



Iraq-Qatar Relations 2017-2024 A Study in the Political and Economic Fields



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Article Information

Received: 1/4/2025

Revised: 25/5/2025

Accepted: 26/6/2025

Published: 1/7/2025

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Keywords: Iraq and
Qatar; Qatari
investments; Gulf States;
regional stability.

Citation: Alnuaimy. L.
O. M., ÖZEV. M. H. &
Shaaban. A. A. (2025).
Iraq-Qatar Relations
2017-2024: A Study in
the Political and
Economic Field.
Regional Studies Journal.
19(65). 9-30.

Abstract

The study aims to examine the evolution of Iraqi-Qatari relations between 2017 and 2024, with a particular focus on the political and economic dimensions. This period, marked by the aftermath of the war against ISIS, witnessed a significant shift in the trajectory of bilateral ties between Baghdad and Doha. The significance of this research stems from its contribution to a deeper understanding how both Iraq and Qatar have responded to regional and international transformations-and how these shifts have influenced their strategic calculations. By analyzing developments in this context, the study offers insights into the broader dynamics shaping Gulf and Middle Eastern politics. The research is structured around four core sections. The first explores the political rapprochement between Iraq and Qatar following 2017. The second examines the growth of economic relations, highlighting trade and cooperative agreements. The third investigates the trajectory of Qatari investments in Iraq after 2022, while the fourth analyzes the key obstacles facing Qatari economic engagement, including bureaucratic, legal, and security-related challenges. The study concludes with several important findings. Chief among them is Iraq's strategic geopolitical position, which presents both opportunities and complexities for regional actors like Qatar. By deepening its political and economic ties with Iraq, Qatar can not only strengthen its influence within the region but also enhance its strategic value as a small state leveraging networked diplomacy. Such engagement positions Doha as a vital partner in Iraq's reconstruction efforts and an indispensable actor for global powers with major political and security interests in Iraq-particularly the

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العلاقات العراقية-القطرية ٢٠١٧-٢٠٢٤ دراسة في المجال السياسي والاقتصادي

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الملخص

يهدف البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على التطور الحاصل في العلاقات العراقية-القطرية خلال المدة ٢٠١٧-٢٠٢٤ في المجالين السياسي والاقتصادي، إذ شهدت هذه المدة بعد الحرب على تنظيم داعش تطورا ملحوظا في العلاقات الثنائية بين البلدين. وتكمن أهمية البحث في أن دراسة العلاقات العراقية القطرية خلال الفترة ٢٠١٧-٢٠٢٤ تمثل أهمية كبيرة في فهم البلدين لخطورة التحولات الإقليمية والدولية وتأثيرها على المنطقة. تضمن البحث أربعة محاور رئيسية، تناول الأول تطور العلاقات السياسية العراقية-القطرية بعد عام ٢٠١٧، وبحث الثاني في تطور العلاقات الاقتصادية بين العراق وقطر، وتناول الثالث تطور الاستثمارات القطرية في العراق بعد عام ٢٠٢٢، وركز الرابع على عوائق الاستثمارات القطرية في العراق وانتهى بخاتمة تضمنت عدد من الاستنتاجات أهمها أن العراق يعد دولة ذات أهمية جيوسياسية كبيرة، وتطوير قطر لعلاقاتها مع العراق سياسيا واقتصاديا سيعزز من السياسة الاقتصادية القطرية في العراق ويطور من قدرات قطر الشبكية كدولة صغيرة، وبالتالي تحمي مصالحها من خلال جعل الدوحة لا غنى عنها لإحياء الاقتصاد العراقي، والأهم من ذلك، للدول التي لديها مصالح سياسية وأمنية خارجية كبيرة في العراق، بما في ذلك الولايات المتحدة.

معلومات الأرشفة

الاستلام: ٢٠٢٥/٤/١

المراجعة: ٢٠٢٥/٥/٢٥

القبول: ٢٠٢٥/٦/٢٦

النشر الإلكتروني: ٢٠٢٥/٧/١

المراسلة:

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الكلمات المفتاحية: العراق وقطر؛

الاستثمارات القطرية؛ دول الخليج؛

الاستقرار الإقليمي.

الاقتراب: النعيمي. لقمان. ع. م.

