

VISIONS

RUAA Foundation for Documentation and Strategic and Future Studies

FUTURE

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SUDANI OR MALIKI ?

WHO WILL BE IRAQ'S
NEXT PRIME MINISTER?

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RuAA Foundation for Documentation and Strategic & Future Studies

A research and think-tank institution that works to keep pace with ambitious development visions in Iraq and the Middle East, supports public policy-making, and anticipates future trends amid rapid transformations. It conducts specialized political, military, economic, and social studies, carries out opinion polls, and organizes events such as seminars and conferences, with the aim of providing decision-makers and researchers with accurate data and insights to help build a better future.

CONTENTS



28 Population Census Rekindles a Crisis of Trust Between Erbil and Baghdad

64 Desertification Threatens 96 Million Dunams of Agricultural Land in Iraq

68 Lebanon and Israel's Negotiations Within the Framework of The 'Mechanism'... What Does It Mean ?

72 Winter storms worsen Gaza humanitarian crisis as UN says aid still blocked

74 Erbil Citadel a Symbol of International Tourism in the Future

78 Kurdistan The Emerging Green Beacon of the Middle East

82 Iraq at a Pivotal Moment to Reform Its Economy and Revive the Private Sector



08 Masrour Barzani's Visit to Cairo Engineering a Regional Balance

12 Why Has Iran Erupted Again?

18 Youth and the Challenges of the Artificial Intelligence Future



32 Sudani or Maliki ? Who Will Be Iraq's Next Prime Minister?

38 A Waste Crisis Suffocating Neighborhoods and Escalating Health Risks

52

Iraq and the Gulf Move Closer to Power Grid Interconnection



44 What Does Lebanon Gain from the Lifting of the "Caesar Act" on Syria?

56 Activities That Overlook Students' Health

60 23,000 Unemployed Dentists in Iraq



EDITOR IN CHIEF'S FOREWORD



Dr. Saad Al-Hamondi

With great pride and a deep sense of responsibility, we present to our readers the first issue of Vision Future, an English-language magazine launched by Ru'a

Foundation at a pivotal moment in Iraq's modern history. This publication is not merely a new media platform; it is a statement of intent, a cultural bridge, and an invitation to see Iraq through a wider, more thoughtful lens.

Iraq has long been narrated to the world through the narrow frames of conflict, crisis, and headlines that reduce a complex nation to a single story. While challenges are real and cannot be denied, they do not define the totality of who we are. Iraq is the land of civilizations, ideas, rivers, poets, scientists, merchants, and resilient communities that have endured, adapted, and continued to contribute to human history for thousands of years. Vision Future is born from the belief that it is time to reclaim narrative balance—to tell Iraq's story in its full depth, with honesty, dignity, and perspective. Our decision to publish in English is both strategic and symbolic. Strategically, it allows Iraqi voices to engage directly with the international community, policymakers, researchers, investors, academics, and global readers without intermediaries.

Symbolically, it reflects our confidence that Iraq's stories deserve to be heard on the world stage in a language that reaches beyond borders, while remaining rooted in local authenticity.

Vision Future aims to spotlight Iraqi affairs, not as isolated events, but as interconnected social, political, economic, and cultural phenomena. We will cover current events with rigor, analyze policies with critical insight, and explore long-form features that unpack the underlying dynamics shaping Iraqi society today. At the same time, we are committed to highlighting success stories, cultural heritage, innovation, youth initiatives, women's leadership, environmental challenges, and the quiet transformations that rarely make headlines but steadily shape the future.

At Ru'a Foundation, we believe that media has a responsibility beyond reporting facts. It must contextualize, question, explain, and sometimes challenge prevailing assumptions. Our editorial

approach is grounded in professionalism, independence, and respect for diversity of opinion. Vision Future does not seek to promote a single viewpoint, but to provide a platform where informed dialogue can thrive—where Iraqi realities are presented with nuance rather than simplification.

We are equally aware that the future of Iraq will not be shaped by nostalgia alone, nor by denial of present difficulties. It will be shaped by knowledge, planning, accountability, and inclusive thinking. This is why our magazine will pay close attention to issues of governance, education, healthcare, climate change, economic reform, and human development—topics that determine not only today's conditions, but tomorrow's possibilities. Importantly, Vision Future is also about people. Behind every statistic is a human story; behind every policy decision are lives affected. Our pages will reflect the voices of Iraqis from different regions, professions, and generations—researchers, farmers, doctors, artists, entrepreneurs, students, and decision-makers—each contributing a piece to the larger mosaic of the nation.

Launching this magazine is an ambitious undertaking, and we do not claim perfection. We see Vision Future as a growing project, one that will evolve through engagement with its readers, contributors, and critics alike. Constructive feedback, thoughtful disagreement, and open discussion are not only welcome—they are essential to our mission.

As Editor-in-Chief, I extend my gratitude to the dedicated team behind this launch, to our writers and researchers who believe in the power of responsible journalism, and to our readers who choose to look beyond the surface. We invite you to read, reflect, and participate in this journey.

Vision Future is, at its core, an act of confidence: confidence in Iraq's ability to speak for itself, confidence in dialogue over noise, and confidence that a clearer vision of the future begins with telling our stories—fully, fairly, and thoughtfully.

Dr. Saad Al-Hamondi
Owner

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE



In a world marked by rapid transformation and accelerating change, the future is no longer a distant concept it is being shaped in real time by the ideas we generate, the decisions we make, and the visions we choose to pursue today. Amid this shifting global landscape, the need for thoughtful reflection and informed dialogue has never been more essential.

Vision - Future, issued by Roaa Foundation, is founded on the belief that meaningful progress begins with awareness, critical thinking, and a clear sense of direction. This magazine is not merely a publication, but a space for inquiry and exploration where questions are as important as answers, and where ideas are examined with depth, responsibility, and purpose. Through in-depth reports, analytical articles, cultural insights, and perspectives rooted in both heritage and innovation, Vision Future seeks to bridge

intellect with impact, and imagination with accountability. We aim to create a platform that brings together diverse voices thinkers, researchers, creators, and change-makers whose contributions help illuminate the challenges of our time and the opportunities that lie ahead. We believe that the future is shaped not only by technology and progress, but also by values, culture, and collective wisdom. By engaging with the present through knowledge and foresight, we can better understand how to navigate what comes next. As you turn these pages, we invite you to read with curiosity, reflect with openness, and participate in an ongoing conversation about the world we are building together. The future is not written in advance; it is authored by those who have the courage to imagine it differently and the responsibility to shape it wisely.

The Editorial Team
Vision - Future Magazine
Issued by Ruaa Foundation





Dr. Govand Sherwani

IRAQI OIL

AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Oil flew for the first time from Kirkuk giant oil field in October 1927. This date is considered a milestone in oil industry in Iraq and Middle East. During the early post discovery years, the Iraqi oil sector was run by a consortium of European and American oil companies (IOCs). By the early 1970s, Iraqi government claimed for higher share from oil revenue, but after exhausting negotiation between the government and the foreign oil companies, the government had decided to nationalize the oil sector in June 1972. Further oil discoveries followed in 1980s raising the oil reserves over 100 billion barrel with production hit 3.5 million barrel per day.

Current Status of Oil and Gas in Iraq

Oil is still the main source of energy over the world and the raw material of thousands of industries and the backbone of economy in many countries. In Iraq, the rentier economy of the country relies on over 90% of oil revenue.

The proven reserve of Iraqi oil is about 145 billion barrel, ranking Iraq as the fifth largest reserve in the world. Considering the average daily production of 4.2 Mbl/d barrels, the production age of Iraqi oil would approach 100 years which is one of the longest age among the oil exporting countries (OPEC). Iraq is also rich in natural gas

(NG) with reserve exceeding 127 Trillion cubic feet, reserving the rank 11 over the world.

The current export of Iraqi oil is around 3.5 million barrels a day with potential extra production of 1-2 million barrels.

By the beginning of the year 2024, the OPEC+ alliance has decided a voluntary production cut of 2.2 million barrel a day. Accordingly, the share of Iraqi oil export was reduced from 3.5 to 3.3 million barrel/day.

This resolution was intended to secure the stability of energy markets and to support fair prices for producers that avoid the collapse of prices.

Economic Challenge

Oil sector in Iraq faces several challenges and complications in administration which is represented by weak managerial system, deficit in technical expertise, lack of intelligent engineering expertise in many sectors in the oil industry. Additionally, there is a legal vacuum caused by the absence of active law of oil and gas in the Iraq, despite having an approved constitution since 2005. This legal vacuum in the oil sector has resulted in many constitutional and legal disputes, particularly those between the Iraqi Federal Government (IFG) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The shortage in oil derivatives (oil products) such as gasoil, gasoline. Upon the increase in the production of several

local oil refineries, the need for importing oil products, particularly gasoline and gasoil is clearly minimized.

Investment in Natural Gas

Iraq has rich accumulation of natural gas, including its two types, free gas and gas associated with oil. The proven reserve of natural gas is 127 trillion cubic feet. Due to shortage in gas production, Iraq imports, according a contract with the Iran, 50 million cubic meter daily.

The new natural gas investment licenses are expected to increase production by 800 million standard cubic feet (mscf). The Iraqi Government stated that efforts are spent to get at self-sufficiency in natural gas within five years.

In Kurdistan Region, successful investment in natural gas started more than 10 years ago in two gas fields (Chamchamal and Kormor) with current production over 500 mscf daily. Most of this production is directed to main power stations. Currently, 80% of supplied electric power in the region is produced by natural gas-operated power stations.

Environment Restrictions

The emission of carbon gases from burning of fossil fuel (oil, natural gas, coal) is always a matter of high concern. The increase of these gases has caused the so-called Global Warming which stands as a

global environmental crisis that negatively influenced climate, human living, and food resources.

Many international summits and conferences were organized by the UN. The outstanding conference was the COP28 that was held in Dubai, UAE in 2023. Important recommendations released from that summit included imposing a gradual transfer from the fossil fuel energy to clean energy. The energy transfer plans should be set over a time span until we get at the zero carbon emission by the year 2050.

The outstanding kind of clean energy is the solar to be an alternative for the traditional hydrocarbon energy. This solar energy project can be easily funded from the revenue of oil in producing countries such as Iraq.

Tasks awaiting oil authorities in Iraq

The main challenge facing Iraqi cabinets since 2003, was to outline a future vision for oil industry within a clear reform plans, these plans should be formulated within broader strategies of economic reform.

1- Economic Reform Plans

The government has announced its program for economic and financial reform that deal with the with the defect in the skeleton of Iraqi economy which is a rentier (not a producing) economy with 90% relying on oil revenue. Such kind of economy would be very vulnerable with energy markets fluctuations and other geopolitical factors. Strategic plans should support other economy bases, such as agriculture, industry, tourism and else, aiming to boost non-oil revenue.

2- Oil and Gas Law

The other mission, for both the Iraqi Government and Parliament

is the urgent legislation of oil and gas law that conforms with the related articles of the constitution, and considers the political agenda of the current Iraqi cabinet.

The new law is believed to secure better management of the oil sector and actual participation between the federal government and regions and governorates and fair distribution of revenues. The same law would occupy the pending issues between the Iraqi Federal Government and KRG.

3- Production Plans

Iraqi Ministry of Oil referred to plans to raise oil production from 4 to 7 million barrel/day within the next three years. The presidency of Ministerial Council added that the government is planning to convert 40% of the of the crude oil into products that create more profits by the year 2030. This ambitious plan requires building new refineries with high capacity.

The re-export of oil through Turkish Cihan port would add 400,000 barrel a day. This pipeline is capable do to transport up to one million barrels a day. This addition conforms with the federal plans for increasing oil production.

4- Oil Refineries and Petrochemicals

Iraq requires between 700 to 800,000 barrel of oil to be refined for local consumption.

For the last two decades, only one refinery was built which is Kerbala Refinery with capacity of 140,000 barrel/day.

Once new refineries are built, Iraq could export derivatives (products) of oil refined from 1-2 million barrels, and can be sold at three times higher profits than those of crude, these products can be exported with no restrictions such as those imposed on the export of crude oil.

The Iraqi Ministries of Oil and Industry had tried to build a huge petrochemical project, named Al-Nibras Compound of Petrochemical Industries. But this project, planned since 2015, was not launched yet as the contracting company withdrew from the project in 2024. The government should now seek for another partner for this project which could produce, once completed, tens of petrochemical products.

Development of Oil Resources

Increasing federal oil revenue in Iraq does not necessarily means increase of rates of export of crude oil, these rates are restricted according to recommendations released by OPEC and OPEC+.

The development of oil resources can be reached through construction of new refineries and building petrochemical factories, both can create extra annual income, no less than \$10 billion. Petroleum (oil and gas) is the matter of global concern among the public and experts in economy, finance and politics. Competition over controlling petroleum resources, has caused and still conflicts locally and regionally.

We believe that these natural resources are generous gift from nature that should be wisely use for the welfare and prosperity of nations and bring peace over the world.



Dr.Govand Sherwani
Editor in Chief

MASROUR BARZANI'S VISIT TO CAIRO

ENGINEERING A REGIONAL BALANCE

In politics, an image is sometimes more than protocol—it is a message addressed to entire maps. The visit of Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani to Cairo in December 2025, and his meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, came precisely in this context: a deliberate recalibration of the Kurdistan Region's compass toward the Arab depth, through Egypt as a geopolitical center of gravity—not a courtesy visit, but a strategic repositioning of the Region within the broader balance architecture of the Middle East.



Barzani's arrival in Cairo on December 20, 2025, on an official visit that included talks with President El-Sisi and senior Egyptian officials on strengthening bilateral relations and discussing developments in Iraq and the wider region, reveals that the visit was not built around a passing occasion. Rather, it was driven by a shared political and economic need

to open stable channels of cooperation in an increasingly volatile regional environment.

Timing, in this case, is critical for two reasons.

From the Kurdistan Region's perspective, there is a clear need to expand partnership horizons beyond reliance on a single track or axis. Diversifying international relationships reduces the cost

of crises when one window closes and another opens. From Egypt's perspective, Cairo has historically favored building communication lines with influential actors within Arab and regional states—particularly those that possess internal stability and the capacity to manage complex political and security files.

This is not political



Egypt is not simply another Arab stop. It is a balance hub that adds geopolitical weight to the relationship. Cairo's extensive regional networks and institutional diplomatic influence turn partnership with Egypt into a value multiplier, not just a bilateral exchange.



First, expanding the circle of partners. Rather than betting on a single pathway, there is a conscious effort to multiply tracks-economic, commercial, investment-based, and regional coordination.



romanticism; it is balance engineering. What Did the Meeting Signal—and Why Does It Matter? The statement issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government following the December 21, 2025 meeting highlighted three explicit pillars: investment and trade as the primary channel for anchoring the relationship; security coordination and stability at the levels of the Region, Iraq, and the wider Middle East; and a clear Egyptian recognition of the importance of the visit and Cairo's readiness to deepen relations. Here lies a crucial point of interpretation. When a state of Egypt's weight places investment and trade at the forefront of its dialogue with a federal region, it is effectively saying: we view this region

as a viable economic partner, not a marginal file. When the Kurdistan Region, in turn, emphasizes Egypt's role in promoting regional stability, it situates the relationship within a broader regional security narrative, rather than short-term transactional interests. The Arab Depth as Policy, Not Slogan Talk of "Arab depth" is often exhausted in rhetoric. What this visit demonstrates, however, is a shift from slogan to method. Arab depth here is not merely a question of identity balance; it is a balance of interests—economy, trade, investment, and political-security coordination. Egypt is not simply another Arab stop. It is a balance hub that adds geopolitical weight to the relationship. Cairo's extensive regional networks and institutional diplomatic influence turn partnership with



Choosing Egypt—with its geopolitical weight—signals a reading of the regional map with a cool, strategic, and decidedly intelligent



Egypt into a value multiplier, not just a bilateral exchange. Put simply: when Erbil says “Cairo,” it does not mean Cairo alone—it means Cairo and its network.

Reading Masrour Barzani’s Vision: From Crisis Management to Option-Making

What stands out most in Masrour Barzani’s political trajectory, as reflected in this visit, is the attempt to move from crisis management to the active creation of options. Within the declared framework, the visit reflects three defining features of this vision.

First, expanding the circle of partners. Rather than betting on a single pathway, there is a conscious effort to multiply tracks-economic, commercial, investment-based, and regional coordination.

Second, consolidating the Kurdistan Region as a stable, investment-ready environment. Prioritizing investment and trade signals an intention to present the Region as a business platform rather than a conflict zone.

Third, linking political legitimacy to tangible public benefit. Any foreign policy that does not translate into economic opportunities and employment momentum risks becoming mere display. Embedding investment and trade at the core of diplomatic engagement gives foreign policy a concrete social



dimension, strengthening its internal credibility and sustainability.

Why Egypt, Specifically? The Geopolitical Answer

Egypt occupies three overlapping roles.

It is a pivotal Arab state capable of reinforcing the Arab legitimacy of any cooperative framework.

It acts as a balance guarantor, operating through a state-institutional logic that enhances continuity and reduces vulnerability to political fluctuations.

It is a major economic actor, with a vast market and companies experienced in infrastructure, services, and



It is a major economic actor, with a vast market and companies experienced in infrastructure, services, and reconstruction—natural areas of cooperation for any partnership grounded in investment and trade.



reconstruction—natural areas of cooperation for any partnership grounded in investment and trade.

From Vision to Execution

If the visit carried a strategic message, its real value lies in post-visit execution. With both sides emphasizing investment, trade, and coordination, several practical activation pathways emerge:

a permanent Erbil-Cairo business council or economic partnership platform, not ceremonial meetings; sector-specific investment packages—construction, housing, healthcare, education and training, medical tourism, agriculture



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sector-specific investment packages—construction, housing, healthcare, education and training, medical tourism, agriculture and food security—aligned with the Region's needs and Egypt's expertise;

and food security—aligned with the Region's needs and Egypt's expertise; clear trade and supply-chain linkages, because commerce grows through infrastructure, not intentions; and institutional and training cooperation in public administration, digital transformation, and governance—areas that strengthen state capacity rather than political noise. These are not technical footnotes; they are the mechanisms that convert symbolic diplomacy into measurable outcomes.

