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One Year After Its Formation: Evaluating the Performance of al-Sudani's Government in the Context of Iraqi International Relations

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Dr. Marwan Salem Al-Ali*

One of the main reasons for failure in the Iraqi political experience post-2003 is the foreign relations, as it was subject to two negative equations. The first is the American choice to make Iraq a part of the American project in the region and the world. The second is the failure of the diplomatic system in general, due to the selection of its senior diplomats based on incorrect criteria.

Nearly a year after the formation of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government, which was formed after a year of severe political crisis, the current cabinet is accelerating its steps towards a new path in Iraqi diplomacy. Since its inception, the Sudani government has adopted and pursued a policy of external openness for Iraq towards regional and international countries, aiming to gain international support for the new government.

The compass of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government is set towards establishing normal relations with the regional and international surroundings, albeit at a slow pace, according to observers familiar with the Iraqi scene. The foreign file of the Iraqi state post-2003 is one of the most controversial and contentious issues among various political forces, often leading the country to be isolated from its Arab and Gulf surroundings for more than 12 years.

Since assuming his role, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani has conducted visits to numerous regional and international countries,

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aiming to strengthen Iraq's foreign relations independently in a way that serves its interests. Al-Sudani focuses during his visits on many files, most notably security and economy, aligning with the challenges faced by his country, as detailed in the following sections.

The Government of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani Adopts a Policy of External Openness and A Principle of Balance in Foreign Relations

The Prime Minister's Media Office stated on December 12, 2022, in a press release that Mohammed Shia al-Sudani pointed out that 'Iraq has adopted the principle of balance in its foreign relations, to enhance its stability and achieve the interests of its people and the security of the region.' Apparently, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani is attempting to overcome past failures and capitalize on his success in order to enhance the country's international standing, both within its regional environment and within the international community as well. Iraq's foreign relations have always been built in an illogical way, especially when countries adopt a superior or arrogant stance in their dealings with Iraq. Mohammed Shia al-Sudani aims to replace this approach with the principle of good neighborliness, mutual respect, and shared interests.

On this basis, his foreign visits are an effort to create a successful environment for attracting countries and major companies in fields where previous Iraqi governments failed to achieve significant progress, exacerbating the problems and crises the country faces. By adopting a calm diplomatic approach, he aims to make progress in areas where progress had not been previously achieved, especially in energy, natural gas, associated gas, and electricity. This effort is to attract investment companies and develop the capabilities of the Iraqi state on all levels, in an effort to transition from a rentier economy to an economy that relies on diversified income sources.



Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani's attempt to build openness in political relations with an economic and investment dimension to attract investors to the country

The Iraqi foreign policy manifests economic dimensions, as Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani attempts to adopt a policy of openness in political relations with an economic and investment dimension aimed at attracting investors to the country and advancing the Iraqi economy forward. After the post-2003 governments, there was a lack of a strong policy of economic diplomacy necessary to improve international relations and, consequently, domestic conditions. However, it can be said that the previous government under Al-Kadhimi, despite its failures in some or most of the internal requirements, left a clear mark in the field of foreign policy on two main levels. The first is the tangible presence in various international forums and the expansion of the horizons of relations with multiple regional and international powers. The second involves addressing problems, crises, and disputes between conflicting parties by completing the preparation of suitable

atmospheres and conditions, which began in the government of Mr. Adel Abdul Mahdi, for constructive dialogues, as happened between Iran and Saudi Arabia, in addition to contributing to defusing a series of crises in the region, or mitigating and containing them to certain limits.

Therefore, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani has well realized this and has started to conduct a series of messages, signals, and meetings with Arab and foreign politicians and diplomats from different countries. This indicates positive directions to achieve more openness in Iraq's relations with its neighbors, regional environment, and international space, enhancing its stature, consolidating its sovereignty, and expanding its interests. This approach also aims to make Iraq a meeting point and a forum for understanding and dialogue among parties...

The critical point is the necessity to leverage the wide regional and international support and endorsement for the new government in achieving several matters, most importantly, enhancing and improving the country's economic conditions, and addressing pending files and issues. The economy should form a central pillar and foundation in shaping Iraq's foreign policies. Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government should differentiate as much as possible between economic requirements and calculations on one hand, and political normalization projects and agendas that use the economy as a gateway on the other. For Iraq to ensure the fluidity of its regional and international relations that benefit its economy, it must prepare its cadres, especially those working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its overseas missions, to enhance their economic thinking and put the Iraqi economy first in their considerations. This approach is crucial in enhancing a positive image of Iraq for its significant importance in attracting international investors, and in imparting a sense of credibility in building long-term, clear, and goal-oriented strategic partnerships. The opportunity

is ripe for Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government to enhance the correct paths and correct the wrong ones, not only in terms of internal security, service, and financial files, but also in terms of foreign files, which are not far removed in many of their stations and turns from internal files. Hence, it is imperative that there be unity in the decisions related to the country's foreign policy, and that sovereignty be a red line in the calculations of the entire political system. Perhaps the best way to develop the country's foreign relations is to move away from the policies of axes and poles pursued by previous governments and not to antagonize any party to avoid harming the country, especially since the experiences of the modern state are still young and require significant support from all.

Iraqi–American Relations

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani finds himself caught between the hammer of geopolitical geography and the anvil of his local allies' objectives, in an unenviable position. The Coordination Framework, a coalition of parties that facilitated Al-Sudani's ascent to his current position, was expected to push for a reassessment of Iraq's relations with the United States. Failure to reduce Washington's influence could cost Al-Sudani the political support he needs. On the other hand, pursuing confrontation with the United States might result in far-reaching economic and security consequences that could destabilize Iraq's currently fragile stability. As a result, the political situation has largely remained the same since Al-Sudani formed his government in October 2022.

Despite the limited role of the U.S. military, some within the Coordination Framework still view the U.S. presence as a threat to Iraq's sovereignty and want to end its influence in Baghdad. In January 2023, Al-Sudani clarified that he supports the continued U.S. military

presence in Iraq and has no timetable for any American withdrawal, emphasizing its importance in the fight against ISIS. In an interview, Al-Sudani stated, “I don’t see it as impossible for Iraq to have good relations with both Iran and the United States,” indicating a desire to pursue balanced relations with both Tehran and Washington. Al-Sudani aims to build balanced Iraqi relations between the United States and Iran, the two most influential powers in Iraqi politics. However, Al-Sudani seeks to establish alliance-like relations with the United States, similar to those the U.S. has with other countries like Saudi Arabia and other oil and gas-producing Gulf states, as he discussed in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* published on Sunday, January 15, 2023.

A new direction in Iraqi-American relations is emerging under Al-Sudani’s government, focusing on institutionalizing the relationship and shifting it towards comprehensive developmental cooperation, following 20 years where security relations dominated. Al-Sudani has focused on implementing a comprehensive developmental government program, which relies on strengthening the Iraqi economy. Therefore, the Iraqi government has started to engage in open dialogues with all of Iraq’s partners, particularly the United States, as evidenced by the phone call between Al-Sudani and U.S. President Joe Biden, aimed at bolstering Iraq’s economy and its ability to meet its commitments to its citizens and the state. This falls within Iraq’s role in the fields of energy, transportation, trade, and other developmental areas.

