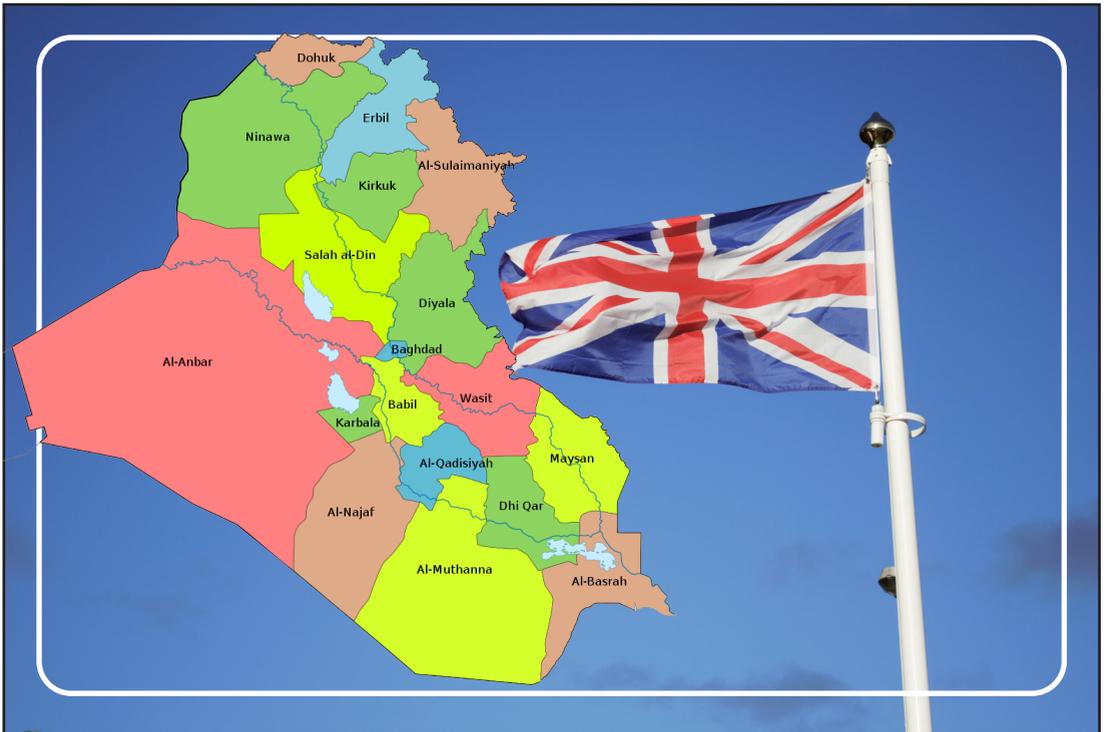




مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies

British Approach in Iraq

Farzad Ramezani Bonesh



Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies Series

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Farzad Ramezani Bonesh*

Past Relationships

Britain has realized the strategic importance of Iraq since the beginning of the 17th century, the history of relations between Iraq and Britain goes back to 1640, and the presence of the East India Company in Basra. In 1808, Britain appointed a consul in Baghdad.¹

After the start of the First World War in 1914 and the entry of the Ottoman Empire under the support of Germany, and following the secret Sykes–Picot agreement (between France and Britain) in 1916,² the British troops were deployed in Iraq. The British troops conquered Basra and continued towards Baghdad, taking control of it in 1917. In fact, the Iraqi government was established by Great Britain in 1920.³

The British ruled Iraq from 1917 to 1958. Britain's position in Iraq was ambiguous⁴, although the Baghdad Declaration was proposed in March 1917, the right to self-determination⁵ was not achieved.

