Missiles	Drone	Missiles	-

Figure 6-6: Types of Iranian Attacks during 2022.



On September 24, 2022, the IRGC targeted the headquarters of the Kurdish PJAK organization with artillery fire. Four days later, on September 28, the IRGC employed explosive-rigged drones to bomb the headquarters of the Iranian Kurdish opposition party located in the Zergwez complex west of al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate. This attack resulted in two injuries and the complete destruction of two headquarters. However, media reports indicated that at least 16 individuals were killed and 58 injured, with hundreds of families displaced. The U.S. Department of State announced that one of its citizens was killed in the attack. In response, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Iranian Ambassador, Muḥammad Kāzīm Āl-Şādiq, to deliver a formal protest regarding Iran's continued attacks in the Kurdistan Region.

The most severe Iranian attacks in the Kurdistan Region occurred on November 14, 2022, following accusations by the Iranian government that Kurdish opposition parties incited unrest in Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16. The IRGC launched missile and suicide drone attacks on the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, specifically the Democratic Party and the Komala Party, in the Koy Sanjaq district of Erbil and the Zergwez area in al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate. These attacks resulted in one fatality and ten injuries. On November 22, the IRGC conducted a missile and suicide drone attack on an Iranian opposition party near Altun Kupri in Kirkūk Governorate. Figure 6-6 illustrates the number and types of Iranian attacks on Iraqi territory during 2022.

It is notable that the IRGC escalated its attacks on Iraqi territory toward the end of 2022, with a qualitative increase in the use of suicide drones and ballistic missiles. Alongside these military operations, assassination attempts targeting Iranian Kurdish opposition political activists have increased over the past two years, particularly in Erbil and al-Sulaymānīyah, totaling approximately 20 operations (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, October 7). Prominent Iranian opposition figures assassinated in the Kurdistan Region during 2022 include Akbar Sanjābī, Yāsīn Būlūt, Mūsā Bābākhānī, and 'Alī Behrūz Raḥīmī (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, June 6).

## V. Tension in Sinjār

On October 9, 2020, the Iraqi government entered into an agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to maintain security in Sinjār through federal security forces, coordinated with Kurdistan Region forces (Peshmerga and Asayish), with the objective of expelling illegal armed groups. Nevertheless, intense conflicts among various competing Arab, Kurdish, and Yazidi factions for control over the strategically significant Sinjār, compounded by the interests of regional powers such as Iran and Turkey, hindered the full implementation of the Sinjār Agreement.

When the Iraqi Armed Forces sought to enforce the Agreement on April 18, 2022, the “Sinjār Defense Units” fired upon an Iraqi Army convoy that failed to stop at a checkpoint. Additionally, the “Sinjār Defense Units” and “Yazidkhan Defense Units” obstructed Iraqi Army forces from entering territories under their control.

On May 3, 2022, a renewed attempt by the Iraqi Armed Forces to implement the agreement resulted in clashes with fighters from the Yazidi Sinjār Resistance Units, affiliated with the Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). These confrontations caused the displacement of over 10,000 Sinjār residents to the Kurdistan Region, underscoring the fragility of the security situation amid ongoing Turkish bombardments in the area. Furthermore, smuggling and infiltration activities across the Iraqi-Syrian border have intensified, exploited by armed militias with diverse loyalties, particularly in the Khānsūr area, the al-Fāw crossing, and the Sīmālkā-Fishkhābūr crossing. Press reports also indicate an escalation in extortion and child abductions aimed at forcibly recruiting individuals into various armed militias active in the Sinjār region.

The armed forces operating in the region, alongside the Iraqi Federal Army and Federal Police, are categorized as follows:

1. **Yazidkhan Protection Force (or: Yazidkhan Defence Units):** Also referred to as the “Yazidkhan Asayish Forces,” this Yazidi group was established by Ḥaydar Shīshū in the summer of 2014 and comprises approximately 3,000 members.
2. **Yazidi Sinjār Resistance Units:** Known as YBŞ, these Yazidi units were formed in Iraq in 2007 and represent the second largest Yazidi faction after the Yazidkhan Protection Force, with a strength exceeding 1,500 members. They maintain links to the Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).
3. **Farmandā Shingāl Forces (Yazidi Peshmerga):** Aligned with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), these forces number approximately 2,000 members and are led by Qāsīm Shīshū, a German national and uncle of Ḥaydar Shīshū, leader of Yazidkhan Protection Force.
4. **Yazidi National Front:** This faction, led by Nāyif Jāsū, is situated in the southern Sinjār region and constitutes a unified Yazidi force.



- **Iraqi Federal Forces:** These include the 72nd and 60th Brigades of the 20th Division of the Iraqi Army, a brigade from the 15th Division, and a battalion from the 9th Armored Division.
- **Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF):** Deployed in the city center, eastern areas, and southern regions extending to the desert, these forces number approximately 15,000 fighters.
- **Police Forces:** Approximately 1,000 local police officers affiliated with the Sinjār Police Directorate are stationed in the center of Sinjār District.
- **Kurdish Peshmerga Forces:** Thousands are deployed at the “Yazidi Sharaf ad-Dīn Shrine” on Mount Sinjār, with several thousand more in northwestern Sinjār areas under KRG control.
- **Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK):** Approximately 5,000 members operate under the designation “People’s Defense Forces” in the northwest of Sinjār city and on Mount Sinjār, as well as in the northeast within Sinjār city. The PKK forces are commanded by party leader Jamīl Bāyik, while other PKK units are stationed in military bases in the Qandīl Mountains and along the Iraqi-Turkish-Iranian border triangle, specifically in the Hākūrk Mountains and the heights of the Gārah Mountains in Dohūk Governorate.

The precarious and complex security situation in Sinjār and its implications for Iraqi national security necessitate consensus and cooperation at local, regional, and international levels. However, such collaboration appears unlikely in the near future due to the ambiguous and unstable Iraqi political landscape, the security situation in Syria, and the competition between Turkey and Iran for influence and control over the geopolitically significant Sinjār region. Consequently, it is imperative to reinforce the military presence of the Iraqi Army in the Sinjār region to establish full federal control, eliminate illegal militias, and facilitate the return of displaced persons and the civilian population to Sinjār.

## VI. Targeting the ‘Ayn al-Asad Base

Following the assassination of Abū-Mahdī al-Muhandis and Qāsim Sulaymānī on January 3, 2020, numerous attacks have been directed at American interests in Iraq, occasionally employing rockets or drones. These attacks targeted locations including the perimeter of the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi military bases hosting International Coalition forces, such as Victoria Base at Baghdād International Airport, ‘Ayn al-Asad Base in western Iraq, and Erbil Airport in the north. The United States attributes these strikes to pro-Iranian armed Iraqi factions. The Coordination Committee for the Iraqi Resistance (Anadolu Agency, 2021, July 24), comprising groups such as Katā’ib Ḥizb Allāh al-‘Irāqī, ‘Aṣā’ib Ahl al-Ḥaqq, Katā’ib Sayyid al-Shuhadā’, and Ḥarakat al-Nujabā’, has publicly opposed the continued American military presence in Iraq. Nonetheless, obscure armed factions frequently claim responsibility for attacks on American interests to obscure direct accountability. These groups include: al-Muqāwamah al-Duwalīyah (The International

Resistance), Ahl al-Kahf (The People of the Cave), Sarāyā al-‘Ishrīn al-Thānīyah wa-Rijāl Allāh (The Second 1920 Brigades and Men of Allāh), Liwā’ Tha’r al-Muhandis (al-Muhandis Revenge Brigade), Liwā’ al-Qāsim (al-Qāsim Brigade), ‘Uṣbat al-Thā’irīn (League of the Revolutionaries), Qabḍat al-Hudá (Grip of Guidance), Liwā’ al-Thā’irīn (Brigade of the Revolutionaries), al-Tashkīl al-Walā’ī (The Loyalist Formation) (Smith & Knights, 2021). Additional names may emerge should attacks on American interests recur in 2023, as these designations serve to mask direct responsibility for such assaults.

These armed groups commenced their targeting of American interests on January 3, 2022, when the Baghdād Diplomatic Support Center at Baghdād International Airport was attacked by two explosive-rigged drones. The attack was thwarted, with one drone bearing the inscription “Leaders’ Revenge Operations,” commemorating the second anniversary of the assassination of leaders al-Muhandis and Sulaymānī. Subsequent incidents include:

- January 4, 2022: The ‘Ayn al-Asad Airbase in al-Anbār Governorate (western Iraq) was targeted by two explosive-rigged drones, which were intercepted by Iraqi air defenses.
- April 8, 2022: U.S. air defense systems downed a drone attempting to approach the ‘Ayn al-Asad Airbase.
- April 30, 2022: The base was targeted by two rockets launched from the industrial district in the city of Hīt. These were intercepted by the base’s air defense system at the outer perimeter, with no casualties reported.
- May 30, 2022: ‘Ayn al-Asad Base was targeted by six rockets that landed near the base without causing casualties.

It is significant to note that attacks on American interests declined markedly during the second half of 2022. This period coincided with an intensification of political conflict between the Sadrist Movement and the Coordination Framework forces concerning disputes over the formation of the new government following the early elections held on October 10, 2021.

In subsequent stages, should the government of Mr. Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī fail to restrain armed groups from attacking American interests in Baghdād and the Kurdistan Region, it will be challenging for the Iraqi government to sustain not only a comprehensive partnership with the United States but also with other European countries that maintain interests and investments in Iraq.

## VII. Political Weapon

Throughout 2022, Iraq experienced an escalation in the utilization of weapons within political conflicts, competition, and efforts to impose political will. This escalation adversely impacted domestic security and resulted in civilian casualties, particularly due to the refusal of certain political parties to accept early election outcomes. Attempts to influence political trajectories and the orientations of some politicians manifested through political assassinations, bombings, and

attacks characterized by excessive use of weaponry. Table 6-6 delineates the most significant incidents related to violence and the employment of political weapons during 2022.

Table 6-6: Key Incidents of Violence and Use of Political Weapon in Iraq during 2022.

Date	Incident	Location	Notes
Jan 9	Assassination of Sadrist Movement leader, Muslim 'Aydān, by unknown gunmen.	al-Shīshān area, Maysān Governorate	He is the brother of Ḥaydar Abū-al-Rīsh, a prominent Sadrist leader in Maysān.
Jan 17	Assassination attempt by firing at the home of cleric Ḥamīd al-Yāsirī.	al-Rumaythah District, al-Muthannā Governorate	al-Yāsirī is the commander of the 44th Brigade in the PMF and leader of the Shrines' PMF in al-Samāwah.
Jan 26	The birthplace of Parliament Speaker Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī was subjected to a Katyusha rocket attack.	al-Karmah District, al-Anbār Governorate	The attack occurred hours after the Supreme Federal Court ruled his election as Speaker was legal.
Feb 19	Hand grenade attack targeting the headquarters of the Taqadum Party belonging to Speaker Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī.	Hīt District, al-Anbār Governorate	Due to his alliance with the Sadrist Movement, which called for a majority government.
May 1	Launch of 6 rockets at the KAR Group oil refinery.	Khabāt District, Erbil Governorate	A rocket launcher loaded with four rockets was found in the al-Fāḍīliyah area of Ba'shīqah in the Nīnawá Plain (NINA News, 2022).
May 4	A rocket was fired at the home of Lieutenant General Aḥmad Abū-Raghīf; no casualties.	Baghdād Governorate	-
Jun 8	Explosion of a explosive-rigged drone.	Erbil city, Kurdistan Region	Injured three people and damaged several cars.
Jun 22-24	Rocket attacks on the Khor Mor gas field.	Chamchamāl District, al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate	The gas field is managed by UAE companies Dana Gas and Crescent Petroleum. Rockets launched from within the Region behind the 16th Peshmerga Brigade (Iraq Nass, 2022).
Jul 25	Attack with 3 rockets on the Khor Mor field.	Chamchamāl District, al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate	Fourth attack in less than a month.

Table 6-6 (continued)

Date	Incident	Location	Notes
Aug 29-30	Clashes in the Green Zone with medium and heavy weapons; Katyusha shelling. Sadrist supporters attacked Coordination Framework and PMF offices.	Baghdād and southern governorates	33 killed, mostly Sadrist supporters, and hundreds wounded.
Sep 1	Armed clashes in al-Başrah between Sarāyā al-Salām and 'Aṣā'ib Ahl al-Ḥaqq following the assassination of Ḥusayn Fu'ād.	al-Tannūmah, al-Barāḍī'iyah, and al-Jumhūrīyah Street, al-Başrah City	5 victims (2 Sadrists, 3 'Aṣā'ib) and 12 wounded.
Sep 1	Clashes and an RPG targeted an 'Aṣā'ib headquarters.	al-Nahrawān District, Baghdād	No data on casualties.
Sep 2	Armed attack on a Sarāyā al-Salām headquarters.	al-Nāṣirīyah, Dhī-Qār Governorate	No data on casualties.
Sep 5	Brigadier General Qāsim Dāwūd Salmān was fatally shot.	Maysān Governorate	Salmān was Affiliated with the National Security Service.
Sep 21	Two mortar shells fell in the Green Zone.	Baghdād city	7 security personnel injured.
Oct 4	Rocket/mortar attack on a PMF headquarters in the Presidential Palaces; violent clashes for one hour.	al-Başrah city	Unspecified human losses; destruction of several vehicles.
Oct 6	Assassination attempt by firing at Sheikh Khālid al-Mullā at a hotel.	al-Başrah city	-
Oct 7	Assassination attempt by firing at MP Fāliḥ al-Khaz'alī (al-Faṭḥ Alliance).	al-Başrah Governorate	Executed by an armed group.
Oct 12	Attack with eight rockets on the Khor Mor field.	al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate	No human casualties.
Oct 22	Assassination of Badr Organization leader Sheikh 'Alī al-'Adhārī.	al-Kamālīyah area, East Baghdād	Perpetrators were not apprehended.
Nov 7	Assassination of U.S. citizen Stephen Troell by an armed group.	al-Karrādah, Baghdād	Perpetrators were not apprehended.

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on reports from Iraqi news agencies.

The data presented in Table 6-6 indicate that manifestations of violence and the deployment of political weapon—specifically the military wings of Iraqi parties—had a profound impact on the lives of Iraqi citizens throughout 2022. The employment of armed violence disrupted public life and institutional operations, posing a potential threat to state stability if such practices persist. Evidently, the military wings of political parties employed a range of heavy, medium, and light weaponry in their rivalries, particularly among political factions within the same ethnic

or sectarian groups. This trend suggests a weakening or disintegration of political alignments based on ethnicity or sect in favor of an emergent Iraqi national identity. The operations varied, encompassing rocket and drone strikes targeting party headquarters and oil and gas facilities, as well as the assassination of political figures.

## VIII. Future Agenda

The events of 2022 reveal that Iraq's fragile political system remains the principal catalyst for security deterioration. The security dilemma is anticipated to continue shaping Iraq's future landscape. As political parties increasingly resort to the "political weapon," the security environment is expected to grow more complex, thereby undermining citizens' confidence in their future prospects. Consequently, 2023 is poised to confront Iraq with unpredictability concerning the ramifications of internal political conflicts on national policies, public welfare, regional relations, and security.

A critical question for 2023 is whether the government led by Mr. Muṣammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī can effectively manage multiple crises and address the consequent erosion of public trust. Challenges such as economic reform, anti-corruption efforts, service improvement, and the mitigation of poverty and unemployment are formidable. Public skepticism persists regarding al-Sūdānī's anti-corruption initiatives, particularly in light of an unemployment rate reaching 16%. These challenges underscore the persistence of latent crises threatening national stability.

Despite the passage of five years since the defeat of ISIS, Iraq continues to grapple with residual challenges posed by this terrorist group, as evidenced by kidnappings and hit-and-run attacks in remote regions. Concurrently, Iraq faces international pressure to repatriate thousands of suspected ISIS affiliates and their families to their cities (Ezzeddine & Colombo, 2022).

No definitive indications suggest a diminution of external threats, including escalating Turkish military incursions and Iranian missile and artillery attacks, which constitute ongoing violations of Iraqi sovereignty. This is particularly pronounced in regions such as Sinjār and the Iraqi-Turkish-Syrian border area, where daily hostilities between the Turkish military and the PKK prevail. Such conditions perpetuate mistrust regarding the prospects for improved relations with neighboring states. Moreover, the U.S.-Iraqi relationship remains ambiguous in 2023 due to tensions between the U.S. and Iran and the ascendancy of Iranian-backed parties controlling the government. Consequently, concerns about renewed attacks on American and European interests persist, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity within Iraq's security environment.

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# 7. Society

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## I. Introduction

For several years, Iraqi society has been experiencing instability across multiple dimensions, resulting from a combination of longstanding issues and new challenges imposed by the current phase Iraq is undergoing, including international and regional factors that exert significant influence. These internal and external forces have adversely affected the functioning of the existing social system, which has become the weakest link in shaping human behavior. The Arab intellectual Muṣṭafá Ḥijāzī (2005) accurately observed that individuals in the contemporary era are merely pawns manipulated by a flawed social system; consequently, individual behavior and social actions stem from a profound sense of victimization by forces beyond their control. Under this framework, expecting individuals to fully comprehend their reality and truth becomes futile.

In fact, addressing social phenomena and problems in Iraq in a fragmented manner is challenging due to their interconnected and overlapping nature. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze social realities comprehensively, although this is complicated by the multitude of social problems and challenges. To navigate this complexity, this study attempts to examine certain phenomena and issues that have prominently impacted social realities.

## II. Tribal Conflicts

Tribal conflicts, particularly in southern and central Iraq, continue to pose significant challenges to society, the government, and security institutions. Despite official claims of a decline in the intensity and social impact of these conflicts, field observations suggest otherwise, given the persistent motives and opportunities that fuel their expansion and escalation, as well as the complexity and overlapping nature of their organizational structures.

Notably, the Director of Tribal Affairs at the Ministry of Interior, Major General Nāṣir 'Alī al-Nūrī, expressed optimism regarding the management of tribal conflicts and the potential to contain and reduce their intensity. He reported that “during 2022, 2,403 tribal conflicts were resolved through the Opinion Board, while tribal operations ('Daggah') decreased by 95% due to the educational initia-

tives of this board aimed at mitigating tribal disputes.” The Ministry of Interior also implemented measures to regulate and reduce weapon possession licenses and intensified security operations to confiscate large quantities of weapons throughout the year. Thousands of light and medium weapons were seized in 2022 as part of the Ministry’s policy, alongside stricter regulation of firearm possession and carrying licenses for specific groups. Furthermore, the Ministry’s spokesperson, Major General Khālīd al-Muḥannā, reported the arrest of approximately 360 individuals involved in tribal conflicts during the early months of 2022 across various cities. Security operations continue to confiscate weapons and apprehend suspects. al-Muḥannā noted that weapon possession has become ingrained in social culture, attributing this to prolonged warfare and militarization. He explained that “large weapon depots belonging to security forces were breached at times, resulting in weapons leaking into civilian hands,” thereby increasing availability. Significantly, in mid-August 2022, the Rapid Response Division of the Ministry of Interior announced the resolution of 787 tribal conflicts in Maysān Governorate alone (Ghazwān, 2022).

In a related development, Major General Taḥsīn al-Khafājī, spokesperson for the Joint Operations Command, emphasized a significant decline in tribal conflicts in 2022 compared to 2021. He attributed this reduction to measures such as the establishment of the Maysān Operations Command, activation of arrest warrants against suspects, and enforcement against unauthorized weapon possession. al-Khafājī indicated that security efforts led to the arrest of numerous individuals involved in tribal conflicts and threats, who were subsequently referred to judicial authorities. Some estimates suggest that tribal conflicts in southern governorates decreased by more than half, coinciding with improvements in security and enhanced capabilities of field forces to enforce the law.

Regarding al-Baṣrah Governorate, Governor As’ad al-Īdānī confirmed on November 13, 2022, that tribal conflicts had decreased by 80%, noting effective performance by the Operations Command and Police Command.

Despite optimistic statements from security and political officials, incidents in governorates such as Dhī-Qār during 2022 indicate a troubling shift in the trajectory of these conflicts. Security forces were unable to maintain order or ensure judicial accountability. On April 20, 2022, masked gunmen in al-Shaṭrah District (Dhī-Qār Governorate) intercepted a police vehicle transporting a recently released prisoner, forcibly removed the security detail, fatally shot the prisoner, and publicly celebrated the act as revenge. The following day, April 21, a Brigadier General in the army was killed by a sniper while attempting to intervene in an armed tribal conflict in Dhī-Qār Governorate.

These events resonated deeply within society, eliciting widespread condemnation on social media and from religious and security institutions. Revenge, a phenomenon rooted in nomadic traditions, has gradually permeated urban Iraqi society and influenced social values. Although revenge is recognized as a crime punishable by law, it persists in many societies under specific conditions and contexts. However, contemporary Iraq has not previously witnessed tribes

intervening in the custody of law enforcement and judicial authorities in such a manner. In a land historically known as the cradle of civilization and legislation, the rule of law and its enforcement mechanisms were undermined in a public social space. If such extralegal behavior is socially justified, the assassination of a high-ranking army officer engaged in a security and humanitarian mission remains inexplicable. Tribal values traditionally respect individuals who mediate disputes, often deriving principles from Islamic Sharia. Yet, the tribal response in Iraq to the killing of a senior army officer performing a moral and security role remains unclear. The political silence surrounding this aggression raises concerns about the future trust of citizens in judicial and security institutions. Numerous legitimate questions about the future of tribal conflicts persist among citizens, yet convincing answers remain elusive.

This situation presents a critical dilemma requiring urgent solutions. MP Bāsim al-Khashshān (April 2022) highlighted the severity of confrontations in southern Iraq, emphasizing that limiting tribal conflicts necessitates genuine security campaigns rather than mere media rhetoric. He asserted that tribal weapons currently enjoy political protection from influential armed factions and parties across governorates, and their continued presence in cities perpetuates insecurity and casualties. al-Khashshān called for tribal leaders to pledge to surrender any tribe members who use weapons to resolve disputes (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, April 22). This scenario reflects overlapping negative cultural authorities—political, sectarian, tribal, and regional—that prioritize utilitarian group interests over the public good. A source within the al-Baṣrah Operations Command revealed that security personnel often belong to the tribes involved, hindering enforcement of judicial orders. Additionally, some security members affiliated with armed groups exploit their positions to perpetuate tribal conflicts. The root causes of many conflicts extend beyond tribal disputes to economic and financial issues involving illegal networks such as oil smuggling, drug trafficking, and border-related crimes (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, January 6). Tribal conflicts thus represent a form of rebellion against state laws and security institutions, revealing an underlying conflict between tribal and state authorities (al-Wardi, 2005, p. 124).

The President of the Supreme Judicial Council, Fā'iq Zaydān, criticized the negative transformation of tribal customs, noting that they have shifted from constructive dispute resolution methods to phenomena that disrupt security and social cohesion (al-Hall Network, 2022).

Statistically, Dhī-Qār Governorate recorded over 30 conflicts in the first half of 2022, while Maysān Governorate reported approximately 13 armed tribal conflicts in early 2022. Notably, a severe conflict in April 2022 between two tribes in the al-'Uzayr sub-district resulted in multiple casualties. In Baghdād, security forces documented 11 armed tribal conflicts from January to May 2022, causing 35 casualties (Ghazwān, 2022).

The Directorate of Tribal Affairs at the Ministry of Interior announced on November 28, 2022, the resolution of 5,993 tribal conflicts since 2020. According

to Major General Nāṣir al-Nūrī, three primary factors perpetuate tribal conflicts: the proliferation of loose weapons post-2003, encroachment on oil investment companies, and drug trafficking due to its high profitability.

Despite security efforts to combat armed manifestations, including tribal conflicts, no clear solutions have emerged. These conflicts have evolved into a widespread social phenomenon, interconnected with other social issues and characterized by coercion. Consequently, society and the state face a complex dilemma that drains human, economic, and security resources. The only viable option for security forces is to enforce the rule of law impartially and remove personnel who prioritize tribal loyalty over national identity to ensure security and stability.

### III. Domestic Violence in 2022

Domestic violence within society is frequently regarded as a phenomenon characterized by distinct cultural and social specificities. Certain patterns of this violence may be socially legitimized or even receive societal protection in various forms. Violence may be deemed acceptable within the Iraqi familial context and may not necessitate concealment or denial. On the contrary, it may serve as a source of pride among others, as adherence to family norms and inherited traditions is often perceived as a necessary and binding practice supported by community members. Such social endorsement functions as feedback that elevates the status of the perpetrator within both the local community and their family, where they are viewed as an instrument of control enjoying collective approval (al-'Umar 2010, pp. 75-76). From a sociological standpoint, violent behavior is acquired through socialization and life experiences; this perspective does not negate the psychological traits of the perpetrator but emphasizes that the cultural and social dimensions underpin the origins and persistence of domestic violence in society.

The trajectory of domestic violence in 2022 appears consistent with preceding years, as it continues to predominate other forms of violence in terms of prevalence and manifestations. The Ministry of Interior reported over 740 cases of domestic violence within a single week. Furthermore, the Director of Community Police at the Ministry of Interior, Brigadier General Ghālib al-'Aṭīyah, indicated an increase in domestic violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1,300 cases of domestic violence against women recorded in 2022. Additionally, 169 runaway girls were returned to their families during the same period. For some girls, fleeing the family may represent the sole means of escaping the pervasive cycle of familial violence. The incidence of girls fleeing their families in 2022 and prior years reflects the violent practices they endure within the family, some of which remain unreported due to the privacy afforded to Iraqi families and the governing values and customs.

The Community Police received reports of domestic violence through the hotline 1162, addressing 754 cases of abuse involving women, 233 involving men, and 55 involving children. Additionally, 62 runaway girls were returned, 22

runaway children were monitored and followed up, and 22 elderly persons and four children were rescued from abuse.

At the judicial level, the Presidency of the Baghdad Rusafa Court of Appeal documented 1,733 domestic violence lawsuits during the first half of 2022 across its affiliated courts. The President of the Baghdad Rusafa Court of Appeal stated on September 20, 2022, that the first half of the year witnessed 1,733 cases of domestic violence, encompassing violence against women, the elderly, and children. These lawsuits included 257 cases of violence against the elderly, 1,408 cases against women, and 68 cases against children in all al-Ruṣāfah courts. The Ministry of Interior also recorded 472 domestic violence lawsuits during the last week of 2022, from December 25 until the month's end.

In the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdistan Men's Union reported that over 500 men experienced psychological, physical, and sexual violence in 2022. The Union recorded 213 cases of men being denied access to their children, 37 cases of elderly men evicted from their homes, 45 cases of marital infidelity, 9 cases of physical violence against men, 193 cases of interference by wives' families in daily family life, 12 cases of sexual violence against men, 8 cases of salary reductions, and 17 cases of media violence or "blackmail" via social media.

Domestic violence, particularly against vulnerable groups such as women, children, and elderly persons with disabilities, is likely to persist as long as legal frameworks permit it. This persistence is exacerbated by ongoing objections to the legislation of the Domestic Violence Law and the Child Law. While laws alone cannot definitively prevent domestic violence, they contribute to mitigating its manifestations within families and society over time.

Regarding legislative delays, the head of the Committee on Women, Family, and Childhood in the previous Parliament, Maysūn al-Sā'idī, identified three reasons on March 3, 2022. First, the law's broad title, which could classify disciplinary actions by a father against a son as violence. Second, concerns over secret informants reporting acts of violence against women or children anonymously. Third, the role of shelters for abuse victims, as the law mandates opening such shelters to qualified individuals upon approval by the Ministries of Interior and Justice.

Concerning child protection, the Iraqi Parliament initiated the Child Protection Bill to address violence against children after previous legislative setbacks. However, the bill faced objections during its first reading in November 2022, due to perceived imbalances between protection provisions and social customs, traditions, and norms. Some clauses allowing children to file complaints against parents in cases of abuse conflicted with social acceptance, leading to resistance from political blocs. This mirrors the fate of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law, which was rejected multiple times in prior sessions.

The Child Protection Bill encompasses numerous legal provisions aimed at safeguarding children both within and outside the family. It commits the state to protect children from various forms of violence and to provide educational, pedagogical, and social care.

Regarding gender-based violence, the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the United Nations, and humanitarian partners launched the “16 Days of Activism” campaign against gender-based violence at the “Let’s Talk” conference on November 28, 2022. The conference, themed “Unite to End Violence against Women and Girls,” convened United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, policymakers, civil society, academic activists, donors, and the private sector from across Iraq to reaffirm commitment to ending gender violence.

Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs signed an agreement with the French Embassy in Iraq and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on January 27, 2022, to rehabilitate a safe haven for women in Baghdad and establish three additional centers in al-Başrah, al-Anbār, and Nīnawá governorates. The UNFPA confirmed that these centers will provide medical, psychological, social, and legal support, alongside “livelihood sessions” to facilitate reintegration into society or family reconciliation.

The Family and Childhood Protection Directorate at the Ministry of Interior identified several consequences of domestic violence, including family disintegration, juvenile delinquency, suicide, permanent disabilities and disfigurements, and divorce. Additional outcomes depend on the psychological resilience and social reintegration capacity of the abused individuals, inside and outside their families.

## IV. Suicide

Suicide is regarded as a relatively recent phenomenon within Iraqi society. In its current manifestation, data, and mechanisms, it represents an emergent issue influenced by both external and internal, subjective and social factors and circumstances. As a social fact, suicide can only be comprehended through its relationship with other social phenomena; therefore, it cannot be analyzed in isolation from poverty, unemployment, social environmental pressures, and family disintegration within Iraqi society.<sup>(1)</sup> This underscores its nature as a social phenomenon with structural determinants. Additionally, individual factors such as life pressures, feelings of frustration, isolation, and alienation contribute to suicidal behavior. Consequently, an integrated cognitive framework that considers subjective, social, and environmental factors is essential for interpreting suicide.

Building on this understanding, the analysis of suicide in Iraqi society necessitates an objective examination of its origins, developmental trajectories, trends, and contributing factors. A distinctive feature of suicide in Iraq is the lack of clarity surrounding its reality and underlying dynamics, as it often overlaps with homicide cases. Many suicide incidents are enveloped in criminal suspicions; however, this does not negate the presence of genuine suicide cases across various societal segments. Despite discrepancies in suicide statistics—particularly between governmental and non-governmental sources—all sources concur

(1) Emile Durkheim posited that suicide is not an instance of individual madness, monomania, or delirium; instead, he maintained that it was a social tendency that developed steadily within all human societies, from childhood into advanced old age (Durkheim, 2011, p. 27).

Table 7-1: Suicide Cases in Iraq (2016–2022).

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
343	449	519	588	644	864	1,073

that suicide cases in Iraq increased notably in 2022 compared to the previous year. According to former Human Rights Commission member 'Alī al-Bayyātī, numerous homicide cases recorded by the Ministry of Interior and other authorities are classified as suicides. al-Bayyātī further indicated that suicide rates among women surpass those among men, raising concerns about potential murders or domestic violence precipitating suicides. He also observed that, contrary to global trends where older age groups exhibit higher suicide rates, in Iraq, younger individuals are predominantly affected. Highlighting discrepancies between figures released by the Ministry of Interior and the Judicial Council, he called for the establishment of specialized committees and centers to mitigate the phenomenon and provide psychological support to those at risk or who have attempted suicide (Ultra Iraq, 2022).

The Ministry of Interior disclosed, for the first time, suicide statistics in Iraq over the seven-year period from 2016 to 2022 (Table 7-1). These figures demonstrate a consistent upward trend in suicide cases. Major General Khālid al-Muḥannā attributes this increase to factors including population growth, economic conditions, unemployment, domestic violence, cybercrime, and electronic blackmail (Shafaq News, 2023). Conversely, the Vice President of the Strategic Center for Human Rights in Iraq, Ḥāzim al-Rudaynī, reported over 700 suicide cases in 2022. The Human Rights Commission corroborated that Iraq records approximately 600–700 suicide cases annually, with global data suggesting that each completed suicide corresponds to two attempted suicides. Brigadier General Ghālib al-'Aṭṭīyah, Director of Community Police, noted an increase in suicide cases, particularly among youth, exceeding 100 cases in the first two months of 2022. He identified unemployment, abuse, family disintegration, drug use, and electronic blackmail—especially among females—as contributing factors. Although Baghdād reported the highest number of cases due to its population size, the Brigadier General emphasized that prevalence rates, rather than absolute numbers, provide a more accurate comparison. Suicide incidents were notably frequent in the governorates of Kirkūk, Dhī-Qār, Diyālā, and Baghdād. He also highlighted the detrimental role of social media, which sometimes disseminates information on suicide methods. The Community Police actively engage in educational and awareness initiatives to curb the phenomenon, intensifying efforts during periods such as examination seasons when suicide rates tend to rise.

A security source from Dhī-Qār Governorate reported over 42 suicide cases in the first half of 2022, including the suicide of two young men and a girl (separate incidents) in 'Īd al-Aḍḥā. Economic hardship and familial traditions, including marriage and personal freedoms, were identified as influential factors. Diyālā also recorded a high number of suicide attempts. Ṣalāḥ Mahdī, Director of the Human Rights Commission in Diyālā, stated that 23 suicide deaths occurred in the current year, with 65% of victims under 35 years of age. Additionally, 25 individuals were

rescued from suicide attempts. He noted that academic failure prompted three suicide deaths and five rescue cases among students, with parental psychological pressure and bullying cited as underlying causes. He further remarked on the difficulty of obtaining accurate suicide attempt data due to familial reluctance to report such incidents. Common methods of suicide in Diyālā include shooting and hanging among men, and medication overdose and burning among women (Ultra Iraq, 2022).

While statistical data are crucial for understanding suicide trends and prevalence, they are not exhaustive due to several factors:

- Social stigma, customs, and traditions often lead to underreporting, particularly in cases involving honor-related issues among women.
- Fear of legal repercussions deters reporting of suicide cases.
- Political and security considerations affect the reliability of data from governmental and non-governmental sources.
- The conflation of homicide, suicide, and drug overdose deaths complicates accurate data collection and analysis.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative to identify the motives and causes of suicide. Drawing on Emile Durkheim's typology and causation of suicide,<sup>(1)</sup> it is evident that anomic suicide is prevalent in Iraqi society. This form of suicide is associated with dissatisfaction, despair, and protest against life itself. It is primarily rooted in social causes but varies according to individual temperament (Durkheim, 2011, p. 378). Economic hardship, poverty, adverse social conditions, and familial and social pressures are significant contributors to suicidal behavior.