Amid increasing pressure on Al-Sudani, U.S. Ambassador Romanski appears more active and visible compared to some of her predecessors, especially recently. While most of her meetings have been clearly political, she has also focused significantly on promoting American businesses in Iraq, raising concerns among political commentators supporting the Coordination Framework parties.

Despite internal political maneuvers and Iran's geopolitical stance, it's unlikely that Al-Sudani's government will seriously seek to disengage from the United States. As Iraqi political analyst Munqith Dagher told Amwaj.Media, "All political forces in Iraq realize that ending security relations with Washington would have serious implications for national security, not just American interests." On September 22, 2023, Al-Sudani emphasized the importance of developing relations with America in various fields, not just security.

In a CNN interview, Al-Sudani stated that Iraq's relationship with the United States should evolve beyond security issues, adding that the Strategic Framework Agreement "needs to be activated between the two countries, especially as there is a serious desire to develop this relationship." He noted the need to activate other files and areas, highlighting their importance today. "Iraq is a country with significant economic resources, influential in the energy market, and there are many opportunities for American companies to work in various economic, service, and construction sectors in Iraq." Regarding the security aspect and U.S. intervention, Al-Sudani said, "What concerns us is the security situation and our relationship with the International Coalition in Iraq." He added, "Iraq today does not need combat forces, whether from the United States or other coalition countries. The Iraqi security forces have reached an advanced stage of readiness and capability to maintain security stability and track down ISIS cells, which are groups pursued in deserts, mountains, and caves, posing no threat to the state entity," he explained.

On December 29, 2022, the U.S. Central Command revealed its operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq during 2022, confirming hundreds of operations with its partner forces against the organization in both countries. These operations led to the deterioration of the group and the removal of several of its top leaders from the battlefield,

including the ISIS leader and dozens of regional commanders, as well as hundreds of fighters. These operations were part of a mission to undermine the group's ability to direct and inspire destabilizing attacks in the region and worldwide, including on U.S. soil. These operations were conducted under the authority of the U.S. Central Command and led by the Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, in partnership with the Iraqi security forces, which play a crucial role in ensuring ISIS's permanent defeat.

Despite the above, sources in the Iraqi Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee indicated that Washington is still hesitant about deciding to receive Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani. The sources explained that Al-Sudani's office has not received a response from Washington regarding his request to visit the U.S. to discuss important files concerning the internal situation in Iraq. They pointed out that Washington was an active party in appointing Al-Sudani, according to the consensus equation between the United States and Iran, noting that the American side agreed to appoint Al-Sudani as the Iraqi Prime Minister in exchange for fulfilling urgent demands for the United States, including:

1. Achieving tangible progress in combating corruption, exposing major corrupt figures, and providing a list of their names to the U.S. for the purpose of pursuing and drying up their funds.
2. Monitoring the movement of Iraqi money and preventing the smuggling of foreign currencies abroad.



The same sources stated that Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani has not achieved significant progress in the areas that Washington wants to resolve, except for the pursuit and arrest of a number of minor corrupt individuals. These individuals are merely extensions of the party leaders who constitute the serious corruption mafia that Washington seeks to dismantle. The American oversight on the movement of Iraqi money was a reason for the rise in the dollar's value against the Iraqi dinar, causing a deep crisis between the Iraqi public and the government of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani. It is important for Al-Sudani's government to avoid any tension in relations with Washington, so as not to prompt the American Federal Reserve, which can impose guardianship on Iraqi funds, to take sanctions that would exacerbate the current economic crisis Iraq is facing, especially with the decline in the exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar against the U.S. dollar. Furthermore, Iraq still needs to rehabilitate and train its security forces with the help of American advisors, and to import more American weapons, ammunition, and combat equipment.

Iraqi–Russian Relations



The Iraqi–Russian relations have spanned decades, with Russia playing a positive role in supporting Baghdad after the events of June 2014, notably by accelerating the delivery of military equipment, including fighter jets. To strengthen these relations, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani visited the Russian capital, Moscow, on an official trip on October 10, 2023. Al-Sudani’s visit to Russia addressed important issues concerning global peace and the energy sector, with Moscow affirming its support for Iraq’s stability and development path.

During the visit, Russian–Iraqi talks were held to discuss political, security, and economic files, as well as bilateral relations between the two countries. The political advisor to the Prime Minister, Fadi Al-Shammari, stated, “The summit meeting between the presidents included a range of strategic issues related to global peace, the energy file, and Iraq’s commitment to settling debts and financial obligations

due to their impact on Iraq's credit rating." Al-Shammari mentioned that "President Putin expressed his aspiration to discuss security in the Middle East and security files that enhance Iraq's internal security." Moscow confirmed its support for the development path project that connects Middle East ports to Turkey and Europe through a network of roads, railways, and energy infrastructure, and supports diversifying Iraq's economy to reduce heavy reliance on the oil sector.

During the visit, oil and gas files were discussed, as cooperation in this sector is one of the main pillars of the economic partnership between the two countries, given that Iraq and Russia are among the world's largest oil producers, influencing the stability of the oil market and its global repercussions.

Additionally, the dangerous developments in occupied Palestine were discussed, with Iraq calling on Russia to urge the permanent members of the UN Security Council to take urgent action to stop the ongoing assaults on Palestinian territories and the targeting of civilians. Russia reaffirmed its position supporting Iraq's stability and enhancing its investment environment and economic growth. Furthermore, cooperation between the two countries can contribute to diversifying Iraq's economy and achieving greater sustainability in the future.

Analyzing this visit, it is evident that it was prepared more than a month in advance and comes in the context of completing Iraq's openness projects towards significant countries. Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani has a vision for his visit to Russia regarding the development path and investment. However, Iraq must be cautious in sending messages to the United States. Iraq has not sided with one party against another in the Ukrainian crisis, and Al-Sudani's visit to Moscow is very standard protocol and will not significantly alter the strategic situation. Nevertheless, Iraq's neutral stance in the Ukrainian crisis will likely

enhance the prospects of its relationship with Russia, a key player in the global energy market and an important source of weapons, including the S-400 missile systems.

Iraqi-Chinese Relations

Amid the fragile situation and confused relations in Iraq during the formation of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government, his administration tried to break away from the traditional binary choice between Washington, the West, and most Gulf countries on one hand, and Tehran, Damascus, Lebanon, and behind them Moscow on the other. Furthermore, this new path was signified by a clear and appealing title, "Development Path Project," seemingly indicating Beijing as the third way forward. Since its formation, Al-Sudani's government has adopted and pursued a policy of external openness towards regional and global nations to gain international support for the new government, which was formed after a tumultuous inception and a political crisis lasting more than a year.

