

Iraq 2021

RCD's Strategic Report

Edited by

Prof. Dr. Hasan L. al-Zubaidi

Prof. Dr. Ahmad S. al-Mamouri

Prof. Dr. Miqdam A. al-Fayyad



al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue

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مركز الراءفدين للحوار
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 2021: RCD's Strategic Report examines significant transformations experienced by Iraq during a tumultuous year marked by political, health, economic, security, and social challenges. The year 2021 stands as one of the most consequential periods in the trajectory of the Iraqi state since 2003, owing to pivotal events that reshaped the national landscape and necessitated a comprehensive reassessment of future policies and strategic directions by policymakers and society at large.

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue (RCD) prioritized the preparation of this report as a rigorous analytical document that systematically monitors national developments within their political, economic, social, and security contexts. This approach facilitates researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders in obtaining a clear and integrated understanding of the events of 2021 and the anticipated developments in subsequent years. The report's first chapter provides a general overview of the most salient issues of 2021, including the early elections and their unforeseen outcomes, the COVID-19 pandemic and its ramifications, the performance of the national economy, the security situation, social conditions, human rights, public services, anti-corruption initiatives, the state of education, and international relations.

The second chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the political process, focusing on the performance of the Council of Representatives, the government's activities, pre-election conflicts and alignments, the electoral outcomes and subsequent reactions, electoral integrity debates, and critical incidents such as the assassination attempt on the Prime Minister, demonstrations in al-Sulaymānīyah, and intra-party disputes. The third chapter reviews the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2021, detailing new infection waves, morbidity and mortality statistics, the Ministry of Health's response, vaccination campaigns, debates surrounding prevention versus coexistence strategies, and updates on viral variants, culminating in projections for the forthcoming year.

The fourth chapter presents a comprehensive economic analysis, addressing the return to relative recovery, federal budget considerations, Federal Supreme Court rulings on oil, oil sector performance, exchange rate fluctuations, the Chinese-Iraqi agreement, poverty levels, drought conditions, sustainable development efforts, and evaluations of the White Paper and recovery plans. The fifth chapter examines the multifaceted security challenges, including internal and

external threats such as ISIS activities, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), attacks on international missions and forces, and a review of security incidents and civilian casualties. The sixth chapter highlights social challenges faced by Iraqi society, including tribal conflicts, domestic violence, suicide, human trafficking, displacement crises, refugee issues, and the evolution of civil society institutions.

The seventh chapter addresses human rights comprehensively, focusing on persons with disabilities, violence against women, rights of displaced persons and children, crimes against demonstrators, freedom of expression in the Kurdistan Region, and a forward-looking perspective for 2022. The eighth chapter details public service conditions in electricity, water, sanitation, transportation, housing, and public health. The ninth chapter discusses anti-corruption efforts, Iraq's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index, the performance of the Integrity Commission, the Board of Supreme Audit, the Anti-Corruption Committee, the Stolen Asset Recovery Law, and related matters. The tenth chapter examines education and higher education, addressing crises and recovery pathways, distance learning, dropout rates, school infrastructure, challenges in higher education, and comprehensive reform recommendations. Finally, the eleventh chapter explores Iraq's international relations, including the Vatican Pope's visit, the Baghdad Summit, relations with the United States and neighboring countries, Iraq's water rights, and regional rapprochement.

Through this report, RCD aims to provide an objective and comprehensive analysis of the events of 2021, free from political bias or narrow interpretations, thereby fostering a realistic understanding of Iraq's challenges and opportunities. The English edition is intended for policymakers and specialists, particularly non-Arabic speakers, as part of a series of documentary strategic reports issued by the center, serving as analytical resources to support balanced, effective, and forward-looking policy formulation.

1. Year 2021 in Review

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Another year has passed for Iraq, fraught with significant and exceptional events whose repercussions and results demand examination. The 2021 Strategic Report of al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD (Iraq 2021) has summarized these events through the pens of several specialists in Iraqi affairs, who have offered their analysis and documentation. We hope this provides the reader with a comprehensive account of the developments the country has witnessed in the political, social, economic, security, and service sectors, within an analytical and critical framework aimed at evaluating the current reality and aspiring to a better future.

I. The Political Process: Early Elections and Unexpected Results

Perhaps the most prominent political event of 2021 was the early parliamentary elections held on October 10, 2021. These elections represented a political and security challenge for the government of Mr. Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī and its ability to ensure their success. It was also a test of the electorate's willingness to participate at an acceptable level, at the very least, to grant the process a reasonable degree of national and international legitimacy. We must not forget the significant political disputes and public pressure for the enactment of a new electoral law that considers the post-Tishrīn (October) movement requirements. This is especially true considering that early elections were one of the most important demands of the Tishrīn movement, which also posed a challenge to the Council of Representatives to legislate a balanced law that ensures justice and equality among competitors. At the same time, the challenge was to escape the pressure

of political blocs and parties that seek to obtain parliamentary seats regardless of the people's will and aspirations, as was the case with previous electoral systems like the open-list system and the Saint-Laguë method, among others. These systems had appropriated the will and desire of many voters, creating significant frustration that led them to boycott the electoral process due to a sense of its futility or the fact that it gave their votes to others they did not vote for in the first place.

Not far from this atmosphere was the popular desire for change and the national sentiment among most voters that these elections were the last chance for the success of the democratic experiment in Iraq. The participation of a large number of independent candidates in the electoral race contributed to fueling and inflaming sentiments that a change would occur in these elections. This prompted well-known parties to step out of their partisan cloaks and enter the elections with new faces and figures claiming independence, or to participate with new lists and alliances to ride this wave.

In this charged atmosphere, the electoral process took place with appropriate technical and security measures. Its serenity was only disturbed by some minor technical problems in the biometric devices, most of which were quickly addressed. The success of the process was declared at the end of the day, with an acceptable participation rate of 43%, although a large number of this percentage did not vote for a candidate or intentionally invalidated their ballot, reflecting their boycott. Until then, the relative calm of the elections preceded the great storm that swept the political scene after the preliminary announcement of the election results. The final results led to a major shock with the rise of certain names and blocs and the exit of some traditional and veteran political figures from the political scene since 2003. A significant advance was announced for the Sadrist Bloc at the expense of other Shiite blocs, later called the "Coordination Framework" (al-Iṭār al-Tansīqī), with a relative advance for the "State of Law" (Dawlat al-Qānūn) bloc. Regarding the western regions and the Sunni public, the results pointed towards the victory of the "Taḡaddum" bloc led by Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī, and the victory of the Kurdistan Democratic Party with most of the Kurdish seats, along with a significant rise of independents and those who emerged from the Tishrīn movement, securing no less than forty seats.

After this shock, the series of events began to move in a complex, dramatic direction. The losing entities questioned the integrity and success of the elections, filing legal challenges against the electoral process on various grounds, such as demanding a manual recount, among others. They tried to portray to their constituents and other voters that the technical problems in the elections created a major flaw that negatively affected their credibility and results. The situation escalated to the point where they considered it fraud and manipulation by the Independent High Electoral Commission and political entities close to the prime minister, with funding and support from external parties. The situation then developed into a campaign of charged protests and demonstrations blocking some roads in Baghdad and some provinces and protests around the perimeter

of the Green Zone, accompanied by the issuance of threats and warnings, with a heated clash with security forces stationed around the Green Zone, until the losing political blocs reached the stage of accepting the reality and attempting political maneuvering and unannounced acceptance of the election results.

One of the most important events in the political scene was the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāẓimī at dawn on July 7, 2021. Although this event was preeminently a security incident, it had its political causes, significance, and repercussions, as well as domestic, regional, and international reactions, as it represented a serious event targeting the head of the executive authority in the country. This incident further complicated the political scene and led to serious repercussions between those who questioned the incident itself, seeing it as a fabricated play staged by the prime minister to achieve political gains and strike his opponents, and those who considered it an unacceptable and dangerous security targeting of a national symbol, with accusations exchanged between the two sides, especially since the investigation results were not announced at all and were shrouded in a great deal of ambiguity, confusion of the issues, and loss of some evidence, which further complicated the political scene and divided the political rivals. The investigative committee on the matter did not reach any tangible results, which leads the observer of this scene to become increasingly convinced that investigative committees for most important issues in Iraq are formed only for the purposes of calming the street, winning its affection, or absorbing its anger, and not for uncovering the facts and finding the perpetrators in the vast majority of cases.

In another context, the political parliamentary performance was not at the required level and did not match the national and historical responsibility of this important authority. The political blocs within the Council of Representatives, which emerged from the ruling parties, represented a great disappointment for the Iraqi people. The failure to accomplish the important tasks entrusted to them is almost their most prominent feature, such as completing the constitutional amendments to the 2005 Constitution, and the inability to achieve an oversight role, as no ministerial figure was questioned. In addition, the Council of Representatives failed in many tasks, such as its inability to complete its final accounts. All of this had a clear impact on disrupting parliamentary oversight, as each party protects the minister affiliated with it from any accountability and works to remain in power and prepare for the next elections.

As for the government's performance, it was also not at its best, as it failed to meet many of the protesters' demands and did not achieve many of the desired results, apart from some partial remedies. Furthermore, the utter failure to control weapons outside of state authority and the continued proliferation of arms in the hands of undisciplined and outlaw groups was one of the most significant files the government was unable to resolve in 2021. In fact, armed groups increased their use of weapons to threaten or pressure the state and its institutions, with continued attacks on American interests and international coalition bases in Iraq.

Finally, the university student protests in al-Sulaymānīyah in November 2021 marked a significant turning point in the political events of the Kurdistan Region. Although these protests appeared on the surface to be demands for the reinstatement of student grants, which had been cut off since 2014, and for the improvement of university conditions, they in fact drew their strength from the Tishrīn protests in the central and southern regions. It seems that the crisis within the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party, the major division and conflict among its leaders after the death of President Jalāl Ṭālabānī, the poor performance in services and infrastructure development, and the economic problems were all factors behind these protests occurring in the al-Sulaymānīyah governorate and not in other governorates of the Region.

II. COVID-19 Pandemic

Experts indicate that any pandemic ends in one of two ways. The first is the medical end, where the discovery of effective treatments and vaccines leads to the end of infection risks, reducing case numbers and their impacts. The other way a pandemic ends is the social end, which occurs when people impose a certain lifestyle, perhaps not adhering to health protocols. Members of society decide to coexist with the virus, breaking the barrier of panic created by the shock of its sudden appearance and the restrictions it imposed on their daily lives. This path asserts itself over time and with the prolonged duration of the pandemic and the recurrence of non-lethal infections. It appears that the de facto situation is what imposed itself in dealing with the pandemic, as the government was forced to overlook the violation of restrictions it had imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, these restrictions were lifted almost completely, with the exception of the continued requirement to test arrivals to the country, despite the virus being more virulent in terms of transmission in 2021, even if it was less lethal to those infected.

Iraq had ended 2020 at the forefront of Arab countries with the highest recorded cases and deaths from the coronavirus, with approximately 600,000 infections and 12,800 deaths, an issue that signaled new dangers threatening society due to the pandemic. Since the pandemic began, Iraq has witnessed four waves of escalating virus infections, the most severe of which were the two waves seen in 2021. That year alone saw 1,498,449 virus infections, from which 11,345 people died. This means that the death rate from the virus decreased to 0.75% of total infections. In contrast, there were 595,291 infections in 2020, with 12,813 deaths, while the death rate from the virus was 2.15%. The reason for this may be due to several factors, perhaps the most important being the increased efficiency in dealing with infections, the availability of appropriate treatments, and, to some extent, the increase in the number of vaccinated individuals.

The governorates varied in terms of the number of infections. Baghdād continued to have the largest share, contributing 27.6% of new virus infections, followed by al-Baṣrah, whose contribution to infections increased to 11.2%, and

then the governorates of al-Sulaymānīyah and Duhok. These four governorates accounted for more than half of the infections in 2021. Meanwhile, the governorates of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, al-Muthanná, and al-Anbār ranked last in terms of the number of infections during the years 2020-2021.

When comparing infections to the total population, we find that the ratio increased from 1.5% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2021. At the governorate level, Duhok was the highest with a rate of 6.8% in 2021, followed by Wāsiṭ (5.4% of the population). These are two small governorates in terms of population size, while the rate in Baghdād was high, approaching 5%.

The virus claimed the lives of 24,167 people during the years 2020-2021. Baghdād ranked first in terms of total deaths (5,113 fatalities), followed by the three governorates of the Kurdistan Region: al-Sulaymānīyah, Erbil, and Duhok, where 3,295, 2,045, and 1,776 deaths occurred, respectively. Regarding gender, 67% of the fatalities in 2020 were male, compared to 33% female, while in 2021, the ratio was 59% male and 41% female. As for age groups, the virus was most lethal in the 60-69 age group in 2020, whereas the death rate in the younger age group (50-59 years) rose to 32.8% in 2021.

To meet the requirements of dealing with the pandemic, the government increased the Ministry of Health's spending from 1.726 trillion dinars (about 1.460 billion dollars) in 2020 to 2.877 trillion in 2021 (about 1.9 billion dollars). Most of the ministry's spending increase was in the operational budget, whose allocations grew from 1.693 trillion dinars in 2020 to 2.752 trillion in 2021. The investment budget's allocations increased by 370% between the two aforementioned years, rising from just 33.5 billion dinars to 124.361 billion dinars. This modest increase does not reflect the urgent investment needs to meet the burdens of developing the health system. Furthermore, a large part of this increase was necessitated by price changes resulting from the currency devaluation, as the increase, when valued in dollars, amounts to only 30%.

Despite the efforts made by the ministry's staff, it was subject to severe criticism in the wake of the incident at Ibn al-Khaṭīb Hospital in Baghdād, which claimed the lives of 82 people and injured 110 others in April 2021. The incident and its aftermath led to the resignation of the Minister of Health and Environment, Ḥasan al-Tamīmī, from his post on May 4, 2021, following the release of the report by the investigative committee formed in response to the incident. The committee imposed disciplinary penalties on the hospital director, his administrative deputy, and the civil defense official, relieving them of their positions and demoting the director's job grade, in addition to dismissing the Director-General of al-Ruṣāfah Health Department and ending the suspension of the Minister of Health and the Governor of Baghdād.

A few months later, a similar event occurred on July 12, 2021, at al-Ḥusayn Teaching Hospital in al-Nāṣirīyah, in the isolation ward for COVID-19 patients, which resulted in the death of 92 people and the injury of 110 others. The director of health for the governorate and the hospital director were dismissed as a result.

Both cases reveal the extent of the disarray within the country's health system and expose the shortcomings in bearing the emergency burdens imposed by the pandemic. Both incidents are related to the handling of pandemic patients who were facing difficult circumstances, which prompted many of them to avoid public hospitals and prefer treatment in private clinics or hospitals.

Vaccination operations with anti-virus vaccines began in early March 2021, with the arrival of the first shipments of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine. The government had announced at the beginning of the year that it had agreed to purchase 1.6 million doses of the American Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and 8 million doses of the British AstraZeneca vaccine. By the end of the year, 8,551,606 people had received one or two doses of the vaccine. The uptake for any of these vaccines was described as weak amid a rise in negative rumors about them.

The total number of vaccinated individuals constitutes less than 21% of the total population, and a significant percentage of them have received only one dose. At the governorate level, they can be divided into two groups:

1. **Governorates with high vaccine uptake**, where the percentage of people who received one or two doses of the total population is above the national average of 20.8%. al-Baṣrah is the highest in terms of the percentage of people who received vaccines, reaching 28.4%, followed by Duhok (25.3%), then Najaf (23.9%) and Baghdād (23.8%).
2. **Governorates with low vaccine uptake**, where the percentage falls below the national average. al-Sulaymānīyah has the lowest percentage of vaccinated individuals relative to its total population, at only 13%.

It goes without saying that these rates are extremely low and delay the achievement of herd immunity against the virus. Looking at other countries, achieving a rate of 70% of the population having received two doses as a target for herd immunity, 83 countries have met this goal, most of them developed nations, in addition to a number of Arab countries including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Morocco. Meanwhile, the rest of the world's countries are still lagging, with India expected to achieve this goal on June 12, 2022, while Iraq is projected to achieve it on March 24, 2027.

An investigative report published on August 6, 2021, prepared with support from the Network of Iraqi Reporters for Investigative Journalism (NIRIJ) in cooperation with the Daraj Foundation, indicated that Iraqis prefer to face the virus over taking the vaccine, in light of increasing rumors, fears, and corruption in health institutions. During the first months of 2021, vaccination operations were weak and were described as weak, slow, and intermittent, and that Iraq would need years to complete the vaccination of two-thirds of the population. The report identified three main reasons for this, which are:

- The government's delay in providing vaccines.
- The limited quantities of available vaccines, the scarcity of vaccination centers, and the long waiting period, which extends for weeks.

- Rumors that speak of the dangers of vaccines and raise doubts about their effectiveness, which were fueled by statements from religious figures and some working in the medical field.

The Ministry of Health warned against the publication of stories that have no scientific basis and conspiracy theories about vaccines and masks, stating that this is considered a crime and a threat to the country's health security. The ministry said it would hold fully legally responsible any individuals proven to be spreading information that misleads public opinion about vaccines, as well as the media outlets that promote this information, and that it would take legal action against individuals who incited people against masks and vaccines.

During 2021, the phenomenon of social disregard for implementing preventive measures, even simple ones like wearing masks, became prominent. Forms of crowded human gatherings, such as mourning gatherings and celebrations in closed halls, returned, and social customs like handshaking, hugging, and kissing were widely resumed. In fact, this disregard was also evident at the level of governmental and non-governmental institutions. A report by the Integrity Commission pointed to the existence of forged test results and others with inflated fees, which are conducted by examining travelers in their homes by health teams affiliated with accredited travel-screening entities. This was in addition to the failure to apply the principle of social distancing, especially by private companies, noting that some planes depart at full capacity, which could lead to Iraq being banned from using its airlines or its travelers being denied entry to many countries if infections are found among them. According to the report, the Commission formed a team to investigate after receiving information about the existence of offices working in coordination with governmental and non-governmental entities to avoid conducting the PCR test for the coronavirus for travel outside Iraq, in exchange for a sum of up to 200,000 dinars.

In June 2021, the government decided to mandate the vaccine for employees, faculty members in universities, and students over the age of 18, with the aim of encouraging vaccine uptake. Subsequently, on June 7, the Council of Ministers announced decisions related to the pandemic, including:

- Continuing the implementation of the decision to vaccinate all individuals working in shops, restaurants, malls, factories, and other places subject to health inspection, making it a condition for the issuance and renewal of health permits, with violators facing fines and closure after September 1.
- Denying entry to government sector employees, educators, and students older than 18 who do not present a vaccination card or a weekly negative test result proving they are not infected with the virus.
- Requiring all state institutions to deny entry to unvaccinated visitors.
- Mandating that outbound travelers possess an international certificate proving they have received the vaccine.

- Requiring proof of having received a dose of an approved vaccine for individuals who wish to obtain an exemption from any comprehensive or partial curfew, should the need to impose one arise in the future.

The government attempted to urge people to take the vaccines, but the turnout remained weak during 2021. Nevertheless, a document issued by the Ministry of Health in early November 2021 indicated an expansion of the age groups eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to include those aged 12 years and above, with the goal of reducing the risk of the virus's spread and increasing the herd immunity necessary to contain the pandemic. The following day, the Ministry of Education called for students not to be permitted entry unless they provided a vaccination card or a weekly PCR test. However, it did not obligate these groups to receive the vaccine.

III. The Iraqi Economy 2021

In 2021, Iraq was still experiencing the effects of a triple shock that began as a political shock in October 2019, followed by a health shock and the shock of collapsing oil prices, which fell to their lowest level in April 2020, reaching about \$13 per barrel. However, the OPEC+ meeting addressed the problem of deteriorating oil prices by making significant cuts in oil supply, which led to a gradual improvement in prices. Iraq entered 2021 with its oil prices at more than \$60 per barrel.

It goes without saying that the movement of the Iraqi economy depends on oil prices and, consequently, its revenues. Oil constituted its lowest share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2020, but it rose to 45.9% in the third quarter of 2021, a clear result of the improvement in oil prices. No structural change appeared in the composition of the GDP in 2021, as the contribution of other sectors remained low, especially the commodity-producing sectors. This is inconsistent with the country's economic situation, which relies on imports to meet growing demand, leading to a deterioration in trade balance indicators, particularly with Iraq's neighboring countries.

Iraq entered 2021 with oil prices on a continuous rise due to the oil agreement between producers inside and outside of OPEC (OPEC+). The selling price of Iraqi oil reached \$58.586 per barrel in January, then peaked in October at \$79.274 per barrel. The highest export rate was in December, at 3.277 million barrels per day (bpd), while the average for 2021 was 3.032 million bpd, a rate lower than the 3.250 million bpd set in the national budget. The rise in oil prices led to an increase in oil revenues, which reached \$4.765 billion in January and \$7.391 billion in December, for a total revenue of \$75.639 billion, or 109.677 trillion dinars. However, there is a discrepancy between the sales recorded by the Ministry of Oil, which records sales upon the finalization of deals, and the revenues recorded by the Ministry of Finance, which records what is received from oil sales. According to the Ministry of Finance, oil revenues amounted to 96.622 trillion dinars, a difference of 13.055 trillion dinars from the Ministry of Oil's figure. The ministry did not clarify the oil

revenues carried over from 2020 and received in 2021. One result of the increased oil revenues was that Iraq paid the remainder of its Kuwaiti compensation dues, amounting to \$44 million out of the \$52.4 billion imposed by the UN Security Council on Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

Regarding the development of the oil sector, an agreement was signed in 2021 to establish a petrochemical complex in al-Fāw with the Chinese company CNCEC. The project includes the construction of the al-Fāw refinery with a capacity of 300,000 bpd and three million tons of petrochemicals, with a total investment of \$29 billion, starting with between \$7-8 billion, and is expected to provide 30,000 jobs.

In order to prepare programs and projects for gas development in southern Iraq, the al-Manṣūrīyah gas field in Diyālā, and the 'Akkāz gas field in al-Anbār province, the Ministry of Oil sought the optimal investment of national wealth. The ministry announced that the agreement with the French company Total would come into effect in the first quarter of 2022 after the necessary approvals are obtained. After the withdrawal of the coalition of companies—Turkey's TPAO, Kuwait Energy, and Korea's KOGAS—from the third licensing round in 2010 to develop the al-Manṣūrīyah gas field, implementation was stalled due to the war with ISIS in 2014. The field was then re-tendered based on Council of Ministers Resolution No. (270) of 2019, which approved the development through national effort with the participation of a qualified international company (51% for the Midland Oil Company and 49% for the foreign company). The Ministry of Oil invited 16 companies, nine of which expressed interest, and the tender was ultimately awarded to the Chinese company SINOPEC, with the shares divided between the Midland Oil Company (51%) and SINOPEC (49%), as per the Council of Ministers' decision on January 20, 2022. The contract was initialed between the Petroleum Contracts and Licensing Directorate of the Iraq National Oil Company and SINOPEC.

The French company Total had submitted its proposals in 2020 to build gas facilities in the southern fields. The Council of Ministers, through its Resolution No. (244) of 2021, approved the Basra Oil Company and the South Gas Company to contract with Total for the implementation of the integrated gas project. This was followed by Resolution No. (307) of 2021, which authorized the two companies, along with Total, to develop the gas projects. The contract with Total included four components:

- Gas investment contracts with a capacity of 600 million standard cubic feet.
- Seawater transport and treatment with a capacity of 5 million barrels per day.
- Generation of 1000 megawatts of solar energy.
- Development of the Arṭāwī field, aiming to increase production to more than 210,000 bpd.

With the improvement in oil prices and the beginning of an increase in the production quotas of oil-producing countries under the OPEC+ framework, the World Bank expected the Iraqi economy to achieve growth of 1.9% in 2021 and an average of 6.3% in 2022-2023. These forecasts are considered conservative due to the rentier nature of the economy and the ongoing problems that threaten macroeconomic stability. Furthermore, the continued lack of investment and the weak business climate in non-oil sectors hinder programs that support sustainable growth and effective service delivery.

However, the government did not take advantage of 2020, a year in which no budget was passed—the second time in the history of the Iraqi state after 2014—to present the budget on schedule as required by the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019. Instead, it was significantly delayed, reinforcing an atmosphere of mistrust regarding its procedures and their potential economic impacts. The large financial deficit proposed by the government, estimated at about 71 trillion dinars to be covered by domestic and foreign borrowing, was surprising and adds to the burdens on the economy. The budgeted oil price was set very conservatively at \$45 per barrel, even though the average price in January was \$53 per barrel.

The draft budget submitted by the government to the Council of Representatives was fundamentally changed, going beyond the powers granted to the Council by Article 62 of the Constitution, which are limited to reallocating funds between budget chapters and reducing its total amounts. The budget was also noted for not taking into account the repercussions of devaluing the dinar; on the contrary, it resorted to reducing expenditures that affect citizens' lives. Allocations for the public food ration system were reduced from 1.5 trillion dinars in the 2019 budget to 795 billion dinars in the 2021 budget, and allocations for medicines were cut from 1.5 trillion dinars to 1.349 trillion dinars at a time when the country was under the strain of COVID-19.

Accordingly, the 2021 budget is inconsistent with the government's "White Paper" reform plan, both in its preparation and its outcomes. It is therefore necessary to consider its shortcomings when preparing the 2022 budget, especially in controlling current expenditures, although forecasts indicate that passing a budget this year may not be possible due to the political conflict that has delayed the formation of a government, and that spending will continue in accordance with the Financial Management Law.

The decision to raise the foreign exchange rate against the dinar (devaluing the dinar) was a pivotal point in the behavior of many economic variables, including inflation. The change coincided with the initial outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq. On December 19, 2020, the Central Bank of Iraq concluded the year's events with a sudden exchange rate hike using a shock method, as the bank had previously announced that no change would occur. This step, which relied on secrecy in its decision-making, was intended to deny speculators sufficient time to play a role in disrupting the process, a strategy stemming from the accumulated experience inherited since the 1990s at the Central Bank.

Inflation was the first variable to respond to this change. Regular inflation figures had not exceeded the 1% threshold since February 2020, and core inflation since March of the same year. Immediately at the end of December (the month of the change), regular inflation jumped to 3.2% and core inflation to 4.2%. When calculating the change compared to the average of the preceding eleven months of the same year, the increase reached 814% for regular inflation and 500% for core inflation, against a change in the exchange rate hike of 23.55%. The exaggerated reaction of inflation in the market can be interpreted as a throwback to what occurred in the 1990s, which caused prices to jump to these levels in December 2020. Once the new year 2021 began, inflation spiraled out of the Central Bank's control, escalating in the subsequent months until regular inflation reached 8.6% in November. However, the change in the inflation rate after that initial leap fluctuated within reasonable ranges.

Public anxiety and a lack of confidence in the Central Bank's ability to sustain the decision to raise the foreign exchange rate, coupled with rumors of a reversal that accompanied it, led financial and banking institutions to refrain from purchasing foreign currency from the auction window. Sales dropped from \$4,567 million, a change of -30%, in December 2020 and continued to decline very sharply at the beginning of 2021, with sales reaching \$492 million in January 2021, a change of -84.6% from the previous month. Sales did not return to near their previous levels until April, by which time it became clear to everyone that there would be no reversal of the change, thereby reinforcing the Central Bank's credibility. Sales continued to fluctuate until the end of 2021. The last months of the year saw a decrease, reaching \$3,148 million in October 2021. The highest sales rates were in June and August, at \$4,824 million and \$4,713 million, respectively. This can be attributed to increased government borrowing, which drove up demand for foreign currency, prompting the Central Bank to increase sales to satisfy demand and maintain exchange rate stability.

It is noted that the total annual sales of the auction window for 2020 and 2021 amounted to \$44,080 million and \$37,095 million, respectively. Thus, they decreased by 15.8%, a total of \$6,985 million. This confirms the achievement of the Central Bank's objective of preserving foreign reserves when it raised the exchange rate by reducing demand for foreign currency by 19% in 2021, despite the expansion in government spending and increased domestic borrowing compared to the previous year. The rate hike led to a reduction in demand, which can be attributed to the increased cost of imports, travel, and tourism abroad, as well as a decrease in dollar savings due to rising inflation levels and the higher cost of living.

The primary reason for raising the foreign exchange rate, from the Central Bank's perspective, was to preserve foreign reserve balances from erosion due to their use in defending the dinar through the currency auction window to satisfy local demand for the dollar. The decision to raise the exchange rate was discussed in closed-door meetings at the Central Bank, and there appears to have been much hesitation in taking such a step due to the potential social impacts.

However, the decline of reserves to low levels, as was the case in the final months of 2020, pushed the Central Bank to make its decision. The groundwork for this was perfectly laid with the International Monetary Fund, in addition to the strong desire of the Iraqi government, which was exhausted by budget deficits, to implement that change. It is noted that reserves began to grow from the beginning of 2021, from the first month until the fifth, exceeding \$61 billion. However, they fell below \$60 billion during August and September 2021 due to indirect government borrowing from the Central Bank. The government sells its debt to commercial banks, which in turn discount that debt with the Central Bank, thereby meeting the government's request while also maintaining their banking reserves, liquidity, and investments, and achieving considerable profits through this process, which commercial banks have been accustomed to for some time, having started when Mr. 'Alī al-'Allāq became governor of the Central Bank.

The foreign reserve reached \$66 billion at the end of 2021, which increased due to the difference between the bank's purchases from the government and its sales at the auction window. The Central Bank typically distributes its reserves between gold (96.3 tons), foreign currency (\$1.9 billion), foreign treasury bonds from reputable governments (\$31.2 billion), and balances and deposits with global institutions (\$26.9 billion).

The change that occurred in the foreign exchange rate did not find an echo in the money supply. It is observed that its rates of change are closer to government borrowing, as was the case at the beginning of 2021, in July, and in October. When comparing the money supply with sales from the currency auction window, we find its reflection on dollar sales. The increase in the money supply in July 2020, amounting to 2.76%, was met with an increase in dollar sales for the same month, which reached 36.9%. The increases in February and March 2021 were met with a similar increase in sales in June, and the increase in the money supply in October was met with an increase in dollar sales in November. Therefore, the increase in the money supply resulting from the expansion in government spending transforms into an increase in demand for the dollar, which is met with a response from the currency auction window.

Turkey and Iran are major trade partners for Iraq, especially in terms of imports, and they play a negative role in dominating its market through their competition to flood it with goods and services, a practice known as "beggar-thy-neighbor" policies. They achieve this by manipulating the value of their currencies against the dinar, which the monetary authorities had kept elevated from 2003 until the end of 2020. These two countries exploit the shortcomings of local production to satisfy domestic demand and ensure that these shortcomings persist. Consequently, the Iraqi economy is considered an exposed economy, and a significant part of the increase in imports can be attributed to the high value of the dinar (low foreign exchange rate) and the low value of the currencies of trade partners, especially Turkey and Iran, and even China, which is an important partner for Iraq that devalues its currency (the Renminbi) in its trade conflict with the United States, thereby gaining an increase in its exports to Iraq as a side effect.

However, the Turkish lira continued to depreciate against the dollar throughout 2021, with the foreign exchange rate going from 7.4150 lira per dollar in January 2021 to 13.4653 in December 2021. The change was continuous throughout the other months, with fluctuations. However, it is noticeable that the positive change in the exchange rate began in March and jumped very significantly in April, when the rate of change reached 13.36%. By June, the change in the foreign exchange rate against the lira (i.e., the depreciation of the lira) had absorbed the depreciation in the value of the Iraqi dinar. Thus, the monetary situation in the trade exchange between Iraq and Turkey returned to the monetary situation that had prevailed between them before the change in the foreign exchange rate against the dinar. In this way, the Turkish Central Bank was able to nullify the effect that could have resulted from the change made by the Central Bank of Iraq. This process is the spearhead of the “currency war” that Turkey is waging against Iraq. Noting the continued raising of the foreign exchange rate against the lira by the Turkish Central Bank until the total change at the end of the year reached nearly 90% of what it was at the beginning of the same year, this action supports the view of Turkey’s seriousness in controlling the local Iraqi market, expanding its market share, and attempting to sideline other competitors who also devalue their currencies to capture a significant part of the Iraqi market, especially Iran. However, the change in the official published foreign exchange rate against the Iranian rial is slight, but the change in the foreign exchange rate on the black market is very large, and it is this rate that governs most commercial transactions inside and outside Iran. We were unable to obtain accurate data from reliable sources on this, as the official rate was 42,110 rials/dollar in January 2021, and the following months of the same year were similar, with only a negligible change. But the price of the dollar on the black market is very different from the official rate, and most commercial deals are conducted at the black market rate, which also absorbed the change in the foreign exchange rate against the Iraqi dinar from the first months of 2021.

According to a study published in mid-2020 by UNICEF, the World Bank, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, and the Ministry of Planning:

- The national poverty rate rose from 20% in 2018 to 31.7% in 2020.
- There are 4.5 million Iraqis (11.7%) who have become newly poor as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and its social and economic consequences.
- Children were the most affected by the crisis. While one in five children suffered from poverty before the crisis, the percentage has almost doubled to two out of five children (37.9%) since its beginning.
- Approximately 42% of the population are now classified as vulnerable and face greater risks as a result of suffering from deprivation across multiple areas—including education, health, living conditions, and financial security.

- For children, one in every two (49%) is at risk of suffering from deprivation across one of these areas. Deprivation of school enrollment and access to improved water sources are major factors contributing to the vulnerability of families and children.

According to a study published by the al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD on the impact of the exchange rate change in late 2020 on poverty conditions, it was shown that:

- It would have been possible to achieve a decrease in the poverty rate from 31.7% in 2020 to 25.6% in 2021 if the exchange rate had remained at its levels before December 20, 2020.
- The devaluation of the dinar led to an increase in the poverty rate to 31.1% in 2021.

In June 2021, the Ministry of Trade announced that it would resort to the food basket, which it considered part of the public distribution system, and added three basic items to it: legumes (chickpeas and beans), as well as tomato paste. The Ministry of Trade affirmed that it would involve the private sector in importing the items, provided they are from reputable international sources, as the private sector is more efficient and faster in importing than the government.

In November 2021, a crisis occurred in the supply of brown flour, with its price in local markets reaching about 40,000 dinars after it was about twenty thousand dinars. This was due to several factors, the most important of which was the Ministry of Trade's delay in distributing the ration as part of the public distribution system, which is a primary source in meeting the market's needs, as most families resort to selling their share of flour and compensating with ready-made bread or 'šammūn' (traditional diamond-shaped bread). This was compounded by the rise in the price of imported flour due to its global price increase, as well as its increased price due to the change in the foreign exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar. However, the crisis did not last, as the Ministry of Trade quickly distributed the flour, although its price did not return to its previous level, which is the nature of prices being inelastic in a downward direction.

Iraq was among the countries that participated in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a member of the United Nations. The path of sustainable development in Iraq reveals the difficulties it faces as a result of the problems it is experiencing and the nature of development management.

Although there is slow progress in the indicators of sustainable development, according to UN assessments, Iraq has advanced from 127th place in 2018 to 105th in 2021. However, part of this improvement was due to the deterioration of some countries and their decline due to the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis.

The upcoming government will be responsible for the latter half of the period leading up to 2030, through developmental perseverance, addressing developmental failures, and adopting an approach that aims to promote a dignified existence, ensure sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable groups, resolve the crisis of the displaced, and implement human rights. Therefore, achieving

sustainable development goals depends fundamentally on comprehensive and efficient financing frameworks through the restructuring of the federal budget, attracting foreign direct investment, partnering with the private sector, encouraging partnerships between it and the public sector, and integrating civil society into the development process.

IV. The Security File: A Confused Security Scene and International Conflicts on Iraqi Soil

The security file continued to dominate the Iraqi landscape in 2021, with its repercussions on all political, social, and economic levels. This includes internal security threats in Iraq, which are armed threats from non-state armed actors such as the terrorist organization ISIS, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and some other armed factions, in addition to security incidents and the resulting civilian casualties. It also includes regional threats from some neighboring countries or other regional powers.

Perhaps the most significant security event of 2021 was the assassination attempt on the Iraqi Prime Minister on the morning of November 7, which was previously mentioned. Another important security event in 2021 was the multiple attacks with Katyusha rockets on the international zone within the Green Zone, which houses foreign diplomatic missions, foremost among them the American embassy. The C-RAM defense system successfully thwarted these attacks, and this event had significant repercussions on the security and political scene in the country.

Regarding terrorist attacks, 2021 saw a noticeable increase in ISIS attacks after they had subsided in 2018 and continued to decline until early 2019. However, their pace increased in the second half of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, and continued into 2021. It seems the reason behind this is that the terrorist organization reorganized its fighters into small, mobile groups that it used to carry out various operations after its defeat. The organization shifted from a quasi-conventional fighting strategy to guerrilla warfare, relying on the complex terrain throughout the country, such as deserts, valleys, and mountains, and focusing on maintaining support in rural areas. In urban areas, it reorganized its fighters into small, mobile sub-groups. On the other hand, the organization continued to use sleeper cells in Iraq to attack security forces with asymmetric attacks that targeted numerous energy facilities, relying on surprise and exploiting the occasional laxity and complacency of Iraqi forces.

As for the security threat from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the city of Sinjār is witnessing an internal and regional strategic security conflict. Turkey maintains dozens of small bases in Iraqi territory to disrupt the PKK's ground communication line between Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Its goal is to oust the PKK from the Sinjār region, which is adjacent to the Kurdish northeast of Syria, through air campaigns and special operations, and by encouraging the implementation of the Sinjār agreement signed in October 2020 between Baghdād and Erbil. Mean-

while, Iran and the PKK, on the other hand, seek to obstruct the implementation of the Sinjār agreement, which will lead to increased tension in Iranian-Turkish relations and further exacerbate the state of instability in Iraq.

V. The Iraqi Society: Exacerbated Social Problems and Missing Solutions

During 2021, society went through a series of momentous events and bore heavy burdens deposited upon it by the many quantitative and qualitative changes. Political tensions, conflicts between powers and parties, and the continuation of violence and terrorism have hindered the work of state forces, reducing their effectiveness in performing their duties towards their people and containing social ills such as poverty, lack of education, and unemployment. One of the symptoms of the weak enforcement of the law was the prevalence of tribalism among many who suffer from excessive dependency on their tribal entity and see resorting to the tribe as their refuge in solving their life problems. Although the outbreak of tribal violence is not new in Iraq, it became more frequent and intense in 2021, resulting in serious clashes that even state agencies sometimes could not control, requiring large military campaigns and exhausting negotiations involving political officials and the highest administrative authorities in the governorates. This indicates that the situation has reached a dangerous level of entrenchment that cannot be tolerated under any circumstances.

Those tribal conflicts were characterized by the large quantity and high quality of weapons used, which ranged from light to medium. Information indicates a chaotic proliferation of weapons in Iraq, with an estimated 7.5 to 12 million weapons outside of state control, which tribal members have obtained from various sources. This necessitates stricter control by security agencies over the arms market and the prevention of continuous arms smuggling from some neighboring countries. It also requires action on all national levels, including the issuance of necessary legislation to control and regulate the carrying of weapons, and the creation of radical solutions based on law and social understandings in which all authorities participate. It is worth noting that the law which classified the 'al-daggah al-'ashā'iriyah' (tribal raid/threat) as a form of terrorism has contributed to the decline of this phenomenon, but the practical reality requires more effort. Statistics confirm the eruption of dozens of tribal conflicts in various parts of the country due to struggles over economic gains, for retaliatory purposes, or due to old disputes. This does not negate the fact that security forces have carried out many operations that have led to the resolution of a number of conflicts and their limitation in some areas, but this was dependent on the vigilance and professionalism of the security leadership, their confiscation of quantities of weapons, and their organization of awareness campaigns about the danger of possessing and storing unlicensed weapons.

It is noted that some political entities and ruling elites have attempted to introduce the tribal situation as an additional factor of social and political division and to fragment national unity, resorting to it to control the electoral process and influence voters' choices during legislative elections. However, the 2021 elections recorded a relative decline in the presence of tribal figures in the Council of Representatives, whose tribal authority was unable to win them seats under the parliament's dome, indicating that the tribes have lost part of their previous power and authority, and a crack in their political share. It appears that many active factors led to the emergence of this scene, foremost among them the outcomes of the Tishrīn uprising and its role in changing the political and social mood, and the culture it spread about the necessity of prioritizing national allegiance over narrow regional and kinship dimensions.

It must be noted that the year 2021 included cases of social violence, whether within a single family or outside it. The frequency of physical and psychological violence within the family has escalated, and a series of assaults and the suffering of women and children in their tense family environment have been exposed. Tens of thousands of cases of domestic violence were recorded, in both rural and urban areas, half of which were assaults by a man against his wife or a father against his children, not to mention those that were not recorded or reported for various reasons, which caused physical injuries and deep psychological repercussions. This indicates a flaw in the moral and social system of families.

However, what mitigates the matter and points to a kind of development in social awareness is the increase in cases of reporting this violence. Instead of silence and fear of unfair moral and social consequences, we see a positive shift that indicates women's awareness of their status and rights as stipulated by law, in addition to the fruitful efforts of specialized bodies, such as the Family Protection Directorate and the Community Police Directorate. The year 2021 also revealed regrettable family practices, represented in the assault of children on their parents, in a flagrant challenge to public values and morals in society. Data from the relevant authorities showed an increase in the number of these cases this year compared to the previous one, which calls for concerted efforts to eliminate this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the disintegration of social and family relations for some, poverty, misery, and increasing cases of frustration, especially among the youth, are considered influential factors pushing towards suicide. Information from the Ministry of Interior indicated a large increase in the number of cases during 2021 compared to the previous year, which necessitates investigating their causes and working to help young people live a dignified life by creating job opportunities, motivating them to feel their human reality and their productive and moral value, and directing the media to raise their awareness and enhance their cognitive skills in the art of dealing with life's pitfalls.

Conspicuous phenomena that threatened social security emerged in 2021, such as human trafficking. The conditions of poverty, despair, and ignorance paved a suitable ground for organized crime gangs and the weak-willed to operate in this

field, using means of threat by force, deception, or coercion to exploit vulnerable social groups by trafficking their human organs, smuggling victims inside and outside Iraq, and employing them in prostitution, massage parlors, cafes, and exploiting them for sexual purposes and forced labor, especially among their victims of girls and children. Statistics indicate a continuous increase in human trafficking operations, and a number of specialized gangs were arrested in this regard during 2021, which requires the government to develop serious and practical solutions to this dangerous crime, support the security agencies, increase their funding, and expand their expertise to redouble their efforts in combating these cases and addressing the causes that provided a suitable environment for the flourishing of human trafficking. There is also a need to provide various forms of assistance to victims of human trafficking and to amend laws to stiffen the penalty for perpetrators to achieve the principle of general deterrence.

The same applies to the phenomenon of begging, which has turned into a profession from which many earn a living, and the emergence of mafias that control the distribution of beggars and collude with them to create new methods and ways, such as the heinous exploitation of infants, and the recruitment of young girls of different nationalities to appear at public intersections and markets. The same is true for the elderly, which reveals that Iraq needs to review all its security and awareness plans in order to limit the spread of this phenomenon.

More than one million two hundred thousand Iraqis are enduring the pains of displacement within their homeland, despite the restoration of control over cities and regions nearly five years ago. There are tens of thousands of families who have not yet returned to their homes, most of them from Nīnawā and Ṣālāḥ-al-Dīn governorates, scattered throughout the country. Many of them reside in camps distributed across the governorates of Erbil, al-Sulaymānīyah, Nīnawā, and Duhok, with the latter still having the highest number of displaced families. The number of unofficial displacement sites spread across Iraq has reached approximately 418, housing about 13,500 families.

The file of the displaced is fraught with many controversial points that require a serious review from the government. For instance, some families have not registered their return for fear of losing their aid or having their residency permits in the Kurdistan Region revoked. Accusations are also exchanged regarding the efforts of some political forces to benefit from the continuation of the displacement file for their own regional reasons, or the Kurdistan Region's lack of seriousness in closing the camps, desiring to achieve material gains and use it as a political pressure card against its opponents at home or its friends abroad. Furthermore, the continued presence of some in the areas of displacement may be their own choice, linked to their adaptation to living and settling in the areas they were displaced to, and the relatively good living conditions they have obtained there.

Statistics from 2021 indicated that al-Anbār was the governorate with the highest rate of return for its displaced people, as a result of its stable security situation, the accelerated pace of reconstruction, and the significant services provided therein. This year, Iraq signed an agreement with the United Nations

Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), one of whose most important clauses stipulates addressing the problem of the displaced and returning them to their regions. The Council of Ministers also approved a plan for the return of the displaced to the liberated areas, which included executive programs and activities related to security, political, developmental, and national reconciliation aspects, noting that this would not be effective without the support of significant social efforts to achieve its goals.

In the same context, a terrible crisis befell Iraqi refugees on the Belarusian border, as thousands stood in the forests facing cold, fear, loss, and inhumane treatment from the concerned countries, fleeing their miserable conditions and the unstable security situation in Iraq in search of job opportunities and an acceptable standard of living. What gives hope is the Iraqi government's swift efforts during 2021 to address the crisis, including suspending flights to Belarus to curb illegal immigration, holding international talks to find effective solutions to the difficulties faced by the migrants, and allocating substantial sums of money for free flights to voluntarily repatriate stranded Iraqis.

For its part, civil society has been a fundamental element in peacebuilding and the defense of human rights and dignity. In 2021, non-governmental organizations continued, despite suffering from a lack of funding and reduced material support due to the health crisis and the deteriorating economic situation, to provide services through their various activities in all governorates. A total of 740 civil society organizations delivered humanitarian aid and assistance to those in need, including hundreds of thousands of children, orphans, and families affected by health or security issues. This is in addition to their essential role in raising citizens' awareness of the need to participate in electing their representatives to the Council of Representatives during 2021. Their efforts included organizing and providing health and educational services, providing camps, food, and protection for vulnerable groups, and undertaking work related to mine clearance, environmental protection and preservation, and combating and protecting against violence against women. The scope of their work also expanded to cover rural areas, which were included in hundreds of projects by non-governmental organizations.

The pivotal role played by civil society organizations and the significant efforts they provide necessitate their protection and support, both in terms of security and logistics. They should be granted a wider scope of work with official administrations and be involved in formulating government decisions related to society. It also requires transparency in providing data and information and a readiness to face the problems and entitlements of the coming year, and to address various phenomena such as domestic violence, unemployment, drugs, begging, tribal conflicts, displacement, and illegal migration.

VI. Human Rights: When Will the Violations Stop?

The report has attempted to provide a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in 2021, in light of the political crisis, the current instability, the continuation of protests against corruption, the restrictions imposed on freedoms, and the continuous targeting of civil activists and opinion leaders. Care was taken to derive information from reports with high credibility and reliability that accurately document the reality of freedoms, monitor cases of violations, and examine the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the Tishrīn uprising and their repercussions on the reality of human rights, levels of violence, and areas of weakness. It also proposes the correct mechanisms to address all of this.

The rights of persons with disabilities were at the forefront of the important issues discussed in the report. There are several million wounded and disabled individuals for natural or emergency reasons, or who fell victim to wars and terrorism over the past two decades. This is a staggering number that demands focusing efforts on ensuring they are not subjected to discrimination in their daily lives and are given their full rights to education, medical treatment, and genuine participation in sports, cultural, and social activities.

Although the government has taken various paths to support persons with disabilities, such as tax exemptions at specific rates and providing a monthly allowance based on the percentage of disability, Iraq had signed an international convention to guarantee their full rights. It was therefore expected to be keen on protecting them from violence, stiffening penalties for those who attempt to harm them in any way, preserving their personal safety, and helping them integrate into society and live with dignity among people through increased training and rehabilitation in special schools. There is still much for the relevant authorities to do for them, such as providing job opportunities for the unemployed among them, ensuring their participation and representation in political life, allocating special treatment for them in educational and health institutions, and involving them in the organizations that represent them, and consulting them in the design and implementation of efforts directed to support them. It is noteworthy that although Iraq has become one of the countries with the largest number of persons with disabilities in the world, the exact number of persons with disabilities is still unknown, and there are no reliable government statistics on this.

Among the important topics that were the focus of efforts was the research into preventing and combating violence against women. If we consider that the number of registered cases of violence against women reached approximately 14,000 in 2021, representing an increase of 58% compared to previous years, we realize the frightening level the situation has reached in this area. It appears that the reasons for this are numerous and complex, with most lying in the difficult economic situation, the misinterpretation of religious texts, some customs and traditions, the prevailing patriarchal culture in society, child marriage, and inadequate family upbringing. This is in addition to reliance on legal articles that

permit a husband and father to “discipline” their sons, daughters, or wife through beating.

As for displaced Iraqis, it is important to monitor and follow up on violations of their rights and their humanitarian conditions, which face immense pressures and are passing through unstable political situations and a severe economic crisis. This is particularly crucial as Iraq is considered one of the countries with the highest rates of displacement and migration, with hundreds of thousands of displaced families due to the complex security situation and the control of terrorist groups in some areas, in addition to emigration out of the country. All these people have been exposed to harsh experiences of violence, torture, and various atrocities, poor supplies across the camps, and issues related to food, shelter, drinking water, sanitation facilities, medical care, education, and livelihood opportunities. This is in addition to the outbreak of some infectious diseases among them and the need for their already overcrowded tents and living spaces to be renovated, especially in the harsh winter.

Although the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government have exerted enormous efforts to contain the displacement crisis and have tried to provide all possible assistance to them in 2021, the continuation of the problem itself is entirely unacceptable. More serious and committed work must be done to find a radical solution to the problem of the displaced and to establish a strategy with a specific timeline for their complete return.

Specialists are also working to monitor children’s rights in Iraq and to ascertain the effectiveness of measures that ensure children have the social and psychological security they need and can exercise their rights. Serious violations of children’s rights are still being practiced, such as killing, maiming, and recruitment by parties to the conflict, and there are large numbers of children separated from their parents and deprived of care, who are considered among the most vulnerable to abuse and neglect. It is also noted that the available psychosocial support and mental health services do not meet Iraq’s growing needs, especially with hundreds of thousands of children in need of protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

On another note, violations against children suspected of belonging to the terrorist organization ISIS have been a thorny issue for a long time. Authorities have accused hundreds of children of terrorism based on swift trials and confessions often extracted under torture, and on malicious information reported by aggrieved individuals due to personal or vengeful disputes. This ignores the fact that children recruited by armed groups are primarily victims of economic circumstances, social pressures, or ignorance and should be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Instead, they are being held in inadequate conditions. This situation has revealed new problems, represented by the failure to register children born in areas under the control of ISIS, where it was discovered that there was no official system for birth registration. A high percentage of children under the age of five in those areas have been left without official documents, which practically means they are deprived of basic education, health, and welfare

services. This requires the government to improve legal and policy frameworks to protect children, strengthen the institutions tasked with their protection or response to their experiences of violence, and raise community awareness to stop the use of force against them and change deep-rooted behaviors that lead to discrimination and violation.

Iraq witnessed diligent efforts by many civil society organizations to combat the process of impunity and defend the rights of victims. This effort particularly targeted what was faced by the demonstrators, political activists, and young protesters in the Tishrîn uprising, who raised legitimate demands to stop widespread and systematic human rights violations at the hands of security services and armed groups aimed at silencing them and suppressing their demands for change. However, what is astonishing is that successive governments have been unable or have hesitated to reopen the file of the disappeared protesters, activists, and movement leaders whose fate is still unknown, which puts the credibility of the responsible authorities to the test. While the response of the Iraqi authorities to the crimes committed against demonstrators and critics for the period from October 2019 to May 2021 was limited to statements of condemnation and the formation of futile investigation committees, the government of Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī has taken some positive steps to address these crimes, but they are not sufficient to stop the crimes and achieve accountability for them and to expose the real parties behind the direct perpetrators.

What is of deep concern are the widespread human rights violations committed in the Kurdistan Region and the restrictions imposed there on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly, as well as the crackdown on civil society and the political opposition. This occurs in the absence of coordination between the federal and regional governments, and a lack of cooperation between activists and civil society organizations from both sides. Reports have indicated that critics of the public authorities are exposed to the risk of intimidation, restrictions, arbitrary arrests, defamation charges, and systematic threats. They also face arbitrary trials that violate the rights of activists and journalists in order to silence dissent and conceal issues of corruption, all while disregarding transparency, legal requirements, and procedural guarantees for a fair trial, in violation of the principle of legality.

A number of arrests targeting activists, demonstrators, and journalists in the Kurdistan Region were also monitored as being arbitrary, during which they were beaten before their release for publishing corruption files or other matters. It was also noted that the number of prisoners, both detainees and convicts, has increased compared to previous years, while some prison buildings are unsuitable and inadequate according to proper standards. This requires imposing more oversight on this matter and recommending that the regional government enhance human rights, ensure accountability for violations, provide justice for victims, and offer full protection for the right to freedom of expression, ending the harassment, intimidation, and retaliation against journalists, human rights defenders, and activists.

VII. Public Services

One of the most important duties of a government towards its citizens is to develop and expand the public services and to seek the easiest and most effective ways to achieve their well-being, leading to sustainable development in various fields, including health, education, housing, and others. This has not been an easy task in a country like Iraq, which has gone through a series of challenges that have left behind a dilapidated and inefficient infrastructure for service delivery. Between 2019 and 2021, the country faced successive political, health, and financial crises, which led to a decline in development across many sectors and fields and exacerbated areas of fragility.

The electricity sector is a fundamental element for achieving economic development and social security, but its performance was still modest during 2021, which saw continued suffering from power outages for long hours and a deficit in generation capacity. In the summer of 2021, Iraq witnessed a complete collapse of the electrical power system nationwide, despite enormous government spending that has exhausted the country's general budget on one hand, and further burdened citizens on the other, as they were forced to pay heavy bills to obtain power from private generators. As demand for electricity is expected to increase by 50% in the next five years due to the growing population, it is understood that the gap between supply and demand will widen, and doubled efforts will be needed to support the electricity supply. The current transmission and distribution networks require modernization and expansion, and alternatives must be found for what might be lost suddenly, as happened when electrical power systems and towers were sabotaged, or when gas supplies from Iran were reduced.

Hopes are pinned on the ambitious project of electrical interconnection between Iraq and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which aims to supply it with thousands of megawatts in two phases. Iraq has sought to secure the necessary funding to fulfill its obligations for the said project with the GCC countries, as it would, in the future, spare it many of the losses incurred by the sector and maintain the continuity of energy security, raising the level of reliability and safety for the electrical systems. Furthermore, it would prevent any power outages by providing immediate support through the transfer of the required energy via the electrical interconnection network.

It should be noted that Iraq must seriously strive towards using sustainable energy and establish an ambitious plan to develop electricity generation from solar power. It has indeed moved in this direction, and the government worked diligently to solve the electricity problem by contracting with major international and Arab companies in the field of renewable energy during 2021. Among these were the signing of agreements with Arab and foreign companies to establish solar-powered projects, which would have a clear positive impact on the hours of electricity supply to citizens.

The process of removing and disposing of all types of waste is one of the most important municipal services related to environmental preservation, in response to urban expansion and population growth. Iraq faces a number of challenges in this regard, most notably the development of consumerism and a lack of awareness among large segments of society, leading to the indiscriminate disposal of waste. This is in addition to a decrease in the number of official transfer stations (temporary collection sites) and an increase in the number of landfill sites that have not obtained environmental approval, which contradicts the standards of environmental sustainability. A low rate of recycling or reuse is also observed, which includes sorting, processing, and converting waste into raw materials, compost, or energy, indicating a major flaw in its utilization strategies.

The government is making diligent efforts to provide safe drinking water services, improve its supply, and manage its resources in a way that can promote economic growth. However, all its endeavors have not reached the level of ambition, especially in light of the complex problems it faces, including rapid population growth, unsustainable water management, and widespread environmental degradation due to armed conflicts. Some governorates suffer from a scarcity of safe drinking water due to the lack of water purification projects, and approximately 20% of safe drinking water is lost during transmission through water networks due to aging infrastructure and illegal tapping of the transmission networks.

There are a number of indicators that sound the alarm regarding the provision of drinking water services to citizens. Climatic conditions are set to become harsher, and we lack transboundary water agreements, as Iran and Turkey refrain from signing binding agreements that would guarantee Iraq's share of the water passing through its territory. It is expected that within two or three decades, Iraq will face a severe water shortage and will be included in the list of countries classified as having a high risk of water scarcity and its dangers. The most pessimistic forecasts indicate that by 2040, the 'Land of the Two Rivers' will become a land without rivers after the Tigris and Euphrates rivers dry up completely.

The provision of sanitation services is one of the main tasks undertaken by public administrations to preserve the environment and public health, and it plays an important role in the human and economic development of cities, as it ultimately leads to warding off the specter of disease from vulnerable groups and improving the quality of life. However, obstacles still stand in the way of this service. Despite the existence of 66 treatment plants for heavy wastewater, data indicates that more than a third of that water (approximately 40%) remains untreated. Furthermore, dozens of plants have partially ceased operation, and the percentage of the population served by sewage networks in all of Iraq has reached about 34%. Regrettably, 70% of Iraq's industrial waste is discharged directly into rivers and lakes without treatment, which means additional diseases and widespread environmental destruction.

The transportation sector is a fundamental pillar of economic development, as it contributes to connecting production areas with consumption outlets and

to delivering services more quickly and appropriately to those who need them, wherever they may be. Statistics indicate a decline in the coverage of the road network relative to the population. While the lowest international standard is 105 km/1000 km², it is approximately 84 km/1000 km² in Iraq, which explains the traffic congestion in large cities. The relevant authorities are currently prioritizing road paving. As for the railways, they suffer greatly due to neglect, wars, and security instability. Despite continuous rehabilitation operations and huge financial allocations, they have only witnessed a decline in revenues and a reluctance from beneficiaries. The government is counting on an ambitious railway project, the Dry Canal project (a railway line connecting the port of al-Fāw to Turkey via Faysh Khābūr), relying on international companies to make the project entirely investment-based.

Maritime transport, which handles a significant portion of Iraq's foreign trade, is suffering from an unacceptable decline, with the government owning a small number of ships (only seven). This is entirely inadequate for Iraq's developmental needs. However, what creates a sense of hope is that the country is on the verge of contracting for the purchase of two new vessels with drafts suitable for the size of Iraqi ports upon the completion of the al-Fāw Grand Port. Additionally, an agreement for the movement of ships and cooperation in the field of maritime transport was signed with Saudi Arabia, in a step that will support trade exchange between the two sides.

As for air transport and the national companies operating in it, they have very limited capabilities. Iraq possesses a fleet of only 32 aircraft, four of which are leased. However, we find that the competent authorities are proceeding to contract with accredited international companies to benefit from their capabilities, modern air freight fleets, and required expertise. It was also announced that part of the air warning previously imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration has been canceled, which is a positive step with clear economic dimensions.

The housing sector has become a main axis of the services that the state helps provide to its citizens, being one of the most important components of welfare and social stability, and the foundation of civility and urbanization. Based on this, the government of Mr. Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī has moved towards trying to solve the country's suffocating housing crisis. It announced that funds were secured during 2021 to complete and implement the construction of 100,000 housing units in the Bismāyah project. The Council of Ministers also voted to establish a residential city in the area surrounding Baghdād International Airport, which will include hundreds of thousands of housing units. The Central Bank of Iraq also announced an increase in financial allocations to support the housing sector for the Real Estate Bank and the Housing Fund, to include the largest possible number of beneficiaries, in addition to other initiatives. However, despite this, Iraq has long suffered from a housing crisis for various reasons. Data indicates that the total deficit in housing units has reached about 2.5 million units, and that millions of Iraqis, or 10% of them, live in slums and unorganized neighborhoods, causing immense pressure on all other services.

Iraq seeks to develop the readiness of its health system to be able to deal with epidemics and health risks according to acceptable national standards in terms of service delivery and the quality of medical staff, and to achieve a good state of health. There is no doubt that the health sector has borne exhausting burdens as a result of the spread of the coronavirus, coinciding with the drop in oil prices, which negatively affected its performance due to the lack of necessary financial allocations. Naturally, the issue of providing vaccines received great attention from the government, and vaccination services began to expand significantly throughout the country. Iraq also obtained approval from the World Bank for a new project to expand the health sector's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, improve its capacity to manage medical waste, and implement communication and public awareness efforts on the importance of receiving the vaccine. The Health Insurance Law No. 22 of 2021 was also passed to regulate the provision of health services to citizens, similar to the rest of the world's countries.

However, any discussion of the health sector in Iraq necessitates pointing out a long list of problems and complexities that permeate it. It suffers from aging infrastructure and an inability to meet the health needs of the population, not to mention the shortage of human and material resources and weak infrastructure, along with a focus of spending on the operational side while neglecting the investment side, which has led to a widening of the gap between supply and demand for health services. Hospitals suffer from overcrowding and a lack of skilled labor, and there is an urgent need to build hundreds of hospitals and more than 1,750 health centers, and to support the existing ones with a larger number of beds, doctors, and health professionals. We should not fail to mention the massive fires that have affected some health institutions, including the fire at Ibn al-Khaṭīb hospital in April 2021, which led to the death and injury of hundreds, indicating poor administrative efficiency and oversight in some aspects.

VIII. Anti-Corruption Efforts

The issue of financial and administrative corruption remains one of the most significant challenges that has faced the Iraqi state since the political change after 2003. In 2021, Iraq ranked 157th with a score of 23, a slight improvement from 2020 when its rank was 160th with a score of 21, according to the annual report of Transparency International (Corruption Perceptions Index 2021). However, the year 2021 witnessed important events related to combating corruption, represented by the opening of corruption files on political and party figures, businessmen, and executive employees who could be considered senior leaders. They were arrested, investigated, and then duly tried by the competent judicial authorities, and judicial sentences were issued against most of them. This matter is unparalleled in previous years in terms of quantity and quality, making it a precedent and an achievement for the government of al-Kāzimi. Arrests were made against the former Deputy Minister of Electricity, the former head of the General Retirement Authority, the former governor of Dhī-Qār, and a number of former directors-general, such as the director-general of the Agricultural Bank,

the director-general of the Iraqi Cement State Company, the former deputy of the National Investment Commission, the former director of the Baghdad Investment Commission, the director of the Qi Card company, the head of the al-Hall (Solution) Party, and many others.

However, it is noteworthy that the procedures for these files, in terms of investigation and execution of arrest warrants, were completed by the committee of the Executive Order No. 29 of 2020, headed by Lieutenant General Aḥmad Abū-Raghīf, which was tasked with investigating major corruption cases. They were then referred to the competent courts according to legal contexts. The entities specialized in combating corruption, foremost among them the Integrity Commission, did not perform their mandated role in this area. This reflects that the anti-corruption file, within the traditional context and the usual legal procedures followed, is unproductive and has not reached the major corrupt figures among the senior political, party, and executive leadership. This is despite the fact that carrying out such a task by an executive, rather than a judicial, body has significant legal and constitutional problems. The evidence for this is the decision of the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq issued on March 2, 2022, which ruled that the formation of the committee of Executive Order No. 29 of 2020 for investigating corruption and major crimes was invalid and annulled it from the date of the ruling's issuance due to its violation of constitutional provisions that guarantee human freedom and dignity, the principle of separation of powers, and the principle of the independence of the judiciary, and because the said order is considered an amendment to the law of the Integrity Commission, as it is a constitutional body specialized in investigating cases of financial and administrative corruption.

On another front, regarding the recovery of smuggled Iraqi funds and assets derived from corruption, the Federal Integrity Commission and the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with the Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research, hosted an international conference in September 2021 to discuss the most prominent obstacles and impediments facing regulatory bodies in recovering assets and funds smuggled outside their countries' borders. The conference was attended by a number of Arab justice ministers, as well as the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. An agreement was reached to take practical measures regarding this file. The Presidency of the Republic also submitted a draft law on the recovery of corruption proceeds to the Council of Representatives, with the aim of recovering corrupt funds, holding the corrupt accountable, and bringing them to justice, which included proactive, deterrent measures and subsequent steps for the recovery of corrupt funds.

At the local level, the events of 2021 witnessed a series of administrative changes in the management of the municipality directorate of al-Najaf al-Ashraf. Many individuals succeeded each other in managing that institution in a very short period of time, as a result of political interventions and successive demonstrations against corruption and mismanagement in this important institution.

Despite all these efforts, the issue of corruption remains one of the most important obstacles hindering the process of political, economic, and civilizational development in Iraq. On the other hand, the issuance of the Federal Supreme Court's decision on the unconstitutionality of the Executive Order No. 29 committee will open the door wide to speculation about the fate of the fight against corruption and the fate of those who were convicted and had final judicial sentences issued against them and were imprisoned. All of this will constitute a dangerous file, prone to media escalation and political bargaining and extortion.

IX. Education and Higher Education: A Turbulent Academic Year and Hopes for Improvement

The COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the most significant challenges that faced the educational process during 2021. It revealed the need for a great deal of work by educational decision-makers to provide the components for the success of the educational process in order to address the imbalances in the reality and future of education. Educational institutions still lack the simplest requirements and essential components for a successful academic year, in addition to the structural problems in those institutions that existed even before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the 2020/2021 academic year was not at the required scientific level, and although it was better than the previous year, it remains far from any level of quality, technically, administratively, structurally, and scientifically.

In the same context, figures and statistics still reveal large numbers of children who have dropped out of school. A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated the existence of 3.2 million Iraqi children of school age who are out of school, and a noticeable decrease in the number of pupils enrolled in primary education compared to previous years. This is coupled with a lack of sufficient and suitable school buildings with their basic necessities such as electricity, water, and other operational supplies, and problems of student overcrowding and a severe shortage of services. All of this was accompanied by the major challenges of the e-learning process and the problems that came with it, such as the weak internet network, its unavailability in most schools and for most students, and the inefficiency and inability of the teaching staff to use and manage it.

As for university education, the situation is no better in terms of managing the scientific and research process remotely. The Ministry decided that education would be blended—electronic and in-person—with in-person attendance for medical, health, engineering, and science specialties, and any faculty or institute with a practical teaching, for students attending practical courses (laboratory, clinical, and applied) in small, rotating groups. This was intended to ensure the benefit from both the scientific and practical aspects and to maintain the health and safety of students and faculty. The year 2021 also witnessed Iraq's exclusion from the Davos Index for Education Quality. Iraq and other countries such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan were considered "unclassified" countries

that do not meet the simplest standards of educational quality. This constituted a major disappointment and a significant setback for the system of higher education and scientific research, despite the large increase in the number of research papers published in reputable international journals within the Scopus and Clarivate databases. In reality, this research is of little practical and serious benefit to the country and is, to a large extent, a drain on time and money. Additionally, the year was marked by an increase in admission capacity and the establishment of universities, faculties, and institutes at the level of public education relatively, and clearly at the private level, with an expansion in the numbers of students admitted for the 2020/2021 academic year.

On another front, the issue of selling and forging certificates for Iraqi students by some foreign universities, particularly Lebanese ones, was one of the most significant events of 2021. This resulted in the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research issuing a decision on November 11, 2021, to suspend the recognition of studies at three Lebanese universities for their failure to adhere to standards of academic rigor. The suspension was to be effective from that day, with no new student registrations to be accepted thereafter, so as not to affect students registered before this date, along with other academic decisions aimed at increasing the rigor of certificates granted from abroad.

In the same context, at the end of 2021, the Federal Supreme Court issued a ruling declaring unconstitutional some articles of the Law of Foundations for Equivalence of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Academic Degrees No. 20 of 2020. Academics considered this a compromise or the lesser of two evils in reaction to this controversial law, which had caused significant disagreements between the Ministry and the legislative and executive branches regarding its feasibility, legitimacy, and implementation mechanisms.

X. Iraq's International Relations: A Return to the International Stage

The year 2021 was filled with significant events in Iraq's history. The visit of Pope Francis in March 2021 was a historic event in terms of Iraq's international standing and its foreign relations, returning it to the world map in terms of regional and spiritual value. The days of the Pope's visit were exceptional in the history of Iraqis, during which they experienced a period of harmony, peace, and hope, giving them a great spiritual and national boost. They felt the importance of their country and its true place among nations, and appreciated the importance of diversity, acceptance of the other, and coexistence. They realized that these factors are a source of strength and cohesion among the segments of the Iraqi people, not, as they had thought, a reason for the inability to coexist, for division, and for the belief that isolation and retreat were the way to solve problems.

The visit's agenda was intensive and full of important activities and trips. However, the most significant and valuable event, which garnered global media and political attention, was the Pope's meeting with the supreme religious

authority of the Shia, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid 'Alī al-Sistānī, in the city of al-Najaf al-Ashraf. This meeting held important significance, as both figures are characterized by a degree of tolerance, the prioritization of reason and wisdom, and the rejection of the language of war. They both have had many stances promoting moderation, temperance, interfaith communication, and working to renounce violence and terrorism. The visit also represented a moral boost for the Christian component in Iraq, as an authentic component with roots deep in the history of this blessed land; Hence, all legal, political, and social measures must be taken to support this component and work to meet its requirements.