أوزوف. محرم. ح. شعبان. أحمد.

ع. (٢٠٢٥). العلاقات العراقية-

القطرية ٢٠١٤-٢٠٢٤: دراسة في

المجال الأمني والعسكري. مجلة

دراسات إقليمية. ١٩ (٦٥). ٣٠-٩.

Introduction

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, regional political dynamics in the Middle East underwent a major shift, impacting Iraqi's relations with its neighbors, including Qatar. Initially, Qatar played a role in supporting the new Iraqi government, offering diplomatic recognition and hosting various political dialogues. The two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 2005, with Qatar's engagement seen as part of its broader strategy to enhance its influence in the region. Between 2005 and 2017, the relationship was complex, influenced by political and security instability in Iraq, diverging political agendas, and differing political positions on regional crises, such as the Syrian civil war and the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS).

In recent years, particularly since 2017, Iraq and Qatar have sought to strengthen bilateral relations amidst regional tensions. High-level visits and agreements have aimed to enhance cooperation in the areas of trade, security, and counterterrorism. This development reflects both countries' interests in promoting stability and mutual prosperity amid a turbulent geopolitical landscape. Therefore, Qatari-Iraqi relations under the new government are taking a completely different path. The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, visited Iraq in June 2023, during which he signed a series of bilateral agreements aimed at expanding Qatar's economic and investment presence in the country. These agreements are expected to contribute to attracting Qatari investments to Iraq exceeding \$9 billion.

Research objective:

The research sheds light on the developments in Iraqi-Qatari relations during the period 2017-2024 in the political and economic spheres. This period witnessed a remarkable development in bilateral relations between the two countries following the war on ISIS.

Research significance:

Studying Iraqi-Qatari relations during 2017-2024 is of great importance in understanding regional and international transformations and its impact on the region. In the political sphere, the research focuses on the two countries' efforts to strengthen diplomatic cooperation and address common challenges, such as regional security and stability. In the economic sphere, it highlights the role of mutual investments in promoting economic development for both countries. Analyzing this period is essential to understanding how relations between Iraq and Qatar evolved and its impact on the balance of power in the Middle East, as well as to draw lessons learned to enhance future cooperation.

Research Problem:

The research problem focuses on raising the following questions: What are the main factors that influenced the nature of Iraqi-Qatari relations during the period 2003-2017? How did political relations between the two countries develop during the period 2007-2024? How did the development of political relations affect the economic relations development between the two countries? What are the areas of Qatari investment in Iraq? What are the most important obstacles to this investment? What are the legal guarantees and policies adopted by the Iraqi side to address the challenges of the Qatari presence in Iraq? How will US policies in the region, particularly toward Iran, and the transformations taking place in the region affect the development of relations between the two countries?

Research Hypothesis:

The differences in political and economic positions between Iraq and Qatar, as a result of regional and international changes occurring after the Al-Aqsa Intifada, significantly impact the nature of bilateral relations between the two countries during 2017-2025. Strong relations between Iraq and Qatar are expected to contribute to promoting shared economic interests and overcoming regional challenges, providing strategic opportunities for achieving sustainable development in both countries.

Research Methodology:

The research adopted several approaches to studying Iraqi-Qatari relations, including historical, descriptive-analytical, and inductive approaches, to provide a comprehensive and balanced study of the development of these relations and their impact on both countries.

Research Structure:

The research included four main axes. The first addresses the development of Iraqi-Qatari political relations after 2017, the second examines the development of economic relations between Iraq and Qatar, the third addresses the development of Qatari investments in Iraq after 2022, and the fourth focuses on the obstacles to Qatari investments in Iraq. It concludes with the most important findings.

1. Factors affecting Iraqi-Qatari relations 2003-2017

Qatari-Iraqi relations have experienced ups and downs over the past decade, often in parallel with Iraq's general relations with the Gulf states. They have been shaped by major turning points in the region's history, including the period following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the Arab Spring, the rise of ISIS, and others. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Saudi Arabia,

Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, became key players in the Iraqi arena following the US invasion, with the outbreak of a proxy war between Sunni armed groups and other Iraqi parties (Newton, 2019).