The political reorganization in Iraq came as a reaction to the changing perspectives of Iraqis towards the United States and the broader geopolitical landscape. This included the lackluster American withdrawal from Afghanistan, changes in the American political approach with Biden's arrival, the failure of the Iran nuclear deal revival, the stalemate in the Syrian file, Erdogan's consistent support for Putin, Russia's ongoing attacks on Ukraine, and the movement of the economy linked to oil prices, inflation, and financial disturbances in currency rates from Cairo to Tehran, and the fear of severe economic sanctions. Ultimately and most importantly, there was the rising Chinese economic ascent.

In an effort to demonstrate external openness, the Prime Minister participated in the Arab-Chinese Summit held in Saudi Arabia on

December 9, 2022, with 30 countries and international organizations to discuss and explore prospects of economic and developmental cooperation. The Prime Minister's media office stated in a release that "Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani received the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Iraq, Tsui Wei, on December 14, 2022. The meeting discussed strengthening bilateral relations and their development in economic and cultural fields, as well as in energy and investment sectors." Al-Sudani expressed the government's desire to expand bilateral cooperation with China in various sectors.

The Chinese ambassador affirmed the continued support of Iraq in several areas, including reconstruction and boosting the economy, and stated that 2023 would mark the beginning of implementing the outcomes of the bilateral meeting between the leaderships of Iraq and China. Ambassador Wei told the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that "Iraq is one of the important countries in the Arab world, and the presence of the Chinese President at the Arab-Chinese Summit is a new starting point for cooperation with Iraq." He pointed out that "the Chinese President referred during his meeting with Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani that Iraq was among the first Arab countries to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China." Al-Sudani expressed a strong desire to enhance relations and cooperation between the two countries. He affirmed that "the Chinese side will continue to provide steady support to Iraq in maintaining its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and promoting solidarity and cooperation among the different Iraqi parties."



Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani’s participation in the Arab-Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development in Riyadh, December 9, 2022

The economic expert Bilal Al-Khalifa pointed out the importance of Iraq obtaining membership in the Asian Development Bank (in which China is the strongest member) through Beijing, and depositing its financial surplus there instead of buying American bonds or increasing its dollar reserves. The Asian Bank offers larger loans with fewer conditions and lower interest rates compared to the World Bank. Al-Khalifa also highlights two other important aspects for the Iraqi economy through the gateway of China: submitting a request for membership in the ‘BRICS bloc’ and another request for membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Undoubtedly, Iraq’s participation in the summit has special importance, as it presents an opportunity to share the new economic vision of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani’s government with Arabs and Chinese. This opens the door for joint cooperation and investment among all the participating countries in the summit. The Iraqi

government's vision is focused on economic openness towards China, given its advanced economic, informational, and technological tools. Currently, Iraq needs to improve its economic situation by enhancing its global position and increasing its economic growth through rapprochement with China, to ensure resource distribution and utilization.

Al-Sudani's government is seeking to benefit from Chinese technology and expand trade relations with the world's second-largest economy, noting that relations between Beijing and Baghdad have strengthened in recent years.

Iraqi-European relations

A statement from the office of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani reported that he "received a delegation from the European Parliament at the beginning of March 2023, where an overview of Iraqi-European relations was presented, and ways to develop them in various areas of joint cooperation were discussed. The meeting also addressed mechanisms for enhancing Iraq's capabilities in facing economic challenges and the impacts of climate change."

The Prime Minister clarified "Iraq's approach to following a balanced policy in international relations, appreciating the European Union's stances towards Iraq at different stages." He also emphasized "the importance of international efforts supporting Iraq in implementing its governmental program and providing assistance in the field of recovering looted funds and individuals wanted by the Iraqi judiciary." Members of the European delegation affirmed "their support and that of their countries for the Iraqi efforts in the field of reform and expressed the serious European desire to establish a partnership with Iraq, aiming at sustainable development and mutual interests."

❖ Iraq and France



French President Emmanuel Macron and Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani during the signing of “strategic partnership” agreements at the Elysee Palace

The Iraqi government announced that Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani signed with French President Emmanuel Macron the largest deal in the history of relations between the two countries, covering dozens of sectors. This came after the two presidents issued a statement affirming their commitment to enhancing strategic cooperation between their countries, especially in the energy sector. This declaration followed a meeting between the two leaders on the evening of January 26–27, 2023, at the Élysée Palace in Paris, where they signed the ‘Strategic Partnership Agreement between Iraq and France.’ The agreement encompasses multiple axes in economic, security, counter-terrorism, extremism, organized crime, cultural exchange, environmental protection, human rights, and education.

The agreements also included training Iraqi diplomats and attracting

French investments in areas like clean energy generation and industry, in addition to the arms sector and purchasing French weapons. They also encouraged French company investments and promoted good governance in managing natural resources, particularly water, developing renewable energies, enhancing the power generation capabilities of electric stations, improving the management of the transportation and distribution network and its maintenance to reduce losses, and building new power generation stations.

Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's visit aimed to expand cooperation in various fields, transforming the positive relationship between the countries into a productive one that clearly reflects on the economic and service conditions in Iraq. Thus, Al-Sudani adopts the principle of productive diplomacy in foreign relations, moving beyond formal or superficial ties. The open policy followed by Al-Sudani's government has deepened Iraq's regional and international role, contrary to expectations that this government might be internationally isolated. Therefore, the comprehensive and varied agreements signed by Al-Sudani with the French represent this vision and are expected to achieve a significant leap in development and investment. The diversification of the partnership with France, and previously with Germany, is part of the priorities set by Al-Sudani in his government program and is actively being pursued. This will be a key factor in transitioning Iraq to a different status in the near future across all levels.

Motivations for the Visit:

The motivations for Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's visit to France were diverse, and the most important ones can be highlighted as follows:

- **Strengthening Strategic Partnership:** The visit witnessed the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Iraq and France, which included more than 50 articles for cooperation and exchange

in various fields, along with the signing of several memorandums of understanding in economic, security, counter-terrorism, organized crime, extremism, cultural exchange, environmental protection, human rights, and education.

- **Diversifying Iraq’s External Ties:** The Iraqi Prime Minister’s visit to France, in part, aimed to diversify Iraq’s regional and international relations based on cooperation, balance, and moving away from the policy of axes. It was focused on adopting strategic partnership policies with many countries, notably France, and redefining the relationship between Iraq and the international coalition led by the United States against terrorism, but through the French gateway. This specific goal suggests that Baghdad is seeking an “international strategic alternative” to the United States, with whom it has strategic alliance relations in various security, military, and economic fields. Despite the challenges of achieving this goal in the short term, given the nature, size, and type of strategic partnership agreements with the United States, it represents a procedural step in a longer path where Baghdad tries to replace the United States with another international partner to reduce reliance and concerns held by its regional supporter, Iran.

- **Enhancing Counter-Terrorism Efforts:** According to the Iraqi Prime Minister during his visit to Paris, France has been proactive in supporting Iraq in facing the dangers of terrorism and regaining its territories. This includes joint cooperation in aspects of armament, training, and information exchange. France also announced its readiness to assist in the restoration and repair of Iraqi areas affected by ISIS terrorist attacks.