London's role in the Kingdom of Iraq was prominent in 1921 and continued through the treaties of 1926, 1927, and 1930. On October 3, 1932, the Kingdom of Iraq gained independence⁶ and was accepted by the **international community** as an independent country. But it

1. <https://goo.su/yzb67>

2. <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/history/britishindex.htm>

3. https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/iraq/britain_iraq_01.shtml

4. <https://academic.oup.com/book/2425/chapter-abstract/142653620?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

5. <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/history/britishindex.htm>

6. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/iraq-wins-independence>

* Researcher .

remained under British influence until the revolution of 1958.

In May 1941, there was a revolution against the British presence led by Rashid Ali Al Gilani, who succeeded in expelling the British allies. Britain declared war to regain control of Iraq and was able to regain power.⁷ Therefore, the kingdom returned to Baghdad with more British influence and following the union of Britain and Iraq, Rashid Ali, and his pan-Arab supporters left the country.⁸

Despite the presence of Iraq as the founding member of the United Nations in 1945⁹ and the signing of the 20-year treaty in 1948 (a new alliance between Iraq and Britain based on equality and full independence), it remained under British influence until the revolution of 1958.

By changing Iraq's regime from a monarchy to a republic, the relationship between the two countries changed.¹⁰ After the Second World War, the relations between Iraq and Britain became difficult and sensitive. The relations sometimes reached a point of conflict due to London's positions on Iraqi national issues and Arab issues.

After the 1958 revolution, Baghdad's foreign policy was directed toward closer relations with the Soviet Union – rather than Britain. Apart from Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact and the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq, Baghdad remained essentially in the Soviet sphere of influence, but early in 1967,¹¹ there were signs of rapprochement and limited relations with the West. The relationship

7. <https://goo.su/DI1aRS0>

8. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iraq/World-War-II-and-British-intervention-1939-45>

9. <https://derasaty.net/lesson/586/>

10. <https://copolicy.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=21062>

11. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iraq/World-War-II-and-British-intervention-1939-45>

between the two countries continued with fluctuations and ups and downs until Iraq's attack on Kuwait angered the British. Diplomatic relations between them were severed,¹² and in 1991 Britain participated in the Persian Gulf War against Iraq to liberate Kuwait.

During the international blockade of Iraq, Britain accused the former Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, of possessing weapons of mass destruction, and along with the United States, other international coalition forces invaded Iraq in 2003. The British forces were the second force in Iraq after the American forces.¹³

The Geopolitical and Political Approach

After the overthrow of Saddam, diplomatic relations between Iraq and Britain were established and significantly developed in political, economic, and cultural fields.¹⁴ The Iraqi interim government led by Ayad Allawi and the British government agreed to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries at the ambassadorial level in June 2004 after the changes in Iraq.¹⁵

Bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries of the Republic of Iraq and Britain expanded by establishing and strengthening embassies in London and Baghdad.

Britain has an embassy in Baghdad and consulates in Basra and Erbil.¹⁶ The Embassy of Iraq in London opened in 2012, The Kurdistan Regional Government also maintains an office in London. Britain sought to expand its ties with Iraq by officially opening a new UK visa application center in Baghdad in January 2013 and opening a consulate in Erbil in August 2013.

12. <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/35565>

13. <https://goo.su/DI1aRS0>

14. <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/35565>

15. <https://copolicy.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=21062>

16. <https://goo.su/DI1aRS0b>

Britain is one of the founders of the modern Iraqi government and has played an important role in Iraqi politics in the past century. As a great power, Britain is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, NATO, the Group of Seven, the Group of Twenty, as well as the President of the Commonwealth of Nations. However, Britain has always paid attention to Iraq and is aware of its importance for the Middle East and the world.

Britain's position towards Iraq, standing next to the US for 'preventive' war and preventing possible dangers, the military presence in the country, and the city of Basra were new milestones in London's policy towards Iraq in the twenty-first century.

