

العلاقات الثنائية بين العراق وتركيا بعد عام 2003

Bilateral relations between Iraq and Türkiye post 2003

الاختصاص الدقيق: العلاقات الدولية

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ملخص البحث

العلاقات الثنائية بين العراق وتركيا علاقات تاريخية مبنية على مصالح مشتركة بين البلدين إذ تحسنت العلاقات بصورة كبيرة ما بعد ٢٠٠٣ خاصة بعد إبرام البلدين العديد من مذكرات التفاهم والتي تضم بشكل رئيسي المجال الاقتصادي حيث تصدر تركيا مختلف بضائعها إلى العراق في المقابل يقوم العراق بتصدير نفطه إلى تركيا، اما في ما يخص القضية المائية إذ إبرم البلدان اتفاق لحل أزمة المياه التي تواجه العراق منذ عقود، كذلك ابرما في المجال الأمني للقضاء على الإرهاب الذي يهدد امن البلدين، بالإضافة إلى مذكرات التفاهم في مجال الهجرة والتعليم والصحة والثقافة وغيرها من القضايا.

Abstract

Bilateral relations between Iraq and Türkiye are historical relations based on common interests between the two countries. Relations improved significantly after 2003, especially after the two countries concluded many memoranda of understanding which mainly include the economic field, as Türkiye exports various goods to Iraq, in return Iraq exports its oil to Türkiye. As for the water issue the two countries concluded an agreement to solve the water crisis that Iraq has been facing for decades, as well as the security field to eliminate terrorism that threatens the security of the two countries, in addition to memoranda of understanding in the field of immigration, education, health, culture, and others.

Introduction

Since the declaration of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1925 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the independence of Iraq in 1932, relations between the two countries have been characterized by relative calm and stability, tempered by apprehension imposed by the reality of evolving political situations in each country and the interactions and changes in the regional and international environment. Although Iraq remained under Ottoman control for four centuries (1534-1920), and despite the dispute over the Mosul Vilayet after World War I (1914-1918), both matters were resolved with the Ottoman Empire's loss of the war and the division of its legacy from the countries it ruled by the Allied powers, with Iraq under the British Mandate in 1920. The status of the Vilayet was decided by the League of Nations in 1926, until its independence and its accession to the League in 1932. Although the Ottoman Empire accepted the *fait accompli* at the time, this did not diminish the interest of its heir, Türkiye, in political developments in Iraq in general, and specifically in the areas that comprised the "Mosul Vilayet," and particularly in relation to developments related to the Kurdish issue. This was in line with Türkiye's understanding of its national interests and security, which constituted and continues to be an important factor in the relationship between the two countries, alongside other factors related to water, energy, and the regional balance of power. All of these factors have become more important in the relationship between them, more clearly, since the war on Iraq in 1991 and the resulting decisions and policies against Iraq (the imposition of no-fly zones, the blockade, and the dismantling and limiting of its military and industrial capabilities), followed by the major changes that affected the state system, political system, and economic and social structures after the invasion and occupation in 2003.

Significance of the Research:

The importance of the research stems from its examination of a key dimension of the relationship with a neighboring country of Iraq, one that has played.

Significant role and impact:

The problem of the research lies in the fact that the political and security dimension has been and remains the most evident dimension in its reflection on the interactions between the two countries, particularly in relation to the

developments of the Kurdish issue and Türkiye's ongoing concerns about its developments in Iraq.

- Is it possible to build a security rapprochement between the two countries based on confronting challenging issues such as the party PKK or combating terrorism?
- Can this rapprochement pave the way for bilateral openness on other issues?

The Research Hypothesis:

We assume that relations between Iraq and Türkiye, although devoid of military confrontation since the establishment of the two countries in the aftermath of World War I, have not been devoid of tension and conflict within specific boundaries and areas. Each of them considered this a challenge to its interests and security, according to its own perceptions, and worked to deal with the other on this basis. This has become more evident after the fundamental changes Iraq has witnessed in various fields since 2003, particularly in the political and security fields.

The Methodological Framework of the Research:

We will attempt to trace and understand the relations between the two countries through the New Structural Realism approach, which includes various and intertwined dimensions of relations between countries and the conflicting interests it reflects and the changing balance of power imposed by Türkiye, especially in its relations with Iraq during this period due to the circumstances that Iraq went through, which limited its scope of action as a strong and influential actor. The historical approach will be employed to identify the facts that coincided with the establishment of relations between them and may have played a role in determining their nature, dimensions, and orientations. The descriptive approach: to describe and analyze these relations and to identify the variables that accompanied their development, especially during the period under study. To cover the subject, we will address it through the following topics:

I- The Roots of Iraqi Turkish Relations and Their Developments.