The joint prayer performed by the Pope in the city of Ur, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, with a large group of clergy and pilgrims from different religions, followed by his visit to the city of Mosul and then the Kurdistan Region, was a message of solidarity, unity, peace, and reassurance. This could open future prospects for the government to develop these places for tourism, economic, and religious purposes with international assistance.

Following this significant international event, Iraq's regional and international standing was enhanced by hosting the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership (the conference of Iraq's neighboring countries) on August 28, 2021. The conference was attended by nine Arab and foreign countries: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and France. International organizations such as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also participated. The conference aimed to expand economic partnership, combat terrorism, support reconstruction projects in Iraq, broaden cooperation among neighboring countries, and work to overcome differences and emphasize commonalities, because all countries need cooperation in the economic field, and the economy requires the provision of security. This conference marked an important turning point in the trajectory of Iraq's regional and international role and the restoration of its true position and role.

On June 27, 2021, Baghdad hosted the fourth trilateral summit between Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan in just two years. This was followed by an international conference in cooperation with France, attended by both Saudi Arabia and Iran, in a step that sought to bring the viewpoints of these two countries, whose relationship is experiencing escalating tension, closer together. These international forums, regardless of their outcomes, are considered a reinforcement and international recognition of Iraq's international status and its ability to influence regional positions. They reflect Iraq's return to practicing its leading role in the region and represent a success by the government of Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī in managing the international relations file well, which opens the way for it to play a larger role in the future if the necessary components are available.

On another front, the year 2021 witnessed the end of the combat missions of foreign forces in Iraq after the United States announced in December 2021 the end of its combat operations and the transition of the relationship to training, advisory, assistance, and intelligence-sharing tasks with the Iraqi side, after three

rounds of strategic dialogue and negotiation with Baghdad on the withdrawal of its last combat forces from Iraq.

Among the important international events on the Iraqi level was the end of the compensation file related to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, after the full payment of the financial reparations approved by the United Nations for Kuwait due to the Second Gulf War, amounting to \$52.4 billion. This was met with mixed reactions, between optimism for an economic recovery and an opening to global investment, and feelings of sadness, anger, and resentment towards Kuwait for not observing the principles of good neighborliness and brotherhood in this thorny issue.

2. The Political Process

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I. Introduction

After the political change in 2003, a federal parliamentary political system was established in Iraq, and this was enshrined in the constitution. Upon this system, a political process was built on unsound foundations, and political authority was formed according to the desires of the political parties and forces that took power after 2003. The political process included the political project formulated by the ruling political forces, in line with their agendas, in pursuit of their goals. There is no doubt that there have been numerous problems that have afflicted this political system in all its aspects since its inception after the American invasion until now. It seems that many of these problems still exist despite the passage of all these years, especially on the political and security fronts.

One of the conditions necessary for the success of a democratic political experiment is harmony and interaction among the ruling political parties and forces; that is, to operate according to democratic principles, to have a spirit of openness to all segments and components of society, and for these parties and forces to be attentive to the demands of their people and aware of the importance of their role and responsibility towards them. The success of any democratic system requires the fulfillment of the above conditions. Based on this, we can pose the following questions: Have the political parties and forces that undertook political action adhered to these conditions? Have they achieved a successful political project nearly two decades after establishing the democratic experiment? What is the basis upon which parliamentary work in Iraq has been built: harmony and interaction, or contradiction and difference? Why were early elections held? And what was the intended goal? What is the relationship between the results of the early elections in October 2021 and the assassination attempt on the prime minister, and why? What is the secret behind the schisms and conflicts that have been and are being witnessed by the political parties and forces in Iraq, especially the

traditional ones? Is it a struggle for renewal or for interests and influence? How will the issues of 2021, on all levels, cast their shadows on the new year: 2022? And will the political changes, especially the election results, constitute a relative breakthrough that helps in addressing the political reality and pressing issues such as security, services, anti-corruption efforts, and development, or are there dangerous scenarios such as the threat of violence and a threat to civil peace? This is what we will attempt to delve into in this part of the report, by reading the political scene and the developments of the political process in Iraq during 2021.

II. Performance of the Council of Representatives

The performance of the Council of Representatives refers to the activity undertaken by the elected representative in the exercise of their social and political function and role as a representative of the people. It is assumed that the planned objectives are achieved through this functional activity, and its success depends on the degree of awareness and knowledge that the elected person possesses regarding the role entrusted to them. Therefore, the political behavior of the representative is a reflection of that role, and there is a set of values that must be adhered to in order to achieve the desired goal. Among these values is that the representative understands what the voter wants from them, possesses the ability to solve their problems and meet their needs, in addition to commitment and discipline behaviorally and functionally, as well as possessing the skill to communicate with their rivals and control themselves to be a better model for developing parliamentary work and thus achieving the public good.

The performance of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, since its establishment until now, has suffered from numerous problems. This is due to the representative's weak awareness of the parliamentary role and function and their lack of understanding of their role and function, which has led to confusion and then the occurrence of crises. Among the manifestations of the weak performance of the Council of Representatives are:

1. Clinging to Power

The idea of being attached to power and remaining in it is the biggest obsession for the representatives of the political parties and forces in the Council, and this has manifested itself in the phenomenon of disputes and differences. Since the change in 2003, the political behavior of the large parliamentary political parties has been based on the principle of imposition and control over the parliament, as well as controlling the administration of the government through its ministers and advisors. The best evidence of this is the time it takes to nominate figures to run the state, as it takes months for a consensus to be reached among the parliamentary parties to form a consensus government. Evidence of this is that after the 2009 elections, the parliament remained in an open session for ten months.

The resignation of the former Prime Minister, 'Ādil 'Abd-al-Mahdī, on December 1, 2019, was the culmination of failures in the management of individuals in the

system and the subsequent erosion of their legitimacy and credibility. The repetition of failure, represented by the Council of Representatives' refusal to grant confidence to the president's candidates for the post of prime minister, namely Muḥammad Tawfīq 'Allāwī and 'Adnān al-Zurfī, plunged the political system into crisis, as the survival and continuity of the system were directly threatened. The activity of institutions was disrupted for several months until a compromise and consensus were reached among the majority of the members of the Council of Representatives, and then Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī was accepted as Prime Minister. Another sign of this is that al-Kāzīmī's government was not formed until several months later, due to the Council of Representatives' obstruction in granting confidence to the full cabinet that al-Kāzīmī brought. Then, al-Kāzīmī's nomination did not mean full acceptance by all members of the Council of Representatives, as doubt still surrounds him, especially after he announced his ministerial program, which focused on measures that were not anticipated by the political forces within the Council of Representatives and which threaten their survival, including the provision for holding early elections. His goal was to achieve a qualitative change in the parliamentary party structure so that he could implement the rest of the components of his reformist ministerial program without obstacles from some forces in the Council of Representatives.

The parliamentary political parties rejected the idea of early elections in October 2021 and sought to obstruct the preliminary procedures for holding them by all means, by placing obstacles in the way of passing the new electoral law, changing the members of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), and the parties law, for fear of losing. This was in addition to their continuous assertions that the IHEC was not ready to hold early elections. This was due to their desire to cling to power and continue to govern. In other words, some political forces consider their size to be above the ballot boxes and election results, which constitutes a challenge to the principles of democracy and political action based on the peaceful transfer of power.

2. Confusing Parliamentary Role

For nineteen years, the Council of Representatives has not sought to rectify past mistakes or change the strategy of its procedures. Instead, it has continued to violate the mechanisms of its internal regulations and the provisions of the constitution in its legislative and oversight work. This is due to the dominance of the large political parties and forces over the Council. This has been observed throughout the period following the change in 2003.

The attendance rate of representatives in the Council was very low in the 2018-2021 session compared to previous sessions; the largest number of attendees was 203 representatives. It is self-evident that the outputs of this attendance would be below the required level in terms of legislation or oversight, and a large group of parliamentary practices that violate its legislative and oversight function were detected (Iraqi Parliamentary Observatory, n.d.). This is an indicator of a shortcoming in the performance of the Council of Representatives and its

members in their function, and a low sense of responsibility towards the tasks entrusted to them. This is in addition to the continuous absence of some representatives and their failure to take the constitutional oath, and violations in the work of parliamentary committees and the disruption of Council sessions.

The number of sessions in the fourth parliamentary term was 149 out of a potential 192. According to the internal regulations (Article 22), eight sessions were supposed to be held each month, meaning there were 43 sessions that the Council did not convene. The result was the voting on only 92 laws out of 174 draft laws. It is worth noting that a considerable number of the 174 laws received a first reading, and then the number decreased to 129 laws in the second reading (Iraqi Parliamentary Observatory, n.d.). In this regard, Representative Aḥmad Ḥamah Rashīd explained this failure of the Council of Representatives, stating that there were important laws that needed to be legislated, such as the law on the recovery of smuggled funds abroad and the law on partnership between the public and private sectors. He noted that these were important laws that would give momentum to the growth of the Iraqi economy. Despite numerous attempts to hold sessions, they failed due to the absence of parliamentarians because political disputes and conflicts among the members of the Council of Representatives were more prominent than their parliamentary role, and this was a reason for stopping and delaying many laws.

On the political performance level, the political parties, blocs, and representative committees within the Council of Representatives have been a great disappointment to the people of the society. These blocs did not fulfill their promises to their constituents in particular and the people in general. They failed to accomplish important tasks such as presenting the required constitutional amendments and voting on them within the Council of Representatives, which was a fundamental popular demand that could contribute to reforming the political process and the political system. Many representatives also contributed to this failure by interfering in established instructions and schedules, such as those related to higher education, or even with the decision of a law that contributes to the decline and backwardness of education, such as the Law of Foundations for Equivalence of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Academic Degrees (No. 20 of 2020). This law sparked widespread controversy in academic and scientific circles because it threatened the process of regulating higher degrees and holders of academic titles.

Among the problems that have afflicted parliamentary work is the interference of representatives in the issue of appointing high-ranking posts, which has included all ministries and institutions, even education, in favor of individuals close to the political parties and forces. On another hand, take for example other parliamentary committees that interfere in the affairs of sensitive security ministries such as Defense and Interior. Political blocs are keen to have their members represented in all committees to serve as a window for them inside the ministries. There have been a large number of violations since previous parliamentary terms, and they are still ongoing. The Council of Representatives has continued

the process of distributing its members to parliamentary committees without clear determinants. We find that some committees have 25 representatives, while others have not reached the minimum number of members, such as the Youth and Sports Committee (5 members only), the Culture and Information Committee, and the Tourism and Antiquities Committee (5 members) (Shabīb, 2021).

In the same context, the Council of Representatives violated its own procedures by not voting on its final accounts. Article 143 of the Council of Representatives' internal regulations states: "The financial department in the Council prepares the final accounts of the Council and presents them to the presidency for approval and referral to the Financial Affairs Committee, and the committee submits a report on that to the Council for ratification" (Shabīb, 2021). From the conclusions presented by the Iraqi Parliamentary Observatory, by dividing the number of parliament's working hours by the months of this report, the final total was 428.46 hours for the total sessions during the fourth electoral term, which is equivalent to 2.8 hours for each session, or equivalent to 61 working days at a rate of seven working hours per day. The report indicated that the Council announced in its agendas 819 items, of which it implemented 515 (62.8%), while 304 items were postponed to the next parliamentary term. During the fourth electoral term, the Council exercised its oversight authority through only one interpellation, directing five questions and two hearings. The interpellation was directed at the head of the Communications and Media Commission regarding the commission's misleading of the Council of Ministers concerning the renewal of mobile phone contracts and the failure to adhere to consumer protection clauses. There were other legal violations, such as four representatives not taking the constitutional oath: Nūrī al-Mālikī, Ḥaydar al-'Abādī, Rākān Sa'īd al-Jubūrī, and As'ad al-'Īdānī. The Council continued to operate with 325 representatives.

3. Conflicting Desires

The assumption is that correct positions yield correct outcomes. It is known that this theory is but a tool to explain some facts during practical experiments. It is taken as a model to measure the functional behavior of the Council of Representatives. Therefore, we assume that the positions and behaviors of all members of the Council of Representatives achieve the public interest and benefit, and their outcomes are sound.

If this theory were applied to the political behavior regarding the issue of the withdrawal of foreign forces, which position and political behavior would be more correct? The representatives who voted on January 5, 2020, on the decision to end the presence of foreign forces in Iraq, or the Kurdish and Sunni representatives who rejected that decision by their absence from the vote? In this regard, one former representative indicated that the reason for the absence of Sunni representatives from the vote on the withdrawal of foreign forces was that there was still a need for the presence of friendly forces to help them face terrorism. He added that the course of events suggested that the expulsion of American forces would be in the interest of regional countries, and that their removal would allow

terrorism to act more freely, causing a destabilization of the fragile security situation (al-Ānī, 2020). As for the former Kurdish representative, Ḥaydar Mas'ūd, he justified the absence of Kurdish representatives from the session on the decision to expel American forces by stating their rejection of Iraq being part of a policy of conflicting axes, especially since Iraq needs internal cohesion among its components. He added that the American and international forces had great credit in liberating Iraqi territories from ISIS, and that the decision lacked a national umbrella due to the absence of Kurds and Sunnis (Mas'ūd, 2020).

This decision by the Council of Representatives means nothing and has no legal effect, but it reveals the depth of the conflict among the members of the parties and blocs within the Council. According to the former representative Fā'iq al-Shaykh-'Alī, this was the first conflict at the level of representatives, and then a second conflict was observed that touched upon one of the principles of the state in its foreign relations, at the level of the representatives and the head of the Council's administration (al-Shaykh-'Alī, 2020). The spokesman for the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī, Shākīr Ḥāmid, stated on August 20, 2020, that America is a strong ally of Iraq in all aspects, especially as it leads the international coalition, and that Iraq is bound by long-term agreements (Ḥāmid, 2020). This major rift in orientations is the prevailing feature of the behavior of representatives in the parliament.

4. Weak Parliamentary Oversight

Legal oversight is the essence of the political process. Perhaps more important than voting on laws is monitoring the government through questions, interpellations, and votes of no confidence, forming committees, discussing the general budget draft, and compelling it to justify its actions and decisions before the people. Because effective oversight depends on transparency and public disclosure, it serves as a safeguard for individual rights and a shield for civil liberties against potential government overreach.

On December 19, 2020, the parliamentary committee for monitoring and implementing the government program submitted a report evaluating the first half of the achievements of al-Kāzīmī's government, during its first hundred days of work. The report indicated that this government's achievement was at a very weak rate of 17.54%. Based on this evaluation, did the Council of Representatives identify the points of weakness? Did it later summon and question the prime minister or the ministers? Or did the Council of Representatives have an effective oversight role during its fourth term? Upon review, it becomes clear that there was a lack of seriousness in the work of monitoring and interpellation by the Council, as the report recorded that the number of interpellations was only one, with five questions and two hearings for the head of the Communications and Media Commission, 'Alī al-Khuwaylidī.

Some representatives stated that there were calls for interpellation and summoning, but that there was a delay in questioning several ministers, including the interpellation of the Minister of Finance, 'Alī 'Allāwī, which Representative

Ashwāq Karīm described as an urgent necessity. However, she said the presidency delayed and obstructed these interpellations without justification (Karīm, 2021). The Council of Representatives' calls for the Minister of Finance to attend were repeated, but he did not appear, with some representatives justifying this by saying he is close to the prime minister. As for the statements of some other representatives, they confirm the existence of political pressures on the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and on the members of the blocs that prevent the questioning of a number of ministers, because each party, as some representatives suggest, fears the questioning of the minister affiliated with it, while the quota system and courtesies remained the controlling factors.

The difference in the positions and behaviors of representatives who belong to political parties with multiple orientations—religious, nationalist, and ethnic—has made their alignment in a single approach extremely difficult. Each party throws the responsibility on the other, and the result was the disruption of parliamentary oversight because each party protects its minister from any accountability so that its party is not harmed, and then works to stay in power and prepare for the upcoming elections. The conclusion we reach about the failure of parliamentary performance is the representative's weak awareness of their social and political parliamentary role and the weak distinction between what is legislative and oversight and the functions of the executive authority. In many cases, the representative turns into a representative of partisan interests or interests based on kinship and tribe.

II. Government Performance

Government performance is the practical translation of all planning stages, which is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve its goal, which is the results. This means that government performance is the total performance of all ministries, and it takes the form of a government system that interacts with the elements of its local and global environment. It includes the performance of ministers in their political tasks, and the performance of the technical and professional apparatus in the ministry, starting from the deputy minister down to the lowest-ranking employee. The prime minister sets the general frameworks of policy and supervises their implementation, and he is the primary person responsible and is held accountable before the parliament for the outcomes of his public policies.

When Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī was tasked with managing the interim government, he presented his reform project. The question that arises here is: how many components of this project were implemented? And how, in general, was the government's performance of this project? The answer is that the project was a roadmap to guide the reform of the Iraqi economy in the first place, which suffers from ruin and financial-political corruption. However, this project faced many obstacles that made it difficult to implement, including:

- **The Legitimacy Problem:** He lacks constitutional legitimacy because his appointment violates the constitution, especially Article 76, which stipu-

lates that the candidate of the largest parliamentary bloc is tasked with forming the Council of Ministers.

- **Absence of Party Support:** al-Kāẓimī does not have a political party base to rely on in managing the government.
- **Popular Rejection:** The rejection by the Iraqi street, which was seething with popular protests that resulted in dozens of deaths and thousands of injuries due to government policies.
- **Lack of Security:** The state of chaos and political, economic, and security instability that has been a hallmark of the political situation in Iraq since the political change.
- **Lack of Harmony:** The ruling parliamentary political parties are characterized by a lack of harmony, given the diversity of their party interests and their political-party orientations.
- **The Controllers:** A defining feature of political parties is their ability to influence and manipulate circumstances to advance their interests.
- **Corruption:** Corruption is rampant in the weak state institutions, where there are hundreds of issues around which suspicions of corruption revolve or which have been actually convicted of corruption, which has caused a clear defect in the work of state institutions and their performance of their constitutional, national, and service functions.

Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāẓimī presented his reform project in this atmosphere. He was counting on the success of the elections as a glimmer of hope for changing the controlling political forces in the Council of Representatives (al-Hindāwī, 2021, October 9). However, the crisis of corruption in its various forms, which has brought with it all the crises in the country, remained intractable because its players are among the major influential political figures in the state. More than \$350 billion of public money has been wasted (Şāliḥ, 2021, March 28), and arrest and summons orders have been issued by the investigations committee of the Commission of Integrity against more than 55 ministers, representatives, directors-general, deputy ministers, and governors. Additionally, there are 20 representatives who refuse to appear before the investigative judges at the Commission of Integrity, so the judicial authorities were forced to ask the presidency of the Council of Representatives to lift their immunity, but the presidency did not respond. The strange thing is that ten of these wanted representatives ran in the early elections to enjoy parliamentary immunity (al-Khālīdī, 2021, October 13). Due to the difficulty of this crisis, the state is seeking to exhaust all means to eliminate this phenomenon. To assist Iraq in recovering its looted funds, the President of the Republic called for the formation of an international committee to combat corruption, similar to the international coalition to fight terrorism. The Ministry of Justice and the Commission of Integrity also called for an Arab conference to be held in Baghdad to recover smuggled funds. Iraq has also signed memoranda of understanding with many countries to combat corruption.

These efforts have resulted in the return of a very small amount of the smuggled funds, while more than 12,850 files remained accumulated at the Commission of Integrity (al-Asadī, 2021, October 13). Representative Nadā Jawdat stated that the government knows the parties involved in corruption and knows who stole these funds, and that it is not easy to recover them, given the system of secrecy followed in international banks. The Iraqi state has not succeeded in recovering the funds smuggled from the time of the former regime, and the Prime Minister has confirmed the difficulty of resolving the corruption crisis, stating that there are those who defend the “whales” (Jawdat, 2021, May 3).

The corruption crisis is both a cause and a result of other crises at the same time, the most important of which is the crisis of internal instability. Furthermore, the political class exploits the state’s resources for its own benefit, which angers and displeases the citizens, as it is an exploitation of their legitimate resources to which they are more entitled. This creates conflicts and confrontations between the two sides. The more confrontations increase, the more chaos increases, and this invigorates the corrupt because they thrive on the continuation of chaos and weak security, which creates greater opportunities for corruption and looting of funds. Therefore, corruption continues to grow and expand, and no force can stop it (Jawdat, 2021, May 3). Security breaches have been distributed and have taken on curves that extend horizontally and vertically, between drug and murder gangs, tribal conflicts, and between ISIS operations and assassinations of dignitaries and activists, in addition to the bombing of the embassy complex, to the point of an assassination attempt on the prime minister. On another hand, neighboring countries have been encouraged to penetrate Iraqi territories, as is the case with the Turkish forces that have penetrated to a depth of 9 km in northern Iraq and established military points in Duhok governorate, and the continuous bombing of the refugee camp in Makhmūr and Sinjār without deterrence, under the pretext of striking elements of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, which is opposed to Ankara.

2. Pre-Elections

The results of the early elections held in October 2021 came as a surprise to public opinion, with a major victory for the Sadrism movement, followed by the Taqaddum Alliance, albeit by a large margin. The biggest surprise was the independents and the Tishrīn movement obtaining more than 60 seats in the Council of Representatives. The question that arises is: how was the Sadrism movement able to obtain the highest number of votes? And how did the newly formed Taqaddum Alliance achieve such a swift victory? And how did the independents sweep the election scene and reserve for themselves a numerically influential number of seats in the Council of Representatives? And will the youth of Tishrīn achieve their revolutionary slogans?

Additionally, what were the reactions of the other parties and alliances to these results? Why did the losing or declining forces protest the results to the point of threatening civil peace? Isn’t democracy based on the peaceful transfer of power

and the acceptance of results regardless of whether they are at the level of ambition or expectations, as long as everyone resorts to the ballot box? And what was the percentage of participants in the elections and those who boycotted them? And why? And was it expected that the elections would produce these results?

The Council of Representatives voted to task Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī as prime minister and grant confidence to him and his cabinet on May 7, 2020. The prime minister sent his ministerial program, which included essential components. In the first axis, titled "Priorities," it included eight components, headlined by the idea of holding early elections, which was conditional on reforming the election law and the Independent High Electoral Commission to ensure the integrity of the elections, under the supervision and monitoring of the United Nations, the European Union, and civil society institutions. The idea of early elections, as is rumored, is one of the ideas of the youth of the Tishrīn movement, which they adopted as one of their conditions for ending the demonstrations. However, Judge Raḥīm al-'Ugaylī explained that the idea of elections was not a demand of the Tishrīn revolutionaries, but that there were those who succeeded in putting it in the mouth of the revolution in order to absorb popular discontent and pull the rug out from under the revolution and its followers (al-'Ugaylī, 2021, October). Therefore, after the success of the elections by the means he had in mind and achieving what he aspired to, Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī will begin to activate the other components, which included important reform steps in the structure and framework of the government and the Parliament, namely:

- Imposing the authority of the state by restricting weapons to the hands of the state's security and military institutions.
- Preparing an exceptional budget bill to deal with the economic crisis.
- Opening a national dialogue with the peaceful protest movement, investigation and accountability for the acts of violence that accompanied the protests, and prosecuting those involved in killing demonstrators.
- Combating corruption and protecting the nation's wealth.
- Protecting Iraq's sovereignty and security.
- Consolidating the values of citizenship while respecting the religious, national, and ethnic diversity in Iraq.

4. The Elections and the Shock of the Results

The elections took place in October 2021, after the necessary preparations for their success were made. The Council of Representatives participated in the preparations by enacting laws supporting the elections, in addition to international support to lend legitimacy through monitoring and supervision, such as missions of the United Nations and the European Union. The voter turnout and participation were low, despite the Independent High Electoral Commission announcing a rate of 44%. It is worth mentioning that this percentage is the result of the participation of individuals holding biometric electoral cards, not all those eligible to vote, who number 24 million, which is the globally recognized standard. Accord-

ingly, the participation rate is much lower, and the boycott rate is much higher. This indicates increased frustration with the political and electoral process among a significant portion of voters, due to their belief in the futility of these elections and a conviction, formed from a nineteen-year experience, that the same parties and individuals will share power to achieve their private interests at the expense of the general interests of the citizens. This represents a troubling signal for the ruling political class and serves as a clear warning—an assessment reinforced by the European Union’s election observer, Viola Cramon. This frustration may have been one of the main reasons for the outbreak of protests in October 2019.

The other segment that boycotted the elections were the ‘rejecters’. Some forces of the Tishrīn movement refused to participate in the elections for two reasons. The first was their lack of confidence in the integrity of the elections and their results. The second was a protest against the prime minister’s failure to fulfill his promises to hold accountable the killers of the Tishrīn youth in the protests and the continuation of assassinations of some activists even before the elections, such as Īhāb al-Waznī, a candidate for the Tamaddun list. This segment preferred to be in the opposition camp in the Iraqi street to give them room for maneuver and pressure. The Iraqi Communist Party showed solidarity with them, refusing to participate by sharing and supporting the position of some of the Tishrīn youth who boycotted the elections.

Nevertheless, the elections were held smoothly and in a secure atmosphere without any significant security breaches. This was confirmed by international observers and is considered a positive achievement and a support for the prime minister, especially since these elections were held without violence, contrary to what their opponents had predicted.

The election results led to a shock for the declining blocs, a shock of victory for others, and the shock of the exit of some traditional and veteran political figures who have been on the scene since 2003 from the Iraqi political landscape. Consequently, a quantitative and qualitative change occurred, to some extent, on the electoral map.

The Sadrist Bloc achieved the largest number of seats compared to its peer blocs, obtaining 73 seats, followed by the Taqaddum Alliance (37 seats), with

Table 2-1: Results of the Early Elections, October 10, 2021.

Political Entity	Number of Seats	Percentage
Sadrist Bloc	73	22.2%
Taqaddum (Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī)	37	11.2%
State of Law (Nūrī al-Mālikī)	33	10.0%
Kurdistan Democratic Party	31	9.4%
Al-Fatḥ Alliance	17	5.2%
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	17	5.2%
‘Azm Bloc (Khamīs al-Khanjar)	14	4.3%
Independents and other parties	107	32.5%

the independent forces ranking last among the blocs. Behind their victory were pre-planned steps that established this win, namely: the Sadrist movement, the Taqaddum Alliance, and the independents acted intelligently in their electoral campaigns, although each had its own style in managing its electoral process.

a. The Sadrist Bloc

There are fundamental points that should be noted when analyzing the advance of the Sadrist movement on both the popular and electoral levels, the most important of which are:

1. Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr enjoys a social and religious status that has added to his social and political prestige. He is the son of the martyred cleric, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṣadr. This legacy has supported him since the martyrdom of his father and two brothers, allowing him to rely on a broad popular base. He thus began to lead the masses spiritually, practically, and as a political leader.
2. He has played the political game skillfully since he entered the practical electoral process. The secret of his continued success is based on the centralized administration of his followers, who offer him loyalty and obedience—a feature not available to any other political party or leadership.
3. His technical team is highly skilled in handling the election game. It follows new and objective methods with each electoral process, which we have previously observed from one victory to the next. The reasons for this are:
 - The team is intelligent because it is skilled at dealing psychologically with its own members (the followers of the movement), as it is familiar with their mood and taste.
 - It deals with them according to a geographical logic, meaning that most supporters of the Sadrist movement are concentrated in specific residential areas, whether in Baghdad or other governorates. This makes it easier for them to adapt to any electoral system or law.
 - Most of its supporters come from a single socio-tribal-religious-sectarian fabric. Everyone has a similar intellectual language and a cultural orientation with interconnected dimensions. Therefore, we see that all candidates from the Sadrist movement are from the aforementioned categories. Based on this, the Sadrist movement's electoral team followed a meticulously engineered methodology. It knew how to divide the geographical area according to the density of its constituents and distribute candidates in a way that ensured the movement's candidates would win in a single district and block the path for other candidates. It even used an electronic map system that showed the residents of an electoral district their polling location and who the candidate was in their area.
4. Approximately six months or more before the elections, Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr used a surprising psychological weapon when he announced in his tweets, speeches, and interviews that the next prime minister would

be nominated by the Sadrist movement. What did Sayyid Muqtadā al-Şadr want from this? And how was he so confident of victory? The answer is that al-Şadr and his team had mastered the game and knew how to manage it both practically and psychologically.

b. Taqaddum Alliance

Muḥammad al-Ḥalbūsī benefited from the prestige of his political and social position as Speaker of the Council of Representatives. During his speakership, he was able to build a popular base in al-Anbār governorate in particular and in the Sunni-majority governorates in general. Al-Ḥalbūsī has limited political experience compared to his peers in political work, and he is aware of this, as this experience does not exceed just eight years. He was not well-known until 2014 when he was elected as a member of the Council of Representatives. He then held the position of Governor of al-Anbār after its liberation from ISIS during the period 2017-2018. From there, he began to build the foundation for his political presence by reconstructing the areas destroyed by ISIS. He won membership in the Council of Representatives in the 2018 elections and was then elected Speaker of the Council to complete the political journey he had established for himself.

On the Iraqi domestic level, al-Ḥalbūsī focused most of his attention on the reconstruction of al-Anbār, making use of state resources by virtue of his functional and political position. He then benefited from the establishment of security there in cooperation with the governor, the representatives from al-Anbār, and also the tribal sheikhs who joined and supported him after the defeat of the ISIS, thus winning over a large segment of the people of al-Anbār. He utilized his previous slogan “al-Anbār is our identity” to launch the creation of a leadership persona for a promised future. The most prominent reasons that led to the rise of al-Ḥalbūsī’s star can be mentioned as:

1. Pragmatic intelligence in his political dealings, as he did not expose himself to collision and confrontation with the large parties in power, neither with the Shiite nor the Kurdish political class. He did not criticize, attack, or oppose anyone. He used a soft approach in his management of the Council of Representatives, in contrast to what used to happen with Sunni political figures and some former speakers of the Council of Representatives.
2. He has worked to create for himself the image of the legitimate representative and political authority for the Sunni community in Iraq, and to fill the existing vacuum in this regard. Previous Sunni political figures were unable to crystallize this model for themselves from 2003 until then, and it appears that al-Ḥalbūsī is seeking to affirm this dimension.
3. His dynamic activity on the level of foreign relations with Arab countries, especially the Gulf states, and his shuttle trips when he was a representative and governor of al-Anbār, enabled him to obtain a reserve of material, moral, and media support for his election campaigns, as he is viewed as a promising youthful force.

Therefore, his choice of the “hammer” slogan in his recent election campaign has a clear symbolism: the determination to hold on to the power of parliamentary decision-making and to win it, and that this is just the beginning.

c. The Protest Forces

Many popular forces contributed to the outbreak of the October 2019 protests, most prominently the youth forces who raised the slogan of change and demanded reconstruction, provision of services, job opportunities, and the elimination of rampant corruption. The protests were concentrated in the capital, Baghdād, and the central and southern governorates. A reading of the reality of the protest movement, which was accompanied by changes that affected the structure of the political system in Iraq, will be through the following points:

- The slogan of the youth of the Tishrīn protests was “Silence is not our language.” Whatever the labels used to describe the youth protests in October (movement, revolution, uprising, etc.), they clearly indicated the existence of a structural flaw in the administration of the political system after 2003. The value of any movement (or revolution or uprising) should be for the benefit of the social structure, be from its core, and be accountable to it. Herein lies the true value of these movements or revolutions; otherwise, why did they start? They started to correct the course of a system that had deviated from its political, constitutional, and institutional path, and to return it to the path it is supposed to follow and from which it derives its legitimacy.
- The feeling among the protesting youth of a class disparity between them and the ruling political class on all levels. A wealthy, influential political class that controls state institutions was formed after 2003, creating a class difference not based on the strength of its economic production, but on its enjoyment of the privileges of power, i.e., financial and administrative corruption.
- The youth had shown solidarity with the governments of change after 2003 and supported them at the beginning in the hope of living in a democratic atmosphere that achieves the public good, after getting rid of a dictatorial regime that had shattered society with its terrorism and futile wars. They waited for eight years after the change until February 2011, when they protested against poor services, neglect, and the deteriorating economic situation. This was the first warning to the government, which, after eight years of mistakes and shortcomings in running the state and its political system, should have realized the need to search for the causes, work to avoid them, and hold the negligent accountable, instead of trading accusations and threats.
- Their protests continued and their geographical scope and strength expanded, especially in southern Iraq, year after year. Then the ceiling of demands was raised from poor services, nepotism, and corruption until 2019, to demanding the resignation of the government and new elec-

tions. These protests were the strongest and had the widest participation. As a result, the Director of General Intelligence, Mr. Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī, was chosen as Prime Minister.

- The youth of Tishrīn won, and this is an advanced step to prove the principles and ideas they believe in, which they raised in their slogans that express their broad political project and their national goals. The slogans of the protesting youth were focused on "I'm coming down to take my right," "Where is my right?," "We want a homeland," and "My loyalty is to Iraq."

The victory of the independents and the representatives who won on lists representing the Tishrīn movement in the elections was a source of admiration, because they also mastered the electoral game, but in a different way from others, and they achieved victory. This is due to several reasons, the most prominent of which are:

- Their anger, protests, and demonstrations were the weapon with which they were able to impose themselves on the political scene.
- They refused to join or belong to any party and refused to deal or communicate with the leaders of the parties and the political authority.
- They rejected all political ideologies and their slogans, and adhered only to the slogan of the homeland.
- They resisted threats and temptations.
- They made their voice heard on a wide scale and obtained moral support.
- They were not safe from infiltrators and malicious actors who tried to abort their protests and offend them, but they continued and persevered until they themselves decided to end the protests after the prime minister promised them to achieve their demands.

The idea of participating in the elections was a cause for the division of the Tishrīn youth into trends between supporters and opponents. There are those who believe that the Tishrīn youth did not unite and were divided—according to the politician Nadīm al-Jābirī—into three currents:

- The first joined the parties of power and became an adjunct to them.
- The second is a group of multiple parties with weak capabilities.
- The third has withdrawn to rearrange its cards.

In the same vein, the Iraqi writer Aḥmad Sa'dāwī also confirmed the existence of three currents within the Tishrīn movement:

- **The conservative current:** represented by the Imtidād movement, which won 9 seats in the early elections. They allied with the New Generation movement and formed a parliamentary coalition between them.
- **The leftist current:** in his opinion, represents a large segment of the Tishrīn youth who refused to enter the elections because they believed

that the objective and subjective conditions were not available, including the al-Bayt al-Waṭanī (National Home) movement.

- **The third current:** are those who reject, in whole and in part, the current discouraging conditions for engaging in the political game, and he describes them as dreamy, desperate, angry extremists.

It is worth noting that there are other movements that emerged from the womb of the Tishrīn movement and won in the elections, such as the Ishrāqat Kānūn movement, which won 6 seats. This movement is centered in Karbalā' governorate and has a parliamentary presence in some governorates such as Diyālā and is close to social and religious circles. In addition, let us not forget the victory of a group of independents with 43 seats who have not yet formed a parliamentary bloc, but it is expected—and this is a likely possibility—that some will ally with each other, some may ally with the Tishrīn movement, and the rest may be attracted by traditional parties, and this depends on the strength of their personal, political, and social orientations.

V. Reactions

The reaction of the parties that lost, or the parties that only obtained a small number of seats compared to what they had achieved in the previous elections, was to refuse to accept the election results. This reaction went through three stages.

1. The First Stage: Rejection and Denial

The election results were announced with a victory, as we mentioned, for the Sadrist movement, the independents, Taqaddum, State of Law, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and finally the forces of the Tishrīn movement. As for the al-Fatḥ Alliance headed by Hādī al-Āmirī, which includes 17 political entities, most of them Islamic and national parties, with only 9 of them being from the resistance factions that fought the terrorist organization ISIS. The leaders of the al-Fatḥ Alliance are political figures who have led the political process since 2003 and have had an active role in managing the political system. Therefore, the election results were shocking to them and their party and popular bases, as they obtained only 17 seats. This angered the forces of the alliance, who considered it a major and unexpected setback for them compared to what they had achieved in the 2018 elections, in which they had obtained 47 seats. Therefore, they refused to accept this result and questioned the mechanisms that accompanied the election process and those that followed it.

All the objecting forces mobilized and formed what became known as the "Coordination Framework," with al-Fatḥ being one of the members of this formation. They pursued legal and constitutional channels in their objection to the results, including some non-Shiite forces, for example, the Sunni 'Azm Alliance, as well as the Kurdish New Generation and the Iraqi National List. They challenged the results and submitted their evidence to the judiciary, questioning

their validity and the existence of some fraud in them, and demanded a manual recount to prove the validity of their evidence. Indeed, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) took the step of a manual recount of the electoral stations whose validity was challenged and announced the results, confirming the validity of its preliminary figures and their significant correspondence with the electronic results.

2. The Second Stage: The Protests

The commission's response after the manual recount did not satisfy or convince the Coordination Framework. Its supporters took to the street, protesting the results. They blocked roads in Baghdad and some governorates, camped around the perimeter of the Green Zone, and issued numerous statements containing threats and warnings. The situation escalated when a clash occurred between the security forces stationed around the Green Zone and the demonstrators, which resulted in the deaths of two people and several others wounded, the majority of whom were from the security forces.

al-'Āmirī stated that he and his alliance were not against the winners but against the poor performance of the commission. A question imposes itself: why did al-'Āmirī place the entire responsibility on the commission? And why does he suspect that the intention is to weaken the resistance forces? Regarding the responsibility of IHEC: yes, the Commission bears part of the blame for the confusion that spread throughout the streets—confusion so severe that it compromised its perceived integrity. This is due to the following reasons:

- A general impression prevailed that the commission had completed all its technical procedures in the best scientific ways and was ready to conduct the elections, and it promised to announce the results in less than twenty-four hours.
- The state of hesitation and confusion that occurred during the electoral process, as a considerable number of electoral stations were disabled due to technical failures in their devices, which led the station managers to tell voters to return later, causing a large number of voters to refrain from voting.
- This confusion led to a manual recount of twelve thousand electoral stations due to the technical failure that affected them.
- Expert 'Ādil al-Lāmī, the former director-general of IHEC, explained that the commission erred in managing its work. He stated that the commission should not have opened the door for appeals immediately after the elections because the results it announced were preliminary, not primary, and were part of the results. Therefore, he argued, the appeals should have been submitted after the commission's final announcement of the results (al-Lāmī, 2021, October 23).

3. The Third Stage: Does al-Fatḥ Alliance Bear Responsibility for the Loss?

al-Fatḥ Alliance is composed of a number of traditional political forces, most of which are Islamic blocs and parties. It includes: Badr Organization, Da'wah Party, and 'Aṣā'ib Ahl al-Ḥaqq (represented by their political wing, the Sadiqun Bloc), Nasr Alliance with its two wings, al-'Abādī and al-Ḥakīm, Ḥuqūq movement, and other groups, most of which have an Islamic ideology and form the political wings of the Popular Mobilization Forces system.

The question that arises here is: to what extent does al-Fatḥ Alliance bear responsibility for losing the parliamentary elections in October 2021? The answer to this question, based on the data, is that the forces of al-Fatḥ Alliance bear responsibility for the loss of their voters' votes for the following reasons:

- Voter apathy was a common factor for all who contested the elections, due to their conviction of its futility. It was assumed that the principle of abstention from participation would bring great gains to the traditional entities, but one of the most prominent winners in the recent elections were the independents, the youth of Tishrīn, and Taqaddum Alliance, which is new to the political scene. Therefore, one should search for the objective and subjective reasons for the loss of votes.
- The use of slogans, operating with a conspiracy mindset, and the lack of clarity in the goal and project of state-building. Most of al-Fatḥ forces also employed the jihadi effort for political calculations, which was a point of rejection by the Shiite supreme religious authority on more than one occasion. The Shiite authority called for the separation between what is political and what is jihadi, which is in complete agreement with what the Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015 stipulated.
- The lack of serious engagement with and conscious reading of the new election law was the main factor in the loss of votes because it requires the adoption of precise criteria for candidacy, especially since the alliance contains seventeen political entities. This is a major weakness that contributed to the loss.
- Technical errors in managing the electoral process were a major reason for the decline. Nominating more than one candidate from the alliance in a single electoral district scattered most of the votes among al-Fatḥ candidates. If any candidate received, for example, 10,000 votes, this led to the waste of votes because the calculation should be based on winning seats, not votes, as happened with al-Fatḥ candidates in Baghdad, Bābil, al-Baṣrah, and other governorates.
- A considerable number of independents affiliated with al-Fatḥ Alliance forces won with their support, at the expense of their primary candidates.
- It is necessary to study the psychology of society and the Iraqi cultural personality after the protests and the events that accompanied them, and to study the slogans and chants called out by the demonstrators. This

requires scrutiny to know the causes and reasons in order to formulate new plans with a new mentality, and to change the political discourse, which must be adapted to the change and must address and resonate with the slogans of the generation of the electronic mind and social media. The alliance's leadership should also put forward new figures to take on and practice political work with a mentality of change. It is worth mentioning that other blocs made the same mistake, such as the State Forces Alliance, which won only four seats. These reasons require deep and precise study, and perhaps that will lead to the discovery of more reasons.

VI. The Integrity of the Independent High Electoral Commission

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) announced that the number of international observers who supervised the elections was 1,500, from the United Nations and the European Union, in addition to some ambassadors from countries within the European Union, the League of Arab States, and Arab and international organizations. There were also half a million party agents and 150,000 local observers. It was noted that there was a common convergence, to some extent, among the international and local observers in their opinions regarding the elections. The opinions of these aforementioned groups centered on the following:

- The elections took place in a good security situation, and no cases of violence were recorded during their conduct.
- The participation rate was low, much lower than what the Independent High Electoral Commission announced (Noorakib.net, 2021, October 11).
- The electronic voting process witnessed technical problems, including the functioning of electoral cards, difficulty in scanning the fingerprints of some voters, and other issues, contrary to the expectation that these devices were of high accuracy (Noorakib.net, 2021, October 11).
- The rate of violations increased in the majority of electoral districts (France 24, 2021, October 10).
- A number of stations, totaling 34 polling stations, did not close at the official time.

The international observers submitted a positive report to the United Nations, and its Security Council praised this report. Its members welcomed the interim reports which stated that the elections proceeded smoothly and witnessed significant technical and procedural improvements compared to previous elections. The members of the Security Council commended IHEC for conducting a technically sound election and praised the government for its preparations for the elections and for preventing violence on the day they were held. However, they expressed regret in the statement issued regarding the recent threats of violence

against the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the staff of IHEC, and others (United Nations Security Council, 2021, October 22).

The European Union mission expressed approval of how the electoral process was managed despite the low turnout. A good impression of the elections was given to the international community by UNAMI. Many countries, such as the United States of America, Britain, France, Germany, and all the European Union countries, and regional countries like Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states, praised the smooth and transparent elections. These reports conferred international legitimacy on the elections, which means conferring legitimacy on the cabinet and the three presidencies, despite the problems that occurred after the announcement of the results and the fear of their continuation and their impact on Iraqi society.

Most of the domestic forces, especially the winning ones, supported the commission's procedures and its neutrality. The international community and the United Nations also praised, on several occasions and in different events, the performance of IHEC, the speed of announcing the results, and the complete impartiality between the political rivals, as we indicated above. It is known that the commission was formed after the protest movement, and the board of commissioners was replaced with judges elected by the Federal Supreme Court, under a new law, Law No. 31 of 2019. The losing forces, especially the forces of the Coordination Framework, tried to cast doubt on the procedures of the election day and the results. However, the Federal Supreme Court considered a number of appeals submitted against the election results and rejected them for lack of sufficient evidence and the absence of proof of fraud, although there was confusion in the announcement of the preliminary election results after the closing of the ballot boxes, as the commission tried to adhere to the election law No. 9 of 2020, which requires the commission to announce the preliminary results within 24 hours.

Despite this, the forces that declined in the elections did not want to acknowledge this decline and wanted to blame IHEC for the decrease in their parliamentary seats, at a time when a political party, in the event of its loss or decline, is supposed to review the reasons for the loss and work to change its policies and deal with the reality differently.

VII. The Assassination Attempt on Prime Minister al-Kāzimī: The Political Controversy

In the early hours of July 7, 2021, three drones attacked the home of Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzimī, sparking a political controversy over the targeting of the highest executive official in the country, which is considered an attack on the prestige of the state. This incident provoked significant reactions both inside and outside Iraq. The United Nations Security Council and most countries around the world condemned this targeting. The question that arises here is: why was this targeting carried out? What was its goal? And who stood to benefit from it?

al-Kāzīmī came to the premiership with the agreement of most political forces after the resignation of Mr. ʿAdil ʿAbd-al-Mahdī, meaning he obtained the legitimacy to govern temporarily until early elections were held and a permanent government was formed. After the elections were held, the results affected the traditional blocs, parties, and figures who had been at the forefront of the political process since 2003. They are:

- **The first group:** Traditional political blocs that did not win any seats, such as the bloc led by Dr. Iyad ʿAllāwī, the former prime minister.
- **The second group:** Blocs that won only a small number of seats, such as the State Forces Alliance, which includes former Prime Minister Ḥaydar al-ʿAbādī allied with the bloc of Sayyid ʿAmmār al-Ḥakīm, which won only four seats.
- **The third group:** Blocs that lost many of their electoral seats and won only a third of the seats they held in the previous term, such as the al-Faḥ Alliance, which won 17 seats.

The prevailing opinion is that there is a direct link between the election results, the discontent of the Iraqi street, and the assassination attempt that targeted the prime minister’s residence. This connection is built on a series of accusations directed at the prime minister by figures associated with the Coordination Frameworks.⁽¹⁾

The Coordination Framework itself clarified its position that the election results would endanger civil peace, stating that “proceeding with these results threatens civil peace.” A member of the National Wisdom Movement, one of the parties included in the Coordination Framework, also stated that the Coordination Framework forces have pursued legal and constitutional means to object to the results, and if they are certified as they are, “each event will be dealt with as it comes” (al-ʿAbbūdī, 2021, November 21). As Saʿd al-Saʿdī, a member of the political bureau of ʿAṣāʾib Ahl al-Ḥaqq, explained, “We did not count on the UN envoy playing a positive role in the election issue, as she is one of the partners and players in the election results. It was she who sent a threatening message to the commission that it would not recognize the election results if they were changed after the appeals.” He then clarified that she had visited Shaykh Qays al-Khazʿalī in his office

(1) There are numerous positions from the forces rejecting the election results. Abū-ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī—a figure associated with the Coordination Framework forces—tweeted on October 22, 2021, that voices have grown hoarse calling for rights to be returned to their owners, and that they have repeatedly warned of the danger of confiscating the majority’s right and following the will of an external majority, stating that difficult days will pass over Iraq and everyone will be a loser. In another tweet, he clarified that the fraudulent elections are the biggest scam, and that they support the right to peaceful demonstration. In another tweet, he addressed the prime minister, saying, “...we are lying in wait for you.” In the same context, Abū-ʿAlāʾ al-Walāʾī wrote a tweet referencing the “dirty bullets” ordered to be fired on the bodies of the honorable, stating that the prime minister should forget two things: the first is the repetition of the farce of renewing his premiership, and the second is that he will not even be returned to his previous position. As for Shaykh Qays al-Khazʿalī, he stated the day before the assassination attempt that Prime Minister al-Kāzīmī would be judged by the blood of the martyrs and that their blood was on his neck. Abū-ʿAlī al-Walāʾī accused the prime minister of being the mastermind behind the rigging of the Iraqi elections without providing evidence or documents to prove this accusation, despite the fact that al-Kāzīmī was not an electoral competitor and preferred to remain neutral with respect to the competing blocs. Thus, he has the distinction among former prime ministers of being the first to prefer not to run in the elections.

and promised to study the evidence and present it to the Security Council, but she reneged on all her promises, and therefore “our position will be revolutionary” (France 24, 2021, December 2). In contrast, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert stated in her speech before the United Nations, in a completely different tone, that although the elections faced difficulties, they were conducted well and with high transparency, and she thanked the Independent High Electoral Commission for its management of the election issue.

After the assassination attempt, no group claimed responsibility for the attack; everyone, both internally and externally, disavowed and condemned it, and it has not been proven to this day who the perpetrator was. On the day of the attempt, Shaykh al-Khaz'alī tweeted: “We emphasize the necessity of an investigation by a specialized technical committee... and the perpetrators must be sought out and punished according to the law... because it is certainly an attempt to shuffle the cards, as it came one day after the crime of killing demonstrators...” (al-Khaz'alī, Q. (2021, November 7a).⁽¹⁾

These statements give the impression that whoever makes the threat is the perpetrator and has an interest in the assassination attempt, and it is self-evident that this is the closest guess that everyone has reached and will reach. refrained from making any direct accusations, except for a statement he made in his meeting with the Council of Ministers: “We prevented Iraq from sliding into a regional war... There are those who are trying to tamper with Iraq’s security and want it to be a state of gangs, while we want to build a state.” He also said: “We are looking for the perpetrators, we know them well, and we will reach you...” (al-Kāzīmī, 2021, November 8). The ambiguity did not stop at the prime minister’s statement but also shrouded the words of his political advisor, Mashriq ‘Abbās, in a tweet: “The security services now have conclusive evidence regarding the matter of the targeting of al-Kāzīmī’s residence. Within days, some facts, films, photos, and evidence about the treacherous targeting operation will be revealed” (‘Abbās, 2021, November 26).

The security services later announced that they had identified three individuals accused of being behind the attempt. Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr said in a tweet: “What should not be overlooked is the prestige of the state... and from here it has become necessary to reveal what is already known, I mean, to reveal the investigations related to this issue and to arrest the terrorists... and if this is not revealed, we may be forced to reveal it in the future” (al-Ṣadr, 2021, November 26). If the government, represented by its prime minister, knows, and the security services have arrested three suspects, then why are the perpetrators not revealed and punished, and the matter closed? In his tweet to the prime minister, he called for “calm and self-restraint from all,” saying: “It is a project of sacrifice for Iraq.” This means he fears announcing who the main culprit in the attempt is and undermining the state’s prestige because this would lead to a clash, which he does not want for fear of sliding into chaos.

(1) See also: al-Khaz'alī, 2021, November 7b.

So, why this procrastination and failure to reveal the facts? Doesn't the public have the right to know, as this is related to their fate and future? Doesn't the accused other party have the right to defend itself? Accordingly, it can be said that no one has the right to direct accusations at others without evidence proving the act. Is the other party a local armed or semi-armed political force trying to seize control of the government? Or is it an external force trying to take control? Or is it a conflict between external forces fighting on Iraqi soil? As long as the evidence is with the government, its security leaders, and its advisors, it is the government that bears the responsibility for not revealing the perpetrators.

VIII. al-Sulaymānīyah Demonstrations

It was not surprising that the youth of al-Sulaymānīyah governorate would revolt in reaction to the rampant corruption among the authorities in the Kurdistan Region, just like the youth of the central and southern governorates. Although the reasons varied, the goal of both groups of youth was the same: their stance against the authority of the corrupt.

The student protests in al-Sulaymānīyah in November 2021, which on the surface appeared to be demands for the reinstatement of university grants that had been cut off since 2014, the improvement of university housing, and attention to higher education, were in fact about something much larger. These protests were an explosion that drew its spark from the Tishrīn youth protests in the central and southern regions, protests that had been in motion since February 2011. They were later joined by university youth from Erbil and Duhok (Kurdistānī, 2021, November 25). The awareness of the youth in general, whether in the south, center, or north, was characterized by the presence of mature intellectual commonalities of a high level. First is the commonality of "awareness of disparity," a class consciousness between them and the men of power regarding the inequality in the distribution of rights and privileges. This class differentiation was not based on socio-economic production but on the exploitation of functional positions in power to plunder and steal public funds, resulting in the absence of social justice. The second commonality that united the demonstrators was the absence of freedom of expression. These two commonalities were the motive for the youth protests. In the Kurdistan Region, where society suffers from a low standard of living and evident poverty, with the latest statistic for the unemployed this year reaching 35%, most of whom are young people (ʿAbd-al-Karīm, 2022, January 29), and with the region's population reaching 10 million (3), the poverty rate in general for 2021 reached 25%, while in the Kurdistan Region the rate reached 13% (al-Hindāwī, 2021, March 27). The question that arises here is: are the economic resources in the region weak?

The region exports 500,000 barrels of oil daily, with revenues reaching \$900 million, in addition to revenues from 20 border crossings, as well as the 12% share from the federal treasury (ʿAbd-al-Wāḥid, 2021, November 23). Where do these revenues go? The opposition figure Maḥmūd Yāsīn al-Kurdī, residing in London,

explained in a television interview that 40,000 people have emigrated from Kurdistan to Europe, of whom 5,000 arrived via Belarus and Poland. He added that the Kurdish people have migrated in large numbers twice: the first time during the era of the former regime, and the second time now because of poverty and the oppression of the corrupt regime in the Region (al-Kurdī, 2021, November 23).

The justification provided by the regional government, as commented by al-Kurdī, for its failure to pay salaries and the lack of services is that the Baghdad government has not fulfilled its financial obligations. He noted that the service situation is poor and no economic development has occurred from which Kurdish society could benefit. This was also expressed by Representative Sarwah 'Abd-al-Wāḥid, who stated that although the region was formed 30 years ago, no economic development has occurred during this period, and that the modern buildings are not inhabited by the people of the Region, but by newcomers from outside or by Kurdish officials ('Abd-al-Wāḥid, 2021, November 23). This suggests a similarity in the living situation and economic suffering between the people of the central and southern regions and the people of Kurdistan.

As for the second commonality, which is freedom of expression, the absence of freedom of expression is a corollary to the class disparity from which the youth, including the youth of Kurdistan, suffer. As al-Kurdī expressed it, he questioned the value of urban development in the form of buildings, hotels, and private hospitals for the ruling families and officials if there is no freedom of opinion and expression in the city. Researcher Salīm Sūzah also explained the absence of freedom of expression in the Kurdistan press, stating that there is no Kurdish journalist who writes an opinion critical of the regional authorities or touches on one of them with a single word without being arrested, insulted, and imprisoned. Based on this, the situation in the Kurdistan Region is no different from any other Iraqi governorate in terms of suffering from corruption in its various forms, which harms the national income and the standard of living of Iraqi society as a whole.

As for the reason for the intensification of protests in al-Sulaymānīyah specifically, before other cities in the Region, it is as researcher Sūzah explains: that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party (PUK) had ended as a coherent party after the death of Jalāl Ṭālabānī, and the party had practically split into family and tribal groups held together by PUK in form only. As the party loses its people, followers, and leadership one after another, the fight over public funds ends up between the wing of Herokhān and her favored sons, and the wing of Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī and his followers. We will discuss this conflict in some detail in the following section.

IX. The Internal Conflict Between the Wings of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

After the passing of the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and former Iraqi President, Jalāl Ṭālabānī (1933-2017), events revealed a large gap within PUK, with internal conflicts between the party's wings. There is a conflict within the Ṭālabānī family, and there is a conflict of external poles. The conflict

over the party leadership among family members is the deepest. An example of this is what happened in the second half of 2021, when the conflict between the two wings of PUK over the party presidency escalated between Bāfel Jalāl Ṭālabānī and Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī Ṭālabānī. This conflict was described as a “white coup” by Bāfel against Lāhūr, reaching the point of an arrest warrant being issued against Lāhūr by the al-Sulaymānīyah court on various charges, including espionage for undisclosed parties and employing ghost personnel in the security agencies he manages, in addition to accusations against officers and loyalists of his entourage of being involved in violations. There are several issues related to the conflict between the wings of PUK that we will discuss through the following points:

1. The Warring Factions within the Ṭālabānī Family

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party (PUK) witnessed sharp disagreements between the two co-presidents of the party, Bāfel Ṭālabānī and Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī Ṭālabānī. At the fourth conference of the party, held in the city of al-Sulaymānīyah on December 21, 2019, both Bāfel Ṭālabānī and Lāhūr Ṭālabānī were elected as co-presidents of the party. Reports from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq indicated that there was an intense conflict within PUK, a partner in the administration of the Region, which reached the point of hinting at a military confrontation. As a result of this conflict, PUK decided to expel co-president Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī and four other members of the leadership: his brother Aras Shaykh Jangī Ṭālabānī, in addition to former member of the Council of Representatives Ālā Ṭālabānī, and the leaders Zīnū Maḥmūd and Shādmān Mullā Ḥasan. This was due to the internal crisis that has been raging within the party, which led to several leaders, including Mullā Bakhtiyār, being targeted in assassination attempt during his stay in Germany. Mullā Bakhtiyār described the assassination attempt as “shameful and most bitter because it came from those who are supposed to be comrades in the same trench of struggle.” Less than a year later, Bāfel Ṭālabānī was also subjected to an assassination attempt by poison, after which he was transferred to the hospital. Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī was accused of orchestrating the assassination attempt on Bāfel.

The illness and subsequent passing of Jalāl Ṭālabānī left the Union under two leaderships, and this was the first clear sign of weakness in PUK’s leadership, which some researchers attribute to various reasons. Among them is the Kurdish researcher and activist Hambār ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, who stated that the security institution being fought over is merely a tool and a manifestation of the issue, but the essence is that Lāhūr, during the long illness of his uncle President Jalāl Ṭālabānī, seized most of the sensitive positions and the social and youth party leaderships, to the extent that Bāfel, during the party conference, was unable to remove him from the party leadership and agreed with him on a joint leadership. ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān adds that Bāfel seeks to withdraw more authorities, institutions, and sources of funds that are under the control of his cousin, to make him an ordinary leader who can be controlled within the party, something Lāhūr is fully aware of, and he is trying to hold on to the institutions that protect his position within the leadership. This indicates the absence of any role for other party leaders and that

the party is linked only to the family conflict ('Abd al-Raḥmān, 2021, November 13). Meanwhile, the analyst and academic Zeravān Barwārī believes that the conflict within the party is a struggle for influence and power, pointing out that the main point in this conflict is that each party is trying to control PUK's areas of influence, especially with regard to the security forces and economic sources to serve individual interests or strengthen specific individuals, in addition to controlling the decision-making of the party (Barwārī, 2021, November 13).

2. Causes of the Conflict within PUK

The disagreements began to surface on the Kurdish scene after Bāfel Ṭālabānī decided to appoint a figure close to him to head the Zanyari security agency, which is considered the most powerful intelligence center and was previously under the leadership of the co-president Lāhūr Shaykh Jangī. This decision meant the removal of Muḥammad Ṭālabānī from the leadership of the agency, who is close to the security leaders associated with Lāhūr. Sources mentioned that the measure was not just a removal, but it reached the point of arresting the head of the agency along with a number of security leaders.

However, information from the party leadership in Kirkūk governorate, which is close to Lāhūr, stated that Muḥammad Ṭālabānī had been released by Lāhūr's own decision along with a number of detained security personnel without consulting Bāfel, who was not interested in the matter but exploited the issue and tried to seize control of the most important security agency in the area he controls. The consequences of this were anticipation, anxiety, and fear of fingers being pointed at the party's senior cadres, due to the lack of clarity of vision and what would result from it in the future. This fear was for their interests and the great privileges they enjoyed, which were provided to them by the former party leader, Jalāl Ṭālabānī, to win their loyalty, contain them, and subject them completely to his hegemony. The management of financial affairs, companies, major interests belonging to the party, and oil, gas, and border crossing revenues were and still are under the absolute control of the party leader, and the officials responsible for their management are appointed from among his family members or those close to him. It can be said that the financial wealth and huge interests are another reason for the escalating conflict, in addition to the party inheritance that was planned for its transfer through the conference (Garmiyān, 2021, May 21).

3. Attempts to Settle the Dispute and Scenarios of Fracture

During the conflict between the two family wings within PUK, there were internal and external attempts to mend the rift and settle the dispute between the two warring poles. One of the most prominent internal attempts was the intervention of Iraqi President Barham Ṣāliḥ, who is one of the most prominent leaders of the party. He tried to reduce the tension and called for self-restraint, warning against resorting to violence to resolve the conflict over the party's presidency, while at the same time trying to find a settlement in the management of PUK after reaching a temporary settlement. It seems that President Ṣāliḥ's attempt was able to calm the clash, but it may have come in favor of Bāfel. This

is confirmed by the degree of closeness and satisfaction that Şālih enjoys within the Union and the trust from the Ṭālabānī family on more than one occasion, including the renewal of confidence in him as a candidate for the presidency of the republic for a second term.

At the level of external attempts to settle the disputes and the clash between the wings of the party, Iran entered forcefully, as it has close and historical relations with the party since its establishment in the seventies, through supporting the party against the former Baathist Iraqi regime, up to the stage of forming the political process. On the other level, American diplomatic parties intervened on the line of pacification and mediation between the rivals. The PUK leader, Laṭīf Nerwayī, revealed American efforts, in addition to the Iranian efforts, to resolve the differences between the co-presidents of the Union, Bāfel and Lāhūr Ṭālabānī. Nerwayī said that a high-level American delegation held a joint meeting with the two presidents of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Bāfel and Lāhūr, in the city of al-Sulaymānīyah, indicating that the meeting reached positive results, as the two presidents decided to continue the meetings to solve the existing problems (Nerwayī, 2021, August 3).

Despite these attempts, the language of threat and accusation still prevails on the Kurdish political scene between the main parties in general, and between the poles of PUK in particular. This demonstrates that the party situation in the Kurdistan Region also suffers from a state of fragmentation and internal divisions for reasons related to influence and the struggle for positions and personal and party interests.

4. The Impact of the Conflict on the Decline of PUK within the Kurdistan Region and Iraq

With the absence of the leader and founder of PUK, Jalāl Ṭālabānī, and the rifts, divisions, and clashes between its wings, PUK has significantly declined in terms of popular support. This is demonstrated by the results of the early parliamentary elections that took place on October 10, 2021. This decline certainly benefits other forces within the Kurdistan Region, perhaps most notably those that split from the party, such as the Gorran (Change) Movement, as well as its political rival, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which has been trying since the 2018 elections up to the early elections to change the equation of governance at the level of the presidency of the republic, by virtue of the progress it has made in the parliamentary elections. Therefore, the conflict within PUK has directly affected the party's position inside and outside the Region.

The conflict within PUK has affected more than one equation within the Kurdistan Region, starting with the political stability in al-Sulaymānīyah governorate. If this conflict develops, it may affect the entire Kurdistan Region, as PUK is a major partner in the regional government. Any disruption in the balance of power between it and KDP will affect the economic, social, and political situation in the Region (Nerwayī, 2021, August 3). Furthermore, the continuation of the conflict has negatively affected PUK's ability to garner the votes of its constituents

during the elections, and may lead to the division of the masses into two sections, one supporting the orientations of Lāhūr, and the other supporting Bāfel and his brother Qubād, and the votes will be scattered if this conflict develops. This conflict may also directly affect the roles divided among the main political wings and forces in Baghdad.

X. Agenda for the New Year 2022

The political process has remained flawed since its establishment in turbulent circumstances, under the legal and constitutional foundations it adopted, and based on the political norms among political groups with their religious, sectarian, ethnic, and even liberal orientations. Since the fifth parliamentary elections in October 2021 witnessed many changes, including a political shift represented by the rise of new forces and the decline of others, it is expected that the year 2022 will carry an agenda to correct the course of the political process and its constitutional and legal system. This would be accomplished through the tasks entrusted to the new members of the Council of Representatives, of all their designations, affiliations, and orientations, by seeking to reform the flaws in the political process. This requires starting first with important constitutional amendments by removing ambiguity from many constitutional articles and the form of the system of government, and restructuring sovereign and constitutional institutions.

Although it is not an easy task, if the national will is present, it is possible to correct some paths of failure on various levels, especially the constitutional, legislative, and executive ones, and the institutions associated with them. This is in addition to reforming the judicial authority, and then moving to other stages of political and administrative reform by eliminating administrative and financial corruption and holding the corrupt accountable. In light of this, the challenges and entitlements for the next stage can be identified, along with ways to address them and the prospects for the political scene in Iraq during the coming year 2022, through the following sections:

1. Problems of 2022

There is more than one scenario that may shape the features of 2022 on the political level. In light of the election results, which still cast their shadow on the political process, and in view of what the Sadrist movement proposes with the support of its allies from the Kurds (KDP) and the Sunnis (al-Siyādah Alliance) to manage the political process with a national majority system—starting from the selection of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and his deputies, through the President of the Republic, to the selection of the Prime Minister with a candidate chosen by the Sadrist movement—in contrast, the Coordination Framework proposes a consensus government. Both sides insist on their views, with the Sadrists threatening to go into opposition, and the Coordination Framework threatening to form what is known as the “blocking third,” which is a version imported from the political experience in Lebanon.

Thus, more than one scenario can be projected to foresee the political scene in the coming year.

- **Scenario One: Political and security instability if the Coordination Framework's project to form a consensus government fails.** We may be facing a scenario of political instability and security deterioration, especially in the central and southern governorates. Evidence for this includes a series of security incidents that have targeted the headquarters of political parties in Baghdad, as well as incidents and assassinations in Maysān governorate in southern Iraq, which prompted al-Sadr in a tweet to call for calm between the 'Aṣā'ib, led by Shaykh Qays al-Khaz'alī, and the Sadrist movement in Maysān governorate, stating that they are brothers and politics will not divide them. Another example is the targeting of a party buildings or government institutions, such as the targeting of Baghdad International Airport with six rockets. This is an example of a scenario of security breakdown that may be provoked for political reasons, which could threaten the security of the state and civil peace.
- **Scenario Two: The political process may witness relative political stability in light of the parties reaching an understanding and accepting the political reality drawn by the election results.** This depends on what the political blocs will present on both the legislative and executive levels. If the political blocs move towards drawing a political and economic roadmap for the next stage with a legislative and executive orientation that prioritizes the country's interest above party and factional interests, and if one of the main alliances succeeds in forming the government, it will be supported and monitored by this alliance (here we are talking about the triple alliance that includes the Sadrist movement, al-Siyādah Alliance, and KDP on one side, and the Coordination Framework, PUK, small blocs, and some independent representatives on the other, with the triple alliance having a majority within the Council of Representatives). We may have a strong executive authority capable of addressing the issues and problems that have prevailed in the political process and other problems concerning the reality of society in various service, health, educational, and industrial sectors, and so on. On the other hand, this supposed stability must be governed by the language of the rule of law and adherence to it, and the avoidance of resorting to harsh tools, which would add more problems of violence to the reality of the political process and its outcomes. After more than eighteen years of instability, a decline in addressing the state's problems, and a deterioration in legislative and parliamentary performance, the people of Iraq hope that with the convening of the fifth session of the Council of Representatives, political and economic stability and progress on various levels will prevail in the country.

2. The Key Tasks of 2022

The key tasks list of 2022 contains many items: actions, projects, and programs awaiting formulation and planning, and then legislative approval. Among the most important of these items are:

a. Constitutional and Legislative Amendments

Many of the political problems that have afflicted the political system and the political process in Iraq are due to the ambiguity of the current Iraqi Constitution of 2005. The large number of complaints, appeals, and requests for interpretation submitted to the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq is clear evidence of this. This is not to mention the problems related to the parliamentary experience and the form of the political system in Iraq and their inconsistency with the aspirations of the Iraqi people for political stability and the achievement of good governance. From here, the current (fifth) parliamentary term must take up the issue of constitutional amendments with a serious and genuine national vision, by forming committees of experts in constitutional jurisprudence, political science, and sociology, with a set timeline, and establishing criteria of citizenship, human rights, political and security stability, and good governance as priorities for the chapters and articles of the current Iraqi Constitution to be amended. In addition to that, there is a set of laws awaiting legislation or amendment by the Council of Representatives, including the federal budget law.

b. Impactful Government Program

An impactful government program must be established to provide economic solutions and prioritize reconstruction and development of the public and private sectors, as a part of the national tasks that the citizen eagerly awaits, such as solutions to the problem of unemployment and the resulting social problems, alongside addressing the service issues that are related to the citizen's life, such as the energy, health, education, and educational sectors, and providing strategic solutions in the short and long term. It also involves deterring all party attempts that try to obstruct these important service issues through commercial activities at the expense of the citizen. Thus, the services issue has become a socially pressing issue. This is in addition to the necessity of advancing the economy and transforming from a rentier economy to a diversified one, and benefiting from the noticeable rise in global oil prices.