A Visit That Signals Strategic Repositioning

The meeting between Masrour Barzani and President El-Sisi, as officially framed, went beyond ceremonial exchanges and protocol imagery. It outlined actionable priorities: investment, trade, and coordination for regional stability.

From a positive analytical standpoint, the visit reflects a political vision that seeks to transform Arab depth into a lever of interests and stability, rather than an emotional slogan. Choosing Egypt—with its geopolitical weight—signals a reading of the regional map with a cool, strategic, and decidedly intelligent eye.

WHY HAS IRAN

ERUPTED

AGAIN?

CURRENCY COLLAPSE AND THE BIGGEST UNREST IN YEARS



In late December 2025, a sweeping wave of protests broke out across Iran, becoming the fastest-spreading and most violent unrest the country has seen in years—surpassing in intensity what Iranian streets witnessed in 2022. What began as economically driven demonstrations has increasingly touched deeper political and social structures, exposing a structural crisis more profound than in previous episodes.



Starting Point: Currency Collapse and a Deteriorating Cost of Living

The immediate trigger was a sharp plunge in the Iranian currency (the rial), pushing the unofficial market exchange rate to record levels around 1.45 million rials per U.S. dollar by the end of December 2025. This collapse is not merely an abstract economic figure; it translated directly into daily hardship. Prices of basic goods surged beyond what many households could afford, and large segments of the population found themselves unable to meet essential needs.

In Tehran, the Grand Bazaar became the first focal point. Merchants and shop owners

shut their businesses in protest against soaring prices that had outstripped families' ability to cover everyday expenses. The strike was not an isolated event; it served as the spark for a broader popular eruption.

Inflation Devours Incomes... and Anger Spreads

Currency depreciation was not the only driver. Inflation in late December was estimated at 42%–48% by various sources, meaning food and essential commodity prices had exceeded the purchasing power of a significant portion of Iranian households. This was not a minor uptick—over time, it compounded into a full-scale economic crisis.

As pressures mounted,

protests expanded beyond merchants to wider segments of society. Students, workers, and residents in cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, and others joined demonstrations, chanting against “high prices” and government economic policies. Soon, demands moved beyond livelihoods toward deeper political grievances.

From Economics to Politics: Demands That Challenge the System

What distinguishes this wave from earlier economically driven protests is the fusion of economic and political demands. In multiple cities, chants went beyond calls for improved living conditions



Authorities responded with a heavy security presence, using tear gas and other methods to disperse crowds, resulting in reported deaths, injuries, and arrests across several cities.



to express broader rejection of the political system or its policies including slogans targeting senior leadership and calls for political freedoms.

This expansion suggests that Iran’s economy is no longer viewed as a purely technical issue; it has become inseparable from the public’s relationship with the state one shaped by expectations of a dignified standard of living, transparent governance, and the ability to plan for the future.

Deeper Drivers: A Weakened Economy and Accumulated Social Pressures

These protests did not emerge in a vacuum. Over many years, Iran has faced mounting economic challenges, including: Intensifying inflation and rising living costs, Persistent long-term currency depreciation, International sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program, Economic shocks linked to

regional conflict and its costs.

Together, these factors mean the current crisis cannot be resolved through limited sector-by-sector fixes; it requires fundamental shifts in economic policy.

State Response: Crackdowns and Partial Measures

Authorities responded with a heavy security presence, using tear gas and other methods to disperse crowds, resulting in reported deaths, injuries, and arrests across several cities.

In an attempt to contain the crisis, the government moved to replace some economic officials - such as appointing a new central bank governor-framed as an effort to restore confidence in monetary policy, though it drew criticism from within political circles. Officially, authorities attributed the unrest to what they described as “foreign interference,” accusing external actors of exploiting conditions to destabilize the country. This line echoes familiar rhetoric used by states during



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periods of escalating tensions involving Iran.

Wider Participation and a Structural Shift in Protest Dynamics

Unlike earlier economic protests, this movement spread rapidly from major commercial centers to smaller areas. It drew in students, lower-income and middle-class residents, and even employees who organized protests in and around their workplaces.

This growing breadth and the ability to mobilize across different social groups reflects more than economic frustration. It points to a shift in social consciousness: demands are no longer confined to a single class or sector but have taken on a broader national character.

Where Are the Protests Headed?

Amid these dynamics, three

potential trajectories stand out:

Partial Containment Through Monetary Adjustments

The government may reduce tensions through technical steps such as stabilizing the exchange rate and curbing inflation. However, this would require time and, crucially, greater public trust something not clearly evident during the early days of unrest.

Ignoring Root Causes and Escalating Confrontation

Unresolved economic pressures can fuel further escalation, expanding protests to more cities and social groups especially if the state relies primarily on security measures rather than addressing economic and political demands.

A Gradual Shift Toward a Structural Social Movement

If protests continue to link livelihoods with political freedoms and transparency, the movement could evolve into a deeper call for a new relationship between citizens and the state reflecting a rising collective awareness of daily hardships and the systems behind them.

What Iran is experiencing today is not a passing economic revolt. It is the most significant social test in years combining currency collapse, shrinking purchasing power, and political disillusionment at once. This crisis did not erupt overnight; it is the result of accumulated economic and social strain over many years. The current unrest is a direct expression of deep public anger, making its trajectory a key indicator of the Iranian system's ability to endure as a political and economic structure under mounting pressure.

YOUTH AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FUTURE

Iraqi youth constitute more than half of Iraq's population and represent the most critical segment for the country's future, whether in economic, technological, or cultural domains. With the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence (AI) as a global driver of change, Iraqi youth face enormous challenges and unprecedented opportunities.

However, the ongoing political instability and repeated failures to achieve sustainable governance hinder young Iraqis' ability to leverage these future opportunities, placing them directly in confrontation with unemployment, inadequate technical education, and pervasive corruption.

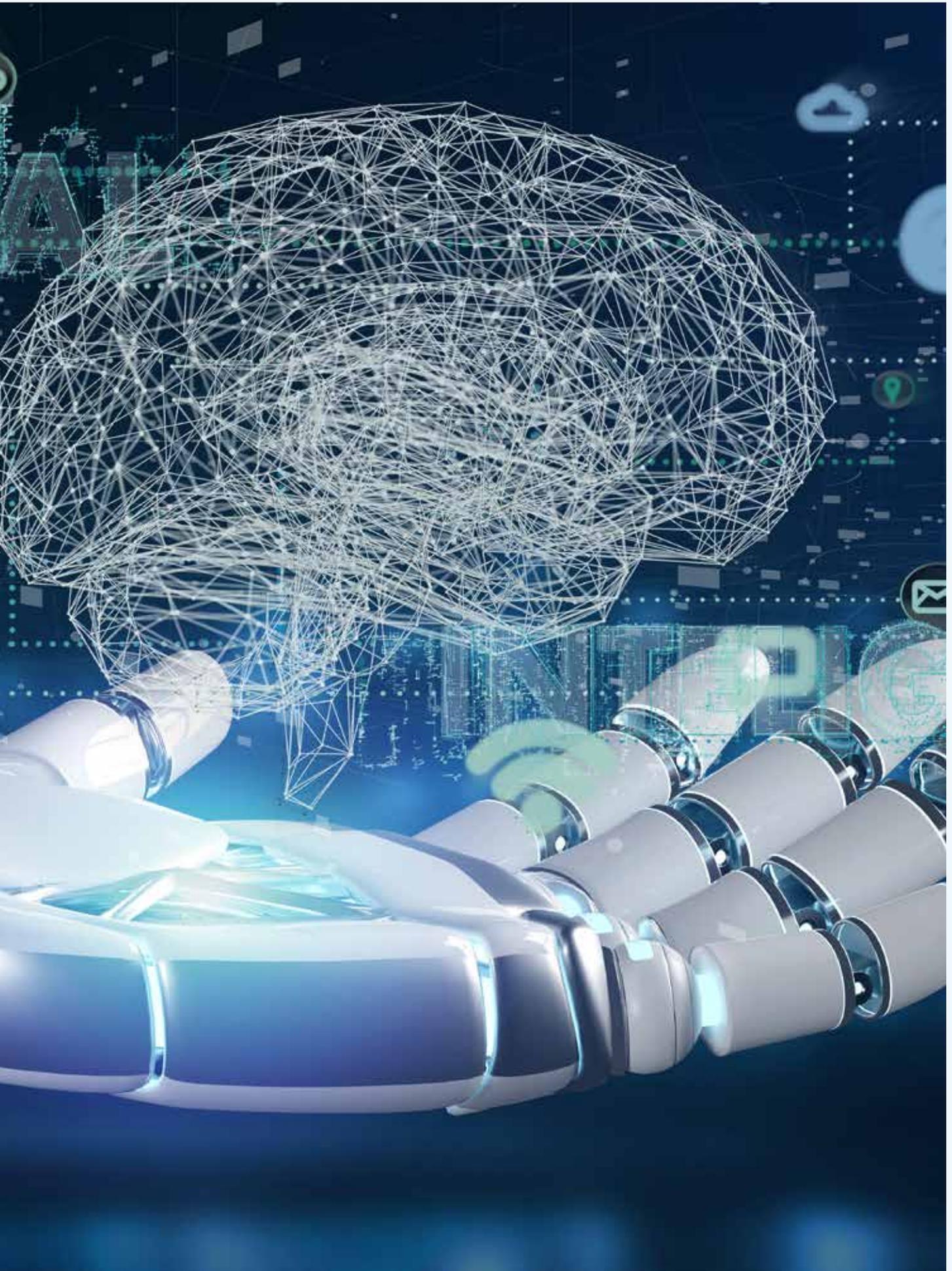
1. Iraqi Youth and Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities and Challenges

AI presents significant opportunities for Iraqi youth:

New employment opportunities in data analysis, programming, robotics, and financial technology.

Entrepreneurial ventures that bridge the digital economy with the local community.

Enhanced efficiency in public and private institutions through service automation and improved decision-making.





Political failures were also evident in previous elections, where traditional parties failed to present clear programs for youth, relying mainly on partisan interests rather than long-term developmental agendas.

Yet Iraq faces major challenges:

Lack of quality technical education: Iraqi universities often lack advanced AI programs, creating a wide gap between students' knowledge and the skills required in the labor market.

Limited digital infrastructure: Weak internet connectivity in some regions and minimal investment in data centers and modern technologies.

Bureaucracy and political corruption: Ambitious youth face obstacles in securing funding or government support for innovative projects.

2. Political Failures and Their Impact on Youth

Since 2003, Iraq has experienced a series of political crises, wars, and

internal divisions, leading to:
Weak trust between youth and governmental institutions.

Brain drain: Many talented youth choose to migrate abroad, reducing Iraq's capacity to utilize its human capital.

Absence of a national strategic vision: The state has not adopted a clear plan to enhance digital education, innovation, or AI integration across key sectors.

Political failures were also evident in previous elections, where traditional parties failed to present clear programs for youth, relying mainly on partisan interests rather than long-term developmental agendas.

3. The Recent Elections: Do They Bring Hope?



The recent elections in Iraq represented a critical opportunity to reintroduce youth representation in parliament and government, which is essential in an era increasingly shaped by technology and AI. Youth, representing more than half of the population, are the most affected by unemployment and political failure, yet they are also the most capable of leveraging the digital revolution if a supportive environment exists.

Lack of Clear Programs for Youth

Despite the importance of the elections, most campaigns focused on maintaining the political dominance of traditional blocs, without offering concrete programs to

address future youth needs: Parties did not propose tangible strategies to develop technical and digital education or support entrepreneurship and innovation.

Training programs in AI and emerging technologies, crucial for youth development, were largely absent.

This lack of initiatives threatens youth with missing genuine opportunities to keep pace with global advancements, leaving them trapped in unemployment and economic instability.

Symbolic Rather than Real Representation

Even when some young candidates enter parliamentary or governmental positions, their representation



Youth, representing more than half of the population, are the most affected by unemployment and political failure, yet they are also the most capable of leveraging the digital revolution if a supportive environment exists.





Economically, national programs can be launched to support innovative projects linked to the labor market, transforming youth from technology consumers into creators and innovators.



is often symbolic rather than effective:

Traditional party control limits their ability to propose serious policies or amend laws. Young elected officials often face political pressures preventing them from implementing ambitious programs. Consequently, youth representation remains mostly formal and does not reflect their true aspirations for reform in education, employment, and technological advancement.

Opportunity for Reforming Education and Employment
Nevertheless, the recent elections offer a real opportunity for transformation if youth participation is

effectively leveraged: Politically active youth can push policies to reform education and update curricula to include AI, programming, and data analytics skills. Economically, national programs can be launched to support innovative projects linked to the labor market, transforming youth from technology consumers into creators and innovators. Political participation allows youth to secure support for legal and institutional frameworks that encourage business incubators and digital initiatives. Major Challenges Ahead
Despite these opportunities, significant obstacles remain: Widespread corruption:



Without tackling political and administrative corruption, any reform efforts will have limited impact.

Lack of a clear strategic vision: Without a long-term plan integrating education, employment, and innovation, elections will remain a formal change without tangible effects on youth lives.

Political fragmentation: Ongoing control by traditional blocs hampers the implementation of new programs.

Elections as an Opportunity, Not an Automatic Solution

In summary, the recent elections hold potential for transformation, but they are not an automatic solution to the challenges facing Iraqi youth or the future of AI in the

country. Success depends on: Genuine political will that places youth and technology at the core of national planning.

Clear strategies for educational and economic reform, directly linked to innovation and entrepreneurship.

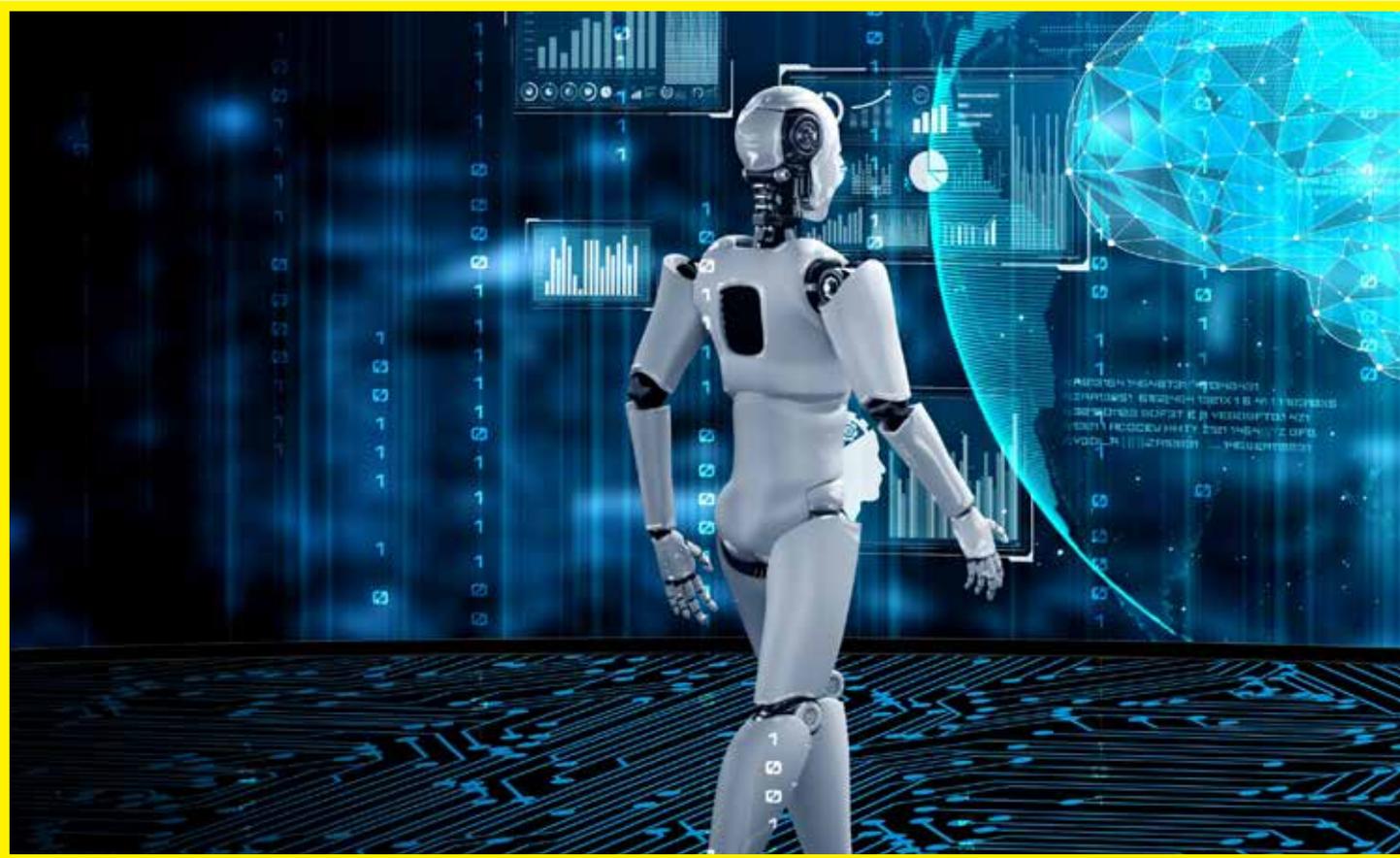
Active youth involvement in decision-making, not merely symbolic representation.

Providing an environment that encourages the use of AI and modern technologies to develop society and the economy.

4. Youth Between Unemployment and Innovation: AI as a Golden Opportunity

Iraqi youth face significant

Lack of a clear strategic vision: Without a long-term plan integrating education, employment, and innovation, elections will remain a formal change without tangible effects on youth lives.