By the end of British military operations in Iraq in April 2009, London's attention turned to establishing strong bilateral relations and new horizons for cooperation in the fields of economic, political, military-cultural, educational, trade, and development.¹⁷

During this time, the partnership agreement was also signed in April 2009¹⁸ between then-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki and then-British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown in London. This agreement was a strategic partnership and bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the fields of energy, science and technology, health, education, agriculture, water, and food security.¹⁹

Although Gordon Brown supported the Iraq war in the period from 2007 to 2010, the opposition of the British people to foreign intervention and the financial crisis of 2008 partly caused London to take a cautious approach²⁰ towards Iraq in 2010-15.

17. <https://goo.su/0sWyM>

18. <https://pmo.iq/index/03-911.htm>

19. <https://copolicy.uobaghdad.edu.iq/?p=21062>

20. <https://www.bayancenter.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/The-UK.pdf>

In recent years, London has tried to give important attention to religious minorities in Iraq. As of 2015, the House of Representatives asked the government to ensure that religious minorities²¹ in Iraq are under protection.

Britain continues to emphasize the importance of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, non-interference in its affairs, and political, economic, and military support for the government of national unity of Iraq. Britain's recent support²² for Iraq and the government of the Prime Minister of this country, Mohammad Al-Sudani, is in this line.

London also maintains Baghdad's relations with neighboring Arab countries and plays an effective role in maintaining regional balance, especially with Iran, and supporting the sovereignty and security of Iraq. In this regard, Britain considered Iran's attacks on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a violation of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.²³ In another dimension, London considers supporting the Iraqi government's efforts to reduce the effects of climate change, asking Iraq's regional neighbors²⁴ to cooperate with Baghdad on water security.

Despite the continued emphasis of Iraqi-British leaders on the need to strengthen political cooperation²⁵ and coordination to establish security

21. <https://www.bayancenter.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/The-UK.pdf>

22. <https://ina.iq/eng/23118-britain-confirms-its-support-for-iraq-and-the-government.html>

23. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-condemns-iranian-attacks-on-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq>

24. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/calling-for-rapid-progress-on-the-formation-of-a-stable-government-in-iraq-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

25. <https://goo.su/WFyiE>

and stability in the region,²⁶ Britain seems to support the expansion of Iraq's role as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Although, after the end of the First World War, the fragile alliance between Britain and the Kurds fell apart,²⁷ and ensuring the stability of the new regime was more important than the Kurds' desire, in 1991, Britain played a key role in declaring a no-fly zone in northern Iraq²⁸ and was an important actor.

In the past years, the continuation of British officials' meetings with the Iraqi Kurds, the commitment to support the region, and the very close relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government indicate an increase in this region's role in British foreign policy.

In fact, in the general approach, the UK sees the Kurdistan Regional Government as an important partner or key factor for cooperation with Baghdad. In the meantime, London emphasizes the importance of resolving the remaining issues between Erbil and Baghdad,²⁹ protecting the security and stability of the Kurdistan Region, implementing the Sinjar Agreement,³⁰ and abandoning the militias in Sinjar.

Military and Security Approach

In the general approach of Britain, stability in Iraq means stability in the Middle East region, and instability there has a negative impact on the

26. <https://ecfr.eu/article/climate-of-opportunity-iraqs-new-government-as-regional-conciliator/>

27. <https://goo.su/txkGl6z>

28. <https://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/23112022>

29. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/calling-for-rapid-progress-on-the-formation-of-a-stable-government-in-iraq-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

30. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/30208-PM-Barzani,-British-envoy-to-Iraq-discuss-bilateral-relations-between-Kurdistan-Region-and-Britain>

entire region. From this point of view, if the Iraqi forces are defeated, and the activities of the extremists are transferred to the regional arenas, the interests of the West in the Middle East will be threatened. In this regard, in the past years, Britain has supported Iraq in the fight against terrorism.

In fact, security has always been considered one of the main priorities. By the growing activity of ISIS, Britain's foreign policy in Iraq in 2014–2015 became the subject of discussions.³¹ Britain participated in airstrikes against ISIS. From Britain's point of view, ISIS remains a serious threat in Iraq and Syria, and the connection between branches³² is a worrying trend.