3. Devising Ways to Confront Problems and Achieve Tasks

If the national will of the political forces within the Council of Representatives is present, especially with the change brought about by the early elections, it is possible to address the challenges and make progress in finding solutions for the national, constitutional, and social problems in the next stage. Perhaps the most prominent ways to achieve this task are:

a. Existence of a Strategic Vision

The next stage requires developing strategic solutions to overcome the political, social, and service problems by establishing a strategy through cooperation between the three powers and relevant state institutions, in addition to the

private sector and national experts inside and outside Iraq, to lift the country out of its problems with a strategic vision based on political stability and economic advancement according to a studied plan for a specific period of time, and benefiting from international experiences in this field. Otherwise, the state of political instability, the escalation of the political struggle for power, especially after the results of the recent parliamentary elections, the security breakdown, in addition to the lack of services, will constitute a new challenge added to the challenges and problems that the country has witnessed and that have been left without solutions, which has caused waves of angry discontent that almost swept away the entire political process.

b. Rule of Law and Achieving Good Governance

One of the necessities for political stability and the elimination of security incidents resulting from political imbalance, party overreach, and tribal conflicts is to impose the law on everyone. Moving forward with this begins from the political side, by applying the Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015, regulating the work of state institutions, especially the security ones, and legislating laws that can organize political, party, and electoral work in order to achieve good governance based on political stability, social justice, and economic prosperity for all citizens according to the principles of justice, efficiency, work, and consideration of social conditions such as poverty, need, and harm.

There are other steps that can be considered part of the solution: The first is to compel the political parties participating in the electoral process to educate their candidates politically and legally, train them in democratic culture and work, and prepare them in the required manner before presenting them for participation in the elections. The second is for an official government body, such as the Supreme Judicial Council, with the assistance of academic institutions, to train the candidates for membership in the Council of Representatives and to seriously inform them of the importance of their political, social, and legal role and function as representatives, while also conducting competency tests for them. Thus, these measures can pave the way for establishing good governance.

c. Administrative Revolution and the Elimination of Corruption and Bureaucracy

It has become clear to all observers and citizens in general that there is a major flaw in the administrative aspect of state institutions, represented by the spread of administrative and financial corruption, bureaucracy, favoritism, and clientelism, and the like, in addition to other issues no less serious than the previous ones. Some public positions were and still are bought and sold, and the reason for this is that the appointment to public jobs and administrative positions is based on party clientelism and not on competence, integrity, and merit. Therefore, the deep-rooted flaw affecting state institutions—from the highest levels to the grassroots—must be decisively addressed in the next stage. This falls on the shoulders of the national forces, which must reconsider the administrative aspect through new instructions and legislations that would serve as a revolution against this dilapidated aspect. The people want the next stage to be a stage of

work, construction, and advancement, and a stage of solving problems, and this can only be achieved with the availability of an administrative structure based on sound foundations in which national choices take precedence over personal, factional, and party interests.

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3.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

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I. Introduction

Pandemics typically conclude in one of two ways, according to experts. The first is a medical end, achieved through the development of effective treatments and vaccines that significantly reduce infection risks and case numbers. The second is a social end, which occurs when people adapt their lifestyles and begin to coexist with the virus, sometimes disregarding health protocols. As the pandemic persists and non-lethal infections become more common, societal fatigue sets in and initial panic fades.

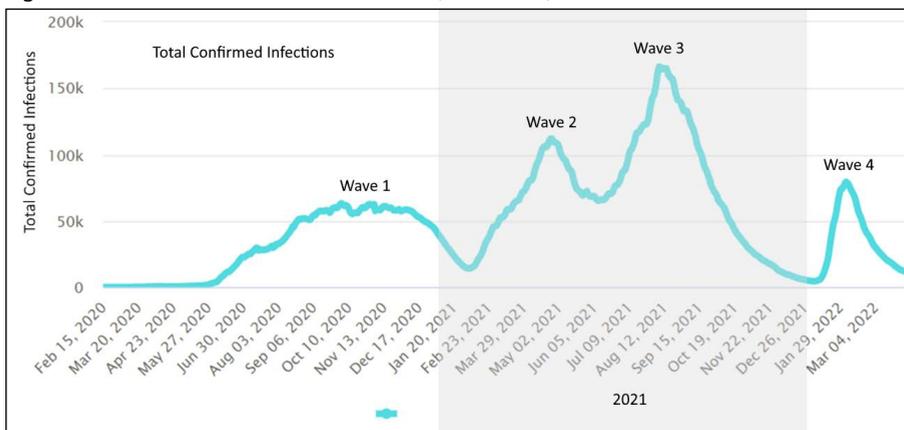
In the case of COVID-19, social adaptation became the dominant response. The Iraqi government relaxed restrictions despite ongoing transmission, and by 2021, most measures were lifted—except for mandatory testing of international arrivals. Although the virus remained highly transmissible, it had become less deadly.

Iraq ended 2020 at the forefront of Arab countries in terms of recorded COVID-19 cases and deaths, with approximately 600,000 infections and 12,800 fatalities. This situation highlighted new dangers threatening society as a result of the pandemic.

II. Waves of the Pandemic 2021

Since the pandemic began, Iraq has witnessed four waves of escalating virus infections, the most severe of which were the two waves seen in 2021. That year alone saw 1,498,449 virus infections, from which 11,345 people died. This means that the death rate from the virus decreased to 0.75% of total infections. In contrast, there were 595,291 infections in 2020, with 12,813 deaths, while the death rate from the virus was 2.15%. The reason for this may be due to several factors, perhaps the most important being the increased efficiency in dealing with infections, the availability of appropriate treatments, and, sometimes, the increase in the number of vaccinated individuals.

Figure 3-1: Waves of Coronavirus Infection (2020-2022).



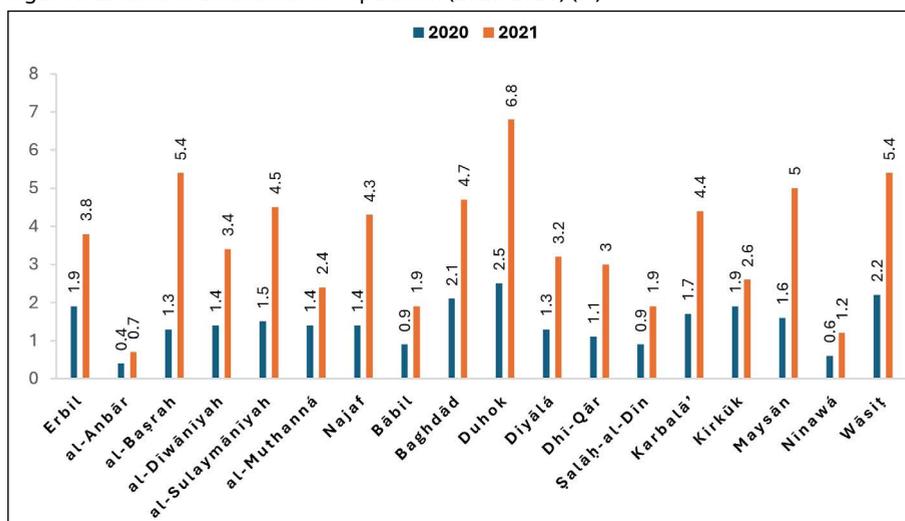
Source: Prepared by the researcher based on: worldometers.info, n.d.

Table 3-1: COVID-19 Infections by Governorate (2020-2021).

Governorate	2020			2021			Increase in Infections
	Total Infections	%	Rank	Total Infections	%	Rank	
Baghdād	181,692	30.4	1	412,648	27.6	1	230,956
al-Baṣrah	39,842	6.7	2	168,013	11.2	2	128,171
al-Sulaymānīyah	33,056	5.5	5	105,146	7.0	3	72,090
Duhok	34,277	5.7	4	95,153	6.4	4	60,876
Wāsiṭ	32,326	5.4	6	80,193	5.4	5	47,867
Erbil	36,328	6.1	3	76,982	5.1	6	40,654
Najaf	22,290	3.7	11	68,349	4.6	7	46,059
Dhī-Qār	23,768	4.0	9	67,407	4.5	8	43,639
Maysān	18,341	3.1	15	60,558	4.0	9	42,217
Karbalā'	22,371	3.7	10	58,466	3.9	10	36,095
Diyālā	21,784	3.6	12	55,668	3.7	11	33,884
al-Dīwānīyah	18,391	3.1	14	47,410	3.2	13	29,019
Nīnawá	25,025	4.2	8	47,410	3.2	12	22,385
Kirkūk	32,185	5.4	7	44,269	3.0	14	12,084
Bābil	20,659	3.5	13	41,771	2.8	15	21,112
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	15,158	2.5	16	33,161	2.2	16	18,003
al-Muthanná	12,423	2.1	17	21,155	1.4	17	8,732
al-Anbār	7,956	1.3	18	12,670	0.8	18	4,714
Total	597,872	100	18	1,496,429	100	18	898,557

Source: WHO, n.d.-b.

Figure 3-2: Ratio of Infections to Population (2020-2021) (%).



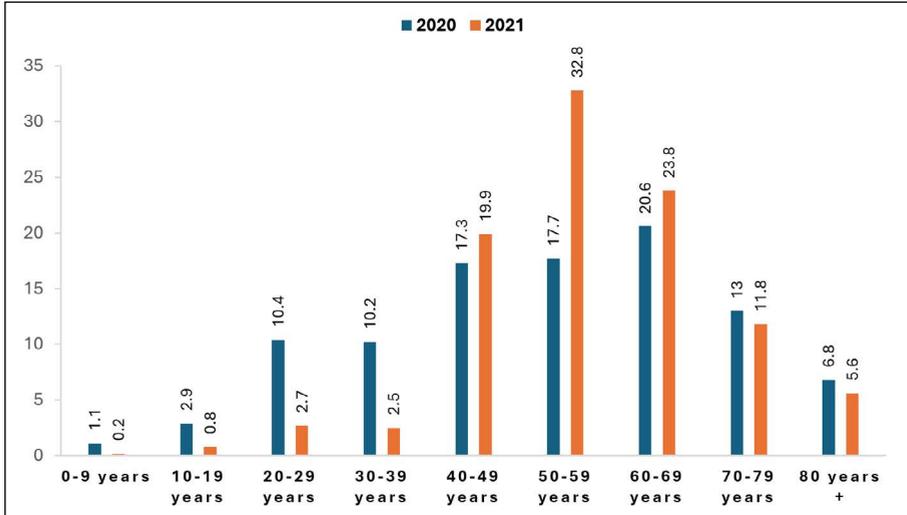
Source: prepared by the researcher based on data from Table 3-1 for infections and population estimates issued by the Central Statistical Organization.

Table 3-2: COVID-19 Deaths by Governorate (2020-2021).

Governorate	2020	2021	Total
Baghdād	2,852	2,261	5,113
al-Sulaymānīyah	1,799	1,496	3,295
Erbil	907	1,138	2,045
Duhok	685	1,091	1,776
Dhī-Qār	818	748	1,566
al-Baṣrah	910	580	1,490
Kirkūk	786	643	1,429
Bābil	593	412	1,005
Nīnawá	491	467	958
Karbalá'	522	404	926
Maysān	444	432	876
al-Diwānīyah	400	361	761
Wāsiṭ	469	286	755
Najaf	319	396	715
Diyālá	273	253	526
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	255	241	496
al-Muthanná	232	109	341
al-Anbār	67	27	94
Total	12,822	11,345	24,167

Source: Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Figure 3-2: COVID-19 Deaths by Age Group (%).



Source: prepared by the researcher based on data from (WHO, n.d.-a).

1. New Infections

The governorates varied in the number of infections. Baghdad had the largest share, contributing 27.6% of new virus infections, followed by al-Basrah, whose contribution increased to 11.2%, and then the governorates of al-Sulaymānīyah and Duhok. These four governorates accounted for more than half of the infections in 2021. Meanwhile, the governorates of Şalāḥ-al-Dīn, al-Muthanná, and al-Anbār ranked last in the number of infections during 2020–2021.

When comparing infections to the total population, the ratio rose from 1.5% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2021. At the governorate level, Duhok had the highest rate at 6.8% in 2021, followed by Wāsiṭ at 5.4%. These are relatively small governorates in terms of population size, while Baghdad also showed a high rate, nearing 5%.

2. Deaths

The virus claimed 24,167 lives during 2020–2021. Baghdad recorded the highest number of fatalities (5,113), followed by the three governorates of the Kurdistan Region: al-Sulaymānīyah (3,295), Erbil (2,045), and Duhok (1,776). In terms of gender, 67% of the deaths in 2020 were male and 33% female, while in 2021, the distribution shifted to 59% male and 41% female (see Table 3-2).

According to Figure 3-3, the virus was most lethal among individuals aged 60–69 in 2020. Conversely, the death rate for the younger 50–59 age group increased to 32.8% in 2021.

3. Performance of the Ministry of Health

To address the challenges posed by the pandemic, the government increased the Ministry of Health's spending from 1.726 trillion dinars (approximately 1.460 billion USD) in 2020 to 2.877 trillion dinars (approximately 1.9 billion USD) in 2021.

Most of this increase was allocated to the operational budget, which rose from 1.693 trillion dinars in 2020 to 2.752 trillion dinars in 2021. The investment budget increased by 370% during the same period, from 33.5 billion dinars to 124.361 billion dinars. However, this increase does not adequately reflect the urgent investment needs required to strengthen the health system. Additionally, a significant portion of the increase was driven by price changes due to currency devaluation, with the dollar value of the increase amounting to only 30%.

Despite the efforts of its staff, the Ministry of Health faced intense criticism following the incident at Ibn al-Khaṭīb Hospital⁽¹⁾ in Baghdād, which resulted in 82 deaths and 110 injuries in April 2021. The incident led to the resignation of the Minister of Health and Environment, Ḥasan al-Tamīmī, on May 4, 2021, after the release of the investigative committee's report. The committee imposed disciplinary actions, including the dismissal of the hospital director, his administrative deputy, and the civil defense official, as well as the demotion of the director's job grade. The Director-General of al-Ruṣāfah Health Directorate was also dismissed, and the suspension of the Minister and the Governor of Baghdād was lifted.

A few months later, a similar tragedy occurred on July 12, 2021, at al-Ḥusayn Teaching Hospital in al-Nāṣirīyah, in the isolation ward for COVID-19 patients, resulting in 92 deaths and 110 injuries. The director of health for the governorate and the hospital director were dismissed in response.

These incidents highlight the extent of dysfunction within the national health system and underscore its inability to manage the emergency demands imposed by the pandemic. The events also reflect the challenges faced by pandemic patients, many of whom opted for private clinics or hospitals over public facilities due to concerns about safety and quality of care.

4. Vaccination Campaigns

Vaccination efforts against the virus commenced in early March 2021 with the arrival of the first shipments of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine. Earlier that year, the government announced agreements to purchase 1.6 million doses of the American Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and 8 million doses of the British AstraZeneca vaccine. By the end of 2021, a total of 8,551,606 individuals had received one or two doses. However, vaccine uptake remained weak, partly due to the spread of negative rumors. The vaccinated population represented less than 21% of the total population, with a significant portion having received only one dose.

At the governorate level, uptake varied and can be categorized into two groups:

- **Governorates with high vaccine uptake:** These regions exceeded the national average of 20.8% of the population receiving one or two doses. al-Baṣrah led with 28.4%, followed by Duhok (25.3%), Najaf (23.9%), and Baghdād (23.8%).

(1) The hospital was established in 1963 and is located near the Jisr Diyālā area in Baghdād, with a capacity of 290 beds.

Table 3-2: COVID-19 Deaths by Governorate (2020-2021).

Group	Governorate	Number of Vaccinated	% of Total Population
Governorates with High vaccine uptake	al-Başrah	892,061	28.4
	Duhok	352,862	25.3
	Najaf	379,715	23.9
	Baghdād	2,083,854	23.8
	Şalāḥ al-Dīn	404,611	23.5
	Diyālā	409,696	23.2
	Dhī-Qār	522,275	23.1
	Karbalā	282,222	21.5
	Total	8,551,606	20.8
Governorates with low vaccine uptake	Kirkūk	347,862	20.2
	Bābil	421,359	18.9
	Erbil	357,836	17.9
	Wāsiṭ	265,075	17.8
	al-Anbār	338,601	17.7
	Nīnawá	660,805	16.4
	al-Muthanná	138,508	15.8
	al-Dīwānīyah	213,045	15.3
	Maysān	179,010	14.9
	al-Sulaymānīyah	302,209	13.0

Source: Ministry of Health, 2021, December 31.

- **Governorates with low vaccine uptake:** These regions fell below the national average. al-Sulaymānīyah had the lowest rate, with only 13% of its population vaccinated.

Such low rates hinder the achievement of herd immunity. Globally, a 70% vaccination rate is often targeted to reach herd immunity. As of the reporting period, 83 countries—primarily developed nations and several Arab countries including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Morocco—had met this goal. In contrast, many countries lagged behind, with India projected to reach the target by June 12, 2022, and Iraq by March 24, 2027 (COVID-19 Vaccine Live, n.d.).

CARE Iraq conducted a study to assess community acceptance of vaccines and identify barriers to uptake, particularly among marginalized groups. The study included interviews with 3,770 individuals (2,067 men and 1,703 women) in Nīnawá and Duhok governorates, and 34 interviews with key health workers in mid-July 2021. It focused on refugees, displaced persons, returnees, and host communities. Key findings included (CARE, 2021, p. 6):

- **High vaccine hesitancy:** 67% of men and 68% of women were unwilling to receive the vaccine, although 52% of men and 48% of women believed the vaccine was safe.

- **Women have less access to and knowledge of vaccines compared to men:** 50% of men and 30% of women knew how to register for the vaccine. Additionally, 51% of women and 32% of men cited vaccine availability as the main barrier.
- **Fear of side effects is the biggest barrier :** Concerns included fever, death, severe allergic reactions, and infertility.
- **Limited trust in vaccine efficacy:** Many doubted the vaccine's ability to prevent the virus and feared counterfeit products.
- **Insufficient information:** A lack of confidence in the availability and accuracy of vaccine-related information was common.
- **Social media as a primary information source:** 60% of men and 46% of women relied on social media for vaccine-related information.

The spread of misinformation on these platforms contributed to increased hesitancy. To combat misinformation, several initiatives were launched (ESCWA, 2022, p. 34). The Iraqi Fact Checking Platform (IFCT) was developed for journalists, social media activists, and the public to verify information. UNESCO, with support from the European Union, built an AI-based smart platform—the first of its kind in the Arab region—to help counter misinformation. This platform enables users to (UNESCO, 2021):

- Access contextual information on Facebook and YouTube videos.
- Conduct reverse image searches on Google, Baidu, or Yandex.
- Fragment videos from platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Daily Motion into keyframes.
- Read video and image metadata to verify copyright.
- Apply forensic filters to still images.

V. New Viral Variants and Their Danger

In 2021, several variants of the COVID-19 virus emerged. These variants are generally classified into two categories. The first is “variants of concern,” which are highly transmissible, may alter clinical symptoms, and reduce the effectiveness of health and social measures. Notable examples include the Gamma variant, first identified in Brazil in late 2020, and the Delta variant, which appeared in October 2020 and became a global concern by May 2021. These joined earlier variants such as Alpha, first detected in the United Kingdom, and Beta, identified in South Africa.

The second category is “variants of interest,” as defined by the World Health Organization. These include the Epsilon variant (United States, March 2020), Zeta (Brazil, April 2020), Eta (reported in multiple countries between December 2020 and March 2021), Theta (Philippines, early 2021), and both Iota and Kappa (United States and India, late 2020).

Variants are versions of the virus with genetic mutations—a natural process that helps the virus adapt and survive. While thousands of COVID-19 variants have been identified, most do not significantly impact public health measures. However, concerns arise when variants become more contagious or evade immune responses, potentially reducing vaccine effectiveness.

Sāmān Barzanjī, Minister of Health in the Kurdistan Regional Government, reported a rise in Delta variant cases, describing it as the fastest-spreading variant globally. In mid-July, he noted that infections had doubled across the Region's governorates compared to June, prompting stricter health measures in public spaces and raising the possibility of a full lockdown.

Later in 2021, the Omicron variant gained attention. The World Health Organization classified it as a variant of concern (WHO, n.d.-b) due to its rapid spread, although it was less likely to cause hospitalization compared to other variants, especially Delta. By the end of the year, Iraq was preparing for a new wave of infections attributed to Omicron. On January 18, 2022, the Ministry of Health announced a sharp rise in cases and hospital admissions, primarily among unvaccinated individuals (Sky Press Agency, 2022, January 19; Rudaw Agency, 2022, January 18). Prior to this, governorates such as Baghdād and Kirkūk had reduced government office hours, and the Supreme Committee for Health and National Safety, chaired by Mr. Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, convened to address the situation and review the Ministry of Health's response efforts (Sky News Arabia, 2022, January 13).

VI. The Controversies of Prevention and Coexistence

An investigative report published on August 6, 2021, supported by the Iraqi Network for Investigative Journalism (NIRIJ) and the Daraj Foundation, revealed that many Iraqis preferred to face the virus rather than receive the vaccine. This attitude stemmed from widespread rumors, fears, and perceived corruption in health institutions. During early 2021, vaccination efforts were described as weak, slow, and sporadic, with projections suggesting it would take years to vaccinate two-thirds of the population. The report identified three main contributing factors (NIRIJ, 2021, August 6):

- Delays by the government in securing vaccines.
- Limited vaccine supply, few distribution centers, and long waiting times.
- Rumors about vaccine safety and effectiveness, fueled by religious clerics and some medical professionals.

The Ministry of Health warned against spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories about vaccines and masks, declaring such actions a threat to public health and subject to legal consequences. The ministry stated it would hold individuals and media outlets accountable for disseminating false information and inciting resistance to preventive measures.

Throughout 2021, social disregard for preventive practices—such as mask-wearing—became widespread. Social gatherings, including mourning gatherings and celebrations, resumed, along with customs like handshaking, hugging, and kissing. This laxity extended to institutions. A report by the Integrity Commission highlighted forged test results and inflated fees for home-based travel screenings conducted by health teams from accredited agencies. The report also noted the failure to enforce social distancing, particularly by private companies, with some flights operating at full capacity. This raised concerns about potential travel bans or restrictions for Iraqi travelers. The Commission formed an investigative team after receiving reports of offices collaborating with government and non-government entities to bypass PCR testing requirements for international travel, charging up to 200,000 dinars for this service (INA, 2021, October 21).

VII. Vaccines: Voluntary or Mandatory?

In June 2021, the government decided to mandate the vaccine for employees, faculty members in universities and schools, and students over the age of 18, with the aim of encouraging vaccine uptake. Subsequently, on June 7, the Council of Ministers announced decisions related to the pandemic, including:

- Continuing the implementation of the decision to vaccinate all individuals working in shops, restaurants, malls, factories, and other places subject to health inspection, making it a condition for the issuance and renewal of health permits, with violators facing fines and closure after September 1.
- Denying entry to government sector employees, educators, and students older than 18 who do not present a vaccination card or a weekly negative test result proving they are not infected with the virus.
- Requiring all state institutions to deny entry to unvaccinated visitors.
- Mandating that outbound travelers possess an international certificate proving they have received the vaccine.
- Requiring proof of having received a dose of an approved vaccine for individuals who wish to obtain an exemption from any comprehensive or partial curfew, should the need to impose one arise in the future.

The government attempted to urge people to take the vaccines, but the turnout remained weak during 2021. Nevertheless, a document issued by the Ministry of Health in early November 2021 indicated an expansion of the age groups eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to include those aged 12 years and above, with the goal of reducing the risk of the virus's spread and increasing the herd immunity necessary to contain the pandemic. The following day, the Ministry of Education called for students not to be permitted entry unless they provided a vaccination card or a weekly PCR test. However, it did not obligate these groups to receive the vaccine.

On March 21, 2021, the Ministry of Health designated 23 accredited laboratories, excluding the Kurdistan Region, for conducting pre-travel PCR tests, five of which are in Baghdād. On April 8, it launched the Iraq Mosafer platform (INA, 2021, October 21), which is intended to verify the validity of PCR tests via a QR code. For its part, the Civil Aviation Authority announced on July 25, 2021, that all Iraqi travelers would be required to present an international vaccination certificate starting from October 1. The decision exempted special cases that prevent receiving the vaccine or those who had been infected within the previous three months, supported by medical reports from medical committees, while requiring everyone to bring a negative test result proving non-infection within 72 hours prior.

VIII. Agenda for the Coming Year 2022

Since the pandemic has not ended and the virus was not eliminated through vaccination during the past year, the coming year promises new challenges in confronting the pandemic, achieving the declared goals of the vaccination policy that was launched, and maintaining awareness of the problems that some variants of concern may pose. Although voices have been raised regarding the possibility of other pandemics for which we should prepare, there are still hopes pinned on the end of the current pandemic during the coming year (2022).

1. Problems of the Coming Year

There are a number of problems related to the pandemic that may emerge in the coming year, including:

- The potential emergence of new variants across the world that threaten to spread in Iraq.
- The continued poor performance of health institutions and the recurrence of failures in facing challenges, such as fires.
- The continuation of public health investment trends at the same pace as in past decades.
- Funding shortages that affect the performance of health institutions, especially in light of the likely delay in passing the budget resulting from the failure to form a new government.
- Iraq 2021 Strategic Report of al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD

2. Challenges of the Coming Year

- Completing the vaccination process for the targeted groups with the approved doses.
- Improving the means of confronting the pandemic by providing detection tools and treatment protocols approved by the World Health Organization.
- Halting the deterioration in the health sector due to the pressures imposed on it and the financial constraints.

- Increasing investment in public health to meet the requirements of the pandemic and the needed development.

3. Ways to Confront Problems and Challenges

- Perhaps the first means of confrontation being proposed across the world is to prepare for the next pandemic and to improve the mechanisms and capabilities for dealing with epidemics. This means re-evaluating the way Iraq dealt with the current pandemic, which was characterized by negativity and reliance on others, and benefiting from the experiences of other countries in designing preparedness plans.
- Continuing media campaigns regarding the dangers of the pandemic and the importance of obtaining vaccines.
- Initiating a comprehensive reform process for the health system and developing its institutions with the aim of improving the quality of services provided.
- Radically developing health data systems and improving public access to data.
- Developing epidemiological surveillance mechanisms for diseases, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Enhancing cooperation with international institutions, especially the World Health Organization.
- Increasing the volume of investments in public health, especially in confronting chronic diseases, monitoring infectious diseases, and establishing an effective and advanced laboratory network for detecting and warning against infectious diseases, which means restoring consideration for scientific research in the medical fields.
- Strengthening cooperation with health institutions in other countries.
- Studying the possibility of establishing facilities for the production of various vaccines, especially those included in the national immunization schedule.

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4. Economy

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I. Introduction

The Iraqi economy experienced mixed trends in 2021, shaped by global and regional economic conditions and government policies, with varying effects on citizens' lives. This section provides a comprehensive overview of these developments, their outcomes, and their implications for the Iraqi economy through key indicators.

II. Return of Relative Recovery

In 2021, Iraq continued to feel the impact of a triple shock that began with a political crisis in October 2019, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister 'Adil 'Abd-al-Mahdī and the failure of two candidates to form a government until Mr. Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī succeeded in May 2020. The second shock was the COVID-19 pandemic, which began on February 24, 2020, with the first recorded case in al-Najaf al-Ashraf governorate. This led to intermittent lockdowns, and while the health crisis persists, its severity has lessened. The third shock was the collapse in oil prices, which fell to approximately \$13 per barrel in April 2020. The OPEC+ agreement to cut oil supply helped stabilize prices, and by early 2021, Iraq's oil prices exceeded \$60 per barrel.

The trajectory of the Iraqi economy is closely tied to oil prices and revenues. Oil's share of GDP reached its lowest point in Q2 2020 but rose to 47.1% in Q4 2021, reflecting improved prices. No structural changes occurred in GDP composition during 2021, as contributions from other sectors, particularly commodity-producing ones, remained low. This imbalance, coupled with reliance on imports to meet rising demand, led to a deterioration in trade balance indicators, especially with neighboring countries.

Table 4-1: Contribution Ratios of Economic Sectors to GDP Formation (2020-2021)

Sectors	2020					2021				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	total
Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting, and Fishing	3.5	10.1	5.9	5.1	5.9	2.8	5.6	4.1	3.2	4.0
Mining and Quarrying	38.8	21.9	28.5	31.7	30.7	44.9	44.8	45.9	47.1	45.8
Crude Oil	38.7	21.7	28.3	31.5	30.6	44.8	44.7	45.9	46.9	45.7
Other Mining	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Manufacturing	2.0	2.6	3.7	3.7	3.0	2.3	1.8	2.1	2.0	2.1
Electricity and Water	3.4	4.9	4.5	3.1	3.9	2.2	2.8	3.4	2.1	2.6
Construction	2.8	3.9	3.1	4.1	3.4	2.6	2.3	2.6	5.7	3.4
Transport, Communications, and Storage	9.9	9.9	9.9	9.9	9.9	10.0	9.9	9.9	9.9	9.9
Wholesale/ Retail Trade, Hotels, etc.	8.6	11.1	9.4	9.9	9.6	9.1	9.1	8.6	7.9	8.6
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	8.5	10.5	9.3	9.6	9.4	8.3	7.4	6.9	6.5	7.2
Banks and Insurance	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Home Ownership	6.5	8.5	7.4	7.6	7.4	6.3	5.4	5.0	4.6	5.2
Social & Personal Development Services	23.9	26.4	26.9	24.3	25.3	19.1	17.5	17.7	16.9	17.7
Public Government	20.5	22.5	23.0	20.1	21.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.1	14.6
Personal Services	3.4	4.0	4.0	4.2	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	3.2
Total by Activity	101.2	101.2	101.2	101.2	101.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	101.2	101.2
Redacted Service Charge	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.2
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization, National Accounts.

Due to rising oil prices and increased production quotas under the OPEC+ framework, the World Bank projected Iraq's economy to grow by 1.9% in 2021 and by an average of 6.3% in 2022-2023. These projections are considered conservative due to the rentier nature of the economy and persistent challenges to macroeconomic stability. The ongoing lack of investment and weak business climate in non-oil sectors continue to hinder sustainable growth and effective service delivery.

III. The Federal Budget 2021

The Iraqi economy remains in need of structural reforms in the financial sector following the triple shock and the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. The Council of Representatives required the government to submit a reform paper ("White Paper") as a condition for approving the borrowing law in June 2020. This paper was intended to outline reforms in public finance. However, the government submitted a budget similar to previous ones. It was passed after 102 days and published in the Official Gazette No. 4625 on April 12, 2021, following political disputes between the federal government and the Council of Representatives. The government had submitted the 2021 budget with a total expenditure of 165 trillion dinars, an expenditure inconsistent with the conclusions and directions of the White Paper submitted by the government, which was intended to control the financial situation in the country.

The government missed the opportunity in 2020—a year without a budget for the second time in Iraq's history after 2014—to present the budget on schedule, as mandated by the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019. The delay deepened mistrust between government procedures and the country's economic conditions. The proposed deficit of approximately 71 trillion dinars, to be financed through domestic and foreign borrowing, was unexpectedly large and added pressure to the economy. The budgeted oil price was set conservatively at \$45 per barrel, despite the average price in January being \$53 per barrel.

The draft budget submitted to the Council of Representatives underwent significant changes, exceeding the Council's constitutional authority under Article 62 of the 2005 Constitution, which limits its powers to reallocating funds and reducing total expenditures. Table 4-2 highlights the differences between the government's draft budget and the version approved by the Council of Representatives.

Table 4-2: Comparison between the Draft Budget Submitted by the Government and What Was Approved by the Council of Representatives.

Details	Government Draft	Approved Budget	Difference*
Public Revenues	93.160	101.320	(8.160)
Price per Barrel (dollar)	42	45	(3)
Exports	3.250	3.250	0
Oil Revenues	73.010	77.403	(4.393)
Other Revenues	20.149	20.149	0
Public Expenditures	164.206	129.993	34.213
Operational Expenditures	120.558	90.784	29.774
Indebtedness	14.762	9.036	5.726
Investment Expenditures	27.756	29.609	(1.853)
Investments Financed by Loans	5.072	4.908	0.164
Planned Deficit	71.046	28.673	42.373

(*): Values in parentheses are negative.

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the draft budget sent by the government to the Council of Representatives and the budget law published in the Official Gazette No. 4625 on April 12, 2021.

Table 4-3: Planned and Actual Revenues and Realization Rates (2021, trillion dinars).

Details	Planned	Actual	Realization Rate %
Oil Revenues	77.403	96.622	124.83
Non-Oil Revenues	20.149	12.459	61.83
Total Revenues	101.320	109.081	107.66
Current Expenditures	90.784	89.527	98.62
Employee Compensation	53.840	42.447	78.82
Investment Expenditures	29.609	12.929	43.67
Total Expenditures	129.993	102.456	78.82
Total Advances	-	14.058	-
Advances + Total Budget	-	116.514	-
Deficit	28.673	7.433	25.92

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the State Account as of December 2021 and the Federal Budget for the year 2021.

Table 4-2 indicates a significant discrepancy between the draft budget submitted by the government and the budget approved by the Council of Representatives, particularly the reduction of the budget by 34.213 trillion dinars, which constitutes approximately 21% of the total public expenditures in the draft budget. This was followed by a reduction in the planned deficit to 28.673 trillion dinars, down from approximately 71 trillion dinars. This reflects a contradiction between the White Paper prepared by the government and the draft budget. Notably, the Council of Representatives worked to reduce indebtedness and increase investment expenditures, as illustrated in Table 4-2.

To assess the realization rates of the budget, Table 4-3 shows that the revenue realization rate reached 124.83%, while the investment expenditure execution rate was 43.67%. The low execution rate is attributed to the Ministry of Finance's failure to fund investment expenditures and the weakness of implementing agencies. The actual deficit amounted to 7.433 trillion dinars, whereas the planned deficit was 28.673 trillion dinars, resulting in a realization rate of 25.92%.

Table 4-3 reveals fluctuations in realization rates on both the expenditure and revenue sides, along with a substantial volume of advances granted, estimated at over 14 trillion dinars. This underscores the need to settle advances and issue final accounts, which have not been released since 2014.

Execution performance is further weakened at the governorate level, as shown in Table 4-4. Nine governorates did not reach the overall investment expenditure execution rate of 43.67%, while al-Anbār governorate achieved an execution rate of 156%. The low execution rates are attributed to the Ministry of Finance's failure to fund investment allocations and the weakness of implementing agencies. This poor performance necessitates an analytical review to diagnose and address the underlying causes when preparing the 2022 budget.

The budget also failed to account for the repercussions of the exchange rate change. Instead, it reduced expenditures that directly affect citizens' lives. Allocations for the public food ration system decreased from 1.5 trillion dinars in the

Table 4-4: Actual and Planned Investment Expenditures and Execution Rates (2021 Budget).

Governorate	Planned	Actual	Execution Rate (%)
al-Başrah	1075	468	43.53
Nīnawá	458	116	25.33
Baghdād	964	66	6.85
Dhī-Qār	304	87	28.62
Diyālá	204	78	38.24
Bābil	359	106	29.53
al-Anbār	249	388	155.82
Maysān	220	62	28.18
Wāsiṭ	208	83	39.90
al-Najaf al-Ashraf	179	101	56.42
al-Dīwāniyah	173	57	32.95
al-Muthanná	117	86	73.50
Karbalá' al-Muqaddasah	149	107	71.81
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn	189	83	43.92

2019 budget to 795 billion dinars in the 2021 budget, and allocations for medicines were reduced from 1.5 trillion dinars to 1.349 trillion dinars during the COVID-19 crisis.

Consequently, the 2021 budget is inconsistent with the White Paper in both its preparation and outcomes. It is essential to address these shortcomings when preparing the 2022 budget, particularly in controlling current expenditures. However, forecasts suggest that passing a budget this year may not be feasible due to political conflict delaying government formation. Spending will continue under the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019.

IV. Federal Court Decisions Related to Oil Affairs

The Federal Supreme Court issued rulings on the unconstitutionality and repeal of several articles of the Federal General Budget Law of the Republic of Iraq for the fiscal year 2021, Law No. 23 of 2021. These rulings include:

- The unconstitutionality and repeal of the phrase in Article 2/First/4/a, which required the Finance Committee in the Council of Representatives to audit the reconstruction plan prepared by the governor, in terms of sectoral distribution.
- Rejection of the appeal against Article 2/First/4/g, which obligates the Ministry of Finance to adhere to allocation ceilings in Table b and redistribute allocations, both operational and capital, and to categorize them at the level of sections and chapters.
- Rejection of the appeal against Article 2/First/4/h, which authorizes the governor to approve the expenditure plan.

- The unconstitutionality and repeal of Article 2/First/8, which stipulated the establishment of a “Petrodollar Fund” in the governorates producing crude or refined oil or gas, to be managed by the concerned governor and funded from the surplus price difference of crude oil sales.
- The unconstitutionality and repeal of Article 12/Second/b, which required restructuring departments performing tasks similar to those of the Federal Service Council.
- The unconstitutionality and repeal of Article 18/Third/b, which imposed a 15% tax on imported fuel sold at gas stations.
- The unconstitutionality and repeal of Article 50/a, which allowed the Minister of Finance to add financial allocations for employee compensation, with a cap of 500 billion dinars.
- Rejection of the appeal against Article 50/c, which required the Council of Ministers to increase crop purchase prices by 50 thousand dinars per ton.
- The unconstitutionality and repeal of Article 56/Third, which prohibited extractive oil companies from including licensing round contract expenses in cost calculations.
- Rejection of the appeal against Article 58, which required the Council of Ministers to submit names for senior appointments by June 30, 2021.

In another decision in 2021 regarding the government’s appeals against the 2021 budget law, the Federal Court refused the government’s right to manage oil operation costs under licensing round contracts signed since 2009 as legislated by the Parliament. The Federal Court deemed it a breach of contractual obligations, potentially leading to contract termination.

Nevertheless, the Iraq National Oil Company law was enforced without considering the Federal Supreme Court’s decisions. This occurred in 2021 with the formation of the company’s organizational and functional structures, the separation of oil companies from the Ministry of Oil, and the signing of contracts with foreign companies.

V. Performance of the Oil Sector

Iraq entered 2021 with oil prices on a continuous rise due to the oil agreement between producers inside and outside of OPEC, also known as OPEC+. The selling price of Iraqi oil reached \$58.586 per barrel in January, then peaked in October at \$79.274 per barrel. The highest export rate was in December, at 3.277 million barrels per day (bpd). The average export rate for 2021 was 3.032 million bpd, which is lower than the 3.250 million bpd set in the national budget.

The rise in oil prices led to an increase in oil revenues. Monthly oil revenues reached \$4.765 billion in January and \$7.391 billion in December, with a total revenue of \$75.639 billion, equivalent to 109.677 trillion dinars. However, there is a discrepancy between the sales recorded by the Ministry of Oil, which records its sales upon the finalization of deals, and the revenues recorded by the Ministry of

Table 4-5: Selling Price of Iraqi Oil, Monthly Oil Revenues, and Daily Export Rate for 2021.

Month	Average Price per Month (\$/barrel)	Oil Revenues (billion \$)	Daily Export Rate (million barrels)
January	58.586	4.765	2.868
February	60.487	5.013	2.96
March	63.371	5.786	2.945
April	62.779	5.550	2.947
May	65.842	5.918	2.899
June	70.801	6.143	2.892
July	71.578	6.476	2.918
August	69.235	6.554	3.054
September	73.328	6.777	3.081
October	79.274	7.666	3.12
November	77.510	7.6	3.273
December	72.768	7.391	3.277
Total Revenues	-	75.639	-

Source: Iraqi Ministry of Oil, <https://www.oil.gov.iq>

Finance, which records what is received from oil sales. According to the Ministry of Finance, oil revenues amounted to 96.622 trillion dinars, a difference of 13.055 trillion dinars from the Ministry of Oil's figure. The ministry did not clarify the oil revenues carried over from 2020 and received in 2021.

As a result of the increased oil revenues, Iraq paid the remainder of its Kuwaiti compensation dues, amounting to \$44 million out of the \$52.4 billion imposed by the UN Security Council on Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 (CBI, 2021).

Regarding the development of the oil sector, an agreement was signed in 2021 to establish a petrochemical complex in al-Fāw with the Chinese company CNCEC. The project includes the construction of the al-Fāw refinery with a capacity of 300,000 bpd and three million tons of petrochemicals, with a total investment of \$29 billion, starting with \$7–8 billion, and is expected to provide 30,000 jobs.

In order to prepare programs and projects for gas development in southern Iraq, the al-Manşūrīyah gas field in Diyālā, and the 'Akkāz gas field in al-Anbār governorate, the Ministry of Oil sought the optimal investment of national wealth. The ministry announced that the agreement with the French company Total would come into effect in the first quarter of 2022 after the necessary approvals are obtained. After the withdrawal of the coalition of companies—Turkey's TPAO, Kuwait Energy, and Korea's KOGAS—from the third licensing round in 2010 to develop the al-Manşūrīyah gas field, implementation was stalled due to the war with ISIS in 2014. The field was then re-tendered based on Council of Ministers Resolution No. 270 of 2019, which approved the development through national effort with the participation of a qualified international company (51% for the Midland Oil Company and 49% for the foreign company), adopting the standard contract for the fifth licensing round (border fields) based on the principle of profit

share. The Ministry of Oil invited 16 companies, nine of which expressed interest, and the tender was ultimately awarded to the Chinese company SINOPEC, with the shares divided between the Midland Oil Company (51%) and SINOPEC (49%), as per the Council of Ministers' decision, with notification on January 20, 2022. The contract was initialed between the Petroleum Contracts and Licensing Directorate of the Iraq National Oil Company and the SINOPEC company.

The French company Total had submitted its proposals in 2020 to build gas facilities in the southern fields. The Council of Ministers, through its Resolution No. 244 of 2021, approved the Basra Oil Company and the South Gas Company to contract with Total for the implementation of the integrated gas project. This was followed by Council of Ministers Resolution No. 307 of 2021, as an addendum to Resolution 244, approving that the South Gas Company and Basra Oil Company, along with Total, would undertake the development of the gas projects.

The contract with Total included four components:

- Gas investment contracts with a capacity of 600 million standard cubic feet.
- Seawater transport and treatment with a capacity of 5 million bpd.
- Generation of 1000 megawatts of solar energy.
- Development of the Arṭāwī field, which aims to increase production to more than 210,000 bpd.

These contracts are structured according to the fifth licensing round's profit sharing model. The National Oil Company obtained the approval of the Council of Ministers for the Ministry of Oil's participation in the infrastructure development project awarded to Total, with a stake of no less than 40%, according to Resolution No. 361 of 2021. The funds for the 40% stake are to be recovered from the revenues generated from the export of oil, which will maximize the financial returns for the national partner (Ministry of Oil, n.d.).

VI. The Effect of Raising the Exchange Rate on Economic Sectors

The decision to raise the foreign exchange rate against the dinar (devaluing the dinar) was a pivotal point in the behavior of many economic variables, including inflation. The change coincided with the initial outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq. On December 19, 2020, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) concluded the year's events with a sudden exchange rate hike using a shock method, despite previously announcing that no change would occur. This step, which relied on secrecy in its decision-making, was intended to deny speculators sufficient time to disrupt the process of changing the exchange rate—a strategy stemming from the accumulated experience inherited since the 1990s at CBI. Inflation was the first variable to respond to this change. Regular inflation figures had not exceeded the 1% threshold since February 2020, and core inflation since

Table 4-6: Core and Regular Inflation (2020-2021).

Month	Core Inflation				Regular Inflation			
	2020	Rate of Change	2021	Rate of Change	2020	Rate of Change	2021	Rate of Change
January	1	-	4.4	4.7	0.5	-	3.2	0
February	1.2	0.2	4.7	6.8	1	1.0	4	25
March	1	-0.167	5.3	12.7	0.6	-0.4	4.3	7.5
April	0.1	-0.9	6.7	26.4	0.2	-0.7	5.5	27.9
May	1.1	10	6.1	-8.9	0.7	2.5	5.6	1.8
June	0.8	-0.273	6.7	9.8	0.1	-0.9	6.5	16
July	0.5	-0.375	7.5	11.9	-0.1	-2.0	7.4	13.8
August	0.4	-0.2	7.5	0	0	-1.0	8.2	10.8
September	0.4	0	7.4	-1.3	0.5	0	7.3	-10.9
October	0.9	1.25	7.5	1.3	0.7	0.4	6.8	-6.8
November	0.3	-0.667	8.6	14.6	-0.3	-1.4	8.4	23.5
December	4.2	13	4.8	44.2	3.2	-11.7	5.3	-39.9

Source: CBI, n.d.

March of the same year. Immediately at the end of December (the month of the change), regular inflation jumped to 3.2% and core inflation to 4.2%.

When calculating the change compared to the average of the preceding eleven months of the same year, the increase reached 814% for regular inflation and 500% for core inflation, against a change in the exchange rate hike of 23.55%. The exaggerated reaction of inflation in the market can be interpreted as a throwback to what occurred in the 1990s, which caused prices to jump to these levels in December 2020. Once the new year 2021 began, inflation spiraled out of CBI's control, escalating in the subsequent months until regular inflation reached 8.6% in November, as shown in Table 4-6. However, the change in the inflation rate after that initial leap fluctuated within reasonable ranges.

It must be emphasized that the process of changing the exchange rate was flawed in two ways: first, the timing, as the appropriate change was long overdue; the suitable change should have been made in 2014 with the occurrence of the

Figure 4-1: Monthly Core Inflation (2020-2021).

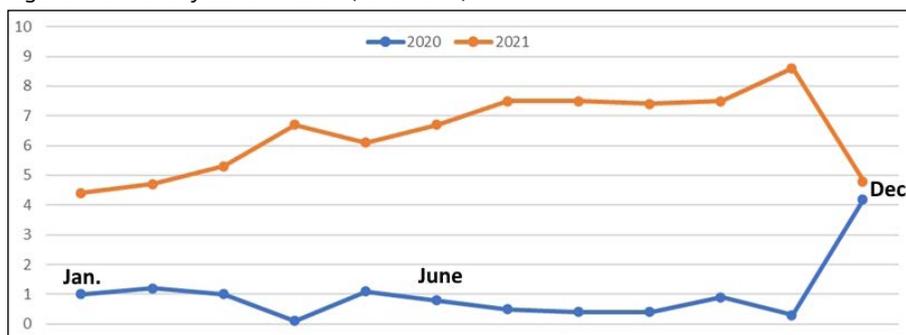
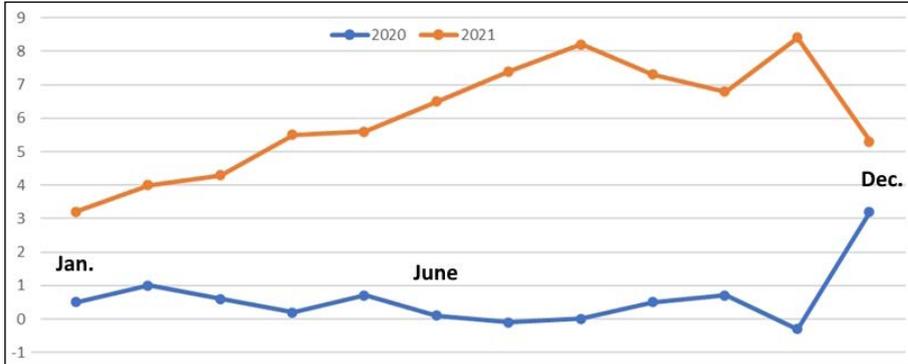


Figure 4-2: Monthly Regular Inflation (2020-2021).



double shock at that time. Second was the rate, as the rate of change was very large. Had it started in 2014 and used a crawling peg with small, gradual adjustments, the change would have been less severe and under control, and perhaps would not have been followed by these changes in inflation.

It should also be noted that the changes in inflation rates are not solely explained by the change in the exchange rate. There was also a rise in global food prices, which was transferred to Iraq through imports, as the Iraqi economy relies on them to meet the local market's needs for goods and services.

1. The Foreign Currency Auction Window

Public anxiety and a lack of confidence in CBI's ability to sustain the decision to raise the foreign exchange rate, coupled with rumors of a reversal that accompanied it, led financial and banking institutions to refrain from purchasing foreign currency from the Auction Window. Sales dropped from \$4,567 million, a change of -30%, in December 2020 and continued to decline very sharply at the beginning of 2021, with sales reaching \$492 million in January 2021, a change of -84.6% from the previous month.

Sales did not return to near their previous levels until April, by which time it became clear to everyone that there would be no reversal of the change, thereby reinforcing CBI's credibility. Sales continued to fluctuate until the end of 2021. The last months of the year saw a decrease in sales, reaching \$3,148 million in October 2021. The highest sales rates were in June and August, at \$4,824 million and \$4,713 million, respectively. This can be attributed to increased government borrowing, which drove up demand for foreign currency, prompting CBI to increase sales to satisfy demand and maintain exchange rate stability. Sales can be observed in Table 4-7.

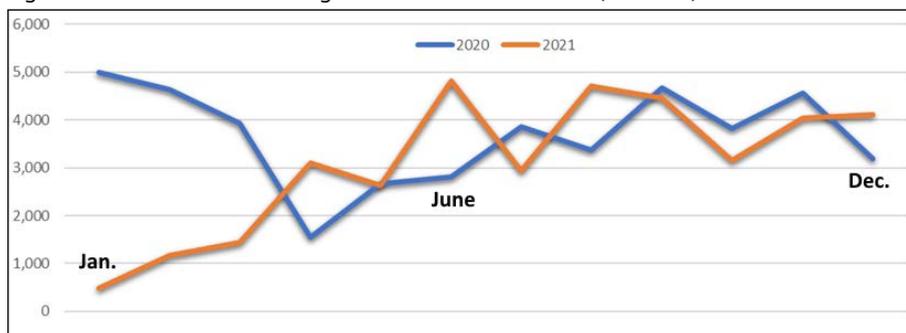
It is noted that the total annual sales of the window for 2020 and 2021 amounted to \$44,080 million and \$37,095 million, respectively. Thus, they decreased by 15.8%, a total of \$6,985 million. This confirms the achievement of CBI's objective of preserving foreign reserves when it raised the exchange rate, by reducing demand for foreign currency by 19% in 2021, despite the expansion in government spending and increased domestic borrowing compared to the

Table 4-7: Dollar Sales at the Foreign Currency Sale Window (2020-2021).

Month	Window Sales (Cash) (million \$)		Window Sales (Transfer) (million \$)		Total Window Sales (million \$)			
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	Rate of Change	2021	Rate of Change
January	-	2	4,516	490	5,005	-	492	-84.6
February	-	1	4,158	1,175	4,628	-7.5	1,176	139
March	-	0	3,620	1,441	3,926	-15.1	1,441	22.5
April	-	273	1,555	2,836	1,555	-60.4	3,109	115.7
May	-	433	2,616	2,206	2,665	71.3	2,639	-23.8
June	-	757	2,581	4,067	2,819	5.7	4,824	82.8
July	-	607	3,655	2,336	3,860	36.9	2,943	-39
August	-	983	3,082	3,730	3,372	-12.6	4,713	60.1
September	-	911	4,296	3,538	4,669	38.4	4,449	-5.6
October	338	792	3,481	2,356	3,819	-18.2	3,148	-29.2
November	367	937	4,200	3,110	4,567	19.5	4,047	28.5
December	244	924	2,951	3,190	3,195	-30	4,114	1.6
Total	-	-	-	-	44,080	-	37,095	-
Average	-	-	-	-	3673.3	-	3091.2	-

Source: CBI, n.d.

Figure 4-3: Window Sales During the Months of 2020–2021 (million \$).



previous year. The rate hike led to a reduction in demand, which can be attributed to the increased cost of imports, travel, and tourism abroad, as well as a decrease in dollar savings due to rising inflation levels and the higher cost of living.

2. The Reserve

The primary reason for raising the foreign exchange rate, from CBI's perspective, was to preserve foreign reserve balances from erosion due to their use in defending the dinar through the Foreign Currency Auction Window to satisfy local demand for the dollar. The decision to raise the exchange rate was discussed in closed-door meetings at CBI, and there appears to have been much hesitation in taking such a step due to the potential social impacts. However, the decline of

Table 4-8: Foreign Reserves (2020-2021).

Month	2020			2021		
	trillion dinars	Exchange Rate	billion \$	trillion dinars	Exchange Rate	billion \$
January	79,376	1,182	67.15	80,285	1,450	55.37
February	79,238	1,182	67.04	81,609	1,450	56.28
March	79,698	1,182	67.42	84,778	1,450	58.47
April	80,804	1,182	68.36	86,406	1,450	59.59
May	79,567	1,182	67.43	88,642	1,450	61.13
June	77,515	1,182	65.58	87,020	1,450	60.01
July	78,570	1,182	66.47	87,085	1,450	60.06
August	76,797	1,182	64.97	86,781	1,450	59.85
September	69,814	1,182	59.06	86,409	1,450	59.59
October	68,032	1,182	57.56	90,985	1,450	62.75
November	65,132	1,182	55.10	91,526	1,450	63.12
December	78,293	1,304	60.04	-	-	-

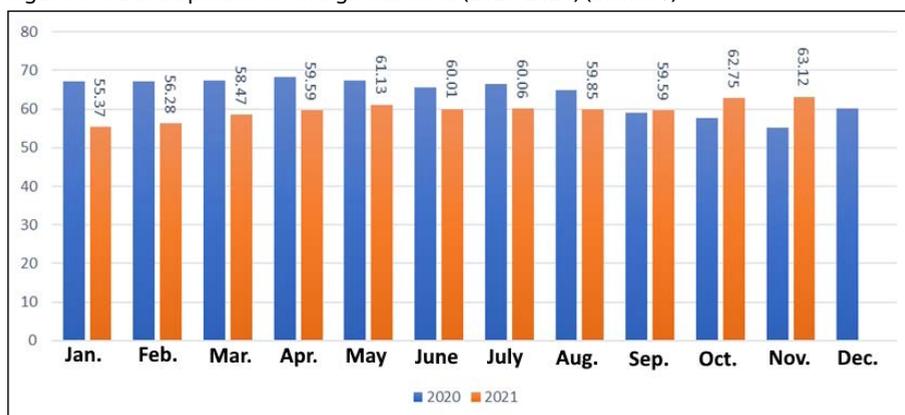
Source: CBI, n.d.

reserves to low levels, as was the case in the final months of 2020 as shown in Table 4-8, pushed CBI to make its decision. The groundwork for this was perfectly laid with the International Monetary Fund, in addition to the strong desire of the Iraqi government, which was exhausted by budget deficits, to capitalize on that change. It is noted from the same table that reserves began to grow from the beginning of 2021, from the first month until the fifth, exceeding \$61 billion. However, they fell below \$60 billion during August and September 2021 due to indirect government borrowing from CBI. The government sells its debt to commercial banks, which in turn discount that debt with CBI, thereby meeting the government's request while also maintaining their banking reserves, liquidity, and investments, and achieving considerable profits through this process, which commercial banks have been accustomed to for some time, having started when Mr. 'Alī al-'Allāq became governor of CBI.

In general, it is observed from Table 4-8 that foreign reserves calculated in dinars began to increase from late 2020 until the end of the period for which data was obtained in October 2021. However, the reality is different; reserves are not increasing but rather fluctuating when calculated in dollars at the official announced exchange rate. Nevertheless, in general, foreign reserves, according to the adopted international standards, are on the safe side and do not signal any danger, especially in October 2021, when they reached \$63.12 billion, or approximately 91 trillion dinars, and they are increasing as the same table shows. There was also an increase in reserves between January and December 2021 amounting to \$7.75 billion, an increase of nearly 14% from the beginning of the year.

Some sources indicated that the foreign reserve reached \$66 billion at the end of 2021, which increased due to the difference between the bank's purchases from the government and its sales at the auction window. CBI typically distrib-

Figure 4-4: Development of Foreign Reserves (2020-2021) (billion \$).



utes its reserves between gold (96.3 tons), foreign currency (\$1.9 billion), foreign treasury bonds from reputable governments (\$31.2 billion), and balances and deposits with global institutions (\$26.9 billion) (Iraqi Economists Network, n.d.).

3. Money Supply

The change that occurred in the foreign exchange rate did not find an echo in the money supply. It is observed from Table 4-9 that its rates of change are closer to government borrowing, as was the case at the beginning of 2021, in July, and in October. When comparing the money supply with sales from the currency auction window, we find its reflection on dollar sales. The increase in the money supply in July 2020, amounting to 2.76%, was met with an increase in dollar sales for the same month, which reached 36.9%. The increases in February and March 2021 Table 4-9: Narrow Money Supply and Market Exchange Rate (2020-2021).

Month	Narrow Money Supply (trillion dinars)				Market Exchange Rate (dinar/dollar)	
	2020	Rate of Change	2021	Rate of Change	2020	2021
January	86.178	-	105.363	1.94	1,202.34	1,460.50
February	89.258	3.57	108.926	3.38	1,193.84	1,460.72
March	91.846	2.89	111.604	2.46	1,198.53	1,460.79
April	94.713	3.12	112.444	0.75	1,226.00	1,475.64
May	94.131	-0.61	115.377	2.61	1,227.21	1,486.38
June	94.476	0.37	115.632	0.22	1,243.33	1,486.93
July	97.090	2.76	116.885	1.08	1,230.01	1,473.04
August	97.638	0.56	117.216	0.28	1,223.09	1,475.14
September	96.490	-1.17	116.314	-0.77	1,221.61	1,470.57
October	95.869	-0.64	119.015	2.32	1,241.42	1,481.06
November	97.951	2.17	117.799	-1.02	1,248.62	1,480.78
December	103.354	5.51	-	-	1,351.35	-

Source: CBI, n.d.

Figure 4-5: Narrow Money Supply by Month (2020-2021) (trillion dinars).

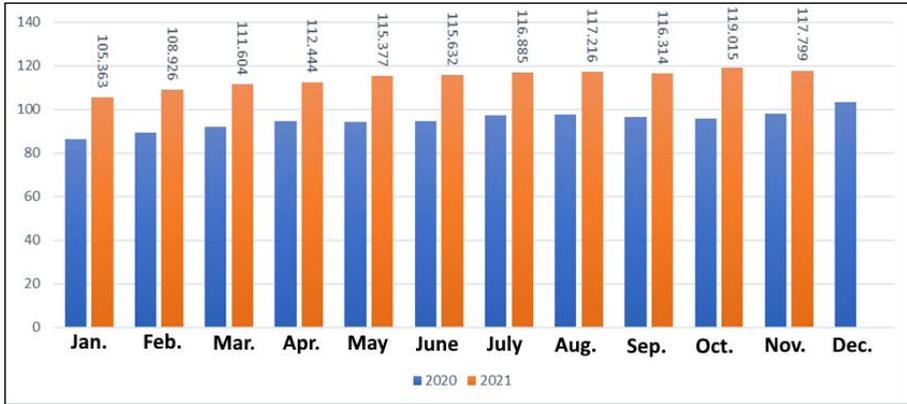
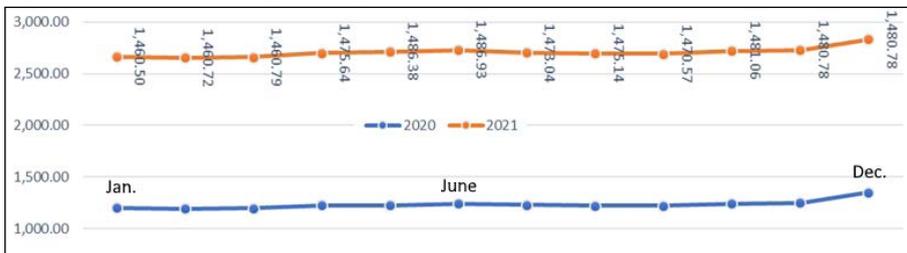


Figure 4-5: Market Exchange Rate by Month (2020-2021).



were met with a similar increase in sales in June, and the increase in the money supply in October was met with an increase in dollar sales in November. Therefore, the increase in the money supply resulting from the expansion in government spending transforms into an increase in demand for the dollar, which is met with a response from the currency auction window.

It is noted from Table 4-9 itself that the surplus in the money supply was reflected in a rise in the market exchange rate. This is clear from the dollar prices in the months of February, March, May, July, and October in 2021, where the rise was a reflection of the increase in the money supply in those months.

4. Repercussions of the Behavior of the Turkish Lira and the Iranian Rial

Turkey and Iran are major trade partners for Iraq, particularly in terms of imports. They exert a negative influence on the Iraqi market through competitive practices aimed at flooding it with goods and services—commonly referred to as “beggar-thy-neighbor” policies. These countries manipulate the value of their currencies against the dinar, which the monetary authorities had maintained at an elevated level from 2003 until the end of 2020. Turkey and Iran exploit the weaknesses in local Iraqi production to meet domestic demand and perpetuate these shortcomings. As a result, Iraq is considered an exposed economy, with a significant portion of import growth attributable to the high value of the Iraqi dinar (low foreign exchange rate) and the low value of the currencies of trade

Table 4-10: Exchange Rate of the Turkish Lira and the Iranian Rial (2021).

Month	Turkish Lira		Iranian Rial	
	Lira/Dollar	Change %	Rial/Dollar	Change %
January	7.4150	-	42110	-
February	7.1042	-4.19	42106	-0.10
March	7.2188	1.61	42094	-0.03
April	8.1835	13.36	42092	-0.005
May	8.3890	2.51	42107	0.04
June	8.6369	2.96	42108	0.002
July	8.5951	-0.48	42132	0.06
August	8.4784	-1.36	42168	0.08
September	8.5710	1.09	42172	0.01
October	9.2441	7.85	42217	0.11
November	10.8060	16.90	42254	0.09
December	13.4653	24.61	42263	0.02
2021 Average	8.8922	-	42157	-
2020 Average	7.0194	-	42173	-
Change during 2021	81.5 %	-	0.3633 %	-
Change between (2020-2021)	26.7 %	-	- 0.038 %	-

Source: ExchangeRates.org.uk, n.d.-a, n.d.-b.

partners, especially Turkey, Iran, and China. China, an important trade partner, devalues the yuan in its trade conflict with the United States, thereby increasing its exports to Iraq as a side effect.

As shown in Table 4-10, the Turkish lira continued to depreciate against the dollar throughout 2021, with the exchange rate rising from 7.4150 lira/dollar in January to 13.4653 lira/dollar in December.

The change was continuous throughout the year, with fluctuations. Notably, the positive change in the exchange rate began in March and surged in April, reaching a rate of change of 13.36%. By June, the depreciation of the lira had offset the depreciation of the Iraqi dinar. Thus, the monetary dynamics between Iraq and Turkey reverted to their pre-adjustment state. The Turkish Central Bank effectively neutralized the impact of CBI's policy shift. This maneuver exemplifies the "currency war" Turkey is waging against Iraq. The continued increase in the exchange rate against the lira by the Turkish Central Bank—culminating in a nearly 90% change by year-end—underscores Turkey's intent to dominate the Iraqi market, expand its share, and marginalize competitors like Iran, which also devalues its currency to gain market access.

Although Table 4-10 shows minimal change in the official exchange rate of the Iranian rial, the black market rate—governing most commercial transactions—experienced substantial fluctuations. Unfortunately, reliable data on the black market rate are scarce. The official rate was 42,110 rials/dollar in January 2021, with negligible changes in subsequent months. However, the market rate

diverged significantly from the official rate⁽¹⁾ and absorbed the impact of the Iraqi dinar's depreciation from early 2021.

Consequently, CBI's policy shift was met with aggressive countermeasures from neighboring countries, undermining its intended effects. Nevertheless, the policy succeeded in securing \$7.75 billion in foreign reserves and curbing non-essential imports, which had become costly for Iraqi consumers. This shift encouraged the substitution of imported goods with locally available products. It is important to note the social repercussions of this policy, which the government must address by supporting vulnerable populations affected by the exchange rate adjustment using a portion of the fiscal gains.

VII. The Sino-Iraqi Agreement

Prime Minister 'Ādil 'Abd al-Mahdī signed a multi-faceted agreement with China on September 19, 2019. On December 16, 2021, Iraq signed 15 contracts with various Chinese companies to build 1,000 schools in different regions of Iraq.

In March 2021, the Iraqi government decided to proceed with the implementation of the agreement concluded with China regarding the establishment of infrastructure projects, known as the "oil for reconstruction" agreement. The agreement stipulates the exchange of revenues from oil exported to China for the implementation of projects in Iraq. This is to be done by opening a credit account in a Chinese bank, where the revenues from 100,000 barrels of oil per day will be deposited to be disbursed to the Chinese companies implementing the projects. The agreement extends for twenty years and focuses on infrastructure.

The Sino-Iraqi agreement has faced numerous challenges, including internal challenges due to political conflict among rivals, and external challenges involving conflicts of interest with neighboring countries and the strong American influence on Iraqi economic decision-making. For example, China did not succeed in establishing the port of al-Fāw, and the contract for the port's implementation was awarded to the Korean company Daewoo. It was hoped that the port would be included in China's Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, the entry of Chinese companies into the country's reconstruction is essential for development, which can only be achieved by implementing the agreement.

VIII. Poverty and Living Standards 2021

According to a study published in mid-2021, prepared by UNICEF, the World Bank, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, and the Ministry of Planning:

- The national poverty rate rose from 20% in 2018 to 31.7% in 2020.

(1) The black market exchange rate in January 2021 was 227,000 rials/dollar or 22,700 tomans/dollar. See: (Dalil Iran, 2021). In February, it reached 240,000 rials/dollar or 24,000 tomans/dollar (al-Naba' Information Network, 2021, February). In June, it rose to 255,000 rials/dollar or 25,500 tomans/dollar (al-Naba' Information Network, 2021, June). In October, it reached 300,000 rials/dollar or 30,000 tomans/dollar (Iran International, 2021). Also see: CSO, 2021, p. 5.

Table 4-11: Poverty Indicators in Iraq for the Years 2007, 2012, 2014, 2018, and 2020.

Details	Year	Poverty Line (dinar)	Poverty Rate (%)	Number of Poor (persons)
al-Qaeda shock & loss of security	2007	76,896	22.4	6,648,000
	2012	105,500	18.9	6,465,000
ISIS shock	2014	105,500	22.5	8,101,000
	2018	110,880	20.5	7,370,000
Corona shock (Planning estimates)	2020	111,000	31.7	12,680,000
Corona shock (Researchers' estimates)	2020	116,700	25.6	10,240,000
In case of no exchange rate change (1190 dinar/dollar)	2021	137,900	25.5	10,504,000
In case of exchange rate change (1450 dinar/dollar)	2021	168,000	31.1	12,810,000

Source: al-Zubaydī et al., 2021, p. 39.

- There are 4.5 million Iraqis (11.7%) who became newly poor due to the coronavirus pandemic and its social and economic consequences.
- Children were the most affected by the crisis. While one in five children suffered from poverty before the crisis, the percentage nearly doubled to two out of five children (37.9%) since the beginning of the crisis.
- Approximately 42% of the population are now classified as vulnerable and face greater risks due to deprivation in needs such as education, health, living conditions, and financial security.
- For children, one in every two (49%) is at risk of suffering from deprivation in more than one of these needs. Deprivation of school enrollment and access to improved water sources are major factors contributing to the vulnerability of families and children.

According to a study published by al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue (RCD) on the impact of the exchange rate change in late 2020 on poverty conditions:

- It would have been possible to achieve a decrease in the poverty rate from 31.7% in 2020 to 25.6% in 2021 if the exchange rate had remained at its levels before December 20, 2020.
- The devaluation of the dinar led to an increase in the poverty rate to 31.1% in 2021.

The Flour and Food Basket Crisis

The public distribution system was initiated after the invasion of Kuwait and the imposition of economic sanctions on Iraq by UN Security Council resolutions, in order to absorb the wave of panic that swept society. The food ration card included ten consumer items, which decreased over time. The system remained in place after 2003, as it was a source of food for most poor families. However, the improvement in living standards and major cases of corruption that plagued the distribution system led to calls for a review. A decision was made to withhold the

food ration from anyone whose salary is one and a half million dinars or more and from the merchant class. Nevertheless, it remained one of the most important sources of corruption, as the items of the ration card were not distributed, being limited to a small number of goods (rice, sugar, flour) which were not distributed regularly, despite the fact that the expenses of the ration card are considered among the governing expenditures in the federal general budget.

In June 2021, the Ministry of Trade announced that it would resort to the food basket, which it considered part of the public distribution system, and added three basic items to it: legumes (chickpeas and beans), as well as tomato paste. The Ministry of Trade affirmed that it would involve the private sector in importing the items, provided they are from reputable international sources, as the private sector is more efficient and faster in importing than the government.