Anomie might be a suitable idea for interpreting the phenomenon of suicide in Iraqi society. Anomie, which means lawlessness, disorder, and normlessness, refers to a disruption of structure and a lack of a rule or standard for behavior through which normal (typical) behavior can be measured or distinguished from abnormal (atypical) behavior. When anomie prevails in a society, social relations and values are afflicted by many forms of conflict and contradiction in a way that the social requirements and duties an individual encounters in their daily life become contradictory (Kārah, 1985, p. 242). According to Durkheim, anomie reflects a society's diminished capacity to regulate desires and control the fulfillment of instincts and whims, undermining confidence in social organization and prompting rebellion and deviance (Kārah, 1985, p. 248). Contemporary Iraq faces complex, intertwined crises that exhaust individuals and confine their aspirations within narrow limits. The resulting unemployment and delayed workforce integration exacerbate frustration and despair, particularly among youth who perceive the loss of their existential projects and productive roles (Hijāzī, 2006). These conditions are exacerbated by feelings of marginalization and deprivation, leading individuals to contemplate surrender (Hijāzī, 2006, p. 209) and, ultimately, suicide.

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(1) Durkheim identifies several distinct types of suicide, which consist of egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide, and fatalistic suicide.

## V. Human Trafficking and Begging

Human trafficking represents one of the most perilous and multifaceted challenges confronting contemporary societies. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, often concealed within practices such as fraud, begging, exploitation, and forced labor, complicating its detection. The insidious nature of human trafficking is underscored by the fact that some victims remain unaware of their exploitation. Moreover, it has evolved into a form of organized crime, currently recognized as the fastest-growing sector of transnational organized crime. Consequently, the global community, including Iraq, has acknowledged the severity of this issue, culminating in the adoption of an international protocol aimed at preventing, suppressing, and punishing human trafficking, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Within Iraq, the Central Committee for Combatting Human Trafficking continues its efforts, albeit at a moderate pace, to mitigate the diverse manifestations of human trafficking observed throughout 2022. Brigadier General Wisām al-Zubaydī, Director of Combatting Human Trafficking for the al-Karkh district, reported that the highest incidences of human trafficking occur in Baghdād and Erbil, predominantly within nightclub venues and primarily affecting women and children. He further disclosed the interception of 30 organ trafficking operations and 60 human trafficking operations prior to their completion in 2022, with several suspects apprehended and prosecuted in accordance with the law (Rudaw Arabia, 2022).

On November 14, 2022, the Ministry of Interior announced the successful prevention of all human trafficking crimes in Baghdād during the year, revealing the dismantling of a trafficking network with connections extending to Turkey and Ukraine. The Director of Human Trafficking Investigations for the al-Karkh district informed the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that human trafficking has increasingly exploited social media platforms, particularly fraudulent Facebook pages targeting minors and youth, alongside the forced labor exploitation of foreign workers. al-Zubaydī emphasized that while the crime remains contained, multiple trafficking attempts—ranging from 80 to 90 annually in Baghdād—were thwarted. He clarified that trafficking lacks a fixed location, with victims often lured to neighboring or foreign countries (INA, 2022, November 14).

The 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report classified Iraq within Tier 2, indicating that although the Iraqi government does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, it is making significant efforts. The report noted enhancements in law enforcement activities during 2022; however, it highlighted inconsistencies in the Iraqi Anti-Trafficking Law, which requires evidence of violence, fraud, or coercion for child trafficking for sexual exploitation to be criminalized. The Ministry of Interior identified 81 trafficking victims, including 38 sex trafficking victims (comprising 16 adult females, three adult males, four adults identifying as LGBTQ+, and 15 children), 17 forced labor victims (including two children), and 26 victims of unspecified exploitation (two adult males, seven

adult females, and 17 children). This represented an increase from the previous period, which recorded 58 victims. Of these, 27 were referred to a trafficking victims' shelter managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Baghdād, while 35 foreign victims were directed to a non-governmental organization for safe shelter. Remaining victims received healthcare or remained with family by choice. The Kurdistan Regional Government reported identifying 77 victims for the first time, including 34 labor trafficking victims (32 females and two males) and 43 foreigners subjected to unspecified exploitation, with 72 referred to protection services.

Human trafficking constitutes a complex and pervasive issue that transcends national boundaries. Iraq's capacity to combat this organized crime is limited without international cooperation and collaboration with relevant organizations. Domestically, security efforts combined with community and non-governmental organization involvement can mitigate the risks and combat active forms of trafficking, particularly in Baghdād, where begging has become notably prevalent.

The economic conditions and prevailing socio-cultural environment have significantly contributed to the proliferation of certain trafficking forms. Networks exploit political and security vulnerabilities to achieve financial gain through egregious practices such as sexual exploitation, servitude, forced labor, and increasingly sophisticated begging methods.

Begging, a longstanding social phenomenon, briefly diminished in Iraq during the early 1980s following the enactment of the Social Welfare Law No. 126 of 1980. However, its contemporary manifestations have evolved, adopting professionalized and organized methods that simulate genuine need and generate substantial financial returns. Begging now employs strategic temporal and spatial tactics to maximize efficacy.

In 2022, Baghdād witnessed a significant presence of beggars from diverse nationalities, some reportedly exploited by organized groups operating beyond the oversight of security forces. Begging activities were especially prominent among girls and children at intersections, religious sites, and commercial areas. Accompanying behaviors, such as car window washing at traffic stops, intimidation, and verbal abuse toward non-contributors, often provoke public anger rather than sympathy.

The emergence of electronic begging (e-begging) has further complicated the phenomenon, requiring considerable intelligence and persuasive skill to solicit funds. This method frequently involves intermediaries who employ fabricated narratives to manipulate donors, exploiting human empathy without arousing suspicion.

Despite sporadic governmental interventions, the response to begging remains insufficient. The Ministry of Interior has acknowledged the existence of organized begging mafias and warned against the exploitation of women and children. Major General Khālid al-Muḥannā, the Ministry's spokesperson, addressed the Iraqi News Channel on January 5, 2022, highlighting the expansion

of begging as a multifaceted social issue necessitating comprehensive solutions. He reported ongoing police campaigns targeting begging, particularly where children's safety is at risk, and detailed the arrest of individuals managing groups of beggars, emphasizing that arrested individuals often conceal the identities of those orchestrating these operations (NRT TV, 2022).

Accurate statistics on the number of beggars remain elusive due to the clandestine nature of some begging activities and fluctuating numbers influenced by varying circumstances. Consequently, the persistence and potential growth of begging are likely unless sustainable, systemic solutions replace temporary measures and enforcement leniency.

On July 18, 2022, the Director of the Strategic Center for Human Rights in Iraq advocated for the development of a national strategy to address begging, citing the presence of four million unemployed individuals. He characterized begging as a natural consequence of poverty, unemployment, and wealth inequality, noting its exacerbation despite existing criminalization laws. The phenomenon encompasses political, economic, and social dimensions, affecting not only Iraqis but also foreign nationals, including the exploitation of teenage girls and infants. He emphasized the necessity of a national strategy, as security campaigns and short-term detentions have failed to eradicate begging. Furthermore, he underscored the importance of shelters in rehabilitating and training beggars for employment (Shafaq News, 2022).

Begging is intrinsically linked to broader economic, social, and political factors and often constitutes a form of human trafficking, particularly in the exploitation of women and children. Effective mitigation requires coordinated efforts addressing related issues such as illegal migration, extortion, drug trafficking, and other expanding forms of human trafficking across Iraq.

## VI. Forced Displacement

Over the past five decades, Iraq has undergone significant demographic transformations influenced by a range of internal and external factors, with displacement and migration emerging as particularly salient phenomena. The most substantial and extensive population movement in Iraq's modern history occurred in 2014, and its repercussions persist to the present day. Consequently, analyzing the population dynamics amid emergency and irregular movements presents a complex challenge, necessitating continuous monitoring of displacement, migration, and return patterns, sometimes on a quarterly basis, as exemplified by the displacement tracking matrix developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix reported in Master List Report No. 127 dated September 30, 2022, there were 1,173,812 internally displaced persons (IDPs), comprising 201,614 families residing across 2,729 locations (Table 7-2). This matrix documented a reduction of 3,422 individuals in the displaced population compared to the April–June period of the same year. This

Table 7-2: Number of IDPs According to Housing Type (2022).

Private Housing	Camps	Critical Shelter Arrangements(*)	Unknown
889,092	179,360	104,598	762
76%	10%	9%	<1%

(\*) Locations characterized by limited access to livelihoods and basic services.

Table 7-3: Movement of IDPs According to Displacement Duration (2022).

First-Time Displacement	Secondary Displacement	Failed Return	Total
1,974	5,867	828	8,670

Table 7-4: IDP Returnees According to Place of Residence (2022).

Original Place of Residence	Critical Shelter Arrangements	Private Housing	Unknown
4,774,332	190,074	14,214	54
96%	4%	<1%	<1%

gradual decline appears to be associated with significant barriers impeding the return of many displaced persons to their areas of origin, alongside the fact that approximately 98% continue to experience protracted displacement. During this period, 8,670 displacement movements were recorded (categorized in Table 7-3).

Regarding returnees, the displacement tracking matrix identified 4,978,674 individuals, comprising 829,779 families across 2,201 locations as of September 30, 2022, distributed as shown in (Table 7-4).

The matrix indicated an increase of 8,886 individuals relative to the April–June 2022 period. The limited return rates are attributed primarily to inadequate livelihood opportunities and substandard housing conditions in areas of origin, as well as the relative safety and security in displacement locations. Nationally, the return rate reached 82%, consistent with previous assessments. It is noteworthy that 829 individuals were recorded as having failed to return to their original residences.

Furthermore, the digital report on relief efforts issued by the Ministry of Migration and Displaced as of August 14, 2022 (Ministry of Migration and Displaced, 2022), provided data concerning IDPs and returnees (Table 7-5).

Table 7-5: Returnees and IDPs According to Ministry of Migration and Displaced Data (2022).

Detail	Number
Displaced families remaining in displacement	444,815
Displaced female heads of household	66,820
Returning families by gender of head of household	493,657 (415,016 male, 78,641 female)
IDP camps	28
Closed camps	148
Male heads of households	359,715
Female heads of households	66,820

Despite nearly a decade since the initial causes of displacement, the issue remains unresolved. The security situation in areas of origin has not fully stabilized, and economic and social conditions continue to hinder the return of some families. Additionally, certain displaced individuals and families have established a degree of stability—economic, security, and psychological—in displacement areas. The potential loss of specific benefits upon return may also constitute a significant deterrent. Therefore, addressing this persistent challenge requires a concerted political will and active social engagement to develop and implement effective solutions, ensuring that governmental and community efforts are not obstructed by vested interests.

## VII. International Migration

Migration has evolved from a localized issue within Iraq and other nations to an international concern, as its impacts have extended to numerous countries worldwide, particularly those frequently targeted as destinations by migrants. While internal migration within Iraq over the past two decades has predominantly been forced, external migration has largely been voluntary. The prevailing conditions in Iraq during this period significantly motivated many individuals to seek alternatives to alter their life circumstances. Migration abroad represented a refuge and the most effective means to achieve legitimate aspirations; however, this path entailed considerable risks. Numerous Iraqi migrants lost their lives at sea, and many families fell victim to migration mafias. Human trafficking was a pervasive issue accompanying migration to European countries, and border security forces in some nations caused fatalities among Iraqi migrants.

Reports have emerged concerning mass and clandestine executions of Iraqi refugees by Polish soldiers near the border with Belarus. According to the Belarusian investigative committee, an Iraqi delegation visiting the capital, Minsk, received evidence and information regarding these executions. The committee documented criminal acts against 135 Iraqi citizens who suffered injuries due to violence and the use of special measures by Polish security forces. Investigations addressed three cases involving physical harm and unlawful expulsions resulting in deaths of Iraqi individuals. The reports indicate that Iraqi authorities obtained information about violations by officials in Poland, including illegal deportations, cruelty, torture, and deliberate neglect in providing assistance, which led to fatalities among refugees from Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced an investigation into the veracity of reports concerning Iraqi migrants facing life-threatening risks. On June 22, 2022, the ministry's spokesperson affirmed close monitoring of information disseminated through agencies and media outlets (Ultra Iraq, 2022, June 23).

On March 1, 2022, the spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the arrival of 223 Iraqis from Ukraine to Poland. The ministry also reported the arrival of Iraqis and their families from Ukraine at Iraqi embassies in

Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Additionally, 160 Iraqis, including students, were evacuated from Ukraine to Poland and Moldova, with the Iraqi embassy documenting the entry of 157 community members from Ukraine into Polish territory, alongside the evacuation of three Iraqi students across the Moldovan border (Ultra Iraq, 2022, June 23).

The head of the Association of Returnee Migrants from Europe in the Kurdistan Region disclosed that 29 citizens, predominantly youth, lost their lives during migration attempts to Europe in 2022, including seven residents of the Rāperîn Administration area. Some bodies were repatriated, while others remain missing, with ongoing efforts by the Regional Government to recover the remaining remains (Baghdad Today, 2022, January 24). Previously, the association revealed that approximately 20,000 citizens from the Kurdistan Region migrated to European Union countries in 2022, with 19,200 individuals traveling via the Turkish coasts and the Belarusian border (Baghdad Today, 2022, January 24).

Government efforts to address the challenges faced by Iraqi migrants have been continuous. In January 2022, 4,000 migrants voluntarily returned to Iraq, facilitated by ten special flights organized by Iraqi Airways, as confirmed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

A report based on German government statistics indicated that Iraqis residing and seeking asylum in Germany constitute a significant population, numbering approximately 250,000 individuals. They rank fifth among refugee populations in Germany, following Syria, Kosovo, Albania, and Serbia.

Furthermore, the National Committee for Monitoring Iraqis Abroad called on June 12, 2022, for comprehensive dialogue with European countries implementing forced return policies to encourage Iraqi migrants to return. The committee emphasized the importance of collaboration with relevant authorities, including the Iraqi Council of Representatives and consulates, to address issues related to forced returns. It also advocated for the registration of Iraqis living abroad through a form prepared by the Ministry of Migration and Displaced (Baghdad Today, 2022, January 24).

Migration is a fundamental human right recognized by divine religions and international treaties. Countries such as Iraq have experienced crises and exceptional circumstances compelling many citizens to migrate. Similar circumstances may prompt migration from other stable countries, as observed with citizens of Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, international organizations and the United Nations should adopt humanitarian principles that obligate states to treat migrants with moral and humanitarian responsibility, avoiding practices that undermine human dignity, such as cruelty and contempt.

## **VIII. Civil Society Developments in Iraq 2022**

The concept of civil society is characterized by a complex and multifaceted history, marked by diverse and often contradictory interpretations, as well as numerous transformations influenced by shifts in production modes, trade

expansion, and the rise of the nation-state. These factors have collectively contributed to significant social changes, underscoring the pivotal role of political and economic variables in the evolution, development, and maturation of civil society (Nāzīm & Sāliḥ, 2007, pp. 5-6).

The emergence of civil society is intrinsically linked to the success of political and bourgeois revolutions, which accomplished many democratic objectives within the frameworks of enlightenment, rationality, and scientific inquiry. The triumph of European revolutions facilitated the transition from a “society of nature,” governed by the doctrine of divine right, to a democratic society underpinned by the scientific revolution, which redefined the relationship between humans and science, as well as reason and the scientific method (al-Şūrānī, 2004). From this vantage point, the developments of civil society in Iraq are reflective of broader global transformations and revolutions, particularly those concerning human rights, the combat against violence and extremism, and the protection of vulnerable groups such as children and women.

In alignment with this perspective, the Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) within the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers intensified its activities. On February 3, 2022, the Director General of the NGO Directorate convened with various organizations operating in Iraq that contribute significantly to supporting displaced persons and addressing their essential needs, including those that focus on women's empowerment, social peace, the rejection of violence and extremism, anti-corruption efforts, and the promotion of democracy. The Director General commended the humanitarian efforts of these organizations in aiding displaced families across Iraqi governorates and emphasized the directorate's commitment to providing support and overcoming obstacles impeding such assistance. Furthermore, on February 11, 2022, the Director General highlighted the importance of involving civil society organizations in advancing the information technology sector and disseminating digital transformation concepts within social circles to establish a foundation for the digital transformation project.

Regarding the social responsibilities incumbent upon civil society in Iraq, the NGO Directorate formalized a cooperation agreement on April 14, 2022, with the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office. The Director General characterized this agreement as a crucial step toward fostering cooperation and information exchange between the entities, thereby advancing Iraq's security and safeguarding it from money laundering, terrorist financing, and the exploitation of non-profit organizations for criminal purposes. He further noted that all relevant parties within official and semi-official state departments, as well as the private sector, are mandated to provide information to the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office either automatically or upon request.

To strengthen partnerships with active stakeholders both within and beyond Iraq, the NGO Directorate announced the launch of the “Taḏāmūn” (Solidarity) project on June 26, 2022, in collaboration with the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP). This initiative represents a priority for the UNDP and results from cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Solidarity Fund to enhance the role of civil society organizations in Iraq.

In pursuit of a more proactive role for civil society organizations, the NGO Directorate and the UNDP initiated the second phase of capacity-building workshops aimed at combating violent extremism on October 24, 2022. These workshops targeted numerous NGOs across various governorates, focusing on enhancing their capabilities to develop tools and strategies for preventing extremism through a comprehensive community-based approach. The Director General emphasized that the expertise and experience contributed by international partners are instrumental in formulating strategies to address the root causes of violence and establishing a foundation for comprehensive cooperation against all forms of violence. He expressed optimism regarding continued collaboration with the United Nations to mitigate threats that undermine the fabric of civil society.

Concerning the operational movement of civil society, the NGO Directorate published its 2022 report on organizational mobility. The Director General explained that the directorate's adopted system facilitated the movement of foreign organizations operating in Iraq, encompassing personnel, vehicles, and work areas. He added that the operational platform is the product of sustained collaborative efforts among the NGO Directorate, the National Operations Center, and iMMAP, with oversight from the United Nations Mission in Iraq. According to the Director General, the platform processed over 2,480 movement requests across 17 governorates in 2022, involving 9,408 foreign workers and 46,385 Iraqi personnel, utilizing 18,611 vehicles to conduct activities in sectors such as environment, education, agriculture, violence against women, peacebuilding, and health.

At a related level, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Iraq convened a consultative meeting on November 16, 2022, with the NGO Directorate and the al-Aghşān Foundation for Agricultural and Environmental Development to deliberate on a roadmap for civil society participation in Iraq. This initiative underscores the critical role of civil society organizations in ensuring food security and poverty reduction, as well as their competencies in designing and implementing programs at regional, national, and local levels, particularly in areas such as natural resource management, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation.

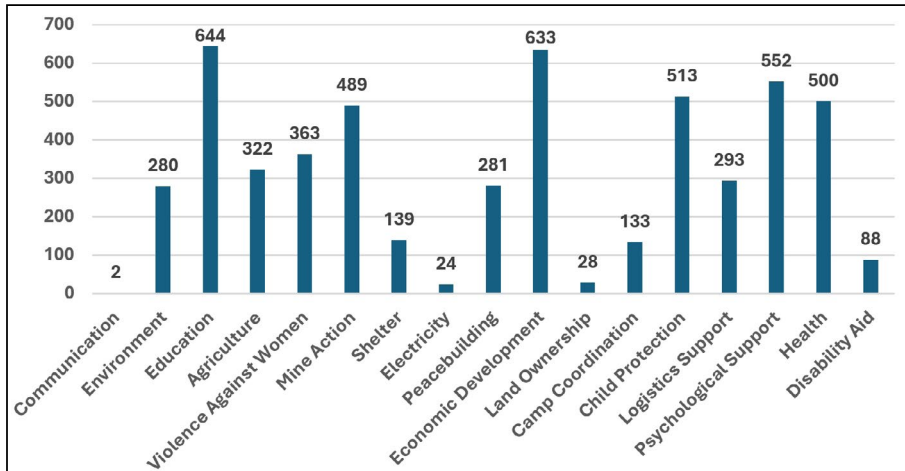
Table 7-6 and Figure 7-1 present comprehensive data on the operational movement and activities of non-governmental organizations in Iraq during 2022, as compiled by the NGO Directorate within the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers (NGO Directorate, 2023).

In the realm of humanitarian activities and events, the largest gathering of young "hope makers" under the Golden Dream Initiative was held in its second session in December 2022. This event was organized by the Iraqi Home Founda-

Table 7-6: The Operational Movement of NGOs in Iraq (2022).

Submitted Requests	Issued Requests	Governor-ates	Iraqi Experts	Foreign Experts	Vehicles	Beneficiary Organizations	Average Request Issuance Time
2,480	2,480 (100%)	17	46,385	9,408	18,611	117	30:10

Figure 7-1: The Activities of NGOs in Iraq (2022).



tion, the Central Bank’s “Tamwīn” (Provision) Initiative Fund, and the NGO Directorate of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. It aimed to select and honor charitable and humanitarian projects initiated by youth groups, facilitating the launch of these projects to foster positive community change. This edition was notable for the participation of approximately 9,500 young men and women from various governorates, with the Golden Dream ceremony acquiring an Arab dimension through the involvement of hope makers from Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, and Lebanon.

Conversely, the al-’Ayn Social Care Foundation reported on April 10, 2022, that it has sponsored over 137,000 orphans since its establishment in 2006. The foundation’s staff have completed and renovated more than 500 houses nationwide. The foundation’s head stated in an interview with the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that the number of orphans sponsored by the foundation since its inception has reached 137,620 continuing orphans, with 77,998 receiving monthly aid, while the living conditions of the remaining orphans have improved (INA, 2022, April 10).

Regarding intellectual and dialogue activities, the al-Amal Association continued its efforts in 2022 by addressing various topics, including the draft labor pension and social security law, social participation in decision-making and policy formulation within democratic systems, cybercrimes and concerns about restrictions on freedoms, the impact of climate change on water resources, the role of civil society in shaping public policies, and voluntary work in Iraq. Additionally, the association conducted training and qualification workshops in the governorates of Baghdād, Najaf, and Kirkūk.

Despite the commendable efforts of certain civil society organizations in Iraq, significant social challenges persist, and some life domains require increased attention from these organizations. This situation necessitates the establishment of partnerships between governmental and non-governmental institutions to identify and address areas and communities that remain underserved and in need of support from both the state and society.

## IX. Agenda for the New Year

Iraq currently faces numerous and multifaceted challenges, some of which are strategic in nature, while others are immediate and influenced by both local and international contexts. These challenges include:

- **Unemployment and Poverty:** These social phenomena encompass psychological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. The living conditions of the unemployed and impoverished individuals result in significant subjective and social consequences. According to Jeremy Bentham, deprivation of livelihood compels individuals to commit severe crimes driven by necessity. In July 2022, the Ministry of Planning, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), reported a national unemployment rate of 16.5%, indicating that one in five individuals in the labor force is unemployed. Female unemployment was notably higher at 28.2%, twice the rate for males (14.7%). Youth unemployment (ages 15–24) was particularly alarming at 35.8%, nearly triple the rate for those aged 25 and above (11.2%). Poverty rates were estimated between 20% and 23%, with liberated areas experiencing rates as high as 41%, and the southern regions approximately 32%. The governorate of al-Muthanná exhibited the highest poverty rate at 52%, followed by al-Dīwānīyah at 49%.
- **Corruption:** Despite its complex origins and multifarious effects, corruption remains a form of social disorganization necessitating urgent intervention. Iraq continues to rank among the most corrupt nations globally. The Ministry of Planning acknowledged the existence of 6,000 state-funded projects that remain unimplemented. Nonetheless, efforts to combat corruption persist; the Investment Commission reported the recovery of over 400,000 dunams of state land associated with ghost or incomplete investment projects, valued at approximately 90 trillion dinars (equivalent to \$62 billion).
- **Political Divisions and Conflicts:** Post-2003 political conflicts have exacerbated divisions among political factions. Nearly two decades after transitioning from authoritarian rule to a democratic political system, political tensions and deadlocks persist, impeding progress and social development. The 2021 early elections exemplified these conflicts, with disputes delaying government formation for over a year and postponing budget approvals, thereby destabilizing the country on multiple levels.

- **Families and Children of ISIS:** This issue represents one of the most complex challenges confronting the government. It transcends national boundaries, as some family members hold foreign nationalities, necessitating adherence to international agreements and treaties. Certain agreements, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, mandate the abolition of the death penalty for ISIS-affiliated citizens. The government faces significant international pressure while contending with legitimate security concerns, given the country's exposure to large-scale, organized terrorist operations supported by known states.
- **Narcotics:** Drug abuse has emerged as a critical social problem with extensive negative repercussions. It stems from an interconnected system of issues that continue to escalate despite periodic containment efforts. The phenomenon reflects broader social changes and crises, contributing to increased apathy, isolation, and rebellion among affected populations. There is a risk that drug abuse will expand beyond current demographics, particularly among those who are alienated or frustrated.
- **Uncontrolled Weapons:** The proliferation of unlicensed weapons poses a significant threat to civil peace and governmental authority. Their presence incites fear and panic within society and has been used against security forces on multiple occasions. Previous administrations have failed to effectively confiscate illegal weapons or implement practical measures to restrict weapon possession to state authorities.

## X. Obligations for the Coming Year

Key obligations for the forthcoming year include:

- Developing a national employment policy aimed at mitigating unemployment, drawing on international experiences and the expertise of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- Implementing advanced social protection systems to broaden inclusion and enhance service quality for eligible populations, thereby preserving human dignity and fostering social stability.
- Reviewing and amending the Draft Domestic Violence Law to safeguard family unity, with expedited approval and enforcement to address both traditional and contemporary forms of violence.
- Combating all forms of human trafficking, particularly involving children and women, including forced labor, coerced begging, sexual exploitation, and smuggling for commercial purposes.
- Addressing drug trafficking and abuse through awareness campaigns highlighting health, economic, and security risks, alongside the development of specialized health centers for treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration.

- Managing issues related to internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and families associated with ISIS, focusing on legal documentation, social rehabilitation, and expediting reintegration for those cleared by security screenings.

## XI. Strategies to Address Challenges and Obligations

Iraq confronts a constellation of complex and interrelated challenges requiring evidence-based and pragmatic approaches. Policies must integrate both preventive and remedial measures, recognizing the urgency of timely intervention. Recommended strategies include:

- **Addressing Poverty Belts:** Particularly in urban areas such as the capital, Baghdād, through job creation, income-generating projects, and enhanced services and recreational opportunities in peripheral neighborhoods (slums).
- **Combating Corruption:** By targeting root causes rather than temporary fixes, promoting responsibility, trust, and legal adherence through strengthening the judiciary and collaboration with law enforcement.
- **Mitigating Political Conflicts:** Although challenging, fostering consensus among political rivals by prioritizing national interests over partisan agendas and adhering to democratic principles as outlined in the Constitution.
- **International Collaboration Regarding ISIS families:** Engaging with states, international organizations, and United Nations bodies to develop immediate and long-term solutions for the issue of ISIS families, while safeguarding Iraq's security.
- **Comprehensive Drug Policies:** Tackling the socio-economic conditions that facilitate drug abuse and trafficking, recognizing the broader security and social implications.
- **Effective Weapons Control:** Enforcing policies to confiscate unlicensed weapons and regulating licensed weapon use to ensure social safety and security.

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# 8. Human Rights

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## I. Introduction

The country experienced a renewed wave of instability due to escalating political challenges, accompanied by a significant economic impact resulting from the devaluation of the Dinar against the Dollar. These issues were further exacerbated by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the persistent presence of armed groups operating beyond state control. Concurrently, Iraq faced substantial numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and was influenced by considerable regional and international conflicts. Political instability was also heightened by the transition from the al-Kāzīmī government to the al-Sūdānī government. It is anticipated that ongoing economic and social difficulties, coupled with political conflicts, will intensify challenges related to human rights, as poverty continues to impede development and remains a critical issue for many Iraqis. Notably, Iraq holds the highest poverty rate among middle-income countries. Urgent priorities for Iraq include substantial investments in basic infrastructure and housing, the restoration of essential services, the creation of jobs, and the reinforcement of social and security cohesion. Nearly five years following the defeat of the ISIS organization, Iraq remains among the top ten countries globally with the highest number of IDPs requiring sustainable and permanent solutions to enable their full participation in society and the economy.

As a founding member of the United Nations, Iraq has committed to upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related protocols and annexes. Compliance with human rights obligations is a vital indicator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), securing international support, and restoring confidence in Iraq as a civilized member of the international community. Despite ratifying numerous international covenants and treaties concerning human rights, many remain confined to rigid textual frameworks requiring transformation into binding legal legislation and implementation within the national legal system. Others exist as non-binding international covenants and treaties that necessitate incorporation into national legislation. Some remain in draft or bill form, awaiting enactment as binding legislation by the Parliament.

## II. High Commission for Human Rights

Article 102 of the Constitution of the Republic of Iraq mandates the establishment of the High Commission for Human Rights, with its operations regulated by Law No. 53 of 2008. The Commission, legally recognized as the High Commission for Human Rights, possesses legal personality and financial and administrative independence. Its headquarters are located in Baghdād, and it is accountable to the Council of Representatives. The Commission maintains offices and branches in regions and governorates not organized into a region. Its primary objectives include ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights, safeguarding rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution, laws, treaties, and international agreements ratified by Iraq, and fostering the values and culture of human rights (Article 3).

Since its inception in 2008, the Commission has been governed by two terms of the Board of Commissioners until August 8, 2022, when members were retired by a decision of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Muḥammad al-Ḥal-būsī, pursuant to Article 8 (Sixth) of the amended High Commission for Human Rights Law No. 53 of 2008.

Regarding this decision, 'Alī al-Bayyātī, a former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, stated that the current term commenced in July 2017 and concluded in July 2021. He noted that upon the dissolution of the Council at the end of the term, a new Board of Commissioners should have been formed. However, for a year, they were instructed not to perform legal and administrative duties due to the absence of a new council. al-Bayyātī indicated that the Board operated without legal authority, management, or powers, and no judicial lawsuits concerning human rights violations were referred during this period. He attributed this flaw to Parliament's failure to establish a new board or maintain the existing one, similar to other institutions such as the Presidency of the Republic and the Premiership, whose operations were extended due to parliamentary disruptions (al-Sā'ah Network, 2023).

The Council of Representatives was unable to form a new Commission Board during the recent period. A committee of experts was to be selected, and the selection of the High Commission for Human Rights Board was presented in the last parliamentary session. However, the session did not convene, and the matter was postponed without resolution until the end of 2022. The parliamentary order referring members to retirement indicated that the referral was effective from August 3, 2021. Consequently, the Commission's operations between August 3, 2021, and August 8, 2022, lacked legal authorization, constituting an obstruction of the Commission's work and undermining human rights, particularly given the ongoing violations.

Political disputes among parliamentary blocs and forces significantly contributed to the suspension of the Commission's activities, alongside the failure to agree on appointing a new Board of Trustees after the expiration of the previous four-year term. Political factions failed to reach consensus on selecting the new

Council members, comprising 11 members including the Commission's head. The Commission's mandate expired without reconstitution, resulting in a legal vacuum for the institution responsible for monitoring human rights issues in Iraq, for which Parliament bears primary responsibility (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2021).

### III. Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

Approximately five years following the cessation of the ISIS invasion in specific governorates, an estimated 1.173 million individuals remain internally displaced. To sustain the achievements of stabilization initiatives, restore social cohesion, and safeguard communities from reverting to conflict and violent extremism, it is imperative to support community reconciliation and reintegration. Consequently, attention must be directed toward assisting vulnerable groups prone to exclusion and marginalization, particularly families stigmatized due to the perceived association of a family member with the ISIS organization, irrespective of the accuracy or extent of such association.

Iraq has experienced recurrent displacement in conflict-affected areas, resulting in persistent social structural challenges for substantial population segments. Displacement adversely affects populations through prolonged poverty cycles and deficiencies in fundamental needs, including dignified housing, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities.

Moreover, the absence of official civil documentation among displaced families restricts their access to aid, relief services, and prospects for food and human security. This issue is especially pronounced among female-headed households, which face additional barriers to securing sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, children may be compelled to discontinue schooling due to diminishing resources and increased difficulties in accessing education, such as insufficient financial means for transportation (United Nations Iraq, 2022, p. 22).

Empirical evidence reveals that displaced groups often inhabit precarious conditions characterized by overcrowded or unlawfully occupied dwellings, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to essential services. These circumstances heighten vulnerability to disease and adverse health outcomes. Furthermore, livelihood opportunities for internally displaced persons (IDPs) are frequently unstable, with most securing only temporary employment within informal sectors.

Since November 2022, with funding from the United States government and collaboration with local partners, the International Organization for Migration has assisted over 15,000 displaced families in obtaining adequate housing through repair, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts. This support facilitates durable solutions for those remaining displaced as Iraq advances into the post-conflict recovery phase. The International Organization for Migration continues to implement innovative and inclusive projects in return and resettlement areas to promote sustainable reintegration of IDPs via shelter rehabilitation, livelihood support, enhanced access to basic social services, and peacebuilding initiatives.

By March 2022, the government had closed and consolidated all IDP camps except for one in Nīnawá and another in al-Anbār, while 26 camps remained operational in the Kurdistan Region. This governmental action rendered thousands of displaced individuals homeless or compelled them into secondary displacement, depriving them of housing and access to fundamental services such as healthcare and education. At the end of 2022, over one million persons remained displaced (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 114).

In the last efforts to close camps during February and March 2022, security forces reportedly threatened displaced persons and forcibly evacuated camps in Nīnawá without providing relocation guidance, concurrently restricting their return to locations outside their original governorates. Both internally displaced persons and returnees faced eviction, home confiscation, or demolition due to perceived affiliations with the terrorist ISIS organization. Security forces also deliberately denied these individuals official documentation, including National IDs, essential for freedom of movement and access to healthcare and education.

Certain armed factions obstructed the return of thousands of IDPs to their original areas in Jurf al-Šakhr, south of Baghdād, based on perceived sympathies toward ISIS. In May 2022, a faction leader in Diyālā governorate advocated for the forced displacement of returnees following multiple ISIS attacks.