Sunni Arab political and armed factions have posed a barrier to the expansion of Iranian influence in Iraq. However, these factions have often been a source of tension in relations between the Gulf states and the ruling elite in Baghdad, which has denounced the Gulf's active and implicit support for Sunni armed factions and their Iraqi political supporters. The rivalry and proxy war in Iraq paved the way for the confrontations that followed the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, with both the Gulf states and Iran supporting rival political parties and non-state armed groups, including their massive financial support for opposing sides in other proxy wars, most notably the Syrian war (Gause, 2014)

Sectarian tensions escalated in the run-up to the ISIS offensive in Iraq in 2014 and reached their peak under former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who was not supported by the Gulf states, particularly following the Arab Spring when he called for uprisings in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In 2014, al-Maliki accused Saudi Arabia and Qatar of declaring war on Iraq because they supported Sunni Arab rebel factions. (Aljazeera, 2014).

Maliki's policies prompted several prominent Sunni Arab political figures to seek political support from Qatar, including former Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who was convicted on terrorism charges and sentenced to death in absentia. Other factors further exacerbated these tensions, as Iraq accused the Qatari Al Jazeera channel of inciting violence and suspended its operating license in the country in 2013 (Tawfeeq, 2012).

Maliki's departure in 2014, following the ISIS offensive in northern Iraq and the collapse of the Iraqi army, paved the way for a rapprochement with Qatar, after his successor, Haider al-Abadi, adopted a more moderate discourse. Then-Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah visited Iraq in 2015, and the visit was followed by Qatar's announcement of its intention to open an embassy in Baghdad. (Reuters, 2015).

Amid of 2017th Gulf crisis, Iraq sent mixed signals to Doha. On the one hand, Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi visited Qatar and pledged to send 10,000 Iraqi fighters to defend it, while Maliki, who had left office, called on the Iraqi government to stand with Qatar in confronting any military aggression from the Saudi axis. Conversely, other Iraqi officials called on the government to mediate to ease tensions and refrain from siding with one party against another (Mamouri, 2017).



2. The development of Iraqi-Qatari political relations after 2017

The year 2017 marked a new beginning for Iraqi-Qatari relations at various political, economic, and educational levels. On the political front, relations between the two countries witnessed tangible development, in light of the mutual visits made by officials from both countries. In the same year, Salim al-Jabouri, the former Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, visited Qatar to strengthen relations between the two countries and work to open new horizons between them after the long estrangement that both countries had experienced (Alsharq, 2017) .

Perhaps the real beginning of the relationship between the two countries began on May 22, 2017, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, made an official visit to Iraq, during which he delivered an official invitation to Haider al-Abadi, the former Prime Minister, to visit Qatar (Aljazeera, 2017).

During his visit to Doha, Al-Abadi discussed bilateral relations and ways to strengthen and develop them in various fields. They agreed to remove all that could hinder relations between the two parties, look to the future, and overcome past differences. The issue of banking exchange and cooperation through the opening of mutual banks was discussed, and Qatar expressed its willingness to help rebuild cities destroyed by the terrorist organization ISIS, most notably Anbar and Mosul. In addition, they agreed on the need to conclude agreements related to electricity (oil and gas). At this stage, Qatar was subjected to a quadripartite blockade in 2017, but it was able to contain the blockade and its negative effects, maintaining its influence and position in the regional and international arenas. Iraq's position on the Gulf crisis contributed to this. The Chargé d'Affaires of the Iraqi Embassy in Doha, Abdul Sattar Al-Janabi, stated: "Iraq rejects the blockade imposed by several Gulf states on Qatar, and was among the first countries to open its airspace and ports to it." He added that his country calls for the Gulf parties to sit at the negotiating table and resolve the crisis peacefully, and supports the Kuwaiti initiative in this regard (Alzaidy, 2019).

The visit of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani to Iraq in November 2018 marked another turning point in the development of relations between the two countries, through the activation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between them, and the holding of regular meetings of the Iraqi-Qatari committee. Iraq and Qatar agreed to activate economic and trade relations and to hold meetings of the Iraqi-Qatari committee in Doha. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Mohammed Ali Al-Hakim, confirmed the existence of cooperation between his country and Qatar, including reconstruction and investment, and a project to transport goods from Türkiye to Qatar via Iraqi

territory (Alzaidy, 2019) . Iraqi President Dr. Barham Salih visited Qatar in mid-2019, where he met with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The visit aimed to build a system of joint relations that would contribute to strengthening Arab-Arab relations. He emphasized the development of bilateral relations between the two countries, expanding horizons of cooperation to serve common interests, and emphasizing the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of both countries (Anadolu Ajansi, 2019).