- **Supporting European Energy Security:** According to a statement from the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, Iraq earned more than 115 billion dollars from exporting crude oil in 2022, amounting to

1.209 billion barrels. Therefore, some economic estimates believe that Iraqi oil could be an alternative to Russian oil for supplying European countries suffering from a severe shortage in energy supplies. According to sources, the Iraqi gateway to the European oil and gas market is represented by the French company “TotalEnergies,” which signed several partnership agreements with the Iraqi government in 2021 worth over 20 billion dollars. This investment in the gas, oil, and electric power sectors is expected to positively reflect on Iraq’s domestic economy, especially as Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani intends to provide significant opportunities for French companies in Iraqi reconstruction programs.

- **Enhancing the Efficiency of Iraqi Security Forces through Training and Armament:** Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani’s desire to upgrade cooperation with France in the security, military, and armament fields aims to reduce reliance on the American side in the same area. It represents an attempt by Baghdad to replace military cooperation with the United States with military cooperation with Paris. This move ultimately aligns with Tehran’s desire to distance Iraq from its strategic bond with the United States in the long term.

On the morning of July 19, 2023, the Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani received French Minister of the Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu and his accompanying delegation. According to an official statement, the meeting discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and prospects for their development at the security level within the framework of the international coalition, including consultancy and training to enhance the performance of Iraqi security forces. The meeting emphasized continuing bilateral cooperation in training, arms cooperation, and information exchange. The Prime Minister praised France’s support for Iraqi forces, referring to the ‘Strategic Partnership Agreement’ signed during his visit to France in

January, which represents a clear roadmap for developing Iraqi–French relations in economic, security, energy, cultural, and educational fields, among others.

Mohammed Shia Al–Sudani confirmed that the government is working on organizing its relationship with the international coalition in Iraq, in a manner that suits the post–war phase against ISIS terrorist groups. This phase witness’s significant growth in the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces across various military sectors. Al–Sudani talked about the government’s interest in training and armament and the desire to cooperate with French companies in this regard, especially in the field of air force, defense systems, and military manufacturing. He emphasized that cooperation with France is not limited to security but extends to several areas, with real opportunities for an enhanced partnership between the two countries. The French Minister of the Armed Forces conveyed President Emmanuel Macron’s greetings to the Prime Minister and affirmed the French government’s readiness to cooperate with Iraq in training, armament, and capacity development. He also mentioned his government’s seriousness in providing what Iraq needs and developing genuine partnerships with it. From here, let us say that Paris wants to re–enter Iraq, and this is an opportunity that should be capitalized upon as much as possible, provided that the balance of international equations is understood and that the relationship with Paris does not come at the expense of London and Washington.

❖ Iraq and Germany (Objectives and results of Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani's visit to Germany)



Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani visits Germany and meets with German Chancellor Schulz during a press conference

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani concluded his visit to Germany on the evening of January 14, 2023, which lasted for one day. While the Iraqi government expressed optimism about developing the electricity sector through the contract signed by Mohammed Shia al-Sudani with the German company Siemens, some observers downplayed its significance, asserting that Iranian and American restrictions could hinder the sector's development. Energy and service problems in general have become a pressing issue for the Iraqi people, and the Prime Minister realized this scene early on, which led him to attract a country like Germany to set a new course for energy in our

country, positively reflecting on everyone, a step in the right direction.

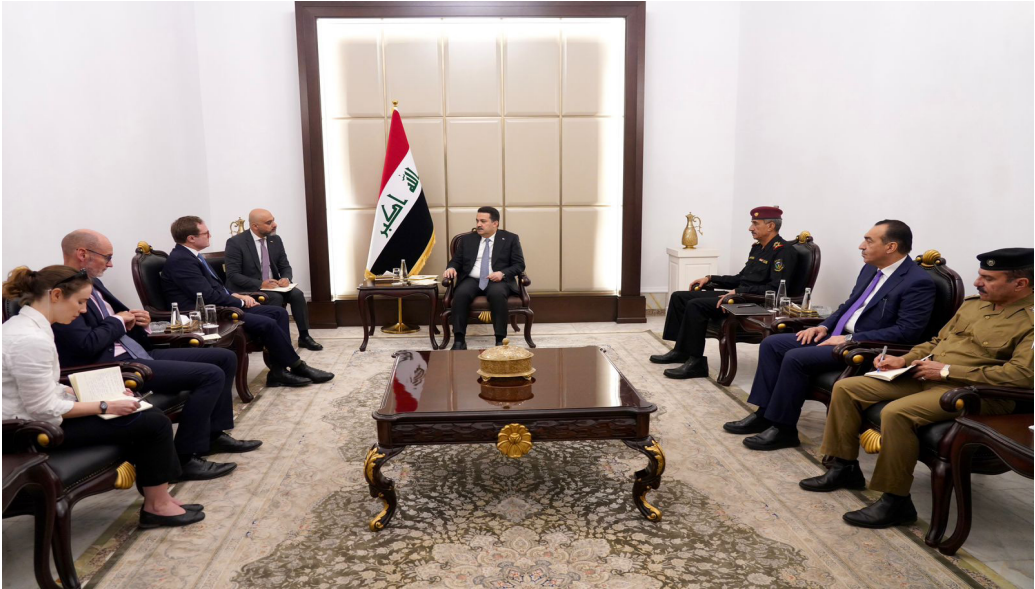
The Iraqi Minister of Electricity, Ziad Ali Fadil, signed a joint memorandum of understanding with the German company Siemens, represented by its CEO Christian Bruch. This memorandum includes a roadmap for developing the electricity system in Iraq by establishing new power stations, in addition to implementing renewable energy projects. The spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, Ahmad al-Abadi, confirmed that the memorandum would add 6,000 megawatts to the national system. He explained to the Iraqi News Agency (INA) that “the importance of the signed memorandum lies in being signed with one of the most prestigious global companies in the energy sector. The work outlined in the memorandum will solve the problems of transportation and distribution in the system and will contribute to the establishment of transformation stations and transmission lines.”

Iraqi-German relations have witnessed significant development, as confirmed by Mohammed Shia al-Sudani on May 15, 2023. The media office of the Prime Minister stated that “Mohammed Shia al-Sudani welcomed a delegation, including several heads of German companies and business representatives, in the presence of the German Ambassador to Iraq, Martin Jaeger. Mohammed Shia al-Sudani expressed his welcome to the delegation, affirming the translation of the agreements witnessed during his visit to Berlin last January into practical steps for cooperation and partnership in various sectors and fields. He emphasized that “the relationship between Iraq and Germany is witnessing significant development, and the Iraqi arena is open to all kinds of economic partnerships with friends and partners.” He pointed out that “the security and economic stability that Iraq enjoys are encouraging factors, supported by an official and popular desire from all parties to succeed in the Iraqi economic reality.” The statement added, “Mohammed Shia al-Sudani discussed the available

investment opportunities and joint work with German companies in Iraq, affirming that the government's clear program and vision for the sectors enabled the movement of projects that had been suspended for more than fifteen years, creating a favorable opportunity for international companies to be present in Iraq and contribute to the reconstruction of infrastructure." On their part, the heads and representatives of the German companies expressed "their enthusiasm and desire to work in Iraq, noting a clear direction of the government in the field of investment and economic work. The German Ambassador confirmed that "what has been achieved in Iraq over six months is equivalent to what was achieved in the past fifteen years, in various aspects of the economy and development."