In late October 2022, Iraqi authorities reported the displacement of at least 227 families from a village in Diyālā after armed faction members attacked the village and set fire to several buildings, apparently in retaliation for a prior ISIS attack. Although financial aid was allocated to affected families, it did not facilitate their return. By early November 2022, displaced families numbered 300, following calls by faction leaders to replicate the Jurf al-Našr displacement (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 114).

## IV. Persons with Disabilities

On May 4, 2022, the International Committee of the Red Cross in Iraq reported that 15% of the Iraqi population comprises persons with disabilities. The committee's official spokesperson, Hibah 'Adnān, indicated that Iraq has a high prevalence of persons with disabilities, totaling approximately six million citizens, while physical rehabilitation centers and qualified therapists remain scarce. In mid-March 2022, the International Committee of the Red Cross inaugurated a new physical rehabilitation center in Erbil, northern Iraq. Spanning 14,630 square meters, it is the largest facility of its kind in the country, offering a comprehensive range of high-quality, sustainable physical rehabilitation services. Estimates suggest that over 600,000 Iraqis require physical rehabilitation, including 200,000 in need of prosthetics or orthotics (Ultra Iraq, 2022, May 4).

Persons with disabilities disproportionately endure the adverse effects of armed conflict, violence, and instability, compounded by barriers to accessing developmental and humanitarian services. Women with disabilities face heightened isolation due to social customs, stigma, and discrimination. The deaf

community experiences significant discrimination, while displaced persons and returnees with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles to achieving durable solutions. Accessibility challenges impede persons with disabilities from education, public spaces, transportation, and healthcare, exacerbated by negative societal attitudes (IOM, 2021).

Additionally, persons with disabilities struggle to obtain assistive devices and communication tools due to limited availability and high costs. Many remain unemployed with restricted access to skills training, employment, or business development support. Social protection payments are often inaccessible, resulting in minimal or nonexistent income and difficulty meeting basic needs (ESCWA, 2018, p. 12).

Although the federal government ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2012 and enacted the Law on the Care of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs No. 38 of 2013, implementation and enforcement remain inadequate. Parliamentary efforts are underway to amend the legislation.

## V. Women's Empowerment

The October 2021 elections marked a significant advancement for women, as they secured 95 out of 329 seats, reflecting an increase in representation from 25% in 2018 to 29%. Analysis of the data reveals that 57 women were elected outside the quota system by obtaining the highest number of votes in their respective electoral districts. This outcome demonstrates that women's representation in the new Council of Representatives has surpassed the minimum 25% threshold mandated in previous parliamentary terms.

Female candidates in the October 10, 2021 elections encountered challenges similar to those faced in prior elections, including gender-based online harassment and the defacement of their electoral advertisements and posters. They also confronted gender-based stereotypes, insufficient financial resources to conduct effective campaigns, and negative attitudes rooted in patriarchal authority. Additional barriers to women's participation in the country's economic recovery include discriminatory laws infringing upon their rights, limited employment opportunities, public harassment, and domestic violence. These factors, combined with persistent negative social norms, contribute to the exclusion of women from the workforce. Although some progress has been made concerning rural women, traditional practices continue to restrict their involvement in development programs and limit their access to credit, healthcare, social services, and community-level decision-making.

Women contribute significantly to the local economy in general and the rural economy in particular. However, their access to productive resources and employment opportunities remains constrained, impeding their capacity to improve their livelihoods and contribute effectively to economic growth, food security, and sustainable development within their communities and the whole nation.

Another challenge confronting women and girls—especially survivors of gender-based violence and female heads of households—is restricted access to housing, land, and property rights. Despite constitutional and legal provisions recognizing gender equality in ownership rights, these rights are undermined by illegal norms, traditions, and cultural practices that exclude women from land inheritance.

## VI. Violence Against Women

The Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights reported in June 2022 an increase in verbal harassment cases against women in various government and private institutions. Testimonies and interviews conducted by the Observatory indicate that schools are also experiencing harassment incidents involving both students and teachers. The deeply entrenched social stigma toward survivors of violence, particularly sexual violence, characterizes the Iraqi social environment. This stigma frequently results in “honor” killings or other crimes, including the mutilation or burning of hundreds of women and girls annually, which often go unreported to authorities. Even when survivors report gender-based violence, the judicial system frequently fails to prosecute perpetrators. Survivors face substantial challenges in accessing quality basic services, including socio-economic and legal assistance. Moreover, there are difficulties in obtaining affordable healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health care, alongside a severe lack of protection and referral mechanisms. The continued impunity for sexual and gender-related crimes perpetuates violence, as mechanisms to achieve gender justice remain limited (Emarat al-Youm, 2022).

Policy and legal reforms must be complemented by new strategies to effect meaningful change, with an emphasis on mainstreaming women’s rights and empowerment at institutional, local, regional, and national levels. In the absence of an official Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Iraq must strengthen women’s roles in decision-making forums, such as ministries and governorate offices. Reporting on conflict-related sexual violence remains insufficient due to entrenched gender inequality, lack of trust in the justice system, fear of retaliation, and social stigma codified in law, which permits the use of “honor” as a defense for perpetrators and allows them to marry their victims to avoid criminal charges.

Key factors contributing to declining education rates among rural women and increased non-enrollment of girls in secondary schools in southern regions include high fertility rates linked to early marriage and limited access to contraception. These conditions are often exacerbated by misinterpretations of religious texts, cultural and social norms, lack of awareness of women’s rights and potential, and institutional and legal barriers. Violence, insecurity, and instability confine Iraqi women and girls to traditional reproductive roles, restricting their access to employment and education. Violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has remained pervasive in Iraq over recent decades, while social and cultural norms continue to limit the participation of women and adolescent girls in their communities.

Women also endure discriminatory laws and social attitudes that reinforce inequality, alongside low levels of decision-making power in sexual and reproductive health matters. Additional barriers include biases in service delivery; for instance, the low representation of women in administrative positions is linked to social norms and public discourse that do not value women as leaders to the same extent as men.

Reports from international and local NGOs indicate an increase in gender-based violence in both domestic and public spheres. In March, an international NGO focused on women's rights estimated that gender-based violence increased by at least 75% during the COVID-19 lockdowns nationwide. Cases of child marriage also rose due to worsening economic conditions. Although federal and Kurdistan Regional Government authorities arrested some men responsible for killing or abusing female relatives, they failed to adequately address the full extent of violations or the sharp rise in domestic gender-based violence during lockdowns. Furthermore, the Council of Representatives did not prioritize enacting a domestic violence law despite mounting pressure and advocacy from civil society. In October 2022, unidentified assailants conducted defamation campaigns and threatened violence against female parliamentary candidates, destroying and defacing their campaign materials with impunity (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 113).

## VII. Press Freedom

The Supreme Judicial Council reported that the year 2022 was free from any crimes involving the killing of journalists. According to a report published in October 2022, four out of five cases concerning the killing of journalists between 2020 and 2021 were resolved, with the remaining case currently under trial in the competent criminal court. For 2022, no journalist killings were recorded; however, other assault cases were brought before the courts for appropriate action. Despite a relative improvement in human rights conditions, the Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq noted an increase in violations by official state bodies during 2022, although no killings or assassinations occurred. The association's executive director, Rayyā Fā'iq, emphasized that the absence of recorded killings does not necessarily indicate an improvement in journalistic and expressive freedoms. She attributed this to shifting political circumstances and the contraction of protest movements. Furthermore, Iraq continues to experience the highest rates of threats and displacement of journalists, particularly in southern regions where dozens have been displaced since 2019. Regarding violations in Kurdistan, Fā'iq highlighted the use of judicial mechanisms to convict journalists of crimes they did not commit, often categorized as publication offenses under the law (Jusoor Post, 2022).

Conversely, the Kurdistan Regional Government justified the systematic targeting of critics, journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society activists through judicial prosecutions under national security pretexts. Security forces arbitrarily arrested dozens of individuals for social media posts, news articles, or

reporting on demonstrations. In February 2022, a court in Erbil sentenced five activists and journalists to six years in prison each for activities related to their social media use and journalistic work, deeming them threats to the security and sovereignty of the Kurdistan Region. Charges were based on laws such as the 2003 National Security Law, the Law to Prevent the Misuse of Telecommunications Devices, and Articles 430–433 of the Penal Code criminalizing vaguely defined acts that are not internationally recognized as crimes. The trial was marked by serious violations of fair trial standards, including convictions based on coerced confessions, delayed provision of case documents to defense lawyers, and lack of investigations into torture allegations. In correspondence with Amnesty International, the Kurdistan Regional Government denied that the convictions were related to journalistic work; however, the organization's review found that the convictions were entirely based on social media messages pertinent to journalistic activities (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 113).

## VIII. Freedom of Expression Bill

On December 3, 2022, the Council of Representatives completed the first reading of the “Law on Freedom of Expression, Assembly, and Peaceful Demonstration” bill, submitted by the Human Rights Committee. Following an analytical review of the bill's provisions, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights asserted that the law aims to curtail citizens' public freedoms. Article 1 conditions freedom of expression on the absence of disturbance to public order and morals, a condition reiterated in Article 2 concerning the freedom of peaceful demonstration and the right to information. The center argued that terms such as “public order” and “public morals” are broad and vague, facilitating their use to imprison opponents and peaceful protesters. Moreover, Article 7 mandates citizens to obtain prior permission from the head of the administrative unit at least five days before any peaceful demonstration, effectively subjecting the right to protest to officials' political discretion. This law would repeal Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 19 of 2003, which required only notification rather than approval for public demonstrations (GCHR, 2022).

Additionally, Article 8 prohibits protesters from using slogans or statements that violate public order or morals, significantly restricting freedom of expression as authorities may interpret any protest activity accordingly. Article 9 denies students the right to peaceful demonstration, while Article 10 limits demonstration times between 7:00 AM and 10:00 PM, thereby ending the right to continuous peaceful sit-ins. Article 11 is particularly concerning as it authorizes security forces to use force to disperse protesters if their actions cause a “disturbance of security,” a vague phrase that could justify force against peaceful gatherings. Article 13 reinstates the Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 for violations related to expression and assembly, applying provisions that include prison sentences of one to two years for demonstrating without government approval (GCHR, 2022).

In response, the parliamentary Human Rights Committee issued a statement assuring the public that rights would be guaranteed. The committee emphasized that the law would not proceed without legal and constitutional amendments and incorporation of suggestions from all social segments. They underscored that the right to protest is constitutionally guaranteed but must be organized to protect citizens' and security forces' lives. The committee called for cooperation and urged civil society organizations not to fear the law, intending to remove punitive provisions (al-Mutalee, 2022).

Conversely, Rayyā Fā'iq, executive director of the Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq, asserted that the Council of Representatives manipulates bill drafts from previous parliamentary cycles and remains intent on wielding restrictive laws against civil society and journalists. Fāḍil al-Gharrāwī, a former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, noted that the draft law restricts freedoms and contains numerous loopholes and vague phrases, and that human rights activists have demanded a review to harmonize the law with the Constitution. Several MPs considered the bill restrictive if passed in its current form, highlighting that 21 of 31 paragraphs are punitive. Sarwah 'Abd-al-Wāḥid MP specifically mentioned the inability to criticize certain figures and the presence of ambiguous terms regarding social values requiring clear interpretation (Jusoor Post, 2022).

## IX. Freedom of Assembly

By April 2022, security forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government had arrested over 100 individuals in the Bādīnān area of Duhūk governorate for protesting government corruption and unpaid salaries. While many were released after brief detentions, dozens remained in custody by year-end. Regional authorities also issued arrest warrants for relatives of activists, prompting many to flee their hometowns. Between late November and early December, security forces in al-Sulaymānīyah governorate responded to student protests with tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, and live ammunition, resulting in at least eight protester deaths (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 115).

Between January and May 2022, security forces in al-Nāṣirīyah, Bābil, and Najaf employed excessive force, including tear gas and live ammunition, to disperse protesters demanding the release of activists and justice for those previously killed or injured. In a television interview, Ḥasan Muḥammad Aswad described how doctors amputated his fingers due to torture by security authorities in Kirkūk governorate following his June 2022 arrest; he was later released after his arrest was deemed a case of mistaken identity. Additionally, on August 31, 2022, peaceful protester 'Abbās al-'Irāqī was assassinated in the al-Salām district of Maysān governorate by an unidentified armed group (GCHR, 2022).

Security forces detained a lieutenant colonel from the Rapid Response Forces of the Ministry of Interior following a warrant from the al-Nāṣirīyah Investigative Court regarding alleged involvement in suppressing demonstrations at al-Zaytūn

Bridge in Dhī-Qār governorate. On May 10, 2022, the al-Ruṣāfah Criminal Court in Baghdād sentenced three anti-riot police members to life imprisonment for killing protesters in al-Taḥrīr Square in July 2020.

On December 5, 2022, the al-Ruṣāfah Criminal Court sentenced civil activist Ḥaydar Ḥamīd Finjān al-Zaydī to three years of severe imprisonment for allegedly insulting state institutions; he was later pardoned. Two days later, peaceful protesters gathered in al-Ḥabbūbī Square in al-Nāṣirīyah to demand his release; security forces opened fire, killing ‘Alī Razzāq al-Yasirī and Muḥammad Samīr al-‘Azṃawī and wounding 21 others. This marked the first fatal targeting of peaceful protesters under Prime Minister al-Sūdānī’s administration. On December 14, 2022, Major General Yaḥyá Rasūl, official spokesperson for the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, stated on Twitter that investigations identified a member of the security services as the main perpetrator in targeting protesters.

In al-Dīwānīyah, journalist Nabīl al-Jubūrī faced repeated assaults while covering protests. On December 12, 2022, authorities raided the home of prominent human rights defender and protest leader ‘Ammār Ḥamīd al-Khaz‘alī in al-Dīwānīyah, arresting him over a social media post criticizing the governor; he was later released following an intensive solidarity campaign (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 115).

Journalist Nabīl al-Jubūrī, correspondent for Zagros TV, also experienced targeted violence when gunmen threw a dynamite bomb at his home in al-Dīwānīyah on August 30, 2022, causing material damage. On September 21, 2022, security cameras captured an individual attempting to plant an adhesive explosive under his car; the attempt failed due to passersby. Despite reporting these incidents, governmental responses lacked seriousness in pursuing perpetrators, who often belong to armed groups with significant government influence.

Regarding international actions, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) sent inquiries in January 2022 to various bodies, including the Supreme Judicial Council, the Martyrs Foundation, and the Ministry of Defense, requesting information on violations attributed to “unidentified armed elements” during demonstrations up to May 2022. The Mission received written responses from the Supreme Judicial Council and the Martyrs Foundation. On May 8, UNAMI and OHCHR received a response from the Supreme Judicial Council, which indicated that 664 cases related to demonstrations were currently under investigation. It further noted that 327 cases had been referred to court or were in the trial phase, with judgments rendered in ten cases, while 1,106 other cases were classified as either “completed” or “closed” (GCHR, 2022).

Concerning justice in cases involving targeted killings, shootings, abductions, and disappearances of activists attributed to “unidentified armed elements,” the OHCHR mission documented three convictions in al-Baṣrah governorate. These convictions included one for the targeted killing of two journalists who had criti-

cized “armed groups,” one for shooting at a crowd of protesters at a demonstration site, and one for shooting from a political party building. Additionally, the Mission recorded the conviction of four individuals in Maysān governorate for the targeted killing of a father who had explicitly called for accountability regarding the disappearance of his son, an activist and lawyer (GCHR, 2022).

## X. Enforced Disappearance

On March 22, 2022, the Human Rights Council convened a general discussion addressing human rights situations warranting the Council’s attention. In a joint statement with the Mīzan Center for Human Rights, Isabelle Despicht, a researcher at the Geneva International Centre for Justice, condemned the international community’s silence concerning human rights violations, despite the passage of twenty years since the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. She underscored that Iraqis continue to endure severe human rights abuses, including torture, extrajudicial executions, human trafficking, arbitrary arrests, and numerous other grave offenses, alongside up to one million cases of enforced disappearance. Both the Geneva International Centre for Justice and the Mīzan Center advocated for the urgent establishment of an independent international tribunal to investigate and prosecute the leaders responsible for the war against Iraq and to examine crimes against humanity committed during the occupation (GICJ, 2022).

In this context, irregular armed groups in several southern governorates perpetrated extrajudicial killings or attempted assassinations of dozens of activists who emerged during the protests commencing in October 2019 against government corruption and demanding improved employment opportunities and public services. Most victims were targeted late at night, often while returning home from protests. These operations were predominantly executed by gunmen on motorcycles or vehicles with tinted side windows, with bullets typically aimed at the head or chest.

In July 2022, authorities announced the arrest of a suspected perpetrator of these killings; however, no further details were disclosed. In October and November, pursuant to the Counter-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005, courts issued death sentences against individuals convicted of targeting and killing activists and journalists in Baghdād and al-Başrah during 2019 and 2020. Nevertheless, aside from limited information on these cases, no additional details were provided, including whether any reparative measures were undertaken for the victims’ families.

Members affiliated with armed groups also threatened activists and their relatives with violence and, in some instances, carried out extrajudicial executions. In March 2022, Jāsib Ḥaṭṭāb, the father of lawyer ‘Alī Jāsib—who had been forcibly disappeared by an armed faction in al-‘Amārah in October 2019—was killed in retaliation for his campaign seeking justice for his son.

Security forces and armed faction members threatened activists and their families in Baghdād and the cities of al-Başrah, al-Nāşirīyah, and al-Dīwānīyah,

compelling dozens to go into hiding. A local monitoring organization reported that security forces in al-Başrah tortured at least three activists to death while in custody during July and August. Meanwhile, the fate of dozens of activists and protesters abducted by unidentified gunmen and armed faction members in 2019 and 2020 remains unknown.

## **XI. Human Rights: From the Perspective of International Institutions**

A United Nations report published in June 2022 described progress toward achieving justice for human rights violations and abuses against individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression, though this progress was characterized as “limited.” The “Accountability in Iraq” report, jointly issued by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN Human Rights Office, acknowledged the government’s operation within a complex environment, including a stalled government formation. Nonetheless, it noted that ongoing impunity for killings, disappearances, abductions, and torture of activists undermines state institutions’ authority. The report highlighted that while some progress has been made, particularly regarding victim compensation, accountability remains limited; between May 2021 and April 30, 2022, UNAMI and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights documented convictions in four cases related to violence committed by “armed elements.” Although the government-established fact-finding committee remains active, it has produced no investigative results or public information on its activities. The report concluded that authorities have taken only “limited steps” to investigate the killings of protesters, critics, and activists, emphasizing that much remains to be done to identify, arrest, and prosecute perpetrators, including those responsible for ordering and planning these attacks (UN News, 2022, June 2).

Regarding enforced disappearance, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) issued a statement on November 24, 2022, urging the government to include enforced disappearance as a standalone crime in national legislation, emphasizing that further delay is unacceptable. At the conclusion of a 12-day visit to Iraq, Carmen Rosa Villa Quintana, chair of the Committee, expressed deep concern over the absence of an explicit definition of enforced disappearance as a standalone crime in national law. She asserted that efforts to address a crime not recognized in the legal framework are illusory, regardless of the methods and objectives established. The Committee clarified that enforced disappearance involves cases committed by state agents or groups acting with state authorization, support, or acquiescence. Delegation members noted that available data do not permit measurement of the crime’s scale, recording 555 urgent actions related to incidents in the country to date (GCHR, 2022).

During the visit, the delegation received hundreds of allegations of enforced disappearance from various governorates and urged Iraq to establish a centralized, interconnected registry to reliably identify cases and facilitate effective

information access for institutions responsible for searching for the missing and investigating alleged disappearances. The experts commended the government's cooperation, which enabled meetings with federal and regional authorities in al-Anbār, Baghdād, Erbil, al-Mawṣil, and Sinjār from November 12 to 24, 2022. They also underscored the necessity of addressing victims' daily suffering; amid decades of violence, families and relatives of the disappeared endure constant grief without knowledge of their loved ones' fate or whereabouts. Furthermore, they confront a complex institutional framework requiring submission of complaints or claims to at least seven institutions. The delegation expressed grave concern regarding numerous allegations of reprisals against families, relatives, representatives of the disappeared, and actors involved in search and investigation processes. The Committee emphasized that no participant in discussions or contributors of information should face reprisals. Villa Quintana acknowledged Iraq's serious challenges but stressed that no system or mechanism can succeed without political will, active victim participation, adequate financial resources, and committed, well-trained personnel to conduct searches and investigations (OHCHR, 2022, November 24).

## **XII. Agenda for the New Year 2023**

Given ongoing political and financial fragility, population groups affected by displacement—including internally displaced persons and refugees primarily from Syria—will remain vulnerable. Consequently, their vulnerabilities, needs, and conditions require continuous assessment, highlighting, and representation to prevent long-term deprivation that could ultimately impact the broader country.

The human rights agenda remains complex and critical, with significant challenges anticipated in 2023. Accordingly, the following measures are recommended:

1. Facilitate the appointment of the board of the High Commission for Human Rights and restore its functionality; its absence constitutes a legislative deficiency impairing the commission's fundamental duties.
2. Ensure provision of all necessary humanitarian support for persons with disabilities and special needs, encompassing economic, legal, and logistical aspects, and enforce laws guaranteeing their rights.
3. Implement serious government initiatives to reduce and control suicide rates, which have reached alarming levels, addressing their social, economic, psychological, and educational determinants.
4. Although authorities have undertaken commendable yet limited and insufficient steps investigating illegal attacks on protesters, critics, and activists' rights, further efforts are imperative. The government must conduct immediate, independent, and credible investigations into all alleged violations and enhance access to effective justice and judicial procedures tailored to victims' needs.

5. Provide comprehensive assistance to victims throughout legal proceedings, implement measures to mitigate harassment, safeguard privacy, and ensure the safety of victims and their families against intimidation.
6. The government and security forces must assume full responsibility for protecting protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society members.
7. Authorities must fulfill constitutional obligations to uphold public freedoms, including peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and press freedom, while combating pervasive corruption that threatens national resources intended for all citizens.
8. Address the needs of displaced populations adequately and support their voluntary return by ensuring basic requirements in post-conflict areas.

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# 9. Education and Higher Education

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## I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant loss of classroom instructional time for children worldwide. At the peak of the pandemic in April 2020, school closures affected over 1.6 billion children across 188 countries. On average, educational systems globally experienced approximately 141 days of complete closure of in-person learning between February 2020 and February 2022, disproportionately impacting children from the most impoverished backgrounds. While some nations promptly reopened schools, others maintained full closures for extended periods or implemented partial reopenings. Countries with pre-existing low learning outcomes tended to have longer school closures, thereby exacerbating educational inequalities.

Similar to global trends, Iraqi children were adversely affected by school closures during the pandemic. The transition to e-learning served as a substitute despite challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited expertise, and the burdens imposed on families, particularly those with limited resources. This chapter examines the state of education in 2022, the challenges encountered, and the responses of the Ministries of Education and Higher Education.

## II. Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Learning Process

### 1. Rising Rates of Learning Poverty

Estimates indicate that learning poverty increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the “State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022” report, learning poverty—defined as the percentage of children unable to read and comprehend a simple text by age ten—was 57% in 2019, exceeding prior expectations. Prolonged school closures and unequal access to remote versus in-person learning led to a one-third increase in learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries, where approximately 70% of ten-year-olds cannot understand a simple text. Additionally, some countries experienced elevated dropout rates, contributing to early marriage, early pregnancy, child labor, and mental health challenges.

School closures intensified existing educational disparities, disproportionately affecting children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Globally, students from poorer households were more vulnerable to pandemic-related educational disruptions. Remote learning programs relying on digital and broadcast media failed to reach at least 463 million children during school closures, with three-quarters of these students belonging to poor families or residing in rural areas.

The World Bank has identified three pillars to assist countries in eliminating learning poverty, ensuring literacy for all children, and enhancing human capital outcomes:

- **Reading Policy Package:** This entails national interventions proven effective in promoting widespread reading proficiency, securing political and technical commitment to literacy through adequately funded plans, ensuring effective literacy instruction, preparing teachers to teach at appropriate levels with practical in-school training, and delivering instruction in children's mother tongues.
- **Advanced Educational Approach:** A sophisticated educational system is necessary to sustain, scale, and achieve comprehensive learning outcomes. This approach comprises five components: (1) motivated and prepared learners; (2) effective and competent teachers; (3) classrooms equipped for learning; (4) safe and inclusive schools; and (5) well-managed educational systems.
- **Ambitious Measurement and Research Agenda:** This agenda involves measuring learning outcomes and their determinants, conducting action-oriented research and innovation, and leveraging new technologies to build foundational skills.

## 2. The Challenge of Learning Loss

Learning loss refers to the amount of time, effort, and money allocated and spent on the educational process without reaching the minimum required results. Specifically, learning loss encompasses:

- Educational objectives that were planned but unmet despite allocated resources.
- The learning gap, defined as the deficit in student learning resulting from factors such as lack of instruction, ineffective teaching, dropout, academic delays, absenteeism, or forgetting, representing a waste of financial and human resources.

Learning loss is a critical issue globally, with a more pronounced impact in developing countries compared to developed ones. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this phenomenon due to prolonged closures of schools and universities and the abrupt shift to remote learning without adequate preparation.

Addressing learning loss necessitates that education authorities identify effective tools to measure its extent and implement strategies to mitigate it, consid-

ering its multifaceted causes and adverse short- and long-term effects on individuals and society.

In response, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank launched the “Recovering Education 2021” initiative, emphasizing three priorities:

- **Return of all students to safe and supportive schools:** Ensuring full or partial in-person instruction by the end of 2021, accompanied by comprehensive support for education, health, and well-being.
- **Recovery of learning loss:** Implementing remedial education, adaptive learning programs, and fostering students’ social and emotional skills.
- **Preparation and empowerment of teachers:** Supporting teachers to address learning loss by teaching missed content alongside the current curriculum, including training and additional resources for remedial and social-emotional learning.

Iraq’s education system has faced longstanding challenges, including conflict, displacement, poverty, and economic crises. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant decline in oil prices have further strained an already fragile education system, impeding efforts to recover learning loss, reduce learning poverty, and enhance education quality.

### III. Education

#### 1. Ministry of Education Procedures for the 2022 Academic Year

The Ministry of Education announced the commencement of the 2022 academic year on November 1, 2021, stipulating that student attendance would be conducted in person four days per week, with the suspension of the Saturday holiday. The General Directorate of General, Private, and Foreign Education, the General Directorate of Educational Supervision, and the General Directorates of Education across all governorates were assigned the responsibility of implementing official attendance protocols.

The Ministry of Education reported that the total student enrollment exceeded 12 million, with first-grade primary students numbering over 1.2 million.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, Iraq suspended official school attendance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning the educational system to e-learning. Subsequently, the 2020-2021 academic year adopted a hybrid model combining in-person and electronic learning. The Ministry of Education confirmed that the 2021-2022 academic year would resume full in-person attendance across all educational levels.

The 2022-2023 academic year commenced amid a shortage of textbooks, as the Ministry was unable to print new materials due to the absence of federal budget approval; instead, textbooks were recovered from previous academic years.

The educational sector continues to experience significant learning loss attributed to the country’s challenges, including a three-year interruption of

studies in the governorates of Nīnawá, Şalāḥ-al-Dīn, and al-Anbār during terrorist control from 2014 to 2017. Additionally, a substantial deficit in school infrastructure exacerbates pressures on teaching staff; the Ministry estimates a need to construct at least 10,000 schools to address double-shift attendance and 15,000 new school buildings to meet international classroom size standards. Factors such as security and economic conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to e-learning without adequate resources, and systemic corruption have contributed to increased school dropout rates.

Among the Ministry's primary challenges is the deteriorating economic situation, which has resulted in budget allocations insufficient to meet educational demands, particularly regarding school infrastructure. The depreciation of the Dinar has elevated living and educational costs, disproportionately affecting students in private and non-governmental schools. Dropout rates are notably higher in rural areas and villages, where educational staff shortages and overcrowding in urban schools prevail due to favoritism and limited capacity for internal transfers.

## **2. School Enrollment Rates for the 2022 Academic Year**

### **a. Kindergarten Stage**

Enrollment in kindergarten, both public and private, declined during the 2021-2022 academic year compared to 2020-2021. Public kindergarten enrollment decreased from 183,699 to 150,158 pupils, reflecting a negative growth rate of -18.26%. Private kindergarten enrollment fell from 262,362 to 80,618 pupils, a negative growth rate of -28.32%. The rising cost of education has impeded many families from affording kindergarten.

### **b. Primary Stage**

Primary stage enrollment increased in both public and private sectors during the 2021-2022 academic year relative to 2020-2021. Public education enrollment rose by 108,134 pupils, a growth rate of 1.74%, while private education enrollment increased by 36,688 pupils, a growth rate of 15.26%.

### **c. Secondary Stage**

Secondary stage enrollment exhibited a marked increase in both public and private education during the 2021-2022 academic year compared to the previous year. Public education enrollment grew by 409,856 pupils, a growth rate of 10.58%, and private education enrollment increased by 28,969 pupils, a growth rate of 21.32%. The primary school enrollment rate in Iraq during the 2020-2021 academic year was 91%. This rate declined significantly to 45% in middle schools and further to 25% in secondary schools. University enrollment reached only 18%, indicating that approximately 75% of primary school enrollees discontinued their education before higher levels.

The National Development Plan, approved by the Ministry of Planning (2018-2022), aimed to increase enrollment rates to 99% in primary education, 70% in middle school, 45% in secondary education, and 7% in vocational education. The plan also sought to enhance educational environments by reducing classroom

Table 9-1: Number of Students Enrolled in Public Schools (2021/2022).

Camps	Gender	2021	2022	Change	Growth (%)
Kindergarten	Male	91,967	73,603	-18,364	-19.97
	Female	91,732	76,555	-15,177	-16.54
	Total	183,699	150,158	-33,541	-18.26
Primary	Male	3,209,051	3,260,927	51,876	1.62
	Female	2,997,366	3,053,624	56,258	1.88
	Total	6,206,417	6,314,551	108,134	1.74
Secondary	Male	1,851,374	2,058,365	206,991	10.06
	Female	1,611,528	1,814,393	202,865	11.18
	Total	3,462,902	3,872,758	409,856	10.58

Source: Ministry of Education (n.d.).

density, limiting overcrowding, ensuring health and environmental services, and activating parental councils and civil society organizations to support the financial rehabilitation and expansion of existing school facilities.

### 3. Number of School Buildings

In 2022, there was a notable increase in the number of completed public schools. Data from the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Educational Planning and Statistics indicate the addition of 7 kindergarten schools, 297 primary schools, and 346 secondary schools. Kirkūk led in new school construction with 82 schools, followed by Dhī-Qār with 31 schools. In Baghdād governorate, 82 schools of various capacities were completed, despite limited land availability for school construction. The remaining schools were distributed among other governorates.

These new schools are expected to mitigate issues related to double and triple shift attendance and reduce classroom overcrowding, which contribute to learning poverty and high rates of learning loss. Additionally, they aim to alleviate pressure on teachers and school infrastructure across governorates. Failure to address these issues may undermine national development strategies, degrade educational quality, and hinder the preparation of students with the knowledge and skills necessary to keep pace with scientific and technological advancements.

Currently, many public schools provide an unsuitable educational environment due to inadequate buildings, insufficient books and supplies, lack of service facilities, and a shortage of qualified teaching staff capable of effectively educating and supporting children.

Table 9-2: Number of Public Schools During the Academic Years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022.

Academic Year	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary
2020/2021	774	16,679	7,656
2021/2022	781	16,976	8,002
Completed in 2022	7	297	346

Source: Ministry of Education (n.d.).

Table 9-3: Gender Parity Index During the Academic Years (2021, 2022).

Year/Stage	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary
2021	0.99	0.93	0.87
2022	1.04	0.94	0.88

Source: Calculated by the researcher according to data from the Ministry of Education (n.d.).

#### 4. Gender Parity Index

An analysis of data from the Ministry of Education indicates no significant gender disparity at the kindergarten level during the 2022 academic year, as evidenced by a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.04. However, this parity diminishes progressively across subsequent educational stages, reaching a GPI of 0.88 at the secondary level, which corresponds to 88 female students for every 100 male students.

Female student dropout rates increase following the primary stage at a higher rate than those of males. Conversely, male enrollment declines markedly at the secondary level. The gender gap at the secondary stage narrows considerably within the scientific branch, where the GPI attains 0.96. In contrast, the literary branch exhibits a pronounced gender gap, with a GPI of 0.71. This latter figure more accurately reflects the parity conditions in impoverished regions, where learning poverty and elevated rates of learning loss prevail. Social and cultural legacies in these areas, including practices such as early marriage, restrictions on women's mobility, and domestic violence, significantly impede females' continuation of education beyond the primary level.

#### 5. Learning Loss

The escalation of learning loss, encompassing dropout and failure rates in Iraq, is attributable to prolonged conflict and insufficient investment, which have debilitated the educational infrastructure and severely restricted children's access to quality education. The persistent deterioration of political and social conditions has precipitated a decline in educational quality, further exacerbated by the ineffectiveness of contemporary interventions designed to mitigate these losses. A 2021 report by UNICEF revealed that approximately 3.2 million Iraqi children of school age are not enrolled in school.

Data from the Statistics Department of the General Directorate of Educational Planning for the 2021/2022 academic year indicate that Nīnawá governorate experienced the highest rates of learning loss at both primary and secondary levels. Specifically, the primary-level dropout rate was 14.25%, with a failure rate of 15.80%. At the secondary level, dropout and failure rates were 9.07% and 10.45%, respectively. Following Nīnawá, al-Baṣrah governorate reported a primary dropout rate of 9.35% and failure rate of 11.16%, alongside secondary dropout and failure rates of 9.47% and 7.59%, respectively. Baghdād / al-Ruṣāfah 2 recorded a primary dropout rate of 8.20% and failure rate of 9.19%, with secondary dropout and failure rates of 9.37% and 9.38%. Bābil governorate reported a primary dropout rate of 8.55% and failure rate of 3.41%, with secondary dropout and failure rates of 6.49% and 8.92%. Other governorates are detailed in Table (9-4).

Table 9-4: Learning Loss Rates in Primary and Secondary Stages in Iraqi Governorates for the Academic Year (2021/2022).