The opening of a shipping line between Qatar and Iraq was announced in April 2018, during a visit by Jassim bin Saif Al Sulaiti, Qatar's Minister of Transport and Communications, to Iraq. The new shipping line will transport goods from Jordan, Kuwait, Turkey, and Iran via Iraqi territory to Qatar. In February 2019, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani announced Qatar's provision of a \$1 billion package of loans and investments in infrastructure and reconstruction projects in Iraq. Addressing the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, he affirmed Qatar's support for Iraq and all efforts aimed at ensuring its unity and sovereignty, enhancing its stability, and building a democratic Iraq through the combined efforts of all political parties and components of society. In mid-2019, the Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, met with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi to discuss developments in the Arabian Gulf region and the escalating crisis between the United States and Iran (alkhaleejonline, 2019). In addition to signing the second executive program of the Memorandum of Cultural, Scientific and Educational Cooperation between the Government of the State of Qatar and the Government of Iraq in the field of higher education and scientific research (Alzaidy, 2019).

In the diplomatic field, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on bilateral cooperation between the Foreign Service Institute of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diplomatic Institute of the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also agreed to sign memoranda of understanding to establish a framework for political consultation and cooperation on common issues, and a memorandum of understanding to exempt holders of diplomatic and special service passports from the procedures for obtaining entry visas. The two sides agreed to exert efforts to activate the outcomes of the committee's work from the memoranda of understanding for all sectors, and to expedite their procedures through the foreign ministries of both brotherly countries. The two sides agreed to urge the national carriers (Iraqi Airways and Qatar Airways) to exchange information and expertise in the field of air transport sector (Alzaidy, 2019).

The first visit to Baghdad by the Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, was in August 2021 to participate in the Baghdad



Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, which was held in August 2021. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad delivered a speech at the opening session of that conference, in which he praised the efforts made to establish security and stability in Iraq, continue building state institutions, consolidate Iraq's independence, and consolidate its national sovereignty (Aljazeera net, 2021).

The second important official visit of the Emir of Qatar to Iraq was in June 2023, the first by an Arab leader since the formation of the new government. During the visit, he held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, covering relations between the two countries, areas of cooperation, and common issues. The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad, said that his country would continue to support Iraq and the Iraqi people. He also explained that he discussed regional developments with the Iraqi Prime Minister, and emphasized the importance of dialogue. For his part, al-Sudani said in a speech after the talks with the Emir of Qatar that Qatar would remain one of Iraq's strongest allies and partners in the region. Al-Sudani explained that the talks covered various areas, including security and information cooperation, to maintain common and regional security. Qatar and Iraq signed a joint declaration of intent in the presence of the Emir of Qatar and the Iraqi Prime Minister. The agreement consists of six basic articles, including (Aljazeera net, 2023) :

1. Continuing political and security coordination and consultation on issues of common interest.
2. Expanding horizons for investment and trade cooperation, particularly in the Development Road project, which the Iraqi government is scheduled to begin implementation soon.
3. Forming a special team to monitor various joint projects.
4. Raising the level of investment and economic cooperation in the energy sector (oil/gas/renewable energy).
5. Activating and facilitating investment and mobility procedures between the two countries.
6. Enhancing cooperation in the field of climate and environment.

On January 4th, 2025, Mahmoud Al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, affirmed that "Qatari-Iraqi relations are constantly evolving and are built on solid fraternal foundations," noting that "the State of Qatar possesses great wisdom in diplomatic dealings." Al-Mashhadani added, in statements to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), "We always seek to strengthen diplomatic ties between Iraq, Qatar, and all Arab countries," noting that "the State of Qatar's position is often close to the Iraqi diplomatic position, and we have many commonalities that bring our views closer on issues in the Arab arena." Regarding the existence of new joint investments between Iraq and Qatar, Al-Mashhadani said, "We, as Parliament, support the decisions taken by the

government to rely on investment to develop the infrastructure in the country, which suffers from an accumulated shortage in many projects, which began during the years of the blockade imposed on Iraq before 2003, the repercussions of which continue to this day." The Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament concluded his remarks by saying, "Certainly, Qatari companies possess great qualifications that make them strong competitors in the Iraqi arena." (Alsharq, 2025).