The concept of bilateral relations refers to overall interaction that can exist between two states. Although important aspects of these relations are of a diverse nature, including economic, cultural, and other factors, the political dimension is often noticeably and influentially present. These relations, like international relations and those embodied in international politics, are usually

political interactions that involve a pattern of Cooperation, competition, and conflict, or both, occur at varying degrees and levels at different times and under different circumstances between two or more states, resulting in a range of political influences on the behavior of the interacting parties and the regional and international political system. ⁽¹⁾ In reality, the second pattern is the most prevalent in relations between states, although its nature, scope, intensity, and circumstances vary due to differences in interests, goals, and balances of power. A cooperative relationship between two states may also entail an attempt by one or both of them to influence the policies of the other, with the aim of directing them in a direction that serves their interests, or restricting their policies when they have the influence to do so. The convergence of the interests of two states, or at least the absence of divergence, at a particular historical stage or under a particular circumstance, may also lead to their cooperation in multiple and diverse fields if both recognize the quality and extent of the benefits that such cooperation can generate at the time and in the future. ⁽²⁾ Returning to Iraqi-Turkish relations, we find that despite the cooperative relations between the two sides, which can be observed throughout their history at the political, commercial, and social levels, as well as in the fields of water and oil, they have not, in reality, been devoid of disagreement and competition, if not conflict within certain limits, as occurred against the backdrop of the imposition of "no-fly zones" in Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, and Türkiye's role in facilitating and maintaining them, and after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This is in addition to the chronic conflict over water, which is likely to escalate in the future considering climate change and the increasing need for water for human consumption and irrigation, in addition to the political use of this vital resource for the continuation of life. In any case, it can be said that the beginning of relations between the two sides was due to the dispute over what has been termed the "Mosul problem". What concerns us here is not to delve into the cause of the problem and the proposals of each side and the arguments and pretexts it presented to support his position, but rather the conflict between them, during the period between the "Mudros Agreement" for a ceasefire between Britain and Türkiye in 1918, after British forces entered Iraq and occupied the Mosul Vilayet two days after the agreement was signed, and the signing of the "Iraqi-British-Turkish Treaty of 1926," whose first article stipulated that the border line between Türkiye and Iraq was finally determined

by the line approved by the Council of the League of Nations at its session dated October 29, 1924 (the Brussels Line)⁽³⁾. Despite the opposition that the treaty met with among various Turkish circles, the statement of Ahmet Tevfik Okday Pasha, the Turkish Foreign Minister at the time, when he presented it to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, clarified Türkiye's official position, stating that Turkish policy, as the main power in the Near East, seeks to be an element of order and progress among civilized peoples. Türkiye agreed to the sacrifices in order to guarantee peace in the Near East, the independence and happiness of Iraq, and the establishment of normal relations with England.⁽⁴⁾

The importance of this statement, in our estimation, lies within the framework of accepting the solution to the "problem of Mosul" with Türkiye's recognition of the *fait accompli* and the transition of its relationship with its new neighbor, which until recently was under its control, to a new, different phase after defining and resolving the contentious issues in the dispute over the province, which relate to its geographical territory, the ethnic origins of its population and their population distribution, in addition to the issue of oil there, drawing the boundaries of the new relationship between them. It can be said that both the Turkish and Iraqi sides acted according to a realistic policy to resolve this dispute. Türkiye acted realistically considering its awareness of its new reality and the changes imposed by the international situation at that time. This facilitated its transcendence of the nature of its previous relationship with Iraq and the move towards a new relationship with it within a framework of cooperation regardless of its nature and extent, which can be attributed to the internal circumstances of each of them and the external circumstances surrounding them. Meanwhile, Iraq, with its realistic policy at that time, was able to preserve a significant part of its territory Geographically, in exchange for specific oil concessions for both Türkiye and Britain, and relations that allowed him to devote himself to declaring his independent state without political problems with Britain, and a border dispute that could lead to political problems with his northern neighbor. This period witnessed the development of political, security, and economic relations between the two sides, especially after Iraq's independence and the two countries' entry into the "Saad a bad Pact" in 1937.

II- Relations Between the Two Countries in The Midst of the Cold War

With the outbreak of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, relations between Iraq and Türkiye witnessed a new phase, facilitated, if not imposed, by the changes in the international environment of the post-World War II world. The two countries found themselves within a new framework of relations in alliances established with Western encouragement and sponsorship, American and British, of a political-security nature, to contain the Soviet Union.⁽⁵⁾ It appears that this alliance policy was consistent with "one of the most important pillars of Turkish foreign policy during the early years of the Cold War regarding its Middle Eastern policy: working with the United States and NATO were keen to limit Soviet influence, which suggests that Türkiye's orientation toward the Middle East in general was a utilitarian one, consistent with its goal of becoming a full member of NATO."⁽⁶⁾ From this perspective, Türkiye's interest in the region in the 1950s and its departure from its previous foreign policy principles of non-interference in regional affairs and abandoning the policy of limited relations with neighboring Islamic countries came from this perspective. For the first time since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Türkiye departed from its one-dimensional foreign policy toward the West and emphasized Türkiye's importance in the East, which was consistent with the Democratic Party's orientations and foreign policy orientations, as expressed by the Turkish Prime Minister At that time, Adnan Menderes (1950-1960) said: "Türkiye's responsibility is to create a deep atmosphere of friendship and solidarity in its region." The Baghdad Pact of 1955 was a clear example of this policy,⁽⁷⁾ and one of its most prominent outcomes. Although logical thinking about international political variables assumes that it was in the interest of the transatlantic allies to use their NATO ally as their proxy in the Middle East, it appears that Türkiye was behind the push for bilateral agreements with the Kingdom of Iraq at that time. "The achievement of the first phase of the Northern Belt Policy was, to some extent, the result of the policy of Turkish Prime Minister Menderes, who persuaded Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said to sign an official statement announcing additional political and military cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq. Then, in close cooperation with Britain, negotiations were conducted with Iraq, resulting in the Baghdad Pact."⁽⁸⁾