Britain is a member of the global coalition fighting ISIS. This demonstrates the importance of countering ISIS and the need for cooperation to ensure the lasting and global defeat of ISIS. The UK also underlines its support for international efforts to bring ISIS³³ perpetrators of violence to justice by conducting reconnaissance patrols against ISIS and significant contributions to the intelligence efforts of the coalition.

In this regard, London is trying to help reduce the flow of immigration and the possibility of terrorist attacks against Britain by emphasizing the continuation of the fight against terrorist organizations,^{34–35} the cooperation of the international community to end the case of Al-Hawl camp in Syria³⁶ and suppressing the spread of ISIS ideology.

31. <https://www.bayancenter.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/The-UK.pdf>

32. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/continuing-our-support-to-the-fight-against-daesh-as-it-expands-to-new-theatres>

33. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-air-strikes-against-daesh>

34. <https://mofa.gov.iq/zagreb/?p=5020>

35. <https://goo.su/VcYCjG>

36. <https://ina.iq/eng/23118-britain-confirms-its-support-for-iraq-and-the-government.html>

In another dimension, the UK and Iraq agreed on a future defense relationship in 2019, with the UK pledging military support to Iraq, with the new deal focusing on training and developing Iraqi intelligence structures.³⁷ In fact, Britain announced its commitment to continue providing military support to Iraq and training local forces. Britain has trained more than 100,000³⁸ Iraqi troops to deal with the ongoing threat from ISIS and other terrorist groups. In addition, there is still a great demand for the import of high-quality equipment and services³⁹ to the Iraqi defense and security departments, and the export of arms to Iraq is probably still high.

Economic Approach

Since 2003, Britain has been investing in Iraq, and several economic conferences and forums such as the Investment in Iraq conference (London 2009), have been held in London,⁴⁰ which has focused on investment issues and the energy sector. Various events, such as the memorandum of understanding to grant more than 12 billion dollars⁴¹ to finance projects, show the British economic interest in Iraq. There are also many Sectors of the Iraqi economy that require British businesses. Also, private and medium-sized companies have played a key role in the level of economic strategies in the UK and cover the British diplomatic missions in the trade sector in the center and south and the Kurdistan region.

37. <https://www.forces.net/news/uk-and-iraq-agree-future-defence-relationship>

38. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-signs-uk-iraq-strategic-partnership-on-visit>

39. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-business-risk-iraq/overseas-business-risk-iraq>

40. <https://goo.su/yzb67>

41. <https://www.noonpost.com/tag/23856>

The department of UK Trade and Investment in Iraq, by using companies including BP, Shell, Standard Chartered, Astra Zeneca, Land Rover Jaguar, JCB and etc., tried to identify opportunities to achieve a successful business in Iraq. In addition, England plays a major role in political and economic decisions in international forums regarding Iraq and has followed up assistance to Baghdad in the economic reform program and assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the G7.⁴² Also, Britain has tried to emphasize approaches such as continuing to support the Iraqi government in economic fields, renewable energy, investment, and dealing with the effects of climate change⁴³ on increasing commercial and economic cooperation in all fields. In this regard, Britain and the Iraqi Economic Contact Group (IECG) intend to support Baghdad to diversify the economy, supporting economic reforms,⁴⁴ and deal with Iraq's important economic challenges.

Although France, Germany, Russia, and China own 80%⁴⁵ of the big projects in Iraq, Britain still tries not to spare any effort to provide any facilities to investors⁴⁶ in different areas of Iraq, especially the Kurdistan Region.