3. The development of economic relations between Iraq and Qatar

Qatar's current relationship with Iraq is radically different from what it was over the past decade, in line with the broader geopolitical shift in the region in recent years. The March 2023 Saudi-Iranian agreement to resume diplomatic relations was a pivotal moment amid the proxy wars of the past two decades, but the war in Gaza has undermined those expectations. Iraq, often the scene of violent rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran, played a pivotal role in easing tensions through its mediation efforts and hosting of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership (Baghdad Summit). In addition to providing a meeting between Iranian and Gulf officials, the summit also brought together the Qatari and Emirati leaderships after years of tension between the two countries (Alnuaimy and Al-Obaidy, 2024).

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' engagement with Iraq comes as part of Washington's relentless efforts to push Baghdad toward the Gulf axis in an attempt to contain Iranian influence. In this context, Washington has worked to reduce Iraq's reliance on electricity imports from Iran, which would undermine US sanctions on Tehran. Although Washington has agreed to Iraq's import of Iranian electricity by granting Baghdad exemptions from its sanctions on Tehran, it considers economic and energy integration between Iraq and the GCC countries essential to its long-term efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program (Alaaldin, 2024), this integration includes the electrical interconnection between Saudi Arabia and Iraq within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority. The first phase of the project is expected to include Saudi Arabia exporting one gigawatt of electricity to Iraq via a line extending (270) miles (434,523) km between Arar and Baghdad. Among other initiatives under implementation is an electrical interconnection project between the Al-Wafra station in Kuwait and the Al-Faw station in southern Iraq, which is expected to provide Iraq with 1.8 gigawatts of electricity by 2025. The states of Kuwait and Qatar have pledged to finance the GCC-Iraq line (Middle East Monitor, 2022).

The work of the joint committee between the two countries (the Qatari-Iraqi Joint Committee for Economic, Trade and Technical Cooperation) was also activated, as its sixth session was held in December 2018 after a hiatus of 16 years. The Qatari side was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Ali bin Ahmed Al-



Kuwari, Minister of Commerce and Industry, while the Iraqi side was chaired by His Excellency Dr. Mohammed Hashim Abdul Majeed Al-Ani, Minister of Commerce. The committee discussed several topics related to enhancing economic, trade and investment cooperation between the two countries in various fields, including industry, agriculture, transportation, health, education, technology, and culture. They agreed on the need to take the necessary steps to move forward in the approach of consolidating trade and investment cooperation between the two countries, to increase the volume of this exchange and facilitate the flow of goods, services, and investment between them (Obaid, 2022).

After the session, an agreement was signed to establish a Businessmen Council and a Memorandum of Understanding between the Qatar Chamber and the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce. The agreement aims to strengthen the bonds of friendship and understanding between businessmen in the two countries and to develop cooperation in the fields of trade exchange, investment, technology transfer, service provision, and support for the industrial sectors in both countries. In an indication of the keenness of officials in Doha and Baghdad to foster relations between them, many prominent Iraqi officials visited Qatar, which in turn contributed to strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed for security cooperation, especially since the most important common interests were confronting criminal terrorist organizations and combating their expansion in the region. On the investment side, both sides expressed their interest in developing cooperation between the two countries, and Qatar expressed its desire to identify available investment opportunities in various Iraqi sectors. The Iraqi side will provide the Qatari side with investment opportunities and related studies so that they can be studied and evaluated by Qatari investors. Communication and exchange of proposals will then take place between the two sides through diplomatic channels (Alzaidy, 2019).