The Development of Relations Under Successive Iraqi Governments and Their Aftermath

With Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact after the change of its regime in 1958, a page in relations between the two countries was turned and another page began, marked by tension due to the Turkish government's dissatisfaction with the change that had occurred to the point of expressing its intention to intervene militarily to suppress and abort it, had it not been for the opposition of the United States and Britain.⁽⁹⁾ Although the Turkish government recognized the new government on July 31 of the same year, it did not appear to be comfortable with it, so it did not take long to announce its recognition of the coup of February 8, 1963. Its relations with Iraq soon deteriorated due to the "April 17, 1963 Pact" concluded between Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, which it considered a threat to its interests.⁽¹⁰⁾ The years from 1965 to 1968 witnessed a degree of calm and stability between the two countries, especially after the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz to Türkiye in July 1966, in which he announced Iraq's support for Türkiye in the Cyprus issue in exchange for its support for the Palestinian cause. In the joint statement issued after the visit, Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel (1965-1971) expressed his government's sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian refugees.⁽¹¹⁾

With the change in the political regime in Iraq in July 1966, relations between the two countries strengthened. In 1972, the two countries signed a protocol for economic and technical cooperation, within the framework of which the issue of Iraq's water quotas was addressed in the context of filling the Turkish "Keban" reservoir and extending the oil pipeline from Kirkuk to the Turkish coast on the Mediterranean. Cooperation between them continued in various fields, despite some economic problems between them regarding the transit fees for Iraqi oil through Turkish territory and its suspension between 1977 and 1980, which also included the conclusion of a land transport agreement in 1980.

The 1980s witnessed an additional expansion and diversification of economic relations between the two countries due to the Iran-Iraq War and Iraq's need to diversify its import routes for the goods it needed and to establish a safe route for export, the two countries signed a cooperation and border security agreement in 1983, allowing each of them to militarily infiltrate the other's territory for a distance of (5-15 km) to pursue Kurds hostile to both

countries.⁽¹²⁾ The two countries also signed a "security protocol for the same purpose, and perhaps to renew the previous agreement, in October 1984, which paved the way for Turkish forces to enter Iraqi territory to pursue members of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).⁽¹³⁾ Since then, they have continued their military operations at various intervals. Iraq, however, did not benefit from either agreement to the same extent or to the same degree, due to its preoccupation with the war, perhaps, and with the developments that followed in the 1990s, following its invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and the US-led war against it on January 17, 1991, and subsequently the imposition of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq). These events continued in one form or another to some extent, and to a greater or lesser degree, the situation in Iraq, in particular, until its second invasion in 2003 and subsequent occupation by the United States, naturally cast a shadow over Türkiye's relationship with it throughout that period. It seems to us that Türkiye at that time understood the nature of the change in the international system after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the position the United States had assumed, and its monopoly over international politics and decision-making. It worked to utilize these changes in a manner that served its interests, according to its own understanding. President Halil Turgut Özal (1990-1991) supported the US-led coalition in the Iraq War of 1990-1991, seeing it as an opportunity for Türkiye to play a greater role in the region.⁽¹⁴⁾ From this perspective, Türkiye's behavior in sympathizing with and cooperating with the Iraqi Kurds outside the framework of its relationship with the Iraqi government, and facilitating the task of enforcing no-fly zones by using a base of Incirlik, can be understood . To appease the United States, and in the hope of containing the changes resulting from the war on Iraq, especially those related to the Kurds, the West's marked sympathy for them, and the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

In its quest for a role in the region, Türkiye once again abandoned the principles of its foreign policy established at the founding of its republic, adopting a policy of interference in Iraq's internal affairs. This was embodied in a series of military interventions in northern Iraq to pursue members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) without coordination with the Iraqi government, and to raise numerous problems and challenges for Iraq, exerting pressure on it by exploiting the water issue and claiming to protect the rights of the Turkmen. It also supported what was described as the "safe zone,"

maintained the so-called "Hammer Forces," and established relations with Kurdish leaders and politicians, exploiting the absence of central Iraqi authority and the imbalance with Iraq in its favor due to the war and Security Council resolutions.⁽¹⁵⁾ Activate Wind. Despite the fluctuations in trade exchange between the two countries and its relative increase after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Iraq and the United Nations "Oil for Food" in 1996,⁽¹⁶⁾ the value of trade exchange between them declined during the years 1999-2003 due to the blockade and sanctions imposed on Iraq and Türkiye's refusal to allow the flow of Iraqi oil through its territory due to American pressure⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Nature of Relations Between the Two Countries After the Invasion of Iraq