However, in 2020, the UK exported \$428 million to Iraq but did not export any services to the country. Also, in 2020, Iraq exported 81 million dollars (mainly crude oil) to the UK. In 2020, there was no

42. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/profile-of-development-workiraq>

43. <https://ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?Key=1015192>

44. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-the-iraq-economic-contact-group>

45. <https://reaction.life/time-for-britain-and-iraq-to-heal-the-scars-of-war-and-do-business/>

46. <https://goo.su/XUvvVH8>

direct foreign investment (FDI) by the UK in Iraq.⁴⁷

Iraq was Britain's 88th largest trading partner in the four quarters to mid-2022. In fact, the total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and Iraq was £756 million. Total UK exports to Iraq were £522m, down from 2011. But total UK imports from Iraq in the same period were less than £1 million and have been falling.⁴⁸

Iraq's economy, in general, and especially the energy sector, is heavily dependent on oil. But from April 2021, the British government will no longer support fossil fuel projects abroad. Therefore, London's efforts are focused on supporting British businesses in the renewable energy⁴⁹, electricity, and gas grids of Iraq.

Cultural Approach and Global Values

In British foreign policy, the expansion of diplomatic activities and communications is not limited to official channels with other countries, and civil society organizations, legal organizations, pressure groups, businessmen, and ordinary people also play a role.⁵⁰ Britain has the highest ranking in the world in the fields of culture, diplomacy, and education and has a lot of influence in other parts of the world.

Britain also, focuses on the use of its strengths, promoting the English language (the world's first language), British values and culture, and benefiting from the prestigious position of British cultural centers and

47. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/gbr/partner/irq>

48. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1124329/iraq-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2022-12-19.pdf

49. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-business-risk-iraq/overseas-business-risk-iraq>

50. <https://goo.su/yzb67>

universities in relation to Iraq.

Britain uses soft power to develop its presence in Iraq and the region. Establishing of the British Council has led to the development of education and the strengthening of cultural relations between Iraq and Britain. In addition, London continues to provide humanitarian aid, food aid; emergency cash transfers, restore stability in areas freed from ISIS control,⁵¹ support the return and reintegration of about 1 million⁵² Iraqis, and fight the destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage.

In another dimension, supporting the nascent democracy and promoting democracy, and human rights, respecting the international laws of minority rights and human rights, and the role of women in society are all important. In this regard, London also tries to implement justice and prosecute ISIS members around the world,⁵³ deal with serious violations of human rights, and prevent sexual⁵⁴ violence in Iraq.

The migration of Iraqis including elites, Christians, politicians, various groups, individuals, etc. Britain began in the middle of the 20th

51. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/profile-of-development-workiraq>

52. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/calling-for-rapid-progress-on-the-formation-of-a-stable-government-in-iraq-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

53. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/working-to-deliver-justice-for-survivors-of-daesh-atrocities-in-iraq>

54. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/psvi-conference-welcome-speeches-by-the-foreign-secretary-james-cleverly-and-nobel-laureate-nadia-murad-28-november-2022>

century.⁵⁵ More than 450⁵⁶–600⁵⁷ thousand people from Iraq live in Britain. As well as several former Iraqi prime ministers who used to live in the diaspora. In fact, London has always tried to make the Iraqi diaspora an important bridge in the relations between the two countries and increase the various positions of Britain in Iraq.

Vision

Undoubtedly, there are many challenges and obstacles to the all-around increase of Iraqi–British relations. Some of the political parties are not in favor of increasing the level of strategic relations with Britain.

However, it seems that despite the reduction of London’s attention to fossil fuels and the political and security situation in Iraq, Britain continues to rely on the positive points of the growing economy, the brand of British goods and services in Iraq, and the strengths of the Iraqi market. In addition, the scope of joint anti-terrorism and security-oriented cooperation between the two sides could still be expanded. In the meantime, it seems that Britain’s attention to closer relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in the fields of cultural, political, and economic cooperation will increase.

55. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-uk-iraqi-diaspora-and-their-mobilization-towards-iraq-homeland-politics-internal-dynamics-and-the-fragmentation-of-diasporic-transnationalism/>

56. <https://goo.su/DI1aRS0>

57. <https://reaction.life/time-for-britain-and-iraq-to-heal-the-scars-of-war-and-do-business/>