Governorate	Primary Dropout (%)	Primary Failure (%)	Secondary Dropout (%)	Secondary Failure (%)
Nīnawá	14.25	15.80	9.07	10.45
Şalāḥ-al-Dīn	3.67	3.42	1.90	1.21
Kirkūk	2.66	3.64	3.25	5.35
Diyālá	0.93	2.57	2.31	1.70
Baghdād al-Ruṣāfah / 1	3.37	4.34	4.62	4.20
Baghdād al-Ruṣāfah / 2	9.35	11.16	9.47	7.59
Baghdād al-Ruṣāfah / 3	4.31	3.01	6.00	6.27
Baghdād al-Karkh / 1	3.39	1.67	2.74	2.77
Baghdād al-Karkh / 2	4.73	2.51	5.29	3.95
Baghdād al-Karkh / 3	3.62	1.94	4.91	4.17
al-Anbār	6.10	6.72	3.21	4.14
Bābil	8.55	3.41	6.49	8.92
Karbalá' al-Muqaddasah	4.81	5.90	5.00	5.88
al-Najaf al-Ashraf	5.58	7.42	5.26	6.46
al-Dīwānīyah	3.00	2.36	5.49	4.72
al-Muthanná	2.11	5.26	2.58	3.48
Wāsiṭ	3.97	0.96	3.42	1.72
Dhī-Qār	3.49	4.85	6.36	3.74
Maysān	3.92	3.85	3.28	3.45
al-Başrah	8.20	9.19	9.37	9.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Calculated by the researcher according to data from the Ministry of Education (n.d.).

Several factors contribute to school loss, notably the acute shortage of school infrastructure, the implementation of double and triple shifts, and overcrowded classrooms. The deteriorating economic conditions faced by many Iraqi families, which limit their capacity to finance their children's education, have further exacerbated dropout rates, compelling children at an early age to enter the labor market to support their families.

The instability of security and political conditions, coupled with the control exerted by the terrorist organization ISIS over extensive areas in the northern and western governorates, resulted in the suspension of educational activities in these regions for approximately three years.

The Ministry of Education's curriculum reforms initiated five years ago introduced increased complexity that was ill-suited to Iraq's context, particularly given the numerous official holidays that disrupt the educational process. This situation has led to an intensification of educational content to compensate for incomplete curriculum delivery, which in turn has contributed to student dropouts. Curric-

ulum development and its instability in recent years have not been matched by corresponding efforts to develop and qualify teaching staff for the new curricula.

Regarding child labor, although the current Labor Law prohibits employment of individuals under 18 years of age, in practice, hundreds of thousands of children participate in the labor market within industrial and commercial sectors without effective legal deterrents. Economic hardship remains the primary driver of school dropouts, with statistics indicating that approximately 12 million Iraqis live below the poverty line. This economic deprivation has led to thousands of children leaving school over the past two years.

Families' inability to cover educational expenses, including transportation costs, has contributed to the increasing dropout rates. Additional factors include weak motivation, an unappealing school environment, limited family engagement, financial constraints, high poverty levels, repeated academic failure, and teaching methods that do not align with students' interests and aptitudes. These factors collectively diminish family interest in education and encourage children to leave school to support household heads, thereby contributing to the prevalence of child labor and begging. Dropout causes are also linked to the deficiencies of the primary education system and its failure to achieve educational objectives.

According to reports by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, dropout rates are highest among females in Iraq, at approximately 12%, compared to 6% among males. This disparity accounts for the observed decline in gender parity at the secondary and middle educational stages.

## **6. Challenges of the Educational Sector**

The World Bank has identified a critical crisis in Iraq's human capital development, primarily driven by deficiencies in the education sector, underlining that a child born in Iraq today is projected to achieve only 41% of their potential productivity in adulthood, with an expected learning attainment of no more than four years by age 18. Consequently, Iraq ranks among the lowest in the region on the Human Capital Index (HCI). The World Bank attributes these low human capital outcomes to prolonged conflict, lack of systemic reforms, limited youth opportunities, social unrest, and administrative corruption.

The World Bank's findings are summarized as follows:

1. A significant shortage of educational infrastructure impairs the delivery of quality education, with an average of approximately 400 students per school and multiple schools sharing facilities.
2. Over two million children aged 6 to 17 are out of school, leading to the erosion of human and social capital.
3. The education system suffers from outdated curricula, insufficient professional development for teachers, inadequate support for school counselors and learning programs, and limited initiatives targeting at-risk youth.

4. Reconstruction needs for damaged infrastructure are estimated at approximately 4.9 trillion dinars, while recovery efforts—including restoring teaching and learning services—require about 490 billion dinars to support vocational training for teachers, educational materials, and rehabilitation programs for out-of-school youth.
5. Corruption adversely affects the provision of public services.
6. The education system is influenced by both external political interference and internal bureaucratic challenges, including favoritism in transfers, appointments, and promotions.
7. The adoption of modern teaching methods is limited due to insufficient staff training, lack of capacity building for trainers, poor coordination between training centers and higher education institutions, and inadequate financial resources.
8. Examination and evaluation methods are outdated and ineffective, with limited capacity building for educational staff, inefficient assessment systems, and weak participation in international assessments.
9. The absence of an Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is attributed to low electronic readiness and insufficient personnel training in data processing and analysis.
10. Educational supervision is inadequate due to a shortage of qualified supervisors.
11. Psychological counseling and healthcare services are limited, stemming from underutilization of educational counselors, insufficient job positions, weak coordination between schools and parents, and inadequate health-care and nutrition.
12. Vocational education plays a limited role due to student reluctance to enroll, outdated curricula that do not align with labor market demands, and insufficient capacity building for vocational instructors.
13. Administrative governance is weak, characterized by poor collaboration between public and private educational institutions, slow decentralization of authority to governorates, lack of administrative decentralization between central and local levels, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

## IV. Higher Education

### 1. Work Program for the 2021/2022 Academic Year

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research established October 11, 2021, as the commencement date for the 2021/2022 academic year for undergraduate studies at universities. Postgraduate programs across all universities were scheduled to resume fully in-person on September 19, 2021. The Ministry mandated that attendance by students and staff required presentation of either

a vaccination card or a negative PCR test. It further acknowledged the challenges associated with a full return to in-person attendance, noting that any potential reimplementation of lockdowns or suspension of face-to-face classes would depend on the epidemiological context and possible increases in infection rates.

The Ministry indicated that the academic program for 2021/2022 would address the actual demand for academic and instructional services while emphasizing the significance of digital technologies. The program was designed to implement in-person learning modalities for both teaching and examinations, concurrently advocating for enhanced community health measures and epidemic prevention through mandatory vaccinations. The Ministry affirmed its commitment to adhere to the directives issued by the Higher Committee for Health and National Safety concerning the health situation and attendance protocols.

In response to the evolving health situation, the Ministry adopted a scientifically informed and methodologically sound approach by implementing a blended learning policy. This policy accounted for the requirements of applied, practical, and clinical components and encompassed core subjects across all specializations. Accordingly, the Ministry's guidelines for the Medical, Health, and Veterinary Medicine faculties stipulated full in-person attendance for final-year students, whereas non-final-year students were required to attend in-person three days per week for core and practical subjects.

For Engineering and Science disciplines, in-person attendance was scheduled for two to three days per week across all academic levels, contingent upon the specific needs of each specialization. Humanities disciplines mandated in-person attendance for core subjects two days per week at all levels. The Ministry specified that e-learning would be limited to non-core subjects across all specializations and academic levels.

Regarding the academic calendar for the 2021/2022 year, the Ministry detailed the schedule as follows: the first semester commenced on October 11, 2021, and spanned fifteen weeks. Examinations for students beyond the first year were set to begin on January 30, 2022, lasting two weeks. These examinations included mid-year assessments for faculties and institutes following the annual system and final examinations for the first semester in faculties adhering to the semester system. For first-year university students, the first semester was scheduled from December 2021 to March 26, 2022. The postgraduate academic year across all universities was confirmed to start on Sunday, September 19, 2021, with full in-person attendance.

## **2. Quantitative Analysis of Higher Education Institutions**

### **a. Number of Admitted Students**

The academic year 2021/2022 experienced a substantial decline in the number of students admitted to public universities through the central admission process during the first and second rounds. Specifically, admissions totaled 168,505 students, representing a decrease from the 274,778 students admitted in the 2020/2021 academic year, corresponding to a negative growth rate of -38.67%.

Table 9-5: Admitted and Graduated Students in Public and Private Universities (2021, 2022).

Year	Admitted		Graduated	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
2021	274,778	116,003	151,916	45,689
2022	168,505	98,025	166,086	52,657
Change	-106,273	-17,978	14,170	6,968
Growth (%)	-38.68	-15.50	9.33	15.25

Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (n.d.).

Similarly, private universities witnessed a notable reduction in admissions, with 98,025 students admitted in 2021/2022 compared to 116,003 in 2020/2021, reflecting a negative growth rate of -15.49%.

### b. Number of Graduated Students

Conversely, the 2021/2022 academic year observed a significant increase in the number of graduates from public universities, reaching 166,086 students compared to 151,916 in 2020–2021, indicating a positive growth rate of 9.3%. Private universities also experienced growth in graduate numbers, with 52,657 students graduating in 2021/2022 compared to 45,689 in the previous academic year, corresponding to a positive growth rate of 15.2%.

### c. The Phenomenon of Quantitative Expansion in Private Universities

Since 2003, the higher education system in Iraq has undergone remarkable quantitative expansion across all levels, encompassing public and private universities, faculties, departments, institutes, research institutions, and consultancy offices. This expansion has not been limited to numerical growth but has also included qualitative developments, such as the establishment of universities that did not exist in 2003, including technical universities, as well as new types of faculties and scientific departments.

Universities in Iraq are categorized into four primary types: first, public universities owned by the government; second, universities of the Kurdistan Region, which are located within the region's borders and administered by the regional government; third, private universities and faculties, which are non-governmental and may be owned by non-governmental institutions, unions, public or private organizations, or universities affiliated with non-Iraqi institutions; and fourth, universities and higher education institutions not affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, such as military and police faculties supervised by the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, as well as faculties of the Sunni and Shia Endowment Offices.

In recent years, private universities have experienced exaggerated expansion, with their number reaching 68 officially recognized private universities and faculties by 2022, including eight located in the Kurdistan Region. These institutions encompass more than 570 departments covering medical, engineering, and humanities specializations. Meanwhile, the number of public universities reached 38. Consequently, private university education accounts for approximately 30% of annually admitted students, according to data from the Ministry of Planning.

Although the proliferation of private universities was intended to enhance the quality of higher education in Iraq, the reality indicates that most of these institutions prioritize quantitative growth with limited attention to qualitative standards due to profit motives. Rather than producing graduates aligned with labor market demands and reducing unemployment, this expansion has contributed to the emergence of new generations of unemployed individuals.

The expansion in private universities has particularly focused on dentistry, engineering, and pharmacy faculties, as these fields are the most profitable. During the 2021/2022 academic year, the number of private dentistry faculties reached 30, compared to 20 public faculties. Private engineering faculties numbered 58, whereas public engineering faculties totaled 37. Conversely, public human medicine faculties numbered 33, while private ones numbered only three. As a result, Iraq now possesses 36 human medicine faculties, exceeding the number in Britain. These increases in admissions coincide with a decline in the absorptive capacity of medical faculties due to persistent shortages in infrastructure, especially in newly established and private institutions, as well as a lack of teaching staff and insufficient teaching hospitals.

#### **d. Educational Outcomes and the Labor Market**

Educational outcomes represent the return on investment in human capital at both social and private levels. Social returns benefit society as a whole, including the advantages of an educated workforce and a community of informed citizens. Private returns at the individual level are realized through higher wages and reduced risk of unemployment.

Although the expansion in higher education outcomes could potentially drive sustainable economic growth, the economy's inability to generate sufficient employment opportunities to absorb the rapidly increasing number of graduates has resulted in rising youth unemployment, particularly among graduates. According to estimates from the Ministry of Planning, graduate unemployment is approximately 32.1% for males and 62.1% for females. This high unemployment rate among youth is compounded by a low female labor force participation rate, currently at only 10.6%, compared to 68% for males.

### **3. Qualitative Analysis of Higher Education Institutions**

The qualitative dimension concerns the quality of services provided by higher education institutions. Its primary indicators include the following:

#### **a. The Iraqi Ranking of Universities (IRU)**

On March 3, 2022, the Department of Relations and Media at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research announced the results of the Iraqi Ranking of Universities (IRU). This ranking was conducted by the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation under the Scientific Supervision and Evaluation Authority. The Ministry emphasized that this initiative aimed to confirm the effectiveness and reputation of university institutions both locally and internationally, to diagnose performance indicators and academic standards in accordance with their missions and objec-

tives, and to ensure alignment with their positions in global rankings. Experts involved in this evaluation comprehensively assessed 83 public and private educational institutions, comprising 36 public universities, 47 private universities and faculties, 875 specialized faculties, and 1,729 scientific departments.

The evaluation encompassed criteria related to the institutional environment and academic programs, which were categorized and weighted as follows:

- **Institutional Performance Evaluation Criteria:** Quality and Institutional Accreditation (20%), International Rankings (15%), Effectiveness of Scientific Research (20%), Community Service (5%), Resource Maximization (10%), Faculty Members (10%), Students (15%), and International Diversity (5%).
- **Scientific Department Performance Evaluation Criteria:** Quality and Programmatic Accreditation (35%), Effectiveness of Scientific Research (30%), Faculty Members (20%), and Students (15%).

The results indicated that the University of Baghdad attained the highest rank among public universities, whereas al-Mustaqbal University ranked first among private universities and faculties. Furthermore, 185 departments achieved advanced positions within their respective specializations.

Acknowledging the requirements of quality and academic accreditation, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research declared its ongoing commitment to policies and procedures aimed at enhancing university performance, improving academic programs, and assessing outcomes to ensure conformity with global developments.

### **b. Position of Iraqi Universities in International Rankings**

A university's standing in international rankings serves as an indicator of the quality of educational services it provides. These rankings are based on several indicators, notably academic reputation, employer opinions, student-to-faculty ratio, citations per faculty member, proportion of international students, and proportion of international faculty members. During the 2021/2022 academic year, Iraqi public and private universities and faculties demonstrated significant progress in international rankings, maintaining an increasingly competitive presence. Notably, four Iraqi universities appeared in The Times ranking, and five appeared in the QS ranking, including its current edition for the Arab region. Additionally, 22 universities were listed in the Scimago ranking, 61 universities entered the Greenmetric ranking, four appeared in the URAP ranking, and 82 universities and faculties were recorded in the Webometrics ranking. The following provides a brief overview of some of these rankings:

- **QS World University Rankings:** Twenty-two Iraqi universities attained notable competitive ranks in the (QS World University Rankings: Arab Region 2022). The official ranking website (QS World University Rankings, 2021) documented the participation of 22 Iraqi universities, representing an increase of six universities compared to the previous year. The University of Baghdad led this group, ranking 26th among 181 Arab universities.

The competition was based on criteria including Academic Reputation (30%), Employer Reputation (20%), Faculty/Student Ratio (15%), International Research Network (10%), Web Impact (5%), Proportion of Staff with a PhD (5%), Citations per Paper (5%), Papers per Faculty (5%), Proportion of International Faculty (2.5%), and Proportion of International Students (2.5%). Several universities competed for the first time in this global ranking, including al-Furāt al-Awsaṭ Technical University, the University of Information Technology and Communications, University of Nīnawá, and University of al-Fallūjah, while the private al-Kitāb University also appeared for the first time.

- **The Times Higher Education Arab University Rankings:** Iraqi universities achieved significant competitive ranks in the Times Higher Education Arab University Rankings, which included 199 universities from 15 countries. The 2022 ranking methodology was based on global university ranking indicators, supplemented by new metrics reflecting the characteristics and missions of universities in the Middle East and North Africa. Universities were evaluated across five main pillars: Teaching (33%), Research (33%), Citations (20%), Society (6%), and International Outlook (8%). According to this ranking, the University of Baghdād secured the 46th position, followed by the University of al-Mawṣil (51–60), the University of Technology (51–60), the University of Bābil (61–70), the University of al-Baṣrah (61–70), al-Nahrayn University (71–80), al-Mustaṣhīriyah University (71–80), the University of al-Kūfah (81–90), the University of al-Anbār (91–100), the University of al-Qādisiyah (101–120), the University of Tikrīt (101–120), al-Qāsim Green University (121–140), the University of Diyālā (121–140), the University of Karbalā' (121–140), Northern Technical University (121–140), the University of Wāsiṭ (121–140), al-Furāt al-Awsaṭ Technical University (141+), the University of al-Muthanná (141+), the University of Kirkūk (141+), Middle Technical University (141+), and the University of Dhī-Qār (141+).
- **Webometrics Ranking of World Universities:** The Webometrics Ranking, affiliated with the Supreme Council for Scientific Research in Spain, is issued semi-annually. It employs indicators measuring the virtual presence of universities through their websites, including Visibility (50%), Transparency (10%), and Research Excellence (40%). The results of the Webometrics ranking for the first half of 2022 recorded the participation of 89 Iraqi public and private universities and faculties, according to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Webometrics ranking website indicated that the January 2022 edition, which covered over 31,000 educational institutions worldwide, featured an increase in the number of Iraqi universities and faculties to 89, compared to 82 in the July 2021 edition. The University of Baghdād ranked first among Iraqi public and private universities, placing 1,857th globally. al-Mustaṣhīriyah

University followed locally in second place (2,636th globally), and the University of Bābil ranked third locally (2,787th globally).

- It is noteworthy that Iraqi universities and faculties have demonstrated increasing competitiveness in other global rankings, including the **Shanghai Ranking** (Global Ranking of Academic Subjects), in which the University of Baghdād appeared within the Chemical Engineering specialization, and **The Times ranking**, which currently features eight universities.

### c. Research Index in the Global Scopus Databases

Public and private universities have increased their scientific research output published in the Scopus databases, with the total number of Iraqi research papers published in global databases exceeding 85,000 across various scientific disciplines. The scientific research index in global publishing databases positioned Iraq 45th globally, 6th in the Middle East, and 3rd in the Arab world.

In this regard, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research underscored the necessity of global publishing, the elevation of local journals, enhancing their presence in international databases, and enabling universities to improve their competitive standings in international rankings. The Ministry further emphasized the importance of securing international partnerships in diverse scientific research fields and utilizing their outcomes to support comprehensive development goals.

Accordingly, the Scopus database documented the leadership of the University of Baghdād, which published 16,276 papers among Iraqi public universities, while al-Mustaqbal University published 418 papers, leading Iraqi private universities and faculties in global publishing.

In this context, the Scientific Supervision and Evaluation Authority convened a consultative meeting in collaboration with the Department of Research and Development. Attendees, including the head of the Authority, the Ministry's advisor, and a number of vice presidents of universities for academic affairs, affirmed that the Ministry is advancing its scientific strategy to develop and consolidate local journals for inclusion in global databases. They emphasized the importance of enhancing international academic reputation, as measured by the rigor of scientific research. Participants outlined pathways for global publishing and clarified mechanisms to avoid predatory journals. The meeting recommended intensifying workshops on publishing in rigorous international journals, establishing committees to audit the accreditation of scientific journals within global databases, and continuing efforts to improve the quality of both academic and applied scientific research among Iraqi researchers while supporting the advancement of Iraqi scientific journals.

## 4. Challenges of Higher Education in Iraq

Higher education institutions in Iraq face numerous challenges, which can be categorized as follows:

**a. Challenges in Public Education**

- Unemployment among graduates from both undergraduate and post-graduate programs.
- Limited autonomy in decision-making processes within higher education.
- Societal pressures influencing institutional policies.
- Establishment of many public universities and faculties without adequate consideration of minimum infrastructure requirements, human resources, or labor market demands.
- Insufficient investment allocations for infrastructure development.
- Interference in university management aimed at appointing individuals lacking the necessary competence or experience to senior administrative positions.
- Absence of clear standards for faculty and staff appointments and their distribution according to specialization and qualifications.
- Inadequate financial support for scientific research.
- Changes in the secondary education system, transitioning from a binary “Scientific and Literary” framework to a diversified system (Biological and Applied), resulting in confusion regarding admissions criteria and negatively impacting enrollment levels and minimum entry requirements for many universities.
- Issues concerning the academic records of self-funded students studying abroad, particularly demands on the Ministry to open educational files for students with low academic performance.
- Significant inflation in the number of graduates whose skills are not aligned with labor market needs.
- Iraq’s absence from the Global Competitiveness Index published by international organizations.

**b. Challenges in Private University Education**

- Unregulated and haphazard establishment of private universities and faculties.
- Lack of regulatory frameworks defining the relationship between private education investors and the management of private universities and faculties.
- Deficiencies in enforcing regulations related to the student-to-faculty ratio in most private universities and faculties.

**V. Challenges for the Upcoming Year 2023****1. Advancing the Education Sector**

To address current challenges and foster improvements in the education sector, the following measures are essential:

- a. Enhancing the efficiency of expenditure on general education by:
  - Increasing investment spending.
  - Prioritizing improvements in educational outcomes for children from economically disadvantaged families and regions.
  - Maximizing value-for-money in education investments by enhancing sector performance within existing resource constraints.
  - Improving the effectiveness of education sector management through streamlined institutional arrangements conducive to achieving desired outcomes.
- b. Prioritizing education investments over the medium term amidst competing demands for limited general budget resources.
- c. Providing social protection for children by adopting a child-sensitive approach that ensures inclusivity and addresses core vulnerabilities to facilitate access to education.
- d. Conducting annual evaluations of curricula through broad surveys involving teachers, parents, and community members to gather feedback and redefine curriculum goals in alignment with societal and state needs.
- e. Enhancing the supervision and inspection systems governing examinations.
- f. Increasing government salaries for education professionals to reduce incentives for dishonest income-generating practices.
- g. Encouraging postgraduate degree holders to join the secondary education teaching workforce by offering job incentives, thereby strengthening schools with highly qualified educators.

## **2. Advancing the Higher Education Sector**

The objective of reforming and developing higher education in Iraq is to elevate and consolidate universities and institutions to meet international standards. This initiative aims to ensure that these institutions effectively fulfill their societal roles. The principal components of the proposed reform and development plan are detailed below.

### **a. Public University Education**

1. Collaborate with the Ministry of Planning to assess labor market demands for undergraduate and postgraduate degree holders, and adjust postgraduate admissions accordingly, emphasizing rare specializations through an annual program to optimize graduate employment.
2. Partner with UNESCO to devise precise and timely solutions addressing challenges faced by public and private universities, faculties, and institutes, particularly concerning the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the 2020–2021 academic year, balancing national circumstances with scientific rigor.

3. Implement comprehensive administrative reforms, including restructuring and streamlining the Ministry to enhance productivity.
4. Enact immediate regulations and directives to resolve practical issues within higher education institutions without compromising educational integrity.
5. Allocate financial resources preferentially to newly established universities for projects, infrastructure, laboratory equipment, and staffing of teaching, administrative, and service personnel.
6. Strengthen sustainable funding sources to reduce dependence on government funding, which is vulnerable to recurrent financial crises, and utilize these funds to improve university facilities and laboratories while establishing timelines for completing delayed projects.
7. Reevaluate university leadership selection criteria based on competence, integrity, academic rank, and administrative seniority, ensuring decisions are free from external interference.
8. Issue guidelines establishing criteria for applicants seeking teaching positions in higher education institutions to enhance performance standards, with a focus on rare and needed specializations.
9. Establish a scientific research fund and enact its governing legislation.
10. Foster integration with the Ministry of Education by enhancing curricula and exchanging expertise to ensure secondary school graduates possess a solid knowledge base and to address grade disparities between the Biological and Applied branches.
11. Review policies for opening study files for students abroad, establishing regulations based on students' GPA and the global ranking of their universities.
12. Introduce professional master's degrees aimed at improving employee performance; these programs do not qualify holders for university teaching roles.
13. Implement programmatic accreditation across all open specializations as a prerequisite for program continuation, balancing market demand with student enrollment.
14. Initiate immediate data collection for the fifth indicator (Education and Innovation) of the Global Competitiveness Index and coordinate with relevant ministries to meet requirements.
15. Establish an independent body for quality assurance and academic accreditation, applying institutional and international specialization standards across all programs.
16. Enhance the reputation of Iraqi universities by developing the three pillars of the university environment—faculty, students, and curriculum—to achieve inclusion in major global rankings such as Shanghai, THE, QS, URAP, Scimago, and Green Metric.

17. Promote cooperation with private universities and faculties, recognizing them as essential partners in higher education development through expertise exchange, research collaboration, and joint workshops.
18. Implement university autonomy programs that uphold academic values, social traditions, and social justice.
19. Support universities in adopting the “productive university” model, marketing scientific research to state sectors, and engaging globally to maximize applied research resources.
20. Encourage collaboration between universities and government institutions, as well as private and mixed sectors, to identify and address challenges in industrial, agricultural, oil, and health sectors.
21. Develop practical measures to attract foreign students and promote international cultural exchange.
22. Cultivate cultural relations with international universities based on mutual trust, reflecting Iraq’s civilization and human values.
23. Implement the credit/course system in universities with adequate capacity to foster constructive competition and academic excellence.
24. Prioritize the rights and needs of scholarship students to ensure degree completion and their return to serve the country.
25. Establish expert councils utilizing the experience of retired faculty members and professors emeriti to deliberate on future visions for university and vocational higher education development.
26. Safeguard public and private universities and faculties from politicization, maintaining them as sanctuaries for knowledge and creativity.
27. Develop vocational education institutions and significantly increase enrollment to prepare graduates with practical skills.
28. Adopt the “productive university” concept to ensure interaction between university research and societal productive sectors.
29. Review curricula in alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and labor market educational requirements.
30. Reassess university admission policies to maximize alignment among labor market demands, actual needs, and student preferences.
31. Expand virtual library resources through international publishing houses to facilitate Iraqi researchers’ access to global journals.
32. Establish foreign universities and branches of internationally recognized institutions, and attracting global academic talent to leverage their expertise in advancing and internationalizing the national academic environment.
33. Developing twinning partnerships between public and private universities and reputable international universities to facilitate knowledge exchange,

strengthen academic programs, and enhance the academic standing of national universities.

34. Support private higher education through federal assistance in land ownership or investment for establishing modern universities.
35. Develop integrated “university cities” outside governorate centers modeled after global smart universities.
36. Provide university professors with appropriate environments, including services and housing commensurate with their scientific status.

**b. Private University Education**

1. Establish universities, faculties, and institutes that meet infrastructure and human resource requirements to accommodate the increasing number of secondary school graduates.
2. Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with operational and student intake standards, closing non-compliant institutions and transferring students accordingly.
3. Develop fixed mechanisms and clear guidelines defining relationships among ownership and management stakeholders, ensuring university/faculty councils hold final authority.
4. Perform comprehensive reviews of university/faculty departments, enforcing staffing ratios aligned with national and international standards to maintain educational rigor and fill vacancies with qualified unemployed postgraduate degree holders.

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# 10.

## Public Services

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### I. Introduction

The availability of public services, including electricity, healthcare, and access to safe drinking water, constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for fostering development, progress, and growth within any nation. These services function as critical drivers that facilitate economic and social advancement, as well as overall welfare. However, despite Iraq's abundant natural and human resources, the country has experienced a pronounced deficiency in the provision of public services in recent years. Notable deficiencies persist across several sectors: the electrical power sector is characterized by significant deterioration and a widening demand gap, currently estimated at approximately 12,000 MW; the healthcare sector exhibits considerable fragility and substandard service delivery; a substantial portion of the population lacks access to adequate sanitation and safe drinking water; and municipal services confront substantial challenges that have adversely affected their operational effectiveness.

In addition to these challenges, Iraq confronts a significant threat posed by climate change. There exists a direct, causal, and reciprocal relationship between climate change and public services. The inadequacy and inefficiency of public services, coupled with the absence of robust infrastructure, precipitate health, environmental, and social issues that contribute to environmental pollution. Conversely, climate change is anticipated to induce extreme phenomena such as elevated temperatures, drought, and reduced water levels, thereby exerting considerable pressure on various service sectors. For instance, extreme temperature increases impose substantial demands on the electricity sector; environmental pollution exacerbates burdens on the healthcare system; and declining water availability and drought result in the scarcity of safe drinking water.

These circumstances necessitate that the government prioritize the enhancement of public services. It is imperative that strategic plans be urgently formulated and implemented, rather than relegated to bureaucratic inaction, to ensure the efficient provision of public services.

## II. Electricity: Persistent Setbacks

Iraq was among the earliest countries in the Middle East to introduce electricity, with the first electrical machine installed in the Khān Dallah building in Baghdad about one century ago. Since then, Iraq has experienced a complex history of events and factors that have influenced the electrical grid and its utilization.

The country's electricity sector has been significantly challenged by wars and international sanctions, which have rendered electricity one of Iraq's most pressing issues. This problem intensified following 2003, as the country's events adversely affected the entire energy infrastructure. Despite successive governments possessing adequate financial resources to construct power generation plants and access to essential raw materials such as fuel and natural gas, the crisis remains unresolved. The electrical grid continues to experience prolonged outages throughout the day, particularly exacerbated during the summer months when temperatures often reach 50°C. Notably, every minister of electricity since 2003 has been unable to effectively address this issue.

Power generation has exhibited marked fluctuations and instability in recent years due to multiple factors, including deteriorating and stagnant infrastructure across production, transmission, and distribution sectors, as well as financial and administrative corruption. Additionally, reliance on imported gas, especially from Iran, has made power generation dependent on external fuel supplies.

Table 10-1: Maximum Required Load for the Period 2021–2025 (MW).

Governorate	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Nīnawá	2,139	2,331	2,471	2,619	2,776
Kirkūk	1,292	1,370	1,452	1,539	1,631
Šalāḥ-al-Dīn	1,188	1,295	1,373	1,455	1,542
Diyālá	1,236	1,310	1,389	1,472	1,560
al-Anbār	1,164	1,269	1,345	1,426	1,512
Baghdād	6,966	7,384	7,827	8,297	8,795
Wāsiṭ	1,213	1,286	1,363	1,445	1,532
Bābil	1,461	1,548	1,641	1,740	1,844
Karbalá'	1,292	1,370	1,452	1,539	1,631
Najaf	1,348	1,429	1,515	1,606	1,702
al-Dīwānīyah	899	953	1,010	1,071	1,135
al-Muthanná	787	834	884	937	993
Dhī-Qār	2,022	2,144	2,272	2,409	2,553
Maysān	1,236	1,310	1,389	1,472	1,560
al-Baṣrah	4,719	5,002	5,302	5,621	5,958
Losses	2,896	3,084	3,269	3,465	3,673
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,959</b>	<b>33,919</b>	<b>35,954</b>	<b>38,111</b>	<b>40,398</b>

Source: Calculated by the researcher according to data from the Ministry of Electricity (n.d.).

Table 10-2: Ministry of Electricity Plans for Power Production (2022–2027) (MW).

General Company for Electricity Production	Planned Production			Production Variables	Total Production
	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term		
Northern Region	1,125	4,243	2,970	2,595	11,333
Southern Region	4,340	1,676	5,875	5,433	11,328
Middle Euphrates	638	2,405	7,090	3,864	13,997
Central Region	1,055	3,565	2,630	8,588	15,923
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>52,581</b>

Source: Calculated by the researcher according to data from the Ministry of Electricity (n.d.).

Data indicate that the electrical load required to supply the governorates in 2022 was approximately 33,919 MW. Conversely, the average production volume was about 15,016 MW, with losses estimated at 3,084 MW, resulting in an actual production volume of approximately 18,100 MW. This creates a supply-demand gap of roughly 15,127 MW. Demand for electrical energy is projected to increase at an annual growth rate of approximately 10%, necessitating immediate and urgent interventions to meet the rising demand (see Table 10-1).

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Electricity announced in 2022 the development of a five-year plan encompassing short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to increase energy production beyond 50,000 MW annually. The plan aims to augment production by 6,000 MW in the first year and by 12,000 MW in the second year, reaching approximately 52,000 MW after five years. Table 10-2 presents the Ministry's planned production targets.

The data in Table 10-2 suggest that the Ministry's plans could generate sufficient electricity to meet domestic demand fully. However, successful implementation requires sustained efforts, continuous monitoring to prevent plan abandonment, adequate financial investment, and addressing the pervasive issue of financial corruption within the sector.

### Zero Routine Flaring Initiative in Associated Gas Production

According to the World Bank, Iraq ranks as the second-largest country globally in terms of gas flaring volumes, following Russia, with approximately 17.37 billion cubic meters flared. This volume is sufficient to supply electricity to around 3 million homes continuously, highlighting a significant paradox: despite possessing the world's fifth-largest crude oil reserves (at least 145 billion barrels) and the twelfth-largest gas reserves (nearly 131 trillion cubic feet), Iraq continues to experience an electricity supply crisis.

In response, the Iraqi government has initiated measures to eliminate routine gas flaring and redirect the gas for electricity generation. Iraq has committed to the United Nations and World Bank's "Zero Routine Flaring by 2030" initiative, which aims to cease routine flaring of gas produced during oil extraction by 2030, thereby reducing imports. The objective is to halt the combustion of all gas released during oil production and instead utilize it for power generation, with

surplus gas exported to generate financial returns for the country. Within this framework, the Ministry of Oil approved an increase in associated gas production at the al-Zubayr oil field to 147 million standard cubic feet per day (MMSCFD) and expanded the number of compressors at the Ḥammār Mushrif station to 11. This expansion will increase capacity from 35 MMSCFD to 147 MMSCFD, enabling multipurpose use rather than flaring.

The Ministry of Oil also announced a contract with the American company Baker Hughes to collect and process associated gas from the al-Gharraf and al-Nāṣiriya oil fields in Dhī-Qār governorate. The project aims to increase gas production in these fields from 20 million to 200 million cubic feet by installing advanced gas processing equipment at the unified natural gas complex. The initiative involves drying and compressing associated gas to generate over 100 million cubic feet per day. Additionally, the al-Nāṣiriya station will be expanded into an integrated natural gas liquids (NGLs) facility to collect and process 200 million cubic feet per day of dry gas, liquid gas, and condensates. This output will support local consumption to operate power plants capable of generating approximately 400 MW for the Iraqi electrical grid (Ministry of Oil, 2021, September 19).