During the 2003 Iraq War, there appeared to be a shift in Türkiye's position from its 1991 stance. The government, headed by the Justice and Development Party, expressed its refusal to open its military bases to American forces or allow the United States to use them in its war against Iraq.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Turkish National Assembly voted "to reject the deployment of 62,000 American troops on Turkish soil on March 1, 2003, to open a northern front" for the Iraq War.⁽¹⁹⁾

In fact, the reason for this Turkish position is the disagreement with the United States over the status of Iraq after the war, as each has a different ultimate goal. The goal for the United States, expressed by Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at the time, was that Iraq represented a strategic opportunity for the United States, and his belief that it was possible to overthrow the regime in Iraq, and through Iraq, the regime in the entire Middle East, and replace it with another at a low cost.⁽²⁰⁾ Overall, the war on Iraq reflected a foreign policy approach that included ambitious goals seeking to influence the nature of countries and their internal situations. It represented an aspect of the imperialism of American foreign policy, a war that was essentially optional, not necessary, and for reasons unrelated to vital American national interests.⁽²¹⁾ This was reiterated by President Barack Obama when he spoke about the war he declared against the Islamic State, describing it as a necessary war. It was not a war of choice like the one waged by his predecessor, George W. Bush, against Iraq in 2003.⁽²²⁾ The issue of Iraqi oil was also present in the thinking of American decision-makers during that war.

Speaking at the Asian Security Summit in Singapore on May 31, 2003, Wolfowitz said, "Let's look at it simply. The most significant difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically, we had no choice in Iraq. The country is floating on a sea of oil."⁽²³⁾ Although Türkiye did not neglect to consider the issue of oil, especially the oil fields in Mosul and Kirkuk, at that critical stage of the invasion, it linked it to its security concerns and fear that the United States would abandon it the task of controlling those fields for the Kurdish armed factions was in the midst of their preoccupation with military tasks in the early stages of the invasion when the presence of forces was limited to these two regions, especially since the United States did not provide sufficient guarantees regarding the future of the Iraqi Kurds in terms of arming them at that stage of the war and their fate after it ended, in addition to the nature of the political system in Iraq following the war.⁽²⁴⁾ In other words, Türkiye was not at that stage willing to intervene in a war whose end was unknown to it and to be faced with situations similar to those that resulted from the Iraq War in 1991, so it continued to procrastinate in order to obtain a clear and specific agreement on all the details with the United States, relying in that on its assessment that war was not possible without opening a northern front across its territory.⁽²⁵⁾

It is clear from the course of events that Türkiye's estimates were not as it had hoped, as the United States relied on the southern front to invade Iraq, and was satisfied with asking Türkiye to open its airspace, and the latter agreed to the request was based on the fact that Türkiye had no other choice ⁽²⁶⁾, as the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in his speech to the Turkish people following his government's acceptance of the American request. Whatever the pretexts Türkiye presented to justify its position, they were largely driven by its security concerns, more than any other considerations, and not by its position on the invasion itself, whether in terms of its legality and legitimacy or the lack of a Security Council resolution authorizing military intervention, which was one of its arguments before the invasion.

From Türkiye's perspective, Iraq has become a long-term dilemma due to its dynamic internal developments and those in the region. These developments are difficult to imagine outside the context of the war on Iraq and its repercussions, and can be summarized as follows:

- 1- The changes that Iraq witnessed as a result of its invasion and occupation, and the resulting political and security instability, in particular, and social unrest due to the conflict between political forces, have prevented the rebuilding of the state and its institutions and the redefinition of public interests and national goals. In light of the federal government's inability to extend its authority over the entire country, especially in the border areas adjacent to Türkiye, the security dimension has once again cast a shadow over relations between the two countries, particularly after the increasing presence of Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) elements in these areas within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the increase in its activities against Türkiye. This challenge is likely viewed as a consequence, if not a result, of the nature of the federal political system adopted by Iraq after the change, which granted a wide margin of authority and freedom of movement within and outside the borders of the region, in an area that Türkiye considers vital to its security. This is in addition to its fear of the repercussions of this situation on the demands of the Kurds there and the political challenges and security risks it could pose for it in confronting them over time.
- 2- On the other hand, Iraq's weakness as a state has affected the balance of power in the region, placing Türkiye and other countries in a state of instability that requires a search for new balances to fill the vacuum of Iraqi power, protect their interests, and strengthen their position.

In Syria, developments since 2011 have led to the growth of Kurdish power there, and the possibility of their situation developing in the future, like what is happening in Iraq. This has increased Türkiye's concern about the expansion of security challenges on its southern and southeastern borders, especially since the sympathy of Iraqi Kurds for Syrian Kurds, if not cooperation with them and support for them to achieve their aspirations and those of Turkish Kurds, is highly likely. This is in addition to the position of The United States and the West in general are using this issue to pressure Türkiye on issues and matters that serve the interests of these powers.⁽²⁷⁾ On a related note, it is unlikely that Turkish policymakers have failed to take into account the size and nature of Iran's presence in Iraq, its growing influence there, and its impact on its policies and positions. Although Türkiye and Iran share a common vision and position on Kurdish separatist aspirations in Iraq