❖ **Iraq and Britain (cooperation in combating cross-border crimes)**

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani welcomed, on August 21, 2023, the signing of the joint statement that is planned to be concluded between the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and the British Ministry of State for Security. The media office of the Prime Minister stated that "Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani received the Minister of State for Security in Britain, Tom Tugendhat, and his accompanying delegation," noting that "during the meeting, bilateral relations between the two countries were discussed, as well as ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in all fields, especially in security, military cooperation, combating terrorism, and also in the fight against cross-border crimes, especially related to smuggling, human trafficking, drug trade, and the recovery of funds and individuals wanted by the Iraqi judiciary for corruption cases."



According to the statement, the Prime Minister praised “the United Kingdom’s support for Iraq and its stance in the war against the terrorist organization ISIS,” emphasizing “the importance of cooperation with the British side in combating transnational crimes, particularly those related to smuggling, human trafficking, drug trade, and the recovery of funds and individuals wanted by the Iraqi judiciary for corruption cases.” He also pointed out that “combating corruption is a popular demand, and its threat extends beyond Iraq to threaten all countries in the world.”

He affirmed that “the government has prepared a national strategy to combat human trafficking in Iraq for the years 2023 – 2026, as well as the national strategy to combat drugs and psychoactive substances for the years 2023–2025,” highlighting “the significant efforts made by Iraq in combating this scourge.”

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani also welcomed the “signing of the joint statement that is planned to be concluded between

the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and the British Ministry of State for Security, as well as the draft memorandum of understanding between the two countries.” Tugendhat expressed “Britain’s readiness to support the Iraqi security forces and provide them with modern technologies,” commending “the Iraqi security apparatuses, in all their forms, in the fight against terrorism and the elimination of the terrorist organization ISIS, and their role in the country’s security stability.”

The Iraqi Diplomatic Confusion

The Iraqi diplomacy post-2003 faces numerous challenges, weakening Iraq’s ability to formulate approaches that support its movement within the framework of foreign policy and preventing the exercise of effective external behavior towards the regional and international surroundings of Iraq.

Therefore, the weakness of diplomatic performance and the absence of a successful design of foreign policy are almost characterized by permanence. It is no secret that the reason for this weakness lies in the instability of the political system in Iraq, in addition to regional and international interventions, as well as the existence of internal problems that affect the stability of the state. We should not forget the entry of the factor of partisan, sectarian, and tribal quotas (Muhasasa) in the matters of choosing diplomatic corps staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the Iraqi foreign policy during the period between 2003 and 2010 was distinguished by significant issues that led to a clear failure in achieving the required level. Among the most important of these issues was what the quota system, in its broad form, dictated, especially in the political field, imposing weakening conditions on foreign political work, in addition to the ongoing constitutional powers dispute between the central government and the local governments, especially with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Often, the two governments have

entered into disputes over the boundaries of the regional government in the field of foreign policy. Furthermore, Iraqi foreign policy during the past period suffered from the conflict of political visions representing the different viewpoints of Iraqi political forces regarding many of the main variables governing Iraqi foreign political action and determining the nature of the country's international relations, negatively reflecting on the unity of the external political decision and on the nature of the objectives of Iraqi foreign policy. Thus, the modest performance of Iraqi foreign policy during this period negatively reflected on Iraq's international relations, especially with neighboring countries, and limited the state's capabilities in resolving many of the pending files in its favor.

On the other hand, leaked lists from the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs containing 80 names nominated for the position of "ambassador," in June 2021, including current and former parliamentary representatives, ministers, officials, as well as their children and relatives, caused widespread controversy in popular circles. This is due to following the system of political and party quotas (Muhasasa), far from the standards of competence, professionalism, and diplomatic conditions that should be available in the candidates. The leaked lists for the appointment of ambassadors, according to the quota agreement reached between the political blocs, gave a clear impression to the Iraqis that the state and its institutions are far from the standards of competence and professionalism in the distribution of positions. According to the law, the Iraqi Parliament does not have any powers in appointing ambassadors, and its duty is limited to reviewing the names of the candidates only, as these are government appointments by the Council of Ministers. The leaked lists include names of candidates from political parties and influential entities, including former parliamentary representatives and officials, as well as researchers working in foreign research centers. In the past, under the parity agreement, the political

parties' share of ambassadors was only 30%, compared to 70% from students of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Institute. However, this equation was changed to be equally divided between political parties and the institute in the government of Adel Abdul Mahdi in 2018. The leaked ambassador lists provoked the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, leading it to downplay the need for Iraq to have such a large number of ambassadors at this time all at once, at a time when it is unable to protect its diplomatic missions and their premises in the capital Baghdad, and indicates – in a hint to the negatives of this step – that it increases the burden on the state's budget and expenses. It is based on –astonishment– by major countries like America and China, which do not have this huge number of permanent ambassadors. The need for Iraq to have 80 ambassadors at once, in violation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' law regarding the nomination of ambassadors, which stipulates that the political parties' share of candidates should not exceed a quarter (25%), yet the leaked lists showed the opposite, describing the nomination of this number of ambassadors as “very exaggerated”.

Competence or Degree of Kinship?

Commenting on the decline of professionalism and competence compared to quotas (Muhasasa) and kinship in the leaked lists, it can be said that no country in the world adheres 100% to standards of competence and fair competition in reaching these positions, without concealing the influence of the nature of relationships between the government, parties, and influential entities. The matter differs when we look at countries far from this concept, in addition to the calculations that overturn the equation in these matters. An Iraqi academic, in her talk to Al Jazeera Net, refers to the 2008 Ministry of Foreign Affairs law regarding the selection of ambassadors. It states that 75% of the choices should be from those engaged in diplomatic work within the ministry, including its staff who are on the diplomatic promotion ladder that starts