Notably, the al-Basrah Gas Company (BGC) project, implemented with Shell's assistance, has made significant progress in recent years. Its primary objective is to enhance Iraq's energy independence and economic diversification by collecting and processing associated gas flared in the al-Rumaylah, West al-Qurnah 1, and al-Zubayr fields. The company's gas production reached approximately 1,035 million cubic feet per day, sufficient to generate 3.5 GW of electrical power. Currently, the al-Basrah Gas Company supplies 70% of Iraq's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) demand. In June 2022, the company exported its first shipment of semi-refrigerated LPG via the port of Umm Qaşr (INA, 2022, December 22).

In mid-2022, former Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī inaugurated the Maysān Investment Combined Cycle Power Plant, which has an operational capacity of 750 MW. The plant utilizes local gas to reduce reliance on imported gas. During his inauguration speech, al-Kāzimī emphasized that the station represents a qualitative addition to the national grid, providing increased electrical energy across all governorates, with Maysān as the primary beneficiary.

The power plant employs a combined cycle system, which reduces energy waste and thermal emissions, thereby enhancing environmental sustainability. al-Kāzimī further explained that the Ministry of Electricity is working to develop traditional plants into combined cycle plants that produce more electricity with lower energy consumption by installing a gas unit in each oil field to help operate power stations at full capacity as a substitute for alternative fuels.

### **al-Sūdānī Government's Plan to Address the Electricity Crisis**

The ministerial program of the government led by Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī prioritized the urgent resolution of the electricity sector's challenges through the establishment of strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing its current state. The Prime Minister underscored the government's commitment to advancing

this sector, which continues to experience a supply shortfall despite substantial governmental expenditure. He emphasized that this deficit has adversely impacted critical economic sectors, including industry, agriculture, and investment. Moreover, the government recognizes the significance of the private sector and its potential for successful partnerships, highlighting its capacity to foster growth across various economic domains.

Within this framework, the Minister of Electricity, Ziyād 'Alī Fāḍil, disclosed plans for innovative projects designed to mitigate the nation's energy crisis. He reported that the Council of Ministers has authorized contracts with international firms to transition the existing traditional electrical grid into a smart grid system.

Correspondingly, the Ministry has introduced a tripartite plan to address power outages within specified timelines. The initial phase encompasses projects slated for completion within six months, targeting operational readiness by the summer of 2023. The subsequent phases constitute a comprehensive strategic approach to alleviate outages nationwide. The Ministry affirmed that the government program's plan includes advanced projects, spearheaded by combined cycle units projected to contribute an additional 4,000 MW within two years. A notable characteristic of these projects is their operation without supplementary fuel, enabling a reduction in the Ministry of Electricity's operational budget by over \$4 billion annually. This initiative is regarded as a pivotal contribution to resolving the energy crisis and curtailing operational expenditures. Additionally, the Ministry outlined plans to reform service and billing sectors, empowered by governmental authorization to engage major international companies for the development of a comprehensive vision and detailed study aimed at smart grid transformation to minimize losses in specific transmission lines. The Minister indicated that localized plans tailored to individual governorates will be submitted to the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives for forthcoming deliberations (Ministry of Electricity, 2022, December 17).

Concerning the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Siemens, the Ministry highlighted that this agreement represents a departure from previous arrangements by converting agreements and MOUs into tangible projects within an expedited timeframe through the establishment of project schedules. The initial phase of the agreement comprises six projects, with implementation periods ranging from one to two years. For the first time, the agreement incorporates the utilization of associated gas, previously unexploited, converting it into a form suitable for power generation plants to significantly augment the electrical system's capacity. Regarding transmission and distribution, Siemens will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the electrical system's condition, focusing on diagnosing deficiencies, vulnerabilities, and supply shortages in coordination with the Ministry. In terms of power generation, the Ministry outlined two primary initiatives: the establishment of a plant in Dhī-Qār during 2023 (initially producing 600 MW), and the development of a 2,000 MW plant reliant on associated gas.

In the transmission and distribution sector, several critical projects are underway, including five power transmission stations strategically located in

bottleneck areas across various governorates, each with a capacity of 1,000 MVA, aimed at alleviating supply constraints. Additionally, over 20 stations with a capacity of 132 MW each will be distributed among governorates to address bottlenecks. Furthermore, Siemens will supply ten transformers with capacities of 500 MVA each, which have yet to be integrated into the grid (Ministry of Electricity, 2023, January 14).

## Electrical Interconnection with Neighboring Countries

To address the persistent deficit in electrical energy production, the government has, over the past four years, pursued agreements with neighboring countries, the Arab Gulf states, and the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA). The Ministry of Electricity has announced its intention to establish interconnections with four neighboring countries to mitigate power shortages. Two strategic plans have been disclosed, one comprising seven pillars presented to the Council of Ministers in preparation for the summer of 2023, aiming to achieve a stable production capacity of 24,000 MW. The Ministry has emphasized efforts to diversify energy sources through interconnection projects, highlighting ongoing work with Jordan to establish a transmission line connecting the al-Qā'im station with the Rīshah station within Jordan. Interconnection points and line routes with Saudi Arabia have also been determined, alongside the mechanisms and quantities of energy to be transmitted via the joint link. Furthermore, the Ministry reported the completion of the final interconnection agreement with Turkey to supply 300 MW to the northern governorates, accompanied by the establishment of a 400 MW transformer station; however, the increase in energy prices in Turkey has delayed the implementation of this agreement.

The current government aims, through electrical interconnection projects with the Arab Gulf states, Turkey, and Jordan, to meet the demand for electrical energy, as these initiatives are expected to provide hundreds of megawatts. The primary interconnection lines with neighboring countries are:

- **Iraqi-Gulf Interconnection (Wafrah – al-Fāw 400):** Line length: 300 km (210 km within Kuwaiti territory and 90 km within Iraqi territory). Expected imported energy: 600 MW to supply the al-Fāw, Abū-Fulūs, Bāb al-Zubayr, and al-Ma'had al-Ṣinā'ī stations.
- **Iraqi-Saudi Interconnection ('Ar'ar – al-Yūsufīyah):** Line length: 440 km. Intended to supply al-Yūsufīyah secondary station and part of al-Karkh stations. Expected imported energy: not exceeding 1,000 MW.
- **Iraqi-Jordanian Interconnection (Rīshah – al-Qā'im 400):** Line length: 300 km. Intended to supply the al-Qā'im 400 station and its linked 132 kV stations (al-Qā'im Factory, 'Akāshāt, al-Ruṭbah). Expected imported energy: not exceeding 150 MW.
- **Iraqi-Turkish Interconnection (Cizre – al-Kask 400):** Line length: 125 km. Intended to supply the al-Kask 400 station and its linked 132 kV stations. Expected imported energy: not exceeding 250 MW.

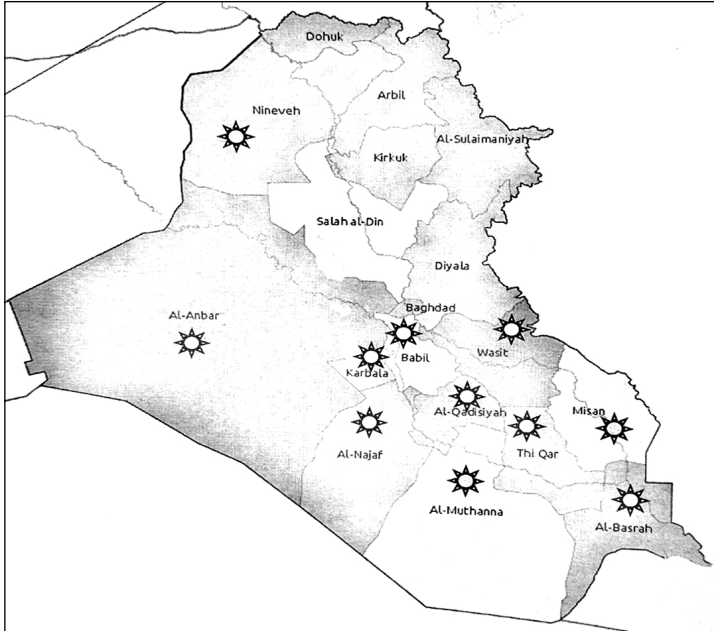
Within the framework of the government of al-Sūdānī following up on the interconnection file, the Minister of Electricity convened a meeting with the GCC Interconnection Authority to review developments in the Iraqi–Gulf project. The meeting addressed the primary pillars for completing the link and determining the route of the line connecting the al-Fāw substation and the Wafrah station. The Minister underscored the necessity of completing procedures such as soil surveys and obstacle clearance in coordination with Civil Defense directorates and the Iraqi Ports Company, particularly following the Ministry’s success in including this project in the 2023 budget and securing the requisite funding from the Ministry of Finance. The Minister also instructed the Department of Operation and Control and the Southern Electricity Transmission Department to finalize procedures for the al-Fāw ultra-high voltage substation and its associated high-voltage substations. It is noteworthy that the first phase of the Iraqi–Gulf interconnection will provide 500 MW, with subsequent phases planned. The Minister explained that this initiative represents a critical step toward enhancing cooperation between Iraq and the Gulf, positioning Iraq as a significant member of the energy market, fostering reciprocal energy benefits, and achieving grid stability. Regarding the link with Turkey, the Ministry indicated that the Silopi–Fāydaḥ and Cizre–al-Mawṣil lines, as well as the al-Kask station, have been completed with a 400 MW capacity. A final operational agreement was signed with the Turkish side to provide 300 MW as the first phase for the northern governorates; however, the global increase in gas prices due to the Ukrainian–Russian crisis has temporarily suspended the project, which will resume upon agreement on reasonable prices or a decline in global gas prices (Ministry of Electricity, 2022, November 27).

Concerning the interconnection with Jordan, Baghdād and ‘Ammān have agreed to expedite efforts to complete the link by the summer of 2023. The National Electric Power Company (NEPCO) of Jordan has initiated implementation procedures by preparing bids for the new Rīshah substation and the transmission line connecting it to the al-Qā’im substation in Iraq. The first phase of the project involves supplying Iraq with 400 kV of electrical power and constructing a high-voltage transmission line linking eastern Jordan (Rīshah) with western Iraq (al-Qā’im). The line spans approximately 300 kilometers, with an estimated cost of \$140 million, and performing a modification on the lines of the new Rīshah substation—which has a capacity of 132 kV—to connect it to the line. The Ministry confirmed that implementation of the first phase has commenced, under which 1,000 MWh per year will be exported. The contract was awarded to General Electric (GE) to complete the line after Iraq finalized studies on interconnection points and line routes.

### **Transition Toward Sustainable Energy**

In response to the rapid increase in energy demand, population growth, urbanization, and the expansion of informal housing—alongside an aging electrical infrastructure and the effects of climate change—the transition to renewable energy has become an imperative. This transition seeks to ensure energy

Map 10-1: Geographical distribution of planned solar power projects in Iraq.



sustainability while meeting climate objectives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel-based power plants.

### Solar Energy

Within this context, the government has pursued clean energy initiatives over the past three years by partnering with international companies to develop solar power projects. Iraq benefits from a high annual average of solar radiation, facilitating its use in electricity generation. According to the National Investment Commission, agreements have been signed with foreign firms to produce 7.5 gigawatts (GW) of solar energy.

As illustrated in Map 10-1, these projects are geographically distributed across Baghdād, al-Anbār, Nīnawá, Wāsiṭ, Karbalā', Dhī-Qār, al-Baṣrah, Maysān, Najaf, Bābil, and al-Dīwānīyah. The UAE-based Masdar Company is expected to generate approximately 1,000 megawatts (MW), including 350 MW in al-Anbār, 500 MW in Dhī-Qār, and 100 MW each in Maysān and Nīnawá. Power China is slated to produce 750 MW, while the French company TotalEnergies will contribute approximately 1,000 MW in its initial phase. The subsequent phase involves awarding contracts for an additional 7,500 MW to Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power and the UAE's Gulf Power.

In alignment with international commitments to mitigate global warming, such as the Paris Agreement, and to reduce fossil fuel consumption, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) allocated 1 trillion Iraqi Dinars (IQD) in early 2022 to provide loans supporting clean energy initiatives and promote the adoption of renewable energy technologies (CBI, 2022, January 3). CBI collaborated with the Higher

Lending Committee to ensure that residential investment complexes incorporate solar panels. Additionally, CBI coordinated with the Industrial Bank to facilitate financing for solar power systems in private residences and projects. The Ministry of Environment has expressed its endorsement of this national initiative as part of the broader transition toward a green economy.

In a related development, the Minister of Electricity, Ziyād 'Alī Fāḍil, participated in a World Bank meeting where he underscored the Ministry's commitment to climate change mitigation. He emphasized that renewable energy projects and carbon footprint reduction are priorities aimed at decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, and that the Ministry is actively pursuing diversification of energy sources through contracts for solar projects totaling approximately 7,500 MW (Ministry of Electricity, 2022, December 12).

### **Hydrogen Energy**

Marking a pioneering effort utilizing national expertise, the Ministry of Oil announced the inauguration of a hydrogen production and compression unit at the Oil Research and Development Center dedicated to research purposes. An energy advisor to the Ministry stated during the inauguration that this project represents the Ministry's initial step toward integrating into the global clean energy transition program, reaffirming Iraq's commitment to emission reduction and environmental protection.

The Ministry highlighted its dedication to keeping pace with global advancements in hydrogen production. It has established foundational renewable energy projects that incorporate solar power to supply laboratories, including the hydrogen unit, thereby ensuring the production of Green Hydrogen.

The production unit has a capacity of 12 normal cubic meters per hour (Nm<sup>3</sup>/h), capable of compressing two hydrogen gas cylinders per hour with a purity level of 99.5% at a pressure of 150 bar. This output suffices for research departments and pilot units, with surplus capacity available for governmental institutions. The production cost for one kilogram of hydrogen gas from this unit is approximately \$9.60, sufficient to fill two 150-bar cylinders. This cost is anticipated to decrease significantly following the completion of the solar cell project at the research center. Currently, the market price for a single hydrogen cylinder is approximately \$200 (Ministry of Oil, 2022, September 1).

### **Nuclear Energy**

The Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) announced a collaborative project with the Ministry of Electricity to implement nuclear power plants. The Commission identified several potential sites for these reactors and confirmed that they could eventually supply up to 25% of the country's electricity demand. Additionally, research reactors are expected to enhance sectors such as health, agriculture, and the environment.

The acting head of the IAEC and national liaison with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicated that the nuclear power project is scheduled to commence in 2023. This initiative aims to address a substantial portion of the

demand for clean electricity. The Commission has established a work program with the IAEA to train personnel for operating research reactors. Five sites have been selected in southern and central Iraq based on criteria including proximity to water sources and distance from seismic zones and flood risks. Although nuclear energy entails high initial construction costs, it is projected to fulfill 25% of the electrical energy demand (INA, 2022, November 23).

### III. al-Fāw Desalination Project

al-Baṣrah has historically faced numerous crises and challenges, particularly concerning the scarcity of potable water. Despite efforts by successive governments to address this issue, obstacles such as financial and administrative corruption and political conflicts have impeded progress. In June 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the implementation of the third phase of the al-Baṣrah Piped Water Project (al-Bad'ah Canal) under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, with an estimated initial phase cost of \$475 million. The decision allocated \$275 million from the additional investment account within the framework agreement between the Federal Ministry of Finance and the China Export & Credit Insurance Corporation (Sinosure), structured outside standard borrowing protocols and in the form of guarantees. Furthermore, the project execution was entrusted to companies within the Ministry of Water Resources to expedite completion, reduce costs, and leverage existing capacities, constituting an exception to government contract execution instructions (No. 2 of 2014).

Within this context, competition emerged between China and the UK to secure the contract. The British proposal, submitted by the company Biwater, entailed establishing a seawater desalination plant utilizing the Reverse Osmosis (RO) system exclusively, with a production capacity of 1 million and transmission lines extending 345 km to address the drinking water salinity crisis in al-Baṣrah. The total projected cost was \$5 billion, financed through a British loan. Specialists have noted that this system imposes substantial maintenance and filter replacement costs on the governorate.

The history of the Biwater company and the desalination project traces back to the tenure of Prime Minister Dr. Ḥaydar al-'Abādī, although negotiations did not yield significant outcomes. During a visit to al-Baṣrah governorate, the British Ambassador highlighted the longstanding and profound historical relationship between his country and the governorate, expressing optimism for an imminent agreement between the government and Biwater for substantial investment in potable water. Conversely, some politicians and MPs criticized the company as unqualified and financially insolvent, asserting that its capital amounted to only \$100 million, whereas the project cost could reach \$5 billion.

Conversely, the Chinese proposal, submitted by Shanghai Electric, involves constructing a steam-powered station in al-Fāw for multipurpose projects, including the production of 1.25 million of desalinated water and 3,000 MW of electricity. Funding for this initiative would derive from either a Chinese loan or

petrodollar allocations, although the precise cost remains undetermined. The Austrian engineering firm ILF Consulting Engineers was commissioned to provide consultancy services for the project. During its 34th regular session on September 7, 2021, the Council of Ministers resolved the following:

1. Authorize the Director General of the Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works to sign and disburse contracts with a joint venture consortium (Samsun Makina Sanayi, Biwater, Wood Group, and al-Reza Group) concerning the seawater desalination project in al-Başrah governorate. The funding was to be sourced from the British loan, capped at \$5 billion, based on the study provided by the Austrian consultant ILF, with execution under their supervision.
2. Authorize the Ministry to appoint an international legal consultancy firm to prepare and audit all contractual matters related to the project.
3. Assign the Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) to manage and organize the financing requirements from the British loan in coordination with UK Export Finance (UKEF) and other relevant financial institutions.

Following the establishment of the new government under Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī, the Prime Minister convened a meeting dedicated to discussing the execution steps for the seawater desalination project and expediting contracting and financing mechanisms. He emphasized the government's commitment to involving reputable international companies to ensure an efficient outcome that decisively resolves the water desalination issue.

The Prime Minister's Press Office clarified that the project would also encompass the construction of a new power plant and the provision of water to enhance the capacity of oil reservoirs. The meeting included the Minister of Construction and Housing, the head of the Board of Advisors, and representatives from the Austrian consultancy and the executing company.

## IV. Municipal Services

### Waste Collection Services

Iraqi cities face a persistent and escalating challenge of waste accumulation. This issue has intensified notably in recent years due to economic factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic and declining oil prices, which have directly impacted the provision of municipal services through insufficient financial allocations. Despite an increase in oil prices during 2021 and 2022, the failure to enact a national budget law adversely affected municipal service performance, with conditions deteriorating further in 2022. Table 10-3 presents the primary indicators for the municipal services sector in 2021.

Data from Table 10-3 indicate that the number of municipal institutions remained constant at 265 compared to 2020. However, the daily volume of waste removed decreased in 2021 to approximately 30,611.1 tons per day, compared to 32,415.1 tons per day in 2020. The total number of landfill sites remained at 221

Table 10-3: Key Municipal Indicators (2021) (Excluding the Kurdistan Region).

Detail	Indicator
Total number of municipal institutions	265 municipalities
Percentage of population served by waste collection	65.7%
Percentage of urban population served	90.6%
Percentage of rural population served	12.5%
Total amount of waste, debris, and scrap removed	17.4 million tons/year
Amount of regular waste removed	11.2 million tons/year
Amount of hazardous waste removed	2,052 tons/year
Amount of debris (construction/demolition) removed	5.8 million tons/year
Landfill sites with environmental approval	72 sites
Landfill sites without environmental approval	149 sites
Number of public waste sorting and recycling plants	2 plants
Quantity of regular waste recycled	145.2 tons/year

Source: CSO (2021a).

Table 10-4: Key Municipal Indicators by Governorate (2021) (Excluding the Kurdistan Region).

Governorate	Municipal Institutions	Population Served (%)		Regular Stations	Temporary Sites	Approved Landfills	Unapproved Landfills	Random Dumping
		Urban	Rural					
Nīnawá	31	88.0	0.0	1	6	6	26	3
Karkūk	12	98.2	0.0	2	2	2	10	0
Diyālá	22	84.6	5.4	0	7	7	13	4
al-Anbār	21	81.3	7.2	0	6	6	16	0
Mayorality of Baghdad	15	95.0	0.0	9	1	1	2	0
Baghdād Outskirts	16	72.5	16.5	0	0	0	16	16
Bābil	16	90.6	0.0	0	8	8	0	0
Karbalá'	7	86.0	52.6	0	1	1	2	1
Wāsiṭ	19	93.0	8.8	0	12	12	2	0
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn	18	66.1	23.7	0	1	1	18	10
Najaf	10	98.8	12.1	4	1	1	1	3
al-Dīwānīyah	15	84.5	0.0	0	6	6	6	0
al-Muthanná	12	99.6	1.8	0	10	10	2	0
Dhī-Qār	20	91.2	0.0	0	5	5	9	0
Maysān	15	95.5	39.6	0	5	5	11	0
Baṣrah	16	96.6	71.9	4	1	1	15	0

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on CSO (2021a).

in 2021, showing no development. Notably, the number of landfill sites lacking environmental approval significantly exceeds those compliant, indicating non-adherence to environmental standards.

At the governorate level, Table 10-4 shows that Nīnawá had the highest number of institutions (31), followed by Diyālá (22) and al-Anbār (21), while Karbalá' had the fewest (7). The highest service coverage was recorded in al-Muthanná (99.6%), followed by Najaf (98.8%), Karkūk (98.2%), and al-Baṣrah (96.6%). Conversely, Ṣalāḥ

al-Dīn and the outskirts of Baghdād recorded the lowest levels (66.1% and 72.5%, respectively). Overall service coverage reached 65.7%, heavily concentrated in urban areas (90.6%), whereas rural coverage remained minimal at 12.5%. Analysis reveals that Nīnawá ranked highest in the number of landfill sites lacking environmental approval (26 sites), followed by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (18), al-Anbār (16), and al-Baṣrah (15). Notably, Najaf recorded no unapproved sites.

Reports indicate that the environmental sustainability index for waste collection in Iraq reached approximately 70%, signifying that Iraq processes 70% of generated waste, while approximately 30% remains in the local environment (neighborhoods, cities, and streets). This situation results in urban landscape degradation, environmental pollution, and public health risks (Ministry of Planning, 2020, p. 67). These findings demonstrate inefficiencies in waste collection services attributable to various challenges, such as (CSO, 2021a):

- Insufficient number of vehicles and machinery, as well as poor maintenance.
- Lack of sufficient financial allocations.
- Low wages for workers and the free nature of cleaning services.
- Weak institutional performance of governorates in implementing waste recycling projects.
- Lack of environmental awareness and non-compliance by citizens.
- Indiscriminate dumping of waste.
- Proliferation of informal housing settlements and encroachments.
- Absence of a waste sorting system at the source.

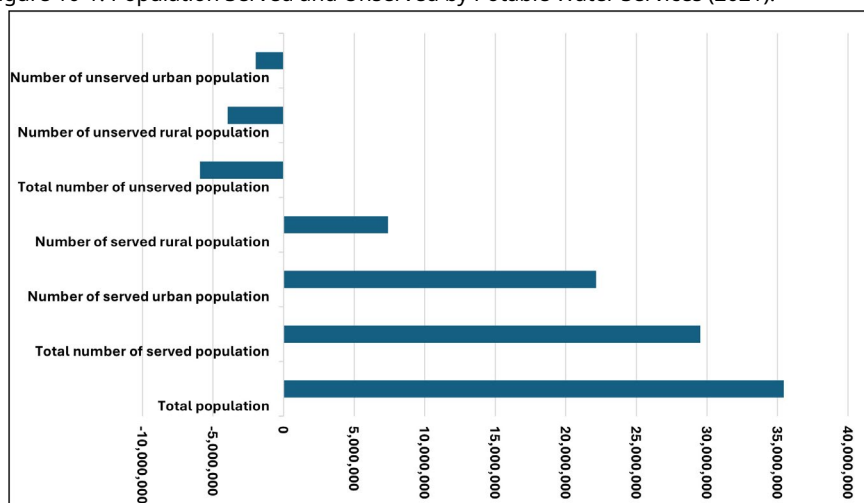
### Potable Water Services

The provision of potable water services constitutes an urgent necessity for sustaining human life. Accordingly, the delivery and optimal supply of these services represent a social and moral obligation of the state toward its citizens. Access to safe drinking water is essential in addressing the challenges posed by climate change; as temperatures increase, children and women—who are the most physically and psychologically vulnerable groups—face heightened exposure to the risks associated with extreme climatic variations. This increased exposure elevates the risk of disease and mortality. Presently, nearly every child experiences water scarcity and intense heatwaves, thereby confronting an increased risk of waterborne illnesses.

The most recent statistics indicate that, as of 2021, 83.3% of the population was served by potable water distribution networks. This coverage includes 91.9% in urban areas and 65.1% in rural areas. These figures remained unchanged from those recorded in 2020, indicating no progress during 2021.

The Mayorality of Baghdād and the governorates of Diyālā and Wāsiṭ exhibited the highest urban service rates at 100%, followed by Nīnawá, Najaf, Karbalā', and Karkūk, each exceeding 94%. Conversely, Baghdād Outskirts recorded the lowest

Figure 10-1: Population Served and Unserved by Potable Water Services (2021).



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2022).

urban service rate at 60%. In rural areas, Najaf reported the highest service rate at 94%, followed by Karkūk, Karbalā', Maysān, Baṣrah, and Diyālā. Meanwhile, Dhī-Qār and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn reported the lowest rural service rates, at 22% and 41%, respectively (Table 10-5).

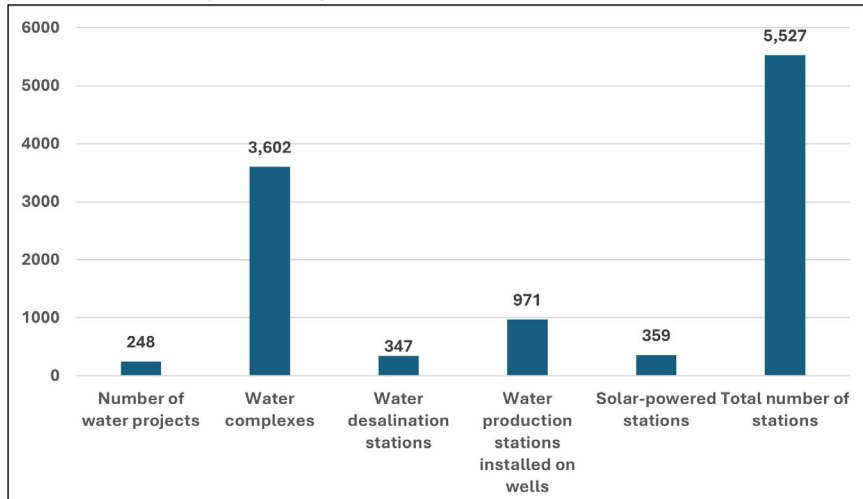
The total number of potable water production stations across Iraq (excluding the Kurdistan Region) reached 5,527. Of these, 195 stations were partially

Table 10-5: Percentage of Population Served by Potable Water (2021).

Governorate	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total (%)
Nīnawá	97.0	75.0	88.3
Karkūk	94.0	89.0	92.7
Diyālā	100.0	80.0	89.8
al-Anbār	80.0	70.0	75.0
Mayoralty of Baghdād	100.0	0	100.0
Baghdād Outskirts	60.0	40.0	50.5
Bābil	85.0	60.0	72.1
Karbalā'	97.0	87.0	93.7
Wāsiṭ	100.0	85.0	94.0
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn	85.0	41.0	60.8
Najaf	98.0	94.0	96.9
al-Dīwāniyah	83.0	64.0	74.9
al-Muthanná	90.0	55.0	71.3
Dhī-Qār	80.0	22.0	59.2
Maysān	90.0	85.0	88.7
Baṣrah	90.0	85.0	89.1

Source: CSO, 2022, p. 32.

Figure 10-2: Water Projects through (2021).



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2022, pp. 23-25).

non-functional, and 1,153 were completely out of operation. The governorates of Nīnawá and Dhī-Qār had the highest numbers of non-functional stations, with 158 and 153, respectively, whereas Najaf and Karbalá' had the fewest, with 11 and 12 non-functional stations. The number of water complexes nationwide totaled approximately 3,602, including 190 partially operational and 392 non-functional complexes. The total volume produced by these complexes was approximately 5.513 million cubic meters per day. The highest clean water production rates were recorded in Baṣrah, Maysān, and Bābil, with approximately 1.2 million, 703.9 million, and 447.3 million cubic meters per day, respectively, while Karbalá' recorded the lowest production rate at approximately 92,044 cubic meters per day.

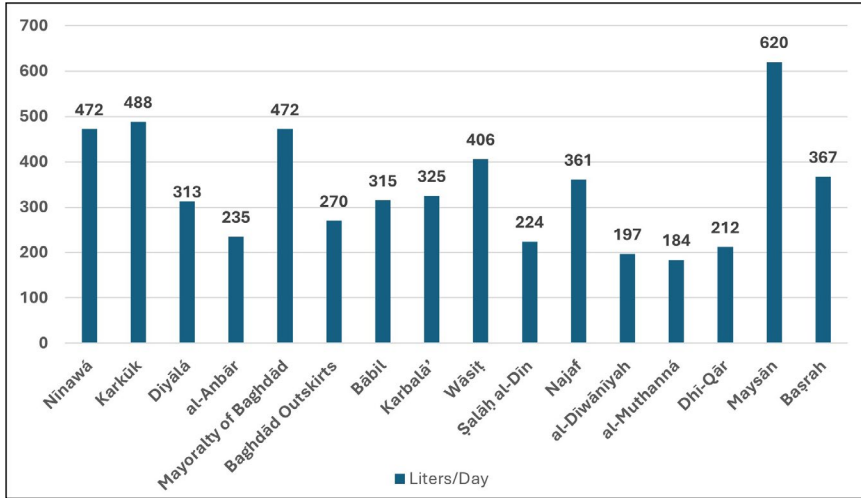
Regarding Reverse Osmosis (RO) desalination stations, the total number reached 347, distributed across all governorates except Nīnawá, Bābil, and the Mayoralty of Baghdād. Of these, 255 stations were non-functional. The governorate of Dhī-Qār accounted for 78 stations, followed by al-Muthanná and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn with 45 stations each, and Diyālá with 42 stations. The fewest stations were found in Karbalá' and al-Anbār, with 5 stations each.

Concerning solar-powered stations, the total reached 359, of which 324 were non-functional. The highest numbers were observed in Dhī-Qār, al-Dīwānīyah, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, with 58, 57, and 55 stations, respectively. In contrast, Najaf and Karbalá' had the lowest numbers, with 1 and 12 stations, respectively.

The average per capita share of potable water supplied to the population, representing daily consumption for drinking and other needs, was approximately 365 liters per day across Iraq.

In a related development, UNICEF and the German Embassy transferred a water project, funded by the German government through the KfW Development Bank, to ensure access to potable water for communities affected by severe water pollu-

Figure 10-3: Average Per Capita Total Water Supply (Excluding the Kurdistan Region).



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2022).

tion in Najaf governorate. The project is designed to pump 6,000 cubic meters per hour to provide safe and clean drinking water to more than 250,000 residents in Kūfah and southern Najaf. The project was implemented in two phases: first, installing piles within the Euphrates River basin to increase intake flow by 15 meters; second, laying pipes and installing submersible pumps and electrical fittings. Completion was achieved by the end of July 2022 (UNICEF, 2022).

According to data from the Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works, there are 42 water sector projects distributed throughout the country (excluding the Kurdistan Region). Of these, 14 projects are fully completed, 4 projects have completion rates between 1% and 25%, 4 projects between 26% and 50%, 6 projects between 51% and 75%, and 14 projects between 76% and 99%.

Nonetheless, the sector faces numerous challenges that have intensified over the past three years due to insufficient financial resources, low budget allocations, and the failure to pass the national budget in 2022. These difficulties are further exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, declining oil prices, and the absence of allocated funds for this sector in the Food Security Law, all of which adversely affected performance during 2022. Key problems facing potable water services include (CSO, 2022):

- Lack of financial allocations.
- Inefficiency of projects, and the aging and weakness of networks.
- Scarcity and fluctuation of electrical power.
- Encroachments on potable water networks.
- Poor maintenance, and a shortage of technical staff.
- Water scarcity from sources and its pollution.

## Sanitation Services

Sanitation infrastructure constitutes a fundamental component of urban development and public health in modern societies. Its absence impedes progress and exacerbates environmental pollution and the spread of diseases. According to the most recent data from the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), the total number of central and medium-to-small wastewater treatment units reached 64 stations in 2021, compared to 66 stations in 2020 (Design capacity: 2.7 cubic meter per day). These treatment units are distributed across various governorates as follows: 15 stations in Baghdād (10 under the Baghdād Mayoralty and 5 in the Baghdād Outskirts), 5 stations each in Karbalā', Maysān, and Baṣrah, 4 stations in Najaf, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and al-Anbār, 3 stations in Nīnawá, Karkūk, and Dhī-Qār, and 1 station in Diyālá. Of the 37 central stations, 12 were non-functional, 4 partially operational, and 21 fully operational. Among the 27 medium and small-sized treatment units, 8 were non-functional, 2 partially operational, and 7 fully operational (Ministry of Planning, 2022, pp. 4-5).

The proportion of the population served by sewage networks (both wastewater and combined systems) increased from 34.0% in 2020 to approximately 37.4% in 2021, reflecting a 3.4% growth. Table 10-6 presents the distribution of service coverage across different systems.

Table 10-6: Distribution of Sanitation Services Coverage Across Different Systems (2021) (Excluding the Kurdistan Region).

Governorate	Served by Sewage Networks (wastewater/ Combined)	Served by Septic Tank Systems	Unserved by Networks or Treatment Systems
Nīnawá	22.6	75	2.4
Karkūk	3.7	65	31.1
Diyālá	4.9	80	15.1
al-Anbār	17	80	3
Mayoralty of Baghdād	91	8	1
Baghdād Outskirts	17.8	72	10.2
Bābil	5.2	90	4.8
Karbalā'	37.2	33.3	29.5
Wāsiṭ	39.1	40	20.9
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn	12.2	80	7.8
Najaf	58.6	37	4.4
al-Dīwānīyah	11.3	80	8.7
al-Muthanná	22.3	75	2.7
Dhī-Qār	41.7	48	10.3
Maysān	71.6	26.6	1.8
Baṣrah	34.9	28	37.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>10.8</b>

Source: Ministry of Planning, 2022.