Student exchange programs and practical training in AI laboratories. Joint workshops to develop problem-solving skills using technology.

challenges related to unemployment and limited opportunities, especially amid the current economic and political situation. However, the digital revolution and the rise of AI present unprecedented opportunities to turn these challenges into drivers of innovation and growth. If human potential is properly harnessed, Iraqi youth can become active participants in the global technology future and contribute to building a sustainable digital economy. Establishing Technology Incubators and Accelerators Creating incubators and accelerators is a crucial step to support entrepreneurial youth: Providing a working environment equipped with

modern technological tools. Offering specialized training programs in AI, data analysis, and software development. Giving youth access to experts and investors to develop ideas into actionable projects. Such initiatives have proven successful in neighboring countries like the UAE and Lebanon, offering youth new employment opportunities and stimulating innovation. In Iraq, similar programs could transform ideas into practical solutions that serve the community and the local economy. Partnerships with International Universities and Specialized Training Iraqi education often suffers from a gap between traditional curricula and labor market



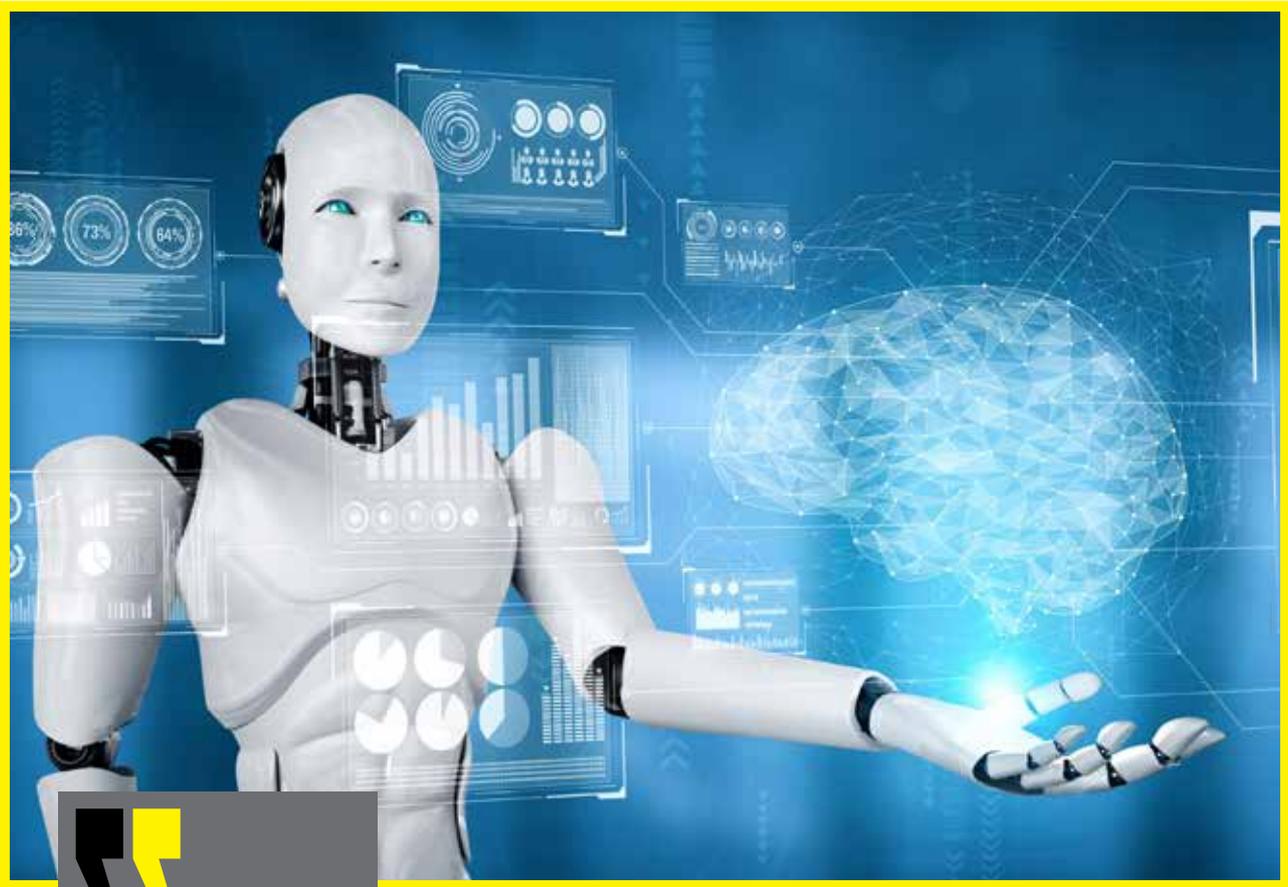
demands, particularly in AI and advanced programming. International university partnerships offer golden opportunities: Student exchange programs and practical training in AI laboratories. Joint workshops to develop problem-solving skills using technology. Access to internationally recognized advanced certifications, enhancing youth employability globally. This allows Iraqi youth to learn from global expertise and apply it locally to solve real challenges, such as improving healthcare services or advancing digital education. Government Digital Projects and Direct Youth Employment The Iraqi government has

the potential to transform public services into smart digital platforms, creating employment opportunities for youth: Developing AI programs to analyze economic and social data. Automating government services to reduce bureaucracy and improve citizens' lives. Participating in digital infrastructure projects, such as smart cities or modern transportation systems. These projects not only create jobs but also allow youth to directly influence societal development, raise the quality of life in Iraqi cities, and foster a culture of innovation and creativity. Challenges in the Absence of



Such initiatives have proven successful in neighboring countries like the UAE and Lebanon, offering youth new employment opportunities and stimulating innovation. In Iraq, similar programs could transform ideas into practical solutions that serve the community and the local economy.





Active political participation: Pressure authorities to implement clear developmental programs for youth, particularly in education and digital work.

a Supportive Environment

If the current conditions persist, youth will remain victims of unemployment and political failure:

Political instability prevents clear plans for technology sector development. Lack of funding and investment limits the ability to establish private projects. Brain drain continues, with talented youth seeking better opportunities abroad, depriving Iraq of critical human capital.

This situation leaves youth caught between ambition and frustration, capable of innovation but lacking the environment to soar.

The Way Forward

If Iraq provides:

A stable and innovative work

environment for youth.

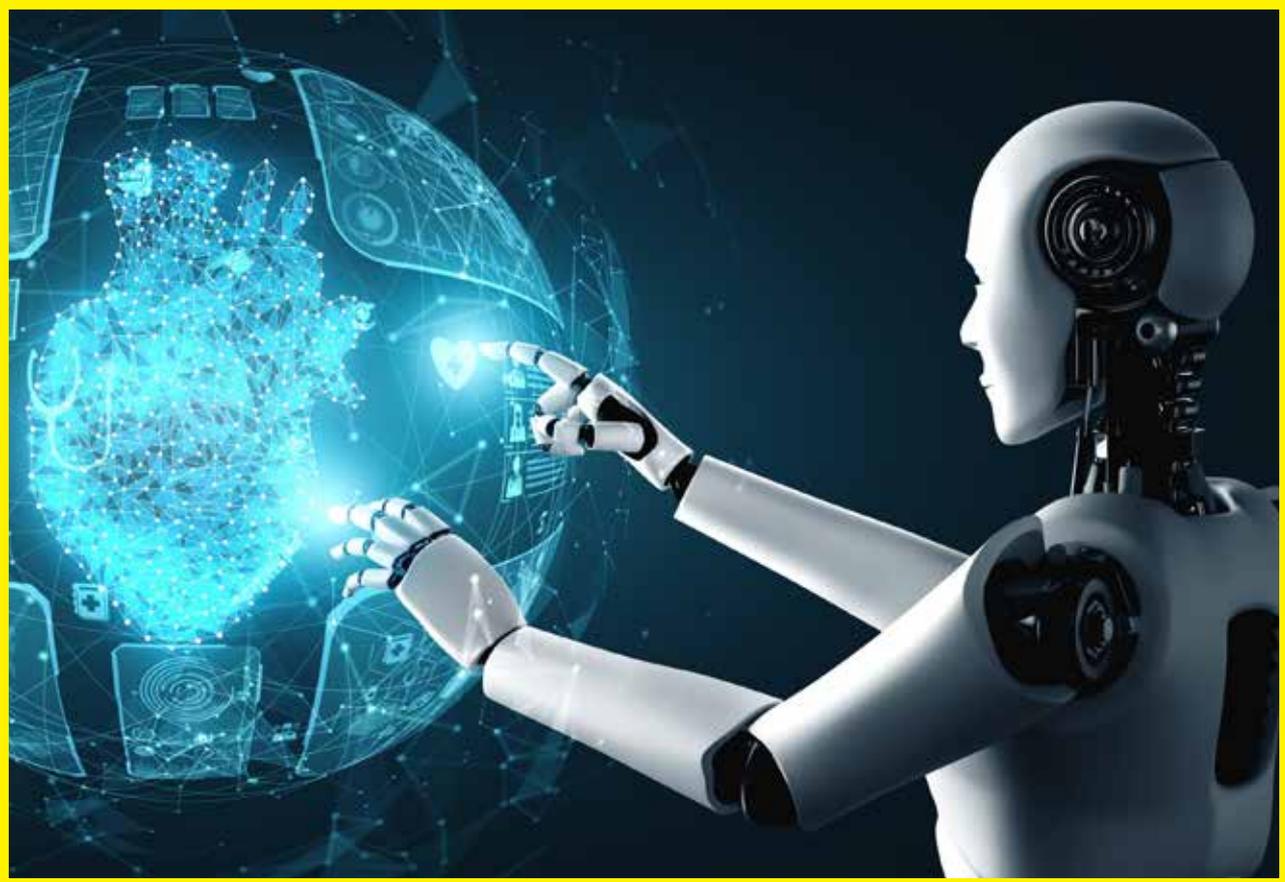
Advanced educational programs and accessible AI training.

Government digital projects that integrate youth into direct work.

Then Iraqi youth will not merely be consumers of technology—they will be creators, innovators, and owners, able to confront unemployment, transform challenges into opportunities, and contribute to a prosperous digital future for the entire country.

Enhancing digital skills: Invest in continuous education, training courses, and self-learning in AI and data analytics.

Building networks for innovation: Collaborate



to launch entrepreneurial projects and social initiatives.

Active political participation: Pressure authorities to implement clear developmental programs for youth, particularly in education and digital work.

Global and local thinking combined: Learn from other countries' experiences in integrating AI with economy and society.

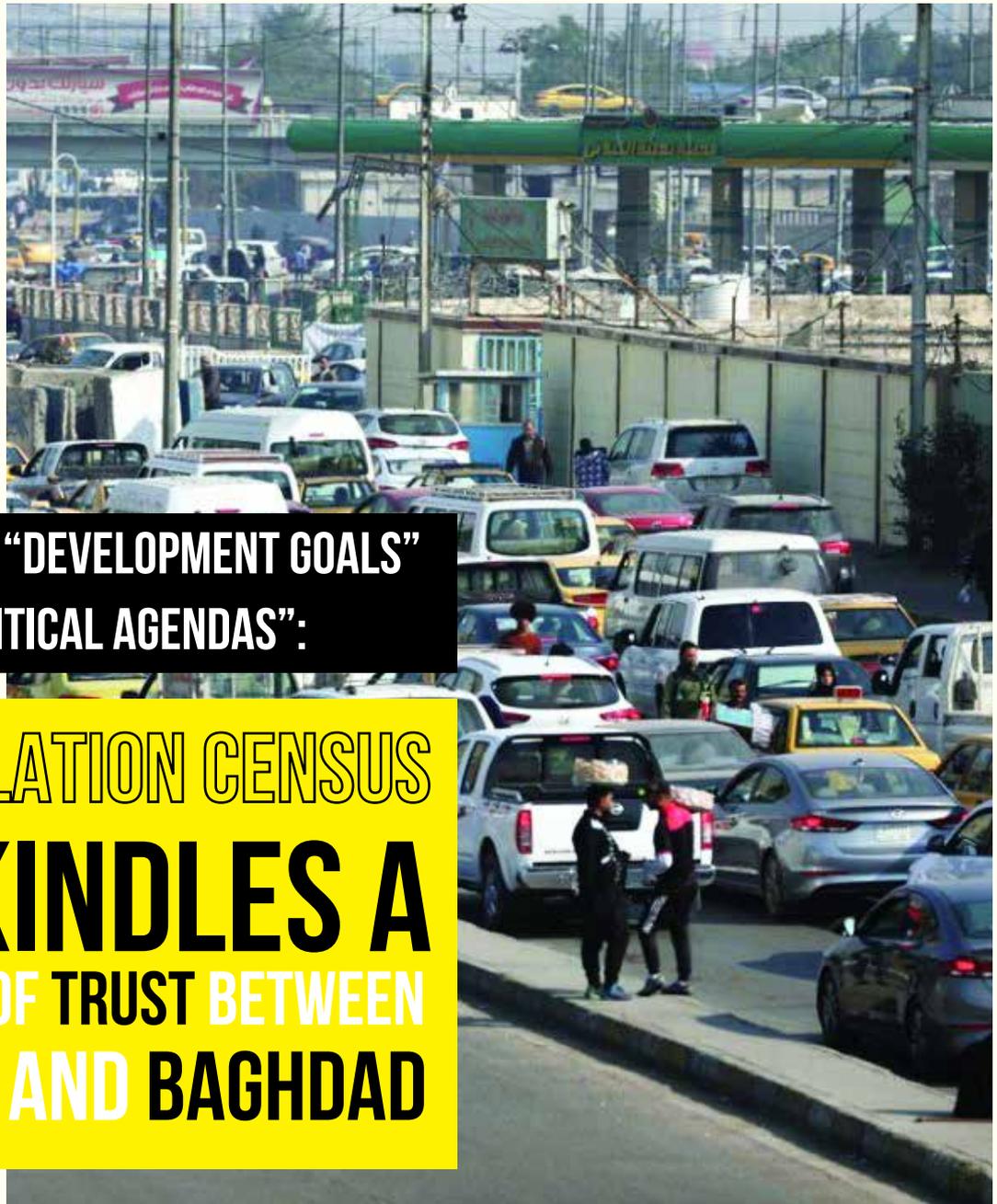
Using technology for community service: Projects solving real problems (health, education, environment) empower youth to play a pivotal role in shaping the future.

In conclusion, Iraqi youth remain at the heart of the future equation. They are the ones who will carry the

banner of AI in Iraq and drive the wheels of innovation and progress. However, this opportunity will only materialize if youth overcome political obstacles, apply their skills wisely, and actively participate in building a sustainable and forward-looking society.

Artificial intelligence is not just a technology; it is a mirror of youth capability to turn challenges into opportunities. If Iraqi youth seize this chance, the future will unquestionably belong to them.

Then Iraqi youth will not merely be consumers of technology—they will be creators, innovators, and owners, able to confront unemployment, transform challenges into opportunities, and contribute to a prosperous digital future for the entire country.



**BETWEEN “DEVELOPMENT GOALS”
AND “POLITICAL AGENDAS”:**

POPULATION CENSUS REKINDLES A CRISIS OF TRUST BETWEEN ERBIL AND BAGHDAD

The population census file has once again become a focal point of tension between Iraq’s federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil, amid growing Kurdish concerns that the process may be exploited for political purposes rather than serving its officially declared developmental objectives.

While Baghdad frames the census as a long-overdue technical tool to support economic planning and social development, political actors and public opinion in the Kurdistan Region increasingly fear that the results could be used to reshape sensitive demographic realities—particularly in disputed territories outside the administrative control of the Region.



This lack of confidence has prompted Kurdish political forces to insist that “census conditions” be formally included as a core issue within the broader negotiations over the formation of Iraq’s next federal cabinet.

Rising Kurdish Concerns

Anxiety is mounting across Kurdish political circles and within the broader public that census outcomes may entrench a new demographic status quo, potentially undermining Kurdish claims in disputed areas. Observers argue that Baghdad has yet to fully honor the conditions and guarantees demanded by Erbil to ensure the neutrality and transparency of the process.

This lack of confidence has prompted Kurdish political forces to insist that “census conditions” be formally

included as a core issue within the broader negotiations over the formation of Iraq’s next federal cabinet.