from attaché and ends with the envoy minister. The remaining 25% is allocated for political parties. From here, it appears that political favors have dominated the state's joints, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is ineffective in the absence of Iraqi ambassadors working on rebuilding its diplomatic relations rather than stumbling in them. As a result, the negatives of partisan and sectarian quotas (Muhasasa) are not confined to the appointment of ambassadors and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only, but extend to the rest of the state's facilities without exception, from the top of the pyramid to its base, to the point of intervening even in the appointment of primary school principals. Perhaps the reasons for this go back to the lack of seriousness in applying the 2015 Law No. 36 of political parties, which organizes the work of political parties and prevents external and internal interventions. State institutions would have become more mature with this law, but its absence made them very marginal compared to the interventions of the parties that manage the state, thus flouting Iraqi law. Despite the rarity of incidents in the Iraqi street caused by Iraqi ambassadors abroad in recent years, they were a source of broad embarrassment for Iraq, forcing the government to intervene to address some of those problems. A senior official in the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking not to be named, indicated that Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani "decided to reconsider many Iraqi diplomatic missions abroad, including those in countries with no Iraqi community, such as Kenya, South Africa, and some South American countries, where this results in high spending and there are not enough useful employees." He spoke of other problems of Iraqi diplomats that did not appear in the media, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a quick decision to resolve them, "including one ambassador in a European country exploiting his position and relations in his private business, and another was found to have an invalid university degree." The same official revealed that "there are 30 Iraqi missions abroad staffed by family members of politicians,

party leaders, and current and former officials, obtained through quotas (Muhasasa) or courtesy and understanding, admitting that the majority of Iraqi ambassadors 'are not trained or graduates of the Foreign Service Institute of the ministry.'"

In February 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the formation of an investigative committee into the diplomatic passport crisis triggered by representatives in The Parliament, after it became clear that non-governmental figures, including fashion models and social media celebrities, obtained them, confirming that the committee would undertake the task of scrutinizing the holders of diplomatic passports. Despite the fact that the effective Iraqi constitution since 2005 did not stipulate the distribution of positions in a sectarian or party framework, the political custom followed since the American invasion in 2003 led to the adoption of quotas (Muhasasa), including "special grades," which includes the position of ambassador. No doubt, the reason for the recurrence of such problems in Iraq is due to "partisan quotas (Muhasasa) and cronyism," which led to the appointment of individuals in vital positions representing Iraq in front of the world's countries. It appears that this file is subject to quotas and consensus, where parties nominate their candidates for embassy positions without these candidates having backgrounds or competence and experience in diplomatic work. From here, political quotas (Muhasasa) have transformed Iraqi diplomacy and embassies into party districts, far from the country's interest. The positions of Iraqi ambassadors in some countries have become affiliated with the families of some political leaders, and others have entered the framework of political and sectarian quotas (Muhasasa). These positions are settled like other positions in the Iraqi state. This is a main reason for the failure of Iraqi diplomacy in many countries.

Evaluating Iraqi Foreign Performance According to the Diplomacy of Balance

The principle of balance in Iraqi foreign policy, adopted by Iraqi governments after a certain year, did not achieve significant success or make a big difference in enhancing Iraq's stature in its Arab and international environment. This principle has often been viewed as an attempt to avoid angering the conflicting and influential states in Iraq. It also expressed an inability to take positions that align with its affiliations and constants, or even what could achieve its interests according to the constitution. The diplomacy of balance (neutrality) in Iraq might have been justified in the early years of building the new political system, but continuing it and adopting it as a fixed approach by seven Iraqi governments, under the pretext of the geopolitical sensitivity of Iraq and the region experiencing a clash of interests of the active states, reflects the level of stagnation of the foreign policy maker and his inability to produce pathways that could preserve Iraq's sovereignty.

As a result of this principle, there has been a complete violation by regional states, such as Iran and Turkey, without a deterring Iraqi diplomatic response towards these countries. To the extent that Iraq, or any party within it that takes a foreign stance against either of them, gets punished.

Furthermore, Iraq, after all these years of adopting the principle of balance, is still more subject to external influences than other countries that possess the components of external immunity from these influences. Even the external positions at the level of joint conferences and the organizations of which it is a part, it seems that the margin of independence enjoyed by Iraqi foreign policy is still limited. The overall Arab, regional, and international projects and interactions undertaken by the governments of Haider al-Abadi and Mustafa al-Kadhimi were

mainly based on reactions to some extent. Even in the case of action, both governments faced sharp internal pressures from leaders and political blocs allied with Iran, Syria, or Turkey, an important indicator for understanding the nature of Iraqi foreign policy management after 2003.

Iraq has a great opportunity to adopt a new foreign policy and approach in which it manages its relations through several pathways, including the theory of “guarantor diplomacy,” which can be built according to the constants of respecting sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries as a fundamental pillar in establishing any bilateral relationship. It is unreasonable for the foreign policy decision-maker to think of balance with a country that violates its sovereignty and seizes its internal and external decision-making. Also, adopting a foreign policy based on “alliance” with the Arab pivot states will achieve for Iraq a space of external strength and greater interaction at all diplomatic, economic, and security levels.

Requirements for the Success of Iraqi Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

The geographical area in which Iraq is situated, whether at the level of the Arab and regional neighborhood or the Middle East, as well as the political environment and international interests that have become more intertwined and complicated due to accelerating changes among major countries, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war and its repercussions on international relations, the escalating conflict between America and Russia-China, and the Iranian nuclear file and its reflections on the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East, requires foreign policy makers, including those of Iraq, to set clear pathways that do not accept diplomatic hesitation or the use of emotions or subsidiary affiliations to determine the compass of foreign positions.

The post-2003 foreign policy of Iraq represents one of the challenges in the new democratic political system, as this policy has been subject to determinants different from what is commonly understood in other countries for shaping foreign policy. In many of Iraq's foreign relations, in addition to the events it has gone through, it has depended on the vision of the official responsible for implementing the public policy, which may be subject to ideological, national, or even personal considerations, making Iraq's foreign policy lose its direction. For the success of foreign policy, certain factors are essential, the most important of which are:

- The existence of a unified and serious internal situation is one of the main factors for the success of foreign policy. International negotiators must be supported by a unified and effective political system; a negotiator cannot achieve the desired goals if there is no internal unity. The presence of internal political disputes weakens the negotiator's position, and politicians are required to avoid engaging in narrow partisan disputes and agree on a unified national policy. National unity is the foundation of strength in implementing foreign policy and defending national interests. Differences in political positions may reflect aspects of democratic diversity, but their exaggeration may weaken the external political stance of the state and harm the national negotiator's position.

- For the success of foreign policy, the society must agree on broad lines to define the supreme national interests to be objectives for foreign policy activity and in defending them. For example, it is impermissible to compromise territory, borders, or waters.

- The third condition for the success of foreign policy is continuity and flexibility. When we establish a consistent foreign policy for a certain period and follow the approach of that policy systematically and

defend it in all international circles continuously, we ensure the success of that policy. Otherwise, the interests of the country become subject to whims and changes.