and within their respective states, this has not prevented the latter from remaining silent on the growing presence of Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) elements in northern Iraq, near the Turkish border and in the city of Sinjar, administratively part of Nineveh Governorate. Nor has it prevented Iraqi government circles and some party factions from raising the issue of the Turkish military presence in northern Iraq from time to time and objecting to Turkish military operations against the PKK. This is considered a chapter in the geopolitical competition between the two countries in Iraq.⁽²⁸⁾ This applies to the situation in some areas of Syria, and others in the regional environment, including Iran's project to create a land route starting from its border with the Iraqi province of Diyala and extending through Iraqi territory and from there to the border and through Syrian territory, reaching the Syrian port of Latakia on the Mediterranean, and from there to Lebanon. If Iran succeeds in securing this vital land corridor, it will provide it with important strategic advantages in terms of political influence and economic benefits in areas close to the Turkish border, within the framework of the two countries' competition for regional status and important economic gains and interests, especially since it passes through or near oil-rich areas in Iraq and Syria. These political and geopolitical variables, as well as other dynamics and challenges in the regional and international environment, must have been taken into consideration by Türkiye, to one degree or another, based on its awareness of the challenges to its interests and national security, in the context of the perceived disruption to the regional balance of power following the invasion of Iraq, its developments, and potential future outcomes. This shift in the balance of power has subsequently impacted on the nature of relations between the two countries. This shift in balance of power has thus significantly impacted Türkiye's ability to navigate within this framework, and its ability to shape and influence its policies has become more pronounced than Iraq's, whose policy toward Türkiye has become clearly limited to reactive actions.

III- The Development of Relations Between Iraq and Türkiye in Light of the Turkish Approach

Türkiye's security concerns, while an important aspect of its relations with Iraq, have not been limited to one aspect or area, and have always been addressed to address the challenges it faces due to Kurdish separatist aspirations in general and the PKK's operations that threaten its security. Relatively soon

after the changes that Iraq witnessed in 2003, economic considerations began to take a significant role in its relationship with Iraq, alongside the security dimension. This can be considered a smart and worthy approach, as the transfer of material goods is accompanied by the transfer of culture and moral values to the receiving society, all of which are important gateways to political influence. This policy appears to be based on the realization that Türkiye can achieve its goals throughout the region, and in Iraq, through economic relations based on the concept of a common security system, rather than military alliances that generate anxiety among surrounding countries. Türkiye can achieve significant gains in its regional influence by prioritizing harmonization between joint action within the framework of the European Security Cooperation of the Helsinki Conference and European economic cooperation, the concept of regional security cooperation, and the possibility of benefiting from the region's geo-economic resources.

This realization may be due to what Ahmet Davutoğlu stated earlier, before assuming the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that it is necessary here not to overlook the role of the advantages achieved by the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline. Therefore, the process of communication between the Arabian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean with Türkiye must be activated, and this goal must be made a strategic priority that must be achieved, as the biggest strategic mistake committed during the Cold War period was the failure to activate this pipeline. We must not forget that the Baghdad Vilayet... was the key to the influence of the Ottoman Empire in Asia, and the situation is no different now for Türkiye. Türkiye cannot remain indifferent to the areas open to the sea in this basin, and to the countries located to the north of the waterways represented by the Euphrates and Tigris and the areas of the Tigris and Euphrates basin.

This may explain why and how Türkiye pursued a multifaceted policy toward Iraq. Businesspeople and construction companies built informal relations between the two countries, while Ankara continued to keep official channels open. This approach paved the way for a further expansion of relations between them in the second half of the last decade.⁽²⁹⁾ In this regard, Mesut Ozcan, deputy head of the Center for Strategic Research, which operates under the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notes that Türkiye's greater reliance on diplomatic and economic relations began in 2004, and it expanded its dialogue

with leaders from various ethnic, religious, and group groups in Iraq. In other words, Türkiye began to perceive Iraq as a land of opportunity rather than a threat posed by the PKK.⁽³⁰⁾

Although this approach did not change Türkiye's view of the PKK threat emanating from Iraqi territory, and it remained a problem in its relationship with Iraq due to the repeated military operations it launched and continues to launch against its members within Iraqi borders, this did not prevent Türkiye from strengthening this approach. It sought to open to various Iraqi social groups within this framework, including the Kurds, despite its undeniable concern over the political and security gains they have achieved as well as the economic benefits and oil resources, under Iraq's federal system. This was clearly evident in its position on the referendum conducted by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Iraq in September 2017, which President Erdoğan described as an act of treason.⁽³¹⁾ He added, "All options are on the table, from economic measures to military actions on land and air... and Türkiye will not hesitate to use the means at its disposal if peace reaches a dead end."⁽³²⁾ In line with the same approach, Türkiye has worked to build good relations with the Iraqi government to address and confront issues and challenges of mutual concern, particularly those related to security. It can be said that, with this approach, Türkiye has not neglected its security concerns, but rather has employed economic factors to confront and contain the security risks and political challenges that have emerged after the change that occurred in Iraq which revolves primarily around the situation of the Kurds in the north and the southeast, and to some extent the situation of the Iraqi Turkmen, and the importance it attaches to the oil city of Kirkuk. Many Turks believe that the situation and future of Iraq in general, and the situation of the Kurds in particular, touches on the essence of Turkish security, as they pose a potential threat to the unity and integrity of Türkiye. Therefore, they are at the core of Türkiye's policies and security strategy,⁽³³⁾ and a factor whose impact on its relationship with Iraq or any of the surrounding countries inhabited by Kurds is difficult to ignore. Iraq realized this fact early on because it is a frequent problem among these countries, and none of them can ignore it in their relations, regardless of the state of those relations. Just as it constituted a factor and a motivation for rapprochement between them, at times, it has been a source of conflict between them, when it was or is being exploited and used by one