Political Stakes and Institutional Trust

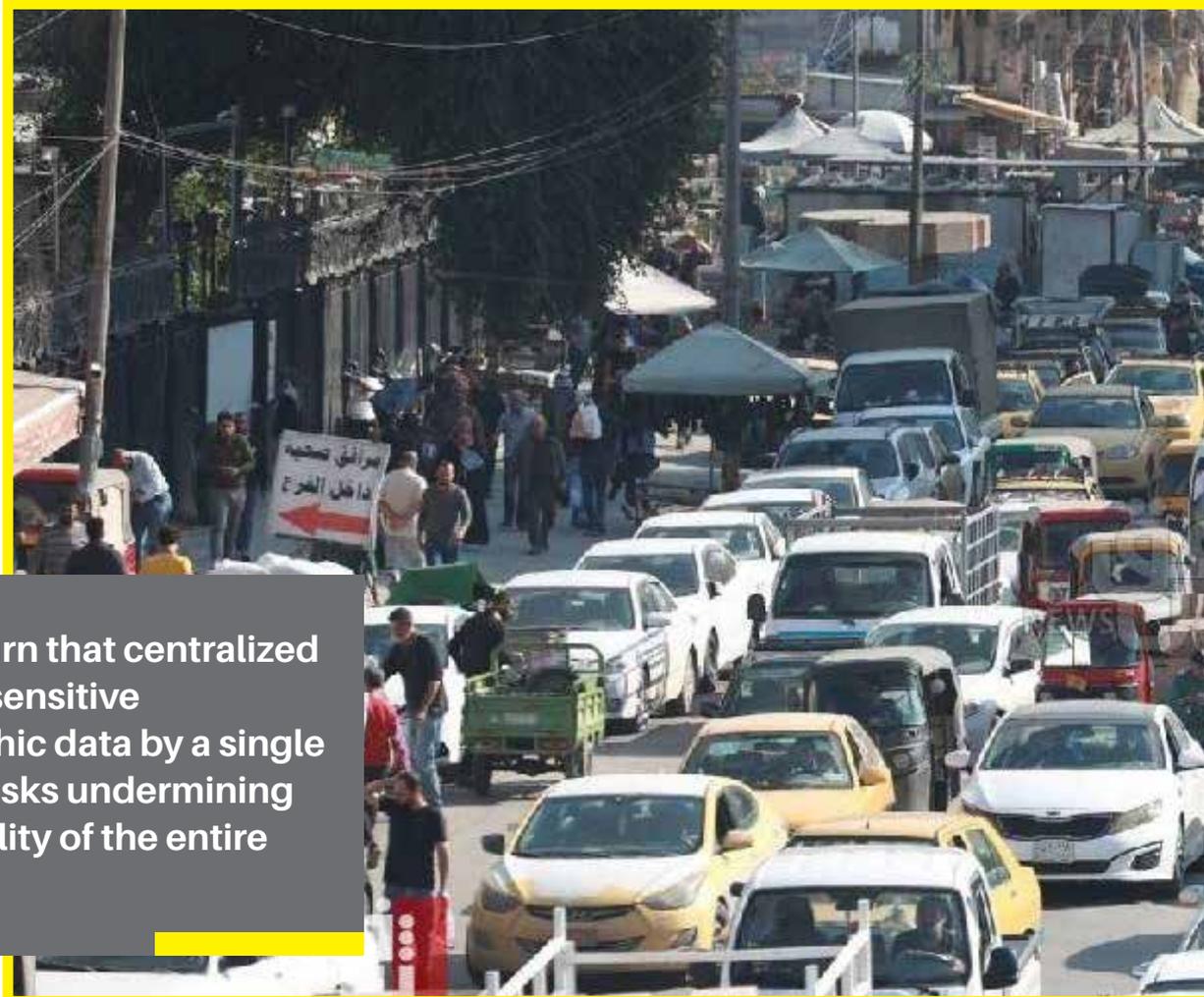
Dara Abdulghafar, a newly elected candidate representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), warned of what he described as “serious and dangerous dimensions” surrounding the census debate.

“If the census is politicized, public trust in both the numbers and state institutions will collapse,” Abdulghafar

said. “We will work through all legislative and legal channels to prevent this deviation.” He stressed that the census file will be a central and contentious topic in government-formation talks, noting that its results directly affect critical aspects of Iraq’s political system—from the distribution of government posts to budget allocations for provinces and the Kurdistan Region.

Technical Gaps and Data Control

Beyond political concerns, significant technical issues



Experts warn that centralized control of sensitive demographic data by a single authority risks undermining the credibility of the entire process.

remain unresolved. Chief among them is the absence of an independent data center for the Kurdistan Region parallel to the central database in Baghdad—one of Erbil’s key demands to prevent potential electronic manipulation of census data. Experts warn that centralized control of sensitive demographic data by a single authority risks undermining the credibility of the entire process.

Expert Warnings

Statistician and data specialist Samia Khalid cautioned

against unilateral data management, emphasizing the long-term implications of such an approach. “There are clearly Kurdish areas that were previously excluded or not officially counted as part of the Kurdistan Region,” she said. “If Kurdish political parties fail to present a united front in confronting these risks, the consequences will be negative.” Khalid added that internal Kurdish political unity could have significantly strengthened the Region’s position in managing this sensitive file. “Had there been

“There are clearly Kurdish areas that were previously excluded or not officially counted as part of the Kurdistan Region,” she said.



Analysts warn that transforming the census into a political instrument could deepen institutional mistrust and exacerbate ethnic and regional divisions, rather than resolving them.

unified Kurdish coordination, success would have been far more achievable.”

From Development Tool to Political Weapon?

The original agreement between Erbil and Baghdad framed the census as a purely developmental exercise aimed at supporting economic growth and social planning. However, current political maneuvering has fueled doubts about whether that framework is still being respected.

Analysts warn that transforming the census into a political instrument could deepen institutional mistrust

and exacerbate ethnic and regional divisions, rather than resolving them.

As debates intensify, experts and political actors alike are calling for a return to the original understandings between Erbil and Baghdad—emphasizing transparency, shared oversight, and mutual guarantees—to ensure that the census serves all of Iraq’s components fairly and avoids becoming yet another flashpoint in an already fragile political landscape.



Observers argue that Baghdad has yet to fully honor the conditions and guarantees demanded by Erbil to ensure the neutrality and transparency of the process



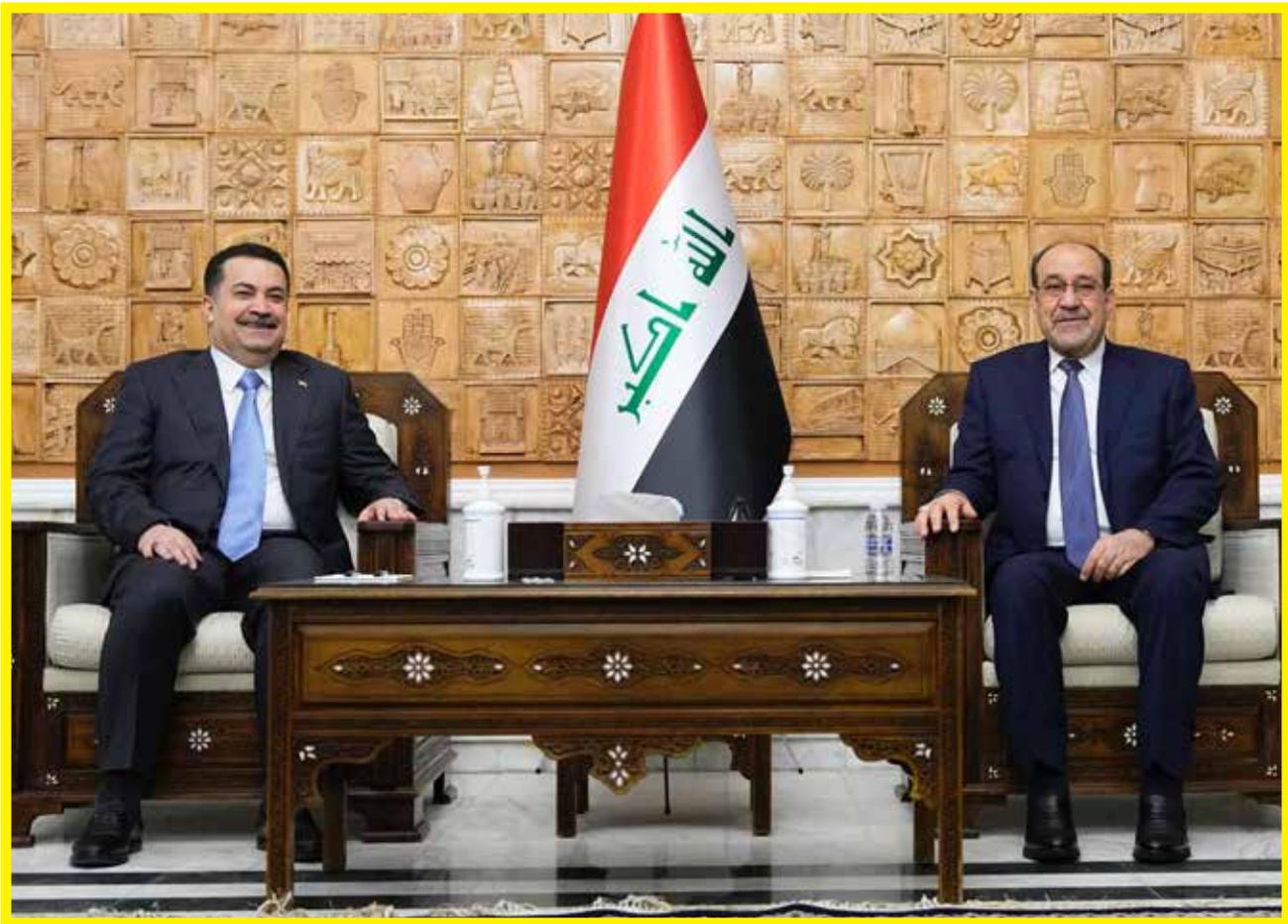
WHO WILL BE

IRAQ'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER?

MALIKI SUDANI OR ?

AN ANALYTICAL READING AMID HEATED POLITICAL BACKROOMS

Iraq has officially entered the phase of “forming authority” following the convening of the first session of the newly elected parliament. This is not a mere procedural detail; it is the real ignition switch for the entire process of selecting the Speaker of Parliament, then the President of the Republic, and finally tasking the nominee of the largest parliamentary bloc with forming the government — a process that may take weeks or even months depending on the balance of consensus and obstruction.



.....

In this context, the question “Will it be Maliki or Sudani?” cannot be answered like an opinion poll. It must be treated as a power equation:

Who possesses the bloc or alliance capable of producing the “largest parliamentary bloc” after positions are distributed?

Who can cross the minefield of internal and external vetoes?

And who can offer a settlement that resembles Iraq itself — one in which there is no absolute winner?

How Is the Prime Minister Actually Chosen?

According to the Iraqi Constitution, after electing the Speaker of Parliament and the parliamentary presidium, the President of the Republic is elected within a defined constitutional timeframe. The President then tasks the nominee of the largest parliamentary bloc with forming the Council of Ministers.

In practice, the “largest bloc” may be an alliance formed after the elections rather than the bloc that won the most seats on election day. This is why political backrooms often matter more than campaign slogans.

For this reason, talking about the individual (Maliki or

Sudani) must be separated from talking about political engineering:

Who guarantees the

Speakership of Parliament?

Who secures the Presidency?

What is the price of each position?

And who ultimately pays that price?

Why Is Maliki Strongly Present — and Why Does He Remain Politically Costly?

Maliki as a Kingmaker More Than Just a Candidate

In the 2025 elections, several reports and analyses indicated that Nouri al-Maliki has positioned himself as a key player capable of influencing the naming of the next prime



minister — whether by running himself or by pushing a “consensus candidate” who passes through his political gate.

It also emerged that the Dawa Party officially nominated Maliki, according to local and regional reports. This brings the “return scenario” back to the table, even if it does not necessarily end with his appointment.

The Burden of Polarization Maliki is a deeply polarizing figure. He has a solid base that views him as a strong statesman who “holds the state firmly.” On the other hand, his opponents burden him with a heavy legacy tied to the 2006–2014 period, including accusations of fueling sectarian polarization, governing through exclusion, and ultimately failing to

prevent the expansion of ISIS in 2014 — points repeatedly raised by his critics and cited in international reporting.

Sudani: A “Continuity Candidate” or a “Candidate Who Fell Short”?

Mohammed Shia’ al-Sudani enters the race from a different position: he is a sitting prime minister seeking a second term. His discourse revolves around “stability,” “service delivery,” and “urban and infrastructure achievements,” alongside attempts to restore administrative authority to the state.

European coverage has described his campaign as one built around the narrative of “rebuilding Baghdad and infrastructure.” However, within the Shiite political house itself, there are divisions over a second term, in addition to the

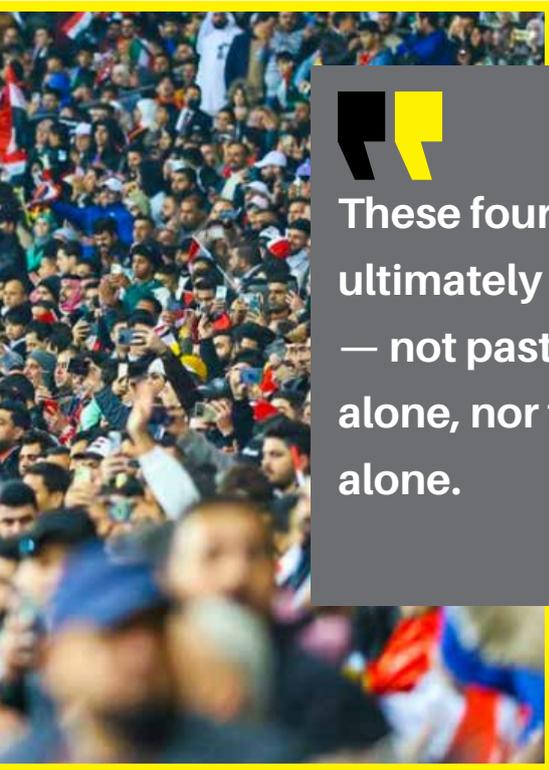
complexities of the weapons issue, armed factions, and Iraq’s position amid U.S.–Iranian tensions.

In post-election backrooms, initiatives have emerged from Sudani’s coalition aimed at breaking the prime-ministerial deadlock -suggesting that he is politically fighting to remain in the spotlight rather than being a “guaranteed candidate.”

The Backrooms Today: What Is Actually Moving?

Without romanticism, Iraq is currently being managed through four overlapping circles:

Shiite House / Coordination Framework Understandings
Who runs, who is blocked, and who is imposed as a compromise. Local reports indicate that more than one



These four circles are what ultimately produce the name — not past achievements alone, nor future ambition alone.



name — including Maliki and Sudani — is being circulated as “options” to avoid confrontation.

The Sunni Deal Over the Speakership of Parliament
The longer the Speaker’s position remains unresolved, the more everything else is delayed. The first parliamentary session is the beginning of the constitutional chain, not its end.

The Kurdish Equation for the Presidency
The presidency is far from symbolic; it is the office that tasks the nominee of the largest bloc and represents a major bargaining chip.

Regional and International Pressure
Intense U.S.-Iranian monitoring of the scene,

sensitivity around armed factions and weapons, and the ever-present possibility of sanctions or political pressure.

These four circles are what ultimately produce the name — not past achievements alone, nor future ambition alone.

Maliki’s Positives and Negatives (A Neutral Assessment)

Positives Highlighted by Supporters

Long executive experience and deep knowledge of state, security, and political balances, often viewed as a “key-holder” within multiple institutions.
High ability to build alliances within the Shiite camp and manufacture political settlements, even if difficult or costly — evident in

his continued presence and influence over prime-ministerial nominations. The narrative of achievements in his first term, with supporters recalling periods of relative security improvement compared to peak chaos, alongside service projects and partial restoration of state authority. This assessment varies by audience but remains central to his political discourse.

Negatives Repeated by Critics
A polarizing personality that raises the cost of consensus, as his return could trigger counter-vetoes and prolonged paralysis.

The 2014 legacy, with critics linking his tenure to political and security conditions that enabled ISIS’s rise, viewing this as a red line.

Accusations of centralization



European coverage has described his campaign as one built around the narrative of “rebuilding Baghdad and infrastructure.”



and politicization of institutions, recurring claims that resurface whenever his name returns to the spotlight.

Conclusion: Maliki may be powerful in shaping decisions, but he is not always the least costly option to occupy the position himself.

Sudani’s Positives and Negatives (A Neutral Assessment)
Positives in His Favor

The advantage of continuity: in an exhausted country, some forces prefer extending an existing government rather than jumping into a prolonged negotiation vacuum. A services and infrastructure discourse: even critics acknowledge that his team attempted to frame governance as work and delivery, not merely political conflict. Higher passability as a

compromise: compared to more polarizing figures, Sudani may be closer to a “settlement product” if a second term is agreed upon under defined conditions — reflected in his political initiatives to break deadlock.

Negatives and Weak Points

The gap between promises and standards: the “rebuilding Baghdad” narrative faces the question of whether projects translated into tangible change according to clear benchmarks. Many believe expectations were not fully met. The weapons and state monopoly issue: a challenge larger than any individual prime minister, yet still used as a yardstick for governments — did they succeed in enforcing state monopoly over force? Difficulty pleasing everyone within the Coordination Framework, as a second-

term bid puts him in direct competition with the ambitions of partners before opponents. Realistic Scenarios Beyond the “Either/Or” Question

Instead of “Maliki or Sudani?” three practical scenarios emerge:

Sudani for a Second Term — With Conditions

Possible if internal guarantees are offered (balanced positions, defined files, economic and security understandings) and vetoes recede.

Maliki as a Kingmaker, Not the Choice Himself

He backs a compromise candidate close to his political line, reducing polarization while maintaining influence — a logical scenario given analyses suggesting his strength lies in naming the next prime minister even if he does not occupy the seat.



The gap between promises and standards: the “rebuilding Baghdad” narrative faces the question of whether projects translated into tangible change according to clear benchmarks.



A Third Candidate Born of Compromise

When vetoes against both Maliki and Sudani balance each other, a “third name” emerges that satisfies internal and external balances. Reports from within the framework already suggest multiple options are being discussed.

What Ultimately Tips the Scale?

What matters most is not only who achieved more or who failed less, but rather: Who can impose the lowest negotiation cost on partners? Who can pass through the constitutional process quickly without opening the door to prolonged obstruction? And who can translate backroom deals into a written agreement on positions and programs, not just personalities?

In this context, Hamid Al-Shatri has previously noted that:

“Political stability in Iraq is not measured by the strength of names, but by the system’s ability to produce a sustainable government at the lowest internal and external cost, capable of managing complex balances without opening new fronts of confrontation.”

In Iraqi politics in particular, the strongest does not always win — the most passable often does.

Reflecting this reality, Ali Shukri, Head of the Advisory and Experts Authority at the Iraqi Presidency, has emphasized that:

“Governance in Iraq has proven that success does not belong to those who win political battles, but

to those who can craft an acceptable national settlement that respects the constitution and translates political understandings into executable programs.”



Possible if internal guarantees are offered (balanced positions, defined files, economic and security understandings) and vetoes recede.