In the context of the foregoing, it becomes clear that the state strives to achieve various objectives in its foreign policy. When seeking to achieve an effective Iraqi foreign policy that contributes to elevating Iraq's regional and global level and role, it necessitates having a set of strategic pillars in the Iraqi foreign policy aiming towards a world of multiple partnerships, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Economic Diplomacy: Iraq needs, first and foremost, to recalibrate the concept of economic diplomacy. It currently understands this concept as the use of foreign policy tools to achieve economic gains and secure national interests, which, of course, include foreign policy objectives. This means that regardless of the delegation of economic objectives to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it also needs to use economic tools to achieve its goals, either through its own authority in formulating economic policy or through coordinating economic policies with other relevant ministries. Accordingly, Iraq needs a strong political roadmap for its economic and geostrategic priorities to be able to harness its economic resources and the creative energy of its population, address unemployment that plagues individuals entering the workforce, and appear as a force that enforces the law and achieves justice, at least to ensure the continuity of the political process that threatens all its aspects from time to time. Forming successful diplomacy that contributes to driving growth in Iraq requires consistency in discourse and actions by liberating its local markets for the private sector and working consistently according to the theory of mutual dependence, especially at the regional and international levels.

2. Effective Realism: By realism here, it means defining Iraq's

foreign ambitions based on the current realities of the political, economic, and security sectors, and aligning the desired goal with the available and allocated resources. Thus, Iraq's foreign policy would be more realistic in setting goals and outlining the state's top strategies. The realistic foreign political performance is fundamentally the first step in determining Iraq's position in the regional and international strategic balance equation, followed by the process of policy formulation to achieve goals. Any move by an international player cannot succeed without determining its position in its regional and international surroundings, as well as its internal bases, alongside understanding the extent to which its foreign policy aspires.

3. Geopolitical Foundation and Free Iraqi Vision: The geopolitical foundation of the state represents the starting point towards rearranging and reshaping the Iraqi foreign policy to align with Iraq's current strength and aspirations. The free Iraqi vision, which the Iraqi foreign policy should adopt in action and behavior, means understanding the movement of regional geography and embarking on redefining its trajectories, extending its influence, and formulating foreign policy in accordance with the philosophy of what the situation should be regionally for Iraq.

4. Understanding the Entries of Geopolitical Movement in the External Environment: This strategy is part of understanding the philosophy of managing Iraq's foreign political relations. Understanding the keys to regional movement and the entries of interests is one of the most important methods Iraq needs to form successful international relations in the next stage. Economy, trade, successful oil investment contracts, reconstruction, establishing strategic cooperation protocols with regional and post-regional countries, as well as with major countries, could enhance Iraq's stability and contribute to reducing the magnitude of the ongoing conflict between regional powers in its

internal environment. However, this subject requires a rational balance in orientation without relying on one side of trade relations with two or more parties.

5. Strengthening Allies and Moving Friends to the Allies' Category then Neutralizing Enemies: This policy is one of the most prominent strategic pillars on which Iraqi foreign policy should be built. Its success requires the existence of a real national will that transcends national, religious, and sectarian differences in the regional environment. It involves treating Iraq's interests as supreme sacred interests. It also requires diplomatically aware management at the level of responsibility, based on economic and investment tools that interest regional and international powers and contribute to the internal stability process.

6. Forming a General Balanced Network of Relations: This strategy includes formulating a comprehensive interest balance for the orientations of Iraqi foreign policy, without limiting it to one or two parties and heavily relying on them. Forming a balanced network of relations requires enhancing economic, security, and strategic cooperation with Iraq in a way that does not allow it to be a place of conflict as much as it should be a place for economic competition, for example, to secure energy investments and comprehensive cooperation in various sectors.

Based on what has been mentioned, adopting these pillars and relying on them as foundations and starting points in Iraqi foreign policy contributes to crystallizing a new vision and an effective pattern in Iraq's foreign relations. At the same time, it leads to defining priorities and understanding the nature of challenges facing the regional environment and Iraq's position in it, and its departure from there to the external environment. This is represented by adopting a comprehensive

strategy in foreign policy, fundamentally based on distributing Iraq's interactions with regional and international powers. It should not be dependent on one global power represented by the United States, by adopting the logic of strategic partnerships with active powers in the international system, which keeps Iraq away from American pressures, especially in Middle Eastern issues.

Iraq can move towards achieving strategic partnerships with several active powers in the region and the world. Its policy should not be limited to the United States, especially in light of Iraq's strategic importance as a global oil power. These partnerships can be achieved with Russia, major European powers, and Asian powers such as Turkey, Iran, and the Arab Gulf states, given the importance of energy, trade, and investments in these powers' interactions in contemporary international politics. In the context of adopting a strategic partnership with active powers in the international system, Iraq's advantage lies in its energy potential, especially oil, which endows Iraq with significant energy capabilities. This contributes to shaping a new strategic vision in Iraq's foreign relations, by opening investment doors to active powers in the international system and achieving strategic partnerships with them. Therefore, it can be said that the success of Iraqi foreign policy in adopting a new strategic vision fundamentally stems from following a set of effective policies in both regional and international environments. Foremost among these is avoiding alignment with regional axis policies, zeroing problems with neighboring and regional countries, and adopting a realistic vision of the distribution of international power centers. This includes maintaining a security alliance with the United States as the world's largest security and military power, alongside adopting multiple strategic partnerships in energy, trade, and investment fields with active powers in the international system such as Russia, major European powers, and Asian powers, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation in social, cultural, health, educational, sports, and other areas.

- ❖ Iraq should formulate a national action plan that restores its status and prestige, and establishes equitable relations with countries around the world, including the United States. A strong Iraq is in everyone's interest, while a weak Iraq can be a source of instability in the region and the world. These efforts should be part of the framework of the Iraqi National Security Strategy, which should involve all parties concerned with this matter.
- ❖ A strategy for multilateral relations should be followed, enhancing Iraq's effectiveness and role in the United Nations, its organizations, and specialized agencies, and elevating it to the level of strategic partnership. It is also necessary to support Iraq's domestic priorities in achieving sustainable development. Iraq's status and role in the Arab League should also be elevated, and the mechanisms of joint Arab action in the league should be activated and developed to match the challenges and current issues in the region.
- ❖ A commitment to balanced diplomacy with the international community is necessary, maintaining an equal distance from all parties to regional conflicts, within the ethical and legal limits of the foreign policy approach.
- ❖ Decision-makers in Iraq should adopt strategic plans aimed at keeping up with international changes, developing society, and restoring our country's position in the external environment. Strategies and strategic plans should be formulated precisely and flexibly, based on clear objectives and focusing on the most important issues, addressing them with a forward-looking vision, and employing all Iraqi capabilities, resources, and energies to confront anticipated challenges. It is important to differentiate between challenges that need solutions and threats that need confrontation.

❖ A policy of unity of position at various official and unofficial levels should be adopted, avoiding the dispersion of opinions or directions, both within the government as the executive body and among political and parliamentary forces. This is necessary to ensure the construction of a balanced and non-conflicting foreign policy in its regional and international environment. Foreign policy priorities should be defined and agreed upon by all forces, and adopted as a basis for a consistent Iraqi strategy agreed upon by all Iraqi political parties. This strategy should place the state's supreme interests, including national sovereignty, at its highest priority. The principle of sovereignty and its consolidation, and the refusal to accept any external interference in internal affairs, are fundamental to the success and strength of the state.