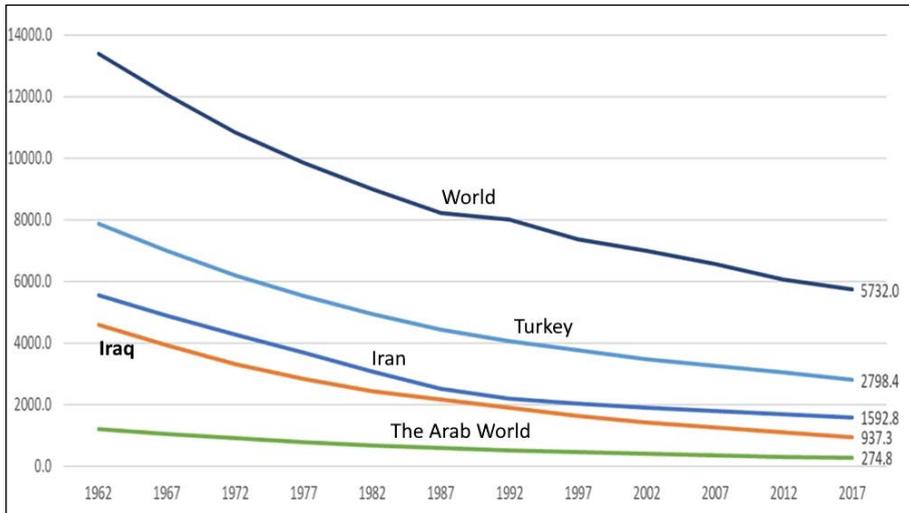
In November 2021, a crisis occurred in the supply of brown flour, with its price in local markets reaching about forty thousand dinars after it was about twenty thousand dinars. This was due to several factors, the most important of which was the Ministry of Trade's delay in distributing the ration as part of the public distribution system, which is a primary source in meeting the market's needs, as most families resort to selling their share of flour and compensating with ready-made bread or 'šammūn' (traditional diamond-shaped bread). This was compounded by the rise in the price of imported flour due to its global price increase, as well as its increased price due to the change in the foreign exchange rate of the dinar. However, the crisis did not last, as the Ministry of Trade quickly distributed the flour, although its price did not return to its previous level, which is the nature of prices.

IX. Exacerbation of the Drought Crisis and Its Effects on Agriculture and Displacement

Iraq is now one of the countries most vulnerable to natural disasters due to severe environmental degradation, lack of attention to environmental preservation, weak legal frameworks for environmental management, and inadequate institutional arrangements. It faces numerous challenges imposed by climate change, such as rising temperatures, low rainfall, water scarcity, and increased soil salinity. These factors obstruct sustainable development, delay the achievement of its goals, and hinder efforts to reduce poverty, enhance livelihoods, and mitigate conflict over natural resources.

Water flows in Iraq were estimated at approximately 43 billion cubic meters according to 2015 data and are projected to decrease to 17.61 billion cubic meters by 2025. Neighboring countries that share some of Iraq's rivers have adopted water and agricultural policies that have caused harm. In 1977, the Turkish government initiated the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which includes 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power stations intended to irrigate 17,000 square kilometers of land. Although the project was expected to be completed by 2010, financial, technical, and political challenges have delayed its completion. The total volume of water to be impounded is about 100 cubic kilometers, which is three

Figure 4-7: Renewable Internal Freshwater Resources Per Capita (in cubic meters).



Source: World Bank, n.d.

times the total capacity of Iraqi and Syrian reservoirs. The project aims to develop southeastern governorates, which cover 9.7% of Turkey's total area and constitute 20% of the country's agricultural land (al-Anṣārī, 2013, p. 675). Iran, for its part, has constructed approximately 600 dams over the past three decades and has cut or diverted rivers that originate in its territory and flow into Iraq.

As a result of these policies, water quality has deteriorated from north to south along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, with salinity levels reaching approximately 2000 mg/l in al-Baṣrah. According to the World Bank (2006), Iraq's water deficit in 2030 will reach 25.55 billion cubic meters (37%), as the expected supply is only 44 billion cubic meters. More recent reports indicate that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers may be completely dry by 2040 (al-Anṣārī, 2013, p. 677).

The per capita share of freshwater has continued to decline. In light of ongoing climate change and a three-year drought, this share is expected to decrease further. This situation necessitates increased cooperation with neighboring countries to ensure a fair distribution of water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

X. Sustainable Development

Iraq was among the countries that participated in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a member of the United Nations. The path of sustainable development in Iraq reveals the difficulties it faces due to ongoing challenges and the nature of development management.

Although progress in sustainable development indicators has been slow, UN assessments show that Iraq advanced from 127th place in 2018 to 105th in 2021. However, part of this improvement was attributed to the deterioration of other countries due to the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis.

Table 4-12: Path of Iraq's Progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (2018–2021).

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Progress Indicator	53.7	60.8	63.1	63.8
Global Rank	127	117	113	105
Number of Countries	156	162	166	165

The upcoming government will be responsible for the latter half of the period leading up to 2030. Its responsibilities include developmental perseverance, addressing developmental failures, and adopting an approach that promotes a dignified existence, ensures sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable groups, resolves the crisis of displacement, and upholds human rights. Achieving sustainable development goals depends fundamentally on comprehensive and efficient financing frameworks, including restructuring the federal budget, attracting foreign direct investment, partnering with the private sector, encouraging public-private partnerships, and integrating civil society into the development process. Key challenges facing the government in the next stage include:

- Financing and resource mobilization.
- Reforming the federal budget toward program-based, performance-based, and gender-responsive budgeting
- Governance of development policies aligned with sustainable development goals.
- Integrating gender into economic plans and policies
- Reforming the social protection system.
- Integrating youth into the sustainable development process.
- Focusing on commodity-producing sectors.
- Adopting decentralization.
- Increasing the role of data in the economy

XI. Evaluation of the White Paper

The government of Mr. al-Kāzīmī submitted a law for borrowing in order to obtain legal cover from the Council of Representatives for spending in June 2020. The law was approved on the condition that the government submit a program to control the public financial situation. Within two months of the law's ratification, in October 2020, the government presented the White Paper, which was welcomed by international circles and institutions. The paper diagnosed the problems of the Iraqi economy and presented a vision consistent with international institutions in the reform process. It focused mainly on controlling expenditures and maximizing revenues, especially non-oil revenues. Despite the positives contained in the White Paper, it was not without negatives, which made it subject to criticism from various segments of society. The most prominent of those negatives include:

1. The 2021 budget draft submitted by the government was inconsistent with the directions of the White Paper, both in terms of the volume of expenditures and the inflation of certain budget items, particularly wages and salaries. The expenditure volume reached approximately 164 trillion dinars, which is about 23% higher than the 2019 budget.
2. The White Paper emphasized reducing the deficit to the standard rate of 3% of GDP, yet the government submitted a budget with a substantial deficit estimated at 71 trillion dinars, which contradicts the paper's recommendations.
3. The paper aimed to reduce the ratio of salaries to GDP from 25% to 12.5%, but did not clarify the mechanism for achieving this. Conversely, there was an increase in the number of contract workers, particularly under Resolution 315, and a significant rise in the number of employees. The number of state employees increased from 2,941,986 in 2019 to 3,263,834 in 2021, excluding those expected to retire during the previous three years. This indicates the addition of approximately 500,000 job positions!
4. Although the paper identified Bureaucratic Bloat as a critical issue, it failed to propose solutions, despite the country's high unemployment rates and the inability of both the government and private sector to generate sufficient job opportunities amid ongoing crises.
5. The paper lacked actionable solutions for the challenges it identified. For instance, it acknowledged Iraq's high population growth rates—among the highest globally—but did not offer strategies to address the associated long-term social conditions.
6. The paper ignored corruption completely, despite notable efforts in 2021 to uncover major corruption cases through the committee of the Executive Order No. 29 of 2020, which led to significant arrests of high-profile individuals.
7. While the White Paper stressed the importance of the private sector in national development, it overlooked the sector's actual conditions and failed to implement tangible measures in 2021 to support it. This neglect occurred despite the sector's vulnerability due to the COVID-19 pandemic and exchange rate fluctuations. Instead, the government moved to eliminate all forms of support previously extended to the private sector.

XII. The Recovery Plan

Iraq faces a set of complex and interconnected internal and external challenges across various aspects of life. This section focuses on economic and related social challenges. Preparing a recovery plan requires addressing political, social, and economic issues, beginning with a robust confrontation of widespread corruption. Corruption affects macroeconomic variables and impedes the creation of an investment-friendly environment for foreign investors and companies.

Unemployment remains one of the most pressing challenges due to its social implications. High unemployment rates and Bureaucratic Bloat in the public sector necessitate efforts to stimulate the private sector to generate jobs, especially as approximately 500,000 individuals enter the labor market annually. The severity of unemployment in Iraq is heightened by its concentration among graduates, who require specific types of employment while the job market has evolving demands.

With rising oil prices and increased oil revenues, strategies to combat poverty can be activated in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, given the recovery in oil prices and revenue growth, it is essential to enact the sovereign wealth fund law referenced in the Financial Management Law No. 6 of 2019. Alternatively, the structure and function of the external development fund could be revised to serve as a sovereign wealth fund following necessary legal adjustments.

Reforming banking institutions is a prerequisite for recovery, alongside restructuring the financing system—particularly for small and micro-enterprises—due to their potential to absorb labor and provide youth employment. This includes improving and simplifying credit procedures.

Measures must be taken to diversify revenue sources and enhance the efficiency of public revenue collection, especially from border crossings, taxes, mobile phone services, and other channels.

XIII. Agenda for the New Year 2022

The challenges of the coming year mirror those Iraq has faced since 2003. However, improved oil prices and recent shocks may serve as catalysts for overcoming economic obstacles. Key issues include:

- Rising unemployment rates, particularly among youth.
- Persistent poverty and the displacement crisis, with 1,186,000 displaced individuals still facing hardship and awaiting resolution.
- Water scarcity and its adverse impact on agriculture.
- Industrial sector decline due to unregulated imports and weak enforcement of laws protecting local products.
- Imbalance in foreign trade structure, with heavy reliance on oil exports and a diverse import structure to meet domestic demand.
- The rentier nature of the economy is expected to persist, at least in the short term.
- Public finance reform is not anticipated, with budget preparation likely to remain influenced by political blocs and party interests.
- Ongoing deterioration of the production structure and the inability of local products to satisfy domestic demand.

Ways to Confront Problems and Entitlements

Identifying the economic problems facing Iraq implies that their opposites represent potential solutions. The first step is to curb corruption, the root of all problems, through good governance and law enforcement. Economic diversification and reducing the rentier nature of the economy—especially across key sectors—are essential. These challenges can be addressed in the short term by the newly elected government, which must implement a robust economic program and adopt macroeconomic policies to tackle poverty and unemployment. This includes reassessing fiscal policy, controlling public expenditures, and maximizing revenues.

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5. Security

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I. Introduction

In 2021, Iraq experienced significant security developments characterized by an increased frequency of incidents stemming from internal threats posed by non-state armed actors, notably the terrorist organization ISIS and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as well as regional interventions primarily from Turkey and Iran. Domestically, ISIS's operations intensified markedly, as the organization reorganized its ranks, adapted to post-defeat conditions, and exploited complex terrain in remote areas such as mountains, deserts, and valleys. These efforts were further facilitated by security gaps and vulnerabilities that Iraqi forces struggled to secure effectively.

Simultaneously, PKK expanded its presence in northern Iraq, capitalizing on the security vacuum created by the conflict with ISIS. This expansion provided Turkey with a pretext to increase its influence and operations within Iraq. Iran, seeking to counter Turkish influence or at least limit its expansion, also acted to secure its interests in this volatile environment. These dynamics contributed to heightened instability and forecasted future tensions and potential clashes.

This chapter outlines the primary security threats during 2021, the incidents they precipitated, and the associated human and material losses.

II. Internal Threats

This section examines internal security threats in Iraq, focusing on non-state armed actors such as ISIS and PKK, as well as the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Muşţafá al-Kāzīmī.

1. The Assassination Attempt on the Prime Minister: Security Controversy

Prime Minister Muşţafá al-Kāzīmī survived an assassination attempt targeting his residence in the Green Zone of Baghdād. In the early hours of November 7, 2021, drones dropped explosives on his home, wounding at least seven guards. According to the Iraqi army, the attack involved an armed drone loaded with explosives, while two additional drones were intercepted by security forces before

reaching their target (EUAA, 2022, pp. 47-48). The drones used were quadcopters, similar to those previously employed in attacks on Iraqi command sites and the U.S. embassy in Baghdād (Knights & al-Zamani, 2021).

This incident marked a qualitative shift in attack methods, transitioning from improvised explosive devices and Katyusha rockets to drones, which offer greater precision and stealth, due to carefully designed precautions adopted by al-Kāzīmī's security staff. Notably, this was not the first drone attack on al-Kāzīmī's residence. On March 4, 2021, drones dropped munitions on the homes of senior political leaders, including al-Kāzīmī, in a prior warning (Knights, 2021).

2. Attacks on Diplomatic Missions and Foreign Forces

The international zone housing diplomatic missions faced repeated Katyusha rocket attacks, the most recent occurring on January 13, 2022, targeting the U.S. embassy. These threats prompted heightened security measures and the deployment of the C-RAM defense system. Although the C-RAM was effective against rockets, drones posed a greater challenge due to their accuracy and ability to bypass US air defenses (Frantzman, 2022).

Additionally, armed groups escalated attacks using improvised explosive devices in southern Baghdād, targeting logistical convoys operated by Iraqi forces and contracted by US-led foreign forces. These attacks aimed to deter Iraqi companies from cooperating with American forces. The frequency of such incidents increased in February 2020 and intensified in late 2020. Between February 17 and March 21, 2021, 30 attacks were reported across multiple governorates, including al-Anbār, Bābil, Baghdād, al-Baṣrah, Dhī-Qār, al-Muthanná, al-Dīwānīyah, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn. In March 2021 alone, attacks occurred in Bābil, Baghdād, al-Dīwānīyah, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Dhī-Qār, al-Baṣrah, and al-Anbār (EUAA, 2022, p. 38). The total number of attacks targeting US interests in Iraq in 2021 included approximately 80 rocket attacks and 22 other incidents (al-Ṣāliḥī, 2021).

3. ISIS: Strategies, Tactics, and Scope of Operations in 2021

Iraqi forces continued to combat remnants of the ISIS insurgency, which maintained operational capabilities in rural and disputed territories inadequately secured between the Kurdistan Region and federal-controlled southern areas. ISIS fighters retained the capacity to execute complex attacks, with its leadership focused on expanding the insurgency to reclaim territorial control (Lead Inspector General, 2021; Blanchard, 2022, p. 2).

While ISIS attacks declined in 2018 and early 2019, their frequency increased in the latter half of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. In 2021, operations surged as ISIS reorganized into small, mobile units capable of executing diverse attacks (EUAA, 2022, p. 31).

Following the defeat of ISIS in Iraq after 2017, the organization transitioned from semi-conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics. This strategic shift involved mobilizing local populations and executing hit-and-run attacks rather than engaging in direct battlefield confrontations, thereby undermining the morale of

Iraqi security forces (Jones, 2017). ISIS conducted a greater number of complex attacks in Iraq compared to Syria, indicating a higher level of operational maturity during 2021 (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 20). ISIS capitalized on several strategic opportunities to reorganize and expand its operations, summarized below:

a. Safe Havens

Aligned with its guerrilla warfare strategy, ISIS utilized remote bases to conduct operations. The organization exploited Iraq's complex terrain—deserts, valleys, and mountains—as safe havens for its fighters (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 25). ISIS cells were concentrated in desert regions of al-Anbār and Nīnawá, and in mountainous and agricultural areas of Baghdād, Kirkūk, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and Diyālá. These locations facilitated the establishment of observation posts, supply routes, command centers, training camps, tunnels, and cave-based shelters. The rugged terrain in Diyālá particularly hindered counter-terrorism efforts. ISIS also sought to reassert control in disputed territories between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (EUAA, 2022, p. 32).

ISIS's operations in 2021 were concentrated in four primary sectors:

- **First Sector:** This sector connects ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq and includes areas such as Ḥawrān Valley and al-Abyaḍ Valley in al-Anbār and Nīnawá (EUAA, 2022, p. 32). The porous long border facilitated smuggling, supply transport, personnel movement, and infrastructure development. The open desert extended to the Ḥamrīn and Makhmūr mountains (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 25).
- **Second Sector:** Encompassing al-Ba'āj and al-Ḥaḍar districts south of Mosul, the Bādūsh mountain range, al-Tharthār Valley, and areas between al-Shirqāt, Kirkūk, and Makhmūr (EUAA, 2022, p. 32).
- **Third Sector:** Covering Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, Kirkūk, and Diyālá, this sector is critical due to its agricultural terrain, which facilitates concealment, movement, ambushes, and improvised explosive device (IED) deployment (EUAA, 2022, p. 32).
- **Additional Areas:** ISIS maintained a presence in the western and northern belts of Baghdād, Balad and Sāmarrā' in southern Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, and Jurf al-Ṣakhr in Bābil. Disputed internal territories in Kirkūk, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, and Diyālá served as training grounds (EUAA, 2022, p. 32).

ISIS prioritized rural support zones to facilitate training and mitigate internal security threats (EUAA, 2022, p. 20). These zones enabled resistance against Iraqi security forces, including operations by the Counter-Terrorism Service, Popular Mobilization Forces, and the Iraqi Army. ISIS also reconstructed bombing networks and reorganized urban fighters into mobile sub-groups. IED production cells were established in northeastern Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn to support attacks on Baghdād's outskirts. Iraqi forces uncovered three such facilities in the Ḥamrīn mountains and al-Dūr district in early 2021 (Kahan, 2021, p. 3). Additionally, ISIS attempted to revive car bomb networks in al-Fallūjah and al-Ramādī to target transit routes near Baghdād.

According to a report issued by the United Nations Security Council on July 21, 2021, the strategic objectives of ISIS include undermining critical infrastructure projects, exacerbating sectarian divisions and grievances, and sustaining the media visibility of its operations. The report further indicated that ISIS had re-established its operational presence to a limited extent through a series of attacks conducted between January 21 and April 15, 2021, in Baghdād, resulting in dozens of fatalities.

ISIS attacks were concentrated in the governorates of al-Anbār, Diyālā, Kirkūk, Nīnawá, and Şalāḥ-al-Dīn during two distinct periods: August 12 to November 10, 2020, and May 5 to August 3, 2021. Between January 1 and March 31, 2021, a total of 157 attacks targeting security forces were documented. Subsequently, between August 25 and October 9, 2021, all recorded attacks were attributed to ISIS (EUAA, 2022, p. 34). A notable incident occurred on January 25, 2021, when ISIS executed a suicide bombing in a crowded market in Baghdad. This attack resulted in 32 fatalities and over 100 injuries, marking the first major terrorist incident in the capital in more than three years. The second quarter of 2021 witnessed a discernible increase in casualty figures associated with ISIS operations (Kahan, 2021, p. 20).

b. Mobilizing Local Support

Mobilizing local support is a critical component for the success of guerrilla warfare strategies (Jones, 2017, p. 65). Accordingly, ISIS has concentrated its recruitment efforts on disaffected, marginalized, and insecure Arab Sunni populations, as well as individuals with preexisting connections to ISIS members, affiliates, and supporters. ISIS also targets individuals returning from displacement camps to cultivate a supportive and incubating environment. Despite its active recruitment strategies, ISIS lacks the necessary resources and popularity to significantly expand its recruitment base. Consequently, it seeks to establish a permissive environment for its operations within the Sunni community in Iraq, often targeting influential community leaders who are perceived as impediments to attracting youth to its ranks (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 25).

c. Financial Strength

ISIS possesses substantial financial capabilities, with estimates from the US Department of the Treasury indicating that the organization maintains tens of millions of U.S. dollars in cash reserves distributed throughout the region. These financial resources are derived from smuggling networks, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, looting, and donations from supporters abroad, which are facilitated through intermediaries in Turkey. The Treasury Department has confirmed that ISIS continues to transfer funds between Iraq and Syria, frequently utilizing facilitators located in Turkey and other financial hubs (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 25).

d. Tactics

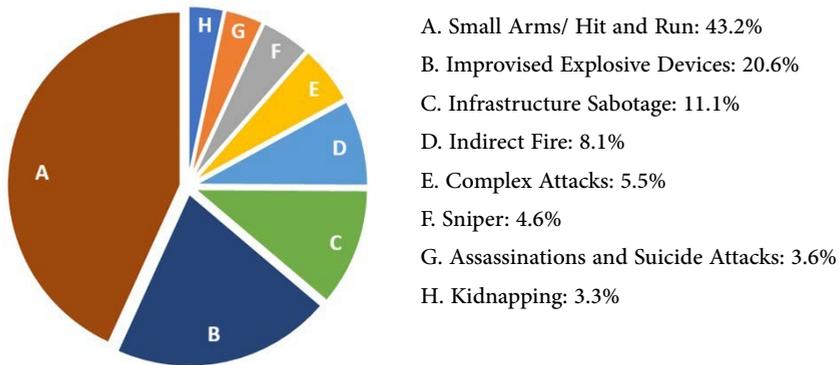
Following its territorial defeat and the shift in power dynamics favoring Iraqi security forces and the units of Popular Mobilization Forces, ISIS has adapted its tactics accordingly. These tactics include ambushes, raids, sabotage, and infrastructure attacks.

ISIS employs sleeper cells to conduct asymmetric attacks against security forces, particularly in northern Iraq. These cells frequently establish fake checkpoints and engage in kidnappings of civilians and security personnel to extract ransom payments. Additionally, ISIS conducts raids on villages and towns to assassinate community leaders and individuals affiliated with security agencies or who provide intelligence on ISIS movements. These operations are most prevalent in Nīnawá Governorate, with a significant focus on targeting members of the security forces (EUAA, 2022, p. 20).

Additionally, In July 2021, ISIS initiated a series of attacks targeting energy infrastructure in the governorates of Şalāḥ al-Dīn, Diyālá, Kirkūk, and Nīnawá, resulting in extensive damage and exacerbating electricity shortages. In response, the Iraqi government launched counter-operations in affected areas, including al-Anbār, Baghdād, Diyālá, Kirkūk, Nīnawá, and Şalāḥ al-Dīn (EUAA, 2022, p. 20).

ISIS intensified its assaults on Iraq's electricity grid in early 2021. On January 24, the Ministry of Electricity reported that organized terrorist attacks had targeted infrastructure in Nīnawá, Kirkūk, and Şalāḥ-al-Dīn, damaging towers and lines west of Mosul and Kirkūk and causing widespread outages. Subsequent attacks targeted technicians and security personnel dispatched for repairs. In August

Figure 5-1: ISIS Attacks by Tactic Used (January 2020–September 2021).



Source: Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 22.

2021, similar operations destroyed 13 towers across the same governorates. ISIS claimed responsibility for numerous attacks and issued threats against additional critical infrastructure, including highways and oil refineries (EUAA, 2022, p. 20).

Furthermore, ISIS increased its attacks on electricity and oil infrastructures to erode public support for the Iraqi government. The international coalition to defeat ISIS reported that ISIS and other non-governmental militias had damaged hundreds of electricity towers and power plants serving hospitals, water stations, and other essential services, resulting in approximately \$4 million in damages. Security operations in 2021 led to a 50% reduction in attacks following the deploy-

ment of drones and thermal cameras by internal security forces and the Ministry of Electricity (Lead Inspector General, 2021, p. 24).

4. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has expanded its presence along the Iraqi-Syrian border due to its ideological and organizational ties with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and newly formed groups in northern Iraq, particularly in the Sinjār region of Nīnawá (EUAA, 2022, p. 24). Historically, PKK operated primarily in the Qindīl Mountains and the Makhmūr area, which hosts a Kurdish refugee camp of approximately 10,000 individuals. The group also maintains a stronghold in the Zagros mountain range, spanning the Iraqi-Iranian and Turkish-Iraqi borders, with training camps dispersed throughout this steep and rugged region (Mandiracı, 2022, p. 4).

Sinjār is part of the fourteen disputed territories outlined in Iraq's 2005 Constitution. Post-2003, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) deployed fighters to these territories to assert control. PUK dominated areas from Kirkūk southeastward toward Iran, while the KDP controlled regions from north of Kirkūk to the Syrian border. Consequently, Sinjār fell under the control of KDP-affiliated Peshmerga forces (Alaca, 2020).

In 2014, during ISIS's invasion of Sinjār, Peshmerga forces withdrew without resistance. PKK capitalized on this security vacuum, establishing a defensive corridor on Mount Sinjār to facilitate civilian evacuations. Subsequently, PKK entrenched its presence by forming the Sinjār Resistance Units and the Sinjār Women's Units. These groups laid the foundation for the Independent Democratic Council in Sinjār and the Yazidi Freedom and Democracy Party, the political wing of the Sinjār Resistance Units (Alaca, 2020).

Following the failed referendum of the Kurdistan Region in 2017, Iraqi federal forces compelled the Peshmerga to withdraw from the disputed territories—regions claimed by both the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)—including Sinjār. Since then, KDP has been unable to reestablish its presence in Sinjār. The area subsequently became a strategic hub for PKK, which leveraged its proximity to the Syrian-Iraqi border to enhance communication with Syria. PKK strengthened its ties with its Syrian affiliate, YPG, which by 2017 had declared an autonomous administration in northeastern Syria (Mandiracı, 2022 p. 4).

PKK's efforts to establish a corridor linking Sinjār, Qindīl, and northern Syria have exacerbated tensions with the KDP. PKK, which controls over 500 villages in the region, has intensified its activities aimed at destabilizing KDP authority in northern Iraq and Sinjār (Alaca, 2020). Competition over territorial control, resources, and political influence has led to periodic clashes between PKK and KDP. A significant incident occurred in 2021 when an attack attributed to PKK resulted in the deaths of five Peshmerga soldiers and injuries to four others, although PKK denied responsibility (EUAA, 2022, p. 44). KDP's alliance with Turkey has further positioned it as a target for PKK aggression. Notably, in October 2020,

KRG accused PKK of assassinating Ghāzī Şāliḥ, its local security chief in Duhok governorate. Additionally, the PKK attacked the KRG-Turkey (Kirkūk–Ceyhan) oil pipeline twice—in October 2020 and January 2021—disrupting oil flow (Mandiracı, 2022).

In response, KRG transitioned from implicit to overt support for Turkish operations against the PKK. This shift influenced Baghdad's stance, culminating in an agreement between KRG and the Iraqi federal government on October 9, 2020, to stabilize and normalize conditions in Sinjār. The agreement, brokered under the supervision of Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the United Nations Special Representative for Iraq, garnered support from the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Turkey (Alaca, 2020).

III. External Threats

1. Turkey

Turkey has pursued influence in Iraqi Kurdistan through military campaigns targeting PKK and by cultivating political and economic ties with KRG (EUAA, 2022, p. 44). KDP has permitted Turkey to establish military bases and conduct intelligence operations within KRG-administered territories (Mandiracı, 2022). Leveraging its familiarity with the terrain and PKK tactics, the KDP has provided Turkey with battlefield intelligence (Mandiracı, 2022).

Turkey maintains numerous small bases in Iraq to disrupt PKK communication lines between Iraq, Turkey, and Syria (Lawlor, 2021, p. 27). Its strategic objective is to expel PKK from Sinjār and northern Iraq through airstrikes, special operations, and implementation of the Sinjār agreement. Turkish analysts estimate that, with KRG approval, Turkey stationed between 2,000 and 3,000 soldiers across approximately 40 outposts in northern Iraq during 2021, some located up to 40 kilometers from the Turkish border (Mandiracı, 2022).

Turkish Military Operations

In November 2020, the Turkish Minister of National Defense reported 28 anti-PKK operations. A UN Security Council report cited an Iraqi Security Media Cell statement indicating that a Turkish drone strike in Sidakan, northern Erbil governorate, killed two senior Iraqi army officers and their driver, escalating tensions between Iraq and Turkey. In April 2021, Turkey launched “Claw-Lightning” and “Claw-Thunderbolt” operations against the PKK in the Qindīl mountains. These operations extended into Duhok governorate and Sinjār, displacing local populations and intensifying PKK-Peshmerga clashes (EUAA, 2022, p. 40).

The operational tempo of the conflict reached a new peak in 2021, with more incidents of violence than in any similar period since the collapse of the ceasefire. These incidents included airstrikes, firefights, roadside bombings, and rocket attacks. An average of 209 such incidents were recorded monthly in Turkey and northern Iraq during 2021 (Mandiracı, 2022, p. 5).

In 2021, Turkish airstrikes accounted for the majority of cross-border military operations, with approximately 1,200 strikes conducted in northern Iraq. Despite the high frequency of incidents, the fatality rate was lower compared to earlier years of the conflict, when fighting was concentrated in densely populated areas. Hostilities resulted in an average of 40 deaths per month in 2021, primarily among PKK fighters, compared to 150 deaths per month in 2016 (Mandıracı, 2022, p. 5).

2. Iran

Iran aims to counter Turkish influence and prevent its expansion beyond usual areas within Iraqi Kurdistan. Additionally, Iran seeks to establish a communication corridor with northeastern Syria and to obstruct Iraqi Kurdish dominance over the disputed Sinjār region, which would diminish Iranian political leverage; therefore, Iran has aligned with PKK through proxy relationships. Turkey's objective to expel PKK from Sinjār and promote the implementation of the Sinjār agreement between Baghdād and Erbil threatens Iranian interests. The agreement, if enacted, would remove PKK and its affiliates and allow a KDP member aligned with Turkey to govern the region, thereby reducing Iranian influence.

Consequently, Iran and PKK may attempt to obstruct the implementation of the Sinjār agreement, potentially escalating tensions between Iran and Turkey and contributing to instability in Iraq. Notably, the negotiations for the agreement excluded Iran, its proxies, PKK, and Sinjār residents affiliated with armed groups. Therefore, the agreement's terms—particularly the expulsion of armed groups—are unlikely to be implemented without renewed negotiations that include local stakeholders and secure the consent of at least some armed factions (Lawlor, 2021, p. 29).

IV. Security Incidents and Civilian Casualties

This section presents data on security incidents in Iraq from August 1, 2020, to October 31, 2021. Incidents are categorized by type and distributed by governorate and time period. Civilian casualties resulting from these incidents are similarly classified.

1. Incident Classification by Number

During the specified period, 4,882 security incidents were recorded in Iraq. These included 1,452 battles, 2,911 explosions or remote violence events, and 519 incidents of violence against civilians (EUAA, 2022, p. 53).

The highest number of security incidents occurred in the following governorates: Duhok (1,702), Erbil (664), Diyālā (497), Baghdād (383), Şalāḥ-al-Dīn (284), Nīnawá (281), and Kirkūk (279). Wāsiṭ and Karbalā' recorded the fewest incidents (11 and 10 respectively) (EUAA, 2022, p. 55).

2. Incident Classification by Instrument

Security incidents are further classified by the instruments used, ranked by frequency and distributed across Iraqi governorates.

Table 5-1: Distribution of Explosions and Remote Violence by Governorates/Districts (August 1, 2020 – October 31, 2021).

Governorates								
Duhok	Erbil	Ninawá	Diyálá	Baghdād	Wāsiṭ	Karbalā'	Maysān	Najaf
1,314	457	204	185	176	3	3	10	10
Districts								
al-Imādiyah	Rāwandūz	-	Khānaqīn	-	-	-	-	-
1,136	389	-	88	-	-	-	-	-
Zākhū	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
170	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Table compiled by the researcher based on data from (EUAA, 2022, p. 55).

a. Explosions / Remote Violence

This category encompasses improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artillery fire, and airstrikes. It represents the largest share of incidents, with 2,911 recorded. The governorates with the highest number of such incidents include Duhok, Erbil, Ninawá, Diyálá, and Baghdād. Wāsiṭ and Karbalā' recorded the fewest incidents in this category, as shown in Table 5-1 (EUAA, 2022, p. 55).

As shown in Table 5-1, the highest number of remote violence incidents during the specified period was recorded in al-Imādiyah (Duhok Governorate), followed by Rāwandūz (Erbil Governorate), Khānaqīn (Diyálá Governorate), and Zākhū (Duhok Governorate). Monthly fluctuations were observed, with peak incidents occurring in May 2021 (231 attacks), June 2021 (240 attacks), August 2021 (289 attacks), and September 2021 (282 attacks). The lowest levels were recorded between October 2020 and March 2021, with March 2021 marking the nadir. A resurgence in incidents began in April 202 (EUAA, 2022, p. 55).

b. Battles and Armed Clashes

Battles and armed clashes constituted the second most frequent category of security incidents, with a total of 1,452 recorded events during the reviewed period. The majority occurred in Duhok, Diyálá, Erbil, Kirkūk, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, and Baghdād Governorates. Conversely, the lowest numbers were reported in Najaf, Karbalā', and Wāsiṭ. At the district level, al-Imādiyah (Duhok), Rāwandūz (Erbil), Khānaqīn (Diyálá), and Zākhū (Duhok) recorded the highest frequencies (EUAA, 2022, p. 56), as detailed in Table 5-2.

The highest number of battles occurred in May 2021 (164 incidents), August 2021 (148 incidents), and September 2021 (145 incidents). The lowest number was recorded in January 2020, with 45 incidents. Kirkūk Governorate registered the highest number of battles in a single month (9 in May), while Diyálá Governorate recorded the highest proportion in March 2020 (10 incidents).

A total of 352 tribal clashes were documented, predominantly in Diyálá, Ninawá, al-Baṣrah, Dhī-Qār, and other southern governorates. Additional clashes involved ISIS or unidentified militants against state forces and Popular Mobilization Forces, particularly in Diyálá, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, Kirkūk, al-Anbār, and Bābil.

Table 5-2: Distribution of Battles and Armed Clashes by Governorates/Districts (August 1, 2020 – October 31, 2021).

Governorates								
Duhok	Diyālā	Erbil	Kirkūk	Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	Baghdād	Najaf	Karbalā'	Wāsiṭ
380	219	188	137	125	104	4	3	10
Districts								
al-Imādīyah	Khānaqīn	Rāwandūz	-	-	-	-	-	-
296	88	166	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zākhū	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Table compiled by the researcher based on data from (EUAA, 2022, p. 56).

Armed confrontations between PKK and Turkish forces were concentrated in border areas of Erbil and Duhok (EUAA, 2022, p. 56).

c. Targeted Attacks, Kidnappings, and Killings

During the reviewed period, 519 incidents of targeted attacks, kidnappings, and killings were recorded across Iraq. Baghdād and Diyālā Governorates reported the highest numbers, with 103 and 93 incidents respectively. The most active months for these incidents were November 2020 (44 incidents), May 2021 (49 incidents), and July 2021 (46 incidents). The majority of these events occurred in al-Başrah, al-Kaḥlā', and al-Muqḍādīyah, each reporting 33 incidents (EUAA, 2022, p. 57).

During the reviewed period, ISIS perpetrated 107 targeted attacks against civilians. Diyālā Governorate experienced the highest number of these incidents (33), with Khānaqīn recording the greatest concentration at the sub-governorate level (15) (EUAA, 2022, p. 57).

Across Iraq, a total of 348 targeted attacks were attributed to unidentified armed groups. These included a limited number of kidnappings and assaults on protesters. The governorates most affected were al-Başrah (26), al-Kaḥlā' (24), al-Nāşīrīyah (21), and al-Miqḍādīyah (20) (EUAA, 2022, p. 57).

Additionally, 51 attacks were attributed to unidentified tribal groups, primarily arising from intertribal disputes. The highest numbers were reported in Baghdād (16), al-Başrah and Maysān (11 each), and Dhī-Qār (7) (EUAA, 2022, p. 57).

2. Civilian Casualties

The toll of the aforementioned security incidents amounted to 938 civilian casualties, encompassing both fatalities and injuries, as shown in Table 5-3.

Casualty classification by gender and age, and police affiliation for the same period indicates the deaths of 18 women, 64 children, 222 men, and 15 police officers. At the time of the incidents, Iraqi police were considered civilians due to their law enforcement roles and non-combatant status. These figures are presented in Table 5-4 (EUAA, 2022, p. 58).

Table 5-3: Total Number of Civilian Casualties (August 2020–October 2021).

Period	Number of Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Total Civilian Casualties
2020 (Aug – Dec)	138	82	134	216
2021 (Jan – Oct)	223	237	485	722
Total	361	319	619	938

Source: EUAA, 2022, p. 58.

Table 5-4: Classification of Casualties by Gender, Age, and Police Affiliation (August 2020–October 2021).

Period	Women casualties		Children casualties		Police casualties		Civilian men casualties		Total Civilian Casualties
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded	
2020 (Aug-Dec)	9	11	13	28	3	3	57	92	216
2021 (Jan-Oct)	9	23	51	48	12	15	165	399	722
Aug 2020–Oct 2021	18	34	64	76	15	18	222	491	216

Source: EUAA, 2022, p. 59.

Geographical Distribution of Civilian Casualties

Casualties resulting from the aforementioned incidents were geographically distributed across Iraq. Baghdad reported the highest number of casualties (335; 84 killed), followed by Diyālā (173; 82 killed), Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn (107; 53 killed), and Ninawā (103; 27 killed). Karbalā' and Bābil recorded minimal casualties (one and two respectively), while no casualties were reported in al-Sulaymāniyah, al-Diwāniyah, and Wāsiṭ (EUAA, 2022, p. 60).

Table 5-5: Number of Casualties by Governorate.

Governorate	Number of Incidents Killed Wounded			Number of Incidents Killed Wounded			Number of Incidents Killed Wounded Total Civilian Casualties			
	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Total Civilian Casualties (Killed + Wounded)
al-Anbār	9	6	8	9	13	20	18	19	28	47
Bābil	1	0	1	1	1	.	2	1	1	2
Baghdād	9	12	12	13	72	239	22	84	251	335
al-Baṣrah	2	0	1	12	6	15	14	6	16	22
Diyālā	23	26	35	43	56	56	66	82	91	173
Duhok	45	4	0	36	5	23	81	9	23	34
Erbil	5	0	1	6	1	11	11	1	12	13
Karbalā'	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Kirkūk	19	11	29	28	9	27	47	20	56	76
Maysān	0	0	0	4	5	2	4	5	2	7
al-Muthannā	0	0	0	5	5	4	5	5	4	9

Table 5-5 (continued).

Governorate	Number of Incidents Killed Wounded			Number of Incidents Killed Wounded			Number of Incidents Killed Wounded Total Civilian Casualties			
	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Incidents	Killed	Wounded	Total Civilian Casualties (Killed + Wounded)
Najaf	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	3	1	4
Nīnawá	15	7	29	36	20	47	51	27	76	103
al-Dīwānīyah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Şalāḥ al-Dīn	8	16	18	23	37	36	31	53	54	107
al-Sulaymānīyah	2	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
Dhī-Qār	0	0	0	4	4	3	4	4	3	7
Wāsiṭ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	138	82	134	233	237	485	361	319	619	938

Source: EUAA, 2022, p. 61.

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6.

The Iraqi Society

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I. Introduction

Although human nature exhibits a degree of uniformity in its general traits and structure, this does not preclude the existence of diverse human groups and societies characterized by distinct attributes. Variations in the social structure of human societies are largely shaped by different temporal and spatial conditions, as well as prevailing natural, cultural, and social factors. Consequently, some societies demonstrate significant development and progress across various domains, whereas others experience decline on multiple levels. This latter condition closely reflects the reality of the Iraqi society, which possesses a unique specificity in its social organization and in the nature, trajectory, and extent of its social change. These characteristics contribute to a distinct set of challenges and problems confronting the society.

II. Tribal Conflicts

The events of 2021 reaffirmed the enduring influence of tribal structures on social dynamics in Iraq. Tribal conflicts persist, fueled by unresolved tensions from the recent past that have disrupted social relations, as well as by emergent variables that have significantly impacted the social fabric. Despite the multiplicity and intensification of these conflicts, effective solutions remain elusive, perpetuating a cycle of continuous and multifaceted problems. This situation underscores the assertion that the weakness of the law and the agencies tasked with enforcing it is the decisive factor in the return of pre-state groups to the forefront.

Tribal conflicts in 2021 largely mirrored those of previous years, representing a continuation rather than a departure. Security agencies have identified this continuation, noting that the primary difference lies in the volume and type of weapons possessed by the tribes. Many of these weapons were acquired during the war against ISIS, facilitated by overlapping affiliations between tribal groups and popular armed factions that volunteered to fight ISIS. Additionally, the unregulated arms market has flourished, with minimal oversight from security agencies.

The persistence and escalation of tribal conflicts are attributable to accumulated disputes and the limited capacity of security agencies, which have been

preoccupied with internal and external challenges. Recognizing the gravity of the situation and its implications for social peace, Iraqi security authorities have proposed a draft arms law anticipated to be enacted during the current electoral term. According to a report by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, over 80 tribal conflicts were documented in 2021. The governorates most affected include al-Başrah, Maysān, Baghdād, and Dhī-Qār. These conflicts typically arise from disputes over agricultural land, socio-economic issues, and longstanding vendettas, some of which date back decades (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2021).

The geographical and economic characteristics of al-Başrah governorate have significantly contributed to the intensification and persistence of tribal conflicts within its central and peripheral areas. Despite its wealth in natural resources—particularly oil and water—these assets have played a central role in fueling disputes. Conflicts over property, land, and water remain pivotal, while competition over oil investments has also triggered tribal confrontations. Historical grievances and the unstable security environment further exacerbate the situation.

In Dhī-Qār governorate, the security landscape has been notably fragile and unstable, particularly following the October protests of 2019. Political and tribal conflicts have become intertwined, complicating efforts to restore stability. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive legal reforms and consensus among tribal entities and other influential actors within the governorate's decision-making framework.

From the beginning of 2021 to the time of writing, tribal conflicts have resulted in 32 fatalities. Although the frequency of al-Daggah al-'Ashā'iriyah (tribal raids or threats) has declined following directives from the Supreme Judicial Council, these acts are now classified as terrorist threats under Article 2 of Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2015. The Council emphasized that any threat intended to instill fear among the populace constitutes a terrorist act, thereby subjecting perpetrators of al-Daggah al-'Ashā'iriyah to prosecution under anti-terrorism statutes.⁽¹⁾

Estimates suggest that Iraq ranks second only to Yemen in terms of weapon proliferation among Arab countries, with approximately 7.5 million weapons circulating outside official control. A security expert noted that the Iraqi Ministry of Interior lacks precise data on the number of unregulated weapons due to the absence of comprehensive statistics and ongoing smuggling operations between Iraq and Iran. The expert characterized Iraq's weapons issue as deeply complex, estimating that the number of weapons outside state control may exceed 12 million (Noon Post, 2021).

In this context, the commander of al-Başrah Security Operations acknowledged that tribal conflicts cannot be resolved instantaneously. Some disputes date back

(1) The Supreme Judicial Council has rendered a definitive decision categorizing the al-Daggah al-'Ashā'iriyah as an act of terrorism, under Article 2 of Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2015. This statute stipulates that "a threat that aims to spread terror among people, whatever its motives, is considered a terrorist act." Accordingly, individuals found guilty of engaging in al-Daggah al-'Ashā'iriyah are subject to penalties ranging from life imprisonment to capital punishment. The classification of al-Daggah al-'Ashā'iriyah encompasses not only the use of firearms and hand grenades but also the act of inscribing threats on residential walls.

to 1958, others to 1997, and many originated in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, he reported that security forces successfully resolved 82 tribal conflicts in 2021 and earlier, and that operations in al-Baṣrah have reduced tribal conflicts by up to 85%. It is important to note that prevailing customs in southern Iraq discourage formal legal complaints in cases of tribal conflict, with judicial recourse being pursued only in exceptional circumstances.

According to security sources, extensive campaigns were conducted by security forces in the governorate, resulting in the confiscation of substantial quantities of weapons from tribal groups. These operations were accompanied by awareness initiatives aimed at elucidating the dangers associated with the possession of unlicensed weapons and the legal ramifications of such actions. In Maysān Governorate, tribal conflicts appear to have diminished in intensity; however, disparities in security measures across different areas—attributable to weak security leadership—have perpetuated localized unrest. An official from the governorate stated that certain tribes continue to engage in aggressive actions, including attacks on police stations and the forcible release of detainees (Shafaq News, 2021).

The underlying causes of tribal conflict are multifaceted, and the consequences are both numerous and severe. One of the most detrimental outcomes is the fragmentation of social relations, which impedes social reconstruction and the fulfillment of developmental objectives. Social security and freedom from fear and deprivation can only be achieved through balanced social relations grounded in the rule of law. Although conflict is inherent to human nature, it should not justify the use of violence as a means of resolution. Instead, reason and logic must prevail in the management of disputes. Empirical evidence from various societies underscores that adherence to legal frameworks is the most effective method for resolving conflicts, regardless of their nature or severity. The progress of nations is increasingly measured by the degree to which their citizens uphold the law and by the extent to which governments respect civil liberties and enforce legal norms to regulate social interactions.

In Iraq, tribal affiliations have historically been intertwined with religious doctrine and spiritual authorities, particularly in the southern regions. Consequently, tribes often align with religious directives, and deviation from these directives may be perceived as apostasy. However, tribal responses to religious authority are not uniform, complicating efforts to address tribal conflicts. Therefore, a comprehensive approach—integrating religious, legal, and social dimensions and endorsed by religious authorities and influential social actors—is essential for resolving tribal disputes.

III. Tribalism and Elections

Iraqi society is characterized by a diverse array of influential forces, including religious, political, economic, and tribal entities. The impact and authority of these groups fluctuate in response to social and political dynamics. Historically, tribes have played a pivotal role not only in social affairs but also in political processes,

particularly during periods marked by the absence or weakening of legal institutions. This status was the reason behind the former regime's efforts to leverage tribal support during contentious events, such as the Iran-Iraq War in 1980.

Following the democratic transition in 2003, all social forces, including tribes, were compelled to reconstitute their roles. This period presented tribes with a significant opportunity to engage in the political sphere, primarily through participation in elections. Post-2003 electoral processes—spanning legislative, governorate, and municipal levels—witnessed substantial tribal influence. However, the 2021 elections marked a departure from this trend due to the implementation of a new electoral system that facilitated the success of independent candidates. The diminished tribal influence was evident in the election outcomes, which included over 220 new parliamentary members, 15 of whom were affiliated with independent parties such as *Imtidād* and *Ishrāqat Kānūn*. Additionally, 57 women secured parliamentary seats through direct voter support, independent of the constitutionally mandated gender quota. Tribal backing played a minimal role in these successes.

Has the Link Between the Tribe and Politics Been Severed?

The relationship between tribal structures and political engagement appears to be undergoing a process of disintegration. This trend has been observable over the past year and is likely to persist. The sociopolitical upheavals following the October protests significantly altered Iraq's political and social landscape. These events created internal divisions within tribes, with members expressing divergent views on the demonstrations. While some tribes, particularly in Dhī-Qār Governorate, maintained unified positions, the broader impact of the protests reshaped public attitudes and priorities. Fundamental issues and regional interests are now subject to reevaluation, and the impetus for change has shifted from collective tribal consciousness to civil activism.

The 2021 election results underscore the ascendancy of religious and civil political forces over tribal influence, particularly in the southern and Middle Euphrates regions. The Sadrist Bloc, which secured 73 seats, derived its authority from religious legitimacy rather than tribal affiliation. Independent candidates, who won 41 seats, were propelled by civil society support and diverse political affiliations. Although some parliamentary members retained tribal backing, especially in western Iraq where tribal loyalty remains a potent social force, comprehensive statistics detailing tribal influence are lacking. In light of these developments, it is evident that the tribe—fragmented during the 2019 demonstrations—has recognized the limitations of its political role. Future tribal engagement is likely to be confined to social functions, such as mediating local disputes, and must operate within the parameters of legal frameworks.

IV. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in Iraq remains a phenomenon that burdens concerned individuals and decision-makers in society. While this type of violence is a phenom-

enon with historical extensions deep in Iraqi culture, some of its patterns have appeared new and updated in the Iraqi family. Modern means of communication may have an influential role in this regard, but it is premature to talk about the extent of this role and the nature of its impact on the members of society. The new aspect of domestic violence is the emergent shift in terms of the perpetrators of violence. Domestic violence has expanded spatially and socially, and its practice is no longer limited to fathers and sons by virtue of patriarchal authority or the masculine nature of society. Instead, a dangerous transformation has occurred in the nature of domestic violence. Data from the Family and Child Directorate confirmed that domestic violence in 2021 is an extension of a social reality in which violence has become entrenched as an almost daily practice within the family and outside it.

Data from the Family Protection Directorate indicated that in 2021 there were 27,630 cases of domestic violence monitored throughout Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Region. This data may not fully reflect the reality, as there are dozens, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of forms of domestic violence that are not reported for social, cultural, and even economic reasons.

There is no debate that there is a spatial variation in the distribution of violence cases among governorates, just as there is a spatial variation between rural and urban areas regarding the nature, type, extent, and scope of violence. In fact, some patterns of domestic violence may not be described as such in rural areas and even in some cities. The beating of a child, woman, or girl may fall under religious justifications as a form of discipline or simple punishment to prevent the repetition of an act, based on the principle of private and public deterrence. This means that many incidents of domestic violence that are not reported fall within the cases that are kept silent or are not considered a practice characterized by violence.

According to official statistics issued by the Family Protection Directorate at the Ministry of Interior, the number of cases of a husband's assault on his wife reached 16,007, accounting for more than half of the total registered cases of various patterns of domestic violence. This is not new, given the nature of the relationship between men and women in the family, as this relationship still leans in favor of the man and his authority, which is supposed to be unchallenged at any time or on any occasion. This matter is a given in light of the continued dominance of traditional concepts over the nature of the relationship between men and women in general, and between husband and wife in particular. However, the development that has occurred in this area is the reporting of this violence. Just a few years ago, it was not acceptable for a wife to report an assault by her husband, as that represented a departure from the family's values and concepts, and perhaps a departure from the morals and ethics of society. But various changes on more than one level have played a prominent role in this field, especially the change in the status and position of women in society and their awareness of the type and nature of their rights as stipulated by the laws. This is in addition to the influential role of some newly established security units in the Ministry of Interior,

such as the Family Protection Directorate and the Community Police Directorate, and their contributions to a number of awareness campaigns regarding domestic violence and the necessity of reporting it in order to limit and combat it, given its serious negative repercussions on the family and society.

In addition to the foregoing, another shift has occurred regarding the authority to practice violence in the Iraqi family. We have previously indicated that the husband is the decision-maker in the family and is therefore implicitly authorized to practice violence at any time he wishes and against any member of the family by virtue of the authority granted to him by some erroneous religious interpretations of the process of family organization and controlling the behavior of its members. However, despite this, about 3,294 cases of assault by a wife on her husband appeared during 2021. This number is very large for several reasons. First, these assaults are foreign to the values of society, and even if some cases of assault on the husband occurred previously, they were rare or did not reach the security agencies or those concerned with this type of violence. But for the cases to reach this number in a single year means that there is a flaw in the moral and social system of the families that have experienced this type of violence. The strange thing is the reporting of these incidents to the security agencies. We certainly do not have a complete picture of who contacted the security agencies to report this form of violence (a wife's assault on her husband). It is known that Iraqi society is patriarchal and masculine, and that the man derives his strength from the authority he enjoys within the family and outside it. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a man, or even some of his family members, reporting to the security agencies about a case of assault he suffered at the hands of his wife. Even if this does occur, the cases are few compared to the state of awareness that has begun to take root among people about the need to report cases of domestic violence that threaten the cohesion and unity of the family.

There is another picture of domestic violence in 2021 that is almost frightening and can be described as the coming danger on the level of social relations within the family and society. Many cases of children's assault on their parents have surfaced in family relations, and it appears that these cases have been worsening over time, declaring their defiance of public values and morals in society. Data from the Family Protection Directorate at the Ministry of Interior indicated an increase in the number of these cases in 2021 compared to the previous year. The number of cases for 2021 reached about 3,080, which is almost twice the number of cases of fathers' assault on their children, which was 1,005. There is more than one interpretation for this matter. Initially, we must acknowledge that many cases of fathers' assault on their children are among the phenomena that are kept silent, as they fall within the framework of discipline. It is inconceivable that a society that holds social values and norms and religious standards that grant the father or head of the household authority over the rest of its members would then experience a major shift in this authority such that the children rebel against it without any preliminaries or logical justifications. In other words, the concepts and values of socialization prevent many children from resorting to the

Table 6-1: Numbers of Assaults and Domestic Violence by Degree of Kinship.

Degree of Kinship	Number	Percentage
Husband's assault on wife	16,007	57.9
Wife's assault on husband	3,294	11.9
Assault between brothers and sisters	2,068	7.5
Parents' assault on children	1,005	3.6
Children's assault on parents	3,080	11.1
Other	2,176	7.9
Total	27,630	100.0

Source: Sâlim (n.d.).

security authorities to resolve a conflict between them and their parents, except in cases where the assault is severe and requires the protection of the children by the legal authorities. This reality confirms a truth that many people may overlook, which is that the challenges and difficulties faced by many heads of households have contributed greatly to many cases of assault on children. This description applies to many other cases and forms of domestic violence.

The human being is a collection of human feelings and emotions that are affected to one degree or another according to the individual differences between human beings. Therefore, these feelings and emotions can be affected by several factors, variables, and circumstances, including the pressures of life, which often exert their destructive effect and destroy everything beautiful in the family and outside it. However, this interpretation does not justify the manifestations of aggressive behavior that are sometimes embodied in destructive action on more than one level. Under all circumstances, this increase in cases of children's assault on their parents cannot be accepted. If this type of violence were not reprehensible and unacceptable on more than one level, these cases would not have reached the concerned security authorities.

V. Suicide Incidents

The World Health Organization (WHO) celebrates World Suicide Prevention Day annually on September 10. Despite the importance of this day and its role in raising public awareness about the danger of suicide to the individual and society, according to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, one person loses their life every 40 seconds due to suicide. Other data from WHO on June 17, 2021, indicated that every year, 703,000 people take their own lives. But this is not all, as the number of suicide attempts is much higher. Suicide was classified in 2019 as the fourth leading cause of death for people aged 15-29 globally. In fact, more than 79% of global suicides in 2019 occurred in low- and middle-income countries. Ingestion of pesticides, hanging, and firearms are among the most common methods of suicide worldwide (WHO, 2021).

On the Iraqi level, the Ministry of Interior announced an increase in the number of suicide cases during 2021, and specialized committees were formed to study

Table 6-2: Number of Suicide Cases by Year.

Year	Number of Cases
2016	393
2017	462
2018	530
2019	605
2020	663
2021	772

Source: INA, 2021, December 25.

what it described as a “phenomenon.” According to the ministry’s spokesman in a statement to the Iraqi News Agency, as a result of the increase in suicide rates throughout Iraq, the ministry has taken a number of measures, including the formation of specialized committees to study this phenomenon and to come up with data that shows its causes and its rate compared to neighboring countries. According to a report broadcast by Alhurra channel on December 25, 2021, the spokesman indicated that the number of registered suicide cases in 2021 reached 772, an increase of more than 100 cases from the previous year, which recorded 663. He confirmed that suicide cases have been on the rise since 2016.

It is clear from the data above that there is a gradual upward trend in the number of suicide cases. It appears that the disintegration of social and family relations and the increase in cases of frustration, especially among youth, are influential factors in this regard. This matter calls for concern and caution regarding the future of social life. Despite the relative stability that Iraq experienced in the past year on more than one level, the reality, according to these figures, does not inspire hope. The data related to suicide in 2021 represent a clear quantitative leap compared to previous years, which prompts us to think a great deal about the psychological, social, and environmental conditions that paved the way for suicide, which may be the accumulations of previous years, or perhaps the product of immediate, compelling circumstances that cause an individual to lose their ability to control their emotions in a way that may push them to commit suicide.

The data in Table 3-6 indicate that:

- The age distribution highlights a disproportionate impact on youth, with individuals under 30 accounting for 68.8% of suicide cases. This demographic is critical to social development, making the trend particularly alarming. The suicide rates by age group were limited to only two categories in the Ministry of Interior’s data, and it seems the the focus was on the youth segment.
- There are tangible differences between males and females in suicide rates, but these differences are not large. This description applies to both married and single individuals, as the latter group is more prone to suicide than others because they often suffer from depression, loneliness, and alienation from the self, in addition to a sense of the futility

Table 6-3: Suicide Rates by Social Characteristics (2021).

Category		Percentage
Age Group	Less than 20 years	36.6%
	20-30 years	32.2%
Gender	Males	55.2%
	Females	44.8%
Social Status	Married	40.0%
	Single	55.0%
Educational Level	Below primary	62.2%
	Below intermediate	16.9%
Employment Status	Unemployed	35.0%
	Housewives	29.9%

Source: INA, 2021, December 25.

of continuing to live. There is a missing 5% that was not mentioned or clarified by the Ministry of Interior's spokesman, but we believe this percentage is distributed among other social statuses, such as divorce, widowhood, and even temporary separation from the family.

- The importance of education in developing awareness of social responsibility towards the family, society, and the state is evident. This data indicates the need for education to avoid many social problems. There is no doubt that education is not limited to acquiring knowledge but also helps in building a healthy personality that can contribute to the development process at all its stages. It also contributes to building the human self in a sound way that can benefit the individual and society. However, despite all this, the importance of education remains relative and not absolute, as psychological, social, and economic pressures may push some holders of higher degrees to commit suicide, and this is neither new nor strange to human nature. History confirms that a number of suicides were committed by intellectuals, thinkers, scientists, and community leaders.
- Employment status further illustrates the psychological significance of work. Employment provides not only economic stability but also a sense of purpose and identity. Conversely, lack of meaningful employment or engagement in devalued roles—such as monotonous domestic duties—can contribute to psychological distress. This is particularly relevant for housewives and individuals in high-stress occupations, where the absence of fulfillment may exacerbate suicidal ideation.

Table 6-4 identifies psychological disorders as the leading cause of suicide, followed by psychological pressure. These findings emphasize the need for targeted mental health interventions and support systems. Economic factors such as poverty and unemployment also play a significant role, while emerging causes—including failure to achieve personal goals—reflect evolving social pressures. The interplay of these factors, especially when compounded by unsupportive familial or social environments, can precipitate suicidal behavior.

Table 6-4: Suicide Rates by Motives and Causes (2021).

Motives and Causes	Percentage
Psychological pressure	22.3%
Psychological disorders	34.6%
Poverty	13.0%
Unemployment	9.5%
Frustration and failure to achieve ambitions	13.3%
Academic failure	5.5%
Other miscellaneous causes	1.6%
Total	100%

Source: INA, 2021, December 25.

Certainly, there are other factors that remain influential at all times despite their relativity, such as family disintegration, addiction to alcohol and drugs, in addition to violence and social stigma.

Globally, suicide is often linked to mental health conditions such as depression and substance abuse, particularly in high-income countries. However, many suicides occur impulsively during crises, when individuals face overwhelming stressors such as financial hardship, relationship dissolution, or chronic illness. Additional risk factors include exposure to conflict, violence, abuse, and bereavement, all of which can foster suicidal ideation.

To address this issue, WHO advocates the “LIVE LIFE” approach to suicide prevention, which includes (WHO, 2021):

- Restricting access to means of suicide.
- Collaborating with media to responsibly report on suicide.
- Enhancing social and emotional life skills among adolescents.
- Early identification and management of individuals exhibiting suicidal behaviors.

In light of these recommendations, Iraq should implement a national suicide prevention strategy that promotes public awareness and destigmatizes the issue. Effective prevention requires coordinated efforts across sectors—including health, education, and community organizations—and must be supported by comprehensive social engagement. No single intervention can adequately address the multifaceted nature of suicide; a holistic, interdisciplinary approach is essential (WHO, 2021).

VI. Human Trafficking and Beggary

The United Nations General Assembly has designated July 30 as the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. The United Nations adopted the Blue Heart Campaign logo to symbolize the sorrow of those affected by trafficking. Human trafficking is defined in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring

or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception... for the purpose of exploitation" (UNODC, n.d.). This definition comprises three fundamental elements:

- The act of trafficking: Recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of persons.
- The means of trafficking: Threat or use of force, deception, coercion, or abuse of power.
- The purpose of trafficking: Exploitation.

Human trafficking is a global crime with diverse manifestations, comparable to drug and arms trafficking, and is inherently transnational. Statistical data illustrate its prevalence and patterns:

- In 2018, 5,000 victims were identified across 148 countries. Of these, 50% were exploited sexually and 38% for forced labor.
- Females accounted for 65% of victims, including 46% women and 19% girls. Children comprised one-third of all victims.
- Over the past fifteen years, the proportion of child victims has tripled, and the number of boys trafficked has increased fivefold.

Brigadier General Ghālib al-Aṭīyah, Director of the Community Police Directorate in the Ministry of Interior, reported a continuous rise in human trafficking, posing a threat to national security. Investigations revealed exploitation in beggary, organ trafficking, prostitution, massage parlors, and cafes (al-Jazeera Net, 2021). al-Ṣabāḥ newspaper cited the director of al-Maṣīr human rights organization, noting 300 cases of trafficking in Iraq during 2021, affecting all demographics. A notable increase in female involvement, particularly in trafficking girls and organs, was observed. Iraq classifies organ sales, sexual exploitation, beggary, and forced labor as forms of human trafficking (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2022).

In February 2021, Kirkūk police arrested an individual for exploiting his orphaned sister's children for beggary and theft. He confessed to using physical abuse to coerce them. He was sentenced under Article 405/31 (Premeditated murder and the attempt thereof), which aligns with Iraqi law's definition of human trafficking.

The gravity of human trafficking is reflected in its geographic spread, increasing incidence, and the types of perpetrators. In 2021, anti-trafficking units arrested several gangs, including one comprising 18 individuals, indicating organized operations with internal and external networks.

According to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, the most prevalent trafficking crimes in the latter half of 2021 included organ sales (11 cases) and child trafficking (19 cases). Men committed 22 crimes, women 9 (6 involving persons, 3 involving organs), and 3 were joint offenses. Crimes were concentrated in Baghdād, followed by Wāsiṭ (4 cases), and Diyālā, al-Baṣrah, and Mosul (1 case each). Legal

proceedings were based on Articles 5⁽¹⁾ and 6⁽²⁾ of the Anti-Human Trafficking Law and Article 17⁽³⁾ of the Penal Code.⁽⁴⁾

Iraq's socio-political challenges have created conditions conducive to trafficking. Security agencies, preoccupied with broader crises and underfunded, lack the capacity to address this issue effectively. Nonetheless, the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons—a collaboration among the United Nations, European Union, and International Organization for Migration—offers a framework for coordinated response involving criminal justice, human rights, and development sectors. Vulnerable populations, including irregular migrants and refugees, are particularly susceptible to trafficking (UNHCR, n.d.).

Human trafficking constitutes a severe violation of human dignity. Interpol identifies several forms of trafficking (Interpol, n.d.):

- Forced labor.
- Forced criminal activities (e.g., theft, beggary, drug trafficking).
- Sexual exploitation.
- Organ trafficking.
- Migrant smuggling.

In Iraq, forced beggary, sexual exploitation, and migrant smuggling are especially prevalent. The weakened security apparatus, ongoing conflict with ISIS remnants, and political instability exacerbate the issue.

Iraq enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Law No. 28 of 2012, which mandates victim assistance under Article 11. Compensation is governed by the Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Civil Code, and related laws. However, revisions are needed to strengthen preventive measures and penalties to enhance deterrence.

Organized crime yields substantial profits, often surpassing legitimate trade. International reports warn of escalating trafficking in Iraq. The US Department of State's 2018 report placed Iraq in Tier 2 for monitoring, urging accountability and threatening sanctions absent substantive reforms.

Although not yet a widespread phenomenon, trafficking incidents in 2021 suggest Iraq is approaching a critical threshold. Cultural norms surrounding honor contribute to underreporting, even in cases involving sexual assault or organ theft. Families may conceal crimes to protect reputations, and perpetrators often wield influence over law enforcement and judicial processes.

(1) The provisions of Article (5) of the Anti-Human Trafficking Law punish with temporary imprisonment and a financial fine.

(2) Article (6) of the Anti-Human Trafficking Law imposed a penalty of life imprisonment and a financial fine of not less than fifteen million Iraqi dinars on the perpetrators of the crime, and the penalty may reach execution in the event of the victim's death.

(3) This article evaluates the legally appropriate penalty in light of the incident and its attendant circumstances.

(4) The data was compiled through a personal effort by collecting all the news related to human trafficking during 2021, as mentioned on the official website of the Ministry of Interior.

Beggary, similarly, has evolved into a structured enterprise. Emotional and religious responses from the public perpetuate the practice. Organized groups, including mafias, exploit infants and young girls for beggary, particularly in Baghdād. Despite legal prohibitions, enforcement remains inconsistent.

In 2021, Kirkūk police conducted campaigns resulting in the arrest of 17 and later 60 beggars, many of whom were capable of employment. Authorities also targeted individuals from outside the governorate. In Baghdād, the community police department rescued a child from violence and being forced to beg by his father and his wife after a plea about the case was received on social media. The father and his wife were warned of the consequences of continuing their act through a pledge to care for the child and not to abuse him or force him to beg. The detachments of the Residency Affairs Department in the Directorate of Civil Status, Passports, and Residency also arrested a foreigner who is considered one of the main promoters of beggary by bringing beggars to the country through social media. The detachments of this department also arrested 45 violators of the conditions and regulations of residency in al-Battāwīn and al-Bayyā' areas of Baghdād, some of whom practiced beggary. Meanwhile, the detachments of Baghdād police affiliated with the Ministry's Agency for Police Affairs arrested 14 beggars within Baghdād governorate.⁽¹⁾

According to unofficial data, the number of child beggars reached nearly 200,000 in 2021, in addition to a similar number of elderly men and women. In this regard, the spokesman for the Ministry of Interior said in an interview with al-Madā, "We have an indication that some organized crime gangs are exploiting this issue towards children and the elderly for the purpose of beggary." He stressed that "combating beggary is not only related to the Ministry of Interior, but there is also a role for society." According to this spokesman, the Ministry of Interior has classified beggary into types: Category 1: the needy who do not have their daily sustenance and for whom the social welfare benefits are not sufficient; Category 2: individuals who are sponsored by people who exploit them for beggary; Category 3: foreigners of different nationalities who are arrested and deported to their countries. The Residency Affairs Department announced in late November 2021 the arrest of 700 Asian beggars and their deportation (Al-Madā, 2021).

It seems in general that Iraq needs to review all its security and awareness plans in order to limit the spread of the phenomenon of beggary, which has begun to expand spatially in more than one governorate and among different social strata, especially among young boys and girls who will in the future become exposed to deviance on more than one level. In addition to that, the exacerbation of the crime of human trafficking should be addressed by working to contain its sources, motives, and the factors influencing its emergence and spread.

(1) Article 1/390 of the amended Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 stipulates: "Whoever has completed the eighteenth year of age and has a legitimate resource to live on, or is able to obtain this resource through his work, and is found beggary on a public road or in public places, or enters a house or an attached establishment without permission for the purpose of beggary, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding one month. The penalty shall be imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months if the beggar fakes an injury or disability or is persistent in beggary."

VII. Evaluating the Government's Plan to Resolve the Displacement Crisis

The 2021 data concerning displaced, returning, and currently displaced families, as published by the Ministry of Migration and Displacement, reveal a significant disparity in the number of returnees. al-Anbār Governorate is identified as one of the regions with the highest proportion of returning families, with a return rate of 84%. This trend may be attributed to the governorate's stable security conditions, extensive and rapid reconstruction efforts, and the scope and quality of services provided to residents (DTM, n.d.).

Conversely, the data pertaining to displaced populations from other governorates suggest that continued displacement may reflect a voluntary decision among families from Nīnawá and Šalāḥ-al-Dīn. Many of these families appear to have adapted to their new environments, perceiving a return to their original locations as potentially hazardous. For some, the prospect of returning entails considerable risk, particularly when their current living conditions are relatively stable or prosperous. These families may be reluctant to abandon the social and economic investments made in their host communities.

Beyond these considerations, certain factors influencing delayed return may remain undisclosed or insufficiently publicized. Political and economic dynamics are likely contributing to the protracted displacement. Allegations have been directed at the Kurdistan Region, suggesting a lack of commitment to resolving the displacement issue. The displacement file is perceived as a strategic instrument exerting pressure on the central government, international actors, and organizations concerned with migration and displacement, thereby facilitating multifaceted gains. These include material benefits derived from the continued operation of displacement camps. According to the displacement map released by the Ministry of Migration and Displacement on December 1, 2021, there were 28 remaining camps for displaced families, distributed across four governorates: Erbil (6 camps), Duhok (16), al-Sulaymānīyah (4), and Nīnawá (3 camps). Notably, Duhok hosts the largest number of displaced families, totaling 26,432 (DTM, n.d.).