A WASTE

CRISIS

SUFFOCATING NEIGHBORHOODS AND ESCALATING HEALTH RISKS

In large areas of Iraq, waste is no longer merely an unresolved service-related issue. It has turned into a suffocating daily crisis that burdens residents and threatens their health and environmental safety. With repeated absences of waste collection services in many districts, thousands of Iraqis have been forced to burn their household waste near their homes—a scene that has become increasingly familiar, from the outskirts of Baghdad to towns and villages in other provinces.





This means that nearly one-third of the population remains outside the scope of this basic service, reflecting the growing scale of environmental and service-related challenges in the country.

Recent data issued by the Environmental Statistics Department indicate that only around 69 percent of Iraq's population was covered by waste collection services in 2024. This means that nearly one-third of the population remains outside the scope of this basic service, reflecting the growing scale of environmental and service-related challenges in the country.

Burning Household Waste

Jannah Al-Zuhairi (32), a resident of a neighborhood on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, says that disposing of waste has become an



exhausting daily burden that weighs heavily on her family and dominates the details of their everyday lives.

"There is no garbage collection vehicle here at all. We wait for days, sometimes weeks, but no one comes,"

she told Vision Magazine. "In the end, either I, my husband, or one of my children has to gather the waste and burn it near the house."

Al-Zuhairi explains that this practice is no longer limited to her family alone, but has



become a collective behavior. “Everyone in the alley does the same—actually, the entire neighborhood. No one likes burning waste, but leaving it piled up is worse.”

She describes the consequences with visible concern: “The smoke enters the houses, and the smell is suffocating, especially in summer. My children cough a lot, and sometimes we feel burning in our eyes and shortness of breath. We know this is dangerous, but there is no alternative.”

A Daily Problem Beyond Baghdad

In Babil province, retired

employee Hussein Al-Aqabi describes how waste has turned into a daily problem affecting the life of his neighborhood. He says that garbage collection vehicles never reach his area, leaving residents with no option but to burn their waste.

“My neighbor and I agreed to place a barrel near our homes and burn the waste together

to reduce how often we do it,” Al-Aqabi said. “We know the smoke is harmful, but accumulated waste attracts insects and rodents. The smell is unbearable, especially during the hot summer days. We constantly suffer from headaches and recurring shortness of breath as a result of the burning.”

Maher Ismail (29) explains that “there are young men who collect garbage using stoota carts (three-wheeled motorcycles with cargo beds) in exchange for money that residents pay to keep them working.”

Individual Initiatives Filling the Gap

In many areas, residents rely on individual initiatives to collect waste. Maher Ismail (29) explains that “there are young men who collect garbage using stoota carts (three-wheeled motorcycles with cargo beds) in exchange for money that residents pay to keep them working.”

However, he adds that weather conditions often disrupt these efforts. “Our areas are unpaved, which makes access difficult—especially in winter or during dust storms. When waste accumulates for two days or more, we are forced to burn it.” Similarly, citizen Salah Al-Omari says that newly built residential neighborhoods constructed in recent years are often left without complete services.

“These areas are growing rapidly, but services are not keeping pace,” he says. “As a result, burning waste has become common, foul odors spread through the air, and everyone complains about its impact on their health.”

Health Risks and Psychological Consequences

All those interviewed agreed that increasing health risks now accompany life in their



“These areas are growing rapidly, but services are not keeping pace,” he says. “As a result, burning waste has become common, foul odors spread through the air, and everyone complains about its impact on their health.”



areas due to waste burning. Many confirmed that they or members of their families suffer direct effects, including persistent coughing, headaches, and breathing difficulties, alongside constant anxiety about more serious health consequences in both the short and long term.

In this context, psychiatrist Hassan Al-Shammari explains that living in such polluted environments leaves deep impacts that do not necessarily appear immediately. He notes that he has encountered medical cases in which air pollution was an indirect factor in worsening physical and psychological conditions.

“Daily exposure to foul odors and smoke creates a state of chronic psychological stress,” Al-Shammari says. “Children are particularly affected by these polluted environments, developing feelings of anxiety and insecurity. That is why many children in Iraq develop negative associations with the weather and atmosphere—when they experience coughing or

choking, especially those with asthma, they realize that air pollution is the cause, which embeds anxiety deeply within them.”

He adds that repeated pollution-related illnesses intensify psychological harm, creating feelings of helplessness and fear among children, adolescents, and young adults, which may negatively affect their behavior

“Daily exposure to foul odors and smoke creates a state of chronic psychological stress,” Al-Shammari says.



and academic performance.

“The same applies to adults,” he continues. “Stress caused by these conditions can affect family relationships, increase irritability, and escalate conflicts. I have reviewed marital disputes where, upon closer examination, pollution was found to be one of the contributing factors.”

Al-Shammari points out that service-deprived neighborhoods often experience higher levels of psychological pressure, making the environmental crisis one with serious social and mental health repercussions.

Environmental Warnings

Environmental expert Asaad Kazem warns that burning household waste is one of the most dangerous sources of unregulated pollution.

“This process releases toxic pollutants, including fine particulate matter and harmful gases that directly affect the respiratory system—not only in humans, but also in animals and birds,” Kazem says. “In

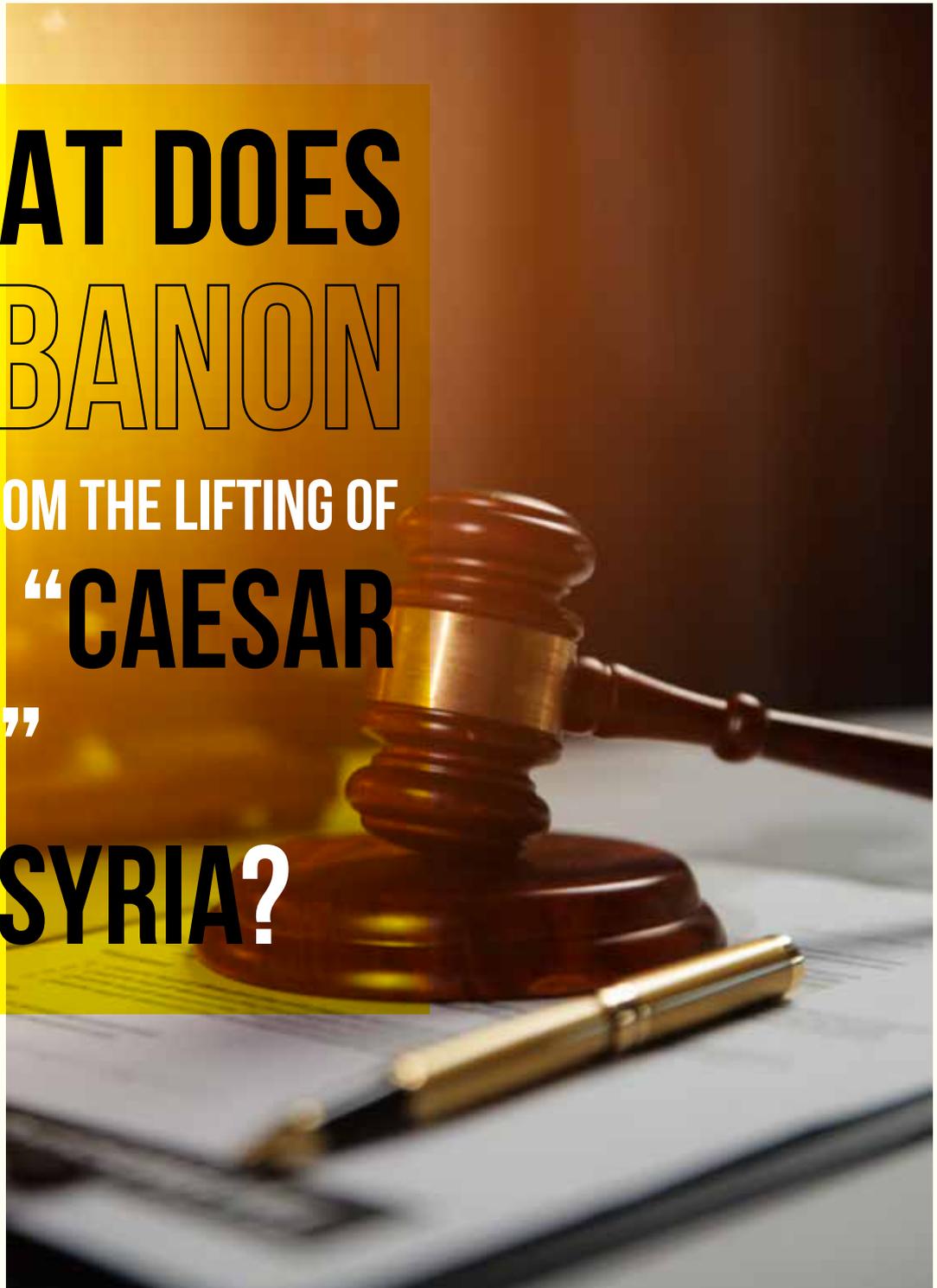
addition, the remaining ash contaminates the soil and may seep into groundwater.”

Kazem stresses that pollution also reaches plants, negatively affecting agriculture. “Air and water pollution disrupt ecological balance,” he says, noting that the continuation of such practices accelerates urban environmental degradation and significantly increases future healthcare costs.

He notes that he has encountered medical cases in which air pollution was an indirect factor in worsening physical and psychological conditions

WHAT DOES LEBANON

GAIN FROM THE LIFTING OF THE “CAESAR ACT” ON SYRIA?



The lifting of sanctions on Syria particularly the US “Caesar Act” did not come as an isolated shift or a purely technical decision. Rather, it represents a political move carrying intertwined regional and economic dimensions. After years of isolation and strict sanctions, the decision opens the door to a new phase in international engagement with Damascus, while simultaneously raising serious questions about the Syrian state’s ability to translate this opening into a genuine reform path.

The lifting of sanctions on Syria cannot be examined in isolation from the broader regional transformations that have unfolded since the fall of the former Syrian regime. The decision is not solely the result of internal Syrian changes, but rather intersects with a wider reordering of regional and international power balances.



At the same time, Lebanon finds itself directly affected by the repercussions of this shift both in terms of redefining its relationship with Syria and in relation to the economic opportunities and challenges that may accompany the post-Caesar Act phase.

Sanctions Within the Context of Regional Transformations

The lifting of sanctions on Syria cannot be examined in isolation from the broader regional transformations that have unfolded since the fall of the former Syrian regime. The decision is not solely the result

of internal Syrian changes, but rather intersects with a wider reordering of regional and international power balances. This reordering has included the decline of traditional actors, the rise of new powers, and shifting priorities among international stakeholders in their approach to Middle Eastern files from Gaza to Lebanon, and through Syria.

Shifting Influence and Redrawing Power Balances

In this context, political science and international relations specialist Joe Hallou said that “the lifting of

sanctions on Syria, particularly the Caesar Act, comes amid profound changes in regional and international power balances that began with the fall of the former Syrian regime and were accompanied by a restructuring of alliances and influence across the region.”

Hallou noted that “the collapse of the former regime led to a decline in Iran’s regional influence, alongside the rise of other regional actors, in parallel with the emergence of new political arrangements. These included a rapprochement between Syria’s new leadership and



On the issue of borders and Syrian displacement, Hallou noted that “the root causes of displacement were the war in Syria

Arab and Gulf states chiefly Saudi Arabia as well as direct US engagement in this process, reflected in a series of high-level political meetings.”

He stressed that “these transformations were not detached from Lebanon. Rather, they unfolded within a sequence of cumulative events, including the Gaza war, the conflict in southern Lebanon, and the aftermath of the cessation of military operations developments that reshaped the broader regional landscape and Lebanon’s position within it.”

Lebanese–Syrian Relations: Opportunities Conditional on a New Framework

Regarding the impact of lifting the Caesar Act on Lebanese–Syrian relations, Hallou explained that “this measure primarily affects Syria and does not directly lift sanctions imposed on Lebanese parties. However, it may open the door to economic opportunities for Lebanese actors, provided relations between the two countries evolve within a legal, balanced framework based on mutual respect.”

He added that “the launch

of a serious reconstruction process in Syria could have positive spillover effects on Lebanon, given its geographic position, ports, and service infrastructure—potentially revitalizing the Port of Beirut and related sectors.”

Regional Influence in Lebanon: Changing Roles, Not Their End

On the question of how lifting sanctions might affect regional influence within Lebanon, Hallou argued that “the move itself does not directly redraw influence inside Lebanon. However, the reconfiguration



It may also help create employment opportunities inside Syria that encourage return, though the issue remains legally and diplomatically complex.”



He explained that “the fall of the former regime led to the return of some Syrians, while many others remain hesitant due to the lack of job opportunities and basic services inside Syria.”



of regional influence within Syria may indirectly affect Lebanon, especially in light of shifting power balances following recent military and political developments.”

He pointed to “the decline of some traditional roles and the rise of new ones, alongside increased US engagement in Lebanon, manifested through diplomatic initiatives and cooperation agreements in technological and economic fields.” Nonetheless, he emphasized that “this does not signal the end of any Lebanese political actor, but rather a transformation in the

nature of roles and the limits of influence.”

Borders, Refugees, and Changing Pressures

On the issue of borders and Syrian displacement, Hallou noted that “the root causes of displacement were the war in Syria.” He explained that “the fall of the former regime led to the return of some Syrians, while many others remain hesitant due to the lack of job opportunities and basic services inside Syria.”

He added that “lifting the Caesar Act could ease



On the investment front, Arbash said that “the Syrian banking sector continues to face structural challenges due to the lack of full integration into the global financial system.”



It may also help create employment opportunities inside Syria that encourage return, though the issue remains legally and diplomatically complex.”



international pressure on Lebanon regarding the refugee file, particularly as international funding priorities shift. It may also help create employment opportunities inside Syria that encourage return, though the issue remains legally and diplomatically complex.”

Energy and Regional Economic Integration

Economically, Hallou pointed out that “previous sanctions on Syria constituted a major obstacle to regional cooperation projects, particularly in the energy

sector.” He explained that “their removal could pave the way for integrating Syria into regional projects—either as a transit corridor or a distribution hub—allowing Lebanon to benefit if Syria is reintegrated into the international economy.”

He concluded by stressing that “the success of Syria’s new phase remains contingent on internal reconciliation and the building of an inclusive state,” warning against “the dangers of political or societal exclusion.” He emphasized “the necessity of integrating all Syrian components into



Regarding the energy file, Arbash explained that “lifting sanctions may theoretically facilitate projects related to importing gas and electricity through Syria.”



state institutions to overcome fear and ensure long-term stability,” arguing that “lifting sanctions represents an opportunity, but its outcomes remain tied to the trajectory of internal reform and the nature of forthcoming political arrangements.”

A Final Opportunity That Cannot Be Wasted

For his part, Syrian economic researcher Ziad Arbash argued that “lifting sanctions on Syria—particularly the Caesar Act—could represent a significant economic opportunity, provided it is accompanied

by serious internal reforms.” He warned that “without such reforms, any potential gains will be squandered.”

Arbash explained that “the most significant economic impact would be the return of Syrian capital held abroad, expatriate remittances, and Arab investment—whether through direct spending or productive investments inside Syria—alongside the revival of financial transfers and the stimulation of cross-border trade, particularly with Lebanon and neighboring countries.”

He noted that “Lebanon’s land, sea, and air ports play a pivotal role in servicing the Syrian economy,” adding that “transit through Lebanon currently remains less costly than alternative routes through other countries, particularly for importing raw materials, intermediate goods, and industrial equipment for projects implemented in Syria.”

Banks: The Weakest Link in Recovery

On the investment front, Arbash said that “the Syrian banking sector continues to



However, Syrian networks themselves require rehabilitation, making actual implementation dependent on infrastructure repair—not merely on the removal of legal restrictions.”

face structural challenges due to the lack of full integration into the global financial system.” He explained that “Syrian banks lack an effective network of international correspondent banks, limiting their ability to finance large projects or manage external transfers.”

In this context, he noted that “Lebanese banks—despite their own financial crisis—remain connected to the global banking system, allowing them to play an intermediary role in financing projects in Syria, whether through letters of credit or

managing payment and transfer operations.”

Energy, Transit, and Infrastructure Constraints

Regarding the energy file, Arbash explained that “lifting sanctions may theoretically facilitate projects related to importing gas and electricity through Syria. However, Syrian networks themselves require rehabilitation, making actual implementation dependent on infrastructure repair—not merely on the removal of legal restrictions.”

He stressed that “lifting

sanctions alone is not sufficient. While the Caesar Act accounts for a significant portion of economic bottlenecks, it is not the sole cause.” He emphasized that “any economic opening will fail without combating corruption, rebuilding institutions, activating oversight bodies, and reforming the banking system.”

On transit trade, Arbash anticipated that “the removal of restrictions would reduce transportation costs and increase export flows—not only between Syria and



He explained that “Syrian banks lack an effective network of international correspondent banks, limiting their ability to finance large projects or manage external transfers.”



Lebanon, but also with Iraq and Gulf states—restoring Syria’s role as a regional logistics corridor.”

Return Begins with Services

On the social level, Arbash argued that “the return of refugees is directly linked to the rehabilitation of infrastructure,” stressing that “providing electricity, water, and basic services is a fundamental condition for any sustainable return.”

He concluded that “lifting sanctions represents a final opportunity,” calling for “a

clear economic plan based on job creation, industrial and agricultural development, and technological transformation.” He warned that “the absence of economic prospects will continue to drive youth migration, even if political conditions improve.”



PROJECT 95 % COMPLETE

IRAQ AND THE GULF MOVE CLOSER TO POWER GRID INTERCONNECTION

The electricity interconnection project between Iraq and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is nearing operational launch, marking one of the most prominent strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing the stability of Iraq's national power system, according to an official at the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity.



