



Interactive Seminar "Iraq and Iran: The course of relations under regional axes"

al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD organized a seminar entitled "Iraq and Iran: The course of relations under regional axes", on RCD's Sérgio Vieira de Mello Hall in Najaf, hosting His Excellency the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Mr. Iraj Masjedi. In his speech, Ambassador Masjedi focused on the strength of Iraqi-Iranian relations at the current stage. He divided those relations into four axes: a socio-political axis resulting from the historical relations linking the Islamic Republic with the former Iraqi opponents during the rule of the former regime, especially from the Shiite and Kurdish forces. They are strengthened by the historical social relations between the two peoples as a result of the presence of Shiite shrines in both countries, which both peoples have visited since ancient times. In addition, defensive relations were strengthened, especially after the war against ISIS, in which the Islamic Republic provided various types of military assistance. Ambassador Masjedi also touched on the economic relations drawn by the exchange of millions of tourists between the two countries. Finally, the ambassador referred to the cultural relations represented by the exchange of students, whether estates or university students. The ambassador's speech was not without touching on regional politics in the Middle East, and in that context he stressed the need for mutual respect for the interests of neighboring countries. The seminar was attended by a group of religious, political, academic and intellectual elites in Najaf.

Below are the main conclusions of the seminar:





1. The length of the natural borders of about 1,400 km, in addition to the historical ties that exist between the Iraqi and Iranian peoples as a result of the presence of the holy shrines in Iraq, which are visited by millions of Iranians, are among the most important factors in the strength of the relationship between Iraq and the Islamic Republic.
2. The Islamic Republic has good political relations with all Iraqi sects. Such distinguished relations with some sects are due to the historical relations it has with them, such as the relationship with Shiite opponents and Kurds during Saddam Hussein's regime. The strength of that relationship is not due to the sectarian dimension, since the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic is not sectarian or nationalistic.
3. The Islamic Republic's dissemination of its ideas and principles is a natural matter, given that the intellectual space is not governed by the political borders of states, but rather is a common space among all, and the issue of accepting the ideas presented remains related to the personal intellectual convictions of individuals, which cannot be imposed by force.
4. The Islamic Republic believes that international and regional relations are a sovereign affair exercised by governments according to their national interests. In this context, Iran does not see Iraq's establishment of good relations with Saudi Arabia or other countries as a problem or a threat directed against it. But at the same time the Islamic Republic believes in the necessity of the two parties' commitment not to enter any of them into a regional axis hostile to the other, with the clear desire of the Islamic Republic for the





- countries of the region to stand with it in its confrontation with the United States.
5. The Islamic Republic deals with the results produced by the polls in a realistic manner based on understanding the will of the people and their right to choose their leaders. The presence of Iranian tendencies towards some candidates or some political figures does not mean not dealing with those whom the Iraqi people prefer to assume positions of responsibility.
 6. The Islamic Republic is keen on the unity and integrity of the Iraqi territories. From this standpoint came the position rejecting the independence referendum held by the Kurdistan Region, despite the strong relations that the Islamic Republic has with the Kurdish leaders.
 7. The war that Iraq fought to liberate from ISIS control over some Iraqi cities led to the strengthening of defensive relations with the Islamic Republic, as military agreements were concluded that facilitated the arming of the Iraqi army and the Popular Mobilization. In addition, the Islamic Republic sent senior military advisors to assist the Iraqi forces, among them Hajj Qassem Soleimani and the martyr Taqwa.
 8. The economic relations between Iran and Iraq are very strong, including the exchange of millions of visitors, in addition to Iraq benefiting from Iranian gas supplies to operate some electrical stations, as well as the presence of a free trade zone in the Iranian city of Khorramshahr, which five thousand Iraqis enter daily.





9. Developing economic relations between the two countries requires some legal reforms in both countries, as well as solving some problems related to international accreditation and insurance certificates.
10. Cultural relations constitute another dimension of the Iraqi-Iranian relations. The cultural relations are represented by the presence of thousands of Iraqi students in Iranian universities, as well as those relations represented by the orientation of many Iranian students to study in the holy shrine of Najaf and the presence of Iraqi students in the estate of the city of Qom.
11. The drought problem that the region suffers from was a reason for cutting off some of the common rivers coming from Iran to Iraq, which constitute 8% of the Iraqi water resources. There are efforts by both parties to solve this problem by holding a meeting of the water resources ministers in the two countries.
12. One of the development projects planned between the two countries is the railway linking project, which was completed by the Iranian side and the Iraqi side delayed its completion due to the conditions of the war with ISIS and the financial hardship as a result of the drop in oil prices.