party against another. This is, of course, in addition to its exploitation by international powers and parties in their relations with these countries, as happened with Iraq in 1991 and as is happening now with international condemnations against Türkiye due to what these powers consider human rights violations and its current military operations against the Workers' Party (PKK) inside Iraq. When examining Iraq's relations with Türkiye over the past five years, we find that despite their commercial development, this did not prevent tensions in security and political matters, despite the agreements signed by the two countries, which focused significantly on security aspects. In August 2007, Iraq and Türkiye signed a memorandum of understanding in which the two sides agreed to work together to end terrorist operations in both countries. This agreement helped bolster Türkiye's position in its struggle against the PKK.⁽³⁴⁾ It allowed it to coordinate with the Iraqi government and US forces before attacking PKK positions on its border with Iraq. Thus, it strengthened its military actions with political understandings that avoided any problems in its relations with Iraq or regional countries, not to mention problems with some countries in the international community. This is what actually happened later. Turkish forces penetrated approximately (25) km and an area of more than (70) km inside Iraqi territory within the administrative borders of Dohuk Governorate,⁽³⁵⁾ in response to attacks by the PKK. Their operation did not receive strong reactions due to their informing the Iraqi government of their actions and informing other countries of their commitment to respecting Iraq's sovereignty.⁽³⁶⁾ When Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Iraq in July 2008, he signed the Joint Political Declaration of the Supreme Council for Cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye with former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The declaration stated: "The relationship between the Republic of Iraq and the Republic of Türkiye is characterized by social and historical ties and mutual good neighborly relations," and that the two countries share the same ideas on regional goals to promote peace, stability, freedom, and prosperity, and to develop a dialogue mechanism to increase economic cooperation and coordination.⁽³⁷⁾

Memorandum of Understanding of 2007 Between The Two Countries

The text of the joint declaration affirmed that the two parties reaffirm their commitment to the elements and principles of joint cooperation stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding. signed by the Prime Minister of Türkiye in

August 2007, the declaration also clarified that this council will meet at least once a year, co-chaired by the Prime Minister, and three times a year at the ministerial level, with high-level meetings held every three months in the capitals of the two countries. According to the text of the declaration, this strategic partnership in the political, security, economic, and cultural fields includes:⁽³⁸⁾

- 1- Supporting the Iraqi government's efforts in combating terrorism and preserving Iraq's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity against threats, and concluding bilateral agreements within a short and specific time frame to help establish stronger ties between the two countries.
- 2- Commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter in respecting internationally recognized borders and pledging the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.
- 3- Respect for Iraq's cultural, religious, and ethnic pluralism, while emphasizing respect for peaceful coexistence among all components and respect for Iraqi identity for the sake of Iraq's future.
- 4- Encouraging diplomatic, cultural, educational, and scientific exchange programs for government employees and students between the two countries and developing cooperation between institutions in the fields of higher education, technology, and technical knowledge.
- 5- Cooperation and coordination of the two countries' policies in international and regional forums, such as mutual support for nominations to international organizations, committees, and positions for both countries.
- 6- Concluding agreements for strategic economic cooperation and interaction between the two countries before the end of 2008, encouraging cooperation aimed at stimulating tourism, enhancing cooperation to develop trade relations, concluding a free trade agreement between them, and encouraging and working on joint programs to establish free trade and industrial zones to contribute to increasing employment and investment opportunities in Iraq.
- 7- On security, it was agreed to respect the territorial security of both countries, support their joint efforts to prevent the movement of terrorists from the banned Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and illegal weapons to and from Iraq, and emphasize the two sides emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between them to control their shared borders and prevent all forms of prohibited transportation, including financial, logistical, and all other forms

of support for terrorists and terrorist organizations, as well as rejecting the use of language that encourages violence and terrorism.

8. The two countries will complete the procedures for a counterterrorism agreement between them and develop trade relations and investments related to the defense industry.