An investigative report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the conditions of displaced and returning Iraqi families in unofficial displacement sites indicated that, as of July 2021, approximately 418 unofficial sites existed across Iraq, accommodating 13,533 families. Of these, 389 sites housed displaced families, while 31 sites were occupied by returnees. The report highlighted that Duhok Governorate contained the highest number of unofficial displacement sites, accounting for 38% (160 sites), followed by Nīnawá Governorate with 18% (76 sites) (Sawt al-Iraq, 2021). The Ministry of Migration and Displacement has highlighted a critical issue: a significant number of families have refrained from registering their return due to concerns about losing humanitarian assistance or having their residency permits in the Kurdistan Region revoked.

Regarding the evaluation of governmental strategies addressing displaced persons and migrants, Iraq entered into a Joint Cooperation Framework agree-

ment with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in early September 2021. This agreement comprises five strategic pillars: social cohesion, economic development, government services, environmental protection, and the resolution of displacement issues. The inclusion of displacement within this framework underscores its importance. Consequently, donor consultations are planned to formulate a strategy for the closure of all displacement camps, beginning with those in the Kurdistan Region following the return of displaced individuals (INA, 2021, September 5).

Previously, on March 18, 2021, the Council of Ministers had approved a plan to facilitate the return of displaced persons to their original, liberated areas. This plan encompasses executive programs and activities aimed at supporting returnees, including infrastructure development, security measures, political and national reconciliation initiatives, and programs promoting stability, rehabilitation, and sustainable community development. According to the Ministry of Planning, the national strategy to resolve the issue of displacement is a governmental priority, requiring an estimated 34 trillion Iraqi dinars for full implementation. This financial requirement necessitates convening an international donor conference. The Minister of Planning emphasized the need to establish a dedicated fund to finance voluntary return projects and address associated challenges. An initial allocation of 25 billion Iraqi dinars has been made to this fund, which is managed by the Ministry of Planning. Project implementation under the national plan will adhere to spatial and sectoral criteria, with the fund overseeing all related procedures (Iraqi News Agency, 2021, August 5).

Although the national plan to facilitate the return of displaced persons is prioritized within governmental programs, its implementation faces substantial challenges. Political tensions continue to impede reform efforts, and allegations persist that certain political actors benefit from the ongoing displacement crisis. A major concern is the capacity of both central and local governments to execute a multifaceted plan addressing security, economic, and social dimensions. The social fragmentation resulting from the occupation of certain areas by ISIS has exacerbated these challenges. Tensions related to revenge and retribution may hinder reintegration efforts. National reconciliation, a cornerstone of the return strategy, may necessitate significant social concessions and efforts, particularly regarding the reintegration of families perceived to have collaborated with ISIS. Given the extensive human, material, and moral losses endured by many displaced individuals, achieving social acceptance remains a formidable obstacle.

Security concerns also persist and may delay the implementation of return programs. The continued presence of ISIS elements, who often remain undetected within communities, undermines state authority and complicates reform efforts. Addressing this issue requires precise identification of such elements. Additionally, economic factors play a critical role, as displacement-affected areas require comprehensive rehabilitation, and many displaced individuals need employment opportunities to replace livelihoods lost during the ISIS occupation.

Table 6-5 :Number of Camps and Their Structures by Governorate (2021).

Governorate	Detail	Number
Erbil	camps	6
	tents	8,211
	Caravans	994
	Structures	800
	families	7,399
Duhok	camps	16
	tents	30,969
	Caravans	6,534
	families	26,432
al-Sulaymānīyah	camps	4
	tents	4,453
	Caravans	1,000
	families	2,423
Nīnawá	camps	2
	tents	6,800
	families	1,261

Source: DTM, n.d.

As of December 23, 2021, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement reported the number of displaced families residing in camps. The ministry confirmed that, apart from the al-Jad'ah camp in Nīnawá, all camps outside the Kurdistan Region had been closed. Table 6-5 presents data on the number of camps, tents, caravans, and families by governorate.

According to the Deputy Minister of Migration and Displacement, approximately 37,000 families remain displaced, primarily from Nīnawá and Şalāḥ al-Dīn governorates. Among them, 27,000 families originate from Sinjār district and adjacent areas in Nīnawá. The Deputy Minister cautioned that certain entities exploit the displacement crisis for political and economic gain and emphasized the necessity of resolving logistical barriers to facilitate the return of displaced populations.

Despite the Iraqi government's tangible efforts to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the displacement crisis persists, notwithstanding official promises to resolve the issue by October 2021. The government's inability to fully honor its commitments is attributed to the protracted procedures involved in repatriating IDPs to their original regions and cities. As of the reporting period, over one million Iraqis remain displaced internally, despite the cessation of hostilities with ISIS and the restoration of governmental control over affected areas nearly five years prior. Moreover, instances of reverse migration have been documented, wherein individuals return from rehabilitated areas to displacement camps. This phenomenon was highlighted by the Director of the Migration Department in al-Sulaymānīyah Governorate, who reported movements from

Table 6-6: Numbers of Displaced and Returnees by Areas of Displacement (2021).

Governorate	Number of Displaced	Number of Returnees
Duhok	513,249	762
Nīnawá	34,256	496,922
Erbil	638,231	43,260
Kirkūk	58,290	886,350
al-Sulaymānīyah	237,140	0
Şalāh-al-Dīn	57,858	820,731
Diyālá	96,343	310,239
al-Anbār	31,235	466,541
Baghdād	61,026	90,291
Bābil	93,816	0
Wāsiṭ	5,124	0
Karbalā'	35,811	0
al-Dīwānīyah	5,163	0
Maysān	9,741	0
Dhī-Qār	2,223	0
Najaf	789	0
al-Muthanná	900	0
al-Başrah	6,165	0

Source: DTM, n.d.

Şalāh-al-Dīn Governorate back to camps in al-Sulaymānīyah. These returns are primarily driven by unresolved tribal conflicts involving displaced families and surrounding tribes, notably the al-Khazraj and Āl-Bū-Ḥashmah, which governmental interventions—including those by security, administrative, and religious authorities—have failed to resolve. Even financial settlements have proven insufficient, resulting in renewed displacement (INA, 2021, December 23).

It is important to note that the number of displaced individuals residing outside formal camps in the Kurdistan Region exceeds those within. These individuals often live independently or in substandard housing, relying on support from humanitarian organizations and charitable entities. The following statistics provide a detailed overview of displacement and returnee figures:

- Number of Displaced Persons: 1,189,581.
- Governorates of Displaced Persons: 18.
- Districts of Displaced Persons: 105.
- Areas of Displaced Persons: 2,842.
- Returnees: 4,939,074 individuals.
- Governorates of Returnees: 8.
- Districts of Returnees: 38.
- Areas of Returnees: 2,171.

VIII. The Crisis of Iraqi Refugees on the Belarusian Border

International Migrants Day, observed annually on December 18, serves as a platform for reporting migration trends. On this occasion, the Summit Foundation for Refugee and Displaced Affairs reported that 53,000 Iraqis migrated and sought asylum in European countries during the year. The report emphasized that migration is unlikely to abate due to persistent security concerns and limited employment opportunities. Between 2015 and 2020, the cumulative number of Iraqi migrants reached 622,671, with 280 fatalities and 173 individuals reported missing.

Despite substantial efforts by international migration organizations and assurances from the European Commission regarding progress in addressing the Iraqi migrant crisis, the situation remains relatively complex due to numerous challenges hindering the development of effective solutions.

Misleading assurances from certain European nations regarding the provision of opportunities for migrants significantly influenced the decision of many Iraqis to migrate via Belarus. These individuals were misled on multiple fronts. The prevailing instability in Iraq appears to be a decisive factor, as many citizens pursue migration in search of safety and improved living conditions—a right enshrined in international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and affirmed by national constitutions globally.

The Iraqi government's response to the Belarus migration crisis in 2021 was largely commendable. Measures included the suspension of flights to Belarus to deter illegal migration and diplomatic engagement with relevant stakeholders to identify viable solutions. Iraqi migrants faced severe hardships during their journeys, including exposure to extreme cold, hunger, and inhumane treatment.

On August 19, 2021, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights reiterated its reliance on host countries to fulfill their humanitarian obligations. Concurrently, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement emphasized the importance of preventing exploitation and upholding the principle of voluntary repatriation. Nonetheless, for many migrants, returning to Iraq may not be a viable option due to the sacrifices made and the stigma associated with perceived failure following such arduous experiences (DW, 2021).

IX. Developments in Civil Society

Contemporary societies are increasingly characterized by the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in diverse humanitarian activities. These organizations emerge in response to the multifaceted needs of social work across various domains. The modern state, constrained by its capacity, cannot address all social challenges independently. Instead, it functions as an enabling entity, fostering collaboration with diverse social groups to promote

security and well-being. This collaborative approach is a cornerstone of good governance and is increasingly influencing governmental practices worldwide.

Accordingly, it is imperative for governments to adopt a partnership model with humanitarian-oriented NGOs that address social and state-level concerns. Despite the potential of civil society to contribute meaningfully across multiple dimensions, its operations are often restricted by stringent regulations imposed by authoritarian regimes that resist participatory governance. This characterization was particularly relevant to Iraq under the former regime, where civil society activities were subordinated to state control, limiting their effectiveness prior to 2003.

Post-2003, civil society in Iraq experienced relative autonomy, leading to the emergence of numerous NGOs across various sectors. These organizations primarily adopted a service-oriented approach, reflecting the socio-political conditions that facilitated their formation.

The aspiration of the Iraqi civil society has been to operate within a framework of acceptable freedom, enabling contributions to social security and prosperity. Following 2003, this aspiration materialized to some extent, culminating in the establishment of the Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations. This entity oversees the regulation of NGO activities, albeit with ongoing challenges.

The Directorate, operating under the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, has issued 2,844 registration certificates pursuant to Law No. 12 of 2010. These certificates serve as legal authorizations for NGOs to implement programs, deliver services that promote voluntary work, facilitate partnerships with public authorities, and enhance the social role of NGOs.

The Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations released statistical data concerning the completion rates of applications submitted by organizations operating in Iraq during the year 2021. These statistics were illustrated in an infographic titled "Access Letter System for Non-Governmental Organizations (ACLET)," which presented the following data:

- Requests Received: 2,452.
- Requests Submitted: 2,452.
- Percentage of Completed Requests: 100%.
- Work Accomplished by Type of NGO: Health services ranked highest, followed by economic development, education, and several social services.
- Number of Foreign Experts: 11,873.
- Number of Iraqi Experts: 59,608.
- Number of Governorates Covered: 16
- Number of Vehicles Utilized: 18,146.
- Number of Beneficiary Organizations: 92
- Average Time to Issue a Letter: 30 hours and 10 minutes

The nature of the work conducted by these organizations is of particular significance. Health services constituted the largest category, with 661 projects, underscoring the heightened demand for healthcare following the COVID-19 pandemic and the persistence of pediatric diseases. Economic development and education followed with 651 and 634 projects, respectively, highlighting systemic deficiencies in these sectors and the critical role of non-governmental organizations in addressing them. Psychological support ranked fourth with 521 projects, emphasizing its growing importance in societies grappling with bullying, violence, and social maladjustment. This category notably served abused women, children, elderly men, and other vulnerable populations.

Child protection services accounted for 461 projects, reflecting ongoing social needs despite legislative efforts such as the proposed Child Protection Law in 2021. Mine clearance operations in conflict-affected areas comprised 446 projects, while logistical support and environmental protection activities numbered 379 and 376, respectively. Although some stakeholders prioritize poverty and unemployment over environmental concerns, the interdependence of environmental sustainability and social well-being necessitates its inclusion in organizational agendas.

Efforts to combat violence against women included 337 projects, a figure deemed acceptable given the governmental focus on gender issues. Agricultural development initiatives totaled 287 projects, indicating a strategic expansion into rural areas, which continue to face marginalization and multifaceted challenges.

Peacebuilding initiatives, essential in conflict-prone societies, were represented by 273 projects. Additional activities included the provision of camps, food, land, and services for persons with disabilities, as well as electricity and communication infrastructure.

Despite operational challenges in 2021, including financial constraints exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations endeavored to maintain service delivery. al-'Ayn Foundation exemplified this resilience, continuing its support for orphans and earning recognition as the leading civil society organization among 740 participants in relief operations. It received the Directorate's special creativity shield. In January 2021, al-'Ayn Foundation reported via Twitter that it had disbursed 497,450,860,000 IQD to orphans over 15 years, sponsoring more than 118,000 individuals, with 63,649 still under its care.

The Iraqi Home Foundation for Creativity also sustained its support for orphaned and vulnerable children and progressed toward launching the "Iraqi Child Foundation," a comprehensive care initiative scheduled for inauguration in late 2021.

Beyond service provision, several organizations engaged in civic education, notably promoting electoral participation. While some supported specific candidates, others maintained impartiality, prioritizing public interest.

The current landscape of non-governmental organizations in Iraq reflects notable progress compared to previous years. Nonetheless, the existence of unlicensed organizations poses long-term risks. Government authorization remains essential for operational legitimacy and protection, as evidenced by past incidents involving licensed entities.

The indispensable role of civil society necessitates collective efforts to safeguard these organizations and streamline licensing procedures through the Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations, particularly for entities facing administrative, financial, and social barriers.

X. Agenda for the New Year 2022

1. Challenges Anticipated in the Coming Year

The extrapolation of social realities within contemporary societies necessitates reliance on a set of premises, data, and informational resources that elucidate the nature and trajectories of prevailing social issues. In the context of Iraq, acquiring reliable data from official sources remains a formidable and often arduous endeavor. Consequently, researchers frequently resort to unofficial sources, a practice that entails significant scientific and ethical risks. Inaccurate data can distort empirical realities, thereby undermining the foundational integrity of scholarly inquiry. In contrast, developed nations typically provide extensive access to data across various domains, a factor that has contributed substantially to their advancements in human development.

Although some may perceive the issue of data availability as secondary to Iraq's broader social challenges, the lack of transparency regarding the scope and nature of these problems constitutes a fundamental impediment to effective intervention. Addressing the multifaceted crises confronting Iraqi society necessitates a comprehensive understanding of their dimensions, typologies, and future trajectories. In the absence of robust statistical data, analyses are often reduced to subjective interpretations or anecdotal evidence.

From this perspective, our future vision of social problems will be based on a qualitative, subjective perception more than a quantitative one, and on a sociological orientation that is not very concerned with other problems, despite our awareness that Iraq's problems are complex and interconnected. However, cognitive limits impose on us the commitment to the social dimension of the problem or phenomenon under study or research.

Among the social phenomena projected to persist in the upcoming year are:

- **Domestic Violence:** This issue is expected to continue along its established patterns, exacerbated by adverse social conditions affecting all demographic groups. Without substantive reform of social structures, a reduction in domestic violence rates remains unlikely. This phenomenon is intricately linked to unemployment, substance abuse, the influence of social media, and deficiencies in education and awareness. The

persistence of domestic violence correlates with rising divorce rates, which are influenced by a constellation of factors including emotional estrangement and informal marital separations. These issues often remain unaddressed due to prevailing cultural norms that discourage open discourse.

- **Unemployment:** As a pervasive social issue, unemployment will exert considerable pressure on the incoming government. The scarcity of employment opportunities and the limited role of the private sector in job creation and economic production compound the challenge. Unemployment is interconnected with other social problems and poses significant threats to social stability and security.
- **Substance Abuse:** The proliferation of drug use continues to expand geographically, with escalating repercussions for families and communities. Governmental responses remain inadequate, primarily confined to medical and law enforcement interventions, with minimal engagement from social and psychological services. The drug crisis is increasingly linked to suicide, particularly among youth, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that certain substances may impair volition and precipitate suicidal behavior. The persistence of social frustration further complicates this issue.
- **Beggary:** This phenomenon is anticipated to intensify due to insufficient enforcement by security authorities and the influx of non-Iraqi individuals entering the country illegally. The final quarter of 2021 witnessed a marked increase in beggary, particularly among women and girls in urban markets and intersections, as well as around religious and health-care institutions in Baghdād and other governorates.
- **Other Social Issues:** Tribal conflicts and the challenges associated with displacement and migration are expected to persist, albeit with potential reductions in severity contingent upon the new government's commitment to gradual resolution.

2. Tasks of the Coming Year

The contemporary discourse on the primacy of duties over rights has lost traction within the context of the modern state. Rights are now recognized as obligatory commitments that states must uphold, particularly in light of international treaties, national constitutions, and local legislation. Accordingly, the modern state is bound by a social contract that mandates the provision of lawful freedoms to its citizens. This framework underpins the tasks anticipated for the incoming Iraqi government.

The challenges confronting the new administration are multifaceted, encompassing security threats from residual ISIS elements, as well as economic, social, health, and environmental concerns. Prioritization is essential in addressing these issues, with certain tasks necessitating precedence.

Despite the passage of half the timeline for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Iraq has yet to demonstrate substantive progress across the seventeen objectives. The first goal—eradication of poverty—remains elusive amid rising poverty rates and regional disparities. Data from the Ministry of Planning indicate that over 30% of the population lives in poverty, with significant variation across governorates. These disparities suggest deficiencies in both strategic planning and implementation. Corruption is a principal barrier to poverty alleviation and undermines the state's protective and productive capacities. Thus, combating corruption is imperative for poverty reduction.

Other SDGs, while important, may be deprioritized given Iraq's current circumstances. The following goals are deemed critical for immediate governmental attention:

- **Goal 5. Gender Equality:** Addressing gender-based discrimination is essential to resolving associated social issues and ensuring the rights of women and girls.
- **Goal 6. Water and Sanitation:** Water scarcity in several governorates has precipitated tribal and regional conflicts. Additionally, inadequate sewage infrastructure poses significant public health and environmental risks in many residential areas.

These goals should be central to governmental planning and development initiatives aimed at enhancing individual contributions to national progress.

3. Strategies for Addressing Challenges and Entitlements

Effective problem-solving requires appropriate tools, sources of authority, and a genuine commitment to change. If the new Iraqi government is constituted on professional, pragmatic, and scientific principles, many challenges may be effectively addressed.

Resolving the triad of poverty, unemployment, and corruption necessitates strong political will and collective action. Anti-corruption efforts should include stringent judicial and executive measures, transparency in addressing suspicious activities, and the prosecution of offenders under applicable legal frameworks. The confiscation of assets acquired through corrupt practices is vital for restoring public trust and financing anti-poverty and employment programs.

Creating employment opportunities, particularly for youth, requires targeted governmental investment and active participation from the private sector. Supporting small enterprises through the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs can contribute to mitigating unemployment and poverty.

To address domestic violence, the enactment of relevant legislation is urgently needed. Religious, educational, and media institutions should be mobilized to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of domestic violence. The community police should explore socially acceptable alternatives for sheltering victims.

Combating drug-related issues necessitates legislative reforms that impose stricter penalties for trafficking. Empirical evidence supports the principle of general deterrence in crime prevention. While rehabilitative approaches may be suitable for certain individual offenses, drug trafficking constitutes organized crime and requires a punitive legal response. The judiciary must adopt a legal philosophy that reflects the gravity of such offenses.

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7.

Human Rights

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I. Introduction

Numerous challenges impede the advancement of human rights at both local and international levels, among which the politicization of international reports is particularly significant. Consequently, this study addresses a complex issue that necessitates a balanced and methodical approach to navigate the extensive array of official reports, shadow reports, publications by international and local organizations, scholarly articles, and digital content addressing human rights. To manage this complexity, the study adopts a clear objective: to examine the status of human rights in Iraq during the year 2021. To achieve this aim, the following research questions are posed:

- What is the current state of human rights in Iraq, and to what extent were these rights violated in 2021?
- Are there credible sources reporting on human rights in Iraq, and what are the sources of these reports?
- Has the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights fulfilled its mandate in monitoring human rights violations, and what mechanisms has it employed to address such violations?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the human rights situation and levels of violence in Iraq?
- How did the Tishrīn youth uprising impact the human rights landscape during this period?
- What are the primary weaknesses in the protection of human rights in Iraq, and what were the most egregious violations recorded in 2021?

To address these questions and fulfill the study's objective, the analysis is structured around the most vulnerable population groups and the most salient and deficient human rights issues observed during the year.

II. Rights of Persons with Disabilities

A critical dimension of the human rights discourse involves the rights of persons with disabilities. The population of individuals with disabilities in Iraq has

Table 7-1: Distribution of Persons with Disabilities within Their Families According to Housing and Living Standard Variables.

Indicator	Number	Percentage
Families with disabled members	1,178,811	-
Families with disabled members in urban areas	875,324	74.3
Families with disabled members in rural areas	303,487	25.7
Families with disabled members headed by a man	1,029,232	8.7
Families with disabled members headed by a woman	149,579	12.7
Families with disabled members with a poor living standard	621,254	52.7
Families with disabled members with an average living standard	501,959	42.6
Families with disabled members with a good living standard	53,639	4.6
Families with disabled members with a very good living standard	1,959	0.2

Source: CSO, 2018.

been increasing due to various factors, including congenital conditions, illnesses, and traffic accidents. However, the most significant contributors in Iraq are the prolonged periods of armed conflict and violence, which have resulted in tens of thousands of injuries and disabilities over the past four decades. The most recent of these was the military campaign to liberate several governorates from the terrorist organization ISIS, culminating in the recapture of Mosul in 2017.

The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR) has reported that individuals with disabilities face systemic discrimination and numerous barriers that hinder their equal participation in society. These barriers include restricted access to education, employment, independent living, mobility, voting rights, cultural and sports participation, social protection, judicial services, healthcare, and legal autonomy in matters such as property transactions. Yusrá Rajab, a member of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee during the 2018–2021 session, stated that the number of persons with disabilities in Iraq reached 4 million under the federal government and 108,000 in the Kurdistan Region. She also highlighted the lack of effective coordination between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal government in supporting this demographic (NNC Iraq, 2021).

Data from the central Statistical Organization (CSO) of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning present figures that differ from those reported by parliamentary sources. The following tables provide a detailed breakdown of the distribution of persons with disabilities across 13 Iraqi governorates, based on a 2016 survey.⁽¹⁾

(1) This is the most recent survey concerning persons with disabilities in Iraq, and it was conducted by the Central Organization for Statistics (CSO), which publishes reports in accordance with its designated responsibilities and strategic vision. This institution produces annual reports detailing the demographic

Table 7-2: Distribution of Persons with Disabilities According to Selected Variables.

	Indicator	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	male	776,721	57.2
	female	580,342	42.8
Living Environment	in urban areas	1,008,967	74.3
	in rural areas	348,096	25.7
Head of Household	male	274,822	86.1
	female	44,455	13.9
Type of Disability	visual impairment	251,313	14.8
	hearing impairment	156,959	9.2
	mobility impairment	720,567	42.4
	cognitive/comprehension impairment	356,283	21
	communication impairment	115,001	6.8
	self-care impairment	97,962	5.8
Age	under 15 years old	376,127	27.7
	15 - 64 years	891,603	65.7
	65 years and over	89,333	6.6
	12 years and over	1,045,715	77.1
Marital Status	single	620,176	59.3
	married	355,293	34
	divorced	11,242	1.1
	widowed	55,250	5.3
	separated	3,754	0.4
Work and Unemployment	working for a wage	97,789	8.8
	have previously worked	15,133	1.4
	have never worked	26,196	2.3
	not working and not looking for work	977,658	87.5

These findings underscore the necessity of addressing the rights of persons with disabilities, who may be considered living victims of systemic neglect. A primary challenge is the absence of accurate demographic data, as Iraq has not conducted a comprehensive population census since 1997. This limitation undermines the reliability of sample surveys. Furthermore, it is necessary to reference international legal frameworks, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is an international human rights convention of the United Nations aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of these individuals. It obliges the signatory parties to promote, protect, and ensure the full rights of persons with disabilities and to guarantee their enjoyment of full equality under the law.

Experts argue that the convention not only establishes rights for persons with disabilities as a distinct group but also advances principles and provisions that

realities, alongside other reports that may span intervals of up to ten years. A pertinent example is the I-WISH report, with its inaugural edition released in 2011 and a subsequent report published in 2021.

benefit humanity as a whole by addressing exclusion and discrimination. Similar to the Sustainable Development Goals, it emphasizes that prioritizing those who have been historically excluded is fundamental to achieving inclusive participation for all. Iraq ratified this convention and its optional protocol in 2013. Consequently, it is presumed that persons with disabilities in Iraq have acquired the following rights in accordance with this convention and relevant Iraqi legislation enacted before and after its adoption:

- **Right to litigation:** Persons with disabilities are entitled to fair judicial treatment and protection from discrimination. Iraqi law affirms equality before the law for all citizens and guarantees legal protection. Courts receive persons with disabilities on equal terms with others, and judges consider their health conditions in cases involving detention or imprisonment when necessary.
- **Protection from violence:** The government has enacted laws and penalties to safeguard persons with disabilities from harm, including physical abuse, deprivation of food, or confinement in isolation.
- **Preservation of personal and health safety:** Medical procedures or experiments require the informed consent of the individual if they possess full capacity. If the individual lacks capacity, consent must be obtained from relatives or legal guardians.
- **Social integration:** Iraqi law ensures that persons with special needs live with dignity within society by providing training for their families on appropriate care and facilitating their integration.
- **Right to education:** The Iraqi constitution guarantees the right to education for persons with special needs, including the development of specialized curricula tailored to their abilities. Dedicated seats are allocated for persons with disabilities in postgraduate studies. Additionally, schools have been established to support students with high abilities, alongside departments catering to students with low abilities.
- **Right to work:** Legislation guarantees the right to employment and vocational training suitable to the abilities of persons with disabilities. Private institutions are encouraged to employ them at specified quotas.
- **Right to rehabilitation:** Comprehensive services in medical, social, psychological, and other relevant fields are employed to support persons with disabilities, promote their social integration, and enhance their functional capabilities.

The Iraqi government provides support through various measures, including (al-Dabbāgh, 2021):

- 10% tax exemption.
- Monthly allowance proportional to the degree of disability.
- Appointment of an assistant at government expense for individuals whose disability impedes their ability to perform basic tasks independently.

The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR) highlighted several violations against persons with disabilities in its activities report for the year 2020,⁽¹⁾ including (IHCHR, 2021):

1. Delays in implementing laws designed to protect their rights, resulting in persistent discrimination and inequality.
2. Limited realization of equal opportunity principles, with accessibility remaining inadequate.
3. Insufficient enforcement of employment laws and directives, leading to high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities.
4. Economic hardships exacerbated by inadequate funding for monthly allowances and prolonged waiting periods for benefit approval, adversely affecting their living standards and those of their families.
5. Lack of political participation and representation in legislative bodies, hindering advocacy for their interests.
6. Significant barriers to educational access for children with disabilities due to systemic issues within Iraq's educational system.
7. Deficiencies in healthcare provision, including lack of identification cards, resulting in charges for services and absence of prioritized or subsidized care in both public and private health facilities.

Despite the legal framework, the rights of persons with disabilities in Iraq remain below aspirations. Reports reveal numerous gaps and unresolved challenges. A Human Rights Watch report (2021) identified key issues, such as:

- The absence of reliable statistics on the population of persons with disabilities, despite Iraq's status as one of the countries with the highest numbers due to prolonged conflict.
- Discriminatory legislation that constitutes a significant barrier, necessitating urgent reform to align with international standards and facilitate equal political participation.
- Iraq's international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in 2013, including affirmation of legal capacity on an equal basis (Article 12) and respect for political rights (Article 29). However, Iraqi laws, such as the 1951 Civil Code, permit judicial deprivation of legal capacity for persons with intellectual, psychosocial, visual, and auditory disabilities, thereby restricting their voting and candidacy rights. Furthermore, the Civil Code employs derogatory language to describe these individuals.
- Persons with disabilities in Iraq encounter substantial barriers to candidacy and holding public office. Human Rights Watch identified only eight individuals with disabilities who have run for public office since 2005—six in parliamentary elections and two in governorate elections. These

(1) This is the most recent available report on the rights of persons with disabilities in Iraq, as the Commission had not issued a similar report for the year 2021 as of the time of this study's preparation.

barriers appear to arise from discriminatory legislation, including requirements that candidates possess “full legal capacity,” as well as political parties’ reluctance to nominate and support candidates with disabilities.

- Iraqi legislators, particularly within the Iraqi parliament, should undertake a comprehensive review of legislation affecting persons with disabilities and enact amendments to ensure full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes revising the Civil Code provisions on legal capacity to uphold their rights to legal capacity and decision-making, rather than depriving them of their rights. Amendments should also extend to election laws applicable in both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. It is necessary that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are actively involved and consulted throughout these legislative processes.
- The Iraqi government and international donors ought to enhance awareness regarding the political rights of persons with disabilities and promote their administrative empowerment, particularly in senior administrative roles. This should encompass training programs for persons with disabilities, election officials, political parties, public authorities, and media personnel on the implementation of political participation rights. The design and execution of such awareness initiatives must include consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.
- Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates States Parties to recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life. Article 29 obliges states to respect the political rights of persons with disabilities. However, the Iraqi Civil Code of 1951 and related legislation permit the widespread denial of legal capacity to persons with certain disabilities, including intellectual, psychosocial, visual, and sensory impairments, contravening Iraq’s obligations under the Convention. Through interdiction procedures, courts may impose guardianship on persons with disabilities, thereby denying them decision-making rights, including the right to vote.
- The REACH humanitarian data initiative conducted a survey of over 9,000 Iraqi households between July and September 2020, yielding insights into the prevalence of disabilities among currently and formerly displaced families. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a mixed-methods survey approach was employed, rendering results statistically representative in some districts and indicative in others. The indicative findings are not generalizable to the broader population; thus, percentages reflect rates solely within surveyed households. Analysis focused on districts with at least 50 surveyed households. Depending on the district, between 8% and 31% of households reported a member experiencing difficulty with

Table 7-3: Percentages of Displaced Households Containing Persons with Disabilities.

Governorate	Survey Type	Percentage of Households with a Person with a Possible Disability
al-Anbār	Representative	8%
	Indicative	12%
Baghdād	Indicative	9%
Diyālā	Representative	16%
	Indicative	23%
Duhok	Representative	26%
	Indicative	21%
Erbil	Representative	21%
Kirkūk	Representative	14%
Nīnawā	Representative	24%
	Indicative	16%
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	Representative	9%
	Indicative	17%
al-Sulaymānīyah	Indicative	31%

at least one of six activities, while 3% to 17% reported a member with severe difficulty or inability to walk or climb stairs.⁽¹⁾

The Human Rights Watch report concluded by identifying several obstacles that have resulted in violations of the rights of persons with disabilities in Iraq, including:

- Legislative and legal barriers.
- Limited access to electoral materials, particularly for persons with visual, intellectual, and sensory disabilities.
- Challenges in accessing polling stations.
- Inadequate accommodations at polling stations for persons with disabilities.
- Difficulties in exercising the right to a secret ballot.
- Denial of candidacy rights.

III. Violence Against Women

In 2021, official authorities monitoring violence against women in Iraq documented nearly 14,000 cases. The COVID-19 pandemic, which adversely affected the economic situation, alongside the prevalence of child marriage, contributed to an increase in domestic violence rates (al-Nahār al-'Arabī, 2021). Iraq lacks specific legislation criminalizing domestic violence; instead, it relies on legal

(1) Human Rights Watch researchers conducted most interviews by telephone in Arabic or Kurdish. Interviewees were informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the interviews, as well as the intended use of the information by Human Rights Watch. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who understood that no compensation would be provided for participation (Human Rights Watch, Political Participation Out of Reach for Persons with Disabilities in Iraq, September 16, 2021).

Table 7-4: Types of Violence Experienced by Women by Source and Type of Violence (2021).

Source of Violence	Type of Violence	Percentage
Others (besides the husband)	General violence	13.6%
	Physical violence	11.5%
	Verbal violence	8.9%
Husband	Exposure to violence in general	28.7%
	Economic violence	22%
	Verbal violence	11.7%
	Physical violence	3.6%
	Sexual violence	1.8%

provisions permitting husbands and fathers to “discipline” their wives and children through physical means. Article 41 of the Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 stipulates that “there is no crime if the act (beating) is committed in the exercise of a right established by law,” explicitly recognizing “discipline by a husband of his wife, and discipline by fathers, teachers, and their substitutes of minor children within the limits prescribed by religion, law, or custom” as lawful. Consequently, incidents of violence against women have escalated.

Brigadier General ‘Alī Muḥammad Sālim, Director of Family and Child Protection from Domestic Violence at the Ministry of Interior, reported that the rate of violence against women in Iraq reached 58% in 2021, marking a significant increase compared to previous years (al-Nahār al-‘Arabī, 2021). This rise is attributed to ongoing crises and the weakness of the legal system in confronting entrenched tribal customs and traditions, which also contribute to underreporting due to social stigma and fear of retaliation.

Additional reports indicate that in 2021, approximately 5,000 cases of violence against women were registered in Baghdad and other governorates, according to ‘Alī al-Bayyātī, a member of the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights. Among three vulnerable groups—women, the elderly, and children—women experienced the highest incidence of domestic violence. Monitoring data from 2020 recorded nearly 15,000 cases across these groups (al-Jazeera Net, 2021). The media center of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq reported 1,449 cases of violence against women out of 1,543 domestic violence cases filed between June and August in courts affiliated with the al-Ruṣāfah appellate presidency in Baghdad. The Iraqi Ministry of Interior documented 3,637 cases of spousal assault out of 5,292 domestic violence cases filed in Baghdad and other governorates during the first half of the year.

A study titled “Gender-Based Violence Against Women,” conducted among female survivors in areas formerly occupied by ISIS, revealed that 96% had experienced violence perpetrated by terrorist groups. Of these perpetrators, 60% were foreign nationals, while 40% were Iraqi. The predominant forms of violence included sexual violence and rape, physical violence such as beating, verbal abuse, and various forms of psychological violence. Approximately 47% of survivors sustained permanent injuries resulting in disabilities, including damage to

Table 7-5: Net Enrollment Ratio in Education by Age Group, 2007 and 2021.

Age Group	Enrollment Ratio according to the 2007 report		Enrollment Ratio according to the I-WISH 2021 report	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
6-11	87.9%	85.6%	91.7%	91.9%
12-14	79.4%	56.9%	53.6%	56.5%
15-17	54.5%	37.8%	30.5%	36.6%
18-24	42.8%	23.1%	15.1%	16.9%

Source: CSO, 2007, p. 249; 2021.

eyes, limbs, paralysis, and other bodily harm. The study further indicated that 76% endured repeated and continuous violence, yet 44% did not report these incidents even after liberation from terrorist control (‘Abd-al-Husayn, 2021, p. 219-242). Notably, 23% attempted suicide during captivity. The study emphasized the urgent need for diverse forms of assistance for these women.

The I-WISH report, issued by the Ministry of Planning, highlights several key findings regarding women’s status in Iraq (CSO, 2021):

- According to women’s perspectives, the primary cause of violence both at home and in public is family upbringing, characterized by persistent discrimination and violence. This is followed by a lack of awareness among both male perpetrators and female victims. Economic hardship constitutes the third major factor, while misinterpretations of religious texts represent the fourth. Additionally, prevailing customs, traditions, and patriarchal cultural norms significantly contribute to the perpetuation of violence.
- The report also addresses girls’ educational attainment through enrollment rates, as summarized in Table 7-5. The data indicate a notable increase in girls’ enrollment rates between the two reporting periods, signaling progress in educational rights. Interestingly, the 2021 figures reveal a positive trend favoring female enrollment, contrasting with previous years when male enrollment predominated. This shift is largely attributable to a significant decline in male enrollment, particularly in post-primary education. Nonetheless, rural areas continue to exhibit male-favored enrollment patterns due to traditional and tribal pressures, especially at the post-primary level.

IV. Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq

Internal displacement refers to the forced removal of individuals from their homes, typically due to armed conflict or natural disasters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines internally displaced persons (IDPs) as individuals or groups compelled to flee their homes to escape armed conflict, widespread violence, human rights violations, or natural or man-made disasters (Mufattin, 2016, pp. 34-35).

Table 7-6: Number of Displaced Families (Emergency Displacement) To and From the Governorates of Iraq (2020-2021).

Governorate	Number of Displaced Families up to 12/31/2020	Number of Displaced Families up to 12/5/2021	Change between 2020-2021
Nīnawá	194,936	176,659	-18,277
al-Anbār	153,257	145,129	-8,128
Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn	85,859	77,477	-8,382
Diyālá	31,722	29,965	-1,757
Kirkūk	22,026	20,059	-1,967
Baghdād	11,654	11,395	-259
Bābil	8,281	8,226	-55
Erbil	0	0	0
al-Baṣrah	0	0	0
al-Sulaymānīyah	0	0	0
al-Dīwānīyah	0	0	0
al-Muthanná	0	0	0
Najaf	0	0	0
Duhok	0	0	0
Dhī-Qār	0	0	0
Karbalá'	0	0	0
Maysān	0	0	0
Wāsiṭ	0	0	0
Total	507,735	468,910	-38,825
Percentage Decrease in Displaced Families (Returning Home)			7.8%

Source: Source: Ministry of Migration and Displaced, 2021.

Reports indicate that between 2003 and 2021, at least one in every six Iraqis experienced internal displacement. This rate ranks among the highest globally during this period, reflecting persistent internal conflict, insecurity, and the influence of extremist terrorist groups responsible for most displacement cases. Additionally, Iraq has witnessed significant emigration over the past four decades, positioning it as one of the leading countries in forced migration.

According to data from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) provided by the International Organization for Migration, as of the end of 2021, there remain 1,186,556 internally displaced persons within Iraq.

The I-WISH report, published by CSO in 2021, reveals that 1.5% of surveyed families, equating to 9,404 households, remain displaced, while 5.7% of families have returned from displacement. Specifically, in governorates affected by military operations to expel ISIS terrorists, the report indicates that in al-Anbār governorate, 6% of families remain displaced, with 57% having returned. In Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn governorate, 1% remain displaced and 27% have returned. In Nīnawá governorate, 1% are displaced, and 20% have returned (CSO, 2021).

The United Nations Human Rights Council, in its report regarding displaced persons in Iraq, submitted to the 44th session of the United Nations General Assembly, documents the severe violence and atrocities endured by the displaced population at the hands of ISIS, including murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery, recruitment and use of children, forced religious conversion, targeted persecution of minorities, and harsh punishments. The report further highlights ongoing insecurity affecting host communities, displaced persons, returnees, and humanitarian actors, as ISIS cells continue to perpetrate attacks amid a complex security environment (UN, 2020).

The same report commends the efforts of the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government in managing the displacement crisis and providing assistance, alongside the contributions of local host communities and civil society organizations, both domestic and international. However, the report also outlines persistent challenges faced by displaced populations, both within and outside camps, including inadequate access to food, shelter, potable water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and jobs, which remain scarce and limited. Service quality varies significantly across camps, which are managed by different organizations. Poverty is widespread, with some displaced families resorting to selling donated food to procure other necessities. Living conditions are substandard, with overcrowded and dilapidated tents that fail to meet humanitarian housing standards, vulnerability of food supplies to pests due to inadequate storage, and poor sanitation contributing to the spread of infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these conditions. Some displaced individuals have been compelled to return to their original residences against their will, despite ongoing security risks. Those returning to camps have sometimes faced denial of registration and food rations, resulting in worsened circumstances (UN, 2020).

This overview underscores a multitude of rights violations and challenges confronting displaced persons, whether residing in temporary accommodations or having returned home. Despite the passage of years since the cessation of combat operations, these issues persist, necessitating intensified governmental commitment and action. An urgent, comprehensive strategy with a timeline not exceeding one year is necessary to facilitate the return of all internally displaced persons to their original residences and ensure the restoration of their rights, subsequently addressing the situation of displaced persons and migrants in neighboring countries.

V. Children's Rights in Iraq

All children possess the inherent right to protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq, including displaced and refugee populations, remain vulnerable and in need of such protection.

The principal international instrument safeguarding children's rights is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most widely ratified human rights

treaty globally. Iraq ratified the CRC in December 1990, thereby obligating itself to uphold the rights enshrined therein. The Convention encompasses a broad spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, delineating specific measures to guarantee these rights for children and adolescents. It affirms that while children hold the same human rights as adults, their vulnerability necessitates special protection.

Key guiding principles of the CRC

- The best interests of the child as a primary consideration.
- The right to survival and development.
- The right of all children to freely express their views in all matters affecting them.
- The right of all children to enjoy the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination of any kind.

Violations against Children Suspected of Affiliation with ISIS

A persistent and complex issue arising from ISIS's control over extensive Iraqi territories from 2014 to 2017 concerns children associated with the organization, often referred to as the "Cubs of the Caliphate." Following liberation, many such children were detained by the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Human Rights Watch's 2019 report, "Everyone Must Confess,"⁽¹⁾ documents that hundreds of children have been accused of terrorism based on fabricated charges and confessions obtained under torture (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

The report details that Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional authorities detain children linked to ISIS, subjecting them to torture to extract confessions and sentencing them following summary trials. International law recognizes children recruited by armed groups primarily as victims entitled to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Jo Becker, Advocacy Director of the Children's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch, characterizes the detention, torture, and prosecution of these children as unjust and predicts enduring negative consequences. Children released from detention express fear of returning home due to stigmatization as ISIS affiliates, exposing them to potential reprisals. Those detained by the Kurdistan Regional Government fear re-arrest by federal forces upon return to federal-controlled areas, risking permanent familial and social separation.

Flawed security screening processes contribute to wrongful detention and prosecution, often based on mistaken identity or unsubstantiated neighbor reports stemming from personal disputes. At the end of 2018, approximately 1,500 children were held on suspicion of ISIS affiliation, with at least 185 foreign children convicted and imprisoned.

(1) This report represents the most recent international analysis concerning Iraq, as prior international reports from 2021 did not address this subject. It is referenced here due to its critical importance in highlighting the situation of these children, who may pose significant security risks and serve as potential recruits for terrorist organizations in the future if they are not effectively rehabilitated and reintegrated as constructive members of society.

Interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2017 and 2018 with detained children and their relatives reveal varied degrees of involvement, often motivated by economic hardship, coercion, or social pressures. Conditions in detention centers are frequently overcrowded and unsanitary, with limited access to education, rehabilitation, or family contact. Some facilities report better conditions but still lack adequate educational and psychosocial support. Reports of physical abuse by guards have also been documented.

Human Rights Watch urged amendments to anti-terrorism laws to cease the detention and prosecution of children solely for ISIS affiliation, emphasizing compliance with international juvenile justice standards, cessation of torture, and accountability for abuses. Becker asserts that punitive measures resemble retribution rather than justice, underscoring the rights of children involved in armed conflict to rehabilitation and reintegration (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Challenges and Proposed Solutions Regarding Children's Rights in Iraq

UNICEF identifies several critical challenges to children's rights in Iraq:

- **Justice for Children:** The justice system is characterized by punitive rather than rehabilitative approaches, excessive use of detention, poor conditions, low age of criminal responsibility, and a rising number of detained children since December 2015, exacerbating deprivation.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Widespread violence against women and girls persists, including sexual violence, domestic abuse, forced and child marriage, with stigma and fear hindering justice for survivors.
- **Serious Violations of Children's Rights:** Ongoing conflict-related violence results in high rates of child casualties and recruitment by armed groups.
- **Unaccompanied Children:** Increasing numbers of unaccompanied or separated children, many foreign nationals, face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and neglect.
- **Birth Registration Issues:** Conflict and ISIS control have disrupted birth registration, leaving 25% of children under five in affected areas without official documentation, impeding access to essential services.
- **Insufficient Child Protection and Psychosocial Services:** Many children exposed to violence and displacement lack adequate protection, mental health support, and case management, with services concentrated in camps and insufficient to meet demand.

UNICEF proposes the following solutions:

- Strengthening legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to ensure child-centered protection aligned with international standards and effective enforcement.
- Expanding availability and equitable distribution of child protection services, including for children with disabilities.

- Addressing harmful social norms through community engagement to promote awareness of rights and access to services, thereby reducing violence against children and women.

VI. Impunity (Crimes Against Protesters)

Within the framework of international human rights law, impunity denotes the failure to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable, thereby constituting a violation of victims' rights to justice and redress. Globally, particularly in states where governments or armed forces have perpetrated mass crimes against civilians, numerous human rights defenders actively combat impunity and advocate for victims' rights. The pervasive lack of accountability for attacks on human rights defenders remains a significant challenge confronting the international human rights movement (Front Line Defenders, n.d.).

A policy paper issued by a coalition of civil society organizations in Iraq, entitled "End Impunity for Violations Against the Protest Movement in Iraq," highlights that since the inception of the protest movement in Iraq in October 2019, demonstrators, political activists, and young protesters articulating legitimate demands have been subjected to widespread and systematic human rights violations by security forces and armed groups. These violations include extensive killings and injuries during demonstrations, targeted assassinations, and death threats, seemingly aimed at silencing dissent and suppressing calls for change. A critical expectation arising from the elections held last year is the establishment of a government committed to reopening investigations into the cases of disappeared protesters, activists, and movement leaders whose whereabouts remain unknown. The government's credibility will be measured by its dedication to resolving the issue of impunity, a task previous administrations have failed to accomplish (Iraqi Al-Amal Association, 2020).

At the international level, these crimes have garnered limited attention and only modest responses despite their severity. To fulfill protesters' demands for a just, inclusive, and less corrupt state, the Iraqi government must eradicate impunity for these offenses, which appear designed to stifle dissent and dismantle the youth activist movement. The international community should support Iraqi efforts and be prepared to undertake serious investigative measures should the government prove unwilling or incapable of doing so independently.

Reflecting on the past, in October 2019, hundreds of thousands of individuals, predominantly youth from diverse social backgrounds, mobilized in a popular protest movement across Baghdad and southern governorates. These largely peaceful demonstrations opposed corruption, nepotism, inadequate public services, unemployment, and entrenched sectarian policies that have persisted through decades of dictatorship, foreign occupation, and recurrent violence. The protests were met with widespread repression by a complex amalgam of government security forces and armed groups. These politically motivated attacks on civilians were systematic and extensive.

Despite the gravity of these crimes, precise casualty figures remain unclear. United Nations documentation reports at least 487 fatalities and 7,715 injuries resulting from live ammunition, tear gas canisters, and other means at demonstration sites between October 2019 and March 2020. Approximately 3,000 individuals were detained. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights estimates fatalities at 541, while activists suggest higher numbers. The Iraqi government estimates at least 560 deaths but has not disclosed names or further details.

Although the majority of violations occurred in southern governorates and Baghdad, other regions also experienced abuses against activists and young protesters during this period. Even in areas without significant demonstrations, such as al-Anbār, local activists faced arrests and harassment for online expressions of solidarity with the protest movement. In the Kurdistan Region, demonstrators in al-Sulaymānīyah and other cities protesting delayed salary payments and corruption, as well as journalists covering these events, encountered violent treatment and arrests by regional security forces.

The Iraqi authorities' response to crimes committed by security forces and "unknown armed elements" against demonstrators and critics from October 2019 to May 2021 has been limited to condemnatory statements, the formation of investigative committees without substantive outcomes, and the reassignment of some security officials. Despite numerous investigations into demonstration-related violence, only two cases have proceeded to trial and conviction, both involving low-ranking police officers rather than "unknown armed elements" (UNAMI, 2021a).

Under Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī's administration in 2020 and 2021, the Iraqi government undertook some positive measures to address these crimes; however, these efforts remain insufficient to halt violations and ensure accountability. In May 2020, shortly after receiving parliamentary confidence, Prime Minister al-Kāzīmī established a committee to compile a list of victims of demonstration-related violence to facilitate compensation for their families. On October 18, 2020, a fact-finding committee was formed by an executive order to investigate all acts of violence associated with demonstrations from October 1, 2019, onward, identify causes, and determine responsible parties. The committee was authorized to interview witnesses and families, review relevant documents, and refer cases or individuals to the judiciary. The report did not explicitly address violence attributed to "unknown armed elements" but recommended completing investigations involving the guards of political party offices who fired on demonstrators. The status and outcomes of these investigations remain unverified.

In 2021, al-Kāzīmī's government announced the formation of an investigative committee concerning demonstrator killings and ordered the release of detained protesters. However, the committee's membership was never disclosed, and after over a year, little information has emerged regarding investigative progress or findings, with no established timeline for completion. Promises to compensate the wounded and families of the deceased have been made, yet implementation details remain scarce. The Supreme Judicial Council also established a judicial

body in July 2020 to investigate assassination cases, but no further information has been provided, suggesting delays or challenges in apprehending perpetrators. In the case of security expert Hishām al-Hāshimī's assassination, the judiciary identified only one individual affiliated with security services, with other responsible parties remaining unnamed.

al-Kāzimī has occasionally taken prompt action to remove police chiefs and security officials due to their failure to prevent targeted assassinations of human rights defenders and civil activists. Nonetheless, such measures do not address impunity for past crimes and may be perceived as scapegoating absent comprehensive investigations and prosecutions of actual perpetrators (UNAMI, 2021a).

VII. Human Rights and Freedom of Expression in the Kurdistan Region

The situation in the Kurdistan Region remains conspicuously absent according to many reports issued by the Iraqi federal government, attributable to factors beyond the scope of this report; chief among these is the lack of coordination between the federal and regional governments, coupled with minimal cooperation among activists and civil society organizations across these jurisdictions, resulting in a significant divide. This report endeavors to illuminate some of the human rights violations and challenges occurring within the Kurdistan Region, which remain obscured by the geopolitical separation from the rest of Iraq.

The scope for freedom of expression within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has notably contracted over the past year. Individuals critical of public authorities have faced intimidation, movement restrictions, and arbitrary detention. Some have been accused of defamation, while others have been prosecuted under national security legislation. These findings are detailed in a recent report published by the United Nations Human Rights Office and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), entitled "Freedom of Expression in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq." The report documents a 'concerning pattern' from March 2020 to April 2021, wherein individuals were targeted for exercising their legitimate right to report on or critique public authorities. In response, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed apprehension regarding the documented repression, emphasizing not only the threats and intimidation directed at critics but also the broader 'chilling effect' on those seeking transparency and accountability from public officials. While acknowledging the unique challenges faced by the Kurdistan Region's authorities at local, regional, and international levels, the report's principal findings raise serious concerns, particularly regarding the conduct of security services, the selective application of laws, and non-compliance with relevant legal procedures and international human rights standards (UNAMI, 2021b).

The report recommends that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) strengthen human rights protections, ensure accountability for violations, and provide redress for victims. Key recommendations include:

- Immediate measures to safeguard the right to freedom of expression and to cease harassment, intimidation, and retaliation against journalists, human rights defenders, and activists.
- Ensuring that criminal law is not employed to restrict freedom of expression, including refraining from arresting or detaining individuals lawfully expressing dissent or dissatisfaction.
- Amending existing legislation to clearly define prohibited speech, ensuring all restrictions on freedom of expression in local laws align with relevant international human rights standards.

Arbitrary Trials

International reports have also highlighted the issue of arbitrary trials infringing upon the rights of activists and journalists, aimed at silencing dissent and concealing corruption within the Region. A report issued in December 2021 by the High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq, titled “Human Rights and Freedom of Expression: Trials in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,” notes that UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights observed, through monitoring four documented cases, a persistent failure to uphold legal requirements and procedural safeguards essential for a fair judicial process. The report identifies violations of the principle of legality, citing vague and imprecise criminal law provisions that allowed for inconsistent interpretations. The public prosecution failed to specify the alleged acts constituting charges or to provide substantive evidence. Trials did not meet international human rights standards; defendants were denied the right to summon and cross-examine witnesses. Confessions were reportedly extracted under torture, with safeguards against torture—such as medical examinations, access to legal counsel, video-recorded interrogations, and solitary confinement protections—being disregarded. The High Commission’s report concludes with recommendations to KRG, including:

- Guaranteeing suspects and defendants effective access to lawyers at all stages of investigation and trial, including detention.
- Ensuring suspects and defendants are promptly and thoroughly informed of arrest reasons and charges at the time of detention.
- Providing defendants adequate time and facilities to prepare and present their cases.
- Allowing all detainees to contact a person of their choice to inform them of their detention and location, and facilitating family visits.
- Issuing judgments with comprehensive reasoning and ensuring public accessibility.
- Safeguarding judicial proceedings from undue interference, including political influence.
- Amending legislation to ensure all restrictions on freedom of expression comply with international human rights standards (UNAMI, 2021b).

Prison Conditions in the Kurdistan Region

The Independent Human Rights Commission in the Kurdistan Region (IHRCKR) published a report entitled "Prison Conditions in the Kurdistan Region," in which the commission's head highlighted a notable increase in the prison population, encompassing both detainees and convicted individuals, relative to previous years. This escalation was attributed to multiple factors, including the ongoing economic crisis adversely affecting citizens' livelihoods, unresolved political disputes between Erbil and Baghdad, a rise in the number of internally displaced persons within the region, and the unregulated possession of firearms by civilians. The report incorporated statistical data collected through the commission's field visits to various prisons, reformatories, and inmates, alongside an examination of cases that remained unresolved despite exceeding the legally prescribed detention periods.

Furthermore, the report underscored the inadequacy and unsuitability of certain prison facilities when measured against international standards, noting the failure to uphold fundamental prisoners' rights. It emphasized the urgent need for the construction of new facilities designed to appropriately accommodate detainees and inmates.

The commission's head also stressed the necessity to enact critical legislation addressing specific offenses, including a narcotics law that differentiates between drug traffickers and users, prescribing distinct penalties accordingly, as well as the renewal of anti-terrorism legislation, which had lapsed.

The report highlights the inadequacy and unsuitability of certain prison facilities when measured against international standards, emphasizing the failure to uphold fundamental principles of prisoners' rights. It underscores the imperative to construct new facilities that appropriately accommodate detainees and inmates.

The commission's head further emphasized the necessity of enacting essential legislation addressing specific cases and crimes, including a narcotics law that differentiates between drug traffickers and users, prescribing distinct penalties for each, as well as a terrorism law whose validity has lapsed.

Arrest of Activists, Protestors, and Journalists

The periodic report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights on human rights violations in the Kurdistan Region documents ongoing infringements, particularly concerning freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. These violations intensified following the Court of Cassation's decision to uphold six-year prison sentences against five activists and journalists. The Gulf Centre compiled extensive data on numerous cases within this report concerning the Kurdistan Region:

- On June 5, 2021, the volunteer legal team representing the activists and journalists filed an appeal against the Court of Cassation's decision, which had upheld the six-year sentences on April 28, 2021. The defense presented evidence challenging the legitimacy of the decision, arguing it contravened established human rights principles. Notably, one charge

pertained to the defendants' visits to the US and German consulates in Erbil, activities not prohibited by law.

- On April 25, 2021, Asayish (internal security) forces arrested 55 demonstrators protesting Turkish military actions in the Kurdistan Region. Among those detained was journalist Rîbáz Hasan of the Furat News Agency. All detainees were released on April 28, 2021. Local reports indicate the arrests were arbitrary and involved physical abuse.
- On May 3, 2021, the Metro Center for Journalists' Rights and Advocacy reported 49 violations against 36 journalists in the Kurdistan Region from the start of the year to date. Coordinator Raḥmān Gharîb detailed these incidents at a press conference in al-Sulaymānīyah.
- On May 16, 2021, Hayman Bāqir, editor-in-chief of Diplomatic Magazine, was detained following a summons by the Bakhtiyari police in al-Sulaymānīyah, subsequent to a complaint filed in Erbil by a political party. The complaint related to the magazine's publication of corruption allegations involving the Kurdistan Regional Government. Bāqir was released the same day on bail pending trial.
- On May 23, 2021, the family of political activist Jawhar al-Harkî, leader of the prominent Harkî tribe in Duhok and Erbil, alleged an assassination attempt orchestrated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party's security services. The plot involved poisoning by a household staff member, who confessed prior to execution. Despite the family's pardon, the individual was arrested and coerced into denying involvement. A parliamentary fact-finding committee investigated but relied solely on security agency testimonies, excluding the family and the accused. The family rejected the committee's findings, questioning its credibility.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights concluded by urging the Kurdistan Regional Government to overturn the prison sentences against the five activists and journalists and to release all detained civil society actors and prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. The authorities were called upon to uphold constitutional obligations safeguarding freedoms of assembly, expression, and the press (Metro Center, 2021).

Despite the limited number of reports, existing documentation reveals pervasive human rights violations in the Kurdistan Region. Researchers face significant challenges due to a dearth of comprehensive reports, compounded by suppression of Kurdish journalists through imprisonment, assassination, and other means. The regional human rights commission has suspended reporting since 2016, with the latest report covering that year. International reports remain insufficient, and cooperation between the federal human rights commission and its Kurdistan counterpart is minimal, despite Kurdish representation within the federal commission.

VIII. Human Rights in 2022: A Forward-Looking Vision

Following the review of human rights cases from 2021, this section outlines anticipated key issues for the forthcoming year deserving focused attention.

1. The Right to Work and Amidst Ongoing Graduate Protests

A critical challenge confronting current and future Iraqi administrations is the integration of youth into the labor market, given that they constitute over half the population. The concept of a “demographic gift” refers to the proportion of working-age youth within a country; in Iraq, this figure ranges between 55-60%. However, labor market absorption remains inadequate. Ministry of Education data indicate approximately 200,000 university and institute graduates annually, alongside twice that number who have not completed higher education. Employment rates among these groups are estimated at a mere 1-5%. Without the creation of sufficient job opportunities, mass protests akin to those in October 2019 are likely to recur.

2. Rights of Displaced Persons to Return to Their Homes

Although returnee numbers from displacement areas are increasing, many displaced individuals and migrants abroad face obstacles to return. These barriers include social challenges linked to their original communities, political issues such as the Jurf al-Naṣr case, affiliations with terrorist groups, and complications related to compensation claims. Consequently, the rights of displaced persons and migrants remain an unresolved and contentious human rights and political issue.

3. Impunity Amidst the Proliferation of Unregulated Weapons

The widespread availability of uncontrolled weapons presents a persistent challenge inherited by successive governments. This issue undermines the rule of law and impedes the establishment of a robust state and civil society. It remains a focal point in both local and international human rights reports concerning Iraq.

4. The Drug Problem and the Rights of Addicts to Treatment Rather Than Punishment

Since 2013, Iraq has witnessed a significant increase in drug trafficking and consumption. The quantities of drugs entering the country have risen markedly, paralleled by a surge in users and addicts. Security efforts to combat trafficking remain weak, as does the healthcare infrastructure for addiction treatment. This issue intersects with sustainable development and employment challenges, as persistent youth unemployment fuels drug addiction, recruitment into terrorist groups, and migration, exemplified by the 2015 migration wave through Turkey to Europe.

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8.

Public Services

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I. Introduction

Public services constitute a fundamental obligation within the social contract between the state and its citizens. They form the foundation for ensuring a dignified standard of living and represent a critical component in the pursuit of progress, development, and prosperity. Sustainable development is unattainable without the provision of essential services and infrastructure projects in sectors such as healthcare, quality education, sustainable energy access, and adequate housing. These sectors correspond to nearly one-third of the United Nations’ seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the past four decades, Iraq has endured a succession of challenges and shocks that have resulted in a deteriorated, fragile, and inefficient infrastructure for service delivery. Entering 2021, the country confronted significant pressures stemming from a compounded triple shock—political, health-related, and financial—that constrained its capacity to provide public services and adversely affected its economic and social conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic struck Iraq following years of security and political instability, disproportionately impacting the most impoverished and vulnerable populations. This situation was further exacerbated by a substantial decline in oil revenues. Consequently, public services experienced a marked deterioration, which accelerated amid the pandemic’s repercussions.

The economic crises have produced multifaceted effects, leading to setbacks in development across numerous sectors, particularly in public service projects. These crises have intensified structural fragility and undermined the foundations of the social contract. Moreover, stark disparities persist between urban and rural areas in service provision, contributing to uneven economic development.

Accordingly, it is imperative for responsible authorities to formulate responsive strategies that address these challenges through clear and targeted pathways. Emphasis should be placed on advancing development sectors, enhancing the quality of health and educational services, improving housing conditions, and ensuring the provision and sustainability of electrical energy, thereby enabling all citizens to enjoy a free and dignified life.

II. The Electricity Sector: A Persistent Crisis

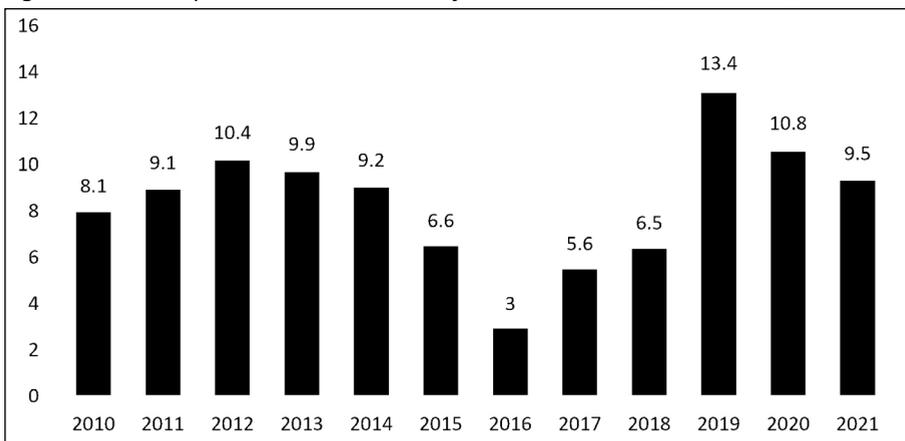
Electricity is central to economic development; without it, societies face stagnation. Universal access to affordable, sustainable, and reliable energy is essential for achieving Sustainable Development (Goal 7), as it facilitates investment, innovation, and the emergence of new industries, which are key drivers of employment and economic growth. Therefore, securing a continuous, reliable, and affordable electricity supply is vital not only for meeting the basic needs of Iraqi households but also for stimulating broader economic activity.

Since 2003, the electricity sector has been mired in crisis. In 2021, Iraqi citizens continue to endure prolonged power outages, deficits in generation capacity, and unprecedented levels of waste and losses during transmission and distribution. These challenges persist despite substantial government spending (investment and operational), which have totaled approximately 102 trillion dinars over the past decade.

The sector's poor performance has imposed substantial financial burdens on the national budget. The electricity crisis has significantly undermined the competitiveness of all economic sectors and constitutes a major socio-economic challenge. Citizens are compelled to incur high costs to procure energy from private generators. Daily power outages remain widespread, and the gap between peak electricity demand and the grid's maximum supply has widened, notwithstanding a one-third increase in available supply. These pressures are expected to intensify rapidly due to population growth, which will further escalate electricity demand.

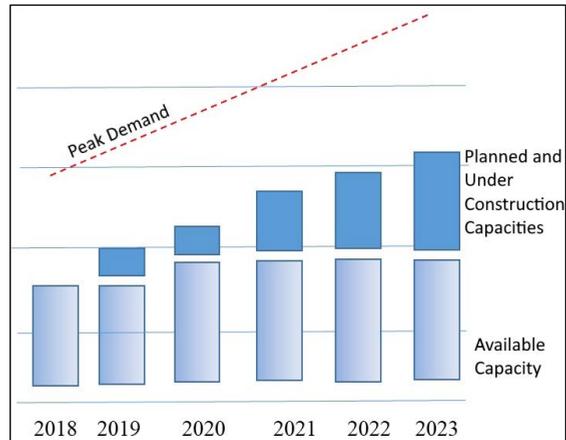
Projections suggest a 50% increase in electricity demand over the next five years. Without effective demand management, a significant disparity between supply and demand will persist. Addressing this gap necessitates enhanced efforts to augment electricity supply, alongside modernization and expansion of the existing transmission and distribution infrastructure.

Figure 8-1: Total Expenditure on the Electricity Sector, 2010-2021 (trillion dinars).



Source: al-'Anbakī, 2022.

Figure 8-2: Available and Planned Capacities and Demand for Electricity (2018-2023).



Source: IEA, 2019, p. 45.

According to a report published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in April 2019, Iraq's electrical energy production capacity is approximately 32,000 megawatts; however, actual generation is limited to about half of this capacity due to inefficiencies in the transmission network. The report further highlights that approximately 40% of generated electricity is lost during distribution.

Production and Consumption

Estimates indicate that Iraq produces and imports between 19,000 and 21,000 megawatts of electrical energy, whereas the actual demand exceeds 30,000 megawatts. To maintain stable electricity supply, Iraq must nearly double its production capacity. Given projections that the population may double by 2050, energy consumption is expected to increase at a rate exceeding electricity production growth.

Despite an increase in electricity production to approximately 20,000 megawatts in 2021, power outages persisted, particularly during summer months when temperatures exceed 50°C. The electricity supply deficit, exceeding 10,000 megawatts, is attributed to several factors, including:

- Targeted sabotage of power systems and transmission towers.
- Reduced gas supplies imported from Iran, which are essential to operate the production stations.
- Non-compliance by governorates with approved energy supply quotas.
- The continued emergence of irregular agricultural and residential areas imposing additional loads on the system.
- Elevated temperatures and associated technical challenges.

In September 2021, the Ministry of Electricity reported a loss of 5,500 megawatts of electrical energy due to decreased Iranian gas supplies, with some production stations experiencing reductions of up to 41 million cubic meters per

day. The national electricity system faced recurring challenges as Iranian gas supplies to central and southern production stations declined from 49 million to 12 million cubic meters per day. Officials indicated that Iranian gas imports are expected to continue for at least another decade, with no current alternatives to compensate for the shortfall.

World Bank data reveal that Iraq flared approximately 17.5 billion cubic meters of gas in 2016, increasing to about 18 billion cubic meters in 2020, ranking it second globally in gas flaring. This practice results in an estimated annual economic loss of \$7.5 billion. Iraq's current gas production stands at 2.7 billion cubic feet, despite possessing natural gas reserves estimated at 132 trillion cubic feet. Approximately 700 billion cubic feet have been flared due to inadequate capacity to utilize associated gas, necessitating continued gas imports from Iran. According to the International Energy Agency, the volume of gas flared daily in Iraq could supply electricity to at least five million homes. The Washington Institute for the Middle East has noted that Iraq flares ten times the gas it requires, representing a squandered resource capable of supporting a robust and modern gas industry sufficient to meet national demand with surplus capacity.

In the summer of 2021, Iraq experienced a nationwide collapse of its electrical power system for the first time in five years, lasting several hours amid temperatures nearing 50°C. This event provoked widespread public discontent. The government responded by dismissing officials, establishing a crisis management cell to address supply shortages, and providing emergency financial, technical, logistical, and security support to the Ministry of Electricity.

The Gulf Electrical Interconnection

The Ministry of Electricity entered into a framework agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) to link Iraq's electricity grid with the Gulf grid. The agreement outlines the establishment of an electrical connection between al-Zawr station in Kuwait and al-Fāw station in southern Iraq. The 300-kilometer link comprises 80 kilometers within Iraq and 220 kilometers within Kuwait, initially supplying southern Iraq with approximately 500 megawatts from the Gulf interconnection grid, with plans to increase capacity to 1,800 megawatts in a subsequent phase. GCCIA has committed to expediting project implementation, recognizing its significance in enhancing cooperation and energy security in southern Iraq. The project is deemed strategic, fostering economic and social ties between Gulf countries and Iraq. Furthermore, GCCIA intends to extend the interconnection from al-Baṣrah to Baghdad, then to eastern Iraq, Turkey, and ultimately Europe. The authority is also pursuing long-term interconnection projects with electrical systems in Asia and Africa, anticipating substantial economic benefits for all interconnected nations (GCCIA, 2019, p. 5).

It is important to note that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states collectively established GCCIA with the objective of integrating the energy systems across the GCC countries. The authority, headquartered in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, was officially inaugurated on July 28, 2001.

Table 8-1: Economic Savings Achieved by the Gulf Interconnection for Member States (2019-2020, in million USD).

Cause	Savings Realized by GCCIA 2019	Savings Realized by the States 2019	Savings Realized by GCCIA 2020	Savings Realized by the States 2020
Reduced installed capacity	235	127	288	97.60
Reduced operational costs	17.52	17.52	14.71	14.71
Reduced operational reserve	345.71	19.59	360.85	6.63
Avoidance of programmed outages	33.21	33.27	11.87	11.87
Energy trading on economic grounds	-	31.01	-	30.91
Reduction of carbon emissions	253.57	31.83	269	15.70
Reduced costs by constructing a fiber optic infrastructure	4.64	4.18	5.10	4.60
Total	889.71	264.40	949.53	182.01
Percentage of Benefit Realized by the States from the Interconnection	-	29.7%	-	30.9%

Source: GCCIA, 2020, p. 50.