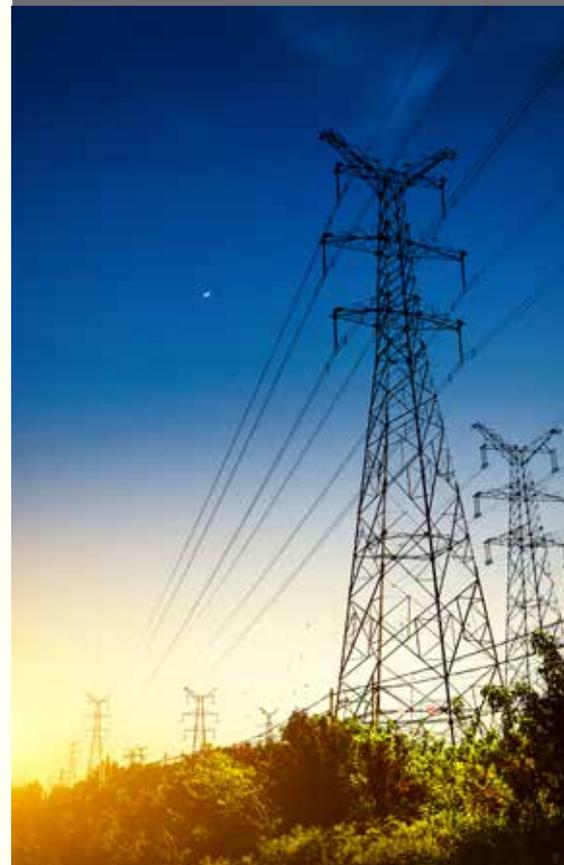
This development follows years of technical and political discussions, alongside the completion of advanced stages of infrastructure and operational testing, paving the way for the start of electricity supply to Iraq through a reliable regional grid. The project holds particular significance as a practical step toward diversifying energy sources, reducing reliance on a single supplier, and helping to bridge part of the growing demand gap—especially during peak loads in the summer season.

Ahmad Mousa, spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, told Vision Magazine that the completion rate of the Gulf-Iraq electricity interconnection project has exceeded 95%, with work ongoing to finalize the remaining stages in

preparation for entering service in the first half of 2026. According to Mousa, Iraq remains in continuous coordination with Gulf countries to accelerate the launch of this vital project. He noted that a recent meeting was held in Bahrain between a delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity and representatives of GCC states, during which mechanisms for operating the interconnection and exporting electricity to Iraq were discussed. The meeting also reviewed operational preparations, examined draft operating contracts expected to be signed, and included visual presentations outlining the characteristics of both sides' power grids, as well as preliminary frameworks for power purchase agreements. Mousa added that Iraq



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has entered a new phase of regional electricity interconnection, similar to systems adopted by GCC countries and the European Union, as part of efforts to achieve energy system integration and cross-border electricity exchange. He emphasized that the interconnection will contribute to stabilizing the power system, deliver important technical benefits to the national grid, and represent a strategic step toward integrating Iraq into the regional energy market, expanding its capacity to exchange electricity with neighboring countries and the wider region. He concluded by stating that technical and related issues are being handled smoothly between Iraq and the GCC

Interconnection Authority, with no obstacles delaying the project's completion. Work continues to ensure it becomes operational in the first half of 2026, where it is expected to play a significant role in stabilizing the energy system, particularly during the summer months. Iraq has faced a chronic energy crisis for more than 20 years, prompting the Ministry of Electricity to pursue multiple projects to address the problem, including electricity interconnection initiatives with neighboring countries and efforts to reduce dependence on fossil fuels by shifting toward renewable energy sources. Iraq's electricity production reached 24,000 megawatts last year and currently stands at 25,000 megawatts, while the shortfall

is estimated at around 14,000 megawatts. This deficit forces the Iraqi government to implement scheduled power outages. Iraq currently imports between 33% and 40% of its electricity and gas needs from Iran, yet it continues to experience widespread power cuts, particularly during the summer. For his part, Iraqi energy expert Ahmed Askar said that the electricity interconnection project between Iraq and the Gulf countries represents a qualitative shift in the path of regional energy cooperation. He explained that the project goes beyond addressing a technical issue related to electricity supply, reflecting a significant economic and strategic dimension for Iraq and the region as a whole. According to Askar, the



interconnection directly enhances the reliability of the national electricity system and reduces supply gaps during peak demand periods—especially in summer—by diversifying energy sources and lowering dependence on a single provider. This, he noted, has a positive impact on supply stability and sustainability.

He added that the project's economic importance lies in reducing production and operational costs over the medium term, improving energy management efficiency, and creating an attractive environment for investment in industrial and service sectors. Stable electricity supply, he stressed, is one of the fundamental pillars of any genuine economic growth.

Askar concluded that the interconnection reflects a broader strategic vision aimed at strengthening regional integration and opening new horizons for cooperation. Such projects, he said, consolidate long-term partnerships and enhance mutual trust. He affirmed that the project represents an advanced step toward integration into regional energy systems, in line with the transition toward sustainable energy, granting Iraq greater flexibility in future planning for its electricity sector.

He concluded by stating that technical and related issues are being handled smoothly between Iraq and the GCC Interconnection Authority, with no obstacles delaying the project's completion. Work continues to ensure it becomes operational in the first half of 2026, where it is expected to play a significant role in stabilizing the energy system, particularly during the summer months.





**IRAQI SCHOOLS UNDER
HARSH WEATHER:**

ACTIVITIES THAT OVERLOOK STUDENTS' HEALTH

Over the past few weeks, dozens of Iraqi schools have recorded widespread cases of colds and influenza among students, amid growing complaints from families and sharp criticism from educators and teachers' unions. Parents and specialists alike have blamed school administrations and provincial education directorates for poor judgment in assessing weather conditions, as well as for insisting on holding morning assemblies, school celebrations, and extracurricular activities despite severe cold and unstable weather.



Observers note that many of these activities are carried out following centralized directives from education directorates to commemorate specific occasions, such as “Victory Day” or cultural events, without sufficient consideration for climatic conditions or the young age of many students.

According to local educational and medical sources, a significant number of schools across several governorates have reported increased illness among pupils at the same time that the daily mandatory morning assembly continued, alongside official celebrations and events—some of them national or political in nature—held in open schoolyards. In addition, visits by officials from education directorates often require students to stand for long periods, listening to lengthy speeches and addresses that do not take into account children’s physical ability to endure such conditions, especially as temperatures drop and Iraq is affected by successive cold fronts.



Observers note that many of these activities are carried out following centralized directives from education directorates to commemorate specific occasions, such as “Victory Day” or cultural events, without sufficient

consideration for climatic conditions or the young age of many students. This approach has had a direct negative impact on students’ health, particularly in primary schools, where children are more vulnerable to cold-related illnesses.



Other families have called for granting school administrations broader authority to suspend morning assemblies and outdoor activities during bad weather, rather than adhering rigidly to directives that fail to take students' physical capacities into account.

Al-Hajj Ibrahim Al-Maamouri, a parent from Baghdad, said that "schools have turned from places of learning into venues for celebrations, while health considerations are neglected, as if children's well-being were a secondary issue." Other families have called for granting school administrations broader authority to suspend morning assemblies and outdoor activities during bad weather, rather than adhering rigidly to directives that fail to take students' physical capacities into account.

For their part, the Iraqi Teachers' Union and a number of education professionals have strongly criticized these practices, arguing

that the excessive focus on non-classroom activities has come at the expense of both education and health. Ghanem Al-Samarrai, a member of the union, stated that "schools are not arenas for constant ceremonies and celebrations; they are educational environments that must be managed according to clear priorities, foremost among them the safety of students and teachers." He added that "morning assemblies and celebrations, despite their symbolic value, should not be imposed under all circumstances, especially during periods of weather fluctuation and low temperatures."

Al-Samarrai called for a

comprehensive review of the philosophy behind school activities, urging that they be linked to genuine educational benefit rather than superficial appearances. He also stressed the need for coordination with health authorities and the provision of clear guidelines to school administrations on how to deal with cold waves and rainfall, in order to prevent the spread of seasonal illnesses inside classrooms.

Amid mounting complaints, Iraqi Minister of Education Ibrahim Namis Al-Jubouri issued directives to suspend morning assemblies and outdoor activities due to falling temperatures and the impact of a cold weather system affecting the



Educators and parents broadly agree that the crisis has exposed a deeper structural problem in the management of the school environment—namely, the prioritization of ceremonial and symbolic activities over scientific, educational, and health considerations.



country. In a statement, the ministry said that Al-Jubouri emphasized “the importance of fully informing all school administrations and strictly adhering to this directive to ensure a safe and appropriate educational environment for students.” The move was met with cautious welcome from parents and educators, many of whom called for the decision to be institutionalized as a standing policy automatically activated during severe weather conditions. Educators and parents broadly agree that the crisis has exposed a deeper structural problem in the management of the school environment—namely, the prioritization of ceremonial

and symbolic activities over scientific, educational, and health considerations. Educational specialist Hashim Ali, a retired school principal, argued for the adoption of flexible policies that place students’ health at the center of decision-making and grant school administrations wider discretion to respond to weather conditions without administrative or symbolic pressure. He stressed that education itself must remain the core priority of school planning. Ali also pointed out that Iraqi schools in general suffer from a widespread lack of suitable environmental conditions, particularly with regard to heating and cooling systems,

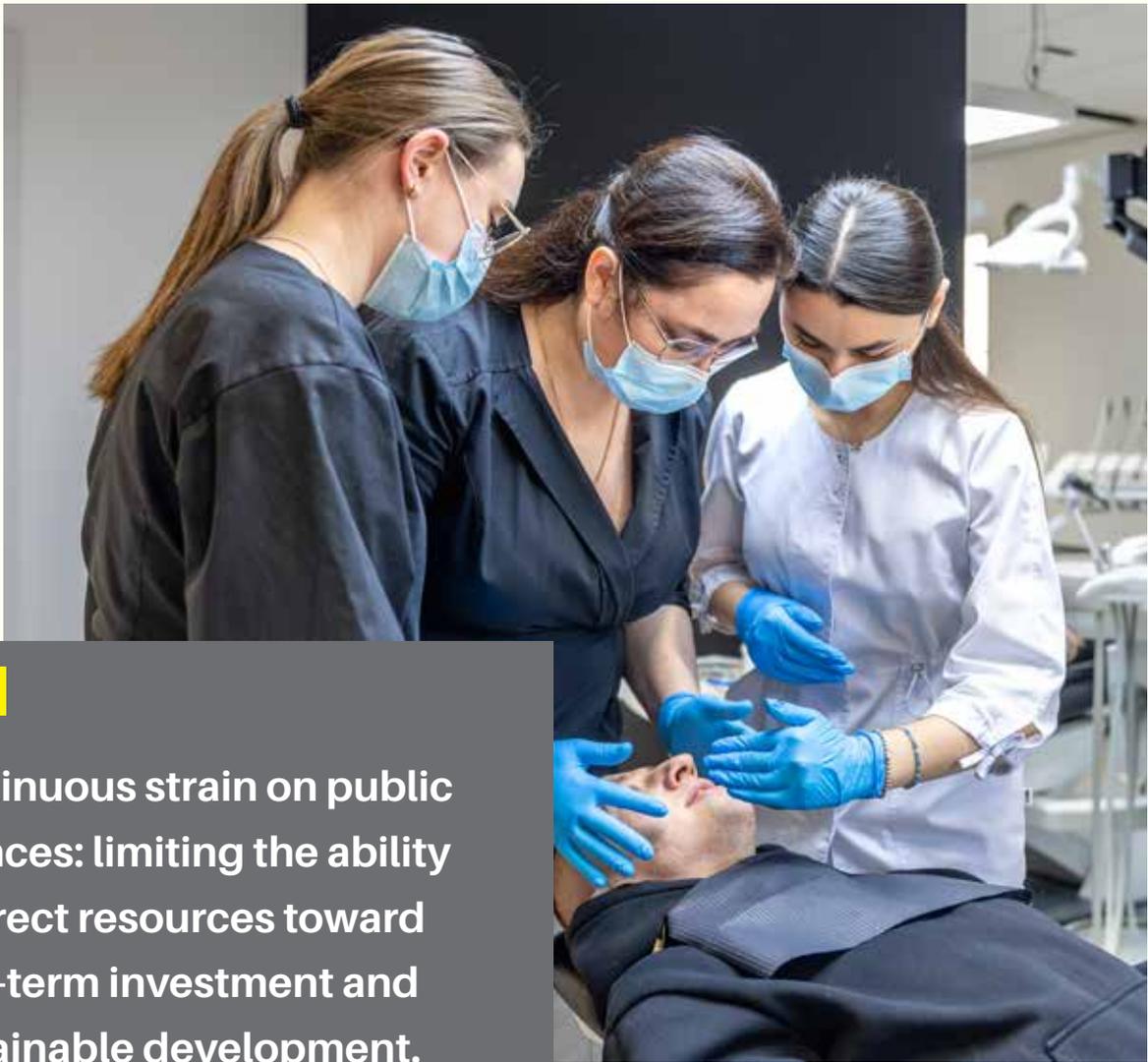
in addition to numerous other deficiencies related to educational needs and priorities. These shortcomings, he warned, compound the risks faced by students during extreme weather and highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reform in how school environments are managed. As winter conditions persist, the debate continues over how to balance symbolic school activities with the fundamental responsibility of safeguarding students’ health—an issue that many see as a test of the education system’s ability to place children’s well-being above all other considerations.

23,000

UNEMPLOYED DENTISTS IN IRAQ



The dental sector in Iraq is facing a deepening crisis, with approximately 23,000 dentists remaining unemployed since 2023. This comes as dental colleges at both public and private universities continue to admit thousands of students annually, raising serious questions about educational planning and human resources policies within the healthcare sector.



Continuous strain on public finances: limiting the ability to direct resources toward long-term investment and sustainable development.



On Monday, hundreds of unemployed dentists staged a protest in front of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance building in Baghdad, demanding employment and a clear timetable for appointing current and future graduating cohorts.

Academic data indicate that the crisis is largely the result of uncontrolled expansion in student admissions at private colleges, particularly given the sharp drop in minimum entry requirements to as low

as 79%, compared with public universities that require grades of up to 99% for the same specialization.

In recent years, this disparity—according to specialists—has led to the graduation of thousands of dentists annually, far exceeding the capacity of government institutions to absorb them, especially after the previous practice of automatic employment for graduates was discontinued.

In this context, the President

of the Iraqi Dentists Syndicate, Arkan Al-Azzawi, warned of the continuation of what he described as a “glaring contradiction in planning.” He stated that “admissions are still ongoing in both public and private colleges, while we now have 23,000 dentists without employment since 2023.”

He added that the syndicate “organized today’s protests to demand a solution to the crisis and the establishment of a clear timeline for



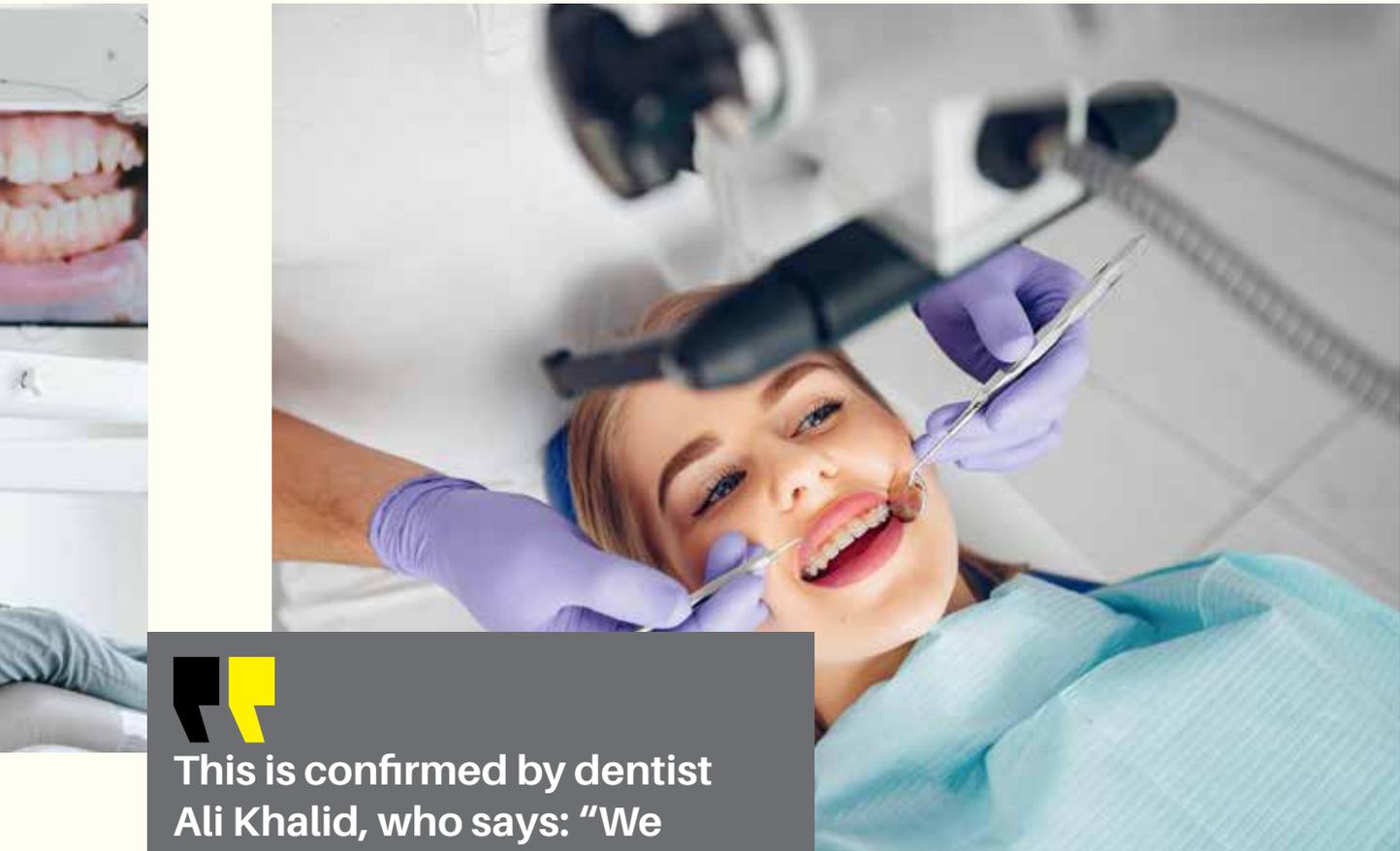
appointing upcoming graduating classes.” In an official statement, Al-Azzawi stressed the “need to raise the minimum admission score in private colleges to 95% for dentistry programs, in order to curb random admissions, ensure educational quality, and prevent the further escalation of unemployment among future graduates.” The Iraqi Dentists

Syndicate had previously warned of a sharp rise in student intake numbers, noting that admissions in the 2023-2024 academic year jumped from around 1,600 students to more than 6,500—far exceeding the actual needs of the labor market. According to syndicate data, the number of registered dentists in Iraq currently stands at approximately 29,000, more than three times the global standard ratio of one dentist per 700 citizens. This oversupply has negatively

He stated that “admissions are still ongoing in both public and private colleges, while we now have 23,000 dentists without employment since 2023.”

affected the quality of training and clinical education. Academics in Iraqi dental colleges, including professors at public universities, confirm that the capacity of teaching hospitals does not match the growing number of students. In this regard, lecturer and physician Majid Al-Obaidi warns that “random admissions in private colleges and the pursuit of profit have weakened graduates’ practical experience and affected the quality of healthcare services.” He explains that “the quality of

education has become one of the lowest priorities for private universities,” stressing that “it is dangerous for the current situation—marked by declining admission requirements—to continue, especially with the support of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and influential parties that benefit from private colleges. This has produced thousands of unemployed graduates.” Al-Obaidi therefore emphasizes the necessity of “imposing strict regulations on these



This is confirmed by dentist Ali Khalid, who says: “We are victims of the outcomes of private colleges. We have become unemployed due to poor planning and mismanagement.”



universities.”