Analysis of Table 10-6 reveals that 10.8% of the population remains unserved by either sewage networks or independent septic tank systems. The highest rates of unserved populations were observed in Baṣrah (37.1%), Karkūk (31.3%), Karbalā' (29.5%), and Wāsiṭ (20.9%). Conversely, Mayoralty of Baghdād and Maysān governorates exhibited the lowest unserved rates at 1% and 1.8%, respectively.

Nationally, the proportion of treated wastewater relative to total generated wastewater was 54%, indicating that approximately 46% of wastewater is discharged untreated, thereby posing environmental and public health risks. Notably, Karbalā', Bābil, and Baghdad Outskirts achieved full treatment of their wastewater, followed by al-Muthanná (93.3%) and al-Anbār (90%). In contrast, Nīnawá, Karkūk, Diyālá, Dhī-Qār, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and Wāsiṭ reported no treatment of generated wastewater (Ministry of Planning, 2022, p. 3).

Data from the Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works indicate that approximately 53 sanitation projects were underway in 2022. Of these, 19 projects were completed, 4 projects were between 0–25% complete, 2 projects between 26–50%, 10 projects between 51–75%, and 18 projects between 76–99% complete. Despite these advancements, the sanitation sector continues to face significant challenges, such as (CSO, 2022a):

- Inefficiency of the infrastructure networks.
- Insufficient financial allocations.
- Shortage of technical and administrative staff.
- Poor maintenance, and a lack of necessary machinery and equipment.
- Scarcity and fluctuation of the electrical power required for the operation of pumps.
- Encroachments involving the unauthorized connection of sewage networks to rainwater drainage networks.
- Low awareness and the misuse of sewage networks.

## V. Maritime, Land, and Air Transport Services

### 1. Maritime Transport

The transportation of liquid bulk commodities, including crude oil and petroleum products, constitutes the most substantial category of goods transported via maritime routes. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the shipment of dry bulk materials such as iron ore, coal, grains, and timber. These developments have influenced the composition of the maritime fleet, resulting in a greater proportion of specialized vessels—particularly liquid tankers, which represent half of the total cargo capacity—as well as multi-purpose carriers designed for both liquid and ore cargoes.

According to the indicators presented in Table 10-7, the General Company for Ports of Iraq (GCPI) reported revenues of approximately 451.5 billion IQD in 2021, reflecting a growth rate of 6.5% compared to 424.1 billion IQD in 2020.

Table 10-7: Key Indicators for the Maritime Transport Sector (2021).

The General Company for Ports of Iraq (GCPI)			The General Company for Maritime Transport		
Indicator	2020	2021	Indicator	2020	2021
Realized Revenue (Billion IQD)	424.1	451.5	Realized Revenue (Billion IQD)	184.0	169.0
Number of Employees	7,867	6,512	Number of Employees	1,264	1,216
Total Imported Cargo (1,000 Tons)	19,569	17,118	Vessels Owned by the Company	7	7
Total Exported Cargo (1,000 Tons)	10,213	10,236	Cargo Moved by Owned Vessels (1,000 Tons)	536	406
Vessels Arriving at Iraqi Ports (Freight)	2,060	1,739	Total Exported and Imported Cargo by Owned Vessels (1,000 Tons)	120	-
Vessels Departing Iraqi Ports (Freight)	808	943	Water Taxi Passengers	2,950	12,700
Wages and Benefits Paid (Billion IQD)	179.8	185.8	Wages and Benefits Paid (Billion IQD)	184.0	169.0

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2021b, pp. 9, 20).

Nevertheless, the workforce decreased to 7,512 employees in 2021, down from 7,868 in 2020, primarily due to retirements and the completion of contracts. The number of ship arrivals at ports declined by 15% in 2021, while the total weight of imported cargo decreased by 12%, indicative of global economic factors affecting freight volumes. Conversely, the total weight of exported cargo experienced a marginal increase of approximately 0.3%.

Data from the General Company for Maritime Transport indicate that revenues amounted to approximately 169 billion IQD in 2021, representing a decrease of nearly 8% from 184 billion IQD in 2020. This reduction was attributable to a 24% decline in the total weight of cargo—both exported and imported—transported by the company's fleet, which remained constant at 7 vessels.

## 2. Land Transport

The land transport sector, which includes the General Company for Passenger Transport and the General Company for Land Transport, reported total revenues of 25,831 million IQD in 2021:

- Passenger Transport: Generated revenues of 13,637 million IQD, representing a growth rate of 48% compared to 2020.
- Land Transport: Recorded revenues of 12,194 million IQD, reflecting a decline of 26% attributed to security challenges and checkpoint procedures.

Regarding the workforce, the combined total number of employees in both companies was 4,362 in 2021 (1,954 and 1,762, respectively), indicating a decrease from 2020 due to resignations and retirements.

Table 10-8: Land Transport Sector Indicators (2021).

The General Company for Passenger Transport			The General Company for Land Transport		
Indicator	2020	2021	Indicator	2020	2021
Realized Revenue (Million IQD)	9,194	13,637	Revenue from Owned Trucks	16,505	12,194
Total Owned Buses	1,202	1,227	Revenue from Non-Owned Trucks	11,015	9,750
Total Owned Buses (Operational)	846	897	Total Owned Trucks	535	535
Total Employees	2,110	1,954	Total Operational Trucks	401	447
			Total Non-Owned Trucks	2,500	2,600
			Total Employees	1,905	1,762

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2022c).

### 3. Railways

The General Company for Railways, affiliated with the Ministry of Transport, plays a critical role in transporting heavy loads over long distances and influencing urban distribution patterns. Iraq's railway network extends over 2,894 km (unchanged from 2020), comprising 1,697 km of main lines (58.7%), 676 km of branch lines (23.3%), and 520 km of double or parallel tracks (18%), serving 6 main stations.

Data indicate that passenger revenue reached 1,079 million IQD in 2021, representing an increase of 46.5% over 2020, following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. Freight revenue experienced a substantial rise to 16,080 million IQD (up from 4,221 million IQD in 2020), reflecting a growth rate exceeding 180% due to increased cargo volumes. Total number of employees was 3,942 in 2021.

Table 10-9: Key Railway Sector Indicators (2020–2021).

Indicator	2020	2021
Total Railway Length (km)	2,893	2,893
Passenger Revenue (Million IQD)	737	1,079
Freight Revenue (Million IQD)	4,221	16,080
Number of Employees	4,201	3,942

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (CSO, 2022b, p. 7).

## VI. Health Services

The healthcare system in Iraq used to meet high standards compared to other Middle Eastern countries; however, the imposition of sanctions, armed conflicts, and internal unrest have contributed to the deterioration of Iraq's health system. Health care indicators have reflected this decline, becoming increasingly fragile over the past three years due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent reduction in financial resources linked to declining oil prices.

Concurrently, social determinants such as rising poverty rates, elevated illiteracy levels, and the declining quality of education have significantly impaired

Table 10-10: Health Institutions and Centers through 2021 (Excluding the Kurdistan Region).

Total Health Institutions		Total Health Sectors and Centers by Type	
Public Hospitals	210	Primary Health Care Sector	125
Private Hospitals	101	Health Centers with a Doctor	1,009
Specialized Centers	148	Health Centers without a Doctor	843
Health Care Centers	1,852	Centers with Delivery Room/ Emergency Ward	121
Popular Clinics	308	Family Medicine Health Centers	108
Health Insurance Clinics	245	Training Health Centers	25
Health Posts	545	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,231</b>
Mobile Teams and Medical Detachments	113		
Birth and Death Registration Offices	280		
Other Institutions	209		
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,011</b>		

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (Ministry of Health, 2021, pp. 1-3).

public health. These factors are further exacerbated by demographic pressures, notably the rapid and substantial population growth, which has constrained the development of the health sector.

According to data presented in Table 10-10, the total number of health institutions reached 4,011 by 2021. Public hospitals (excluding those in the Kurdistan Region) numbered 201, with the highest concentration in Baghdād (52 hospi-

Table 10-11: Total Number of Health Care Centers, and Population per Center.

Governorate	Total Health Care Centers	Population per Health Center	Health Center per 10,000 Population
Baghdād	263	32,542	0.3
Başrah	138	22,196	0.5
Nīnawá	183	21,466	0.5
Maysān	74	15,835	0.6
al-Dīwānīyah	85	15,996	0.6
Diyālá	104	16,579	0.6
al-Anbār	191	9,769	1.0
Bābil	118	18,430	0.6
Karbalá'	62	20,701	0.5
Karkūk	121	13,908	0.7
Wāsiṭ	79	18,380	0.5
Dhī-Qār	170	12,979	0.8
al-Muthanná	71	12,080	0.8
Şalāḥ-al-Dīn	109	15,413	0.6
Najaf	84	18,450	0.5

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on (Ministry of Health, 2021, p. 5).

tals), followed by Bābil and Nīnawá, each with 18 public hospitals. Subsequently, Najaf, Baṣrah, and al-Anbār accounted for 16, 14, and 13 hospitals, respectively, while Wāsiṭ and al-Muthanná had the fewest, with 8 and 5 hospitals, respectively. Private hospitals (excluding the Kurdistan Region) totaled 101, with Baghdād possessing the largest share at 53 hospitals, followed by Najaf and Bābil with 7 and 5 hospitals, respectively. In contrast, al-Muthanná, Wāsiṭ, and Maysān each had only one private hospital.

Regarding the total number of health sectors and centers, approximately 2,231 units were recorded. Of these, 125 belonged to the primary health care sector, with the highest concentrations in Baghdād, al-Anbār, and Nīnawá, whereas al-Muthanná and Maysān exhibited the lowest numbers (Table 10-11). Health centers staffed or managed by a doctor numbered 1,009, while those without a doctor totaled 843. Training health centers were limited to 25.

### **COVID-19**

As of December 31, 2022, the total number of COVID-19 infections in Iraq reached 2,467,107 cases. Recoveries approximated 2,439,079, while the death toll was recorded at 25,369. Despite the Ministry of Health providing vaccines free of charge from various international manufacturers, vaccination rates remain below the targeted threshold. Approximately 11,328,818 individuals received the first dose, 7,938,409 received the second dose, and only 272,585 individuals received the booster (third) dose.

### **Viral Hemorrhagic Fever**

In early 2022, the health sector encountered additional challenges due to a new wave of Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF), with over 300 cases and 60 deaths reported. VHF is transmitted through contact with infected animals or insects; the viruses responsible reside in various animal and insect hosts, including mosquitoes, ticks, rodents, and bats. Transmission occurs via mosquito or tick bites, contact with bodily fluids of infected persons (e.g., blood, saliva, semen), or inhalation of excrement from infected rodents. Clinical manifestations include fever, fatigue, weakness, malaise, dizziness, musculoskeletal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Severe symptoms involve hemorrhaging under the skin, internal organs, orifices such as the mouth, eyes, or ears, neurological dysfunction, coma, delirium, and multi-organ failure involving the kidneys, respiratory system, and liver.

The Ministry of Agriculture identified several factors contributing to the increase in VHF cases, including a shortage of veterinary personnel, indiscriminate slaughtering of animals within urban areas, and inadequate hygiene in animal enclosures. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Iraqi health authorities issued warnings following multiple fatalities, prompting government advisories to exercise caution and implement preventive measures when handling livestock or carcasses.

## Cholera

Cholera also spread during this period, Ministry of Health data indicate over 1,100 cases and five deaths since early 2022. The fatalities were distributed as follows: three in Karkūk, one in Baghdād, and one in Bābil. Cholera transmission is closely linked to water and food safety, which serve as primary vectors.

## Key Challenges

The health sector continues to experience significant weaknesses and challenges stemming from decades of conflict, corruption, and neglect. The health-care system remains in a deep-rooted crisis, severely impairing service delivery. Chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung disease account for approximately 55% of primary mortality causes, with respective rates of 11%, 37%, 4%, and 2%. Additionally, 30% of the population suffers from hypertension, 15% from diabetes, and 30% from obesity. Communicable diseases and nutritional disorders constitute 17% of total deaths. Studies reveal that 16.5% of individuals aged over 15 suffer from mental disorders and lack access to essential medical and psychosocial care. Substance abuse and addiction affect approximately 2.7% of the population across various life stages (al-'Alwān, 2019, pp. 3-4).

Environmental pressures, including air and water pollution, further burden the health sector. WHO estimates attribute approximately 35,000 annual infections to environmental risks encompassing both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Regarding air pollution, the average exposure to fine particulate matter in urban and rural residential areas is 53.6 micrograms per cubic meter, whereas WHO recommendations suggest this ratio should not exceed 10 (al-'Alwān, 2019, p. 5).

The fragility of the health system and resource deficits have profoundly and negatively impacted public health. Although the Emergency Support for Food Security and Development Law (No. 2 of 2022) allocated 150 billion IQD to the Ministry of Health for procuring medications for cancer and hereditary anemia, the sector requires substantially greater financial resources and sustained efforts for revitalization.

Neglect over the past two decades has resulted in infrastructure deficiencies, insufficient hospital and health center capacities, and shortages of human resources. These gaps in preventive and curative services disproportionately burden impoverished populations. International health reports indicate that over 70% of healthcare costs are borne by patients or their families, whereas WHO recommends this share not exceed 30%.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgent necessity for fundamental sectoral reform and reconsideration. The principal challenges confronting the sector include: Weak health system infrastructure and inadequate financial allocations, inequitable distribution of health personnel, and outdated legislation and absence of long-term strategic plans and visions.

## VII. Agenda for the New Year

Following a comprehensive analysis and review of the current state of public services, this section delineates the principal features of the Ministerial Platform of the newly established government. The administration aims to fulfill these objectives in service of the community across diverse public sectors. The platform characterizes the new administration as a “government of services.” The introductory segment of the government program underscores a commitment to honoring promises made to the populace and pledges, with full transparency and clarity, to revitalize sectors that directly impact citizens’ lives while striving to enhance and develop public services.

### 1. Electricity Services

The fourth paragraph of the government program addresses the electricity crisis and the objective of increasing supply hours. To enhance sector performance and implement reformative measures, the program specifies the following measures:

- Launching a comprehensive and urgent campaign for the maintenance and rehabilitation of all types of power generation plants.
- Initiating a plan with defined timelines to eliminate bottlenecks in the transmission and distribution sectors in preparation for the summer of 2023.
- Completing the construction of stations and projects related to conversion, transmission, and generation within the electrical grid, with a strategic emphasis on solar power generation.

### 2. Health Sector

The fifth paragraph of the government program encompasses a series of procedures and plans aimed at delivering health services and addressing the current fragility of this sector through the following measures:

- Implementing the Health Insurance Law to improve medical services and ensure the availability of medications for citizens.
- Completing ongoing hospital projects of varying bed capacities, alongside the establishment of new health centers across all governorates and districts.
- Expanding the provision of primary and secondary health services to alleviate the burden on major hospitals.

### 3. Municipal Services

The government program for the municipal services sector prioritizes the following:

- Advancing the completion of requirements for the seawater desalination and electricity generation project in Başrah governorate, recognizing its urgent and strategic importance to citizens’ lives.

- Finalizing stalled projects with completion rates of 70% or higher, particularly those involving water, sewage, schools, and hospitals.
- Developing an investment plan to address the road network crisis.
- Adopting measures to manage waste and rationalize water use across domestic, agricultural, industrial, and other sectors.
- Restructuring the transport sector broadly (including ports, airports, railways, and land transport) and capitalizing on Iraq's strategic location to generate significant employment opportunities and financial resources.

Based on the foregoing, the government program of Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī predominantly focuses on electricity, transport, and health sectors. However, it appears to neglect other critical areas such as potable water provision, waste removal, and sewage services—sectors in which Iraq experiences substantial deficiencies and low sewage network coverage.

Moreover, the program contains only cursory references to climate change, despite its increasingly evident impacts. Iraq ranks as the fifth most affected country by climate change within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with significant consequences for public health and water availability. Addressing climate change is intrinsically linked to the enhancement of general public services.

Therefore, the government should consider prioritizing the sewage, municipal, and waste management sectors by increasing their financial allocations and formulating long-term strategies for their development, given their direct implications for the environment and public health.

## VIII. Challenges of the Upcoming Year

The government is expected to address critical issues anticipated by the public to enhance living conditions. Iraq confronts multifaceted economic, social, health, and political challenges, in addition to environmental and climate crises. The provision of services remains a pressing concern, with numerous resolutions long overdue.

Despite the financial gains resulting from the global increase in oil prices, the deterioration of public services continues unabated without a definitive resolution. This persistent decline is attributed to several principal factors:

- **Delay in Approving the 2023 General Budget:** The absence of an approved budget at the end of 2022 resulted in Iraq entering 2023 without a financial framework, adversely affecting the overall economic situation and, more specifically, public services. Political disputes may cause significant delays in budget approval. Recent decisions, such as granting permanent status to contract workers in state ministries, necessitate inclusion in the budget, further complicating its passage. This delay directly impedes public services by postponing the allocation of essential financial resources.

- **Financial and Administrative Corruption:** Corruption remains the most formidable challenge, exemplified by the “Theft of the Century” scandal at the end of 2022. It diverts funds intended for public welfare into the hands of corrupt individuals. This environment suppresses economic activity and undermines sustainable development, and the services sector is particularly susceptible to corruption; despite substantial expenditures that should theoretically ensure high-quality services, infrastructure continues to deteriorate.
- **Health Fragility:** Recent health crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks of Cholera and Hemorrhagic Fever, have revealed the extreme vulnerability of the health sector. The system suffers from deteriorating facilities, shortages of essential treatments, and a high prevalence of chronic diseases and cancers. Comprehensive reform and modernization are required to provide effective solutions for citizens.
- **Climate Change:** Climate change represents one of the most significant economic and humanitarian challenges facing humanity today, generating complex humanitarian, social, and health crises (al-Naşrāwī, 2022). There is a direct correlation between the lack of public services and climate change; for instance, electricity shortages compel citizens to rely on private generators, thereby increasing harmful emissions. These emissions further compromise public health, placing additional strain on already burdened health institutions. In addition, climate change results in severe droughts, reduced rainfall, and a significant decline in river levels, leading to critical shortages of potable water. Moreover, inefficient waste removal and inadequate sewage services contribute to increased greenhouse gas emissions. Addressing this perilous challenge necessitates the formulation of strategic governmental plans to mitigate its severe impacts.

## IX. Obligations for the Upcoming Year

In 2023, Iraq and its government confront significant and critical obligations, particularly as Prime Minister Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī has designated his administration as the “Government of Services.” This administration aims to address the fundamental needs of the Iraqi population, including electricity, water, sanitation, etc.

The obligations for the forthcoming year are outlined as follows:

- It is imperative to complete and execute the provisions of the government program specifically related to public services.
- The government must assess and analyze the health sector to develop plans informed by health indicators. This includes preparing for viral outbreaks and ensuring the availability of treatments for chronic diseases.

- Designing and adopting a comprehensive set of measures to combat financial and administrative corruption within the services sector, particularly in electricity, health, and infrastructure, as these sectors are foundational to development.
- Immediate strategies must be formulated to advance the electrical power sector, recognizing that daily life and economic activities depend heavily on electricity.
- Strategic projects currently delayed or suspended, such as hospitals, infrastructure developments, and potable water facilities, require prompt completion.
- The government should facilitate private sector participation in public service delivery by utilizing and expediting the legislation of the Public-Private Partnership law, thereby establishing the private sector as a key and efficient partner.
- Iraq should capitalize on the outcomes of the GCC-China Summit to enhance economic and trade relations in alignment with the new ministerial platform. Given China's role as a primary economic partner with numerous active companies in Iraq, all barriers impeding rapid reconstruction and public service provision must be eliminated.
- Addressing climate challenges and developing effective mitigation strategies is a priority. The government must prepare sectoral policies to build resilience across transport, health, electricity, municipal, sewage, and water sectors to ensure the provision of high-quality services.

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# 11.

## International Relations

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### I. Introduction

Iraq is recognized as a pivotal actor influencing the strategic orientations of states on both regional and international levels, owing to its intrinsic material and moral attributes. Over time, major powers have leveraged their political, economic, and military capabilities to maintain a focus on Iraq, which has emerged as a significant factor in sustaining their global dominance and influence. Numerous international stakeholders, including states, corporations, and regional and international organizations, attribute considerable importance to Iraq. This prominence and relative significance contribute to the dynamic and rapid evolution of Iraq's international relations, shaped by the material and moral foundations that determine a state's strategic relevance.

Nevertheless, this relative significance fluctuates depending on how data is utilized to shape Iraq's international relations, situating these relations within a context of international and regional pressures. This situation indicates ongoing competition and conflict in the region, while Iraq continues to face the challenge of constructing a national state capable of establishing relations characterized by parity with other actors. Achieving this parity is essential to balance relations with regional powers, uphold national sovereignty, and fulfill an international role commensurate with Iraq's actual potential. Within this framework, it is imperative to maximize benefits and minimize detriments in relationships that are inevitable in the foreseeable future—not only between Iraq and the United States but also with regional states—where national interests constitute the fundamental basis for external interactions.

The principal external variables influencing the Iraqi political landscape in 2022 include the following:

- Several events and crises dominated the Iraqi scene in 2022, reaching unprecedented levels of intensity.
- Iraq and the United States formalized the executive agreement concerning a Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) grant aimed at supporting Iraq's development efforts. The agreement encompasses initiatives to reform economic, financial, and service sectors, while addressing poverty and

unemployment according to defined priorities, enabling the government to address these issues and enhance service delivery across all Iraq.

- The Iraq-US Strategic Partnership was reaffirmed following the United States' declaration ending its combat mission in Iraq in December 2021. The security relationship transitioned to a focus on training, advising, providing various forms of assistance, and intelligence sharing to support security forces, with the Iraqi government leading the fight against the terrorists of ISIS.
- The Law Criminalizing Normalization with the Israeli Occupation, enacted by Parliament on May 26, 2022, affected the nature of Iraq's relationship with the United States, who expressed strong disapproval of the Iraqi Parliament's passage of legislation criminalizing normalization of relations with Israel.
- Iraqi mediation played a significant role in de-escalating tensions and resolving longstanding Iranian-Saudi disputes in the region. This mediation culminated in the signing of a ten-point memorandum of understanding between the two countries, including the reopening of consulates in Jeddah and Mashhad. The memorandum also included agreements to resolve the Yemeni crisis, address issues concerning Iranian pilgrims, and cooperate in trade, anti-crime, and counter-terrorism efforts. Additional understandings addressed the situations in Lebanon and Syria, as well as the pursuit of security and stability in the Gulf, marking a significant breakthrough in the crisis between the two nations.
- The visit of Prime Minister al-Sūdānī to Jordan as his inaugural foreign trip conveyed multiple messages, chiefly the new government's readiness to engage with the Arab world. The visit signaled the establishment of balanced foreign relations with all parties, indicating that Iraq does not align exclusively with any single axis. It emphasized a commitment to building relations with all parties based on Iraq's supreme national interests. The visit further reinforced the renewed rapprochement among Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt within the framework of Trilateral Cooperation, which aims to foster unity beyond current regional polarizations.
- The official statement issued by the UN Security Council regarding the Turkish attack in the Zakho district of Duhok Governorate (Kurdistan) in July 2022 endorsed the Iraqi government's investigations. The statement affirmed support for Iraq's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic process, and prosperity. This statement represented a precedent concerning the series of Turkish violations of Iraq's sovereignty and security, strengthening the government's position and framing violations of national sovereignty within a new international context.
- The Jordanian city of al-'Aqabah hosted a consultative quadrilateral summit in March 2022, involving leaders from Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and the UAE. The summit focused on enhancing joint cooperation across

various sectors, particularly trade and the economy, with the objective of increasing trade exchanges to promote prosperity and development among these nations.

- Observers note that Iraq faces substantial obligations regarding political and governmental decision-making and the management of state responsibilities. By the end of 2022, Iraqis anticipate the elimination of terrorist strongholds within the country, especially following security forces' successes against sleeper cells and targeted operations against individuals wanted by the judiciary.

## II. Iraq–United States Bilateral Relations

The bilateral relationship between Iraq and the United States continues to be fundamentally shaped by strategic considerations and the evolving objectives that initially prompted the occupation. The American strategic approach to the Iraqi regional context is broadly characterized by six principal constants: maintaining a long-term US presence; consolidating control over critical energy corridors—specifically the “Oil Arc” extending from the Arabian Gulf to the Caspian Sea—and thereby exerting influence over global energy markets and the strategic interests of major powers; ensuring the security of the Israeli entity; preventing regional actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction; and projecting American hegemony in managing regional geopolitical dynamics (al-‘Alī, 2022, p. 298).

This analysis delineates the primary factors influencing Iraq–US relations during the year 2022.

### 1. Economic Cooperation

On Sunday, November 13, 2022, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fu‘ād Ḥusayn received the United States Ambassador to Iraq, Alina Romanowski. The meeting entailed a comprehensive review of the bilateral trajectory between Baghdād and Washington, and explored mechanisms to enhance cooperation in alignment with mutual interests. Discussions focused on the implementation of the Strategic Dialogue framework, with particular emphasis on economic and commercial sectors. Minister Ḥusayn highlighted the necessity of multilateral and regional collaboration to address contemporary global challenges, including counter-terrorism, economic volatility, public health crises, and acute climate change. Ambassador Romanowski reaffirmed the United States' sustained commitment to supporting Iraq across various sectors, notably ongoing security operations against the terrorist organization ISIS and initiatives aimed at climate resilience (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022, November 13).

Under the auspices of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning Dr. Muḥammad ‘Alī Tamīm, Iraq and the United States finalized an executive agreement concerning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) grant on November 23, 2022. The agreement was signed on behalf of Iraq by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning, Dr. Māhir Ḥammād Jūhān, and on behalf of the United

States by the USAID Mission Director. This strategic roadmap prioritizes structural reforms within the economic, financial, and service sectors, alongside targeted interventions to alleviate poverty and unemployment. During the signing ceremony, Minister Tamīm emphasized Iraq's intention to deepen its partnership with the United States to achieve the benchmarks outlined in Iraq Vision 2030, noting that bilateral relations have matured into a phase predicated on shared economic interests (INA, 2022, November 23).

The executive agreement is effective for a five-year period from the date of ratification, operating under the framework of the Strategic Framework Agreement and the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement. This grant aims to stimulate accelerated and inclusive economic growth, thereby rehabilitating and reinforcing public trust in state institutions. The Ministry of Planning has initiated rigorous measures to resolve impediments facing developmental projects, leveraging US cooperation to modernize interconnected economic sectors (Shafaq News, 2022, November 23).

Ambassador Romanowski characterized this accord as the foundational executive agreement for developmental cooperation and the consolidation of the bilateral partnership. She noted that since 2012, USAID has invested over \$172 million in enhancing basic service delivery, fiscal transparency, and governmental responsiveness. Through this latest instrument, USAID commits approximately \$550 million over the subsequent five-year period to catalyze economic expansion, bolster democratic governance, address the needs of marginalized populations, and manage the impacts of climate change. This framework enables the Ministry of Planning and USAID to synchronize priorities and ensure the long-term efficacy of developmental assistance within Iraq (Ministry of Planning, 2023, February 1).

## 2. Security Cooperation

On September 20, 2022, Dr. Celeste Wallander, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, undertook a diplomatic mission to Baghdad to engage with senior Iraqi officials. Her meetings included consultations with former Minister of Defense Jum'ah 'Inād Sa'dūn, Chief of Staff General 'Abd-al-Amīr Yār-Allāh, and National Security Advisor Qāsim al-A'rajī. Throughout these discussions, Dr. Wallander underscored the enduring nature of the defense partnership between the United States and Iraq. Grounded in the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing Iraqi defensive capabilities and providing security assistance. This collaboration aims to bolster national sovereignty, stability, and security for the Iraqi population. The United States emphasized its transition to a mission centered on training, advising, assisting, and intelligence sharing, supporting Iraqi security forces as they lead the kinetic campaign against the terrorist organization ISIS. Although US combat forces withdrew from Iraq in December 2021, advisory and enablement personnel remain present at the formal invitation of the Iraqi government. Iraqi leadership reciprocated by affirming their dedication to strengthening the

operational capacity of both federal security forces and the Peshmerga to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS. The discussions also explored expanding defense cooperation beyond counter-terrorism to address emerging threats and enhance interoperability (US Embassy and Consulates in Iraq, 2022, September 20).

#### **a. Renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding Between the US Department of Defense and the Kurdistan Regional Government**

On September 21, 2022, Assistant Secretary Wallander and Shūrish Ismā'īl 'Abd-Allāh, Minister of Peshmerga Affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), signed a renewed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to sustain support for the Peshmerga in operations against ISIS. Initially established in 2016, this MoU exemplifies the prolonged cooperation between the United States and the Kurdistan region and their shared commitment to the total defeat of ISIS. Through this agreement, the United States reiterates its support for the Peshmerga as an integral component of the Iraqi security forces. The MoU highlights advancements in institutional reforms and the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs' commitment to further professionalize its forces, maintaining solidarity with the people of Iraq, including those in the Kurdistan region, in their efforts to build a strong, stable, and sovereign state. The signing ceremony, held under the auspices of Regional President Nechirvān Bārzānī and attended by Prime Minister Masrūr Bārzānī and Deputy Prime Minister Qubād Ṭālabānī, underscored the KRG's dedication to security cooperation within the framework of the Iraqi Constitution and the Peshmerga reform program (US Embassy and Consulates in Iraq, 2022, September 21).

#### **b. US Diplomatic Response to Iranian strikes in the Kurdistan Region**

On September 28, 2022, the United States formally condemned Iran's use of ballistic missiles and drone strikes against the Kurdistan region. Spokesperson Ned Price characterized these actions as unjustified violations of Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity. The statement expressed profound regret regarding reports of civilian casualties resulting from the attacks. Furthermore, Price denounced rhetoric from the Iranian government threatening additional strikes against Iraq, affirming that the United States stands with the people and government of Iraq in the face of such blatant assaults on national sovereignty (US Embassy and Consulates in Iraq, 2022, September 28).

#### **c. US Kinetic Operations Against ISIS**

Following the December 2021 transition, the US security relationship with Iraq shifted exclusively to an advisory and enablement role. Iraqi security forces successfully lead unilateral offensive operations at the brigade level and demonstrating significant progress in combined arms maneuvers. On December 29, 2022, US Central Command (CENTCOM) released its annual summary of operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The report confirmed that hundreds of joint operations conducted with partner forces resulted in the degradation of the organization and the removal of senior leadership from the battlefield, including the leader of ISIS, dozens of regional commanders, and hundreds of combatants. These operations are integral to the mission of undermining the group's capacity to direct or inspire destabilizing attacks globally, including within the

United States. CENTCOM reported that during 2022, it conducted 191 joint operations against ISIS in Iraq, resulting in 159 detainees and at least 220 fatalities. These actions were conducted under the authority of the CENTCOM Commander and the leadership of the Commander of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve. Notably, no US personnel were killed or wounded during these 2022 operations, as local security partners continued to play the primary role in ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS (Kurdistan24, 2022, December 29). CENTCOM emphasized that both the United States and its partners in Iraq and Syria remain resolute in their commitment to achieving a permanent victory over the terrorist organization to safeguard global security and human rights in 2023.

### 3. US Position on the (Criminalization of Normalization) Law

Iraq has historically maintained a policy of non-recognition toward the Israeli entity since the latter's establishment in the Middle East as a post-World War II outcome (Shafaq News, 2022, May 27). Iraq formally declared a state of war with the Israeli entity upon its founding in 1948, and bilateral relations saw no substantive improvement following the 2003 transition. This trajectory culminated in a legislative initiative by the Council of Representatives to prohibit normalization with the occupying entity, sustaining a relationship defined at best by mutual hostility. On May 19, 2022, the Council of Representatives concluded the second reading of the draft "Law Prohibiting Normalization and the Establishment of Relations with the Israeli Entity," following an initial reading earlier that month. The legislation was proposed by the "Save the Homeland" (Inqādh Waṭan) alliance for parliamentary deliberation and ratification.

The primary provisions of the law include (Bāsim 2022):

- The criminalization of any form of political, security, economic, technical, cultural, athletic, or scientific cooperation or dealing, under any activity or title, with the occupying Zionist entity.
- The affirmation that Iraq remains in a state of war with the occupying state; any actions by individuals, institutions, groups, movements, or parties that undermine this concept—thereby providing material or moral support for the occupation's existence—are classified as high treason. Such crimes carry penalties ranging from life imprisonment to the death penalty, in accordance with Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 (amended).
- A prohibition on dealings with companies and institutions that engage with, support, or are linked to the entity, alongside significant clauses detailing the penalties for violations.
- The imposition of statutory penalties, including temporary or life imprisonment; notably, Article 201 of the Penal Code stipulates the death penalty for anyone who promotes "Zionist principles, including Freemasonry (al-Māsūnīyah), or affiliates with, supports materially or morally, or works in any capacity to achieve the objectives of its institutions."

Regarding the external repercussions of this legislation, the Palestinian movements Ḥamās and al-Jihād al-Islāmī welcomed the parliamentary readings, characterizing the measure as “honorable.” Ḥamās called upon Arab and Islamic parliaments to adopt similar stances against the Israeli entity. Conversely, the enactment of the law on May 26, 2022, prompted significant inquiries regarding its impact on the Iraq–United States bilateral relationship and Baghdād’s ties with states that have normalized relations with the occupation. In response, the US Department of State, via spokesperson Ned Price, issued a statement expressing that the United States was “deeply disturbed” by the passage of legislation criminalizing the normalization of relations with Israel (RT Arabic, 2022, May 27). The statement argued that the law jeopardizes freedom of expression, fosters an environment of anti-Semitism, and stands in “stark contrast” to the progress made by Iraq’s neighbors in building bridges and normalizing ties. Price reaffirmed that the United States remains a “strong and unwavering partner in supporting Israel,” including the expansion of regional ties to pursue peace and prosperity (CNN Arabic, 2022, May 27).

Simultaneously, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a communiqué condemning the Iraqi parliamentary decision, asserting that the law places “Iraq and the Iraqi people on the wrong side of history, detached from reality.” The ministry emphasized that the future of the Middle East lies in peace and normalization agreements that bring stability and prosperity, accusing Iraqi leaders of choosing a path of “hatred and incitement” that primarily harms their own populace (Arabi21, 2022, May 28).