In the field of communications, Iraq and Qatar agreed to open up prospects for cooperation between the two countries in this sector, and the possibility of developing it through the exchange of expertise, governance, e-commerce, data communication systems, and cybersecurity. In the field of agriculture and the environment, the two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the areas of environment, biodiversity, combating desertification, desert investment, cooperation in the plant sector, the use of modern technology in environmentally friendly agriculture, and the exchange of expertise in this field. In the field of livestock and veterinary wealth, the two countries agreed to exchange expertise and cooperate in the field of fisheries, fish and shrimp development using the latest technology, training workers, legislating agricultural investment opportunities, and facilitating a suitable environment for them. In the field of

education, it was agreed to expedite the completion of discussions on the draft second executive program for the cultural and scientific cooperation agreement between the two countries, which was presented by the Qatari side. The Iraqi side promised to study it and respond to it through diplomatic channels in preparation for its signing. In the field of health, the necessity of completing the procedures for signing the draft memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of the two countries was emphasized, and the two sides agreed to exchange experts (Alzaidy, 2019).

4. Development of Qatari investments in Iraq after 2022

Since the Iraqi government, led by Mr. Al-Sudani, took office in October 2022, it has worked to attract more investment from the region for an economy battered by decades of war and unrest, but one that benefits from record oil revenues, helping to stimulate demand for consumer goods from a rapidly growing population of at least 43 million.

China, Iran, and Turkey are currently Iraq's largest trading partners. However, the Gulf states, whose relations with Iraq have been complicated over the past two decades, have pledged a series of investments as part of their efforts to cultivate soft power in a country where Iran enjoys unparalleled influence through a strong network of allies. This has been achieved in part through a thaw in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

a. Energy Investment

Qatari investment in the energy sector represents one of the most important investment sectors in Iraq. Qatar has extensive experience in this field, as it is the leading gas producer in the Middle East. Furthermore, Iraq possesses vast natural gas reserves, representing significant opportunities and fertile ground for investment. The Iraqi Ministry of Oil confirmed on December 3, 2023, that Iraq's gas reserves amount to 132 trillion cubic feet, ranking it fifth in the Arab world and tenth globally in terms of gas reserves. The ministry also indicated that Iraq ranks fourth globally in gas flaring, with an estimated 14 billion Cubic Meters of gas being burned annually. Ali Jassim, Director of the Oil Research and Development Center, explained that natural gas is an important source of energy in various sectors and is considered a clean fuel with less environmental pollution. He highlighted the importance of investing in gas to improve electricity production output and reduce environmental emissions. Jassim stressed that Iraq has the potential to become one of the world's leading gas suppliers if its reserves are properly invested, calling for the implementation of strategic plans to activate the service and economic aspects related to gas (NRT, 2023).

On June 18, 2023, three Qatari companies and the Iraqi National Investment Commission agreed to develop projects worth \$9.5 billion in Iraq,



including the construction of two power plants with a total capacity of 2,400 megawatts (Doha News, 2014). According to data issued by Union Carbide Corporation Holding and the Investment Authority, they signed a 25-year public-private partnership related to the two power plants, the construction cost of which will amount to 2.5 billion dollars (Reuters, 2023).

Perhaps Qatar's largest and most ambitious investment project in Iraq is its share of 27 billion dollars in the "Integrated Gas Growth Project," an integrated agreement in the fields of gas, oil, water, and solar energy between the Iraqi government and the French company "TotalEnergies" in 2022. "Qatar Energy" acquired a 25 percent stake in the project, with the three partners: "TotalEnergies," "Basra Oil Company," and "Qatar Energy" investing together about (10) billion dollars in the project aimed at developing facilities to capture natural gas that is burned in multiple gas fields in southern Iraq. The Saudi company "ACWA Power" will join "TotalEnergies" in the solar energy portion of the deal (Saadi, 2023)

In June 18, statements revealed that three Qatari companies and Iraq's National Investment Commission agreed to develop \$9.5 billion worth of projects in Iraq. This deal will include the construction of two power plants, costing \$2.5 billion, as well as a \$7 billion initiative to develop cities, manage hospitals, and build hotels. Egypt Oil reported on the Qatari-Iraqi memorandum of understanding (MoUs) of oil and power: "One of the MoUs is for establishing a joint company to build and operate oil tankers that carry crude oil and petroleum products according to the laws in force in both countries, and another MoU is for cooperation to establish a 150,000 barrels per day oil refinery in Iraq." The third MoU allows the two "to work together to supply Iraq with liquefied gas and to form partnerships with Qatari firms that are experts in constructing gas receiving stations, related storage facilities, and the necessary infrastructure, such as pipelines and power plants." The fourth established memorandum establishes "cooperation to supply Iraqi crude oil to Qatar's refineries and storage facilities" (Middle East Policy Council, 2023).

b. Investment in trade, real estate, infrastructure, and health.