Relevant studies have identified the Gulf electrical interconnection project as one of the most successful initiatives within the framework of Gulf cooperation, representing a critical strategic endeavor endorsed by GCC. This project has ensured the continuity of energy security across electricity grids, enhanced the reliability and safety of electrical systems, and mitigated power outages by enabling immediate energy transfer support through the interconnected network. Economic benefits resulting from the Gulf countries' interconnection project can be summed up in (GCCIA, 2020, p. 49):

- Reduced installed capacity.
- Reduced operational costs.
- Reduced operational reserve.
- Avoidance of programmed outages.
- Energy trading on economic grounds.
- Reduction of carbon emissions.
- Reduced costs by constructing a fiber optic infrastructure.

According to GCCIA's estimates, the interconnection project had yielded, by the end of 2020, cumulative savings amounting to approximately \$2.921 billion since its commencement in 2009. The data presented in Table 8-1 suggest that the

electrical interconnection among Gulf countries holds the potential to transform sectoral losses into profits, contingent upon the extent and scale of the interconnection.

Iraq has actively pursued the necessary financial resources to meet its obligations under the electrical interconnection project with the Gulf Arab states, aiming to alleviate the nation's energy shortage crisis. Negotiations with the World Bank have been initiated to secure funding for the completion of the Iraqi-Gulf electrical interconnection line, with the first phase projected for completion by summer 2022. According to Ahmad al-'Abadi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Electricity, Iraq has fulfilled approximately 86% of its project commitments.

In this regard, the Ministry of Electricity announced the ratification of a five-year contractual agreement pertaining to Iraq's participation in the Gulf interconnection project, stipulating Iraq's entry into the Gulf energy market six months subsequent to the agreement's signing. The Ministry convened an expanded virtual meeting with GCCIA to assess project progress and expedite forthcoming procedural steps during August and September 2021.

Furthermore, the Director-General of the Operation and Control Department at the Ministry provided a technical overview of the project, affirming the completion of all contractual and consultancy procedures. These stipulate that GCCIA will bear the costs associated with establishing the interconnection line with Iraq. During the initial six-month phase, Iraq will procure energy from the Gulf market, subsequently entering the global energy market to engage in energy transmission and transit exchanges. The Director-General of The General Company for Electric Power Transmission - Southern Region reported the formation of technical committees to facilitate the implementation of the (al-Faw - al-Zawr) transmission line in southern Iraq, noting that all official approvals for the proposed route have been secured. GCCIA confirmed ongoing communication with the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, completion of all negotiations, and readiness to appoint consultants to supervise implementation and finalize pricing agreements.

Regarding the electrical interconnection with Jordan, anticipated to commence in 2022, the Ministry's spokesperson indicated that the initial phase involves constructing the Rishah-al-Qā'im transmission line with a capacity of 400 kV and establishing al-Qā'im conversion station at the same voltage level. This interconnection is designed to transfer 150 megawatts to the western governorates, with planned expansion to 960 megawatts in subsequent years. The project contract was awarded to General Electric, with a projected completion timeline of 26 months. The visit of the Jordanian Minister of Energy to Baghdad in late 2021 culminated in the expedited signing of the implementation mechanism, targeting completion of the first phase within one year. Financial coverage for contracting and international protocols has been secured, and administrative procedures, including line routing and connection points, have been finalized in coordination with relevant state departments (Elaph, 2021).

III. Sustainable Energy

The global community has long recognized the environmental risks associated with the depletion of natural resources. The increasing demand for energy, driven by population growth and heightened electricity consumption, necessitates that Iraq adopt prompt, effective, and innovative strategies to meet this demand. Consequently, integrating sustainability principles into energy production has become imperative.

Historically, Iraq was among the pioneering Middle Eastern nations to pursue sustainable energy initiatives. In the 1980s, the country formulated an ambitious plan to develop electricity generation through solar energy. The Renewable Energy Law was enacted in 1982, and the first rooftop solar panels were installed at the Solar Energy Research Center in al-Jādirīyah in 1986. However, subsequent conflicts, sanctions, political instability, and security challenges following 2003 impeded the advancement of renewable energy projects. In 2009, the Ministry of Electricity announced plans to install solar-powered lamps as part of a broader strategy to harness solar and wind energy. Nevertheless, the dual challenges posed by the ISIS insurgency and declining oil prices hindered the realization of these initiatives (Istepanian, 2018, p. 10).

On April 13, 2016, the Department of Renewable Energies and Energy Efficiency was established pursuant to Ministerial Order No. 22097. This department was tasked with ensuring sustainable energy supply security by implementing diverse renewable energy projects for electricity generation. Its objectives include providing essential energy to support comprehensive sustainable development, increasing the share of renewable energy in the national energy mix at minimal cost and optimal quality, formulating and enforcing relevant policies, legislations, and programs aligned with available natural resources, enhancing energy efficiency in production and distribution, mitigating environmental impacts from excessive fossil fuel use, aligning with scientific advancements in energy transition, reducing emissions in accordance with established standards, adopting cutting-edge clean energy technologies, and fostering collaboration with international and local institutions through scientific and cultural exchanges.

The Ministry of Electricity has reiterated its commitment to diversifying energy sources and maximizing the national energy system's potential through projects in solar energy and electrical interconnection. The ministry aims to increase renewable energy's contribution to 40% of electricity generation by 2040. Coordinated efforts with relevant authorities are underway to meet rising demand and ensure reliable service delivery to citizens.

In July 2019, the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity invited independent power producers to develop seven photovoltaic sites with a combined capacity of 755 megawatts, reflecting efforts to diversify the energy mix. However, political instability, including protests and governmental changes, alongside the declining oil prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic, delayed project implementation.

At the close of 2019, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released a comprehensive roadmap outlining Iraq's energy future. The roadmap identified several solutions, including the integration of rooftop photovoltaics within one to three years. IEA recommended that Iraq increase renewable energy's share to 30% of electricity supply by 2030, which would yield environmental benefits and conserve approximately 9 billion cubic meters of gas for alternative uses (IEA, 2019, p. 2).

Renewable energy sources present cost-effective, rapid, and efficient solutions. Research indicates that constructing 500 megawatts of photovoltaic capacity could displace 6,000 barrels per day of crude oil used in thermal power generation, potentially generating \$87 million in annual export revenues. Expanding capacity to 2,000 megawatts would correspond to displacing 24,000 barrels per day, equating to approximately \$350 million by 2022 (IEA, 2019, p. 46).

In 2021, the Iraqi government sought to address electricity shortages by contracting with major international and regional companies specializing in renewable energy. Agreements were signed with Arab and foreign firms to establish solar power projects across Iraq. The Ministry of Electricity indicated that solar projects planned for 2022 would contribute to the national grid and alleviate existing electricity deficits. The Ministry's spokesperson reported contracts with PowerChina and the UAE-based company Masdar to supply 1,000 megawatts to four governorates initially, with plans for expansion to other governorates later. Additionally, an agreement was signed with the Norwegian company Scatec ASA to develop solar power stations with a capacity of 525 megawatts. These agreements represent the initial phase of a broader program to construct clean energy generation facilities, with implementation commencing following the completion of administrative and legal procedures. The Ministry aims to achieve 7,500 megawatts in the first phase of clean energy projects (attaqa, 2021).

In September 2021, the Ministry of Oil entered into a \$27 billion, 25-year contract with the French company TotalEnergies to execute four projects in gas and electrical energy sectors, including the construction of solar power stations with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts. The initial \$10 billion investment covers projects such as the recovery of flared gas from three oil fields for local power plant use, saline water injection to enhance oil production and conserve scarce water resources, and the establishment of a solar power plant (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Electricity articulated that the initial phase of the solar energy initiative will commence in al-Başrah and al-Rumaylah, with subsequent expansion to additional areas. This endeavor necessitates collaboration with certain governors due to the requirement for land allocation to facilitate project construction. He emphasized that Iraq is undergoing a revival aimed at strengthening the electrical system, safeguarding existing achievements, and ensuring the sustainability of ongoing projects.

Furthermore, the spokesperson elucidated that the resolutions emanating from international conferences, alongside the stipulations attached to loans extended to Iraq during 2022 and forthcoming years, predominantly priori-

tize renewable energy sources, including solar power. This strategic orientation aligns with global efforts to adopt environmentally benign energy solutions that mitigate atmospheric pollution while serving the populace. He noted that solar energy systems operate independently of generators by utilizing photovoltaic panels, and that the conducive environmental conditions, governmental initiatives, and available financial loans collectively underpin the viability of these projects. Specific timelines have been established for the implementation of such projects in the governorates of al-Muthanná, Karbalá', and Najaf, with local administrations demonstrating cooperative engagement to expedite completion.

Concerning tariff structures, the spokesperson clarified that pricing for solar-generated electricity is calibrated to reflect both international market dynamics and the particularities of the Iraqi context. Investment frameworks typically span 15 to 20 years, after which ownership of the infrastructure reverts to the state.

In a related development, the Advisor to the Minister of Oil for Energy Affairs disclosed that the Ministerial Council's strategic plans encompass the integration of clean and renewable energy sources. Multiple contracts and projects are either underway or under negotiation, with projections indicating an augmentation of approximately 7,000 megawatts to the national electricity grid by 2026, contingent upon successful implementation. These initiatives extend beyond solar energy to include long-term plans for hydroelectric power generation (Iraqi Ministry of Oil, 2021). The Minister of Water Resources corroborated the existence of studies aimed at harnessing water resources for electricity production, outlining a roadmap extending to 2035 to enhance the ministry's contribution to the energy sector (INA, 2021, December 20).

Additionally, the Director-General of the Training and Energy Research Department at the Ministry of Electricity reported the execution of several projects related to electrical energy production in 2021. Notably, the ministry completed a pilot project converting government buildings into green and smart facilities through the application of renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. This included the commissioning of a 100 kW photovoltaic system, synchronously connected to the low-voltage grid (0.4 kV) at the electricity training center in Baghdād. The system supplies electrical energy to the center, resulting in reduced electricity costs and environmental benefits. Moreover, it serves as a practical training model for university and postgraduate students within the department's inaugural renewable energy laboratory. The department's research division is actively pursuing enhancements to the existing installation and conducting detailed studies to implement additional rooftop systems aimed at achieving energy self-sufficiency and minimizing reliance on the national grid. Surplus energy generated during non-operational hours is exported to the national grid. Financially, the solar energy system accounted for over one-third of the project's implementation costs within two years. The Director-General posited that widespread adoption of similar projects across government institutions could significantly improve electricity availability for citizens, given the substantial energy

consumption by the public sector. She further highlighted that transitioning to green energy generation via renewable sources not only preserves the environment but also reduces costs compared to thermal or gas-fired power plants. Solar energy production obviates the need for fuel and transmission infrastructure due to its decentralized rooftop installation model. This approach affords energy independence, enabling users to function simultaneously as producers and consumers. The technology requires minimal high-tech equipment for installation and maintenance, relying instead on continuous, low-cost upkeep, and is environmentally benign with no harmful emissions (Mutalee, 2021).

IV. Municipal Services

Municipal services involve the collection of all types of hazardous and non-hazardous waste (agricultural, industrial, domestic, etc.) that are disposed of or intended for disposal. These are among the most important services related to the environment. Iraq suffers from many problems in this field, and these problems have worsened in recent years, becoming more complex amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the decrease in the volume of investments needed to advance these services. This is occurring against the backdrop of waste accumulation and significant population growth, which has not been met with an adequate response, not to mention the development of unsustainable consumption and production patterns and a lack of awareness among large segments of society.

From the data presented in Table 8-2 and Table 8-3, it can be observed that the number of municipal institutions (excluding the Kurdistan Region) has remained relatively stable, ranging between 250 and 265. In contrast, there has been a decline in the number of official and unofficial transfer stations (temporary collection sites), reaching 84 in 2020 compared to 87 in 2018. Meanwhile, the number of landfill sites (with and without environmental approval) reached 220 in 2020 compared to 213 in 2018. The table also showed that the percentage of the population served by waste collection services reached 64.6% in 2020, which is lower by about 2.5% compared to 2018. Urban rates were 89.9% and rural rates were 10.9%. The governorates of Najaf, al-Muthanná, Maysān, al-Başrah, Wāsiṭ, and

Table 8-2: Summary of Municipal Services Sector Indicators (2018-2020).

Year	Number of Municipal Institutions	Quantity of Ordinary Collected Waste (ton/day)	Number of Official and Unofficial Transfer Stations (Temporary Collection Sites)	Number of Landfill Sites (With and Without Environmental Approval)	Percentage of Population Served by Waste Collection Service	
					Urban	Rural
2018	261	26,370.2	87	213	63.5	88.8
2019	265	29,023.5	77	224	63.6	88.7
2020	265	32,415.1	84	220	64.6	89.9

Source: CSO, 2020.

Table 8-3: Methods of Ordinary Waste Disposal and Type of Method (2020).

Methods of Ordinary Waste Disposal	Number of Governorates	Percentage	Governorates
Landfilling in sites with environmental approval	13	81.3	All governorates except Baghdād outskirts, Karbalā', and Şalāḥ-al-Dīn
Landfilling in sites without environmental approval	14	87.5	All governorates except Bābil and al-Muthannā
Dumping in vacant lots	6	37.5	Nīnawá, Diyálá, al-Anbār, Baghdād outskirts, Şalāḥ-al-Dīn, Najaf
Recycling or reuse	2	12.5	Baghdād outskirts and Dhī-Qār
Burning	1	6.3	Maysān
Conversion to compost	0	0.0	None
Conversion to energy	0	0.0	None
Selling	0	0.0	None
Other	0	0.0	None

Source: CSO, 2020.

Bābil were the highest in providing municipal services, recording 100%, 99.6%, 95%, 92.3%, and 90.6% respectively, while Şalāḥ-al-Dīn governorate had the lowest percentage of population served by municipal services at 66.1%. Regarding the methods used for disposing of ordinary waste, data indicates that landfill sites with environmental approval reached 81.3% in 13 governorates, while landfill sites without environmental approval reached 87.5%, followed by dumping in vacant lots at 37.5%, and recycling and reuse at 12.5%.

Through the analysis of Table 8-3, we realize that landfill sites without environmental approval exceed their counterparts with environmental approval, which contradicts environmental sustainability standards. A low rate of recycling or reuse is also observed, which includes collecting, sorting, processing, and converting products into raw materials that can be used as inputs for producing new products. Recycling products results in material that is more energy-efficient and less polluting, and more cost-effective for production. It is also noted that there are no methods for converting ordinary waste into compost or energy, indicating a major flaw and the absence of any strategies for its exploitation, leading to its loss as a resource that could be utilized. Most countries in the world have begun to use this waste in multiple applications that benefit their countries. In Sweden, for example, nearly half of solid waste is burned to generate electricity through the use of pyrolysis in processes such as producing clean energy from old tires, as well as converting plastic scrap into oil, etc. In general, the municipal sector in Iraq suffers from a number of obstacles and challenges that can be illustrated through Table 8-4.

Table 8-4: Problems Facing the Municipal Services Sector in Iraq.

Problems Facing the Municipal Services Sector	Number of Governorates	Percentage	Governorates
Shortage and unavailability of vehicles in municipal institutions, and aging of some.	16	100.0	All governorates
Poor maintenance and upkeep of vehicles.	14	87.5	All governorates except Diyālā and Wāsiṭ
Scarcity of spare parts needed for waste management vehicles.	13	81.3	All governorates except Diyālā, Wāsiṭ, and Dhī-Qār
Lack of financial allocations to implement cleaning projects.	15	93.8	All governorates except Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn
Shortage of workers allocated to the vehicles for waste collection and transportation.	16	100.0	All governorates
Low wages for workers in the waste sector.	16	100.0	All governorates
Lack of availability of supplies (bags) allocated for waste collection.	13	81.3	All governorates except Baghdād outskirts, Wāsiṭ, and al-Baṣrah
Lack of environmental awareness and non-compliance of citizens with waste collection schedules, disrupting the system.	16	100.0	All governorates
Indiscriminate dumping of waste by citizens and commercial establishments.	16	100.0	All governorates
Weak institutional performance of governorates in allocating funds for waste recycling plant projects within regional development budgets.	11	68.8	All governorates except Nīnawá, Mayorality of Baghdād, Baghdād outskirts, Wāsiṭ, and Maysān
Weak coordination between supporting departments that grant approvals for landfill projects and transfer stations.	13	81.3	All governorates except Nīnawá, Mayorality of Baghdād, and Maysān
Non-use of designated waste collection bags distributed to citizens and weak standards for monitoring cleaning operations.	12	75.0	All governorates except Baghdād outskirts, al-Muthanná, Dhī-Qār, and al-Baṣrah
Difficulty for transfer stations to cover all municipal institutions, problems of indiscriminate waste dumping.	11	68.8	All governorates except Nīnawá, Kirkūk, Mayorality of Baghdād, al-Muthanná, and Dhī-Qār

Table 8-4 (continued).

Problems Facing the Municipal Services Sector	Number of Governorates	Percentage	Governorates
Lack of studies and research to establish a sound mechanism for waste management and weakness of the specialized local private sector in this field.	14	87.5	All governorates except Ninawá and Mayoralty of Baghdād
Absence of a waste sorting system at the source, low use of bags by citizens, and failure to utilize them in waste collection.	14	87.5	All governorates except Amanat Baghdād and Baghdād outskirts
Free cleaning services for residential areas, weak awareness of the impact of negative citizen response, and lack of cooperation between service provider and recipient.	13	81.3	All governorates except Ninawá, Kirkūk, and al-Dīwānīyah
Large geographical area of cities and their horizontal expansion, resulting in large waste generation disproportionate to available mechanical and human resources.	15	93.8	All governorates except Ninawá
Spread of informal settlements and encroachment, significantly impacting the level of services provided.	16	100.0	All governorates
Shortage of designated waste collection containers, lack of specialized modern containers damaged by use, and delay in replacing damaged ones.	14	87.5	All governorates except Ninawá and Amanat Baghdād

Source: CSO, 2020.

V. Safe Drinking Water Services

Safe drinking water services are of paramount importance to governments and hold a prominent place in strategies and plans. Improving water supply and managing water resources can significantly boost economic growth and greatly contribute to poverty reduction. Conversely, the absence, inadequacy, or mismanagement of water services exposes individuals to grave health risks. Armed conflicts and protracted struggles, as well as crises (most recently the COVID-19 pandemic), pose an increasing challenge for the population's access to fresh water. Studies indicate that Iraq has suffered and will suffer more than others from water scarcity due to rapid population growth, the lack of transboundary water agreements, unsustainable water management, and widespread environmental degradation caused by armed conflicts.

Many are the problems Iraq faces, especially those related to the exploitation of natural resources. However, one of the most important natural resources facing imminent danger is water and its availability in the land of two of the world's greatest rivers (Tigris and Euphrates). Iraq has failed to exploit them efficiently,

leading to successive water crises with the upstream countries, Turkey and Iran. Despite the efforts made by the government after 2003, all attempts have failed to lead Iraq to sign binding agreements with Turkey and Iran to guarantee its share of the water passing through its territory, the majority of which originates from the two neighboring countries.

Statistics indicate that the percentage of the population served by safe drinking water networks in the entire country reached 83.3%, including 91.7% in urban areas. The highest percentage was in Najaf governorate at 93.4%, followed by Karbalā' and Maysān at 92.7% and 92% respectively. Meanwhile, the percentage of the population served by safe drinking water networks in rural areas reached 65.6% (meaning more than a third of the rural population is still not served by these networks). The parliamentary Services Committee has confirmed that about 50% of Iraq's villages and rural areas are without safe drinking water and that their situation requires continuous support to secure it, as most governorates suffer from a decline in basic services, especially water. The average per capita share of safe drinking water reached 365 liters/day (there is a gap in the per capita share, which amounted to 450 liters/day). The highest average per capita share was recorded in Maysān governorate at about 636 liters/day, while the lowest average per capita share was in al-Anbār governorate at 166 liters/day. Statistics also indicate that approximately 20.1% of safe drinking water is lost during transmission through water networks due to aging infrastructure, pipe breakages, and illegal tapping of transmission networks (Ministry of Planning, 2021c, pp. 22-23).

Some governorates, including the capital Baghdād and al-Başrah, suffer from a scarcity of safe drinking water due to the lack of water purification projects. In Baghdād, several areas on its outskirts constantly suffer from water scarcity due to major breakages and encroachments on the transmission pipes, coupled with a lack of rehabilitation, maintenance, and upkeep projects, and the irrigation of agricultural lands located near residential areas. This is in addition to the issue of power outages, which significantly affects the operation of purification plants. The director of the operations department at the Baghdād Water Directorate pledged readiness for the upcoming summer season through maintenance and upkeep works for water projects lasting several months, while fearing pressure on the network due to excessive water use in large quantities. Mayorality of Baghdād also announced the implementation of campaigns in cooperation with the Ministry of Water Resources to dredge the intakes of projects affected by the decrease in water production, including the raw water station in al-Za'farānīyah, near which central islands appeared, leading to the complete shutdown of the station, as well as the al-Wathbah water project in Bāb-al-Mu'azzam. It is also preparing plans to complete all projects and bring them into service, including the projects for al-Baladīyāt, al-Kāzīmīyah, al-Şadr, and al-Ruşāfah, to eliminate water scarcity in the capital.

As for al-Başrah governorate, which suffers from a permanent scarcity of safe drinking water, in addition to water salinity that increases in the summer, the Iraqi

Red Crescent Society initiated efforts to help solve this problem by establishing a large station in al-Ribāṭ area. Water treatment and desalination plants were installed with a capacity of 600 m³/hour, meeting the needs of more than 55,000 people in the al-Ḥakīmīyah, al-Tamīmīyah, al-'Ashshār, and al-Dākīr areas so that residents of the area and neighboring regions do not have to buy safe drinking water.

The number of stations installed by the Iraqi Red Crescent throughout the country reached 44 water desalination and purification plants. Additionally, Crescent teams trained specialized personnel for the maintenance of these stations to ensure their continued operation. Water stations were installed in remote areas, villages, rural areas, and regions suffering from scarcity of safe drinking water, based on field surveys conducted by Red Crescent teams in coordination with the relevant authorities from the water directorates in those governorates. The water stations are distributed geographically with 15 stations in al-Baṣrah governorate, 9 in Nīnawá, 4 in Baghdād governorate, 9 in Bābil, 3 in Wāsiṭ, 4 in Dhī-Qār, and 3 stations in al-Muthanná. It is worth mentioning that the number of beneficiaries from the water desalination stations installed and operated by the Iraqi Red Crescent teams exceeds 1.5 million people.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned that the health of Iraqi children is at risk due to lack of access to safe drinking water. The UN organization stated that 3 out of every 5 children in Iraq do not have access to safe drinking water, threatening their nutrition and endangering their health (25% of total child deaths are due to water-related diseases, according to the World Health Organization). It explained that less than half of the schools in Iraq have basic water services. The UNICEF representative in Iraq indicated that water scarcity in Iraq is alarming because children cannot grow to their full potential without water. The number of children in Iraq in the age group (0-14 years) is 16 million and 220 thousand, according to statistics from the Iraqi Ministry of Planning in January 2021. According to the same statement, the rainy season in Iraq for 2020-2021 was the driest in 40 years, causing a sharp decrease in water flow in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers by 29% and 73% respectively. Iraq relies primarily on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries for water, all of which originate in Turkey and Iran and meet near the city of al-Baṣrah in the south of the country (INA, 2021, August 29).

In this context, the advisor to the Minister of Water Resources confirmed that Iraq will face a sharp shortage in water levels in the coming years. He explained that there are immense challenges facing Iraq, especially with indicators warning of water shortages, coupled with Iraq's population increase, in addition to climatic indicators. He noted that his ministry's strategic indicators predict that Iraq will experience a water shortage estimated at nearly 10 billion cubic meters by 2035. International reports indicate that Iraq's water stress level is 3.7 out of 5 according to the water stress index, placing Iraq among the countries classified as having a high risk regarding water scarcity and its dangers. The global index

predicts that by 2040, Iraq will become a land without rivers after the Tigris and Euphrates rivers dry up completely (Noon Post, 2021).

VI. Sanitation Services

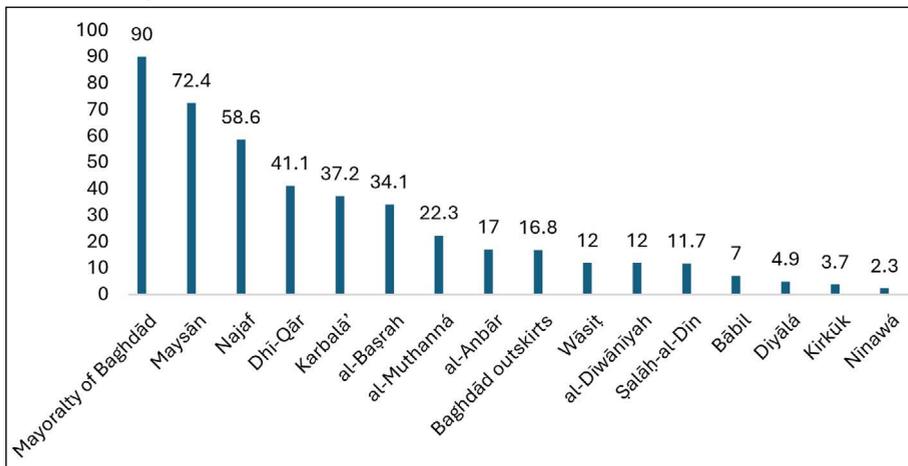
Sanitation services exert a significant and direct influence on various dimensions of human and economic development. They are recognized as a critical factor in the eradication of extreme poverty by the year 2030.

Empirical studies and reports consistently demonstrate that sanitation initiatives yield multiple benefits, including reductions in disease burden, enhanced nutritional outcomes, decreased stunting, improved quality of life, increased school attendance among girls, expanded employment opportunities and wages, heightened urban competitiveness, and broader socio-economic advancements.

Recent data from 2020 concerning Iraq's sanitation sector reveal the existence of 66 central treatment plants and small to medium treatment units, collectively designed to process approximately 2.7 m³/day of wastewater, distributed across all governorates. The highest concentration of these facilities is found in Baghdād, which hosts 15 treatment plants, whereas Diyālā governorate has only one such plant (CSO, 2020).

The volume of wastewater generated for treatment reached approximately 3.2 m³/day, of which about 2.0 million m³/day (only 60.5%) undergo treatment. However, over one-third of wastewater (approximately 40%) remains untreated. The closure of 14 treatment plant units and the partial operation of 9 others have contributed to this reduced treatment rate, with no wastewater from central treatment plants being treated. The proportion of the population served by sewage networks (both wastewater and combined) across Iraq stands at approx-

Figure 8-3: Percentage of Population Served by Sewage Networks (Wastewater and Combined) by Governorate.



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on data from (CSO, 2020).

imately 34%. Baghdād exhibits the highest coverage at 90%, followed by Maysān at 72.4%, and Najaf at 58.6%. Conversely, Diyālā, Kirkūk, and Nīnawá report the lowest coverage rates at 4.9%, 3.7%, and 2.3%, respectively.

According to United Nations data, approximately 70% of Iraq's industrial waste is discharged directly into rivers and lakes. In al-Nāšīriyah, untreated sewage flows directly from drainage pipes into the al-Chibāyish marshes, a critical water body in southern Iraq, thereby posing a significant threat to the local ecosystem. The Dhī-Qār Sewerage Directorate attributes the absence of treatment units at sewage stations to the prohibitive cost, estimated at around 100 billion Iraqi dinars. The Directorate also noted two planned treatment plant projects, one of which was scheduled to commence operations in 2015 but was delayed due to the financial crises between 2015 and 2021.

On a related note, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities announced that 2022 would witness the completion of strategic sanitation projects in several governorates. Notably, the sewage project for the al-Ḥusaynīyah district in Baghdād, serving approximately 400,000 residents, includes heavy water and rainwater networks extending 285 km, alongside the construction of six pumping stations with a combined design capacity of 65,000 m³/day. The unified Kirkūk sewage project, with an execution rate between 14% and 34%, is among the most significant initiatives aimed at improving service quality, reducing pollution, and producing treated water suitable for agricultural irrigation. This project, executed by a Turkish company, has a design capacity of 300,000 m³/day. Additionally, the strategic al-Ramādī sewage project, featuring a central treatment unit with a capacity of 100,000 m³/day, is nearing completion. Other projects include the near-completion of sewage networks in al-Rumaythah district of al-Muthanná governorate (97% complete), the feeder line project for the Najaf treatment plant, and the sewage networks for the al-Ḥurr district in Karbalā' governorate (94% complete). al-Nāšīriyah treatment plant project, with an estimated capacity of 2,000 m³/day, aims to treat heavy water and convert it into environmentally compliant treated water.

VII. Transportation Services

The transportation sector holds a pivotal role in the economy due to its substantial contribution to economic growth at local, national, regional, and global scales. It facilitates shared prosperity, poverty reduction, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Transportation infrastructure enables connectivity to essential services such as healthcare and education. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the sector's critical importance, particularly in the distribution of vaccines worldwide throughout 2020.

Despite its importance, the transportation sector (comprising land, river, and air transportation) faces numerous challenges, including deteriorating infrastructure quality and declines in key performance indicators. The land road network extends 47,877 km, yielding a road density of 84.2 km per 1,000 km², which falls

Table 8-5: Investment Projects of the General Company for Iraqi Railways in 2021.

Project Name	Description	Length (km)	Number of Tracks	Estimated Cost (million \$)		Construction Period (years)
				Expro-riation	Imple-mentation	
Musayyab-Karbalā'-Najaf-Samāwah railway line	Designs were prepared by an Italian company in 1982 and updated in 2021 by another Italian company	288	Double	750	2400	3
Başrah-Fāw railway line	Designs prepared by a German consulting firm; requires clearing surroundings from mines	100	Double	300	1410	3
Ring railway around Baghdad city	Designs prepared by an Italian company	248	Mixed	430	2000	5
Mosul-Duhok-Zākhū-Turkey railway line	Original designs prepared by an Italian company in 1982; design update underway by Czech companies	160	Double	450	2157	3
Baghdād-Kūt-'Amārah-Başrah railway line and Kūt-Nāşiriyah-Shu'aybah-Umm-Qaşr branch line	Original designs are old and largely missing; require design update	910	Double	2730	11000	7
Baghdād-Ba'qūbah-Kirkūk-Erbil-Mosul railway line and Ba'qūbah-Khān-aqīn-Mundhiriyah-Iran branch line	Original designs prepared by a French company in 1982; design update underway by a Czech company	700	Mixed	1650	7000	7
Kirkūk-Sulaymānīyah railway line	Detailed designs prepared by a Hungarian company	120	Single	350	3000	5.5
Ramādī-Karbalā' railway line	Original designs prepared in 1982 by an Italian company and updated by a German company	133	Double	400	1500	3
Iraq-Jordan rail link	Designs recently prepared by a German company	400	Single	50	4000	5
Shu'aybah-Zubayr-Murbad-Şafwān-Kuwait railway line	Designs prepared by an Italian company	52	Double	150	500	3
Kūt-Ba'qūbah railway line	No previous designs exist for the project	250	Double	750	3000	4
Karbalā'-Najaf suspended monorail	New project, not yet started; route will be above central reservations	70	Double	-	-	-

Source: Ministry of Transportation, 2021.

short of the international standard of 105 km per 1,000 km². This deficiency contributes to traffic congestion in major urban centers. Road density per capita is approximately 102.1 km per 1,000 inhabitants, also below the international benchmark of 496 km per 1,000 inhabitants. The per capita availability of paved roads is 1 meter per person, significantly less than the international standard of 12 meters per person (Ministry of Planning, 2021c, p. 24).

The railway system, which has suffered from prolonged neglect, comprises 2,839 km of tracks distributed along nine lines. Revenues from freight transportation by rail declined from 5,206 million dinars in 2019 to 4,221 million dinars in 2020. The railway network has been severely impacted by neglect, armed conflict, and security instability, particularly due to the war on terrorism. The Director of the General Company for Iraqi Railways reported ongoing rehabilitation efforts targeting railway infrastructure damaged by ISIS and subsequent military operations. Maintenance work has commenced on the Baghdād-Bayjī line, which services the Bayjī refinery. Additionally, engineering teams are nearing completion of a railway line connecting to Mosul, with an expected opening in early 2022. This line, spanning 407 kilometers, suffered extensive damage during the conflict with ISIS (CSO, 2021b, p. 3).

The Dry Canal project, a railway line linking the port of al-Fāw in southern Iraq to Turkey through Fīshkhābūr—the final border crossing with Turkey—is currently under consideration. According to the Director-General of Railways, several international firms have submitted bids for the construction of this 1,211-kilometer canal, which is planned to be entirely funded through private investment. Table 8-5 presents the investment strategies and railway projects slated for 2021 (Independent Arabia, 2021).

Maritime transportation, which constitutes a significant component of Iraq's foreign trade, has experienced a marked decline. Data reveal that the General Company for Maritime Transportation operated seven vessels in 2020, down from eight in 2019. Concurrently, revenues for the General Company for Ports amounted to 424.1 billion dinars in 2020, compared to 486.1 billion dinars in 2019. These declines are attributed to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of most economic activities (CSO, 2021b, p. 3).

The General Company for Maritime Transportation, headquartered in al-Başrah governorate, announced plans in 2022 to procure two new vessels with drafts compatible with the dimensions of Iraqi ports following the completion of the al-Fāw Grand Port. Each multipurpose vessel will have a capacity of 35,000 tons. Additionally, in September 2021, Saudi Arabia and Iraq signed an agreement to facilitate maritime transportation and ship movement, aiming to enhance trade exchange and streamline port access procedures between the two countries.

Regarding air transportation, Iraq possesses five international airports located in Baghdād, al-Başrah, al-Najaf al-Ashraf, Erbil, and al-Sulaymāniyah. The sector is primarily managed by the General Company for Iraqi Airways alongside two other airlines with limited operational capacity. As of 2020, Iraq had seven national

carriers: three passenger airlines (Iraqi Airways, Fly Baghdad, UR Airlines), two private transportation companies (Iraq Gate and al-Burhan), and two air transportation companies (al-Haya and Saqr al-Rafidain). The national fleet comprised 32 aircraft, including four leased units, with approximately 4,200 employees in the sector (CSO, 2021a).

Notably, in 2021, the General Company for Iraqi Airways entered into a contract with al-Haya Company for Aviation and Air Cargo Services, which holds an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and accreditation from the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), to activate air cargo operations and leverage the company's expertise and modern cargo aircraft.

In October 2021, Iraqi authorities announced the partial lifting of the airspace warning imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in 2014 during the conflict with ISIS. The Director of the Air Traffic Management Department at the General Company for Air Navigation Services, affiliated with the Iraqi Ministry of Transportation, stated that following extensive coordination with relevant stakeholders, improvements in navigation services, and participation in meetings with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), IATA, and transit companies, a portion of the FAA warning was lifted. This development is expected to have positive economic implications by increasing air traffic over Iraqi airspace and augmenting state revenue.

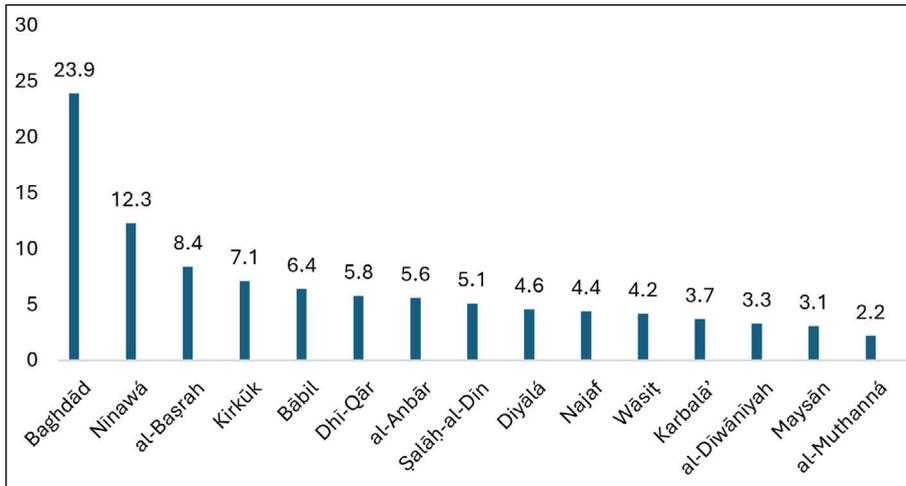
VIII. Housing Services

Iraq has long endured a severe housing crisis, exacerbated by successive wars, unstable security conditions, terrorism, and financial corruption, all of which have significantly impeded sectoral development. The conflict against ISIS from 2014 to 2017 resulted in the destruction of approximately 150,000 homes, according to government statistics. Despite a near doubling of the population over the past 18 years, Iraq has witnessed no major housing projects, contributing to a substantial housing deficit. Current data indicate a shortfall of approximately 2.5 million housing units, predominantly concentrated in Baghdād, Nīnawá, al-Baṣrah, Kirkūk, Bābil, and Dhī-Qār, whereas al-Muthanná, Maysān, al-Dīwānīyah, and Karbalā' exhibit comparatively smaller deficits.

The Ministry of Planning has reported that approximately 3.5 million Iraqis reside in slums and unplanned neighborhoods nationwide, encompassing 522,000 informal housing units distributed across 4,000 residential complexes. This population represents over 10% of the national demographic. Baghdād and al-Baṣrah account for 1,000 and 700 units respectively, while Nīnawá has the largest number of such units. Conversely, Najaf and Karbalā' report the lowest figures, with 99 and 98 units respectively (Ministry of Planning, 2021b).

The proliferation of slums has exerted significant pressure on essential services including water supply, electricity, sewage systems, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. These settlements, being outside the original urban planning

Figure 8-4: Percentage of Housing Deficit in Iraq by Governorate (%).



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on data from: CSO, 2020.

frameworks, exceed the designed capacity of municipal services. Additionally, this phenomenon has induced demographic shifts within the affected cities. It has also led to the destruction of agricultural lands, which have been converted into residential areas. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, at least 10,000 dunams (equivalent to 10 million square meters) of agricultural land have been leveled and repurposed for housing. In Baghdad alone, approximately twelve agricultural sites were bulldozed in 2020 to facilitate housing developments.

International assessments have highlighted that over the past two decades, successive Iraqi governments, through contracts managed by the Ministry of Housing, have squandered hundreds of millions of dollars.

In response to the acute housing crisis, Iraqi Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī announced in 2021 the allocation of funds to complete the construction of 100,000 housing units within the Bismāyah project, following the completion of 35,000 units by the implementing company. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the city of al-Rafil near Baghdad International Airport, which is planned to comprise hundreds of thousands of housing units across eight distinct areas (Office of the Prime Minister, 2021).

Additionally, in June 2021, the Prime Minister initiated the Dārī program, aimed at distributing land plots to eligible and economically disadvantaged citizens, prioritizing widows, victims of terrorism, and beneficiaries of social welfare. To ensure equitable distribution and prevent manipulation, an electronic application system was introduced, whereby eligibility is determined through a points-based system reflecting applicants' economic and social status.

As part of the governmental strategy to alleviate the housing crisis, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) announced an increase in financial allocations to the housing sector amounting to 1.9 trillion Iraqi dinars. This funding is divided between the

Real Estate Bank (1 trillion dinars) and the Housing Fund (900 billion dinars), enhancing their capacity to provide financial support to a greater number of beneficiaries. Consequently, the total allocations to these institutions will exceed 3.6 trillion Iraqi dinars, according to CBI

Minister of Planning Khālid al-Najm appealed to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to assist in addressing the housing crisis in alignment with the population policy outlined in the five-year development plan and the 2030 sustainable development vision. This collaboration aims to develop modern, low-cost housing designs that incorporate sustainable development principles and utilize available natural resources. al-Najm also announced the completion of several low-cost housing complexes under the poverty reduction strategy, which will soon be allocated to beneficiaries based on established criteria (Ministry of Planning, 2021a).

Regarding legislative measures, the parliamentary Services and Reconstruction Committee has introduced two draft laws: one to guarantee housing ownership for all Iraqis, and another to address the issue of slums. The committee emphasized its commitment to proposing solutions to the housing crisis, advocating for housing prices that reflect the living standards of middle- and low-income citizens. It also highlighted efforts to allocate funds for stalled housing projects and to resolve their associated challenges.

IX. Public Health Services

Health constitutes a fundamental right and represents a primary objective within the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 3). The Iraqi constitution addresses this right in multiple articles, affirming the entitlement of Iraqi citizens to a free, dignified, and healthy life. These provisions emphasize the right to social and health security, particularly for women and children, and delineate the shared responsibilities among federal authorities, regional administrations, and governorates.

The Iraqi health sector is widely regarded as underdeveloped by international standards, characterized by aging infrastructure, insufficient capacity to meet the population's health needs, limited availability of health services, and elevated prevalence rates of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

In recent years, the sector has faced escalating challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by declining oil revenues which adversely impacted financial allocations necessary for mitigating the pandemic's effects. The emergence of viral variants precipitated successive waves of infection, further straining the health system.

According to data from the Iraqi Ministry of Health, from the first confirmed case on February 24, 2020, through December 31, 2021, Iraq recorded 2,093,740 COVID-19 infections, with 2,064,970 recoveries, yielding a recovery rate of 98.6%. The death toll reached 24,158, while 8,551,606 individuals received vaccinations.

Vaccine provision garnered significant governmental attention despite initial delays in early 2021, alongside support from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Vaccination efforts expanded nationwide, establishing over 120 external vaccination sites targeting approximately 12 million individuals, including children aged 12 years and older.

In September 2021, the World Bank approved a \$100 million project to bolster Iraq's health sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative aims to support vaccine administration to priority populations, enhance institutional capacity for safe and effective vaccine deployment, improve healthcare waste management, and promote public awareness regarding vaccination benefits. The World Bank's Regional Director for the Middle East Department underscored the necessity of facilitating vaccine access to curb the pandemic's spread and alleviate pressures on Iraq's fragile health system. The project further seeks to enable safe reopening and economic recovery.

The pandemic, coupled with the emergence of new viral variants, intensified demand for health services amid shortages of human and material resources and inadequate infrastructure. The Iraqi health system has historically failed to meet International Health Regulations, particularly in responding to health risks. Moreover, disproportionate expenditure on operational costs at the expense of investment has constrained the sector's capacity to accommodate rising service demands.

Statistical data indicate that Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, possesses 450 hospitals (155 private), approximately 341 popular clinics, and 239 specialized health centers encompassing 55 dental clinics, 21 chest disease centers, 8 allergy and asthma centers, and others. Primary healthcare centers number 2,805, with an additional 799 health institutions. Hospitals face overcrowding, shortages of skilled healthcare personnel and management, and inadequate funding, impeding service delivery and quality assurance. Studies reveal deficits of approximately 382 hospitals, 1,754 health centers, 3,489 beds, and 4,462 medical professionals, predominantly in the governorates of Nīnawá, Baghdād, and Dhī-Qār (Ministry of Planning, 2021c, p. 21).

Many hospitals have experienced significant administrative challenges and service deterioration despite substantial financial investments aimed at infrastructural improvements and capacity expansion. The rapid population growth, which has more than doubled, exacerbates these pressures.

Notably, in April 2021, a catastrophic fire at Ibn-al-Khaṭīb Hospital, designated for COVID-19 isolation, resulted in 82 fatalities and 110 injuries, prompting the resignation of the Minister of Health and the Governor of Baghdād. Subsequently, on July 12, 2021, a fire at a COVID-19 isolation hospital in Dhī-Qār caused 90 deaths and numerous injuries, leading to the issuance of arrest warrants for 13 officials.

Health sector expenditures exhibit inefficiencies, with 37% allocated to hospitals, 16% to preventive care, and 13% to primary outpatient care, reflecting imbal-

anced resource distribution. The predominance of operational over investment spending undermines specialized and technical efficiency (World Bank, 2021, p. 3).

The Health Insurance Law No. 22 of 2021, ratified by the Iraqi Council of Representatives in October 2020, represents a pioneering legislative framework regulating health service provision akin to international standards. It establishes clear regulations governing access to public and private healthcare facilities. Since the establishment of the Iraqi state in the 1920s, prior legislation lacked explicit provisions for health insurance mechanisms addressing routine and emergency medical care.

The law aims to guarantee quality health services and equitable access, alleviate financial burdens, and uphold social solidarity and health justice as enshrined in Article 30 of the Iraqi Constitution. It mandates the establishment of the Health Insurance Authority, linked to the Ministry of Health, with legal personality and administrative and financial independence, operating branches across regions and governorates. The Authority administers the Health Insurance Fund. Registration is compulsory for all state employees and optional for retirees, associations, employers, citizens, and their families. Contributions are set at 2.5% of total salary for special grades and 1% for other state employees. The law provides free coverage for specified groups, including non-employed spouses, children up to age 21 (or 24 if studying), unmarried daughters, divorced and widowed women without employment, and individuals with certain medical conditions or social vulnerabilities, such as cancer patients, those with mental illnesses, hereditary blood diseases, kidney failure, intellectual disabilities, persons with special needs among security forces, unemployed males over 60, unemployed females over 55, and children under five.

The services encompass clinical examinations, laboratory and radiological diagnostics, physiotherapy, specialized treatments, surgical interventions, childbirth, medication provision, hospital admissions, nursing care, and other therapeutic needs as determined by the Health Insurance Authority. The legislation aims to fulfill several objectives, including:

- Guaranteeing comprehensive health coverage for insured individuals.
- Upholding the principles of social justice and solidarity.
- Alleviating the financial burdens on citizens and mitigating poverty.
- Diversifying funding sources for the health sector.
- Fostering a competitive environment and enhancing the performance of personnel and health institutions across both public and private sectors.
- Improving the quality of medical services by regulating the collaboration and competition between public and private health sectors.
- Encouraging private sector participation and investment in health services.

X. Agenda for the New Year 2022

The incoming Iraqi government, anticipated to be established in 2022, confronts multifaceted challenges, with public service provision being paramount. Mr. Muṣṭafá al-Kāẓimī, head of the caretaker government, emphasized the significance of these challenges, particularly the delivery of services to citizens. He noted that his administration has initiated efforts and anticipates their continuation by the succeeding government. He asserted that through cooperation, solidarity, and diligent work, all challenges can be surmounted.

The new government must capitalize on the favorable conditions presented by rising oil prices and growth in energy markets to augment financial revenues. This financial enhancement should underpin the design and implementation of a comprehensive development program focused on advancing the nation's infrastructure and service superstructure, including ports, railway networks, land transportation, potable water, sanitation, electricity, road construction, and housing development. Additionally, increased financial allocations within the investment budget are imperative, articulated through detailed short-, medium-, and long-term reconstruction plans for physical infrastructure.

The development program should be formulated in partnership with the private sector, aiming to enhance infrastructure amidst the challenges and pressures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on public services. This necessitates the adoption of policies, reforms, and projects aligned with these objectives. The priorities for the government's 2022-2026 term should be grounded in previously prepared documents and strategies, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018-2022, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan, the National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals, the White Paper, Iraq Vision 2030 for Sustainable Development, and the National Development Plan 2018-2022. These priorities must be harmonized with these frameworks, accompanied by a specific action plan delineating timelines and achievement targets, ensuring the allocation of requisite financial resources, and subject to regular governmental review.

The following list delineates the 2022 agenda concerning public services:

1. **Enhancement of the Investment Climate and Efficiency in Public Services**
 - a. Provision of appropriate investment infrastructure.
 - b. Enactment of pertinent laws and regulations.
 - c. Implementation of procedural and administrative reforms to address stalled and delayed projects.
 - d. Governance of public service entities.
 - e. Amendment of laws and regulations impeding private sector activities.
2. **Public-Private Sector Partnership**
 - a. Empowerment of the private sector and investment support.
 - b. Job creation.

- c. Incentivization for improved service provision.
 - d. Skill development.
 - e. Support for small and medium enterprises.
 - f. Activation of partnerships between public and private sectors.
3. **Priority Public Sector Departments**
- a. **Health Sector:** Strengthening the capacity of the health sector to face the COVID-19 pandemic, providing sufficient financial allocations, and developing plans to advance this sector and support its capabilities.
 - b. **Electricity Sector:** Addressing waste and corruption, increasing investment in national capabilities, completing production projects, providing the appropriate infrastructure for transitioning to renewable energy.
 - c. **Education Sector:** Necessity of developing a modern program to advance the reality of higher education in the country, especially in the context of the developments the world is witnessing, to elevate the quality and efficiency of education.
 - d. **Housing Sector:** Addressing the housing crisis, solving the problem of slums, and promoting sustainable investment policies for water, sewage, transportation, and banking services.
4. **Gradual Digital Transformation in Public Service Delivery:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of change in the field of public services, and social distancing has forced the government to innovate in this area. Within the framework of the digital transformation project and e-government, technology and innovation should be harnessed in the best way possible to achieve better results, because digital services are characterized by saving about 50% of time and effort and 60% of costs. Therefore, the upcoming government's agenda must include setting plans for a gradual transition towards digitizing public services in the country.

As Iraq progresses into 2022, it faces enduring and emergent challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, shaped by political, economic, and social dynamics. Economically, the country grapples with fragility, structural imbalances in production, and a lack of coherent economic vision across successive administrations. Politically, delays in government formation—exceeding three months post-parliamentary elections—undermine national stability. Socially, declining human development indicators, inadequate social policies, elevated poverty rates, and deficient service provision prevail, compounded by environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and desertification. New challenges stem from the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, including the spread of variants such as Omicron, impacting economic and social conditions.

Access to fundamental public services remains insufficient relative to population growth. Financial resources allocated for service sector infrastructure fall short of developmental needs, posing significant obstacles to securing investments necessary for optimal service delivery.

The principal challenges confronting Iraq in 2022 are summarized as follows:

1. **Government Formation Delays:** Prolonged delays and political uncertainty adversely affect public service provision and the completion of service projects. The government's incapacity to meet societal needs culminates in service delivery failures.
2. **Budget Approval Delays:** The postponement of the 2022 general budget approval constitutes a major impediment. Although the Ministry of Finance has presented the draft budget, governmental formation delays prolong the approval process, impeding the allocation of financial resources essential for public service investments.
3. **Health Sector Vulnerabilities:** Structural weaknesses and infrastructural deficiencies characterize Iraq's health sector, which has been severely strained by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. **Electricity Sector Decline:** Despite expenditures exceeding \$80 billion over the last fifteen years, Iraq endures chronic electricity shortages, presenting a formidable challenge for the incoming government to rectify and modernize the sector.
5. **Pervasive Financial and Administrative Corruption:** Corruption represents a critical issue across all sectors, with estimated costs surpassing twice the domestic product (more than 450 billion dinars). This pervasive corruption engenders widespread deficiencies in services including electricity, healthcare, and education.

XI. Challenges of 2022

In 2022, Iraq confronts numerous critical challenges amid a significant transitional phase, pending the establishment of a government tasked with resolving the persistent bottlenecks afflicting public services. The nation grapples with substantial deficiencies, including the disposal of over one and a half million cubic meters of waste into the Tigris River, deteriorating infrastructure, an underdeveloped healthcare system, and an escalating housing crisis affecting more than four million citizens residing in informal and irregular settlements. Additionally, the education system is experiencing marked decline and degradation, compounded by a chronic electricity shortage that remains unresolved. These challenges collectively constitute the primary entitlements for the year 2022.

In light of the aforementioned issues, the challenges pertaining to the public services sector for 2022 can be delineated as follows:

- Expediting the formulation of strategic plans and implement necessary measures to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes augmenting financial allocations to strengthen the health sector, prioritizing the development of requisite infrastructure to ensure optimal service delivery, and addressing structural deficiencies to achieve comprehensive and efficient healthcare provision.

Table 8-6: Projects Approved in 2021 but Not Yet Initiated.

Project	Allocated Amounts (million \$)	Beneficiary Entity
Completion of Şalāḥ al-Dīn Thermal Power Station project	452	Ministry of Electricity
Completion of the new al-Nāşirīyah Depot project	349	Ministry of Oil
Construction of schools (1000 model schools)	199	General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers
Sewage project (Nahrawān - Ḥayy al-Waḥdah - Abū-Gharīb - Sab' al-Būr)	199	Baghdād Governorate
Project for construction of hospitals (100 beds)	100	Ministry of Health
Completion of al-Anbār power station / combined cycle project	199	Ministry of Electricity
Rehabilitation of Wāsiṭ Thermal Power Station project	100	Ministry of Electricity
Project to convert gas stations (Simple Cycle) to Combined Cycle	200	Ministry of Electricity
al-Nāşirīyah Airport project	-	Civil Aviation Authority
al-Başrah Water Project Pipeline - al-Bad'ah Canal	5	Ministry of Water Resources

Source: Iraqi Gazette, 2021.

- Finalizing the service projects sanctioned under the Chinese agreement, as published in the Iraqi Gazette No. 4625 on April 12, 2021, with an allocated budget of \$1,803 million, detailed in Table 8-1.
- Completion of electricity projects outlined by the Ministry, as part of a short-term one-year plan, which aims to add 5,000 megawatts by commissioning the al-Dibs station (Kirkūk), units at the Bismāyah station (Baghdād), and the al-Rumaylah (al-Başrah) investment station. Additionally, efforts include reactivating units currently under maintenance to promptly address the existing electrical energy deficit.
- Fostering a conducive business environment for investments in the public services sector, infrastructure, and superstructure projects. This includes facilitating private sector participation in service provision by streamlining procedures, establishing companies, and implementing necessary measures.
- Developing immediate and rapid plans to implement and monitor stalled and suspended projects, addressing deficiencies and allocating the requisite financial resources, particularly in the context of rising oil prices.
- Finalizing the legal framework for public-private partnerships to facilitate private sector involvement in the development and enhancement of public service infrastructure, thereby contributing to economic growth.

-
- Initiating a series of measures to improve education quality, which has significantly declined recently and deteriorated further during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social distancing and reliance on e-learning. These measures aim to restore necessary quality and efficiency in education.
 - Commencing the process of addressing informal settlements, focusing on reorganizing and formalizing these areas as residential neighborhoods to mitigate the pressures and challenges they impose on public services such as electricity, water, sanitation, and health.
 - Developing a package of measures and short-term strategies to reduce spatial disparities identified in the 2021 analysis of service provision in Iraq, in order to address existing problems and gaps to achieve a more balanced distribution of public services.

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9.

Anti-Corruption Efforts

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I. Introduction

Corruption constitutes a pervasive global phenomenon that transcends social development levels, governance systems, and the robustness of legal frameworks. It is virtually ubiquitous, affecting nearly all societies and political structures. The ramifications of corruption are profoundly detrimental, fostering inequality and injustice within societies. Moreover, corruption significantly undermines economic performance, exacerbates unemployment, and elevates poverty rates. Its multifaceted and entrenched nature has attracted scholarly attention across disciplines including economics, law, political science, and sociology, due to its pernicious impacts on economies, human rights violations, deprivation of sustainable development, and the perpetuation of impunity that incentivizes its persistence.

In Iraq, financial and administrative corruption has been a salient issue over the past two decades, resulting in the waste of billions of dollars intended to underpin the national economy. Annually, substantial sums are diverted to corrupt individuals, influential political actors, and armed factions, thereby impeding economic development, reform initiatives, and the delivery of essential public services. Although successive governments have undertaken measures to combat corruption, these efforts have been insufficient and largely ineffective due to complex underlying factors. This chapter provides a cross-sectional evaluation of anti-corruption efforts in Iraq during 2021, highlighting key elements and developments.

II. Iraq's Position in CPI

Since 2003, Iraq has consistently ranked near the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), positioning it among the

Table 9-1: Iraq's Rank According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (2020-2021).

Year	International Rank	Arab World Rank	Score (out of 100)
2020	160	15	21
2021	157	15	23

Source: Transparency International, 2022.

most corrupt nations globally. The CPI aggregates expert and business executive perceptions of public sector corruption, synthesizing data from thirteen reputable surveys and assessments. It remains the most widely recognized global corruption metric. According to the 2021 CPI report released on January 25, 2022, Iraq was ranked 157th with a score of 23, reflecting a marginal improvement from its 160th position and score of 21 in 2020. These rankings underscore the persistent prevalence of corruption and the absence of effective measures to eradicate it.

III. The Role of the Commission of Integrity

Iraq hosts several oversight institutions addressing corruption, including the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, the Public Prosecution, and the Integrity Committee within the Council of Representatives. Additionally, executive committees established under executive orders, particularly in 2021, have assumed certain responsibilities. This chapter focuses primarily on the Federal Commission of Integrity (FCOI), an independent entity mandated to combat corruption, while acknowledging the roles of other bodies within the 2021 timeframe.

Established under Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 55 of 2004 and subsequently governed by the amended Federal Commission of Integrity Law No. 30 of 2011, FCOI is tasked with preventing and combating corruption and promoting transparency in governance. Its mandate encompasses investigating corruption allegations, including bribery, nepotism, favoritism, ethnic or sectarian discrimination, abuse of power for personal gain, and misappropriation of public funds. The Commission's functions include:

- Developing ethical standards codified in a code of conduct applicable to all state employees.
- Organizing seminars and awareness programs to foster a culture of transparency, integrity, and accountability.
- Implementing preventive measures, conducting investigations, proposing legislative amendments to enhance integrity and combat corruption, by collaborating with civil society, international organizations, and research institutions.

Notably, FCOI has demonstrated progress in prosecutorial activities and investigative processes, marked by increased transparency through public disclosure of investigation statuses, summons, arrest warrants, judicial outcomes, and financial recoveries. However, executive committees formed under executive orders, such as the executive order No. 29 of 2019, have encroached upon FCOI's jurisdiction, particularly in 2021.

The Commission also represents Iraq in international anti-corruption frameworks, including the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the Arab Convention against Corruption. It is responsible for formulating national strategies aligned with these conventions.

In accordance with the obligations stipulated by the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003), which Iraq ratified pursuant to Law No. 35 of 2007 regarding the accession of the Republic of Iraq to the Convention, the Commission, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), formulated the draft National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption covering the period 2021–2024. It is noteworthy that the Integrity Commission had previously developed the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2010–2014. This draft strategy was subsequently submitted to the Council of Ministers, which approved it during its session on April 6, 2021, formalized under Resolution No. 181 of 2021. Through the completion of this strategy, FCOI has met the principal legal requirements for combating corruption at international, regional, and local levels. Nevertheless, the predominant challenge remains the effective implementation of these strategies and their practical enforcement.

The strategy encompasses the following components, structured in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption guidelines:

1. Lessons learned from the 2010-2014 National Anti-Corruption Strategy.
2. Methodological framework for the current strategy's development.
3. Analysis of Iraq's corruption environment and requisite countermeasures.
4. Strategic objectives.
5. Executive plan for the National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption.
6. Implementation mechanisms for the executive plan.

FCOI's 2021 annual report reveals a continuation of conventional and routine approaches in addressing corruption, with limited notable achievements compared to the previous year. The Commission documented several key activities during 2021, including the receipt of 4,230 corruption complaints, registration of 9,183 reports, and initiation of 11,605 criminal cases. Judicial actions comprised 7,736 summons orders, 1,568 arrest warrants, and 1,405 detention orders. Additionally, 815 in flagrante delicto operations were conducted, resulting in immediate arrests.

The Commission referred 2,912 cases involving 5,836 accused individuals to the relevant courts, encompassing high-ranking officials such as ministers, directors-general, and other senior personnel. Financially, the Commission successfully recovered substantial public funds, amounting to approximately 642.5 billion Iraqi dinars and 10 billion US dollars, which were safeguarded and returned to the public treasury.

Judicial rulings in corruption cases totaled 1,150, with 632 convictions and 518 acquittals. The Commission also proposed several legislative reforms, including drafts related to the Right to Access Information, amendments to financial

liability laws, bribery provisions in the Penal Code, civil service regulations, and the National Asset Recovery Fund laws (FCOI, 2021).

In its statement accompanying the report, the Commission emphasized its engagement with over 18,000 cases during the past year, and the number of accused in those cases exceeded 11,000 individuals, against whom 15,000 charges were brought. Among the accused were 54 ministers, against whom 101 charges were brought, and 422 individuals with special grades, directors-general, and those in their grade, against whom 712 charges were brought. It pointed out the issuance of 632 conviction rulings, including one ruling against a minister and 42 rulings against 23 individuals with special grades, directors-general, and those in their grade (al-Shammari, 2021).

IV. The Role of the Federal Board of Supreme Audit

The Federal Board of Supreme Audit (FBSA) represents one of Iraq's most enduring institutions, having been established concurrently with the inception of the modern Iraqi state. Since its foundation in 1927, the Board has been responsible for overseeing and auditing the operations of governmental bodies. As reported in the first quarterly report of 2021, the Board finalized 1,501 audit reports encompassing financial statements, performance outcomes, investment budget analyses, periodic assessments, inspection visits, performance evaluations, contract audits, among others. Furthermore, nine reports were produced in specialized audit domains, including engineering, agriculture, irrigation, health, environmental issues, trade, oil, and Sunni Endowment affairs.

In 2021, the Board identified several recurrent issues, notably delays by audited entities in submitting required data within stipulated deadlines, contrary to budget implementation directives; persistent unavailability of reliable data for electronic system integration; and deficiencies in administrative and accounting personnel, resulting in delays or improper submission of financial statements (FBSA, 2022, p. 4). The report also documented various violations, such as (FBSA, 2022, pp. 18-24):

1. Violations Related to FBSA's Law No. 31 of 2011

- Certain ministries and their subdivisions have demonstrated a lack of diligence in addressing and resolving the observations documented by the Board.
- There exists selective responsiveness to the Board's observations.
- Submission of data to the Board has frequently failed to meet the requisite standards necessary for comprehensive auditing.
- Refusal or delay in responding to the Board's memos and inquiries.

2. Violations Related to General Budget Implementation Instructions

- Numerous state departments and public companies have not finalized their accounts for the fiscal years 2019 and 2020, with some also failing to submit accounts for preceding years.

- Some entities within ministries and independent bodies have neglected to utilize the annual financial allocations designated by the Ministry of Finance.
- Some ministries have misappropriated allocations intended for subordinate formations, contravening budget implementation directives.

3. Violations Related to Government Contract Implementation Instructions

- The majority of contracted projects lack an accompanying economic feasibility study, contravening Article (2/First/A) of Government Contract Implementation Instructions No. 2 of 2014.
- Estimated contract costs have been inaccurately calculated and remain unupdated, violating Article (2/First/D) of the Government Contract Implementation Instructions.
- Certificates of origin for goods under government contracts have not been provided as required.
- Bid analysis committees have failed to compute weighting percentages for financial and technical offers, impeding proper comparison, shortlisting, and selection of bids.
- Awarded bidders have delayed contract signing beyond the stipulated 14 working days following notification.
- Some contracting firms have not furnished evidence of prior similar work.
- Contracts have been completed prior to verification of guarantee issuance.
- Project completion rates remain low due to negligence and reluctance by implementing companies.
- Delay penalties have not been calculated despite non-compliance by suppliers or contractors.
- Certain entities have neglected to consult the Ministry of Planning to verify the legitimacy and status of contracting companies.
- Contracts have not been prepared in accordance with the Ministry of Planning's standard documentation procedures.
- The direct invitation method has been employed without adequate justification.

4. Violations Related to Contractual Deductions

- Numerous formations within some ministries have failed to remit deducted contractual pension contributions to the State Employees Pension Fund, violating Article 17/Third of the amended Unified Pension Law No. 9 of 2014.

5. Violations Related to State-Owned Vehicles

- Vehicles assigned to various departments, employees no longer in service, or military forces have not been returned to their original departments.

6. Violations Related to Encroachment on Public Property

- Administrative measures to remove encroachments on land and buildings by third parties have been insufficiently enforced.

The comprehensive assessment of the aforementioned report indicates a persistent reticence in the Board's supervisory role. A substantial portion of the cases and observations pertain to periods preceding the assessment year of 2021. While many observations fall within the Board's oversight and evaluative mandate, they appear less consequential compared to the oversight of public funds, which are frequently misappropriated or squandered within a constrained or neglected supervisory framework. In this context, attention is drawn to the Board's observation regarding the al-Sīb border crossing in Maysān Governorate, which states: The competent oversight authority conducted an on-site inspection and engaged with the crossing's administration concerning the commer-

Table 9-2: Nature of Violations Recorded by the Federal Board of Supreme Audit in its Semi-Annual Report for 2021 Regarding Some Ministries

Violating Entity	Violations	pertinence
Council of Ministers/ Border Ports Authority	• Failure to subject imported goods to health prevention, sterilization, and disinfection procedures.	Core activities were not subjected to audit.
Council of Ministers/ Martyrs Foundation	• Forged transactions involving certain beneficiaries of the Foundation's operations.	Financial and administrative performance was not reported.
Ministry of Interior/ Directorate of Civil Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embezzlement of employee salaries within the Wāsiṭ Directorate of Civil Defense. • Absence of a response plan for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents. • Non-compliance with occupational and civil safety standards and civil defense requirements across all state facilities and departments. • Failure to execute the contract with Durrat al-Muḥīt Company. 	Financial and administrative performance was not disclosed.
Ministry of Interior/ Border Guard Command	• Audit of personnel catering records revealed non-adherence to contracting methods as stipulated in the amended Government Contract Implementation Instructions of 2014.	Financial and administrative performance was not disclosed.
Ministry of Defense	• Cessation of operations by the Directorate of Military Canteens.	Observations are significant and warrant comprehensive evaluation.

Source: FBSA, 2022, pp. 25-29.

cial exchange procedures for imported goods entering through the specified crossing; It was determined that these procedures lacked adherence to preventive health protocols, including sterilization of incoming materials and disinfection at the point of commercial exchange (FBSA, 2022, p. 23). Despite the significance of this observation, it suggests that the core operations of al-Sib border crossing were devoid of oversight issues. Indeed, these operations appeared to be executed without fault, as evidenced by the absence of recorded observations beyond those cited. Table 9-2 delineates the pertinence of the Board's observations relative to specific ministries and governmental bodies in accordance with their primary functions.

V. The Anti-Corruption Committee Established by Executive Order No. 29 of 2020

In August 2020, the Council of Ministers promulgated Executive Order No. 29, instituting a supreme investigative committee directly accountable to the Prime Minister's office. The committee's mandate encompassed the investigation of major corruption cases and significant criminal offenses. Chaired by Lieutenant General Aḥmad Abū-Raghīf, its membership included representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, the National Security Service, and the Commission of Integrity. Empowered with extensive authority specifically targeting major corruption cases, the committee was supported by personnel from the Counter-Terrorism Service. The judiciary and Public Prosecution were tasked with appointing an investigating judge to oversee the committee's inquiries. Since its inception, the committee has prioritized several key dossiers, including:

1. Cases pertaining to the Ministry of Industry, particularly in the sectors of iron, steel, and cement.
2. Matters related to the Ministry of Trade, including food supply and ration card issues.
3. Files concerning the Ministry of Electricity's investment contracts.
4. Investigations involving a group of businessmen accused of corruption and money laundering.
5. Cases involving banks and financial institutions, notably the (Qi Card) file.
6. Matters related to the Investment Commission.
7. Cases involving governors and provincial councils.
8. Issues concerning real estate, state lands, and the forgery of title deeds.

Shortly after its establishment, the committee faced criticism from various political blocs and parties, which alleged that it detained numerous individuals on charges of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. Accusations were made regarding legal violations, including the use of torture and the extraction of confessions under duress. In response, Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī

affirmed in February 2021 that the committee would persist in its efforts despite such allegations until tangible progress was achieved in combating corruption.

Legal critiques of the committee arose from its inception due to its lack of constitutional legitimacy. Iraq possesses constitutionally established institutions dedicated to combating corruption, such as the Commission of Integrity and the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, alongside a constitutional security institution responsible for terrorism cases. However, al-Kāzīmī's close circle contended that these bodies had failed to fulfill their mandates effectively, allowing corruption to persist as a significant threat to the state and its institutions.

Despite these criticisms, the committee continued its operations. A series of arrests conducted in September 2020, targeting government officials implicated in corruption, fostered public optimism regarding the potential dismantling of entrenched corrupt networks.

The Federal Supreme Court of Iraq conclusively addressed the controversy by issuing Decision No. 169/Federal/2021 on March 2, 2022. The court declared Executive Order No. 29 (2020), which established the permanent committee for investigating corruption and significant crimes, null and void. The ruling cited violations of Article 37/First/A of the Constitution, which safeguards human freedom and dignity; Article 47, which enshrines the separation of powers; and Articles 87 and 88, which guarantee judicial independence and jurisdiction over investigations and trials. Furthermore, the court determined that the order effectively amended the law governing the Commission of Integrity, a constitutionally mandated body specializing in financial and administrative corruption investigations. This decision was rendered pursuant to the court's authority under paragraph three of Article 93 of the Constitution.