❖ The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs is urged to adopt virtual and digital diplomacy, and to address the challenges posed by cybersecurity and the technological development gap. The ministry should build a digital diplomacy department to activate digital diplomatic performance and promote digital culture among diplomatic staff. It is advised to build an application in the ministry that enhances strategic communication with the international community, with a focus on reducing the number of Iraqi embassies in the world to achieve financial returns that help address the country's financial problems.

❖ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is urged to elevate the Iraqi diplomatic role in order to effectively contribute to the process of development and construction amid significant internal and external challenges, which require the convergence of all good efforts to restore Iraq's distinguished role in the region and maintain good relations with all its neighbors and countries of the world.

❖ The government and the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs are

urged to invest Iraq's presence in international and Arab specialized organizations to work on activating the diplomacy of Iraqi artifact recovery, where Iraq has succeeded in recovering thousands of artifacts and manuscripts through activating its diplomacy.

❖ The Iraqi decision-maker is urged to strengthen Iraq's role in the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Group of 77 and China, in a manner that ensures strengthening relations with member states of the movement, and the Group of 77, in order to invest the voting bloc of the two organizations in the United Nations. This enhances the means of multilateral collective action and supports Iraq's interests in international and regional organizations.

❖ The Iraqi government is urged to create a new center specializing in the coordination and implementation of joint agreements and priorities in the field of counter-terrorism, based in Iraq, with financial and logistical support for this purpose. The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs should play a significant role in the external discourse on counter-terrorism.

❖ The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs is urged to activate and develop joint working mechanisms in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in a way that enhances understanding, cooperation, and stability among Islamic countries, ensuring the enhancement of Iraq's presence and effectiveness in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

❖ A strategy should be adopted to develop relations and cooperation with major industrial countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, the Russian Federation, China, and Japan, in a way that enhances mutual interests at all economic, political, and security levels.

- ❖ Strengthening trade, investment, and harmonious economic relations between Iraq and the European Union (promoting sustainable economic development) should provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, and cultural cooperation, through the enhancement of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and Iraq signed in 2012.
- ❖ Seeking new markets for local products and encouraging foreign businessmen and institutions to invest in Iraq is crucial.
- ❖ Strengthening relations with geographically close African countries to Iraq, especially with East African countries, opening African centers in Iraq, in addition to holding Iraqi–African trade exhibitions, and establishing committees specializing in strengthening relations between Iraq and African countries is essential.
- ❖ Establishing Iraqi cooperation with ASEAN countries due to their current importance, specifically with its Muslim member countries, is vital as ASEAN may seek to enhance its presence in the oil production sectors in Iraq. ASEAN’s policy towards Iraq is subject to its general policy of building an environment of international stability and peace.

Conclusion

Despite Iraq still being subject to external influences, monitoring its foreign affairs file indicates that the independence enjoyed by Iraqi foreign policy remains limited. The overall regional and international projects and interactions carried out by Iraq in 2022 were primarily based on reactions. Even when taking action, the government faces severe internal pressures from political blocs and alliances, an important indicator for understanding the nature of Iraqi foreign policy management post-2003. The formation of the new Iraqi government led by Mohammed Shia al-Sudani at the end of 2022 could establish an important base for Iraqi foreign activity, aiming to achieve significant transformations at the foreign level in 2023.

A state like Iraq, given its relationships and connections, cannot rely on a policy or principle of self-reclusion. Almost all countries in the world need each other politically, economically, or security-wise. International relations have become complementary, with significant reliance on mutual dependence and regional and international interaction. At the same time, not all countries rely on blocs and alliances, as this would place them in a position of weakness and need for a particular axis against hostility from another and strategic intersection with it. This is difficult in Iraq due to its diverse political and social reality. In addition to its pursuit of balance in its dealings with the world's nations and its complex regional situation socially intertwined with its internal situation, Iraq necessitates not favoring one axis over another. Therefore, the strategy of balance and equivalence in international interaction is most suitable for our state in its foreign policy, aiming to achieve economic and political independence and prevent interference in its internal affairs.

The experiences of previous Iraqi governments up to now indicate the inability of their leaders to genuinely deal with national and foreign capabilities, directions, and aspirations. Therefore, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani attempts to move towards Arab and Western directions. Among the conclusions of the research article:

- Iraq has a strategic location that gives it many privileges, being a center for trade, economy, and energy, and it can be integrated into all transport projects related to it and the region, especially in terms of oil.
- After the establishment of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's government, a new strategy in foreign relations was adopted, based on balancing those relations between East and West for Iraq's benefit. Bias towards the East and distancing from the West, especially the United States, could cause significant problems for the current government.
- Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's government adopts a diplomacy of productive relations. If there are risks of engaging with China, which has not advanced towards Iraq even a step, it is possible to develop strategic relationships and agreements with the West.
- There is a serious Iraqi desire to continue partnership and cooperation with the United States to achieve sustainable development goals, improve performance, and establish principles of good governance, after signing the executive agreement for the development goals grant provided to Iraq to support development efforts. The government of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani may not have shown a public policy of defiance against the U.S. administration, but according to informed sources, it firmly faces many American pressures and interventions. However, it balances that in a way that aligns with the circumstances and complexities of the current stage and its exceptional intricacies.

- Going towards the East and away from the West, especially America, could cause significant problems for the current government. The recent American steps, which resulted in the devaluation of the Iraqi dinar and the rise in the exchange rate of the dollar, are the biggest evidence of this. This is due to Washington's arbitrariness in delivering Iraq's financial needs in dollars from its oil deposits account at the Federal Reserve Bank of America, hindering Iraq's economic liberation.
- Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's recent visit to France led to a strategic agreement, which will undoubtedly be a test of France's ability to perform roles outside American interest, and perhaps even compete with it, especially economically.
- The government may be excused under the current stage's circumstances and exceptional complexities in deciding to fully remove American forces from Iraq, but it certainly is not excused for legitimizing the presence of these forces.
- The role of non-governmental actors, including businessmen, politicians from various sects, and tribal leaders, has a greater influence in neighboring countries or those with regional or international interest than the government itself, which is a mistake. Therefore, the government should adopt a consistent strategy, reduce non-governmental foreign activity, and strengthen the governmental role represented by the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and ambassadors. Without this strategy and effective action, the balance will tilt towards other countries attracting from within Iraq in line with their policies. Here, the government loses its influence abroad and hinders relations.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the ability to build a balanced and non-conflicting foreign policy in its regional and international

environment requires unity of position at various official and unofficial levels. Avoiding the dispersion of opinions or directions between the government as the executive body and among the political and parliamentary forces is essential. The main and important issue in this field is defining the priorities of foreign policy, agreeing on them among all forces, and adopting them as a basis for a consistent Iraqi strategy that all Iraqi political parties believe in, which should prioritize the state's supreme interests, especially national sovereignty. Starting from the principle of sovereignty and consolidating it, and not accepting any external interference in internal affairs, is fundamental to the success and strength of the state.

We hope that Iraq will have good relationships in the next phase that ensure its interests and those of its people through stability in foreign policy, which has not yet been achieved.