9. Completion of the military framework agreement between the two countries' chiefs of staff, which stipulates support for ongoing cooperation between the deputy chiefs of staff of the Iraqi and Turkish armies in their efforts to complete a military cooperation agreement for the training and education of Iraqi officers. Although the agreement encompasses various areas of cooperation, the security concerns of both parties can be discerned in what was agreed upon, which is evident in Articles 1, 2, 3, and 4. However, it could have provided a solid foundation for more stable and developed relations had its procedures been completed and its provisions implemented comprehensively. (48) Memoranda of Understanding and agreements in various areas of cooperation were signed at the second meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation, held in Baghdad in October 2009. However, many of them were not implemented due to the ratification procedures in both countries.⁽³⁹⁾ This is despite the Iraqi Prime Minister's assertion that the signing of the agreement "is an indication of the strong political will of the two countries to develop strategic relations, which we hope will be exemplary relations between the countries of the region, and that the establishment of the Strategic Cooperation Council between Iraq and Türkiye requires greater communication and follow-up between the two countries."⁽⁴⁰⁾

However, it appears that there was not enough of such a will to stimulate communication and follow through on what was agreed upon to serve the interests of both countries. The dispute between the two sides was renewed during the battles to liberate Mosul from ISIS control, and Türkiye refused to withdraw its forces from the north, especially after ISIS seized vast areas of Nineveh Governorate and the western governorates, especially the base it had established in Bashiqa District, which is just under 100 kilometers from the Turkish border. This reflects its continued security concerns and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of ignoring them in light of the situation in Iraq and the region, particularly the developments in Syria, and within the framework of its fears of the growing US military presence in Iraqi Kurdistan and its support for

Iraqi and Syrian Kurds and their demands and aspirations. This support, even if it is within its current limits, constitutes a limit to its freedom of movement to contain its developments according to its understanding of its national security and interests. This is on the one hand, and on the other hand, due to its geopolitical rivalry with Iran,⁽⁴¹⁾ and in light of its silence on the presence of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

In the city of Sinjar, near its border, the fighting continues despite the end of the battles against terrorism (specifically, the Islamic State - ISIS). This is in addition to Iran's influence in some Iraqi governmental and party circles, and its role in pushing for the issue of Türkiye's military presence near Mosul and its military operations against the PKK inside Iraq.

The Basic Provisions of The 2017 Memorandum of Understanding Between the Two Countries

To contain the crisis that occurred at that time, the two countries held the third meeting of the Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation between them in Baghdad on January 7, 2017. The two sides, chaired by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Jawad al-Abadi and Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, discussed vital issues of interest to both countries, prospects for cooperation, and the possibility of developing political and economic relations that serve their interests. The statement of the meeting stated that the two sides agreed on the following:⁽⁴²⁾

- 1- The two parties affirmed their commitment to achieving mutual security and stability and combating terrorism together, within the framework of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, which constitutes the foundation of relations between the two countries.
- 2- The two parties affirmed that the Bashiqa camp is an Iraqi camp.
- 3- The Iraqi side affirmed its firm position on the Bashiqa camp and called on the Turkish side to begin steps to withdraw its forces and close this file. The Turkish side affirmed its commitment to the unity of Iraq and respect for its sovereignty.
- 4- The two sides emphasized the importance of raising the level of trade and economic cooperation between them, particularly in the field of reconstruction of areas affected by terrorism and activating the agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between the two parties.

- 5- The two sides agreed to increase cooperation in the management of the Tigris and Euphrates waters and joint water projects.
- 6- The two sides affirmed their rejection of the presence of any terrorist organizations on their territories and their rejection of any activity that threatens the national security of either country. They agreed to work together in the fight against terrorism and ISIS with the international coalition.
- 7- The two parties agreed to find common ground in identifying common interests and challenges with a strategic vision, working together to achieve regional security and stability, and eliminating all factors that could threaten the region's security and stability, including sectarian and ethnic polarization. This is in addition to agreeing to cooperate in the cultural, social, and tourism fields to strengthen ties between the two peoples. From this and that, it is understood that there is a degree of understanding and coordination between Iraq and Türkiye at official levels and in various fields, foremost among which is cooperation in security areas that concern each of them and pose a serious challenge to their national security, according to their perceptions. There is no doubt that what has been, and continues to be, most worrying to Türkiye is the evolving situation of the Kurds in Iraq in general, and the attacks launched against it by the PKK from Iraqi territory in the north. This has increased and developed since the invasion of Iraq due to developments in the political and security situation there, Türkiye's realization that it is unable to extend control over its borders with it under the current circumstances, and Türkiye's interaction with and competition with international and regional powers whose influence in Iraq remains significant. While all these factors are important to Turkish decision-makers, what provides them with the pretext to maintain their presence in northern Iraq are the PKK attacks launched from within Iraq and across its border with Türkiye. The agreement of the Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation and the security agreements between the two sides within its framework provide it with legal and political cover for its military operations against the PKK in the border strip with Iraq and within its territory, including, for example, the military operations launched by the Turkish government on June 15, 2020, which it named “Claw of the Tiger” to pursue its leaders and members. This operation caused tension in the

relationship between Iraq and Türkiye, especially after two Iraqi military officers were killed in a Turkish drone strike while they were meeting with members of the PKK after the latter prevented Iraqi border guards from setting up a checkpoint in the area.