By the end of 2021, the committee had handled 156 criminal cases, issued 16 summons orders, 39 arrest warrants, and detained 9 individuals. Fourteen cases were referred to trial courts for misdemeanors and felonies, resulting in 19 convictions. Notable actions undertaken by the committee, in collaboration with security and judicial entities, include:

1. The arrest of Sālār Muḥammad Amīn, Deputy Chairman of the National Investment Commission, on January 4, 2021.
2. The arrest and judicial referral of the former director of the Pension Authority. On January 19, 2021, Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Jalīl al-Sā'idī, former head of the National Pension Authority, was sentenced, in accordance with Decision 160 of 1983, to six years imprisonment for bribery related to an insurance contract and for unlawfully deducting amounts from pensioners' salaries in collusion with al-Salāmah Trading Company. Additional trials concerning other corruption charges against him remain ongoing.
3. On January 24, 2021, the Central Criminal Court for Combating Corruption sentenced Bahā' 'Abd-al-Ḥusayn 'Abd-al-Hādī, director of the Qi Card company, to four years imprisonment and imposed a fine of 10 million

- dinars for bribery offenses involving Aḥmad ‘Abd-al-Jalīl al-Sā’idī, former head of the National Pension Authority.
4. On February 9, 2021, the former director of the Agricultural Bank, ‘Ādil ‘Aṭīyah Khuḍayyir, along with four bank employees, received six-year prison sentences and fines of 10 million dinars (approximately \$7,000) following investigations by the Committee.
 5. The al-Karkh Court for Corruption Crimes sentenced Shākir ‘Azīz Shabīb al-Zāmilī, head of the Baghdād Investment Authority, to four years imprisonment and a fine of 10 million Iraqi dinars for accepting bribes, based on investigations by the Committee.
 6. On January 5, 2022, pursuant to investigations conducted by the Committee, the al-Ruṣāfah Criminal Court sentenced Ra’d Muḥsin Ghāzī al-Ḥāris, the former Deputy Minister of Electricity, to six years of imprisonment and imposed a fine of 10 million Iraqi dinars in accordance with Decision 160 of 1983. The conviction pertained to the acceptance of financial bribes and the awarding projects to subcontracting companies.
 7. On February 16, 2021, businessman Bahā’ ‘Alā’ al-Jawrānī was arrested following his conviction on corruption charges related to dealings within the Ministry of Industry. Subsequently, on April 18, 2021, Jamāl al-Karbūlī, the head of the al-Ḥall party, was detained pursuant to a judicial arrest warrant issued on corruption allegations. Early in 2022, the al-Karkh Criminal Court sentenced al-Jawrānī to six years of imprisonment based on investigations by the Committee concerning the payment of bribes to government employees.
 8. On July 27, 2021, the former governor of Dhī-Qār, Yaḥyá al-Nāṣirī, was arrested in Baghdad on charges of corruption. Subsequently, at the beginning of 2022, the Central Criminal Court for Combating Corruption sentenced him to one year of imprisonment under Article 331 of the Penal Code (IQ News Agency, 2021b).
 9. On the same day, the Director General of the General Company for Foodstuff Trading was apprehended pursuant to an arrest warrant issued under Decision 160 of 1983, on suspicions of corruption and bribery during his tenure.
 10. On August 25, 2021, the Central Criminal Court for Combating Corruption issued two temporary imprisonment sentences of six years each against Bahā’ ‘Alā’ ‘Abd and ‘Alī Ṣāliḥ Hādī. The first sentenced individual appointed the second (‘Alī Ṣāliḥ Hādī) as Director General of the General Company for Iraqi Cement in exchange for awarding supply contracts to Bahā’'s companies in Baghdad. These actions were prosecuted in accordance with Decision No. 160 of 1983, paragraph two/1, and pursuant to Articles 308 and 310 of Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 (IQ News Agency, 2021a).

VI. The Stolen Asset Recovery Law

The recovery of Iraqi assets is governed by Law No. 9 of 2012, as amended by Law No. 7 of 2019. This legislation establishes a fund dedicated to the recovery of smuggled Iraqi assets, managed by a board of directors comprising various officials and relevant authorities, chaired by the head of the Commission of Integrity.

The parliamentary Integrity Committee estimated that approximately \$350 billion, equivalent to 32% of Iraq's revenues from 2003 to 2021, was smuggled by corrupt individuals during the current political regime.

Regarding procedural follow-up, the Commission's 2021 annual report indicated that during that year, 257 judicial decisions were issued in absentia against 142 defendants and individuals wanted by the Commission. The total amounts of smuggled funds subject to recovery procedures since the fund's establishment until December 31, 2021, include 954,175,313,311 Iraqi Dinars, \$1,420,357,508, €23,582,725, £2,329,521, 721,002 Jordanian Dinars, and 3,652 Swiss Francs.⁽¹⁾

Iraq's challenges in recovering these funds stem from the complexity of the issue, which necessitates international and bilateral agreements. The primary difficulty lies in the requirement for domestic judicial investigations culminating in final court judgments. Following this, the government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs must engage with Interpol and foreign ministries to initiate judicial procedures abroad.

In this context, through collaborative efforts among the Federal Commission of Integrity, the Iraqi Ministry of Justice, and the Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research, under the patronage of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Iraq hosted an international conference in September 2021. The conference aimed to address the principal obstacles faced by oversight bodies in recovering assets smuggled beyond national borders. Attendees included several Arab Ministers of Justice, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and over 200 representatives from governmental and non-governmental institutions. The conference featured multiple sessions over two days, during which numerous research papers, studies, and working papers were presented.

The conference highlighted the challenges and exerted pressure on mechanisms for recovering funds from corrupt individuals, encouraging many countries to sign bilateral agreements with Iraq. Notably, the conference recommendations were submitted to the United Nations to be incorporated into international recovery mechanisms.

The significance of the conference was underscored by discussions concerning funds smuggled by individuals holding dual nationality, emphasizing the necessity for international law firms to facilitate the recovery process. While the Iraqi Presidency estimated smuggled funds abroad at approximately \$150 billion, political estimates suggest that the total stolen assets, both domestic and international, amount to approximately \$300 billion.

(1) These amounts encompass the total recovered funds, funds mandated for recovery, and seized assets. For detailed figures pertaining to each category, see FCOI, 2021, p. 41.

Meanwhile, the Commission's 2021 annual report noted that its legal department concluded 11 cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding with domestic and international entities in the field of anti-corruption. These included a memorandum of understanding with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

To prepare recovery files and facilitate the extradition of convicts, the Integrity Commission coordinated with local and international bodies, including the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, Arab and international police directorates, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Anti-Corruption Center, and other relevant organizations.

In furtherance of these initiatives, the President of the Republic submitted the draft law "Recovery of Corruption Proceeds" to the Council of Representatives in 2021. The draft law aims to strengthen state efforts to recover corruption proceeds, hold perpetrators accountable, and enhance judicial processes. It includes practical deterrent measures and procedural steps designed to complement existing legal frameworks and institutional efforts to combat corruption. The draft also seeks to empower financial and oversight institutions to mitigate the detrimental effects of corruption on Iraq's present and future. However, the law was not enacted due to the expiration of the Council's legislative term.

In a related development, on September 29, 2021, the government announced initial steps toward repatriating stolen assets held abroad. The Ministry of Justice indicated that the aforementioned conference marked a foundational step in this process, leading to the negotiation of bilateral agreements with countries holding Iraqi assets. Draft agreements are reportedly underway with Jordan, Egypt, and Switzerland, focusing on the return of funds and the restitution of properties seized by the former regime, in exchange for recovering frozen Iraqi assets held under the names of intelligence officials. These efforts are coordinated through the Ministry of Justice's claims offices and the Fund for Asset Recovery at the Commission of Integrity, with regional and international stakeholders expressing support. Additionally, the Commission has drafted memoranda of understanding with inspection and anti-corruption authorities and Civil Rights organizations in several countries, as well as with the United Nations Development Programme.

VII. The Case of al-Najaf al-Ashraf Municipality

Local media have reported various corruption cases across several governorates, with notable attention to administrative changes within the al-Najaf al-Ashraf Municipality Directorate. In mid-November 2021, Engineer Maḥdī al-Ḥatīmī was appointed as the new director. Shortly thereafter, he disclosed the existence of corruption files exceeding 20 billion dinars, representing outstanding municipal debts. Earlier, in June 2021, several municipal employees protested and closed their department, an unprecedented event in Iraq (NAS News Agency, 2021).

al-Ḥātimī submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Najaf detailing multiple violations, including: budget overruns in operational chapters and sections for 2021; deferred payments on projects totaling 10 billion dinars; numerous fictitious contracts and instances of double salary payments; suspicions of corruption related to land plots and vehicle repairs, with disbursements amounting to 15 billion dinars despite many vehicles being non-operational; tampering with municipal properties; and failure to settle hotel debts and unauthorized building expansions (Directorate of Najaf Municipality, 2021).

Despite these revelations, the specific actions taken by local and federal regulatory authorities remain unclear. Prominent political figure Sayyid Muqtadā al-Ṣadr publicly called for investigations into corruption suspicions within the directorate, naming individuals allegedly involved in illicit financial and real estate gains, exertion of pressure to secure contracts, and other benefits through unlawful means from various government institutions, including the Najaf Municipality Directorate (Shafaq News, 2021). Before the end of the year, Lu'ay al-Yāsirī, Governor of al-Najaf al-Ashraf, resigned amid renewed protests and accusations regarding deteriorating public services.

VIII. Challenges of the Coming Year (2022)

Corruption is a global phenomenon affecting both developing and developed nations, albeit with varying degrees of prevalence. In the context of Iraq, corruption predates the 2003 regime change, though it has since become more pervasive, extending beyond ruling authorities to permeate most governmental institutions and sectors.

Given the numerous political, legal, economic, and social challenges facing Iraq, it is anticipated that corruption will persist into 2022, potentially exacerbated by a lack of genuine political will and effective measures to combat it.

10.

Education and Higher Education

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I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing educational crisis and inflicted substantial long-term damage on the human capital of the current generation of students. Globally, education was disrupted for over 1.6 billion children and youth across 161 countries, representing approximately 80% of enrolled students. This disruption contributed to an increase in learning poverty, defined as the proportion of students unable to read or comprehend by age ten or older. Additional consequences included rising unemployment rates, diminished public revenues, deteriorating health outcomes, increased mortality, mental health challenges, compromised emotional and social well-being, heightened crime rates, violent extremism, and greater dependence on state assistance.

Learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries exceeded 53%. The direct effects of learning losses due to school closures also encompassed increased dropout rates and the deprivation of school meals for many children. Moreover, educational inequalities were exacerbated, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, as evidenced by the following factors:

- Limited support for teachers transitioning to distance learning, reducing their preparedness to engage with learners and caregivers.
- Disadvantaged children faced reduced access to distance learning due to lack of electricity, communication tools, and reliable internet connectivity.
- Younger students and those with disabilities experienced significant neglect in policy responses.
- Girls encountered compounded barriers to learning, including social norms, insufficient digital skills, and limited access to electronic devices. Addressing gender disparities requires targeted policies and programs, such as cash transfers and support for pregnant girls and adolescent

mothers, to enhance participation and school re-entry rates in vulnerable communities.

In response, concerted efforts were mobilized to salvage the academic year and promote recovery in the education sector over the short and medium term. Reopening schools was prioritized globally to halt and remediate learning losses. Countries had to develop learning recovery programs focusing on three key areas: (1) curriculum strengthening; (2) extension of instructional time; and (3) enhancement of learning effectiveness.

Bridging the digital divide and ensuring connectivity remain critical priorities for building resilient education systems and facilitating blended learning opportunities.

To capitalize on lessons learned during the pandemic and increase investment, children and youth must be prioritized amidst competing demands. Long-term resilience in education systems requires:

- Investment in enabling environments to unlock digital learning potential for all students.
- Strengthening the roles of parents, families, and communities in supporting children's learning.
- Providing sustained support and high-quality professional development for teachers.
- Increasing the proportion of budget funding allocations for education to stimulate economic recovery.

In Iraq, educational attainment levels rank low within the Middle East and North Africa region and have further declined due to the pandemic's impact, including prolonged school closures. There is an urgent need to invest in education to recover lost learning and transform the crisis into an opportunity. Such investments must be accompanied by comprehensive reforms prioritizing learning outcomes and fostering a resilient, sustainable education system for all Iraqi students.

II. The Educational Process: Impact of the Crisis and Paths to Recovery

1. Ministry of Education Procedures for the 2021 Academic Year

The Ministry of Education announced plans to reopen schools for the 2021 academic year, stipulating that students attend in-person classes one day per week, supplemented by e-learning for the remainder of instructional time. However, ten weeks into the academic year, health authorities in multiple governorates reported COVID-19 outbreaks in several schools, coinciding with rising infection rates nationwide. Consequently, the Ministry re-closed schools on February 18, 2021, until further notice.

Under these conditions, distance learning posed significant challenges for teachers, including increased workload and difficulties adapting to new pedagogical methods. The school closure crisis occurred amid a general shortage of teaching staff. Ministry data indicated an average teacher-to-student ratio of 1:25 in primary schools and 1:19 in secondary schools, lower than the Arab world averages of 1:22 and 1:15, respectively (according to World Bank data). Furthermore, only 25% of Iraqi teachers had received regular training in e-learning, exacerbating difficulties in transitioning to remote instruction.

Parents bore substantial responsibility for supporting children's education at home, a task complicated by disparities in parental education and socioeconomic status. Survey data revealed that one-third of women aged 15 to 49 were illiterate, with illiteracy rates of 20% among affluent women and 60% among the poorest. Maternal education levels directly influenced children's enrollment and continuation in school; children of uneducated mothers enrolled in primary school at a rate of 77%, compared to over 92% for children whose mothers had secondary education or higher.

The Ministry has yet to implement effective measures to address disparities in access to e-learning between affluent and disadvantaged children. Learning losses incurred during school closures are projected to result in permanent reductions in future earnings, as inadequate preparation limits engagement in productive economic activities. The World Bank estimates that children born in Iraq today will lose 41% of their potential productivity due to educational deficits, in addition to receiving only four years of effective learning out of seven years spent in school. Continued school closures are expected to exacerbate these learning losses.

2. School Enrollment Rates

Kindergarten enrollment declined sharply during the 2020–2021 academic year, falling from 183,699 pupils in 2019–2020 to 47,410 pupils, representing a 74% decrease. This decline is attributed to ongoing lockdowns, school closures, low female labor force participation (approximately 13%), high rates of women as housewives (78%), parental unawareness of early childhood education importance, inadequate infrastructure, and limited human resource capacity.

Primary school enrollment also decreased, from 6,336,489 pupils in 2019–2020 to 6,206,417 pupils in 2020–2021, corresponding to a negative growth rate of -2%. Factors contributing to this trend include continued lockdowns, parental reluctance to register children, worsening poverty, overcrowded and under-resourced public schools, and frustration over graduate unemployment leading families to prioritize work over education. Additionally, families in areas recently liberated from terrorist control face challenges registering children due to difficulties obtaining civil documentation, further increasing educational poverty.

Conversely, secondary education enrollment demonstrated notable growth, with student numbers increasing from 3,094,021 in the 2019–2020 academic year to 3,462,902 in 2020–2021, reflecting a positive growth rate of 12%.

The enrollment rate in primary education during the 2020-2021 academic year reached 91%, which significantly decreased to 45% in intermediate schools and further declined to 25% in preparatory schools. University enrollment stood at 18%, indicating that approximately 75% of students enrolled in primary education discontinued their studies before completing higher levels.

The National Development Plan (2018–2022), ratified by the Ministry of Planning, set forth targets to increase enrollment rates to 99% in primary education, 70% in intermediate education, 45% in preparatory education, and 7% in vocational education. The plan also emphasized the provision of educational services and supplies aimed at creating an appealing school environment by reducing class density, mitigating overcrowding, ensuring the availability of health and environmental services, and activating the roles of parent councils and civil society organizations to financially support the rehabilitation and expansion of existing school infrastructure.

3. Number of School Buildings

The year 2021 witnessed a marked increase in the number of educational institutions. Data from the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Educational Planning Statistics indicate an increase of nine kindergartens, 395 primary schools, and 340 secondary schools. Furthermore, the Ministry of Planning reported that, within the investment budget allocated to governorates and the Fund for Reconstruction of Areas Affected by Terrorist Operations, approximately 2,160 schools were completed across all governorates in 2021. These completed facilities comprised

Table 10-1: Number of Students Enrolled in Schools During the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Stage	Gender	2019/2020	2020/2021	Change	Growth Rate
Kindergarten	Male	91,967	23,787	-68,180	-74%
	Female	91,732	23,623	-68,109	-74%
	Total	183,699	47,410	-136,289	-74%
Primary	Male	3,298,800	3,209,051	-89,749	-3%
	Female	3,037,689	2,997,366	-40,323	-1%
	Total	6,336,489	6,206,417	-130,072	-2%
Secondary	Male	1,657,417	1,851,374	193,957	12%
	Female	1,436,604	1,611,528	174,924	12%
	Total	3,094,021	3,462,902	368,881	12%

Source: Ministry of Education, Directorate of Educational Planning Statistics.

Table 10-2: Number of Schools During the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Academic Year	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary
2019/2020	765	16,284	7,316
2020/2021	774	16,679	7,656
Increase	9	395	340
Completed 2021	482	1,189	489

Source: Ministry of Education, Directorate of Educational Planning Statistics.

482 kindergartens, 1,189 primary and intermediate schools, and 489 secondary schools, in addition to the construction of classrooms and administrative wings.

The distribution of completed schools varied among governorates, with al-Başrah Governorate leading with 444 schools, followed by Nīnawá with 346, Baghdad with 214, and al-Anbār with 176. Other governorates included Kirkūk (154), Bābil (121), Maysān (119), al-Muthanná (79), Wāsiṭ (67), al-Dīwānīyah (60), Diyālá (58), al-Najaf al-Ashraf (51), Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn (46), Dhī-Qār (38), and Karbalá' al-Muqaddasah, which recorded the fewest completions at six schools.

4. Gender Parity Index

An analysis of data from the Ministry of Education reveals minimal gender disparity in kindergarten enrollment during the 2020-2021 academic year, with a parity index of 0.99, indicating 99 female students for every 100 male students. However, this disparity widens in subsequent educational stages, reaching 0.84 in the intermediate stage, where female dropout rates exceed those of males following primary education. Conversely, male enrollment declines significantly in secondary education. Notably, the gender gap narrows considerably within the scientific track at the secondary level, with a parity index of 0.97. In contrast, the literary track exhibits a more pronounced disparity, with a parity index of 0.70. This latter figure likely reflects the realities in economically disadvantaged regions, where sociocultural factors such as early marriage and unstable security conditions impede female access to post-primary education.

Table 10-3: Gender Parity Index During the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Kinder- garten	Primary						interme- diate	preparatory	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	1st	scientific	literary
0.99	0.94	0.95	0.94	0.93	0.88	0.89	0.84	0.97	0.70

Source: Calculated by the researchers using data from the Ministry of Education, Directorate of Educational Planning Statistics.

5. Challenges of Distance Learning

An analysis of data from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Communications, and reports issued by international organizations concerning education in Iraq indicates that economically disadvantaged groups and women were disproportionately affected by educational policies implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these policies aimed to address the crisis, they lacked inclusivity. The primary barrier to internet subscription among families is the high cost; approximately 70% of non-subscribers identified the expense of subscriptions and smart devices as fundamental obstacles to accessing online services. Despite assurances from the Ministry of Communications to provide free internet for students and enhance internet quality for general use, internet service prices have remained largely unchanged. The average monthly cost for a medium-quality subscription is 50,000 dinars, a price unaffordable for low-income families. Even when some families can afford internet fees, the issue persists as most pupils do not possess personal phones

or smart devices necessary for consistent participation in online lessons, often relying on shared devices such as their father's phone.

During the 2020–2021 academic year, only 20 public primary schools were covered by internet service, distributed as follows: 15 in Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Governorate, two in Baghdad, and one each in al-Anbār, Bābil, and Dhī-Qār.

Regarding private primary schools, 209 were covered by internet service, with Baghdad leading at approximately 100 schools, followed by Karbalā' with 41, Najaf with 35, and al-Baṣrah with 26 schools. Coverage of public secondary schools reached 190, with al-Muthanná ranking first with 77 schools and Baghdad Governorate second with 41 schools. Private secondary schools covered by internet service numbered 415, including 189 in Baghdad Governorate, 58 in al-Baṣrah, and 35 in Nīnawá.

As an alternative to e-learning, the Ministry employed educational television programs by recording lessons and broadcasting them via an educational satellite channel. Although 98% of Iraqi households own a television, irregular electricity supply and prolonged power outages present additional challenges. Consequently, students attend lessons intermittently and miss substantial portions, which inadequately compensates for the direct instruction previously provided by teachers.

6. Dropping Out of School

A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) revealed that approximately 3.2 million Iraqi children of school age are not enrolled in schools. The report attributed this to decades of conflict and insufficient investment, which have devastated Iraq's education system and severely limited children's access to quality education. Overcrowding in classrooms remains a significant issue. Prior warnings have highlighted the severe challenges facing Iraq's education system. While security and economic conditions have contributed to school dropouts, the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to e-learning without adequate prerequisites have exacerbated the problem.

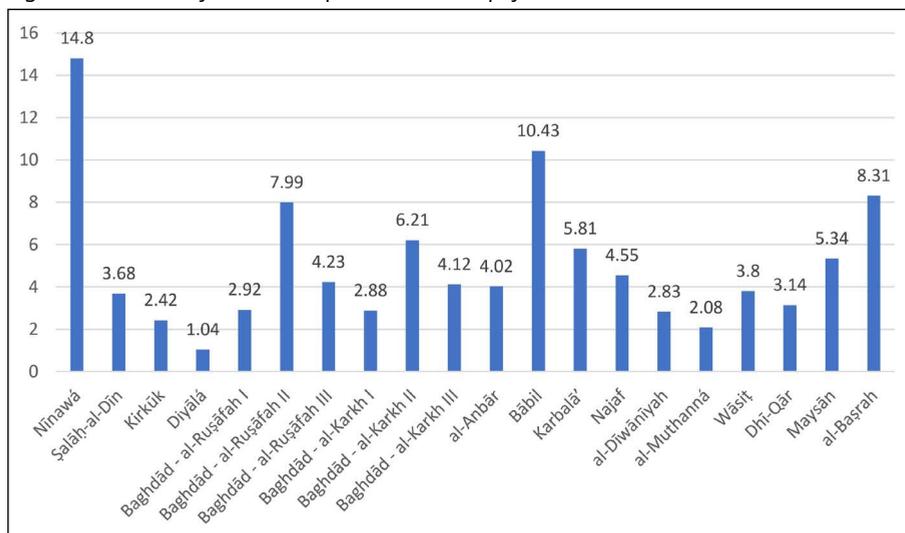
Data from the Statistics Department in the Directorate of Educational Planning indicate that the dropout rate in the primary stage was 2.5%, and 2.8% in the secondary stage across public, private, and religious schools during the 2020–2021 academic year. The pandemic notably contributed to increased dropout rates, as many pupils refrained from attending school to support their families.

Nīnawá Governorate exhibited the highest primary school dropout rate at 14.18%, followed by Bābil at 10.43% and al-Baṣrah at 8.31%. In Baghdad - al-Ruṣāfah II, the rate was 8%, while al-Ruṣāfah III recorded 2.2%. Karkh I, Karkh II, and Najaf each had a rate of 2.0%. Wāsiṭ reported 1.9%, Karkh III, al-Anbār, and Dhī-Qār each had 1.8%, and al-Ruṣāfah I had 1.7%. Maysān, al-Muthanná, and al-Baṣrah each reported 1.6%. al-Dīwānīyah Governorate had a rate of 1.4%, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn and Kirkūk each 1.0%, and Diyālá the lowest at 0.4%.

For the secondary stage, al-Ruṣāfah II had the highest dropout rate at 3.4%, followed by al-Ruṣāfah III and al-Muthanná at 3.2%. Karbalá' reported 3.1%, Nīnawá 2.9%, Karkh II and Najaf 2.7%, and Bābil 2.5%. Karkh III had 2.4%, al-Ruṣāfah I 2.3%, al-Baṣrah 2.2%, Dhī-Qār and Karkh I 2.0%, Wāsiṭ 1.9%, Maysān 1.8%, Kirkūk 1.6%, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn and al-Anbār 1.3%.

Several factors contribute to school dropout, including lack of motivation or an unappealing school environment, partly due to limited family support and financial constraints, repeated academic failure, curricula and teaching methods that do not align with children's interests, child labor, and poverty. Additionally, weaknesses in the primary education system, consequences of conflict such as forced migration, increased numbers of orphaned children, and loss of parental care exacerbate dropout rates. According to UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, dropout rates are higher among females, with 11.4% of females dropping out compared to 5.4% of males. This disparity contributes to a decline in the parity index at the intermediate stage to 0.84.

Figure 10-1: Primary School Dropout Rate in Iraq by Governorate, 2021.



7. Challenges Facing the Education Sector

The World Bank's report has identified a significant human capital crisis in Iraq, primarily driven by deficiencies in the education sector. It estimates that a child born in Iraq today will, on average, realize only 41% of their potential productivity by adulthood. Furthermore, it is projected that Iraqi children will attain no more than four years of effective learning by the age of 18. Consequently, Iraq ranks among the lowest in the region in terms of human capital indices. The underlying causes of this low human capital include prolonged conflict, insufficient educational reforms, limited opportunities for youth, social instability, and pervasive administrative corruption.

1. A primary challenge confronting the education sector is inadequate financial allocation within the national budget. In the 2021 budget, the Iraqi government allocated approximately 2.162 trillion dinars to the Ministry of Education out of a total budget of 129 trillion dinars. This allocation is insufficient relative to the sector's needs, hindering the Ministry's capacity to provide essential resources to enhance educational quality. Iraq dedicates less than 10% of its general budget to education (covering both primary and higher education), which is below the average expenditure in the Middle East and North Africa region. Notably, 93% of the education budget is consumed by salaries for teachers and staff, while only 1% is allocated to investment in the sector.
2. The educational system suffers from low efficiency, attributable to weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, ineffective implementation, procedural complexities related to land acquisition and allocation, and insufficient financial resources for land procurement and registration.
3. There is a critical shortage of school infrastructure. Iraq requires at least 10,000 new schools to eliminate double-shift schooling, with average class sizes ranging from 50 to 70 students. To meet international standards for optimal classroom sizes, an estimated 15,000 new school buildings are necessary.

The report's findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Deficiencies in educational infrastructure significantly impede the provision of quality educational services. The average number of students per school is approximately 400, with multiple schools often sharing facilities.
2. Approximately 2.1 million children aged 6 to 17 years are out of school in Iraq, nearly half of whom are of secondary school age. Despite recent improvements, educational participation rates remain relatively low.
3. The education system is hindered by outdated curricula, limited professional development opportunities for teachers, inadequate support for school counselors and learning programs, and insufficient initiatives targeting at-risk youth.
4. Reconstruction needs are estimated at 4.9 trillion Iraqi dinars, reflecting infrastructure damages. Additionally, recovery efforts, including the restoration of teaching and learning services, require approximately 490 billion dinars for vocational education development, educational materials, and rehabilitation programs for out-of-school youth.
5. Corruption adversely affects the delivery of public services, including education.
6. The education system is subject to both internal and external influences. Externally, political interference compromises system autonomy, while internally, bureaucratic manipulation, nepotism, and favoritism in trans-

fers, appointments, and promotions undermine institutional infrastructure.

7. The adoption of modern teaching methodologies is limited due to insufficient training of educational staff, lack of capacity development for trainers, poor coordination between training centers and higher education institutions, and inadequate financial support for training programs.
8. Evaluation and testing methods are outdated and ineffective, failing to align with curriculum developments. There is a lack of capacity building for educational staff in assessment techniques, limited efficiency in evaluation processes, and weak participation in international assessments.
9. The absence of a comprehensive educational information management system is evident, stemming from inadequate electronic readiness and insufficient staff capacity for data processing and analysis.
10. Educational supervision is weak, characterized by a shortage of qualified supervisors.
11. Psychological counseling and healthcare services within schools are limited due to underutilization of counselors, insufficient staffing, poor coordination between school administrations and parents, and inadequate health and nutrition programs.
12. Vocational education plays a limited role, hindered by low student enrollment, outdated curricula misaligned with labor market demands, and insufficient capacity development for vocational educators.
13. Administrative governance is weak, due to 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.

8. Requirements for Advancing the Education Sector

Addressing the prevailing challenges and future objectives of Iraq's education sector necessitates the implementation of the following measures:

1. To optimize the efficiency of public education expenditure, efforts should concentrate on:
 - Increasing investment spending.
 - Enhancing educational outcomes for children from economically disadvantaged families and regions.
 - Maximizing the return on investment in education by improving sector performance within existing resource limitations.
 - Augmenting the effectiveness of education sector management through streamlined institutional frameworks that facilitate the achievement of desired outcomes.

2. Prioritizing educational investments in the medium term amidst competing demands for limited budgetary resources during the post-COVID-19 recovery phase.
3. Variations in school enrollment rates across governorates are correlated with poverty levels, particularly at the secondary education stage. While primary school enrollment rates remain generally high throughout Iraq, secondary education participation declines as the governorate's poverty rate increases, with an average decrease of one percentage point for each percentage point rise in multidimensional poverty.
4. Curricula should undergo annual evaluations. This process may involve conducting comprehensive surveys to collect feedback from teachers, parents, and community members regarding their expectations and observations. Based on these insights and recommendations from educational experts, curriculum objectives should be redefined, and curricula developed to meet social and state needs without discrimination based on sect or ethnicity.
5. Political interference should be minimized to ensure the system operates smoothly and equitably. Frequent political intervention and the power-sharing system have introduced detrimental loopholes, resulting in systemic decline and corruption.
6. Sound policies should be implemented promptly with the assistance of international experts, ensuring no delays in time or resource allocation.
7. Strong political will from the government is essential for the timely implementation of policies. Delays and poor execution have contributed to policy gaps and eroded public trust.
8. The examination system must be safeguarded against corruption, unfair practices, and illicit favors. To this end, supervisory and inspection mechanisms should be enhanced both materially and theoretically. Additionally, increasing the salaries of education sector employees may reduce incentives for dishonest behavior aimed at supplementing income.
9. Encouraging individuals with advanced degrees to enter the secondary teaching profession, coupled with attractive job incentives, can support schools by providing highly qualified and knowledgeable educational personnel.

III. Higher Education: Critical Points of the Crisis and Paths to Recovery

1. Work Program for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated existing challenges within the educational system, exposing numerous underlying disparities and compelling educational policymakers to reconsider the future trajectory of educa-

tion. The pandemic intensified inequalities and restricted learning opportunities, thereby imposing multifaceted challenges—economic, social, psychological, and health-related—on both students and faculty members, who were required to adhere to their roles in mitigating viral transmission. In response, the Ministry of Higher Education announced the commencement of the 2020/2021 academic year on September 12, 2020, accompanied by a comprehensive work program for undergraduate and postgraduate studies disseminated to all public and private universities. This program mandated a blended learning approach (combining electronic and in-person modalities) for medical, health, engineering, and science disciplines, as well as faculties or institutes with practical components. Practical sessions, including laboratory, clinical, and applied courses, were conducted in small, alternating groups to optimize educational outcomes while ensuring the safety of all participants through adherence to Health and Safety Committee protocols, including physical distancing, use of personal protective equipment (masks, goggles, gloves), and sterilization measures. Conversely, humanities disciplines would continue exclusively with e-learning until the pandemic subsides, as stipulated in an official circular outlining the academic calendar and associated regulations for the academic year.

Given the ongoing health crisis and related circumstances, a decision was ratified—pursuant to Article 12 of Opinion Board Law No. 9 of 2011—authorizing the implementation of the university work program for the 2020-2021 academic year under exceptional conditions. This decision emphasized the temporary nature of these measures, with a planned return to traditional in-person instruction upon resolution of the health emergency. The following summarizes the key provisions:

a. Undergraduate Studies:

- Theoretical course materials would be delivered via e-learning, while practical components (laboratory, clinical, applied) required in-person attendance in small, alternating groups, with strict compliance to health and safety protocols.
- E-learning would continue for all humanities specializations until the pandemic's cessation.
- Blended learning would be mandated for medical, health, engineering, and science disciplines, with departmental councils authorized to determine the extent of in-person attendance, limited to one or two days per week, ensuring health precautions.
- Theoretical lessons for specified disciplines would be conducted electronically, while practical sessions were held at universities proximate to students' governorates of residence.
- An electronic correspondence system would facilitate communication between students' home universities and host institutions for practical components and grade reporting.

- Summer training would be conducted practically in students' proximate public or private institutions when feasible; otherwise, electronic project submissions would be utilized.
- University governance bodies would be empowered to implement regulations autonomously to facilitate program execution.
- Scheduling of practical sessions would be managed to accommodate small groups and social distancing, with extended laboratory hours as necessary.
- Students' engagement with theoretical e-learning would be monitored by their home institutions.
- Coordination between universities would ensure students could fulfill practical requirements at proximate institutions, with formal confirmation of attendance.
- Electronic schedules for theoretical and practical sessions would be disseminated to faculty and students via university platforms.
- Medical and health faculties would employ visual aids and skills laboratories for practical instruction not requiring hospital-based clinical training, with preventive measures enforced when hospital training is necessary.
- Compliance with circulars from the ministry's Department of Studies, Planning, and Follow-up regarding academic scheduling is mandated.

b. Postgraduate Studies

- Preparatory year postgraduate students would follow mechanisms analogous to undergraduate provisions.
- Postgraduate research students would be hosted in laboratories of relevant scientific departments at proximate universities, with supervisors responsible for scientific oversight and departments managing administrative aspects.
- Adherence to circulars from the Department of Research and Development concerning academic scheduling is required.

c. Additional Provisions

- Due to the closure of internal sections (dormitories) resulting from prevailing health concerns and to ensure the safety of students, overnight stays within these sections may be permitted under stringent restrictions. Such accommodations are limited to specific days and granted solely in cases of extreme necessity. Compliance with health prevention protocols is mandatory, and authorization must be obtained through recommendations from the head of the department or scientific branch, the director of internal sections, approval by the faculty deanship, and endorsement from the university president.
- Electronic archiving of all lecture materials (electronic, paper, video, audio) is mandated, with immediate uploading to approved university platforms to facilitate access.

- Faculties and departments are required to clarify and implement mechanisms for distributing lecture materials and recordings exclusively by course instructors, ensuring electronic communication with students.
- Continuous engagement between course instructors and students is emphasized, including opportunities for inquiries, assignments, and consistent academic interaction.
- Electronic assessment methods would be adopted, utilizing diverse question formats, reports, activities, quizzes, and applications such as Quiz Maker.
- Universities is tasked with providing the Ministry with data documenting faculty and student engagement with e-learning standards.
- The e-learning experience from the 2019-2020 academic year would be leveraged and enhanced through the development of specialized electronic platforms, training programs, and human resource development plans.
- Universities and their subdivisions are allowed to implement measures deemed necessary to fulfill academic year requirements.

2. Quantitative Analysis of Higher Education Institutions

a. Increase in the Number of Universities and Departments

The higher education system in Iraq experienced significant quantitative growth during the 2003-2004 academic year, marked by a substantial increase in the number of public and private universities, faculties, departments, and institutes. This expansion extended beyond mere numbers to include qualitative improvements, such as the establishment of new types of universities, including technical universities, which were absent prior to 2003. Similarly, new faculties and scientific departments were introduced.

Table 10-4 illustrates that Iraq currently hosts 35 public universities and 54 private universities, alongside numerous public and private institutes and departments distributed nationwide from Mosul to al-Başrah, excluding the Kurdistan Region. These universities admit students graduating from secondary education through a centralized admission system for public universities. University admin-

Table 10-4: Quantitative Analysis of Higher Education in Iraq (2003-2020).

Institution	2003-2004	2020-2021	Increase	Average Rate of Change (%)
Public Universities	17	35	18	105.88
Public Faculties	165	379	214	129.70
Public Scientific Depts.	531	1197	666	125.42
Public Institutes	56	68	12	21.43
Private Universities	10	54	44	440
Private Scientific Depts.	34	524	490	1441.18

Source: Ministry of Higher Education - Department of Studies, Planning, and Follow-up and Department of Private Education.

istration is governed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Law No. 40 of 1988 and its amendments. Consequently, universities operate under a unified legal and administrative framework dictated by the Ministry of Higher Education and its departments. This structure precludes institutional autonomy, preventing universities from competing to attract high-achieving students or from allocating specializations based on local and international labor market demands, unlike practices observed in international universities.

b. Increase in the Number of Admitted Students

This quantitative expansion coincided with an increase in admission capacity and the establishment of universities, faculties, and institutes at both public and private education levels, resulting in a substantial rise in student enrollment. In the 2020/2021 academic year, 211,402 students were admitted to universities through the centralized admission process during the first and second rounds, representing a 63% increase compared to the 129,345 admissions in the 2019/2020 academic year.

The number of students participating in ministerial examinations across preparatory study branches (biological, applied, and literary) reached 453,267, with 262,593 students successfully passing in the first and second rounds. Admissions by branch included 111,249 students from the biological branch, 36,123 from the applied branch, and 64,030 from the literary branch. The Ministry reported expanded admission plans for various specializations: 1,836 students in medical technology, 2,925 in nursing, 22,393 in engineering, 25,200 in sciences, 52,641 in education and basic education, 4,474 in law, 18,842 in administration and economics, 16,921 in medical institutes, and 17,105 in technological institutes. Additionally, 9,543 students were admitted through the martyrs' channel.

3. Qualitative Analysis of Higher Education Institutions

The qualitative dimension pertains to the quality of services provided by higher education institutions, with key indicators including:

a. University Ranking in International Classifications

A university's position in international rankings serves as an indicator of educational quality. These rankings consider factors such as academic reputation, employer opinions, student-to-faculty ratios, faculty citation impact, and the proportions of international students and faculty members. The number of Iraqi universities included in accredited international rankings increased notably in the 2020–2021 academic year compared to 2019–2020.

However, in 2021, Iraq was excluded from the Davos Index for Education Quality, which evaluates 180 countries. Iraq, along with Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan, was classified as lacking basic education quality standards. The index assesses multiple categories, including institutional soundness, innovation, macroeconomic environment, health, education and training, market efficiencies, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, and business sophistication. Table 10-5 presents the number of public and private universities included in various international rankings.

Table 10-5: Number of Public and Private Universities Included in International Rankings.

Ranking	2019-2020			2020-2021		
	Public Universities	Private Universities/faculties	Total	Public Universities	Private Universities/faculties	Total
Shanghai (Chinese)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Times (British)	1	0	1	2	0	2
QS (British)	3	0	3	5	0	5
Scimago (Spanish)	10	0	10	18	0	18
GreenMetric (Indonesian)	26	18	44	34	26	60
URAP (Turkish)	4	0	4	3	0	3
Webometrics (Spanish)	34	32	66	36	40	76

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Department of Studies, Planning and Follow-up, National Development Plan for the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2018-2022).

b. Publication in Reputable International Journals

There has been a marked increase in research publications by public universities in reputable international journals indexed in the Scopus and Clarivate databases, rising from 13,129 papers in the 2019–2020 academic year to 18,391 papers in 2020–2021. Private universities and faculties published a total of 2,723 papers during 2019 and 2020. The proportion of papers indexed in Scopus and Clarivate relative to total publications for public universities increased from 32% in 2019 to 43% in 2020. For private institutions, this proportion rose from 18% in 2019 to 26% in 2020.

c. Utilization of Modern Communication Technologies in Teaching

The adoption of modern communication technologies among faculty members increased, with 93% of public university faculty and 91% of private university and faculties utilizing such tools in 2020.

d. Rehabilitation and Development of Damaged Infrastructure and University Buildings

There was a 5% increase in the completion rate of fully damaged infrastructure, rising from 28% in 2019 to 33% in 2020. Conversely, the percentage of partially damaged buildings undergoing rehabilitation decreased by 4%, from 45% in 2019 to 41% in 2020.

4. Challenges Facing Higher Education in Iraq

Higher education institutions in Iraq encounter numerous challenges, which can be categorized as follows:

a. Challenges in Public Education

- Graduate unemployment at all postgraduate levels.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational processes.
- Limited autonomy in decision-making within higher education institutions.
- Social pressures.
- Establishment of numerous public universities and faculties without adequate consideration of essential infrastructure and human resource requirements.
- Insufficient funding allocations for infrastructural development.
- Political interference in university administration, leading to the appointment of individuals lacking requisite competence or experience to senior administrative positions.
- Absence of clear criteria for faculty and staff appointments, including specialization and qualifications.
- Inadequate financial support for scientific research.
- Confusion arising from changes in preparatory school curricula, shifting from a binary scientific and literary system to a more diversified model (literary, biological, and applied sciences), adversely affecting admission processes and enrollment standards.
- Challenges related to students studying abroad at their own expense, particularly those with low academic averages seeking recognition of their study by the Ministry.
- Lack of integration within higher education institutions, resulting in an oversupply of graduates not aligned with labor market demands.
- Iraq's exclusion from the global competitiveness index issued by international organizations.

b. Challenges in Private University Education

- Arbitrary establishment of private universities and faculties.
- Absence of clear regulations defining the relationship between private education investors and university administrations.
- Deficiencies in enforcing regulations concerning student-to-faculty ratios in most private institutions.

c. Challenges Related to the Unconstitutionality of Certain Provisions in the Law on Principles for Equivalency of Certificates

The enactment of the Law on Principles for Equivalency of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Academic Degrees No. 20 of 2020 has generated significant repercussions, eliciting discontent among academic, legal, and public sectors. The law's passage was marked by division within the parliament and among relevant bodies responsible for its implementation. Critically, the law was tailored to accommodate political party interests, granting special grade employees priv-

ileges to obtain certificates and academic titles outside the Ministry of Higher Education's established regulations.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research expressed reservations regarding the law's passage, emphasizing the lack of consultation with the competent ministry and its departments. Concerns were raised about specific articles that undermine institutional integrity and the scientific basis for evaluating and equating certificates. The Ministry attempted to obstruct the law's ratification by the President; however, this effort was legally ineffective due to the President's formal ratification role and an organizational vacuum within the Federal Court.

Following the Federal Court's reconstitution, multiple challenges to the law were filed, including by the Academics Syndicate and the Ministry. Although the court upheld the law's constitutionality in general, it annulled several key provisions deemed unconstitutional. The court ruled the following articles unconstitutional:

- The phrase "(special grade holders)" in Article 2/Second/a, invalidating the equivalency of university degrees for special grade holders outside the Ministry's authority, in addition to not limiting the tasks of certificate equivalency to procedural aspects but extending them to the scientific aspects of thesis and dissertation contents.
- The phrase "(or embassies or cultural attachés)" in Article 2/Second/b.
- Paragraph (a) of Article 2/Third, concerning the General Secretariat of the Council of Representatives' authority to equate certificates issued by the Parliamentary Development Institute.
- The phrase "(unless the duration required to obtain them matches the duration required to obtain the qualifying certificates for entering those universities or training therein)" in Article 2/Third/c.
- Paragraph (d) of Article 2/Third, regarding ministries and bodies equating certificates granted through their institutes.
- Paragraph (e) of Article 2/Third, concerning universities and the Federal Service Council's authority to equate training certificates.
- Clause (Third) of Article 3, limiting equivalency and evaluation processes to procedural aspects.
- Clause (Third) of Article 5, neglecting the requirement of a secondary school certificate when a university or higher degree is obtained.
- Article 11, which authorized the Minister to approve equivalency and evaluation exceptions to residency requirements; this was annulled, prohibiting exceptions for certain groups.
- Article 12/Second, which granted academic titles to holders of higher degrees among civil servants outside the Ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research; this was ruled unconstitutional, except for provisions allowing certain officials to complete studies during service.

The Federal Supreme Court's decision to annul specific articles rather than the entire law signifies that the law remains in effect with modifications. Specialists regard this as a progressive step that supports higher education integrity and the quality of Iraqi academic credentials. The ruling reinstates the Ministry's legitimacy in certificate equivalency procedures and safeguards the academic status of university professors.

d. Challenges Associated with Certificate Forgery

One of the most significant tasks of implementing the Law on Principles for Equivalency of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Academic Degrees No. 20 of 2020 was to face the proliferation of certificate forgery and fraudulent issuing for Iraqi students by certain foreign universities, notably those in Lebanon. In response, the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, on November 11, 2021, suspended recognition of academic qualifications from three Lebanese institutions: the Modern University for Business and Science, the Islamic University of Lebanon, and Jinan University. This suspension was due to these universities' failure to comply with academic standards as stipulated by Law No. 20 of 2020. The suspension took effect immediately, with no new student registrations after this date being accredited. However, students enrolled prior to this date were exempted, pending the universities' adherence to established admission criteria. The Ministry indicated that this decision would be revisited following coordination between the Department of Missions and Cultural Relations and the Cultural Attaché in Beirut, contingent upon verification of compliance by all Lebanese universities with the prescribed standards.

Furthermore, the Ministry mandated that all theses and dissertations submitted by students who completed their studies abroad undergo electronic plagiarism screening, with a maximum acceptable plagiarism threshold set at 20%. Iraqi universities were tasked with enforcing these plagiarism checks. Additionally, Iraqi students who completed their studies abroad at their own expense are required to undergo a scientific evaluation process conducted by specialized committees upon submission of their certificates.

In a related development, the Minister of Higher Education issued orders terminating the assignments of the Cultural Attaché in Beirut and the department's accountant, dismissing them from their positions. This action followed public concern over the increasing number of Iraqi students obtaining higher education degrees from Lebanon through irregular and suspicious means, a situation exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly 27,000 certificates implicated. Individuals within the Iraqi embassy were reportedly involved in these irregularities. The dismissals took immediate effect from November 11, 2021, but did not retroactively address certificates obtained prior to this date. This implicitly acknowledges the existence of certificates that may have been forged or issued in violation of the equivalency regulations for Arab and foreign university degrees prior to the suspension. The ministry should have reviewed specific certificates obtained before this date, particularly those granted through exceptions by influential government officials contrary to legal provisions, while respecting

the rights of individuals whose equivalency procedures were completed in accordance with applicable laws.

5. Requirements for Advancing the Higher Education Sector

The objective of reforming and developing higher education is to elevate the status of universities and higher education institutions, aligning them with international standards to effectively fulfill their social mission and contribute to national advancement. The following outlines the principal proposed reforms and developmental strategies:

a. Public Education

1. Collaborate with the Ministry of Planning to assess labor market demands for undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, revising postgraduate admission numbers accordingly, with emphasis on rare specializations through an annual program to optimize graduate utilization and potential.
2. Partner with UNESCO to devise immediate, precise solutions addressing challenges faced by public and private universities, colleges, and institutes at the undergraduate level, particularly considering the 2021 academic year disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These solutions should balance national circumstances with academic rigor and educational reputation, including the adoption of e-learning and blended learning modalities for instruction and examinations.
3. Implement comprehensive administrative reforms, including restructuring and streamlining the Ministry to enhance operational efficiency.
4. Issue prompt decisions and directives targeting genuine issues within higher education institutions without compromising educational standards.
5. Prioritize financial allocations for newly established universities, focusing on projects, infrastructure, laboratory equipment, and staffing appointments across teaching, administrative, and service roles.
6. Maximize and diversify sustainable funding sources to reduce exclusive reliance on government funding, which is constrained by ongoing financial crises, and utilize these resources to upgrade university infrastructure and complete stalled projects within set timelines.
7. Reevaluate university leadership selection criteria emphasizing competence, integrity, academic qualifications, and administrative experience, ensuring decisions are free from external interference.
8. Establish clear criteria for teaching position applicants to enhance faculty performance, develop an annual schedule of needed specializations reflecting new institutions and staffing changes, with focus on rare disciplines.
9. Establish and legislate the Scientific Research Fund.
10. Foster integration with the Ministry of Education by updating curricula and exchanging expertise to ensure knowledge continuity for preparatory

school graduates and address disparities between biological and applied science tracks.

11. Review regulations governing study files for students abroad, instituting policies based on academic performance and the international ranking of their institutions.
12. Introduce professional master's degree programs aimed at employee development without qualifying holders for university teaching roles.
13. Implement program accreditation for all open specializations, making it a prerequisite for program continuation, ensuring alignment with market needs.
14. Initiate data collection for the fifth indicator (Education and Innovation) within global competitiveness metrics, engaging all relevant ministries and agencies.
15. Establish an independent quality assurance and academic accreditation body, applying institutional and international specialized accreditation standards across all programs.
16. Enhance the reputation of Iraqi universities by developing faculty, student body, and curricula, aiming for inclusion in prominent international rankings (e.g., Shanghai, Times Higher Education, QS, Scimago, URAP, Green-Metric).
17. Collaborate with private universities and faculties as essential partners in higher education development through expertise exchange, research collaboration, and academic events.
18. Consolidate university autonomy within a framework that upholds academic values, social traditions, legal compliance, and social justice.
19. Support the transition of Iraqi universities from knowledge dissemination to knowledge production, promoting the concept of the productive university, marketing scientific research to state sectors, and fostering applied research capabilities.
20. Encourage engagement between universities and government, private, and mixed sectors to identify and address challenges, particularly in industrial, agricultural, oil, health, and information technology fields.
21. Develop strategies to attract foreign students, promote international relations, and encourage cultural exchange.
22. Establish cultural relations programs with foreign universities based on trust, enhancing Iraq's reputation and reflecting its civilization's value.
23. Implement the course credit system in capable universities to foster constructive competition and academic excellence.
24. Ensure scholarship students receive appropriate entitlements and complete degrees within required durations, facilitating their return to serve the country.

25. Form expert councils utilizing retired faculty and emeritus professors to discuss future visions for advancing Iraqi universities, especially vocational and higher education development.
26. Emphasize student extracurricular activities, practical training, and participation in envisioning and discussing ambitious goals, recognizing youth as future builders.
27. Employ innovative teaching methods, enhance faculty skills, and ensure comprehensive theoretical and applied knowledge delivery.
28. Prevent politicization of public and private universities, maintaining them as safe spaces for science, knowledge, and creativity.
29. Develop vocational education institutions and increase student enrollment to prepare graduates with practical skills.
30. Adopt the productive university concept to ensure interaction between academic forces and social production sites.
31. Review curricula to align with sustainable development goals and labor market requirements.
32. Cultivate modern, civilized individuals committed to patriotism, freedom, altruism, corruption resistance, self-education, and academic achievement.
33. Reassess university admission policies to better align labor market needs with student aspirations.
34. Expand virtual library resources by partnering with international publishers to enhance research accessibility for Iraqi scholars.
35. Facilitate the establishment of foreign universities and international branches in Iraq, attracting expertise to elevate scientific standards.
36. Promote twinning arrangements between Iraqi and renowned international universities to exchange expertise, strengthen programs, and improve academic reputation.
37. Support private university institutions through federal assistance in land acquisition or investment for modern university establishment.
38. Develop integrated university cities modeled on global smart universities, located outside urban centers.
39. Provide suitable environments and services for university professors, including appropriate housing reflecting their academic status.

b. Private University Education

1. Establish universities, faculties, and institutes meeting infrastructure and human resource standards to accommodate increased secondary education graduates.
2. Continuously audit compliance with establishment and student admission standards, monitor infrastructure development, close non-compliant institutions, and transfer affected students.

3. Implement clear governance mechanisms defining ownership relations, adhering to laws and internal regulations, with university/faculty councils as decision-making authorities.
4. Conduct comprehensive reviews of academic departments, establishing ratios per national and international standards to maintain educational rigor, and fill vacancies with qualified unemployed graduates.

IV. Vision for Reforming the Education and Higher Education Sectors

The reform vision aims to enhance the efficiency of the educational system in producing gainful employment and accelerating economic growth by aligning educational outputs with labor market demands, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Priority is given to vocational and technical education and training, improving university rankings in international assessments, and expanding life-long learning opportunities. Considering the country's challenging economic conditions and the substantial financial resources required for certain interventions, the reform strategies are categorized into two types:

- **Unconstrained Reform:** These reforms can be implemented with minimal or no financial resources and typically yield short-term impacts on the educational process.
- **Constrained Reform:** These reforms necessitate significant financial investments and extended timeframes to realize positive spillover effects on educational quality and service delivery, generally in the medium to long term.

These reform strategies align with national development objectives and Iraq's Vision for Sustainable Development 2030, developed collaboratively by the Ministry of Planning and the Ministries of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research.

1. Short-Term Reform Proposals

a. Joint Proposals for the Education and Higher Education Sectors

- Administrative leadership within the education and higher education sectors should be appointed based on merit and professionalism, free from political interference, quotas, tribalism, and regionalism.
- Strengthen coordination between the Ministries of Education and Higher Education by enhancing the Higher Coordinating Committee's functions and developing joint programs that promote integration based on educational sector outputs.
- Uphold academic rigor in decisions concerning student affairs (e.g., enrollment termination, supplementary examinations, transfers, and hosting) to ensure quality educational outcomes.

- Implement principles of administrative governance to foster partnerships between public and private educational institutions, promote administrative decentralization between central and local authorities, and improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Employ diverse and contemporary teaching methodologies by developing infrastructure and expanding e-learning (distance learning), cooperative learning, and inclusive education, alongside diversifying student assessment methods. Leverage advancements in information and communication technologies to diversify instructional approaches, reduce costs, and enhance quality.
- Expand partnerships with international and civil society organizations to utilize grants and projects addressing key issues and to implement targeted development initiatives aligned with sector priorities.
- Apply the recommendations of the National Committee for the Education and Training Strategy to advance educational practices.

b. Proposals at the Education Sector Level

- Reevaluate the diversified preparatory education system (biological and applied sciences tracks).
- Increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates by improving school infrastructure, enhancing the learning environment, and implementing awareness programs to encourage family engagement in school enrollment, complemented by economic incentives such as student grants.
- Establish an integrated statistical system for educational data management with an emphasis on statistical analysis.
- Develop quality standards for teachers and administrators by creating a dedicated guideline.
- Strengthen vocational education to supply intermediate technical personnel (agricultural, industrial, commercial, information technology) aligned with economic and social development needs and labor market demands.

c. Proposals at the Higher Education Sector Level

- Base university admissions for undergraduate and postgraduate studies primarily on students' academic performance, minimizing reliance on other weighting criteria (e.g., martyrs, political prisoners), while preserving their privileges in other domains. This necessitates amendments to relevant laws and regulations.
- Reassess policies on open postgraduate studies by limiting admissions to enhance educational quality and outcomes. Reduce study leaves, fellowships, and scholarships to universities with lower rankings than Iraqi institutions, particularly in neighboring countries, favoring universities with advanced standards. In addition, there must be review procedures for recognizing privately obtained certificates.

- Enhance university rankings and academic reputation internationally by:
 - Promoting collaborative research with international scholars and facilitating participation in scientific conferences domestically and abroad, supported by dedicated research funding.
 - Encouraging publication in reputable journals indexed in international databases (e.g., Scopus, Clarivate, Nature, Science).
 - Prioritizing applied research addressing diverse problems and solutions, especially in agriculture, industry, health, and information technology sectors.
 - Emphasizing quality standards in higher education, improving educational outputs, and meeting criteria for partnerships with reputable international universities. Adopt mechanisms for knowledge transfer to practical applications and foster collaborations with development sectors, notably the private sector.
 - Enhancing staff capabilities in continuing education and training centers through international expertise so they can train faculty members on the latest methods of training and teaching.
 - Elevating private university education as a key partner in offering advanced academic programs and specialized fields that contribute to development, social needs, labor market demands, and require substantial investments (e.g., laboratories, equipment).
 - Deepening cooperation with international universities and organizations in strategic resources, educational technologies, scientific research, capacity building, and cultural exchange.
 - Creating an adaptable educational environment responsive to change and crises by integrating traditional education with e-learning systems by establishing Iraqi-specific electronic platforms for each university (akin to Google Classroom) to provide essential infrastructure for technological advancement and rapid crisis response (e.g., pandemics, conflicts), including alternative local e-learning solutions.
 - Promoting awareness through educational seminars on the importance of female university completion, recognizing their vital social role. This supports Sustainable Development Goal 4, target 4.5, which aims to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access at all levels.

2. Medium- and Long-Term Reform Proposals

a. Joint Proposals for the Education and Higher Education Sectors

- Increase the proportion of the state's total operational and investment budget allocated to the education and higher education sectors to enable these sectors to fulfill their commitments and implement programs aimed at enhancing educational services and supporting scientific research.

- Reevaluate laws and regulations governing private sector participation to encourage investment in these sectors while ensuring the delivery of high-quality outcomes.
- Review the retirement law to retain experienced and competent teaching staff, thereby supporting the objectives of educational institutions.

b. Proposals at the Education Sector Level

- Reconsider legislation, particularly the Compulsory Education Law, including the possibility of extending compulsory education to the intermediate stage.
- Reassess laws and regulations related to private and foreign education systems to establish standards and conditions for licensing private schools, focusing on educational staff qualifications, infrastructure, and geographic location.
- Renovate existing school buildings and construct new facilities to eliminate double shifts and expand geographic coverage by enforcing expropriation laws, allocating land, contracting reputable construction firms, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Develop curricula grounded in a progressive educational philosophy that aligns with contemporary demands by utilizing available grants, establishing curriculum standards and sequencing for all subjects and stages, building the capacities of curriculum authors and designers, including vocational education, and relying on government resources for curriculum printing.
- Modernize testing and evaluation methods by adopting contemporary techniques.
- Implement teacher preparation, professional development, and qualification programs that align with intellectual, cognitive, and technological advancements.
- Establish and equip community centers dedicated to literacy, life skills education, and lifelong learning.
- Develop programs to integrate students with disabilities and special needs into society by facilitating their access to educational and training services and establishing specialized infrastructure and facilities.
- Provide vocational education graduates with increased opportunities for admission to Iraqi universities and employment.

c. Proposals at the Higher Education Sector Level

- Reevaluate legislation and regulations pertaining to higher education, particularly the Private University Education Law, addressing objections raised by the Ministry of Higher Education's legal department and incorporating the Ministry of Planning's recommendation to include provisions for consultation on the establishment of private universities and faculties.

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- Develop robust educational systems aligned with labor market needs by reviewing existing scientific specializations, suspending some, and introducing new specializations that support national development plans and labor market demands, thereby enhancing graduate qualifications. This includes improving criteria for postgraduate study needs domestically and abroad, supported by comprehensive labor market surveys focusing on the private sector's informal activities, a responsibility of the Ministry of Planning.
 - Conduct studies to formulate a future-oriented higher education strategy emphasizing technology, advanced educational alternatives such as digital learning, and autonomous universities.
 - Prioritize the development of technical education due to its critical role in sustainable development and its capacity to produce skilled intermediate cadres required by government institutions and the private sector.
 - Resume study missions for rare specializations, secure fellowship opportunities, and activate training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of educational institution personnel, including staff and faculty members.

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11.

Iraq's International Relations

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I. Introduction

Iraq occupies a pivotal position in shaping strategic directions both regionally and internationally, attributable to its substantial material and symbolic significance. Over time, major powers have leveraged their political, economic, and military capabilities to maintain influence over Iraq, recognizing its role as a critical factor in sustaining their global hegemony and dominance. Various international actors—including states, corporations, and regional and international organizations—accord Iraq considerable importance. Notably, Iraq ranks second among Arab nations and fifth globally in terms of proven oil reserves. This prominence and relative weight drive the continuous and rapid evolution of Iraq's international relations, influenced by both material and symbolic factors that underscore its strategic regional and global significance. However, the extent of this influence fluctuates based on active parameters and its application in shaping foreign relations. Consequently, Iraq's international relations are subject to considerable regional and international pressures, reflecting ongoing dynamics of competition and conflict within the region.

Despite these challenges, Iraq continues to strive toward establishing a capable national state that can engage in relations characterized by parity with other nations, thereby securing respect for its sovereignty and fulfilling an international role commensurate with its actual capabilities. Within this context, it is imperative to maximize benefits and minimize losses in unavoidable relationships, particularly with the United States and neighboring countries. National interests must serve as the foundational principle guiding Iraq's foreign policy, a theme explored in this chapter.

The year 2021 was marked by several significant events and crises that shaped the political landscape, albeit less intensely than in previous years. The visit of Pope Francis in March 2021 provided a substantial spiritual uplift for the Iraqi populace and repositioned the country on the global map in terms of regional and spiritual significance.

Subsequently, Iraq enhanced its regional stature by hosting the Baghdād Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, in collaboration with France, which included participation from Saudi Arabia and Iran. This summit was perceived

as reinforcing Baghdād's role as a mediator between Riyadh and Tehran amid strained bilateral relations. Although the outcomes of this initiative remain pending, Iraq maintained prominence in international discourse, with the refugee issue remaining a critical concern.

The early parliamentary elections held on October 10, 2021, represented a major political milestone, constituting the fifth such elections since 2003.

In December 2021, the United States announced the conclusion of its combat mission in Iraq, transitioning the security relationship to focus on training, advising, assistance, and intelligence sharing.

Throughout 2021, Iraq endeavored to assert a more prominent regional and international role after a period of diplomatic retrenchment caused by domestic challenges. This shift entailed expanding diplomatic relations and openness toward neighboring countries and the broader international community. Foreign policy in 2021 underwent significant transformations at both regional and international levels, reflecting a strategic reorientation by political decision-makers from narratives of conflict toward those of peace. Although the government of Muṣṭafā al-Kāzīmī faced limited domestic achievements, it secured notable successes in foreign policy by positioning Iraq as a platform for regional initiatives and engaging in "Track Two Diplomacy"⁽¹⁾ to create a state of regional/Arab balance with the Iranian influence in Iraq. These diplomatic efforts materialized through numerous meetings, conferences, and visits hosted in Baghdād during 2021.

A critical question remains regarding the continuity of these foreign policy initiatives into 2022, contingent upon the orientation of the incoming government following the parliamentary elections and evolving regional and international dynamics. This situation presents substantial challenges for Iraq's foreign policy.

In 2021, Iraq also resolved a significant economic burden by completing the full payment of United Nations-mandated financial compensations to Kuwait, totaling 52.4 billion dollars, related to the Second Gulf War. This development fostered optimism for economic recovery and increased openness to global investment.

Experts have noted that Iraq faces considerable challenges in political and governmental decision-making and in managing state administrative responsibilities. By the end of 2021, citizens anticipates the eradication of terrorist enclaves, following security forces' successes against sleeper cells and targeted operations against individuals wanted by the judiciary.

To analyze these and other variables, this chapter is organized into eight main sections, as follows:

(1) Track Two Diplomacy denotes diplomatic efforts conducted through unofficial channels involving individuals and institutions outside formal governmental frameworks. This form of diplomacy is particularly valuable when official diplomatic avenues face impediments, providing an alternative platform to explore innovative ideas and initiatives. For further reading, see Buckle (2012) and Gregory (2008).

II. The Visit of Pope Francis: Importance and Outcomes

On the afternoon of Friday, March 5, 2021, Pope Francis commenced a historic visit to Iraq, marking his first international trip since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The visit occurred amid heightened security concerns following a series of rocket attacks targeting the 'Ayn al-Asad military base, which hosts US forces. The papal visit spanned five governorates and concluded on March 8. The Prime Minister personally welcomed the Pope at Baghdād International Airport (France 24, 2021, March 5).

al-Kāzimī wrote on his personal Twitter account: "With all love and peace, Iraq, its people and government, welcomes His Holiness Pope Francis, to affirm the depth of the humanitarian ties that Mesopotamia was, and still is, and will remain, its historic station for the meeting of religions and universal human ideas and values. Welcome to His Holiness in the land of Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, and the prophets and saints." The Vatican characterized the visit as a message of love and peace for Iraq (France 24, 2021, March 5).

1. The Significance of the Pope's Visit to Iraq

Numerous experts have regarded the papal visit to Iraq as a historic event, not only due to its occurrence amid the COVID-19 pandemic but also for several other critical reasons (al-Khūrī, 2021):

- Pope Francis is the first Vatican Pontiff to visit Iraq, marking the inaugural pilgrimage by a Supreme Pontiff to Mesopotamia and the first spiritual summit of this magnitude with a Shiite authority, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid 'Alī al-Sīstānī.
- The Pope's itinerary included visits to Baghdād, al-Najaf al-Ashraf, Dhī-Qār, Nīnawá, and the Kurdistan Region, representing an unprecedented endeavor by a spiritual leader given the prevailing security risks and the ongoing pandemic, which had restricted papal travel outside the Vatican for over a year. Despite these challenges, the Pope was resolute in undertaking the visit.
- The visit fulfilled a longstanding aspiration of the Vatican, originally envisioned by Pope John Paul II, who had planned a similar pilgrimage in 2000 to the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham as part of his journey to the Holy Lands at the millennium's onset. However, the former Iraqi regime cited international sanctions as an impediment to organizing the visit. The Pope's intention at that time was met with controversy, including a letter from opponents of the Baath regime urging him to reconsider visiting a country under dictatorial rule. Approximately two decades later, initiatives by Iraqi church leaders revived this idea (BBC News Arabic, 2021, March 5).
- Since his papacy began in 2013, Pope Francis has demonstrated profound sensitivity toward marginalized and impoverished populations. His visit to Iraq represents a further step in establishing his role as a "messenger

to the weary," emphasizing outreach not only to global leaders but also to vulnerable communities affected by conflict and division.

- The visit conveys multiple significant messages, foremost among them being the affirmation of Iraq's continued regional and international importance due to its historical legacy and promising future, grounded in its geographical and economic significance (BBC News, 2021, March 5; al-Kinānī, 2021). The Pope's visit is poised to enhance Iraq's reputation as a nation respectful of all religions and minorities. It also underscores the success of Prime Minister al-Kāẓimī's government in leveraging religious diplomacy to foster greater international engagement by capitalizing on Iraq's religious and civilizational heritage (Ilyās, 2021). This enhanced status is expected to resonate both within Western public opinion and among Muslim populations, particularly Arabs.
- The visit attracted considerable international attention, symbolizing moral support and reaffirming Iraq's relevance within the global community.
- A critical objective of the visit was to urge local political actors to safeguard what was left of the Christian minority, which has endured oppression and persecution amid ongoing conflicts, resulting in significant emigration. The visit served as a reassurance to Christians that they remain a focus of the global Church and the Supreme Pontiff, emphasizing efforts to stabilize Christian-inhabited areas damaged by conflict. Since 2003, the Christian population has declined from approximately 12% to an estimated 1%, reflecting the broader losses Iraq has suffered due to war, internal strife, and corruption. The papal visit may incentivize Christians to remain by highlighting their historical and future significance in Iraq.
- Nonetheless, the former Iranian ambassador to the Vatican, Muhammad Masjid Jāmi'ī, expressed skepticism regarding the visit's impact on Iraqi Christians, suggesting it may only provide temporary reassurance. He posited that religious freedoms are not the primary concern for Christians, but rather a lack of confidence in the future—a challenge unlikely to be resolved solely through the papal visit (IRNA, 2021, February 20).
- The visit also reaffirmed the status of the Supreme Religious Authority in al-Najaf al-Ashraf. The Pope's meeting with the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid 'Alī al-Sīstānī symbolized interfaith dialogue and cooperation, aiming to restore the rights and properties of displaced Christians and facilitate their return with governmental and international support. This meeting underscored the moderate approach of the Najaf authority and called upon global powers to prioritize reason, renounce conflict, and respect the rights of peoples. Both leaders emphasized the role of religious figures in promoting harmony, peaceful coexistence, and human solidarity across religions and societies (Group of Researchers, 2021).
- The visit occurred amid heightened tensions between Iran and the United States, with indications of impending military actions linked to nuclear

agreement negotiations (al-'Uraybī, 2020). On the other hand, the Pope's meeting with al-Sīstānī, as the preeminent Shiite authority, could thwart efforts aimed at dividing the components of Iraqi society (IRNA, 2021, February 20).

- Finally, the visit conveyed a message of solidarity with profound religious and social implications, particularly in light of the suffering endured by Christians and Yazidis during and after the ISIS occupation. The Pope's visit to the city of Ur, traditionally regarded as the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, held symbolic significance as a cradle of human civilization and a platform for interfaith dialogue among Iraq's diverse religious communities, including Muslims, Christians, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, and Yazidis. The visit aimed to foster brotherhood, tolerance, and peace among Iraq's foundational social components, many of whom have emigrated in recent years.