To enhance cooperation between the two sides, coordinating joint work and exchanging information, developing trade relations and economic cooperation between Qatari companies and their Iraqi counterparts, and organizing exhibitions and economic events, the Qatar Chamber signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce on July 11, 2019. The agreement was signed on behalf of the Qatar Chamber by Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and on behalf of the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce by

Abdul Razzaq Al-Zuhairi, President of the Federation. The signing ceremony, held at the Chamber's headquarters, was attended by several members of the Chamber's Board of Directors. Through signing the MoU, the Qatar Chamber and the Federation of Iraqi Chambers aim to develop trade relations and economic cooperation between their affiliated companies, exchange information and data related to the economy, laws and legislation related to establishing businesses, arbitration practices, and resolving commercial disputes. The MoU also aims to hold exhibitions and events to bring together their affiliated companies to discuss concluding mutual deals and alliances, receive Iraqi trade delegations to the State of Qatar, and organize visits by Qatari businessmen to the Republic of Iraq to discuss establishing joint projects (Qatar Chamber, 2019).

The visit of the Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Al Thani, in June 2023 witnessed the signing of several agreements and memoranda of understanding between the two countries in the fields of infrastructure, tourism and health, intending to expand investment and trade cooperation between the two countries. Sheikh Tamim expressed the State of Qatar's intention to invest (5) billion dollars in several sectors in Iraq over the coming years (Aljazeera net, 2023).

Qatar has worked to strengthen and diversify its investments in Iraq during the Al-Sudani government. In August 2023, the Qatari Investment Holding Group announced a package of investments in Iraq within the framework of the memorandum of understanding concluded during the visit of the Emir of Qatar to Baghdad in the same year. The group signed agreements worth (7) billion dollars with the Iraqi National Investment Commission in the fields of real estate and tourism development, in addition to operating and managing hospitals, including the construction of gated residential complexes and five-star hotels, to develop the Iraqi tourism sector. (Qatar News Agency, 2023) .

"This is the right time to invest in Iraq," said Moataz Al Khayat, chairman of Qatari investment holding company Istithmar, which is behind the Rixos project. He pointed to the Iraqi government's ability to build mega projects and attract international investors. "Iraq is more secure and disciplined," he said, adding that he believes Baghdad will be one of the most important Arab capitals in the next 25 years. (Alarab, 2024).

New Rixos Baghdad hotel project in the Green Zone

On August 24th, 2023, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced the commencement of work on a project to build a massive tourist complex in the Green Zone in central Baghdad. The project is scheduled to be implemented by Or Qatar Holding, paving the way for Qatari companies to invest in the country. While stressing that "promising cooperation" between the two countries began in earnest following the visit of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim



bin Hamad Al Thani to Iraq in June 2023, he also noted his government's view of Arab investment as a gateway to economic integration (Iraqi News, 2025).

Mr. Al-Sudani laid the foundation stone for the project implemented by the Qatari Investment Holding Company, which is the first of Qatari investment projects and businesses in Iraq, within the government's orientations to enhance opportunities, work towards economic integration, and improve the investment environment to attract Arab and foreign companies' contributions to infrastructure projects in Iraq. The area of the large tourist complex, whose designs are derived from Iraq's heritage and civilization, is about 115 thousand square meters, 23 floors and 242 hotel rooms of different sizes. The project will also include 22 presidential suites and a center for official conferences (Info Plus, 2023).

"We are working on implementing projects in various fields, whether infrastructure, services or housing," Al-Sudani said, noting that "the promising cooperation between Iraq and Qatar was launched in earnest during the important visit of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, who was a guest in Baghdad." He added that "this investment project, implemented by the Qatari Investment Holding Company, will be a distinctive architectural landmark that will be added to Baghdad's architectural identity," explaining that "we have reviewed the design, which was inspired by history and cultural landmarks, and it will be an architectural masterpiece worthy of Baghdad" (Info Plus, 2023).