Commenting on the implications for Iraq–US relations, political analyst ‘Adnān al-Sarrāj noted that the bilateral relationship is inextricably linked to the Strategic Framework Agreement. He argued that the United States still perceives Iraq as within its sphere of influence and seeks to secure the strategic outcomes of the 2003 occupation, wishing to avoid a replication of policy failures seen in Afghanistan and other withdrawal zones. Consequently, it is unlikely that the US will allow this legislation to provoke a breakdown in diplomatic relations or lead to practical escalation; rather, the response will likely remain confined to the realm of “rhetorical warfare” rather than operational implementation. Al-Sarrāj highlighted that despite a 2020 parliamentary resolution to expel US forces, Washington successfully maneuvered by reclassifying its personnel as advisors rather than combatants. This suggests a pattern of American political flexibility and “maneuvering” regarding Iraq that precludes a total severance of ties (Arabi21, 2022, May 28).

A sound assessment suggests that Iraq–US relations are unlikely to be fundamentally destabilized by such legislation because the practical avenues for normalization are already limited, and the general Iraqi consensus remains opposed to the Israeli entity. The US, Israeli, and British reactions reflect a perception that the regional normalization project has encountered a setback due to Iraq’s decision. Despite the reported parliamentary consensus for the law, its practical implementation requires significant institutional capacity and political will—both of which remain subject to doubt. Ambiguity persists regarding the

law's application, particularly given that certain political blocs and parties within the state system reportedly maintain secret ties with the entity. Furthermore, the timing of the decision—occurring under a caretaker government in a fractured political landscape—suggests that the lack of a unified political vision and the interference of external and regional interests may ultimately render this resolution a mere formality (Ḥannūsh, 2022).

### III. Iraq's Bilateral Relations with Iran and Turkey

#### 1. Iran

In 2022, Iraq experienced a notable transformation in its foreign policy framework, successfully hosting several regional and international summits. Central to this strategic development was Baghdad's role as a key mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran—two principal regional adversaries—facilitating direct dialogue after years of diplomatic estrangement. This endeavor to foster regional stability represents a deliberate strategy by the Iraqi state to reassert its central position by capitalizing on its unique geographic location to reconcile interests among its Arab and regional neighbors. The Iraqi government aimed to strengthen its political, economic, and security relations with Iran while concurrently striving to establish a regional balance intended to shield the country from international interventions that exacerbate domestic political instability.

#### **Iraq-Mediated De-escalation of Saudi-Iranian Tensions**

Analysts contend that Iraqi mediation has played a significant role in tempering regional tensions and resolving longstanding conflicts. Political sources report that Baghdad hosted five rounds of negotiations between Iranian and Saudi officials focused on normalizing relations, which had been severed since January 2016 following attacks on the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashhad (Middle East News, 2022, July 6). These attacks were provoked by protests against Riyadh's execution of opposition cleric Nimr al-Nimr. The initial direct dialogue took place in December 2019, marking the first face-to-face engagement since the 2016 rupture, during which complex bilateral issues were addressed (Mūsá, 2022).

These dialogue sessions resumed in April 2021 under the facilitation of former Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī, who maintained strong ties with both parties. By March 2022, Iranian Foreign Minister Ḥusayn Amīr 'Abdallāhyān expressed a positive response to statements by Saudi Crown Prince Muḥammad bin Salmān regarding neighborly relations, interpreting them as Riyadh's "desire" to restore diplomatic ties. During a mid-April 2022 visit to Tehran, Fu'ād Ḥusayn articulated aspirations to advance the dialogue from confidential, security-level meetings to a public, diplomatic phase (Euronews, 2022, April 23).

The second edition of the "Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership," held at the Dead Sea in Jordan on December 20, 2022, served as a pivotal forum for this rapprochement. The conference included leaders from Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Iran, and Turkey. A meeting between Saudi Foreign Minister Fayṣal bin

Farḥān and his Iranian counterpart, Ḥusayn Amīr ‘Abdallāhyān, resulted in the latter noting the Saudi minister’s “readiness to continue the dialogue” (Rudaw Net, 2023, January 22). This indicated the prospect of a sixth round of talks in September 2022, as announced by Fu’ād Ḥusayn’s after the fifth round in April (Dhannūn, 2022), but it was delayed due to Iraq’s domestic political deadlock—which remained unresolved until the establishment of Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī’s government in October 2022—and Iranian accusations concerning Saudi involvement in Iran’s internal protests.

Experts suggest that the second Baghdad Conference in Jordan acted as a catalyst for resuming negotiations. The mediation was also a central theme during Prime Minister al-Sūdānī’s visits to Tehran in November 2022 and Riyadh in December 2022 for the Arab-Chinese Summit, where he met with Crown Prince Muḥammad bin Salmān. The final two rounds of negotiations culminated in a ten-point memorandum of understanding addressing the reopening of consulates in Jiddah and Mashhad, frameworks for resolving the Yemeni crisis, the administration of Iranian pilgrims, and cooperation in trade, counter-terrorism, and organized crime. Additionally, agreements were reached concerning the situations in Lebanon and Syria and the promotion of security in the Gulf, representing a significant breakthrough (‘Abd-Allāh, 2022). The Iranian Foreign Minister characterized the Baghdad rounds as positive, commending the facilitation provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly regarding arrangements for Iranian citizens to perform the 2022 Ḥajj season (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022, June 16).

### **Consolidation of Bilateral Relations**

On April 13, 2022, Foreign Minister Fu’ād Ḥusayn undertook a strategic visit to Iran to deliberate on bilateral, regional, and international issues of mutual concern (Shafaq News, 2022, August 28). A subsequent visit occurred on August 29, 2022, during which Minister Ḥusayn met with Iranian President Ibrāhīm Rāīsī. Their discussions focused on the security and political situation in Baghdād, regional developments, and the broader implications for Iraqi and regional stability. Minister Ḥusayn underscored Iraq’s commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors, emphasizing the necessity of integrated regional and international efforts to combat extremism and resolve ongoing conflicts. He advocated for the establishment of “bridges of trust” and prioritized dialogue to foster a secure environment, asserting that Iraq’s stability is important to Iran. President Rāīsī reciprocated by reaffirming Iran’s continued support for Iraq’s security and sovereignty (Kurdistan24, 2022, August 31).

In parallel discussions with his Iranian counterpart, Ḥusayn Amīr ‘Abdallāhyān, both ministers explored mechanisms to deepen institutional ties reflective of their historical relationship. Minister Ḥusayn expressed a strategic intent to sustain cooperation and activate existing Memoranda of Understanding to serve mutual interests. The dialogue also encompassed an exchange of perspectives on regional challenges and the promotion of peace through collective action (Loft, 2022, p. 5-9). Minister ‘Abdallāhyān acknowledged Iraq’s role in facilitating

regional de-escalation and its consistent advocacy for diplomatic solutions over military confrontation.

During this visit, the Foreign Minister convened with the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, 'Alī Shamkhānī. The meeting concentrated on the intersection of security and bilateral relations, with Ḥusayn emphasizing the concept of "collective security" as essential for regional stability. He noted that Iraq continues to confront multifaceted security challenges, particularly in counter-terrorism, and cautioned that any actions undermining Iraqi stability would complicate the internal and regional geopolitical landscape (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022, September 2).

Following the inauguration of the new Iraqi government in early November 2022, Minister Ḥusayn articulated a firm stance against foreign interference. While affirming the government's desire to maintain constructive relations with all neighboring states, he underscored that Iranian and Turkish military interventions within Iraqi territory are unacceptable. He clarified that Baghdād seeks to resolve contentious issues with Iran and Turkey through diplomatic channels, rejecting the use of Iraq as a theater for regional or international proxy conflicts. He emphasized that the government's message remains one of peace and solidarity in the face of shared challenges (Middle East News, 2022, November 1).

In a December 2022 assessment concerning Iranian kinetic strikes targeting the Kurdistan region, Minister Ḥusayn detailed ongoing negotiations aimed at de-escalation. He acknowledged that Iraqi territory must not serve as a launchpad for attacks against Iran. He noted that Iran had officially demanded the disarmament of Iranian-Kurdish opposition parties stationed in the region. He added that a high-level security and negotiation committee, including representatives from the Kurdistan Regional Government, was established to oversee these security arrangements and manage the border crisis through a bilateral framework (RT Arabic, 2022, December 19).

### **The Parliamentary Mission to Iran**

On April 27, 2022, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī, arrived in the Iranian capital, Tehran, leading a parliamentary delegation following an official invitation. He was received by his counterpart, the Speaker of the Iranian Islamic Consultative Assembly, Muḥammad Bāqir Qālībāf (Rudaw Net, 2022, April 27). During a joint press conference, al-Ḥalbūsī articulated that the preservation of sovereignty, good neighborliness, and the protection of citizen rights constitute the foundational principles that must remain constant in regional relations. He emphasized the continuity of cooperation between the two neighboring states, noting that stability in Iran reflects positively on Iraq, and vice versa. He further stated that the representative bodies of both nations are working toward full regional stability through serious steps that fulfill the aspirations of their constituents for security and economic prosperity while averting the specter of war and crisis (Kurdistan24, 2022, April 27).

al-Ḥalbūsī noted that while Iran has faced economic sanctions and Iraq has endured terrorist attacks, global crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic, these negative periods were exacerbated by repeated violations of state sovereignty. He argued for “turning the page” on these obstacles to move toward practical, open steps. He asserted that the imposition of sanctions on nations is impermissible, as is intimidation through the empowerment of armed gangs. He expressed hope that the legislative councils in both countries would facilitate governmental progress by removing obstacles faced by previous administrations and providing the necessary legislative frameworks to ease executive interaction (Rudaw Net, 2022, April 27).

The reception of al-Ḥalbūsī in Tehran, following initial Iranian reservations, suggests a potential easing of the friction that existed at the time between the “Triple Alliance”—which included al-Ḥalbūsī alongside the leader of the Sadrist Movement, Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Mas‘ūd Bārzanī—and Iran. Iranian influence was a primary point of contention for this alliance, particularly regarding the role of political forces and armed factions aligned with Tehran, such as the Popular Mobilization Forces. This visit may pave the way for a breakthrough in the political impasse caused by the alliance’s refusal to participate in a coalition government with those forces, insisting instead on a “national majority government” (Chyād, 2022, April 30).

The strategic dimensions of al-Ḥalbūsī’s visit are multifaceted: first, the Coordination Framework parties and armed faction leaders maintain excellent relations with the Iranian leadership; second, Iran remains a formidable and essential regional and international actor that cannot be bypassed; third, visits by Iraqi political leaders to other neighbors like Turkey and Saudi Arabia necessitated a balanced diplomatic approach through engagement with Iran; and fourth, the visit aimed to break the political deadlock by mediating and pressuring certain blocs to enter into dialogue. Furthermore, the diverse political affiliations within the accompanying delegation, including the Sadrist leader Ḥasan al-Ka‘bī, served to convey mutual perspectives and specific messages to key figures involved in the political stalemate.

### **Economic Cooperation**

Two decades after the resumption of comprehensive relations following the 2003 US-led invasion, the political relationship between Iraq and Iran is described as strategic, yet trade exchange has not reached the desired levels according to Iranian observers. Despite the Ibrāhīm Raīsī administration’s emphasis on prioritizing trade with neighbors and establishing a roadmap to increase trade with Iraq to \$20 billion, official statistics indicate a decline in joint trade in recent months (al-Sā‘idī, 2022). In the latest foreign trade report, the Iranian Customs Organization noted that from March 2022 to October 2022, China led the list of recipients of Iranian goods at \$9.181 billion, followed by Iraq at \$4.029 billion.

Iranian customs reports reveal that the value of imports from Iraq during this same period amounted to only \$150 million, indicating a trade balance that is heavily skewed and negative for Iraq. While Iraq ranks second among importers

of Iranian goods, its own exports to its eastern neighbor do not qualify it to be among the top five exporters to Iran, signaling a unilateral trade relationship. An Iranian report suggested that the slight increase in imports from Iraq last year was primarily due to difficulties in repatriating Iranian export revenues owing to financial transfer sanctions (al-Jazeera Net, 2022, November 15). Nevertheless, Tehran maintains an ambition to increase its exports to Iraq to a range of \$10 billion to \$20 billion during 2023.

## 2. Turkey

Turkey strategically prioritizes stabilizing the regional balance of power, viewing Iraq as a critical exemplar of Sunni-Shia relations within the broader Middle East. Accordingly, it remains dedicated to ensuring Iraqi security and stability to prevent sectarian escalation that could destabilize the entire region. Within Iraq's pursuit of a balanced foreign policy, Turkey represents a pivotal neighboring state (Makkī et al., 2022, pp. 53-58).

The bilateral relationship between Iraq and Turkey has held significant importance for decades, as both nations possess strategic political and military attributes. This relationship is further reinforced by diplomatic cooperation, international agreements, and shared civilizational and cultural ties (al-'Ammār, 2022, pp. 142-144). The principal developments in Iraq-Turkey relations during 2022 are outlined below.

### a. Evolution of Trade Relations

In recent years, the commercial relationship between Iraq and Turkey has undergone substantial expansion, particularly in the import-export sector. Data from the Turkish Ministry of Trade indicate that Iraq ranked fourth globally and first in the Arab world among the largest importers of Turkish goods during the first seven months of 2022 (Dağlıoğlu, 2022, p. 24). Conversely, the Ministry's semi-annual report revealed that Turkey ranked third globally among the largest importers of Iraqi products. Official Turkish statistics show that Turkish exports to Iraq reached \$12.604 billion in the final months of 2022. Moreover, the Turkish-Iraqi Business Council announced a target to increase exports to Iraq to \$16 billion in 2023, reflecting both parties' intent to deepen economic interdependence (Rudaw Net, 2022, December 11).

To support this growth, numerous committees and bodies have been established to enhance economic cooperation. In March 2022, both nations agreed to activate the Iraqi-Turkish Parliamentary Friendship Committee, which aims to strengthen bilateral ties across all sectors, with a particular emphasis on commerce. The trade framework encompasses a diverse range of commodities, with Iraq primarily sourcing its food and industrial needs from Turkey. This preference is motivated by competitive pricing and the capacity to manage shipping costs effectively. Key Turkish exports include grains, precious stones, plastics, rubber, construction materials, furniture, wheat flour, poultry, eggs, and textiles. In return, the Turkish economy remains dependent on Iraqi exports, particularly oil and gold, which have sustained the long-term nature of this bilateral trade.

Both countries primarily utilize land-based logistics for trade exchange. The shared border and the relative ease of transporting goods have significantly contributed to the development of the land shipping sector between the two states (İslim, 2022).

### **b. Turkish Attacks on the Kurdistan Region**

The United Nations Security Council convened an emergency session to address the situation in Iraq following the attack in the district of Zākhū within the Duhok governorate of Kurdistan on July 20, 2022. During this session, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) urged an immediate cessation of such attacks, emphasizing that these actions further undermine the stability of the Iraqi state. She provided the Security Council with a detailed chronology, noting that five artillery shells struck the Parakh tourist resort in the early afternoon of July 20, 2022. The attack resulted in nine civilian fatalities and thirty-three injuries. The representative highlighted that, as typical for the season, the site was populated with visitors, including children (al-Jazeera Net, 2022, July 26). The Government of Iraq unequivocally attributed responsibility for these events to the Turkish Armed Forces. Consequently, the United Nations Security Council convened an emergency session on the evening of Tuesday, July 26, 2022, to deliberate on the matter. Council members strongly condemned the attack and issued a statement affirming their support for the Iraqi authorities' investigative efforts. The Council called upon all member states to cooperate with the Iraqi government in these investigations and reaffirmed its commitment to Iraq's democratic process, prosperity, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the United Nations' statement. Its spokesperson, Aḥmad al-Şahḥāf, described the statement as unprecedented in the context of the series of Turkish violations against Iraqi sovereignty and security. He further noted that the statement reinforced Iraq's position and framed the procedures for addressing assaults on national sovereignty within a new context (NAS News, 2022, July 26).

In his briefing to the Security Council, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq, Mr. Fu'ād Ḥusayn, expressed his country's strongest condemnation of the blatant aggression perpetrated by the Turkish military against innocent civilians and civilian property. He characterized the attack as a military aggression violating Iraq's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, constituting a threat to regional and international peace and security.

Mr. Ḥusayn further clarified that Turkey's attempts to deny responsibility for the shelling of Duhok would be ineffective, as Iraq possessed evidence confirming Turkey's involvement. He identified two distinct challenges facing Iraq: the presence of Turkish forces on Iraqi soil and the presence of elements of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). He asserted that it is unacceptable to export Turkey's internal conflicts and resolve them on Iraqi territory. Moreover, Ḥusayn denounced the illegal military presence of Turkish forces in Iraq and called upon the Security Council, invoking Article 35 of the United Nations Charter, to fulfill its respon-

sibilities in maintaining international peace and security by issuing an urgent resolution. This resolution should mandate Turkey to withdraw its occupying forces from all Iraqi territories under full Council supervision and hold Turkey accountable for any refusal to comply. He also requested the establishment of an independent international investigation team, a strong condemnation of the aggression, inclusion of Iraq-Turkey relations on the Security Council's agenda, and reparations from the Turkish government for losses sustained by unarmed civilians (United Nations, 2022, July 26).

### **c. Convening of the Turkish National Security Council under Erdoğan's Chairmanship**

On May 26, 2022, the Turkish National Security Council convened under the chairmanship of the President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The session addressed several critical issues, with particular emphasis on matters related to Iraq (Anadolu Agency, 2022, May 25):

- The Council received briefings on operations conducted against various threats. These operations targeted the terrorist organizations: the Kurdistan Workers' Party/Kurdistan Communities Union (PKK/KCK), the Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG), the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Additional measures related to these efforts were also discussed (Muhammad, 2022).
- It was emphasized that ongoing and planned operations aimed at clearing terrorist threats from the southern borders do not infringe upon the territorial integrity or sovereignty of neighboring states. Instead, these actions are deemed necessary for national security and are expected to contribute significantly to the peace and security of adjacent countries (Anadolu Agency, 2022, July 21).
- The Council underscored Turkey's consistent fulfillment of its obligations within international organizations and alliances, adhering to the principles of *pacta sunt servanda* (loyalty to agreements). It called upon allied states to demonstrate similar responsibility and sincerity, particularly urging those that support or harbor terrorism—deemed a common enemy of humanity—to cease such activities and respect Turkey's security concerns (TRT Arabi, 2022, December 1).
- Deliberations included updates on the progress of the ongoing "Claw-Lock" operation in northern Iraq.

On December 1, 2022, the Council convened again under the chairmanship of Erdoğan and highlighted the following points (Arabi Post, 2022, December 1):

- The necessity of taking all required measures to prevent any terrorist organization from maintaining a presence along Turkey's borders, cities, citizens, and security forces. The Council asserted that Turkey would not tolerate attacks on its security forces originating from the Syrian side and emphasized that cooperation and solidarity in combating terrorism

would promote regional and global peace. Turkey also expressed its readiness to collaborate in the fight against ISIS and other terrorist entities.

- A comprehensive briefing was provided on ongoing military operations within and beyond Turkey's borders against militants of PKK and YPG in Syria and Iraq, conducted in accordance with international law. The Turkish Minister of Defense, Hulusi Akar, stated that the Turkish army remains resolute in its struggle against terrorism to safeguard its people and borders. He affirmed that these actions comply with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognizes the right to self-defense, while respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighboring states (Rudaw Net, 2022, December 1).
- The Council reaffirmed Turkey's determination to launch a military operation in northeastern Syria to secure its borders from terrorist organizations. This decision followed a series of airstrikes conducted in response to the bombing in the Taksim area of Istanbul on November 13, 2022. President Erdoğan confirmed that Turkey aims to establish a security belt along the southern border from east to west. This region includes the city of 'Ayn al-'Arab (Kobani), currently controlled by the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who captured it from ISIS in 2015 with American support. The aerial bombardment and artillery fire targeted positions held by PKK and SDF, both accused by Turkey of orchestrating the bombing, an allegation they deny (al-Mayadeen Net, 2022, December 1).

## **IV. Iraq's Bilateral Relations with the Arab States**

### **1. al-'Aqabah Summit**

On March 25, 2022, the Jordanian city of al-'Aqabah hosted a quadrilateral meeting involving King 'Abd-Allāh II, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Muḥammad bin Zāyid Āl-Nahyān, the Egyptian President 'Abd-al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī, and the Iraqi Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī. The meeting was convened to discuss international and regional developments. According to the Jordanian Royal Court, the session also included a Saudi presence represented by Prince Turkī bin Muḥammad bin Fahd bin 'Abd-al-'Azīz, Minister of State and Member of the Saudi Cabinet (CNN Arabic, 2022, March 25).

This summit is regarded as the second of its kind hosted by Jordan. The inaugural summit took place in the Jordanian capital, 'Ammān, in August 2020, involving three countries at the time: Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Following that first tripartite summit, a joint coordination council was established. The three nations subsequently entered into joint economic and bilateral agreements, primarily centered on energy, trade, and investment (Shafaq News, 2022, March 24). Among the most significant aspects of the al-'Aqabah meeting were the following (al-Khaleej Online, 2022, March 25):

- The quadrilateral meeting was “consultative” in nature. Such meetings typically do not produce formal agreements or understandings; instead, participants use them to assess their positions within the current international and regional landscape.
- al-‘Aqabah meeting occurred within a series of active diplomatic engagements resulting from regional and international developments. These efforts were aimed at “extinguishing fires before they ignite.” For instance, the war in Ukraine has placed most of these parties (Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates) in a critical position. While they have historically been allies and friends of Washington, they also maintain deep relations and interests with Moscow. Consequently, these states cannot turn their backs on Washington, yet they are simultaneously unable to fully align with it if doing so would gamble away beneficial relations with Russia (al-Hurra, 2022, March 25).
- The official Hashemite statement indicated that the meeting addressed methods for developing brotherly relations between the assembled Arab nations.
- The participants discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation across various levels, particularly in trade and economics. They aimed to increase trade exchange to achieve the interests of their peoples in terms of prosperity and development.
- There was an exchange of views regarding the general political and economic conditions at the regional and international levels. Particular attention was paid to addressing the repercussions of current global circumstances, specifically the developments of the global economic crisis and its impact on food security, energy, and trade sectors, as well as exploring coordination mechanisms to mitigate these effects for the benefit of their populations (Mahdī, 2022).
- The meeting touched upon the developments of international and regional crises and the strengthening of efforts to find solutions for the purpose of ensuring regional security and stability.

## 2. al-Sūdānī’s Visit to Jordan

In his first foreign tour since his appointment, and as one of the initial steps in shaping his government’s foreign policy, Prime Minister Muḥammad Shiyā’ al-Sūdānī visited the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on Tuesday, November 22, 2022. He met with King ‘Abd-Allāh II to discuss several economic, security, and diplomatic issues of mutual interest (Shafaq News, 2022, November 20). al-Sūdānī’s visit to ‘Ammān outlined the external trajectory of the new Iraqi government, emphasizing the importance of shared issues between the two states and aiming to dispel doubts regarding the fate of previous agreements concluded between Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. The visit signaled Iraq’s commitment to the principles of Arab and regional good neighborliness.

The media office of the Iraqi Prime Minister noted that the visit included an expanded discussion session covering various issues of mutual concern and bilateral coordination across multiple fields. It also served to strengthen work based on the memorandums of understanding signed between the two countries. This visit followed a series of questions regarding the newly formed Iraqi government's willingness to honor agreements made with the Jordanian side, as well as regional integration projects, most notably the "Tripartite Development Partnership" with Jordan and Egypt (NINA, 2022, November 21).

Given the importance of the meeting, the King emphasized the necessity of continuing bilateral cooperation between the two countries and tripartite cooperation with Egypt as a model for regional integration. The high-level protocol and the accompanying delegation demonstrated that the visit was intended to alleviate concerns regarding al-Sūdānī's readiness to proceed with the aforementioned agreements. Some parties that granted the appointed Iraqi government their confidence, or nominated it, held views opposing the previous government and its projects, particularly those related to Iraqi-Arab relations. Most recently, 'Āliyah Nuṣayyif, a member of parliament for the State of Law Coalition, criticized the electrical interconnection project between Jordan and Iraq in mid-October 2022 (al-Rubayī, 2022).

### **Messages of the Visit**

The visit reflects an Iraqi awareness of Arab concerns regarding potential shifts in Iraqi foreign policy toward its Arab neighbors. Accordingly, the visit conveyed several implicit messages of reassurance, the most notable of which are as follows (al-Dakhīl, 2022):

- The Prime Minister was accompanied by the Governor of al-Anbār, who participated in the discussions. al-Anbār is the Iraqi governorate bordering Jordan and serves as the principal gateway for implementing the economic and security agreements signed between the two parties.
- The Iraqi government's media office stated that the visit aimed to strengthen the partnership and memorandums of understanding previously signed between the two countries.
- By selecting Jordan as his first foreign destination, with subsequent visits to Gulf states planned, Prime Minister al-Sūdānī signaled the new government's readiness to reconcile with its Arab neighbors. This approach indicates a desire to establish balanced foreign relations with all parties rather than aligning with one axis against another. Furthermore, it reflects an intention to build relations based on the supreme interests of Iraq.

### **Implications of the Visit**

al-Sūdānī's meeting with King 'Abd-Allāh II holds multifaceted significance in terms of timing, bilateral strategic relations, and the influential roles both countries play in Middle Eastern international politics. As the Prime Minister's first foreign destination, this visit carries several implications (al-Rubayī, 2022):

- **Strategic Partnership:** Jordan represents a vital partner and supporter for Iraq across multiple sectors. This partnership is necessitated by the shared border and economic cooperation involving the movement of goods and joint investments. Additionally, a significant Iraqi diaspora resides in Jordan, estimated at 131,000 individuals according to the Jordanian Higher Population Council.
- **Counter-Terrorism Cooperation:** Jordan is at the forefront of nations advocating against and confronting terrorism, an area where Iraq requires ongoing support. This was reinforced by the King's continuous messages regarding Jordan's support for Iraq and the necessity of maintaining its security. During the meeting, the King emphasized the importance of Iraq's role within its Arab and regional environment, highlighting that Iraqi security constitutes a fundamental pillar of regional stability.
- **Economic Projects:** The visit underscored the significance of joint projects, such as the Iraqi oil pipeline extending from Baṣrah to al-'Aqabah, the joint industrial city, and the special economic zone. These projects, initiated under the previous government, require advance efforts from the current administration in order to address the economic crisis in Iraq, which has exacerbated public discontent; while Prime Minister al-Sūdānī seeks to gain popular trust and prevent a resurgence of protests (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022, November 21).
- **Anti-Corruption and Security Cooperation:** The visit addressed domestic concerns, specifically cooperation regarding individuals wanted for corruption and security offenses, and efforts to recover smuggled funds. Jordan can assist in these matters through its extensive experience in security and financial intelligence, as well as its established relationships with global security agencies. These issues are priorities for the al-Sūdānī government to enhance public confidence following its formation. Politicians close to the Prime Minister confirmed that he faces the challenge of combating corruption and recovering funds, with Jordan serving as a supportive partner.
- **Tripartite Rapprochement:** The visit aimed to strengthen the emerging rapprochement among Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt within a tripartite cooperation framework. This effort seeks to align Arab positions away from current regional polarizations and reorganize the "Arab house" amidst regional instability. Given Jordan's strategic location, it can play a distinguished role in linking the economies of Iraq and Egypt, potentially fostering greater economic stability across the three nations (al-Dakhīl, 2022).
- **Border Security and Economic Stability:** Jordan and Iraq share a border of approximately 181 km. Ensuring Iraqi security is vital for Jordan to avoid the instability experienced on its northern and eastern borders, where it confronts a war against drug smuggling. Economically, Iraq serves as

a gateway for investment and trade that bolsters Jordanian economic stability and promotes future public-private partnerships.

Ultimately, the visit highlights Jordan's prominent regional role amid shifting dynamics in the Middle East and globally.

### **3. Jiddah Summit for Security and Development**

At the invitation of King Salmān bin 'Abd-al-'Azīz Āl-Sa'ūd of Saudi Arabia, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and the United States convened a joint summit in the city of Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, on July 16, 2022. The summit sought to reaffirm longstanding partnerships and enhance collaborative efforts across multiple sectors. The leaders acknowledged President Joe Biden's reaffirmation of the United States' commitment to its strategic partnerships in the Middle East, emphasizing the enduring American dedication to the security and territorial integrity of its allies. Additionally, the participants recognized the region's pivotal role as a nexus connecting the Indo-Pacific with Europe, Africa, and the Americas (al-Faqīh, 2022).

#### **Bilateral Meetings Preceding the Summit**

In the lead-up to the Jiddah Summit for Security and Development, President Joe Biden engaged in a series of bilateral meetings. These commenced with a meeting with Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, followed by discussions with the Egyptian President and the President of the United Arab Emirates, Muḥammad bin Zāyid. A joint American-Iraqi statement underscored the importance of mutual commitment to the bilateral partnership, as outlined in the Strategic Framework Agreement. The statement emphasized the necessity of establishing a new Iraqi government that reflects the will of the Iraqi populace and upholds Iraq's sovereignty and independence. Furthermore, the communiqué following the Biden-al-Kāzīmī meeting highlighted the imperative of strengthening Iraqi institutions and empowering security forces to foster stability within Iraq and the broader region (al-Jazeera Net, 2022, July 16).

#### **Inauguration of the Summit**

The summit was inaugurated by Saudi Crown Prince Muḥammad bin Salmān, who called upon Iran to desist from interfering in the internal affairs of regional states. He expressed optimism regarding the development of constructive relations between the United States and regional countries. al-Kāzīmī participated in the summit, affirming Iraq's critical role in the region. Upon his arrival in Jiddah and subsequent meeting with Crown Prince Muḥammad bin Salmān, al-Kāzīmī remarked that relations with Saudi Arabia were at an unprecedented high and evolving significantly, noting the numerous shared interests between the two nations. During their discussions, the leaders reviewed bilateral relations, identified opportunities for cooperation, and exchanged perspectives on various regional issues, with a primary focus on economic matters. Moreover, al-Kāzīmī reiterated Iraq's support for the Palestinian cause and affirmed that Iraq would not align itself with any regional bloc against another. He noted that Iraq's relations with Arab and neighboring countries remained robust. Regarding the

Tehran–Washington relationship, al-Kāzimī expressed hope that the outcomes of the American–Iranian dialogue would be beneficial for the region, indicating Iraq’s intention to facilitate dialogue channels (al-Arabiya Net, 2022, July 16). He also proposed the establishment of the Middle East Bank for Development and Integration, emphasizing Iraq’s aspiration to cultivate a regional environment conducive to dialogue that serves the interests of its peoples (al-Faqih, 2022).

### **Electrical Interconnection Agreements**

In a related development, the GCC Interconnection Authority and the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity signed a contract during the summit to connect the Gulf interconnection grid with the electricity grid in southern Iraq. The signing ceremony was attended by the Saudi Minister of Energy, Prince ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz bin Salmān, and the Iraqi Minister of Oil, Iḥsān ‘Abd-al-Jabbār. Additionally, the two ministers signed an executive protocol outlining the principles of the electrical interconnection agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. This action implemented the memorandum of understanding signed by the two parties earlier in 2022 (al-Jazeera Net, 2022, July 17).

### **Final Statement of the Jiddah Summit**

The final Statement of the Jiddah Summit for Security and Development was issued by the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and the United States. The primary outcomes of the statement are as follows (al-Emarat al-Youm, 2022, July 16):

1. The leaders affirmed a shared vision for a region characterized by peace and prosperity. This vision necessitates taking all essential measures to preserve regional security and stability, developing mechanisms for cooperation and integration, and collectively addressing shared challenges while adhering to the principles of good neighborliness, mutual respect, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.
2. President Biden reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to achieving a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East. The leaders emphasized the necessity of a just resolution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict based on a two-state solution. They stressed the importance of halting unilateral measures that undermine this solution and maintained that the historical status quo in al-Quds and its holy sites must be respected, noting the central role of the Hashemite custodianship. Furthermore, they emphasized supporting the Palestinian economy and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). President Biden commended the significant roles played by Jordan, Egypt, and the GCC states in the peace process and their support for the Palestinian people and its institutions.
3. The leaders expressed their determination to enhance regional cooperation and integration through joint projects contributing to sustainable development, aiming to collectively address climate challenges by accelerating environmental ambitions and supporting innovation, including

the circular carbon economy and the development of renewable energy sources. In this context, the leaders praised the electrical interconnection agreements between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the GCC and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and both Jordan and Egypt, as well as the interconnection between Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq.

4. The leaders emphasized the importance of ensuring energy security and market stability while promoting investment in technologies designed to reduce emissions and achieve decarbonization in line with national commitments.
5. Support was reaffirmed for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the objective of preventing nuclear proliferation in the region. The leaders called upon Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and regional states to keep the Gulf free of weapons of mass destruction.
6. The leaders strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and expressed their resolve to strengthen regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism. They committed to preventing the financing, arming, and recruitment for terrorist groups by any individuals or entities.
7. A strong condemnation was issued regarding terrorist attacks against civilians and energy facilities in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as against commercial vessels in vital international trade routes in the Strait of Hormuz and Bāb al-Mandab. The leaders stressed the necessity of complying with relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, including Resolution 2624.
8. The leaders reaffirmed full support for the sovereignty, security, and prosperity of Iraq, as well as its counter-terrorism efforts. They welcomed Iraq's positive role in facilitating communication and building trust among regional states.
9. The participants welcomed the truce in Yemen and the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council. They expressed hope for a political solution based on the Gulf Initiative, the outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue, and UNSC Resolution 2216.
10. The leaders emphasized intensifying efforts to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis that preserves Syria's unity and sovereignty in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254. They stressed the importance of supporting Syrian refugees and host countries and ensuring humanitarian aid reaches all areas of Syria.
11. Support was expressed for the sovereignty, security, and economic recovery of Lebanon. The leaders noted the Kuwaiti initiative for joint action between Lebanon and the GCC and Qatar's direct support for the Lebanese Army's salaries. The United States announced its intention to develop a similar support program for the Lebanese Army and Internal

- Security Forces. The leaders also welcomed Iraq's support for the Lebanese people and government in energy and humanitarian relief.
12. The statement reaffirmed support for resolving the Libyan crisis in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 2570 and 2571, stressing the need for simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections and the immediate withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries. They supported the unification of military institutions under United Nations supervision and praised Egypt's hosting of the Libyan constitutional dialogue.
  13. The leaders supported efforts for stability in Sudan, the completion of the transitional phase, the encouragement of consensus among Sudanese parties to preserve state institutions, and Providing assistance to Sudan in confronting economic challenges.
  14. Regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the leaders expressed support for Egypt's water security and called for a diplomatic solution that serves all parties. They emphasized reaching an agreement on the filling and operation of the dam within a reasonable timeframe, as stated in the UNSC Presidential Statement of September 15, 2021, and international law.
  15. Concerning the war in Ukraine, the leaders reaffirmed the necessity of respecting international law and the UN Charter, specifically state sovereignty and territorial integrity. they urged the international community to redouble efforts for a peaceful solution, end human suffering, and facilitate food and grain exports to affected countries.
  16. On Afghanistan, the leaders emphasized the need for humanitarian aid and addressing terrorist threats. They advocated for the fundamental rights of the Afghan people, particularly education, healthcare, and the right to work for women, while commending Qatar's role in supporting Afghan stability.
  17. The leaders welcomed Qatar's preparations for hosting the 2022 World Cup, reaffirming their support for all measures that contribute to its success.
  18. The leaders committed to reconvening their meeting in the future.