Meanwhile, unemployed dentists including graduates of public universities-complain about the suspension of the mandatory service period stipulated by Iraqi law, which requires three years of service in state institutions before dentists are permitted to work in the private sector.

This is confirmed by dentist Ali Khalid, who says: “We are victims of the outcomes of private colleges. We have become unemployed due to poor planning and

mismanagement.”

Estimates from the Ministry of Planning indicate that Iraq needs only about 700 dentists annually-a figure vastly disproportionate to the actual number of graduates. This has raised serious concerns about an oversaturated private labor market and rising unemployment rates among young graduates of medical specialties.

Amid these developments, calls are growing from specialists and academics for a comprehensive review

of admission policies, linking them to actual market needs and the absorptive capacities of educational institutions. Such measures, they argue, would ensure academic rigor, protect the future of the dental profession in Iraq, and spare the country escalating social and economic costs resulting from poor planning-at a time when the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has refrained from responding to these demands.



The figures on desertification contained in Iraqi institutional reports are no longer merely technical indicators; they have become a tangible reality affecting vast areas of Iraqi land. In a recently issued report, the Central Statistical Organization of Iraq's Ministry of Planning revealed that areas threatened by desertification have reached 96.5 million dunams (one dunam equals 2,500 square meters), while the total area already affected by desertification has risen to 40.4 million dunams-reflecting a significant increase compared to 2021.

DESERTIFICATION THREATENS

96

MILLION DUNAMS

**OF AGRICULTURAL
LAND IN IRAQ**



Land irrigated by rivers alone declined to approximately 1.5 million dunams, a direct indicator of the worsening water crisis.



At the same time, the report noted that the total cultivated area in Iraq in 2024 amounted to only 11.9 million dunams, distributed across rain-fed (dry farming) land, irrigated land, and areas dependent on river water.

Land irrigated by rivers alone declined to approximately 1.5 million dunams, a direct indicator of the worsening water crisis.

These figures are the result of an accumulation of regional and domestic water policies, accelerating climate change, and unsustainable agricultural practices that have, over time, led to widespread

soil salinization and degradation.

Agricultural expert Shaker Al-Dulaimi points to the need to examine a set of interrelated factors driving desertification. Foremost among them are the water policies of upstream countries. Iraq relies almost entirely on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which originate in Turkey, in addition to several smaller rivers flowing from Iran. The construction of major dams and changes in water release policies in both neighboring countries have significantly reduced the volume of water reaching Iraq.

Al-Dulaimi adds that the second major factor is climate change. Iraq is considered one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, having experienced a marked rise in temperatures, declining rainfall rates, and increasingly frequent droughts. The third factor, according to Al-Dulaimi, is the deterioration of domestic water resource management.

He explains that the use of modern irrigation technologies remains limited. The fourth factor is soil salinization and groundwater depletion



resulting from expanded reliance on wells. In a related context, sustainable agriculture specialist and agricultural engineer Saleh Mahdi says that "Iraqi agriculture is facing its worst crisis in decades," explaining that "what we are witnessing today is not seasonal fluctuation, but a systematic erosion of the foundations of agricultural production." Mahdi adds that "the shift from river irrigation to reliance on groundwater comes at an environmental cost. Declining groundwater levels increase salinity and reduce soil fertility. This explains why farmers are turning to lower-value crops or abandoning

agriculture altogether." The agricultural expert provides comparative figures, noting that land previously dependent on river water has declined by up to 60 percent in some government statistics. In several provinces, irrigated land once ranged between 4 and 6 million dunams, but has now shrunk to less than half during multiple growing seasons. Mahdi laments that Iraq "has lost much by failing to keep pace with technological advancements in agriculture and irrigation." Environmental expert Ahmed Hassan explains that the decline in vegetation cover is a



Environmental expert Ahmed Hassan explains that the decline in vegetation cover is a major driver of dust storms that suffocate cities and adversely affect public health.

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He says: "Every time we lose native vegetation, Iraqi soil becomes more exposed to wind and surface erosion, and we lose ecosystem services such as carbon absorption, local climate moderation, and moisture retention."

Hassan elaborates on the impacts of drought, noting that they include "the loss of plant biomass, increased depletion of organic matter, and reduced soil capacity to retain water, leading to structural degradation of the soil and increased vulnerability to wind

penetration."

For his part, environmental researcher Hussein Al-Nadawi outlines the risks desertification poses to aquatic life in Iraq. He observes that declining river flows and rising salinity have led to reduced fish biodiversity, increased migration, and higher mortality rates.

Al-Nadawi points out that the "food chain" has been severely damaged and faces even greater threats as drought expands.

Drawing on field visits to villages in central and southern provinces, Al-Nadawi also documents growing internal migration, noting that "many families

no longer see any value in remaining on the land."

He explains that this social transformation has immediate consequences, including "declining production of local grains and vegetables, the collapse of local supply chains, and increased pressure on cities due to waves of rural displacement."

LEBANON AND ISRAEL'S NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 'MECHANISM' ... WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



Dr. Nassif Hitti

Lebanese Ambassador and
official spokesperson for
the League of Arab States



Much has been said about the appointment of a civilian (former ambassador Simon Karam) to head of the Lebanese delegation to the Mechanism- the body established to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire reached on November 26 last year between Lebanon and Israel. Some of the explanations of this move and its messages were entirely detached from reality: supporters and allies of Hezbollah considered the appointment a step towards gradual normalization with Israel or a sign of moving toward political negotiations with the Israeli enemy.



Others, however, believe that this appointment may signal stronger or more serious engagement in this process. Appointing a civilian figure does not, neither in principle nor in practice, imply normalization. The goals of the negotiations, its frame of reference and the course it takes, answer this question.

The Lebanese position is clear: no peace talks with Israel and no direct negotiations outside the framework of the Mechanism.

Israel has not fully respected the agreement/declaration: it was supposed to withdraw from the South to the Blue Line within sixty days (point 12

of the declaration), which of course did not happen.

It did not release the prisoners either; on the contrary, Israel's war intensified in ferocity and scale. Israel also occupied five hills for what it calls "security sovereignty." This concept likewise applies to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and southern Syria, southern Lebanon, and, more recently, the Beqaa.

Appointing a civilian does not change the nature or goal of indirect "technical" negotiations within the framework of the Mechanism on the implementation of the ceasefire, which Israel has not respected in practice.

The inclusion of civilian

negotiators is entirely normal in technical negotiations given the issues being discussed. It is also important to recall that the current format of these negotiations fall under an international/UN committee (the United States, France, and the UN peacekeeping forces in the South). It should likewise be recalled that the goal of the negotiations is Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the release of prisoners, and the establishment of a viable security arrangement that consolidates stability, security, and safety along the border. In this context, and with the mandate of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon ending in late 2026, an alternative international/UN framework for monitoring this



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process and reinforcing stability must be found.

The official Lebanese position in this regard is clear: Lebanon wants to revive the 1949 Armistice Agreement, with the possibility of reinforcing this agreement that Israel, in various ways, refuses to re-enter: deploying UN monitors on both sides of the line in a balanced manner.

As for talk of indirect- or “soft,” as some call it- normalization, the Lebanese position is clear: Lebanon remains committed to the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut, which seeks a comprehensive, just, and durable peace grounded entirely in United Nations Resolutions.

Today, because of Israel’s policies, we are extremely far from

achieving its goals. Accordingly, safeguarding security and stability along the southern border is necessary, as is preventing Lebanon from becoming a playground for regional conflicts or for intermittent, open-ended proxy wars employed in the “Great Game” of the region.

Today, Lebanon must intensify its engagement with both the international community and the Arab states. Both official diplomacy and public diplomacy (efforts to influence opinion-makers and decision-makers in the capitals that matter), in order to support the Lebanese position outlined above.

We must warn (and there are many lessons to this effect from both the recent and distant past are) that the game of buying time through tenuous arrangements and makeshift settlements, which





some may be pursuing, would destroy Lebanon over time. It is a game that will lead only to further complications and difficulties at a moment when the Middle Eastern is undergoing grave and fundamental changes. For this reason, supporting the official Lebanese position, and ensuring genuine adherence to this position by all Lebanese components, remains more than necessary if Lebanon is to reinforce its state.



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WINTER STORMS

WORSEN GAZA

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

AS UN SAYS AID STILL BLOCKED



Caolán Magee

Caolán Magee is an Irish journalist based in London

Winter storms are worsening conditions for hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians in Gaza, as aid agencies warn that Israeli restrictions are preventing lifesaving shelter assistance from reaching people across the besieged enclave.

The United Nations has said it has tents, blankets and other essential supplies ready to enter Gaza, but that Israeli authorities continue to block or restrict access through border crossings.

In Gaza City's Shati refugee camp, the roof of a war-damaged family home collapsed during the storm, rescue workers said on Wednesday. Six Palestinians, including two children, were pulled alive from the rubble.

It comes after Gaza's Ministry of Health said a two-week-old Palestinian infant froze to death, highlighting the risks faced by young and elderly people living in inadequate shelters.



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A spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the storms had damaged or destroyed shelters and personal belongings across the territory. "The disruption has affected approximately 30,000 children across Gaza. Urgent repairs are needed to ensure these activities can resume without delay," Farhan Haq said. The Palestinian Civil Defence in Gaza added in a statement that "what we are experiencing now in the Gaza Strip is a true humanitarian catastrophe". Ceasefire talks and aid access The worsening humanitarian situation comes as Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman

bin Jassim Al Thani held talks in Washington, DC, with United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio on efforts to stabilise the tenuous ceasefire in Gaza. According to Qatari officials, the talks focused on Qatar's role as a mediator, the urgent need for aid to enter Gaza, and moving negotiations towards the second stage of a US-backed plan to end Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. "He said aid has to be taken into Gaza unconditionally, clearly making reference to the fact that a number of aid agencies have said that Israel is blocking the access to aid for millions of people in Gaza," Fisher said. The Qatari prime minister also discussed the possibility of an international stabilisation force

to be deployed in Gaza after the war, saying such a force should act impartially. "There has been a lot of talk in the US over the past couple of weeks about how this force would work towards the disarmament of Hamas," Fisher said. Sheikh Mohammed also called for swift progress towards the second phase of the ceasefire agreement. "He said that stage two of the ceasefire deal has to be moved to pretty quickly," Fisher said, adding that US officials were hoping to announce early in the new year which countries would contribute troops to a stabilisation force. The Israeli army said it is investigating after a mortar shell fired near Gaza's so-called yellow line "missed its target".

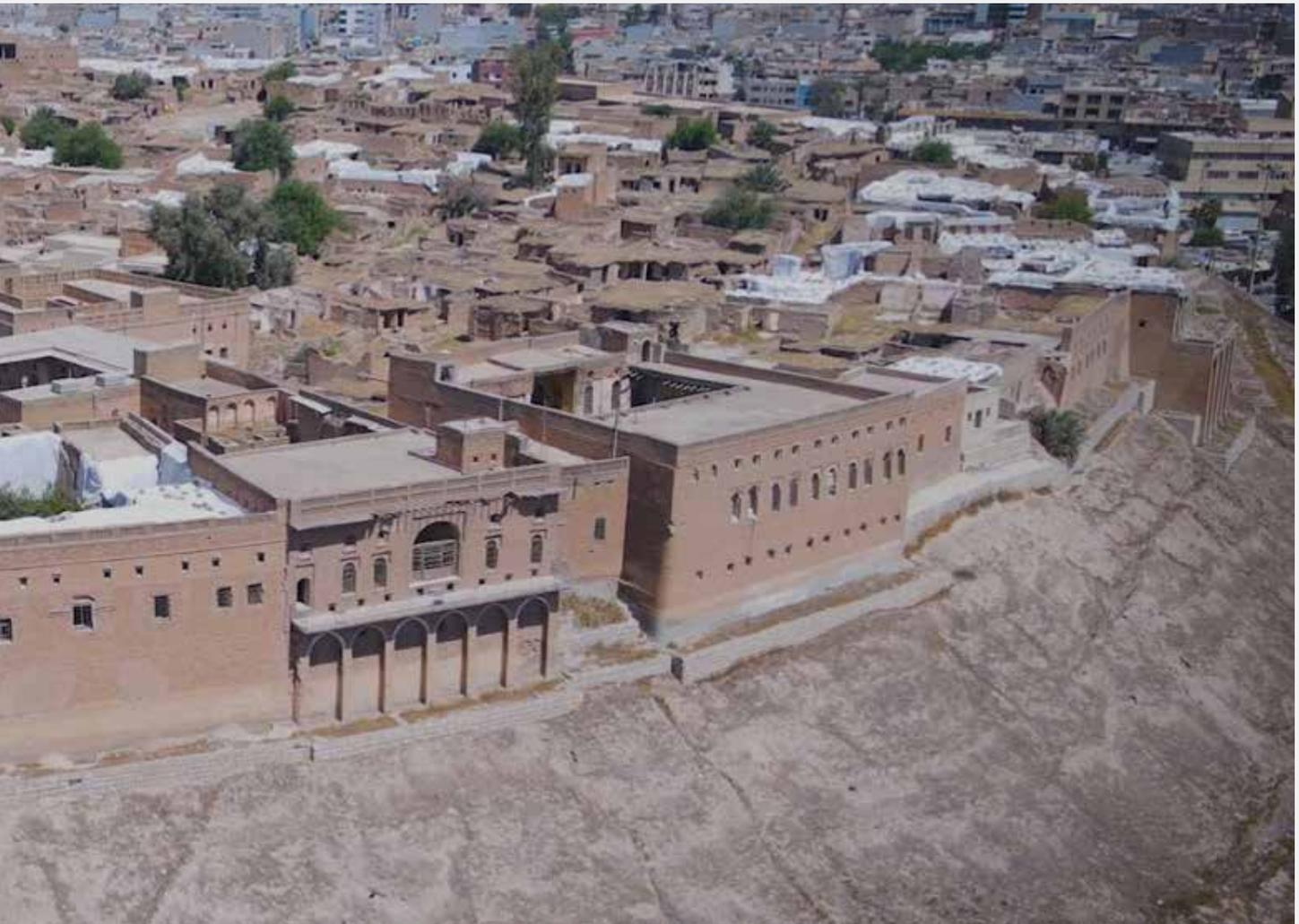


ERBIL CITADEL A SYMBOL OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN THE FUTURE



Dr. Aras Ismail
ACADEMIC

Implementation of the Proposed Project Plan Protecting the Integrity of the Citadel, Erbil, The conservation and restoration plan for the Jamil Effendi House is aimed at preserving its historical and cultural importance while restoring its architectural splendor. This process ensures that every detail, from structural integrity to artistic features, is maintained in its original form, allowing the Erbil Citadel to remain a living heritage site.



Architectural conservation efforts are carried out in collaboration with heritage conservation experts, and traditional restoration techniques compatible with the original structure are used to repair and restore the damaged parts. Skilled craftsmen will be involved in the careful restoration of the décor and decorations, ensuring that all repairs are historically accurate and consistent with the original design of Erbil Castle. Special attention is given to the stability of the structure, using materials similar to those

originally used to preserve the true character of the building. In addition, the involvement of local and international cultural heritage organizations plays a key role in the budgeting, supervision, and guidance of the project. In partnership with institutions dedicated to historic and heritage conservation, it ensures that the restoration process follows the most appropriate international standards, including full compliance with UNESCO's relevant principles and regulations. These partnerships also provide opportunities for information exchange, research and development initiatives for

heritage tourism, and ensure that the restoration contributes to cultural sustainability and economic growth.