2. Outcomes of the Visit

The visit yielded several significant outcomes (Karīm, 2021):

- Pope Francis's historic visit revitalized the prominence of Mesopotamia in both Arab and international media, framing it under the theme of "Fraternity and Peace" rather than conflict and turmoil. Under the motto "You are all brothers," the visit served as a platform to advocate for the cessation of violence and extremism. In his inaugural address, the Pope highlighted the longstanding presence and contributions of Christians in the region as a valuable heritage. He emphasized the importance of enabling the Christian community in Iraq to continue serving society and underscored their entitlement to full citizenship rights, freedoms, and responsibilities (Ādil et al., 2021).
- The visit conveyed both local and international messages. Locally, it addressed the Iraqi populace, affirming their country's worthiness of pride and constructive development. It fostered renewed confidence and alleviated widespread frustration, promoting unity and mutual understanding. Globally, it underscored the imperative of prioritizing dialogue as a means of conflict resolution.
- The visit challenged the prevailing media stereotype that had depicted Iraq for eighteen years as a land dominated by warfare and violence. Instead, it revealed Iraq's rich historical legacy as an ancient civilization credited with pioneering writing, law, and inventions such as the wheel and sail. This reframing dispelled negative perceptions and highlighted Iraq's deserving place in global attention beyond narrow conflicts.
- The meeting between Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah al-Sīstānī demonstrated the feasibility of interreligious dialogue, fostering unity on shared values. This historic encounter represents a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the region, with anticipated significant repercussions warranting scholarly attention.

- Regarding domestic political implications, the visit's impact appears limited. Political factions have historically failed to capitalize on opportunities for national reconstruction and stability. Although the visit generated positive psychological effects, it is unlikely to alter the entrenched behaviors of political elites who maintain sectarian divisions to consolidate power. Consequently, the visit's most enduring influence is expected to be cultural, religious, and intellectual, contributing to reduced animosity and enhanced dialogue.

III. Baghdād Conference for Cooperation and Partnership

On August 28, 2021, the Baghdād Conference for Cooperation and Partnership convened, bringing together representatives from nine Arab and foreign countries, several Arab and international organizations, and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Iraq was represented by Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī. Gulf Cooperation Council states included Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Other Arab participants included Jordan and Egypt, while Iran and Turkey represented non-Arab neighboring countries. France represented Western nations. International organizations such as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation were also present, represented by their Secretaries-General (Maḥmūd, 2022).

The summit aimed to foster regional cooperation through dialogue, emphasizing that Iraq's stability is integral to regional security. Discussions focused on expanding economic partnerships, combating terrorism, supporting reconstruction efforts in Iraq, and enhancing cooperation among neighboring states.

Prime Minister al-Kāzīmī characterized the summit as a historic moment for Iraq's foreign relations, grounded in cooperation, solidarity, mutual understanding, and shared interests. He reaffirmed Iraq's rejection of its territory being used for external conflicts and emphasized its role as a cornerstone of regional stability. al-Kāzīmī also highlighted Iraq's progress in reconstruction and preparations for the forthcoming parliamentary elections (Xinhua Arabic News, 2021, August 29).

Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamīm bin Ḥamad, stressed the importance of Iraq's unity and security as foundational to regional stability, noting that terrorism has hindered Iraq's potential. He called upon the international community to support Iraq's pursuit of security and development. Egyptian President 'Abd-al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī acknowledged Iraq's challenges, including terrorism and foreign interventions, but commended its achievements in defeating terrorism and preserving national unity. He expressed Egypt's willingness to share its experiences to support Iraq's future.

Iran's Foreign Minister, Ḥusayn Amīr 'Abdullāhiyān, emphasized Iran's commitment to regional security and recognized Iraq's significant role. He highlighted the

need for collective cooperation to support the Iraqi people post-terrorism. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Fayṣal bin Farḥān, underscored the historic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iraq and expressed optimism about continued collaboration to combat terrorism and promote peaceful coexistence (DW, 2021, August 28).

The success of the conference can be attributed to its emphasis on economic and security dimensions while deliberately avoiding contentious disputes. It highlighted shared interests, recognizing that all nations require cooperation in economic matters, which in turn depend on the provision of security. At the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, participating countries agreed to unify efforts to maintain regional security, combat extremism and terrorism, and collaborate on investment initiatives to address the COVID-19 pandemic and significant climate-related challenges. Given that terrorism affects all nations, such cooperation is expected to yield positive outcomes for Iraq, the broader region, and the international community (ʿĀdil & al-Rifāʿī, 2021).

The conference facilitated bilateral meetings between countries experiencing significant conflicts and disputes. Notably, the meeting between Egyptian President ʿAbd-al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī and the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamīm bin Ḥamad Āl Thānī, contributed to rapprochement between the two nations, positively influencing their bilateral relations and the wider region. Additionally, the Emir of Qatar met with the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Muḥammad bin Rāshid Āl Maktūm, who described the Emir as both a brother and friend, emphasizing the kinship and shared destiny of the Gulf peoples (Qādir, 2022).

Arab media outlets analyzed the anticipated outcomes of the summit held in Baghdad in August 2021. Some commentators suggested that the summit would enhance Iraq's political prominence in the region, particularly given the invitations extended to Saudi Arabia and Iran. Conversely, others expressed skepticism about achieving substantive results, especially due to Syria's exclusion from the summit. The Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Ṣabāḥ* reported that Iraq invited both Iran and its Gulf counterparts with the aim of de-escalating tensions that had brought the parties close to open conflict in recent years. Some observers viewed the conference as a potential step toward resolving the crisis between Tehran and Riyadh, noting Iraq's prior role in facilitating high-level security negotiations between these states (Xinhua Arabic News, 2021, August 29).

The Saudi newspaper *ʿUkāz* urged Iraqi leadership to leverage the summit to address the country's deteriorating internal conditions. Meanwhile, the London-based *al-ʿArab* newspaper highlighted the low level of representation from invited countries and described the summit's agenda as vague. Media leaks suggested that the summit grappled with numerous contentious and complex issues—including Saudi-Iran reconciliation, the ongoing conflict in Yemen, Lebanon's collapse, and the regional water crisis—problems that previous summits had failed to resolve. In the London-based *Raʿy al-Yawm* newspaper, *ʿAṣrī Fayyāḍ* criticized Syria's absence and argued that Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuʿād Ḥusayn failed to provide a convincing rationale for Syria's exclusion from the summit (BBC News Arabic, 2021, August 26).

The summit concluded with a final communiqué affirming the participating nations' support for Prime Minister al-Kāzīmī's government and its efforts to strengthen state institutions in accordance with constitutional mechanisms. The communiqué also expressed support for Iraq's security and economic stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. It called upon the nations of the Arab East and neighboring countries to address regional challenges through cooperation, mutual interests, and good neighborliness. Furthermore, the communiqué emphasized the necessity of conducting parliamentary elections under international observation to ensure transparency and integrity. Leaders and representatives at the summit expressed solidarity with Iraq and underscored the importance of unifying regional and international efforts to promote stability and security. The communiqué also highlighted that Baghdād's hosting of the conference exemplifies Iraq's commitment to a balanced and cooperative foreign policy (BBC News Arabic, 2021, August 26).

The significance of the summit appears to reside in its emphasis on shared interests among nations while deliberately refraining from addressing contentious issues at this stage. The primary objective is to establish a robust foundation for cooperation and partnership, thereby initiating a new phase upon which future resolutions of disputed matters can be constructed. Despite the diverse positions and disagreements among the participating countries at the summit, their assembly in Baghdād functioned as a unifying event, not aligning with any particular faction but maintaining a balanced and inclusive approach that considers the interests of all parties involved. The participants resolved to establish a committee comprising representatives from the foreign ministries of the involved nations to ensure ongoing follow-up and to convene technical and specialized meetings aimed at operationalizing the key outcomes of the Baghdād Conference for Cooperation and Partnership. This initiative is expected to facilitate sustainable and progressive measures, underscoring the conference's pivotal role and its commitment to concrete and procedural implementation strategies.

IV. Iraq-US Relations

Relations between Iraq and the United States have been shaped by enduring strategic considerations and shifting objectives that initially motivated the US occupation of Iraq. Developments in 2021 did not indicate any US commitment to rebuilding a strong Iraqi state following the destruction wrought by the invasion and occupation. Instead, cooperation focused primarily on security and financial matters, with US support largely limited to advisory roles for Iraqi forces. After prolonged hesitation, this support expanded to include airstrikes.

The US strategy in Iraq's regional context appears to rest on six constants: maintaining a long-term US presence; controlling energy resources along the "oil arc" from the Gulf to the Caspian Sea, thereby influencing global energy supplies and international strategies; ensuring Israel's security; preventing the prolifera-

tion of weapons of mass destruction among regional powers; and demonstrating US capability in managing regional dynamics.

Although the United States announced the end of its combat missions in Iraq, significant changes on the ground are unlikely beyond minor adjustments. This announcement raises questions regarding the future trajectory of bilateral relations. Key developments in Iraqi-US relations during 2021 include:

1. The End of US Combat Missions

On April 7, 2021, during the third round of strategic dialogue with Baghdād, the US agreed to withdraw its remaining combat forces deployed against ISIS extremists. This decision was reaffirmed in the joint statement following the fourth round of the Strategic Dialogue, subsequent to Prime Minister al-Kāzīmī's visit to Washington and meeting with President Joe Biden on July 26, 2021. The visit established the strategic framework for Iraqi-US relations, including the transition of International Coalition forces from combat to training and advisory roles by the end of 2021, retaining approximately 2,500 US personnel as "international advisors" (Şāliḥ, 2021). The statement emphasized that US forces would cease combat operations in Iraq after December 31, 2021, shifting fully to roles involving training, advising, assistance, and intelligence sharing (Ilyās, 2021). This transition was implemented in December 2021, with the US military announcing the conclusion of its combat mission in Iraq. Analysts suggest that this agreement was intended to alleviate domestic pressure on al-Kāzīmī's government, which faces significant opposition from factions vehemently against any US military presence in Iraq (Schaer, 2021, July 29).

National Security Advisor Qāsim al-A'rajī confirmed in early December 2021 that the transition of US forces to advisory roles was completed ahead of schedule. He noted that US forces had shifted to missions focused on advising, assisting, and enabling Iraqi forces to achieve their objectives. Despite the announcement's publicity, substantive changes on the ground are unlikely, as the situation does not parallel the abrupt US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 (al-Sharq, 2021, December 9).

Regarding the nature of the US withdrawal, Caroline Rose, a researcher at the New Lines Institute in Washington, reported that US forces withdrew from eight bases due to concerns about attacks by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). A November 2021 report to the US Congress indicated that one US command center was relocated from Iraq to Kuwait, while personnel numbers at another command center were reduced. These changes affected not only military personnel but also American contractors. Some staff responsible for maintaining Iraq's F-16 fleet were reassigned and now operate remotely (BBC News Arabic, 2021, December 13).

As a result, the majority of US forces are concentrated in the capital city, Baghdād, and in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The US military has also transferred approximately two thousand military vehicles to local personnel. This development coincides with a gradual reduction in US funding for

certain aspects of military cooperation, as it is anticipated that the Iraqi government will eventually assume these financial responsibilities.

Concerning recent military operations against ISIS, a report prepared by the US military indicated that, between July and September 2021, the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service conducted 426 operations against ISIS, with coalition forces participating in only 13 of these operations. During the same period, the international coalition conducted airstrikes against ISIS targets less frequently than before (Schaer, 2022, January 7).

Despite these developments, a senior Iraqi government official affirmed the continued need for US military support, particularly air support. The Iraqi Air Force remains weak, and without assistance from the US Air Force, Iraq would be more vulnerable to drone attacks and would face challenges in conducting airstrikes against ISIS. President Biden's policy toward Iraq may be more limited than Iraqi expectations and is primarily viewed through the lens of issues related to Iran and ISIS. Caroline Rose, a researcher at the New Lines Institute in Washington, posits that ISIS will continue to influence US policy in Iraq, alongside the prevailing perception that US forces provide a counterbalance to Iranian influence (Schaer, 2022, January 7).

Nevertheless, despite the attention surrounding the announcement of the agreement to end combat operations, it is important to note that the US withdrawal is not a complete withdrawal akin to the situation in Afghanistan. The Biden administration decided to fully withdraw from Afghanistan before September 11, 2021. In contrast, the US-Iraq agreement is more accurately characterized as a repositioning of US forces and a redefinition of their role rather than a reduction in troop numbers. This step officially ends US combat missions in Iraq but does not constitute a full withdrawal. The United States considers its relationship with Baghdad strategic and does not intend to cede Iraq to Iranian influence amid deteriorating relations between Tehran and Washington, even as President Biden has indicated a willingness to reengage with the Iran nuclear deal.

2. Targeting of US Interests

Certain Iraqi armed factions continue to target US interests, despite some announcing a suspension of attacks until 2022 if US forces do not withdraw as agreed between Baghdad and Washington. Military bases hosting US forces have been repeatedly attacked by rockets and drones loaded with explosives. Washington attributes these attacks to armed Iraqi factions loyal to Iran.

3. Perspective on an Independent US Policy

At the conclusion of the strategic dialogue session between Baghdad and Washington, a joint statement reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening the long-term strategic partnership. The statement indicated that the United States intends to continue supporting Iraqi security forces and emphasized the necessity of conducting fair elections to bolster Iraq's sovereignty and development. During the dialogue, the United States expressed support for Iraqi efforts to enhance

economic reform and regional integration, particularly through commitments to regional energy networks involving Jordan and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Both parties agreed to resume discussions through the coordination committees of the Strategic Framework Agreement and reiterated their resolve to strengthen their strategic relationship on all bilateral issues, serving the national interests of both countries and promoting regional stability (Ma'lūf, 2021).

Based on these discussions, the strategic objectives of US national security in the Middle East remain central. These objectives include preventing Iraq from becoming a safe haven for terrorists, as Washington emphasized the necessity of continuing the US mission to eliminate active terrorist hotspots and prevent the resurgence of ISIS; preventing hostile states from dominating Iraq; and maintaining Iraq's role in global energy market stability, given its status as one of the world's largest oil producers and exporters. Any disruption to Iraq's oil production and exportation could precipitate a major crisis for the global economy.

Finally, it is important to note that the dialogue session did not result in a detailed strategy defining Iraq's specific needs from the United States or the methods for implementation in the next phase. Therefore, it is premature to assess the success or failure of the dialogue. Tangible results on the ground must be observed. Until then, the agreement between the two countries may be characterized as a redeployment intended to facilitate Iraqi elections and support US midterm elections in 2022 to secure democratic control of Congress.

V. Iraqi Relations with Neighboring Countries

In 2021, Iraq experienced significant developments in foreign policy, hosting several regional and international summits. Notably, Iraq acted as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two prominent regional rivals, facilitating their dialogue in Baghdād after years of severed relations. Iraq sought to harmonize its relations with Arab and regional neighbors to restore its regional and international role, leveraging its geographical position and the "zero problems" policy pursued by al-Kāzīmī's government toward regional countries.

On June 27, 2021, Baghdād hosted a tripartite summit involving Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan—the fourth such summit in two years. The meeting brought together Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī, King Abdullah II, and President 'Abd-al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī. This summit featured a historic visit by the Egyptian president, the first of its kind in 30 years. It was part of the fourth round of cooperation among the three nations, initiated in Cairo in March 2019 under the project named "The New Levant" (Şāliḥ, 2021). This initiative encompasses major economic and investment projects. Economically, the project involves Iraq exporting oil at preferential prices to Jordan via a proposed pipeline and to Egypt through the port of al-'Aqabah. In exchange, Iraq and Jordan would receive electricity and Egyptian gas. The project also includes Egypt's contribution to Iraq's reconstruction and the opening of the Iraqi labor market to millions of Egyptian craftsmen, who previously participated in Iraq's reconstruction after the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.

The "New Levant" project traces its origins to a World Bank study from March 2014, which included Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey alongside the three countries (al-Kharjī, 2021).

1. Iraq-Iran Relations in 2021

Iraq aims to enhance its political, economic, and security relations with its neighboring country, Iran, following the election of a new president. This initiative seeks to establish regional balance, minimizing international interventions that may provoke political crises. Iraqi officials and experts anticipate an improvement in bilateral relations, largely because decision-making within Iran is expected to be unified; the president-elect, Sayyid Ibrāhīm Raʿīsī, maintains close ties with the Supreme Leader, Sayyid 'Alī Khāminahī. Relations are projected to develop across multiple levels, with Baghdād striving to balance its relations between Washington and Tehran. The forthcoming period is anticipated to be challenging for Baghdād, primarily because it seeks to maintain its relationship with the United States, which similarly does not intend to withdraw from Iraq. Additionally, expectations of a US-Iranian agreement will test Iraq's capacity to cooperate with both parties. Iran is well-positioned to resolve its issues with Iraq, especially given its considerable influence within the country. The new Iranian government is expected to foster stronger relations, potentially surpassing its ties with the United States, which may affect Iraq-US relations to some extent. Clarity on these dynamics is expected within six months, during which Baghdād must maintain equilibrium in its foreign relations (Fākhir, 2021).

According to the Iraqi News Agency, Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī received an invitation from President Ibrāhīm Raʿīsī on June 19, 2021, to visit Iran. This invitation marked the first extended by the new Iranian president at the international level. al-Kāzīmī engaged in a telephone conversation with Raʿīsī, emphasizing the importance of strengthening bilateral relations and expressing aspirations for enhanced cooperation in economic, security, and counterterrorism domains to bolster the security and stability of both nations and the broader region. President Raʿīsī highlighted the historical ties binding the two countries and Iran's commitment to expanding cooperation across various sectors. Concurrently, President Barham Ṣāliḥ was among the first Arab leaders to congratulate the new Iranian president, affirming Iraq's anticipation of reinforcing established relations with Iran and its people, with whom Iraq shares profound civilizational, cultural, and social connections. He acknowledged Iran's significant role in supporting Iraq in combating terrorism and extremism and addressing regional security challenges (al-Hadath Net, 2021).

Iran's participation in the Conference for Cooperation and Partnership was represented by Foreign Minister Ḥusayn Amīr 'Abdullāhiyān, who affirmed Iran's support for Iraq's security, stability, unity, strength, and its elevation in regional and international arenas. He underscored efforts to develop bilateral and regional cooperation. The minister noted that annual trade volume between the two countries exceeds 13 billion dollars, facilitated by eight official border crossings that

enhance trade exchange. He added that Iran has significantly contributed to economic and trade cooperation with Iraq, including the export of goods such as electricity (Shafaq News, 2021, August 28); noting that during the Iranian fiscal year from March 21 to November 20, 2021, Iran exported goods worth 31.1 billion dollars, with Iraq accounting for 6.1 billion dollars, representing approximately 20% of Tehran's global trade volume (al-A'rajī, 2021).

The conference also featured an Iraqi initiative to prioritize dialogue between Iran and its neighboring countries. Iraqi Foreign Minister Fu'ād Ḥusayn, during a high-level delegation visit to Iran and meeting with President Ra'īsī at the end of 2021, emphasized Iraq's role in fostering dialogue aimed at securing a stable environment. He highlighted the importance of Iraq's stability for Iran and discussed bilateral relations, regional and international developments, and the withdrawal of US forces. The minister stressed the necessity of regional and international cooperation to combat extremism, resolve conflicts, and build trust among Iraq's neighboring countries, including Iran (al-Arabiya, 2021, December 26).

At the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Iraq invited Iran to initiate executive steps concerning agreements on land and sea borders and the Shaṭṭ al-'Arab waterway. During a meeting on September 26, 2021, between Foreign Minister Fu'ād Ḥusayn and his Iranian counterpart, Ḥusayn Amīr 'Abdullāhiyān, at the UN headquarters, the importance of continued coordination, committee meetings, and technical sessions was underscored to address water issues arising from Iran's alteration of river courses and withholding of Iraq's water shares, which have caused environmental and economic repercussions. The ministers also discussed political and security developments in the region and Iran's financial claims related to gas and electricity purchases amid economic sanctions on Tehran (al-Jazeera Net, 2021, September 27).

2. Iraq-Turkey Relations in 2021

Turkey aims to establish a balance of power, viewing Iraq as a critical model for Sunni-Shiite relations across the region. Consequently, Turkey prioritizes Iraq's security and stability to prevent sectarian conflict that could destabilize both countries and the broader region. Within Baghdad's foreign policy framework seeking balance, Turkey is recognized as a significant neighbor.

The bilateral relationship has been crucial for many years, given the strategic political and military characteristics of both countries, alongside diplomatic cooperation on international agreements and their civilizational and cultural proximity.

Economic factors play a multifaceted role in bilateral relations due to mutual dependencies. For Iraq, Turkey serves as a vital gateway for commercial imports and the entry of diverse goods into Iraqi markets. Conversely, Turkey provides an essential outlet for Iraqi oil exports via pipelines traversing its territory to Turkish ports (TRT Arabi, 2020, September 10).

Given Iraq's economic challenges and service deficiencies, it seeks to benefit from Turkey's expertise. Notably, officials specializing in economy and investment accompanied Prime Minister al-Kāzimī during his visit to Turkey on December

17, 2020, including Minister of Planning Khālid Battāl, Minister of Oil Iḥsān 'Abd al-Jabbār, and Minister of Water Resources Maḥdī al-Ḥamdānī. The visit resulted in agreements to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in trade, economy, and investment. In addition to meeting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, al-Kāzīmī engaged with Turkish business leaders at a Turkish-Iraqi Business Council event organized by the Foreign Economic Relations Committee. Collectively, these developments indicate Iraq's recognition of Turkey as a vital economic partner, especially concerning oil sales via the Kirkūk-Ceyhan pipeline. The Khābūr border crossing is also significant for supplying essential goods to Iraq. Approximately 2,500 Turkish companies operate within Iraq (Şālīḥ, 2021, August 19). al-Kāzīmī appears to be fostering relations with Turkey, perceiving it as a contributor to Iraq's stability. President Erdoğan emphasized that cooperation in combating the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would yield positive outcomes in Iraq. Over the past two years, Turkey has conducted airstrikes against PKK military sites in the governorates of Duhūk and Nīnawá, resulting in civilian casualties (Jihādī, 2020).

On August 19, 2021, the Ministry of Trade announced an agreement with its Turkish counterpart to establish joint committees aimed at enhancing economic relations between the two nations. This development occurred during the visit of the Turkish Minister of Trade, Mehmet Muş, to Baghdād, where he met with his Iraqi counterpart, 'Alā' al-Jubūrī (Muḥammad, 2021). According to the ministry's statement, both parties agreed to form joint committees to address outstanding issues and develop a shared vision to advance economic cooperation. al-Jubūrī expressed Baghdād's intention to strengthen economic and trade relations with Ankara and to increase bilateral trade volume. Similarly, Muş conveyed Turkey's aspiration to expand trade exchange and collaborate with the Iraqi private sector to establish joint ventures (INA, 2021, August 18).

Despite these initiatives, bilateral relations have recently experienced significant tensions due to several factors. Notably, disputes over water resources and Ankara's repeated violations of Baghdād's sovereignty through land and air shelling of Iraqi territories have strained relations. Turkey justifies these incursions by citing the presence of PKK in Iraq, thereby infringing upon Iraq's sovereignty and contravening international law.

In an effort to alleviate tensions, National Security Advisor Qāsim al-A'rajī met with the Turkish Ambassador to Baghdād, Ali Rıza Günay, on September 4, 2021, to discuss the future of bilateral relations and regional political and security developments, as reported by the Iraqi National Security Advisory (Jawād, 2021). al-A'rajī emphasized the necessity for the Turkish side to comprehend Iraq's unique circumstances concerning water issues and expressed hope for enhanced cooperation benefiting both neighboring countries and their populations. Although Iraq extended an invitation to Turkish President Erdoğan to attend the Baghdād Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, he delegated attendance to his Foreign Minister (al-Karmalī, 2021).

During the Iraqi-Turkish Business, Investment, and Contracting Forum held in Istanbul on November 19, 2021, the Iraqi government proposed the formation of

an economic bloc comprising Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. According to statements by Muḥammad Ḥannūn, spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Trade, the Iraqi delegation presented this proposal to establish a regional economic bloc capable of competing with global economic alliances (Şāliḥ, 2021, November 20). The delegation highlighted investment opportunities in agriculture and health sectors, requested authorization for Iraqi banks to open branches in Turkey, and underscored the importance of Turkish companies investing in Iraq. Additionally, they addressed the water scarcity affecting central and southern governorates, which has led to a 50% reduction in agricultural production. The delegation also advocated for facilitating Iraqi investors in Turkey, expediting medical case entries within 48 hours, and granting Iraqi investors multiple-entry visas valid for four to five years. Trade exchange between the two countries reached \$21 billion in 2021, up from \$17 billion in 2020, with Turkey ranking as Iraq's second-largest exporter after China. This substantial trade volume obliges Turkey to assist Iraq in resolving outstanding issues and to adopt a credible approach in fulfilling commitments (Enab Baladi, 2021, November 21).

Although the invitation originated from the Iraqi Ministry of Trade spokesperson, it likely reflects a mutual interest from Turkey and Iran. Several factors favor the establishment of this bloc, including geographical contiguity, existing land routes, established trade and economic relations, and longstanding cultural and civilizational ties. However, significant challenges persist, such as Iraq's political and security instability and Turkey's and Iran's conflicts with Kurdish groups in Iraq. Furthermore, Iran faces international economic sanctions, although these may soon be lifted. Nevertheless, Iran maintains economic, commercial, cultural, and civilizational relations with both Turkey and Iraq (al-Şāwī, 2021).

Several key issues are anticipated to shape future economic relations between Iraq and Turkey. These include reopening the Ovaköy border crossing, reconstructing the Baghdad railway line with an extension to al-Başrah, and repairing the Kirkūk-Ceyhan pipeline alongside constructing a parallel line. It is imperative for bilateral relations to establish a foundational framework that transcends short-term objectives. Historically, relations have fluctuated in tandem with Iraq's internal political dynamics (Duman, 2020). Moving beyond transient political considerations toward tangible, principle-based cooperation will strengthen bilateral ties and foster a robust, sustainable partnership.

In summary, multiple factors influence Iraq-Turkey bilateral relations, notably cultural and civilizational proximity, economic interests, trade volume, alignment in foreign policy, and shared military concerns. Experts anticipate that future relations will evolve toward new strategic horizons, encompassing economic, political, military, security, social, and strategic dimensions.

3. Iraq-Gulf Relations in 2021

Since assuming office in May 2020, Prime Minister Muşţafá al-Kāzimī has pursued foreign policies aimed at restoring Iraq to a position of "balance" in managing its international relations. This strategy encompasses Iraq's geo-strategic

tegic Arab depth, its regional neighbors—including Iran and Turkey—and its relations with global powers, notably the United States (al-Ḥāmid, 2021). Within this framework, the Iraqi government convened a regional and international conference involving several Arab and foreign nations, prominently Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, alongside representatives from the United Nations and the European Union. This summit aligns with al-Kāzimī's approach to deepen engagement with external actors in economic partnerships, reconstruction efforts, counterterrorism, and the pursuit of security stability. The government successfully fostered rapprochement with Egypt and Jordan by enhancing coordination and economic cooperation among the three countries, as well as with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states (Aḥmad, 2021).

The characterization of Iraqi-Gulf relations as “strategic” was rightly articulated by the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Nāyif Falāḥ al-Ḥajraf, during his visit to Baghdād on February 1, 2021, following his meeting with Foreign Minister Fuād Ḥusayn. al-Ḥajraf emphasized the Council's support for Iraq in combating terrorism, establishing security and stability, advancing the electricity linkage project between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Iraq, and organizing a business conference between the two parties. Foreign Minister Fuād Ḥusayn noted discussions concerning early elections and the potential support from Gulf states and the broader region (al-Ānī, 2021). Concurrently, Prime Minister al-Kāzimī advocated for expediting the electricity linkage initiative and enhancing trade exchanges. During his reception of al-Ḥajraf, al-Kāzimī underscored efforts to strengthen relations with Gulf Cooperation Council countries and to achieve integration across political, cultural, economic, and commercial domains, acknowledging that these relations had yet to reach Iraq's aspirations. He highlighted the importance of monitoring investment initiatives and donor conference pledges due to their impact on Iraq's economic, social, and security stability (DW, 2021, February 1).

Approximately one year prior, Iraq entered into an agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council countries to import approximately 500 megawatts of electricity to mitigate the severe power shortages experienced domestically. On December 6, 2020, Foreign Minister Fuād Ḥusayn and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council convened on the sidelines of the Manama Dialogue security conference in Bahrain. Ḥusayn identified Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as Iraq's gateways to the Gulf, emphasizing the necessity of establishing mechanisms for cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council. Iraq's foreign relations are predicated on principles of balance, mutual interests, and respect, with a call for Gulf companies to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction through infrastructure investment, the formation of a committee to oversee outcomes from the Kuwait Donors Conference, and coordination with the World Bank (al-Ṣāwī, 2021).

In September 2021, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Iraq, 'Abd-al-'Azīz al-Shammarī, articulated Riyadh's vision for cooperation with Baghdād across various sectors. He stated that the Gulf states envision a stable Iraq with which part-

nerships can be established based on shared interests, potentially facilitating a renewed engagement process. Despite the Gulf states' vested interest in election outcomes, they intend to engage with the forthcoming political landscape on the basis of fraternity and common interests, adhering to a policy of non-interference in Iraq's electoral affairs (al-'Ānī, 2021).

Should Iraq and the Gulf states succeed in establishing security cooperation, this would constitute a significant advancement in revitalizing bilateral and multi-lateral relations, representing a historic development beneficial to the entire region (al-Marhūn, 2016).

In conclusion, considerable progress has been made in Iraq's relations with its Gulf neighbors; however, further reflection is necessary to elevate these relations to their full potential.

VI. Iraq's Water Rights with Iran and Turkey

International organizations have raised concerns regarding the significant decline of freshwater resources in Iraq. A recent World Bank report projected that, if current climate change trends persist—characterized by reduced rainfall and increased temperatures—water availability could decrease by up to 20% by 2050 (UN, 2010, pp. 19-30; IAU, 2011). This reduction would deprive approximately one-third of irrigated lands of their water supply and result in a 4% decrease in GDP, coinciding with a population expected to double from its current estimate of around 40 million. For millions dependent on agriculture, this drought is anticipated to reduce labor demand in the sector by at least 12%, and to forcibly displace approximately 7 million individuals whose livelihoods rely on agriculture and water resources. In this context, the Ministry of Environment has recently declared Iraq as the “fifth most affected country globally” by climate change (DW, 2021, December 7).

The World Bank report further indicates that Iraq requires an investment of \$180 billion over twenty years to modernize its infrastructure, including dams and irrigation systems essential for water security, equating to an annual need of \$9 billion. However, the Ministry of Water Resources received only \$15 million in 2018, with no clear indication of policy change. Concurrently, rather than prioritizing alternative water conservation projects—such as reducing network losses and promoting drip and sprinkler irrigation over flood irrigation—reports suggest an increased focus on expanding oil and gas extraction and reliance on their revenues. This shift is notable given widespread discourse on the decline of the oil era and the anticipated depletion of reserves by the mid-21st century (DW, 2021, December 7).

The critical question arises: what measures has Iraq officially undertaken to address this looming crisis? Successive governments have largely limited their responses to diplomatic protests and delegations to Turkey aimed at securing water flow, occasionally achieving success. Nonetheless, Iraqi authorities have generally neglected water rights established through bilateral agreements and

international laws, which stipulate that upstream countries sharing international rivers must not alter water flows detrimentally affecting downstream agricultural projects and populations (al-Ansari et al., 2017, pp. 14-22; 2018, pp. 212-225). This principle is underscored by Iraq's civilization, which has been sustained by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for millennia, predating the Ottoman Empire and the modern Turkish state (ʿAlī, 2018, pp. 12-15).

Iraq's water supply predominantly depends on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries, all originating in Turkey and Iran, converging near al-Başrah in southern Iraq to form the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab, which empties into the Gulf. Iraq has experienced a persistent decline in water inflows the Tigris, Euphrates, and rivers coming from Iran, exacerbated by reduced rainfall in recent years (al-ʿAlī, 2018, p. 365).

To safeguard its water rights, Iraq has engaged in prolonged diplomatic efforts with Turkey and Iran to restore water flows and mitigate scarcity. In July 2021, Minister of Water Resources Maḥdī Rashīd al-Ḥamdānī reported ongoing discussions with Iran and Turkey regarding a water-sharing protocol, noting a lack of response and zero water releases from Iran. An Iraqi Presidency report indicated that 7 million Iraqis have been affected by drought and displacement due to climate change. On September 18, 2021, al-Ḥamdānī advocated for reinstating the 1975 Algiers Agreement on Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab water sharing to address reduced flows from Iran (al-ʿAbbāsī, 2022).

Negotiations with Turkey have facilitated the 2014 memorandum of understanding ratified by the Turkish parliament, wherein Ankara acknowledged the Tigris and Euphrates as shared rivers. The memorandum recommended equitable water releases to prevent harm to Iraq (Şāliḥ, 2022, January 8). As disclosed by the Minister of Water Resources on November 29, 2021, in an interview with the official newspaper al-Şabāḥ, al-Ḥamdānī highlighted positive outcomes from ongoing visits to Turkey, including activation of the 2009 memorandum of understanding, granting Iraq a fair share of the rivers. This achievement, unprecedented in 40 years, secured Turkish parliamentary and presidential approval. Plans include establishing a joint research center in Baghdād and a protocol for equitable water releases in the Tigris River (Shafaq News, 2021, November 29).

Despite progress with Ankara, Iraq faces challenges in negotiations with Tehran. al-Ḥamdānī indicated that Iraq "is cooperating significantly" with Turkey on the water file, unlike Iran, which is taking "unilateral measures" in this field. He stated that his ministry has exhausted all its political and diplomatic options with the Iranian side to end the crisis of cutting off water from 42 rivers, accusing it of violating international covenants by diverting river courses into Iran and cutting them off from Iraq. Diyālā Governorate has been most affected by this, as all its tributaries come from Iran. Furthermore, Iran has changed the courses of the al-Zāb al-Asfal, Sīrwān, Kārūn, and Karkhah rivers into Iran, thereby violating all international covenants. These actions result in both water scarcity and flooding, as most water is diverted to Iranian territory. Minister of Agriculture Muḥammad Karīm al-Khafājī warned that water scarcity threatens national food

security, with 90% of water inflows sourced from Turkey and 10% from Iran (B. al-Shammarī, 2021).

Consequently, the Ministry of Water Resources has urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to internationalize the water crisis with Iran, pursuing legal action at the International Court of Justice and human rights organizations. This follows Iran's rejection of Iraqi dialogue invitations unless Baghdad recognizes the Algiers Agreement, signed on March 6, 1975, which includes provisions for sharing Shatt' al-'Arab waters and regulating water distribution from Iranian territory (M. al-Shammarī, 2021).

Beyond water rights, Iraq possesses economic leverage through its role as a significant market for Turkish and Iranian exports, primarily consumer goods such as food and clothing (al-Ansari et al., 2017, pp. 14-22). Approximately 5.4% of Turkey's imports originate from Iraq, with 4% of its exports directed to the Iraqi market, one of the largest in the Arab world. For Iran, Iraq has served as a crucial economic outlet amid Western sanctions (DW, 2021, December 7). Iraq could potentially utilize this economic relationship to influence Turkish and Iranian recognition of its historical water rights and interests.

VII. The Iraqi Rapprochement with Egypt and Jordan

Following the conflict with the Islamic State organization (ISIS), Iraq has sought to diversify its diplomatic relations within the Arab and regional context, emphasizing economic collaboration, reconstruction, infrastructure rehabilitation, and the attraction of foreign investments in the energy sector (For more details, see al-'Alī & al-Shujayrī, 2021). The administration of Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī aims to transcend the policy of regional alignments amid prevailing international and regional polarizations in the Middle East. This strategy is intended to serve the interests of the Iraqi populace and to restore state sovereignty over security, political, and economic decisions (al-Ḥāmid, 2020).

In pursuit of mutual understandings among Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan, which could culminate in a new alliance, a tripartite Arab summit convened in Baghdad on Sunday, June 27, 2021. This historic meeting included Egyptian President 'Abd-al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī, Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī, and Jordanian King 'Abdullāh II, occurring at a critical juncture for the Arab region with discussions centered on an economic alliance. Notably, this summit marked the first visit by an Egyptian president to Iraq in 31 years, and the purpose of the visit was to explore opportunities for cooperation, coordination, and strategic integration among the three nations.

In his address, the Egyptian President expressed anticipation for inaugurating a new phase of constructive cooperation, both bilaterally and tripartitely, advancing towards broader strategic partnerships. He emphasized that the primary objective is to reinforce joint Arab action within a sustainable framework of economic integration and strategic cooperation, particularly in light of shared challenges confronting the three countries (a-Arabiya Net, 2021, June 27). An official statement from the Egyptian presidency indicated that the leaders discussed regional

issues of mutual concern, including developments in the Palestinian cause, counterterrorism efforts, and economic cooperation. The statement affirmed that the three leaders agreed on the importance of intensive work to reach a comprehensive political settlement within the framework of preserving the unity, independence, and territorial integrity of the region's states. Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzimī characterized the summit as a historic and significant turning point amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic difficulties, and the ongoing fight against terrorism (DW, 2021, June 27).

The rapprochement initiative among the three countries dates back to March 2019, when the initial meeting of their leaders occurred in Cairo, attended by King 'Abdullāh II, President al-Sīsī, and then-Prime Minister 'Ādil 'Abd-al-Mahdī. This was followed by a summit in New York in September of the same year during the United Nations General Assembly meetings. Subsequently, on August 25, the Jordanian capital, 'Ammān, hosted the third tripartite summit (Zaydān, 2020).

The rationale behind convening a fourth summit among these Arab nations at this particular time raises questions regarding the prospects for achieving the desired economic integration or establishing a new pivotal Arab bloc.

It is evident that multifaceted crises—both economic and political—unite the three countries. Nevertheless, these crises have not culminated in paralysis or collapse. Despite their challenges, the three nations maintain coherence and the capacity for initiative, which has fostered a will to act and pursue enhanced cooperation and rapprochement (al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2021).

The Egyptian-Iraqi-Jordanian rapprochement represents a serious endeavor to identify common ground among countries with shared interests and compatible visions. Success in this endeavor would constitute a significant achievement; however, it should be noted that this tripartite rapprochement does not equate to an alliance (Mus'ad, 2020).

Economic concerns dominated the summit's discussions, reflecting the accumulated economic crises afflicting these countries. Egyptian writer and political analyst Aḥmad Ḥasan described the Baghdād summit as one of "beleaguered countries seeking solutions to internal and external crises—economic, political, and social—through summits and agreements that offer their populations a semblance of hope." He elaborated that Egypt faces popular discontent alongside challenges such as the Renaissance Dam dispute, rising unemployment, and high living costs. Egypt experiences a crude oil deficit of approximately 136,000 barrels per day and seeks suppliers willing to offer deferred preferential pricing after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates withdrew support. Egypt also aspires to access the Iraqi market to absorb Egyptian products. Iraq confronts a substantial electricity deficit of approximately 26,500 megawatts and aims to import surplus Egyptian electricity to mitigate power shortages in its cities caused by deteriorating power generation infrastructure. Additionally, Iraq grapples with the increasing influence of armed factions challenging the authority of the prime minister and military, widespread corruption, poor living conditions, and tensions

with Turkey. Regarding Jordan, Ḥasan noted intensified economic crises following the withdrawal of Saudi and Emirati aid after Jordan's rejection of the "Deal of the Century" announced by former U.S. President Donald Trump. Jordan also experiences internal disputes within its ruling family.

Consequently, the economic dimension of the tripartite summit sought to establish mechanisms for integrating electricity grids, extending an oil pipeline from Iraq through Jordan to Egypt, and developing a parallel land route for transporting goods among the three countries. In exchange, Iraq and Jordan would receive electricity and Egyptian gas (Maghāwir, 2021). Each country thus economically depends on the others, alongside seeking support from the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Should this tripartite summit succeed and endure, it may yield balanced agreements, including Egypt exporting surplus electricity via a linkage line connecting to Jordan and Syria, while importing crude oil from Baghdād at preferential prices. Egypt also anticipates its companies securing roles in Iraq's reconstruction. Jordan aspires to increase access to Egyptian gas and electricity and Iraqi crude oil to achieve self-sufficiency in petroleum products, compensating for previous supplies from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Politically, which might reflect shared positions on regional issues such as Iranian interventions in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, the summit's joint statements were notably circumspect and general. The Egyptian regime may desire a joint Iraqi-Jordanian stance opposing Turkey's role in the Libyan civil war; however, Iraq cannot adopt a hostile position toward Turkey, which cooperates with it in efforts to eliminate the Kurdistan Workers' Party's presence and influence. Iraq's stance on Turkey aligns with al-Kāzīmī's broader strategy to restore state authority over national territory, as the Kurdistan Workers' Party maintains influence in the Kurdistan Region governorates and Ninawá, including the Sinjār district, extending to the Qandīl Mountains in Erbil Governorate and parts of al-Ḥasakah Governorate in Syria. Geographically, Jordan serves as an essential land corridor connecting Iraq and Egypt (al-Ḥāmid, 2021).

Iraq continues to require external assistance for reconstruction, state authority consolidation, decision-making restoration, curbing external interventions, and disarming non-state actors. Egypt and Jordan, both facing economic constraints, may lack the capacity to fully assist Iraq's multifaceted crises but can offer political support, particularly through the League of Arab States, where Egypt wields significant influence aligned with its foreign policy objectives regarding Turkey and Iran (al-Ḥāmid, 2021). This tripartite rapprochement also facilitates Iraq's alignment with US allies in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt—and supports Syria's reintegration into the Arab League. Political analyst Iḥsān al-Shammarī conveyed to Agence France-Presse that Iraq seeks to stabilize its foreign policy within its Arab environment and counterbalance regional pressures. He further characterized the summit as a message to the United States that Iraq will not maintain a unilateral relationship with Iran at the expense of other countries (DW, 2021, June 27).

The final communiqué of the Baghdād summit affirmed the leaders' commitment to regional stability, principles of good neighborliness and non-interference, intelligence cooperation to combat terrorism, ongoing coordination on regional issues (BBC News Arabic, 2021, June 27) including Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Palestine, and the formulation of a joint vision to achieve comprehensive political settlements preserving the unity, independence, and territorial integrity of regional states and Arab water security (RT Arabic, 2021, June 27). The statement also announced the commencement of the Iraqi-Egyptian-Jordanian economic city project.

Despite these developments, it remains challenging to characterize the partnership as a significant geopolitical axis in the region. While Egypt has sought to expand its influence in Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these issues generally hold limited concern for Iraq and Jordan, except for the Palestinian matter. In the regional balance of power, active Arab regional roles are overshadowed by the influence of Israel, Iran, Turkey, and international actors such as the United States, Russia, and France. Consequently, the three countries appear to lack the capacity to form a robust and effective alliance or bloc.

The complexities surrounding the motives, objectives, and capabilities of the three countries regarding the alliance project culminated in a relatively weak joint statement from the Baghdād summit, which fell short of the expectations generated by preceding declarations. Beyond calls for Israel to pursue peace, support for Egypt's position on the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, and intentions to facilitate free movement of labor and tourism among the three countries, the primary tangible outcome was the agreement to interconnect their electricity grids. However, the completion of this linkage is projected to require at least three years, with future domestic and regional political dynamics remaining uncertain.

In summary, the tripartite political bloc is primarily grounded in economic cooperation, which takes precedence in coordination and joint discussions. Nonetheless, there exists a concerted effort to establish common positions on the broader geopolitical transformations and internal conflicts in the region, many of which have evolved into proxy wars influenced by external actors.

VIII. The Normalization Debate: The Erbil Conference and the Sale of the Region's Oil to Israel

The proceedings of the conference held on the evening of Friday, September 24, 2021, in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, entitled "Peace and Recovery," continue to elicit strong reactions within Iraq. At this conference, over 300 Iraqi participants, including tribal sheikhs from both Sunni and Shiite sects, advocated for the normalization of relations between Iraq and Israel (BBC News Arabic, 2021, September 27).

The conference was sponsored by the American organization "Center for Peace Communications," based in New York, United States, which aims to

promote dialogue between Arabs and Israelis and to protect activists supporting normalization with Israel. According to the center's website, its founder is Joseph Braude, an American expert of Iraqi Jewish descent, whose intellectual project, as described in his biography, focuses on countering anti-Israel rhetoric in media, religious, and educational discourses throughout the Middle East (Asharq News, 2021, September 26).

The Iraqi federal government promptly responded with a firm rejection. The government described the meetings as "illegal" and reaffirmed Iraq's "categorical" opposition to normalization. It emphasized Iraq's steadfast support for the Palestinian cause and the full realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The government characterized the conference as an attempt to destabilize the general situation and undermine civil peace. A statement from the Prime Minister's media office asserted that "the concept of normalization is constitutionally, legally, and politically rejected in the Iraqi state" (BBC News Arabic, 2021, September 27). Furthermore, the judiciary issued arrest warrants for three individuals: Wisām al-Ḥardān, head of the "Şahwat al-ʿIrāq" movement; former parliament member Mithāl al-Ālūsī; and Saḥar Karīm al-Ṭāṭ, Director of Research at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdād.

Several figures in the Kurdistan Region maintained ties with Israel for its support of Kurdish statehood, and although relations between Israel and Kurdish society have historically been more favorable than those with Arab societies, this conference marked the first occasion where approximately 300 guests from various Iraqi governorates convened.

Wisām al-Ḥardān, who delivered a speech at the conference, clarified that he did not advocate for normalization per se but rather questioned the possibility of the return of Iraqi Jews and the restoration of citizenship to all Iraqis of various religions, including Jews whose citizenship had been revoked. He expressed support for peace, security, and investment. Previously, al-Ḥardān authored an article in *The Wall Street Journal* titled "Iraq Must Join the Abraham Accords," in which he explicitly called for full normalization of relations with Israel and the adoption of a new policy aimed at development and prosperity. He indicated that the conference represented a first step, with subsequent direct talks with Israelis anticipated, asserting that no local or foreign entity would impede their progress (DW, 2021, September 28).

The conference's final communiqué, read by Saḥar al-Ṭāṭ, stated: "We demand to join the Abraham Accords. Just as the agreements stipulated the establishment of diplomatic relations between the signatory parties and the state of Israel, we also demand normal relations with Israel and a new policy based on civil relations with its people for the sake of development and prosperity." The Abraham Accords, signed under the auspices of Washington in September 2020, normalized relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, followed by Morocco and Sudan. Al-Ṭāṭ, a conference speaker, asserted that "no force, whether local or external, has the right to prevent us from launching such a call" (France 24, 2021, September 25).

According to Iraqi sources, the founding body of the “*Ṣaḥwat Abnā’ al-‘Irāq*” (Awakening of the Sons of Iraq) resolved to remove al-Ḥardān from his position. Concurrently, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities established an investigative committee to examine the involvement of Saḥar Karīm al-Ṭāṭī, an employee of the General Authority for Antiquities and Heritage. In her address, al-Ṭāṭī said: “We extend our hands in peace to all the countries of the world. Israel is a strong state and an inseparable part of the world and of the United Nations. Iraq will not ignore this reality, will not live in isolation from the world, and will not be subordinate to anyone.” Mithāl al-Ālūsī stated that he was not present at the conference due to medical treatment abroad but strongly criticized the arrest warrants issued by the Iraqi judiciary (RT Arabic, 2021, September 25).

The Kurdistan Regional Government sought to distance itself from the conference, issuing an official statement asserting that the meeting was organized without its knowledge or approval and did not represent its position. It emphasized that foreign policy matters fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government according to the constitution and affirmed the Kurdistan Region’s full commitment to this policy. The regional presidency called on all parties and political forces to “approach the issue calmly and await the results of the investigation conducted by the Ministry of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government” (Ṣāliḥ, 2021, September 25). Nevertheless, many commentators argue that the region’s stance toward Israel differs from that of the federal government, which rejects normalization. Over recent decades, numerous Kurdish leaders have visited Israel, and Kurdish politicians have openly advocated for normalization (BBC News Arabic, 2021, September 25).

The Erbil conference exposed considerable hope among Israelis regarding Iraq and forcing it to normalize relations. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted immediately after the conference, noting that hundreds of Iraqi public figures, both Sunnis and Shiites, convened to call for peace with Israel, characterizing it as a grassroots call rather than a government initiative. He highlighted the importance of recognizing the historical injustices inflicted upon the Jews of Iraq and extended Israel’s hand in peace. Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid also expressed optimism, stating that the event in Iraq was a source of hope and that Israel continually seeks to expand the circle of peace (Awf, 2021).

Despite these developments, the primary outcome of the Erbil conference was the widespread popular rejection of normalization. This rejection persists despite the considerable hardship and deteriorating living conditions faced by Iraqi citizens. Assertions that normalization with the occupying state might improve these conditions have not changed the rejection. The public outcry following the conference demonstrated that Iraq’s national principles remain firmly upheld by both Sunni and Shiite communities.

Conversely, the government faces accusations from political blocs and parties regarding its suspension of investigations into oil exports, specifically concerning Iraqi oil reaching Palestinian territories for the benefit of the Israeli occupation. These exports reportedly originate from the Kurdistan Region via Turkish

ports (Sālim, 2022). In a recent development, 'Adī 'Awwād, a member of parliament from al-Baṣrah Governorate, announced possession of official documents from the Ministry of Oil and the State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO) confirming the delivery of Iraqi oil to the Israeli occupation. He noted that the Kurdistan Region sells oil independently of SOMO and at prices below the global market rate. 'Awwād indicated he holds detailed records of tankers transporting Iraqi oil sold by the Kurdistan Regional Government to Israel over several years and intends to pursue legal action. Political factions have previously proposed legislation criminalizing all dealings with the occupying state, while officials in Erbil maintain that the regional government is unconcerned with the destination of oil once exported from ports outside Iraq (al-Sumaria TV, 2022, January 27).

Ultimately, normalization remains a politically and socially taboo subject in Iraq, notwithstanding limited support among segments of the post-2003 political system. It is widely recognized that redefining relations with major regional and international powers constitutes the genuine pathway for both Baghdād and Erbil to establish a stable and prosperous political and economic system, rather than courting Israel.

IX. Agenda for the New Year 2022

1. Challenges Anticipated in 2022

The year 2021 was characterized by significant social, political, and health-related tensions, marked by the ongoing pandemic and its variants, armed conflicts, displacement, and widespread poverty. Analysts predict that 2022 will witness intensified crises among established political factions, accompanied by increased political fragmentation as these groups vie for control over state mechanisms. Assertions regarding the demise of ISIS are considered misguided and politically naive in the context of Iraq's future trajectory. The year 2022 is expected to bring unforeseen developments, serving as a strategic period for all factions to exert influence over the political process through pressure and extortion (Ma'rūf, 2021). A critical question for 2022 concerns whether the Iraqi political structure, emerging from the early parliamentary elections, will be capable of reinforcing national sovereignty amid prevailing geopolitical rivalries (al-Dūshī, 2021).

Iraq aspires to surmount its crises and assume a more prominent regional role in 2022, contingent upon building on initiatives commenced in 2021. The realization of Baghdād's ambitions for the year remains uncertain.

Foremost among Iraq's challenges is the resurgence of the ISIS terrorist organization, particularly in the Diyālā and Kirkūk governorates, the Ḥimrīn mountains, the western al-Anbār region, and even areas south of Mosul. Concurrently, the nation is undergoing a significant transitional phase, awaiting the establishment of a national majority government aimed at fostering an independent and neutral Iraq, distanced from regional conflicts, wars, and sectarian divisions. Governmental authorities have demonstrably failed to address internal issues comprehensively, thereby imposing burdens on the populace. Iraq's capacity to

influence regional affairs is compromised, as it remains entangled in ongoing problems, including the “Kurdistan Workers’ Party” issue in the northern territories, the Jurf al-Şakhar situation, and the management of displaced persons’ camps. These challenges threaten progress on critical infrastructure projects such as the al-Fāw port, which holds potential for significant employment generation. However, Iran’s insistence on integrating a railway linkage risks undermining the project, marginalizing its operational scope, and isolating Iraq from its sole maritime outlet (Sputnik Arabic, 2021, December 29).

Strategic planning deficiencies represent a profound and persistent obstacle to Iraq’s emergence as a significant regional and international actor. This is evidenced by the government’s and Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ failure to achieve key national objectives, notably the restoration of Iraq’s standing in regional and global contexts (al-’Alī, 2020, p. 67). A principal factor contributing to the weakness of foreign policy is the absence of a coherent strategic philosophy and an agreed-upon plan among relevant institutions. Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates within a constrained framework, prioritizing immediate and short-term interests in managing Iraq’s external relations. Since 2003, foreign policy has been politicized, treated as a bargaining tool among political parties asserting entitlement to the ministry, resulting in appointments based on electoral quotas rather than professional qualifications. This politicization has hindered the development of political consensus necessary for coherent foreign policy formulation and the adoption of a unified vision addressing Iraq’s external challenges (al-Sa’īdī et al., 2018, p. 216). Further complicating matters, many strategic plans have been externally imposed, drafted by inadequately qualified individuals, and disconnected from Iraq’s realities. Consequently, numerous plans remain unimplemented due to unrealistic goals misaligned with available material and human resources (al-Faylālī, 2010, p. 23).

Moreover, the lack of internal political consensus continues to influence Iraq’s external posture on regional matters and their developments (Ḥusayn, 2018 p. 13-14). Persistent conflicts within and beyond Iraq’s borders have crystallized tensions, security disruptions, regional destabilization, and territorial expansion, fostering new roles and external interference in domestic affairs. A significant challenge for foreign policy planning lies in the internal environment’s political and institutional instability, which undermines the coherence and clarity of Iraq’s external discourse. This is compounded by external pressures and conflicting agendas, exacerbated by a fragile national economy and insufficient military capabilities to deter neighboring states (Bāqir, 2016, p. 110).

2. Tasks for the Coming Year 2022

Several experts argue that Iraq faces significant political and governmental tasks concerning decision-making processes and the management of state administrative responsibilities (al-Kātib, 2021, December 31).

By the end of 2021, the Iraqi population anticipate the eradication of terrorist enclaves within the country, particularly following the successes of security forces

against sleeper cells and targeted operations against individuals wanted by the judiciary. The Prime Minister previously asserted that 2022 would serve as a complementary year dedicated to eliminating all terrorist pockets nationwide. He also expressed hope that 2022 would be characterized by peace, with political disagreements and conflicts not impeding efforts to maintain security and stability (al-Ḥajjār, 2021, December 13).

In terms of foreign policy, Iraq currently occupies a pivotal role in the region. In December 2021, the Foreign Minister visited Tehran to discuss preparations for the US-Iranian dialogue, whether conducted in Baghdād or through diplomatic channels. Iraq also contributes to the normalization of Iranian-Saudi relations, supports Lebanon amid its ongoing challenges, and maintains strategic relations with Jordan and Egypt, alongside strategic and economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Additionally, relations with Turkey have gained importance. Collectively, these dynamics afford Iraq the opportunity to play a significant role in economic, political, and security cooperation, counterterrorism efforts, and the development of partnerships with the United States, the European Union, and other major industrial nations (Dhannūn, 2022).

Despite these developments, Iraq's geopolitical centrality necessitates that its strategic performance in 2022 prioritize the reconfiguration of regional relations, adopting conciliatory stances toward neighboring countries while addressing multiple challenges, foremost among them capability. Restoring Iraq's status and role requires the state to possess political, economic, and military capacities, followed by addressing the challenge of continuity. A third challenge arises from weak management capacity, the complexity and interconnectivity of problems, and the inability to maintain a balancing role. Addressing these challenges demands strength, determination, economic cohesion, and national confidence. The absence of these elements undermines Iraq's ability to safeguard its territory from external threats. Given Iraq's abundant resources, wealth, and geostrategic significance for international interests, it must pursue a policy of neutrality in its political and economic relations and cooperative ties with neighboring countries. Iraq has no interest in aligning with Iran against Turkey or vice versa, nor with Saudi Arabia against Iran. Iraq's capabilities can be leveraged through neutrality to promote peace, security, and coexistence among nations, principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter (al-'Alī, 2020).

Consequently, Iraqi security strategists should emphasize strengthening ties with Arab and regional partners in military, security, and intelligence cooperation by concluding joint security agreements that ensure stability for Iraq and its neighbors in combating terrorism (Group of Researchers, 2012). Iraq's geopolitical and security challenges preclude alignment with any side in existing or emerging competitive axes. Therefore, it is imperative to maintain elements of balance, sources of strength, and strategic flexibility vis-à-vis neighboring countries, while striving to resolve disputes and avoid conflicts. This approach requires foreign policymakers to engage with Iran on the basis of parity and mutual respect, avoiding transgressions by either party. For this to be realized, Iraq must

reclaim its rightful position within regional and international systems, driving Iran to acknowledge Iraq's strategic weight and significance. Iraq must refrain from becoming a party to, or battleground for, Iranian-Gulf-American conflicts, instead adopting positions aligned with its strategic interests. Relations with Turkey should be managed to safeguard national interests, particularly concerning Iraq's share of the Tigris and Euphrates waters and curtailing Turkish ambitions within Iraqi territory. Furthermore, Iraq should enhance its participation in international agreements and treaties related to human rights and democracy, while strengthening relations with influential global powers to support national reconstruction efforts (Bāqir, 2016, p. 107-108).

Economically, the Central Bank announced the closure of a significant financial burden on Iraq's economy following the full payment of United Nations-mandated compensation to Kuwait under Resolution 687 of 1991, related to the Second Gulf War, totaling \$52.4 billion. This development has been met with optimism regarding economic recovery and openness to global investment (al-Kātib, 2021, December 9). The conclusion of the compensation file is expected to prompt a UN Security Council resolution in early 2022 to lift Iraq from the constraints of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, resolve disputes through peaceful means under Chapter VI, and facilitate Iraq's reintegration into the international economic community (al-Ḥajjār, 2021, November 2). Economic expert Bāsim Anṭūn stated to the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that closing the Kuwait compensation file will restore confidence in Iraq and its investments, improve its image and reputation among various countries and companies to benefit the Iraqi people, and enhance foreign citizens' confidence in Iraq. Anṭūn said that the government's post-compensation strategy involves establishing a sovereign fund where the 3% of oil revenues previously allocated to Kuwait—sometimes amounting to one to two billion dollars annually—will be deposited for domestic and international investment, serving as a buffer against international crises affecting Iraq, given its rentier state nature (al-Karmalī, 2021). Consequently, this will facilitate the reintegration of Iraq's national banking system into the global financial system, enabling the protection of Iraqi funds held abroad. It is imperative for the government to petition the Security Council accordingly.

Militarily, a report by the American military affairs website "War on the Rocks," as published by Shafaq News, noted that NATO's suspension of its training and advisory mission in Iraq following the assassination of Iranian Quds Force commander General Qāsim Sulaymānī in January 2020 marked the first critical test for the alliance's new project in Iraq. NATO must determine whether to invest in establishing effective political influence in the Middle East or limit its mission to technical capacity-building. On February 18, 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced the approval by NATO defense ministers to expand the alliance's mission in Iraq. This expanded mission will involve cooperation with multiple ministries beyond the Ministry of Defense and is likely to operate outside Baghdad. At the Iraqi government's request, NATO countries will increase personnel from 500 to approximately 4,000 for training missions supporting

Iraqi forces in counterterrorism efforts, including deployments outside Baghdād, primarily to prevent the resurgence of ISIS (DW, 2021, February 18). The NATO mission is unprecedented in its strong civilian component, providing strategic-level advisory services primarily to the Ministry of Defense. The expanded mission will increase these civilian elements. Success depends on NATO allies providing high-level civilian personnel capable of navigating the complex bureaucracy of the Ministries of Defense and Interior. The report suggested that Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī's openness to an expanded NATO mission with a greater European presence than American aimed to affirm Iraq's sovereignty while reducing US influence. He has also sought engagement with neighboring countries, including Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, to secure political and economic support and manage regional risks and competition. NATO can offer technical capacity-building through training and advisory activities; however, these efforts require integration within a coherent strategy developed by the Iraqi government and supported by NATO—a process fraught with sensitivity. Iraq remains a nexus for regional and international issues, including US-Iran relations, Iran-Gulf monarchies dynamics, and Turkey's regional ambitions. In this context, the NATO mission will contribute to security sector reforms, a critical yet polarizing and complex endeavor in Iraq, with no decisive solutions to structural challenges, which are more serious (Shafaq News, 2021, April 1; Blackwell, 2020).

As the International Coalition reduces its presence and activities, the updated NATO mission will initially broaden its scope within the Ministry of Defense to include advisory roles in policy development, planning, command, and governance. Future expansions may include advisory missions for the Federal Police under the Ministry of Interior, previously trained by Italian police. Leadership of the NATO mission in Iraq will transfer from Denmark to Italy in 2022, reflecting European countries' readiness to share alliance responsibilities. Spain, a major contributor to the anti-ISIS coalition and NATO training missions, is well-positioned to assume future command roles. The Biden administration has emphasized the importance of NATO allies and multilateral frameworks, including in Iraq, contrasting with the previous Trump administration. With the US presence declining, European countries' willingness to fill operational gaps will be crucial (Shafaq News, 2021, April 1; Baghdād Today, 2021, July 29).

3. Ways to Approach Challenges and Tasks

Prime Minister Muṣṭafá al-Kāzīmī characterized the year 2022 as a complementary year aimed at eradicating all pockets of terrorism throughout Iraq, suggesting it could mark a positive beginning for the country's stability and progress. During the annual operations conference for the Joint Operations Command on December 27, 2021, al-Kāzīmī expressed hope that 2022 would be a year of peace, emphasizing that political disputes and challenges should not impede their responsibilities in maintaining security and stability. He further highlighted the importance of focusing on the security of their sectors and affirmed collective support for these efforts (Shafaq News, 2021, April 1).

From the inception of his government, al-Kāzīmī articulated the principles guiding Iraqi foreign policy, grounded in the constitution. These principles include mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, rejection of policies based on axes, blocs, and polarizations, and the prevention of Iraq serving as a launching pad for threats against neighboring countries or as a battleground for regional and international adversaries. These principles underscore the significance of Iraq's geostrategic location as the foundational element of its foreign policy (Maḥmūd, 2020). Leveraging this geographical specificity in alignment with national interests and shared regional and international concerns facilitates the essential principle of maintaining balance in relations with various countries worldwide. Consequently, Iraq would be positioned as a convergence point for neighboring countries and, through them, the broader international community, rather than as a locus of conflicting interests or international disputes (Bāqir, 2016).

President Barham Ṣāliḥ advocated for the establishment of a new government capable of addressing prevailing challenges and for the creation of a competent, respected state with full sovereignty that effectively utilizes national resources to benefit the populace. He also emphasized the urgent necessity of resolving entrenched regional crises, highlighting this as a shared interest for all parties involved (al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ, 2022, January 6).

Despite Iraq's current political and economic challenges, three focal areas have been identified to promote economic diversification, growth, and stability (al-'Alī et al., 2022). First, the maintenance of peace itself serves as a potent catalyst for growth. In the short term, Iraq must prioritize the implementation of good governance standards (World Bank, 2020). Second, the country should capitalize on its export potential to diversify economic activities beyond oil production, advancing trade and regional integration. Although Iraq's geographical position qualifies it to serve as a regional logistics hub, its logistical performance currently lags behind peer nations, creating a regional bottleneck. Third, the advancement of the agricultural sector is essential to establishing a diversified, private-sector-led economy. The agricultural production sectors, food industries, and associated services—including logistics, finance, processing industries, and technology—possess significant potential for expansion and job creation.

Furthermore, weak strategic planning has manifested as a significant and ongoing impediment to Iraq's national security and emergence as an influential and effective regional and international actor. Addressing this requires (al-'Alī & al-Shujayrī, 2021):

- The development of strategic planning capabilities characterized by foresight and future-oriented thinking (al-'Azzāwī, 2009), particularly as Iraq confronts security and economic challenges that strain its institutional framework. This entails formulating a government program with defined pillars and planning mechanisms to address forthcoming challenges. Effective strategic thinking and planning must precede solution implementation to enhance the performance of the comprehensive strategic

system within existing capacities. Given the prevalence of crises within the internal strategic environment, planning becomes a vital tool for survival and adaptation to rapid, successive, and often unexpected regional and international developments. Consequently, mitigating risks is imperative to achieving relative stability across all security fronts (Fathī, 2022).

- In order to make the required changes to draw up a rational and serious foreign policy that rises to the level of existing challenges, the next government should establish a specialized unit within the Prime Minister's advisory office to assist in formulating, monitoring, and evaluating foreign policy in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the legislative authority. Additionally, it should prioritize appointing distinguished and competent ambassadors to maintain a stable presence at the Ministry's headquarters, thereby rectifying the disorder that has characterized the Ministry's operations in recent years. Attention must also be given to the Foreign Service Institute by selecting qualified teaching staff to enhance the education and training of the diplomatic corps. Efforts should be made to advance scientific research in strategic, geopolitical, and economic domains, emulating practices in neighboring countries. Furthermore, resources and personnel should be allocated to modernize the Ministry's outdated library, transforming it into a sophisticated research and information center.
- Iraqi diplomacy must be restructured and developed based on professional principles and a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing Iraq, including terrorism, counterterrorism efforts, globalization, and others. This restructuring aims to empower the Iraqi people to rebuild their country through effective diplomacy that is cognizant of its realities and environment (al-Jumaylī, 2013, p. 13).
- Iraq should formulate and activate an effective and influential role in international conferences and forums.
- There is an urgent need to revitalize the economic dimension of foreign policy, specifically economic diplomacy, due to several factors. First, globalization over the past two decades has significantly transformed international economic relations and diplomatic activities, including global trade, capital flows, and the proliferation of information technology. Consequently, foreign policy must adapt to these developments to overcome Iraq's isolation and facilitate its strategic integration into the rapidly evolving global economy. Second, although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has articulated a strategy emphasizing support for reconstruction and economic development, it has not demonstrated significant efforts in this domain in recent years. The Ministry has played a negligible role in addressing Iraq's financial obligations related to debts and compensations, attracting foreign capital and technology for reconstruction, or promoting trade and economic relations with neighboring countries and the broader international community. This situation is unsurprising given

the absence of an economic department within the Ministry tasked with these critical functions and the limited expertise among its personnel in this area. Moreover, the Ministry's weak relationships with other ministries, state institutions, private sector entities, and civil society organizations hinder effective economic diplomacy. Addressing this imbalance necessitates establishing a dedicated economic department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, equipped with the necessary resources to perform its functions effectively (Hasan, 2010). Iraq should build its economy on a knowledge and technology foundation by integrating into the global economic system and attracting investment from major industrial nations. Linking these nations' interests to Iraq's economy can facilitate the country's return to its deserved international status.

- Iraq must reclaim its lost sovereignty and political decision-making independence, establish internal stability, and adopt a clear approach in dealings with international actors. Foreign policy planners must engage deeply in international relations and maintain a diplomatic presence in global forums to foster mutual trust (Hamid, 2022).

In conclusion, structural reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and substantive changes in foreign policy formulation and implementation must be prioritized by the next government. The success of foreign policy is closely linked to the coherence, integration, clarity, and decisiveness of the government's overall public policies, which enhance the prospects for effective foreign policy outcomes.

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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 Khālid 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
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. Ṣayhūd	2021

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
11	The Social Contract According to Shaykh al-Nā'inī 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
26	Iraq 2022: 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.) Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.)	2024
27	Iraqi Military Establishment 2003-2020	Dr. 'Imād H. al-Rubayrī	2024

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
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
31	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

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
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

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
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	Gülstan 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
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

No.	Book Title	Author	Year of Publication
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
7	International Investment Based on the ICAPM Model and Investments of International Companies	Dr. 'Alī 'A. Fulayfil Prof. Dr. Ḥākīm M. al-Rubayṯ	2022
8	Financing Economic Development in Developing Countries: Iraq as a Model	Asst. Prof. Dr. Ibrāhīm J. al-Yāsirī	2022

No.	Title	Researcher	Year of Publication
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. Bāsim 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	'Abd-'Alī Ḥ. al-Khaffāf Ḥusayn 'A. al-Zayyādī Khālid 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. Aḥmad S. al-Ma'mūrī (ed.) Prof. Dr. Miqdām 'A. al-Fayyāḍ (ed.) Prof. Dr. As'ad K. Shabīb (ed.)	Forthcoming
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 2021: RCD's Strategic Report examines significant transformations experienced by Iraq during a tumultuous year marked by political, health, economic, security, and social challenges. The year 2021 stands as one of the most consequential periods in the trajectory of the Iraqi state since 2003, owing to pivotal events that reshaped the national landscape and necessitated a comprehensive reassessment of future policies and strategic directions by policymakers and society at large .

RCD prioritized the preparation of this report as a rigorous analytical document that systematically monitors national developments within their political, economic, social, and security contexts. This approach facilitates researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders in obtaining a clear and integrated understanding of the events of 2021 and the anticipated developments in subsequent years.

Through this report, RCD aims to provide an objective and comprehensive analysis of the events of 2021, free from political bias or narrow interpretations, thereby fostering a realistic understanding of Iraq's challenges and opportunities.

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📍 Iraq, Baghdad, al-Jadiriya Neighborhood



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