## **V. Agenda for the Coming Year**

### **1. Problems**

The year 2022 represented one of the most tumultuous and critical periods in Iraq's recent history, marked by challenges that surpassed those of preceding years. At several pivotal moments, the nation appeared to be on the brink of collapse, with political, security, and economic achievements accumulated over the past nineteen years at risk of disintegration. Numerous analysts have observed that the cumulative impact of systemic errors, entrenched corruption,

and prolonged conflicts spanning nearly two decades culminated in a critical juncture, resulting in a precarious and somber national environment.

The crises experienced in 2022 were primarily rooted in the contentious outcomes of the early parliamentary elections conducted on October 10, 2021. These results precipitated a political deadlock, constituting the most severe political crisis Iraq has encountered since 2003. The ramifications of this impasse persisted until late 2022, culminating in the appointment of Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī as Prime Minister in October 2022 (al-Jubūrī, 2022).

Despite ongoing military and intelligence operations aimed at suppressing terrorist factions—most notably the ISIS groups—2022 witnessed multiple security breaches across several governorates, including Kirkūk, Diyālā, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and al-Mawṣil. A notable incident occurred on December 18, 2022, when an assault targeting federal police forces in Kirkūk resulted in the deaths of seven soldiers and injuries to several others. Security analyst Ḥasan al-'Ubaydī emphasized that although Iraq has succeeded in restricting the movements of terrorist cells in recent years, complete eradication has not been achieved, necessitating a thorough reassessment of intelligence strategies (al-Dabbāgh, 2023). Moreover, these security lapses are frequently intertwined with political instability, as a fragmented political landscape inherently undermines national security.

Domestic political instability has indirectly facilitated external infringements upon Iraqi sovereignty. Neighboring countries have often justified these incursions as operations against armed opposition groups utilizing Iraqi territory as a base for cross-border activities. This situation has exacerbated tensions within the Kurdistan region and placed the Iraqi government in a vulnerable position.

The ongoing tension between the United States and Iran significantly influences Iraq. Minister of Foreign Affairs Fu'ād Ḥusayn noted that although Iranian influence in Baghdad exists due to ideological and intellectual connections, it does not imply that Baghdad's sovereign decisions are dictated by Tehran. He asserted that while Iraq has made strides toward reclaiming its sovereignty since the defeat of ISIS in 2017, full sovereignty remains elusive due to recurrent military interventions and the influence of neighboring states (Middle East News, 2023, February 16).

Both Turkey and Iran have targeted Kurdish opposition groups in the Kurdistan region through drone strikes and missile attacks. Tehran has even threatened ground incursions, accusing these groups—some of whom have resided in Iraq for fifteen years—of supporting the protest movement that commenced in Iran in September 2022. Similarly, Turkey continues to target PKK, accusing them of terrorist activities against Turkish territory. These regional actors frequently employ such external operations to divert attention from domestic issues. Public opinion surveys reveal widespread Iraqi discontent regarding these recurrent violations of national sovereignty (Salīm, 2023).

A significant obstacle to Iraq's emergence as a regional power is the absence of effective strategic planning. The failure to realize national objectives, partic-

ularly the restoration of Iraq's regional and international stature, directly stems from this deficiency (al-'Alī, 2020, p. 67). Since 2003, Iraqi foreign policy has often been treated as a commodity in partisan political contests rather than a professional institutional pursuit. Consequently, governance is frequently influenced by electoral quotas rather than expertise, resulting in a lack of consensus in foreign policy formulation (al-Sa'īdī et al., 2018, p. 2016). Numerous strategic plans in Iraq remain unexecuted because they are often "imported" or developed by unqualified individuals under external influence. These plans commonly lack feasibility, proposing objectives disproportionate to Iraq's actual material and human capacities (al-Filālī, 2010, p. 23).

The absence of internal political agreements has impacted and will continue to affect Iraq's external stance on current regional issues and their developments (Ḥusayn, 2018, pp. 13-14). Furthermore, despite the numerous conflicts present in both the internal and external environments, a persistent struggle has led to the emergence of tensions and security disturbances, undermining regional roles and geographical expansion. This, in turn, has resulted in the formation of new roles and interventions in domestic matters (ʿAṭwān, 2007, p. 158). Among the most significant challenges confronting our foreign policy planners is the internal environment and the lack of political and institutional stability, which will complicate Iraq's external discourse and affect its coherence. Additionally, external conditions and conflicting agendas prevail amidst a fragile national economy and the absence of the necessary military strength to ensure deterrence with neighboring countries (Bāqir, 2016, p. 110).

Economically, Iraq remains one of the most oil-dependent nations globally. Over the past decade, oil revenues have accounted for more than 99% of exports, 85% of the government budget, and 42% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This extreme dependency exposes the country to macroeconomic volatility, while budgetary rigidity restricts public spending, thereby limiting any opportunity to implement policies aimed at addressing cyclical fluctuations. Current high oil prices, driven by factors such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the subsiding impact of COVID-19, are not guaranteed to last. Any shift toward global peace or a new pandemic could trigger a global recession, reducing oil demand and devastating the national budget, which relies on oil for 95% of its total revenue.

## 2. Obligations

In 2023, it is expected that Iraq would be confronting substantial new responsibilities related to political governance and the administration of state affairs. By the conclusion of 2022, Iraqi citizens had expressed aspirations to eradicate terrorist strongholds within the nation, particularly in light of the successes achieved by security forces against sleeper cells and targeted operations against individuals sought by the judiciary.

It is anticipated that in 2023, the prevailing conditions will continue, with security forces maintaining their offensive against ISIS. There is a pronounced necessity to reassess intelligence operations and strive for the complete disman-

tlement of the organization, especially as it increasingly employs sophisticated tactics, thereby requiring an equally strategic and intelligent response. The overall security environment will be contingent upon political stability; any deterioration in this realm could precipitate renewed attacks on the United States Embassy and the Green Zone. Such circumstances would place the administration of Muḥammad Shiyā' al-Sūdānī in a challenging position akin to that faced by the government of former Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī (al-Dabbāgh, 2023).

With respect to foreign policy, Prime Minister al-Sūdānī has articulated his intention to pursue a balanced approach, particularly in the context of the rivalry between the United States and Iran. He has underscored the existence of robust and longstanding relations with Arab countries, including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Jordan and Egypt, primarily in economic and energy sectors. Moreover, the Prime Minister has committed to sustaining constructive relations with Iraq's immediate neighbors, Iran and Turkey, while upholding Baghdad's role as a mediator in Saudi-Iranian dialogue (Sputnik Arabic, 2023, March 6).

Accordingly, Iraq has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role within the region. Iraqi mediation efforts have significantly contributed to the de-escalation of tensions and the resolution of protracted regional conflicts. Political sources report that Iraq hosted five rounds of negotiations between Iranian and Saudi officials aimed at normalizing relations severed since January 2016. Additionally, Iraq has explored facilitating dialogue between the United States and Iran, either in Baghdad or through Iraqi diplomatic channels. These initiatives, coupled with strategic relations with Jordan and Egypt and economic and strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, position Iraq to assume an important role in economic, political, and security cooperation, as well as counterterrorism efforts. This is further supported by developing partnerships with the United States, the European Union, and other major industrial nations (Dhannūn, 2022).

Prime Minister al-Sūdānī and several allies within the Coordination Framework have expressed endorsement of the American mission of "advice, assistance, and empowerment," acknowledging Iraq's continued reliance on United States support in combating residual ISIS elements. They have also supported a similar position regarding the long-term capacity-building mission for Iraqi security forces conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In contrast to his predecessor, al-Sūdānī's relationship with Iran is anticipated to be less contentious, given Iran's favorable view of him and his allies. Conversely, Arab governments, particularly those within the Gulf Cooperation Council, remain cautious about a Baghdad government supported by the Coordination Framework. It remains incumbent upon al-Sūdānī to demonstrate effective governance beyond the role of a mere "manager," as some within the Coordination Framework have suggested.

Economically, the increase in oil prices has provided a critical lifeline following the near-financial crisis of 2020. The economy is gradually recovering despite persistent structural vulnerabilities. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was

projected to increase by 8% in 2022, driven by a 12% rise in oil production. Concurrently, non-oil real GDP was expected to grow at a more moderate pace of 3%, following a 21% rebound in 2021. Inflation remained relatively controlled, averaging 5% during the first ten months of 2022. Oil production is forecasted to incrementally rise from 4.4 million barrels per day to 5 million barrels per day by 2027. Non-oil real GDP growth is projected to accelerate to 4% in 2023, supported by stimulus measures under the Emergency Support Law for Food Security and Development (IMF, 2022).

### 3. Methods for Confronting Problems and Obligations

The current Iraqi government faces significant challenges, particularly in providing essential services such as electricity and enacting a national budget that supports the permanent employment of state contractors. Additionally, the government must address the depreciation of the Iraqi dinar relative to the US dollar. These domestic issues complicate Iraq's regional and international foreign relations, necessitating internal resolution before effective regional engagement can occur.

Geographic determinism is widely recognized as a fundamental basis of Iraqi foreign policy, stemming from the state's distinctive geostrategic position (Maḥmūd, 2020). Leveraging this position to serve both national and regional interests is crucial for maintaining equilibrium in international relations. Accordingly, Iraq should function as a convergence point for neighboring countries and a gateway to the broader international community, rather than a venue for conflicting interests or international disputes (Bāqir, 2016, pp. 107-110).

Given this geopolitical centrality, Iraq's strategic focus in 2022 should have been on restructuring regional relations and adopting reassuring stances toward neighboring states. This entails addressing three principal challenges:

- **Capability:** Reestablishing Iraq's regional role necessitates substantial political, economic, and military resources.
- **Continuity.**
- **Managerial Weakness:** Overcoming administrative deficiencies and complex problems, in addition to the inability to function as a balancer.

Addressing these challenges requires a cohesive economic foundation and national confidence; without these, Iraq remains vulnerable to external threats. As a resource-rich nation occupying a vital geostrategic position, Iraq must maintain neutrality in its political and economic relations. Aligning with Iran against Turkey, or vice versa, or with Saudi Arabia against Iran, is not in Iraq's interest. Instead, Iraq should leverage its position to promote peace, security, and regional coexistence, consistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter (al-'Alī, 2020, p. 69).

Security strategists should prioritize enhancing military, security, and intelligence cooperation with Arab and regional partners through joint agreements that ensure stability for Iraq and its neighbors in combating terrorism. Iraq's

current geopolitical and security vulnerabilities preclude alignment with any specific regional bloc. Therefore, the government must safeguard its sources of strength and strategic options by resolving conflicts and avoiding disputes with neighboring states. This necessitates a relationship with Iran founded on equality and mutual respect. For this to be realized, Iraq must reclaim its natural status within the regional system so that Iran acknowledges Iraq's strategic significance. Iraq should not serve as a battleground for Iranian-Gulf-American conflicts but should act in accordance with its own strategic interests. Similarly, relations with Turkey must be managed to protect Iraqi interests, particularly concerning water rights in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Furthermore, Iraq should activate its participation in international treaties related to human rights and democracy while strengthening ties with influential global powers to support national reconstruction (Bāqir, 2016, pp. 107-108). Regarding foreign relations, balancing ties between Iran and the United States may prove challenging given the ongoing tensions and the failure to revive the nuclear agreement. Consequently, a clear "Iraq First" foreign policy vision is imperative, led by a national government with independent political will.

The historical deficiency in strategic planning has impeded Iraq's emergence as a regional power. To address this, the following measures are necessary (al-'Alī & al-Shujayrī, 2021, pp. 197-199; Mūsá, 2022):

- Effective strategic planning requires the capacity to anticipate future trends (al-'Azzāwī, 2009, p. 14). Iraq requires a planning vision to confront security and economic challenges by developing a stable governmental program with suitable implementation mechanisms characterized by the readiness to adapt to the changing variables in its environment (Fathī, 2022).
- The government should establish a dedicated unit within the Office of the Prime Minister's Advisors to assist in drafting, monitoring, and evaluating foreign policy in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the legislature. Additionally, the Ministry should retain highly qualified ambassadors at its headquarters. A serious commitment to the Foreign Service Institute is essential, employing expert teaching staff to ensure the training of diplomatic personnel. Also, the Ministry's library should be transformed into a modern research and information center.
- Iraqi diplomacy should be restructured based on professionalism and a comprehensive understanding of global challenges such as terrorism and globalization, in order to provide effective diplomacy that is aware of its realities and environment (al-Jumaylī, 2013, p. 13).
- Iraq requires the restoration of its sovereignty and the independence of its political decision-making, both of which have been compromised. It is also necessary to solidify the foundations of internal stability and adopt a transparent methodology for interacting with international parties. Therefore, foreign policy planners must immerse themselves in interna-

tional relations and establish a diplomatic presence in global forums to consolidate mutual trust (Ḥamīd, 2022).

- There is a critical necessity to revitalize the economic dimension particularly within foreign policy (economic diplomacy), based on the following considerations:
  - Over the past two decades, international economic relations and diplomatic activities have undergone significant transformations driven by globalization. These changes have influenced global trade flows, capital movements, and the widespread dissemination of information technology. Consequently, foreign policy must adapt to these developments to overcome Iraq's isolation and facilitate its intentional integration into a rapidly evolving global economy.
  - Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formulated a strategy emphasizing support for reconstruction and economic development, as indicated on its official website, the Ministry has not demonstrated substantial efforts in this domain in recent years. It has played a negligible role in addressing Iraq's financial obligations, including debts and reparations, and in attracting foreign capital and technology essential for reconstruction. Moreover, it has failed to bolster trade and economic relations with neighboring countries and the broader international community. This lack of progress is unsurprising given that the Ministry currently lacks an economic department dedicated to these critical functions. Its personnel seldom possess the requisite training or expertise in this area, and coordination with other ministries, state institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations remains weak. Addressing this significant deficiency necessitates the establishment of an economic department within the Ministry and the provision of all necessary resources to ensure its effective operation (Ḥasan, 2010, p. 61). Furthermore, Iraq must develop a knowledge-based and technological economy by integrating into the global economic system and incentivizing major industrial nations to invest, thereby aligning their interests with Iraq's stability and expediting its restoration to its rightful international standing.
- Despite prevailing political and economic challenges, three primary areas warrant focus to promote economic diversification, growth, and stability (al-'Alī et al., 2022, p. 61):
  - Maintenance of peace constitutes a potent catalyst for growth. In the short term, Iraq should prioritize the implementation of good governance practices by completing and disseminating government audit reports promptly. Additionally, it must enhance the legal framework, advance the digitization of governmental institutions, and enforce the National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption 2021–2024, while

streamlining institutional structures designed to combat corruption (World Bank, 2020).

- Iraq ought to leverage its export potential to diversify its economy beyond oil production. Given its strategic geographic location, Iraq is well-positioned to serve as a regional logistics hub; however, its current logistics performance significantly lags behind regional counterparts, resulting in a bottleneck effect.
- Revitalization of non-oil productive sectors is imperative for establishing a diversified economy led by the private sector.

Structural reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a substantive shift in the formulation and execution of foreign policy must be prioritized by the government in the forthcoming period. The efficacy of foreign policy is inherently linked to the success of broader public policies; the greater the consistency, integration, and clarity of these policies, the higher the likelihood of success for foreign policy.

Currently, Iraq remains subject to external influences. An examination of Iraq's foreign policy reveals a limited margin of an independent foreign policy. Most regional initiatives and international engagements have been predominantly reactive. Even when the government endeavors to assume the initiative, it encounters considerable domestic pressure from political factions and alliances. This serves as a critical indicator for understanding the characteristics of foreign policy management since 2003. Accordingly, the year 2022 may provide a fundamental basis for external engagement, enabling significant changes on the international stage throughout 2023.

Given its diverse relationships and regional interconnections, Iraq cannot pursue a policy of isolation. International relations have become increasingly integrative and interdependent. Nonetheless, reliance on specific axes or blocs is inadvisable, as it engenders vulnerability and dependency. This challenge is particularly pronounced for Iraq due to its pluralistic political and social landscape. Consequently, a strategy emphasizing balance and parity in international relations remains the most suitable approach for Iraq's foreign policy.

The capacity to construct a balanced foreign policy necessitates a unified stance at both official and unofficial levels. The government, as the executive authority, alongside political and parliamentary forces, must reach consensus on foreign policy priorities. This consensus should underpin a stable Iraqi strategy that prioritizes the paramount interests of the state, centered on national sovereignty. The state's strength and success depend on establishing the principle of sovereignty and repudiating any external interference in internal affairs.

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# **al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue (RCD)**

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD is an Iraqi independent think tank that works on encouraging dialogues in educational, political, cultural, and economic affairs, among all elites, in order to enhance the democratic experience, achieve societal peace and help governmental and societal institutions actualize their role and enhance their performance by providing them with experiences and strategic visions. RCD represents a free forum for dialogue characterized by objectivity and impartiality and it invests its outcomes to help decision-makers and guide public opinion towards establishing a state based on institutions.

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue is considered one of the distinguished think tanks in Iraq that brings together on its platform the active political, economic, and academic elites who guide visions and influence decision-making and public opinion. The Center was established on February 2, 2014, in the city of al-Najaf al-Ashraf as a virtual group in the virtual world, comprising a number of academics, intellectuals, and politicians. The idea later evolved to acquire legal status by registering RCD in the NGO Affairs Directorate of the General Secretariat of the Iraqi Council of Ministers.

## **Vision**

The center is a cultural hub where the opinions of elites and decision-makers from all their political, religious, and national spectrums converge. It provides a positive dialogic environment that enhances the creation of common ground among those opinions and contributes to building a prosperous country.

## **Mission**

RCD's mission is to encourage and develop objective and serious dialogues between Iraqi elites and decision-makers in a manner that enhances the democratic experience and achieves societal peace and sustainable development in Iraq through the following objectives:

1. Enhancing societal peace through constructive dialogue among Iraqi elites.
2. Strengthening national responsibility, supporting the state's democratic experience, and building its institutions.
3. Assisting state institutions in solving problems by providing suggestions and consultations in various fields through its diverse publications and informed experts.

4. Expanding common ground between political and social entities through neutral dialogue that strengthens the relationship between the citizen and the state.

## Means

1. Organizing seminars and panel discussions in the fields of RCD's concerns and following up on their outcomes with media coverage to promote them inside and outside Iraq.
2. Issuing books and strategic reports, conducting research and studies, and publishing them in print and electronically.
3. Forging partnerships with local and international research and academic institutions and think tanks with shared objectives.
4. Collaborating with esteemed universities to hold scholarly events and forums.
5. Establishing research departments and specialized committees to promote scientific research.
6. Holding dialogues between differing parties to promote social integration.

## Structure

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD consists of an administrative structure formed in accordance with its internal regulations, which includes: the Board of Directors, consisting of the founder, Mr. Zayd al-Ṭālaqānī, as Chairman of the Board and eight members; a CEO and his deputy; a Board of Advisors; and a number of scientific and administrative departments, which are: the Department of Research and Development, the Department of Administrative, Legal, and Financial Affairs, and the Department of Protocols and Public Relations, in addition to an Advisor for Cultural Affairs and International Cooperation.

Like any giving and fruitful institution, al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue has been exposed to a considerable number of challenges, harassments, and targeting that have attempted to undermine it, yet it has insisted on continuing its triumphant march with sustained giving and strength of will.

RCD addresses several local, regional, and global issues through its diverse publications in the following fields:

1. Political Science and International Relations.
2. Economics and Development.
3. Sociology.
4. Intellectual Affairs and addressing social phenomena.
5. Strategic and Military Affairs.
6. Technology and Cybersecurity.
7. Constitutional, Social, and Legal Issues.

8. Geography.
9. State and Society.
10. Environment and Climate Change.
11. Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformations.

## **RCD's Research and Scientific Connections Locally, Regionally, and Internationally**

As a research center that works to promote dialogue with the other, al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue is keen to build bridges of cognitive and research cooperation by establishing connections with Arab and foreign research centers and institutions around the world. This is done through cooperation agreements signed with institutions and centers of significance at the Iraqi, Arab, regional, and global levels, including Foreign Service Institute of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Center for Banking Studies of Central Bank of Iraq, Salahaddin University-Erbil, International Crisis Group ICG (Belgium), Geneva Institute for Water, Environment and Health GIWEH (Switzerland), French Institute for Research and Analysis of International Policy CFRP, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations CICIR, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Russian International Affairs Council RIAC, Governance and Policy Think Tank GPTT (Iran), The Arab Institute for Democracy (Tunisia), Center for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa CAMEA at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad ISSI (Pakistan), and other important institutions.

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD has managed to be a pioneer in holding forums through its largest annual forum (RCD Forum), an international forum held annually in the capital, Baghdad. It discusses the most prominent topics and developments at the local, regional, and global levels, provides a free space for discussing opinions in the fields on which it is based among elites of high importance at the local and international levels, and dedicates its outcomes to building the state and its institutions and promoting the culture of dialogue and coexistence at all levels.

RCD receives support and funding from its sponsoring institutions through public agreements and in accordance with applicable Iraqi laws and regulations, and it is keen to announce the sources of this support and funding with transparency and clarity. This support for the RCD's activities is represented by contributions from the administrative body (Board of Directors), internal and external donations, grants, endowments, and unconditional gifts, in addition to financial grants from international organizations, United Nations agencies, Iraqi and international donors, humanitarian and development bodies, and private companies such as Central Bank of Iraq CBI, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, Communications and Media Commission, European Union Mission, British Petroleum BP, Trade Bank of Iraq TBI, Iraqi Economic Council IEC, Wādī al-Khayr Company for Agricultural Investments, al-Thiqah International Bank, al-Nāfidhah Company

for Internet Services and Information Technology, Iraqi Business Council, Wajh al-Qamar Company for Investments and Contracting, Madīnat al-Ma'ālī Company for Investments and Contracting, and Ta'lim Platform.

Additionally, RCD receives support from reputable, legally licensed Iraqi institutions, most notably al-Waṭanī by Earthlink, which is the first and leading company in Iraq specializing in fiber optic technology (FTTH) and the largest provider of internet services in Iraq, and Asiacell, the first telecommunications company in Iraq and the main provider of high-quality mobile communication and internet services, with a subscriber base that has reached 19.7 million. And Maṣrif al-Ālam al-Islāmī (Islamic World Bank), one of the most important Iraqi banks in the field of economic development, which is a private joint-stock company founded by an elite group of locally and regionally renowned businessmen.

## Publications

### I. Authored Books

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
1	The Iraqi Economy After 2003	Zayn-al-'Ābidīn M. 'Abd-al-Ḥusayn Ṣādiq 'A. Ḥasan	2018
2	The Iraqi Marshes: Regional Analysis Through Interdisciplinary Lenses	'Abd-'Alī Ḥ. al-Khaffāf Ḥusayn 'A. al-Zayyādī Khālīd G. al-Farṭūsī	2019
3	Lectures on the Iraqi Affair	Group of Authors	2019
4	Building Iraq: Reality, Foreign Relations, and the Dream of Democracy	Luqmān 'A. al-Faylī	2020
5	The Political Economy of Education in Iraq	Prof. Dr. Kāmil 'A. al-Fatlawī Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī	2020
6	Between Two Generations: A Series of Dialogues Between a Young Iraqi and His Older Brother	Luqmān 'A. al-Faylī	2021
7	Central Bank of Iraq: Roles, Tasks, and Future Options	Group of Authors	2021
8	Iraq 2020: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2021
9	Summary on State Succession: A Legal Study in Light of the Provisions of International Agreements	Dr. Abū-Ṭālib H. al-Ṭāliqānī	2021

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
10	The Philosophy of the Frameworks of the Interrelationship between Ethics and Law: A Critical Legal Study of Reality and the Post-Secular World	Prof. Dr. Iyād M. Şayhūd	2021
11	The Social Contract According to Shaykh al-Nāʿīnī in Iraq	Prof. Emer. Dr. 'Abd-al-Amīr Zāhid	2022
12	New Visions for Managing the Oil Extraction Industry in Iraq	Prof. Dr. Jawād K. al-Ka'bī	2022
13	Contemporary Iraqi Problems	Prof. Dr. Walīd 'A. Jabr	2022
14	Iraq 2021: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2022
15	China and Technology Companies: Arms of Espionage and Sources of Superiority and Digital Hegemony	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī Dr. Karrār A. al-Budayrī Dr. Aḥmad Amīn	2022
16	Financial and Administrative Corruption in Iraq: A Geopolitical Vision	Prof. Dr. Ḥusayn 'A. al-Ziyādī	2023
17	ISIS's Violations of International Humanitarian Law	Dr. Fāḍil 'A. al-Gharrāwī	2023
18	Energy Sources and the Future of Mankind	Dr. Ḥusayn al-Shahristānī	2023
19	Studies in Contemporary Islamic Movements in Iraq	Group of Authors	2023
20	Islamic Presence in Europe and Its Future: A Study in Light of Contemporary Orientalist Sources	Hibah Ḥ. al-Rumāḥī	2023
21	Najaf 2050: A Future Vision	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2023
22	Evaluation of the Iraqi Government's Work During a Full Year 2022-2023	Group of Authors	2023
23	Iraq's Two Inflamed Decades: The Proliferation of Crises and the Intractability of Solutions (5 Volumes)	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. al-Ṭufaylī (ed.)	2024
24	Iraqi Kirkuk and the Conflict of Sub-Identities	Dr. Dahhām M. al-'Azzāwī	2024
25	The Economic Importance of the Grand Faw Port and Its Reflection on the Reality of Sustainable Development in Iraq	Prof. Dr. Ḥamīdah Sh. al-Īdāmī Asst. Prof. Dr. Amjad R. al-Zāhidī	2024

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
26	Iraq 2022: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. Hasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.)	2024
27	Iraqi Military Establishment 2003-2020	Dr. 'Imād H. al-Rubayfī	2024
28	Iraq 2023: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2025
29	1999 Popular Uprising in Iraq After the Martyrdom of Sayyid al-Ṣadr: Preludes, Trajectories, Results	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.)	2025
30	Republics of the Former Soviet Union: New Facts on Old Land	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. al-Ṭufaylī (ed.)	2025
31	US Policy in the Middle East During the Trump and Biden Administrations 2017-2024	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. Ḥamīd (ed.)	2025
32	Najaf in the Pre-Islamic Era: Excavations in the Memory of a Region	'Abd-al-Amīr al-Mu'min	2025
33	Iran's Role in defining the Parameters of Strategic Balance in the Middle East: The Case of the Nuclear Program	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2025
34	Iraq 2024: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. Ḥamīd (ed.)	2025
35	Green Policies: Redefining Progress in the Age of AI	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. 'Amir 'A. al-Wā'ilī (ed.)	2025

## II. Translated Books

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
1	War Without End: The Iraq War in Context	Michael Schwartz	2019
2	Political Philosophy: An Introduction	Jason Brennan	2019
3	Resource Rents and Economic Growth	Peter Kaznacheev	2019
4	Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation	Adeed Dawisha	2019
5	Patriotic Ayatollahs: Nationalism in Post-Saddam Iraq	Caroleen Marji Sayej	2020

<b>No.</b>	<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>
6	Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know	Daniel Byman	2021
7	Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State	Carter Malkasian	2021
8	Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons From the Vietcong to the Islamic State	Seth G. Jones	2021
9	The Iraqi Federation: Origin, Operation and Significance	Farah Shakir	2021
10	Global Trends 2040	US National Intelligence Council	2021
11	The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims	Graham E. Fuller Rend Rahim Francke	2021
12	Rulers, Religion, and Riches: Why the West Got Rich and the Middle East Did Not	Jared Rubin	2021
13	Soldiers and Citizens: An Oral History of Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Battlefield to the Pentagon	Carl Mirra	2021
14	Security in the Persian Gulf Region	Fatemeh Shayan	2021
15	Between State and Non-State: Politics and Society in Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine	Gülistan Gürbey (ed.) Sabine Hofmann (ed.) Ferhad Ibrahim Seyder (ed.)	2022
16	Shi'i Islam and Politics: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon	Jon Armajani	2023
17	Understanding Religious Violence: Radicalism and Terrorism in Religion Explored via Six Case Studies	James Dingley (ed.) Marcello Mollica (ed.)	2023
18	The Political Economy of EU Ties with Iraq and Iran: An Assessment of the Trade-Peace Relationship	Amir M. Kamel	2023
19	Rethinking Turkey-Iraq Relations: The Dilemma of Partial Cooperation	Mehmet Akif Kumral	2023
20	Stealth War: How China Took Over While America's Elite Slept	Robert Spalding Seth Kaufman	2023
21	Cyber War & Cyber Peace: Digital Conflict in the Middle East	Eliza Campbell (ed.) Michael Sexton (ed.)	2023
22	Seven Pillars: What Really Causes Instability in the Middle East?	Michael Rubin (ed.) Brian Katulis (ed.)	2023

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
23	Russia Rising: Putin's Foreign Policy in the Middle East and North Africa	Dimitar Bechev (ed.) Nicu Popescu (ed.) Stanislav Secrieru (ed.)	2023
24	The Ambassadors: American Diplomats on the Front Lines	Paul Richter	2023
25	How the World Became Rich: The Historical Origins of Economic Growth	Mark Koyama Jared Rubin	2024
26	Institution Building in Weak States: The Primacy of Local Politics	Andrew Radin	2024
27	Information, Power, and Democracy: Liberty is a Daughter of Knowledge	Nico Stehr	2024
28	The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century	Giuliano Garavini	2024
29	Iraq against the World: Saddam, America, and the Post-Cold War Order	Samuel Helfont	2025
30	Iraq: Power, Institutions, and Identities	Andrew J. Flibbert	2025
31	Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity	Sandrine Dixson-Decleve et al.	2025

### III. Dissertations Series

No.	Title	Researcher	Year of Publication
1	Iran's Position on the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait 1990–1991: A Historical Study	Rimāḥ S. al-Ma'mūrī	2021
2	Consequence of Violating the Rules for Justifying Criminal Judgments in Iraqi Legislation: A Comparative Study	Asst. Lect. Yūsuf F. Ḥirz-al-Dīn	2021
3	Sovereign Wealth Funds: A Comparative Legal Study	Dr. Lanjah Ş. Amīn	2021
4	Political Development and Its Political Crises in Iraq After 2003	Dr. Farazdaq 'A. al-Tamīmī	2021
5	Dynamics of Rising and Hegemonic Powers in Southeast Asia: An Analytical Study According to the Balance of Interests Theory	Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. al-Ṭufaylī	2021
6	Terrorism and the International Political System After the Events of September 11, 2001: A Future Vision	Dr. Khālid M. Shubbar	2022

No.	Title	Researcher	Year of Publication
7	International Investment Based on the ICAPM Model and Investments of International Companies	Dr. 'Alī 'A. Fulayfīl Prof. Dr. Ḥākīm M. al-Rubayfī	2022
8	Financing Economic Development in Developing Countries: Iraq as a Model	Asst. Prof. Dr. Ibrāhīm J. al-Yāsirī	2022
9	Place and Its Organizational Impact on the Social and Economic Forces of al-Najaf al-Ashraf Governorate	Dr. 'Iṣām Ṣ. Ibrāhīm	2022
10	General Budget Deficit and Monetary Change in Iraq for the Period 1980 - 2015	Asst. Prof. Dr. Ḥusayn Sh. Majīd	2023
11	The Protest Movement in Iraq, The Dream of Democracy: From Regression to Resurgence	Dr. Sayf Ḥ. al-Ḥusaynī	2023
12	Regional Environment and Combating Terrorism in Iraq	Dr. Bāsīm M. Yūnus	2025

#### **IV. Publications in English**

No.	Publication Title	Publication Category	Year of Publication
1	Najaf 2050: A Future Vision	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2025
2	The Iraqi Marshes: Regional Analysis Through Interdisciplinary Lenses	Prof. Dr. 'Abd-'Alī Ḥ. al-Khaffāf Prof. Dr. Ḥusayn 'A. al-Zayyādī Prof. Dr. Khālīd G. al-Farṭūsī	2025
3	Iraq 2021: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2025
4	Iraq 2022: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. Ḥasan L. al-Zubaydī (ed.) Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	2026
5	Iraq 2023: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.)	Forthcoming
6	Iraq 2024: RCD's Strategic Report	Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Asst. Lect. 'Ammār K. Ḥamīd (ed.)	Forthcoming





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Iraq 2022: RCD's Strategic Report, represents a corporate research effort aimed at providing an in-depth and balanced reading of the Iraqi state's trajectory throughout an entire year. This report was produced during a phase characterized by the complexity of challenges and the intersection of political, economic, security, and regional pathways. It does not merely describe events in isolation but adopts a narrative-analytical approach designed to understand the structural interactions governing the political system's performance, public policy options, and both official and social response patterns.

The significance of this report stems from its role as part of an annual strategic series adopted by the al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD. This series aims to build an institutional knowledge memory that regularly monitors Iraq's transformations, providing an analytical reference for decision-makers, diplomats, researchers, and those interested in public affairs. It seeks not only to document the recent past but to support strategic thinking and enhance the ability to interpret future trends in light of accumulated experiences.

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