It is important to note ten key points related to conservation and restoration, which are nationally recognized to ensure that proposed plans for registered historic properties, especially those supported by the Historic Preservation Fund, align with the principles of conservation. These standards can be applied to both the exterior and interior treatment of buildings. These points have been highlighted by the National Park Service, which Strategic Investment in Dams and Water Security

Standards for Preservation

A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in

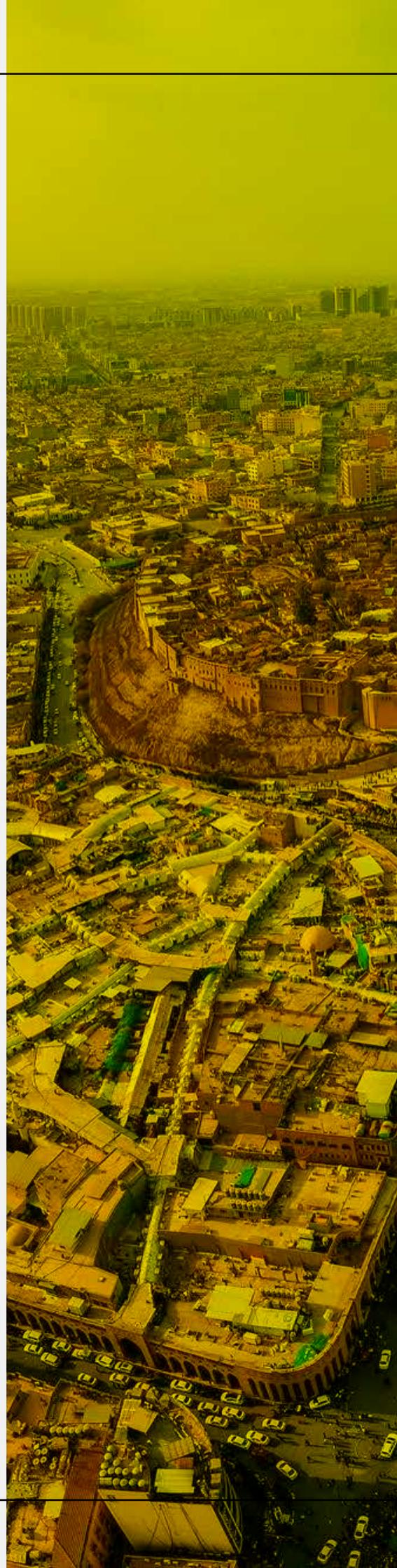
design, colour, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



In addition, the standards highlight the importance of flexible conservation methods, careful treatment of archaeological remains, and the considerate incorporation of new architecture.

Additions and modifications should be both diverse and appropriate, ensuring that historical elements remain central. By following these guidelines, restoration projects can effectively balance preservation with their purpose, enabling historic buildings to meet modern needs while safeguarding their heritage for future generations.

The physical transformation approach to designing small hotels, especially in the context of renovating and repurposing buildings, emphasizes following architectural and interior design standards to ensure efficiency, appeal, aesthetics, and an overall positive guest experience. This approach implies that a small hotel should have four main distinct areas: guest rooms, public spaces, administrative offices, and other facilities. Each of these areas plays a crucial role in the hotel's overall operation, affecting both the guest experience and the efficiency of hotel management.



KURDISTAN

THE EMERGING

GREEN BEACON OF

THE MIDDLE EAST



Farhad Al-Kake
MANAGING EDITOR

At a moment when the Middle East is confronting intensifying environmental degradation alongside persistent political and social instability, Kurdistan is increasingly distinguished as a compelling model for an alternative future—one grounded in harmony between humanity and nature and anchored in peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity. A convergence of environmental, social, and developmental indicators suggests that Kurdistan is on a trajectory that may soon position it among the most environmentally resilient regions in the Middle East, and potentially as the region's next "green zone."



Water security constitutes the cornerstone of sustainable development and societal stability. In a region marked by chronic water scarcity and escalating disputes over transboundary rivers, Kurdistan demonstrated early awareness of the strategic importance of effective water resource management. Over recent years, the region has placed increasing emphasis on dam construction and the regulation of rivers and springs, aiming to secure drinking water supplies, support agricultural productivity, and mitigate the risks associated with floods

and prolonged droughts. These investments transcend conventional infrastructure development. Rather, they reflect a long-term strategic vision oriented towards sustainability. By enabling water storage during periods of surplus and controlled distribution during scarcity, dams enhance resilience against climate variability. Moreover, they facilitate the generation of clean hydroelectric power, reducing reliance on environmentally harmful energy sources. This forward-looking approach distinguishes Kurdistan from many parts of the

Middle East that continue to depend on short-term and environmentally costly solutions.

Preserving Rivers and Mountain Ecosystems
Kurdistan's natural geography—defined by its majestic mountains, abundant rivers, and forested landscapes—constitutes one of its most valuable assets. These ecosystems function not only as natural reservoirs of biodiversity but also as vital ecological buffers that sustain air quality and climatic balance. Recognizing this, there has

been growing momentum toward safeguarding these resources from pollution, overexploitation, and unregulated urban expansion. Efforts to protect river systems from waste dumping and industrial discharge are fundamental to improving environmental health, conserving biodiversity, and ensuring public well-being. Furthermore, Kurdistan's mountainous terrain, when sustainably managed, holds significant potential for ecotourism. Such an approach can generate employment opportunities, stimulate local economies, and reinforce the foundations of a green and inclusive development model.

Addressing Pollution and Enhancing Quality of Life
Environmental pollution represents one of the most pressing challenges of contemporary societies, and Kurdistan is not immune to its effects. Nonetheless, the region is marked by a growing public consciousness regarding the necessity of reducing pollution across its various forms—air pollution from transportation and generators, water contamination, and the accumulation of solid waste. In recent years, public discourse and policy discussions have increasingly emphasized the adoption of renewable energy sources, the modernization of waste



management systems, large-scale afforestation initiatives, and the expansion of green urban spaces. While these efforts remain in need of further institutionalization and scaling, they signify a genuine commitment to enhancing quality of life and transforming Kurdish cities into healthier, more sustainable environments for residents and visitors alike.

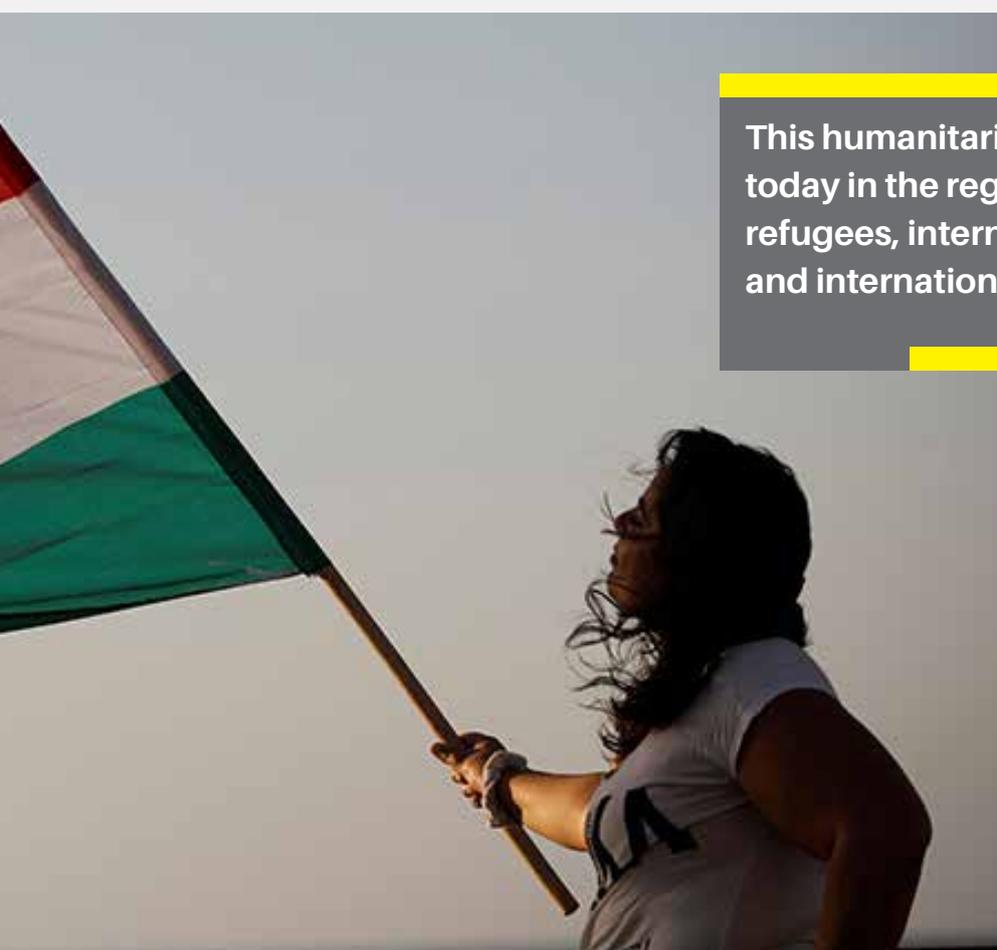
Diversity and the Foundations of Peaceful Coexistence
Any vision for environmental sustainability must be inseparable from social harmony and human dignity. Sustainable development thrives in societies characterized by peace,

inclusivity, and mutual respect. In this regard, Kurdistan occupies a distinctive position within the Middle East, having long served as a shared homeland for diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural communities.

Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Kakais, and others have historically lived side by side in Kurdistan, alongside multiple ethnic groups united by a shared sense of humanity rather than division. This diversity has never constituted a liability; on the contrary, it has enriched the region's cultural fabric and contributed to the emergence of an open, tolerant, and resilient society.

Hospitality and Openness: A Living Historical Legacy

This humanitarian ethos remains evident today in the region's treatment of refugees, internally displaced people, and international visitors.



One of the most enduring characteristics of Kurdish society is its deeply rooted tradition of hospitality and respect for strangers and foreigners. Throughout history, Kurdistan has functioned as a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution and a crossroads for travelers, merchants, intellectuals, and displaced populations.

This humanitarian ethos remains evident today in the region's treatment of refugees, internally displaced people, and international visitors. Such openness enhances Kurdistan's appeal as a destination for tourism, investment, and cultural exchange, reinforcing its image as a secure, welcoming,

and globally engaged region. Toward a Sustainable Green Future

When environmental stewardship, water governance, pollution mitigation, and peaceful coexistence are viewed collectively, it becomes evident that Kurdistan possesses the essential foundations to emerge as a leading green region in the Middle East. A clean and resilient environment cannot be sustained without a tolerant and cohesive society, just as economic growth cannot flourish in the absence of social stability and respect for diversity.

The principal challenge lies in maintaining momentum—

transforming visionary plans into durable policies and ensuring the active participation of civil society, academic institutions, and media outlets in promoting environmental and cultural awareness. Regional and international cooperation will also be crucial in facilitating knowledge transfer, technological innovation, and investment in green initiatives. Kurdistan stands today at a critical historical juncture. It could harness its rich natural landscapes, diverse population, and profound cultural heritage to build a sustainable and stable future—or to forfeit this potential amid mounting regional and global pressures. Current trends, however, offer grounds for optimism. If Kurdistan continues along its present path, it is poised to become a model of environmental responsibility and human coexistence in the Middle East: a vibrant green region defined by life, peace, and diversity.



IRAQ AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT TO REFORM ITS ECONOMY AND REVIVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Iraq is currently experiencing a critical phase in its economic trajectory, where longstanding structural challenges intersect with emerging opportunities due to relative financial stability and rising foreign reserves. Despite these positive indicators, the Iraqi economy remains fragile, as it still heavily depends on oil, the state dominates most economic activities, and the private sector remains weak and largely oriented toward government employment.

Recent studies by Roaa Foundation for Documentation and Strategic Studies emphasize that Iraq is facing a pivotal moment: it must either invest in genuine structural reforms to rebuild the economy on productive and diversified foundations or continue relying on oil revenues and public spending, with all the associated risks for future stability and intergenerational development.

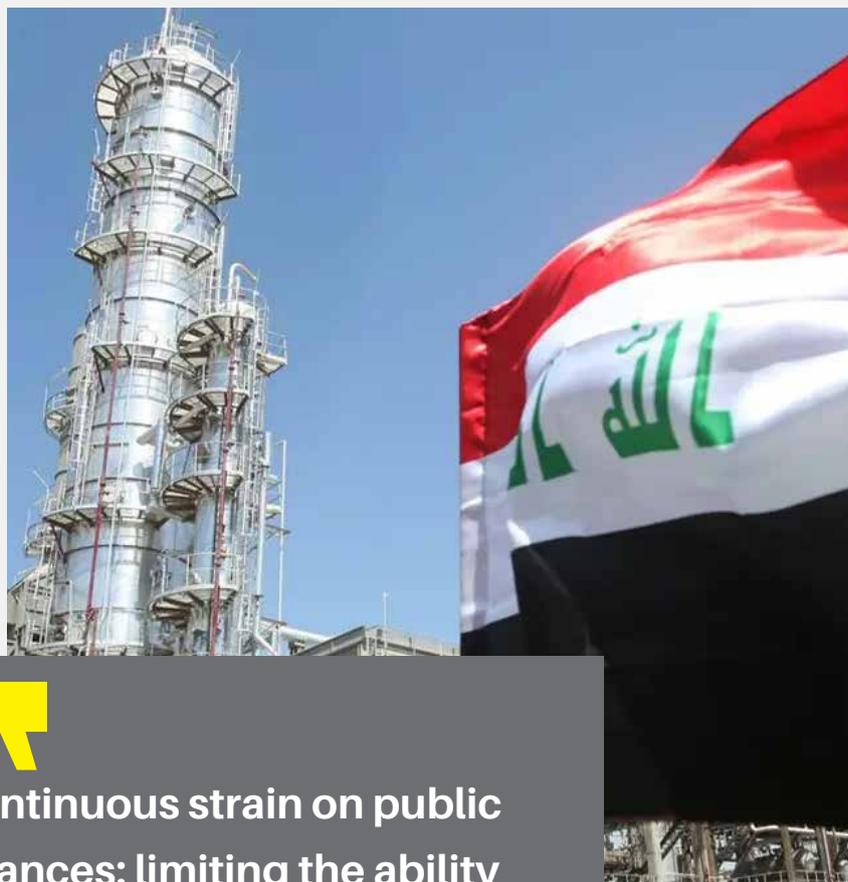


Weak economic and administrative institutions: reduces the state's capacity to manage resources efficiently and transform them into productive investments.



1. Diagnosing Economic Imbalances

Reports indicate that Iraq suffers from a clear paradox: possessing substantial financial resources while lacking the ability to convert them into real and sustainable development. This imbalance stems from several key factors: Overreliance on oil: makes the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and limits diversification of income sources.



Inflated role of the state: the government has become the largest employer and primary income source for citizens through salaries and subsidies, hindering private sector development. Weak economic and administrative institutions: reduces the state's capacity to manage resources efficiently and transform them into productive investments. Even the current relative financial stability conceals accumulated structural imbalances, which require precise diagnosis before any reform measures are implemented, according to the Roaa Foundation Center for Studies.

2. Effects of Previous Economic Policies

Successive governments have managed short-term

Continuous strain on public finances: limiting the ability to direct resources toward long-term investment and sustainable development.

stability through expanding public spending, benefiting from oil revenues and growing cash reserves. However, this approach has produced a fragile economy that relies more on oil shocks than on domestic production, with consequences such as: Inflated public budgets: not due to actual productive growth, but as a result of expanding operational expenditures, especially salaries and subsidies. State as the primary economic driver: leaving the private

sector marginalized and largely dependent on government employment opportunities. Continuous strain on public finances: limiting the ability to direct resources toward long-term investment and sustainable development.

3. Public Sector Reform and the Role of the State

To transform Iraq into a productive and sustainable economy, the role of the state must be redefined from direct operator to regulator and

enabler:

Reform the salary system and link wages to productivity: to reduce the financial burden on the state and incentivize efficiency.

Transform social support into economic empowerment programs: rather than universal subsidies, resources should target the most needy while promoting productive economic participation. Enhance governance and administration: improve state institutions for greater efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

4. The Private Sector: A Core Partner for Growth

Economic reform cannot succeed without a strong and active private sector: Provide a stable business environment that protects investors, reduces bureaucracy, and ensures fair competition. The private sector is not a replacement for the state but a key partner in development, generating jobs, diversifying income sources, and supporting sustainable growth. Supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurial initiatives will stimulate the economy and create real employment opportunities, moving beyond traditional public-sector jobs.



Reform social support systems: target subsidies to the most needy and link them to productive economic activities.



5. Structural Challenges in Key Sectors

Energy Sector

The energy sector is one of the most pressing structural challenges draining public finances and limiting growth: Massive electricity spending has not ensured stability, due to management, governance, and revenue collection issues. Continued flaring of associated gas represents a glaring mismanagement of

resources, costing Iraq billions annually that could otherwise be converted into energy, revenue, and jobs.

Comprehensive restructuring is required, as partial or temporary solutions will not achieve sustainable improvement.

Banking and Finance

Banking reform is essential to direct financing toward investment and production, rather than merely circulating

liquidity.

Limited funding for innovative projects restricts the private sector's role and growth potential.

6. Strengths and Opportunities

Despite the challenges, Iraq possesses notable strengths that can be leveraged: Relative monetary stability and rising foreign reserves. Low inflation rates. These indicators will remain limited in impact unless translated into real growth in the productive economy through structural reform.

7. The Required Reform Path

Diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil: invest in productive sectors and digital services.

Empower the private sector: encourage domestic and foreign investments and expand the production base. Reform social support systems: target subsidies to the most needy and link them to productive economic activities.

Enhance education and vocational training: align skills development with labor market demands and the digital economy.

Improve resource management: reduce financial



Develop the banking sector: provide financing for innovative and productive projects, making banks engines for growth.



waste in critical sectors like energy and electricity.

Develop the banking sector: provide financing for innovative and productive projects, making banks engines for growth.

The Roaa Foundation report emphasizes that Iraq stands at a pivotal moment:

Either invest current financial stability to implement genuine structural reforms that rebuild the economy on productive and diversified foundations.

Or continue relying on

oil revenues and public spending, with the associated future risks that threaten national stability and generational development. Economic reform in Iraq is not merely a political choice but a strategic necessity to ensure stability, foster development, and secure a better future for youth and the national economy as a whole.



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