In response to the incident, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador twice in a row and handed him two protest notes regarding the Turkish operations, which it considered an assault on Iraqi sovereignty. The ministry's spokesperson also stated that the ministry demanded that the Turkish government uncover the perpetrators of the hostile crimes and hold them accountable. The ministry also announced that it had "...taken a decision to cancel all scheduled visits by Turkish officials to Iraq, most notably the visit of the Turkish Minister of Defense."⁽⁴³⁾ The Turkish Foreign Ministry responded in a statement that it would continue its cross-border operations against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq if Baghdad continued to overlook their presence in the region, and urged the Iraqi authorities to cooperate with it in this regard.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This statement by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, in addition to its insistence on maintaining its military presence in northern Iraq, The military operations it launches from time to time reveal the extent of its anxiety and security concerns, which still constitute a very important factor in its relations with Iraq, if not the decisive factor, despite the significant development observed in its economic and trade relations with Iraq and even with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This is as Cengiz Aktar, a professor of political science at the University of Athens, stated in his comment on the secret visit of the head of Turkish intelligence, Hakan Fidan, to Baghdad and his meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi stated on June 12, 2020, that the issue of the Kurdish presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the attempt of Iraqi Kurds to manage their affairs away from the influence of the Baghdad government, preoccupies Türkiye and determines the future of the relationship between Baghdad and Ankara.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Aktar noted that Türkiye is no longer a player in Iraq and that its move is a reaction to what is happening there, especially with the decline in the influence of Iraqi blocs that receive its support. This is a reason that prompts the head of Turkish intelligence to communicate with his former counterpart... at least to confront Kurdish influence in northern Iraq (2). Aktar also linked Fidan's visit to Baghdad to the visit made by the Syrian Kurdish General Mazloum Mobaei, commander of the Syrian Democratic

Forces, to Iraq... after Ankara expressed its strong dissatisfaction with the Iraqi rapprochement with the Syrian Kurds.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In short, as long as these security concerns persist in Türkiye's awareness of its national security requirements, its relations with Iraq will remain vulnerable to tensions and crises that will inevitably impact other areas of bilateral relations, to one degree or another, and will hinder their stability and development in a way that serves their interests. They also determine the nature and scope of relations between them. As much as Türkiye is required to respect Iraq's sovereignty over its territory, Iraq must also, in return, work to translate this sovereignty into reality by working to extend state control over all its territories, starting from the center and ending with its international borders with Türkiye and others.

Conclusion

It is understood that stable relations between Iraq and Türkiye are important to both neighboring countries, each according to its own perception of its own interests and security. Although relations between them have never witnessed a military confrontation, they have not been without tension and conflict at various stages since the establishment of the two modern states in each country, for several reasons, beginning with territorial issues. The borders, after reaching an agreement on their resolution, were soon transformed into other issues related to purely security matters, and others that fall within the realm of achieving security in its comprehensive sense, such as energy and water security. However, the former remained a priority in Türkiye's relations with Iraq due to its concerns about developments in the Kurdish issue and the status of Kurds within it, especially after the changes that took place in 2003, particularly the form and nature of the federal political system it adopted. This was on the one hand, and on the other hand, due to the increasing presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the bordering areas and its increasing activities against them, and the declining ability of the Iraqi government to impose its full authority over those areas and limit its activities. As an approach to contain these developments, Türkiye has worked to establish multifaceted relations with Iraq, beyond the official governmental aspects. On the one hand, it has opened to the various social components of the Iraqi people, while on the other, it has employed economic factors in various fields to confront security

challenges. While Türkiye has achieved some notable success in this approach, it cannot be said that it has been able to eliminate the security challenges it faces, at least regarding PKK operations, which it feels are related to the evolving situation of the Kurds in general. This is evidenced by its repeated military operations against the PKK inside Iraqi territory and its position on the 2017 referendum in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. While the change in Iraq, with its political ramifications and internal security repercussions that have hindered its ability to control its borders, and the regional imbalance of power, are security issues that cast a shadow over Türkiye, the economic, trade, and oil opportunities it has provided with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) appear more like relationships imposed by security concerns and disputes than a viable strategy to resolve entrenched security issues in the long term. Therefore, Turkish foreign policy toward Iraq appears incoherent, with relations oscillating between economic and security tools and methods. Meanwhile, its political relations with Iraq have oscillated between appeasement and crisis, due to its military interventions, from the time it adopted this approach to the present. Nevertheless, the Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation between the two countries remains an important entry point for developing relations between them, provided they succeed in creating mechanisms that pave the way for diverse and balanced relations, rather than limiting them to security issues alone.

Therefore, we propose the following:

- Needing to work to improve the decision-making environment in Iraq, as it is not commensurate with the magnitude of the regional and international challenges facing the Iraqi state.
- Investing Türkiye's need for the Iraqi market in its foreign policy behavior towards that country, especially if we know that the percentage of its trade exchange with Iraq has reached more than 50% than its total trade exchange with the countries of geographical proximity.
- It is imperative for the Iraqi decision-maker to work to distance the state from the conflict of geopolitical and geostrategic axes, as this does not serve its interests, in addition to the fact that it is not politically qualified for that conflict.
- Working to restore the Iraqi social contract, as it represents the soft underbelly of the state, from which international and regional actors,

including Türkiye, have benefited in implementing their aggressive projects against the state.

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