Chairman of the National Investment Commission, Haider Mohammed Makiya, revealed the designs for the Rixos tourism project in central Baghdad. During the laying of the foundation stone for the project, he said: "This project is one of the largest tourist resorts in Iraq, and its designs are inspired by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. It will be a distinctive landmark in the capital through its modern designs, meticulous work, and the specified timetable for completion of the project." He added that "the resort includes luxurious hotel suites with hotel apartments, villas, a conference and exhibition center, meeting and event halls, a sports club, outdoor and indoor swimming pools, multiple sports fields, restaurants, gardens, and public services." He indicated that "the commission and its staff have made great efforts to complete the contract and investment license with the Qatari Investment Holding Company to proceed within the timetable for completion of the project." (Raisan, 2023).

c. Signing of a draft agreement to encourage and protect investment between Iraq and Qatar

Iraqi Minister of Commerce Athir Dawood Al-Ghurairi and Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani signed the final minutes of the seventh session of the Iraqi-Qatari Committee in Baghdad on

August 7, 2024, more than six years after the previous session. In a speech during the signing, Al-Ghurairi said, "Iraq and Qatar are keen to strengthen economic, trade, and investment relations," noting that "investment between our two countries constitutes a fundamental focus of cooperation, and we strive to create an attractive investment environment that enhances the economic partnership and achieves common interests." He stated that "the signing of the draft agreement to encourage and protect investment between Iraq and Qatar is an important step towards enhancing mutual investments," calling on "the Qatari side to be the guest of honor at the upcoming Baghdad International Fair, while inviting Qatari companies and businessmen to invest in Iraq, particularly in projects related to development, as these partnerships will contribute to strengthening cooperation between our two countries and open new horizons for economic development." (Iraqi News Agency, 2024).

For his part, Al Thani affirmed that "the seventh session of the joint committee between our two countries reflects our shared desire to enhance cooperation in a way that achieves mutual benefits and fulfills our aspirations for development," stressing "the need to intensify joint efforts to realize the full potential of the partnership. We look forward to achieving more bilateral trade relations and promising economic partnerships at various levels, completing mutual registration protection, enhancing inter-trade, and activating the Qatari-Iraqi Business Council, given its importance in investment and trade." (Iraqi News Agency, 2024).

It is worth noting that the two sides, over the course of two days of the seventh session of the committee, held an intensive exchange of views on ways to enhance and intensify the second cooperation included in the joint minutes, in the fields of "trade, industry, investment, free zones, the private sector, energy, finance, taxation, customs, transportation, civil aviation, communications, information technology, construction, housing, public municipalities, infrastructure, agriculture, water resources, the Baghdad Municipality, education, scientific research, health, environment, culture, sports, youth, and health care." (Iraqi News Agency, 2024).

5. Obstacles to Qatari Investment in Iraq

The boom in Qatari and Gulf economic initiatives in Iraq, in general, reflects the country's important position at the crossroads of regional conflicts and its involvement in the most pressing issues threatening the region and international security, from terrorism to proxy wars, energy security, and competition between major powers. Iraq also boasts tremendous economic potential, as it is the second-largest oil exporter in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Its population exceeds (45) million, according to the latest population census on November 21, 2024, and it is recording a population growth rate of 2.3 percent annually. (France,



2024) However, it faces a number of internal obstacles and challenges that hinder its ability to benefit from these resources, including:

1. Corruption, bureaucracy, and poor governance:

Financial and administrative corruption is one of the biggest obstacles facing major projects in Iraq. This corruption leads to mismanagement of funds, increased costs, and delayed implementation, thus preventing the natural flow of capital into the country, which is the foundation for private sector growth. The biggest problem in this regard is that corruption is politically and security-wise protected by armed groups, some of which have arms involved in the political process. The government is unable to seriously combat corruption, which gives foreign investors the impression that investing in Iraq will be highly risky given the many ramifications of corruption. However, the importance of Iraq's role in the broader economic transformation in the region cannot be underestimated, as evidenced, for example, by the growth of Chinese investments in the country. In 2021, Iraq was the largest recipient of infrastructure funding under China's Belt and Road Initiative, with investments worth \$10.5 billion (Reuters, 2022).

Aware of the reality of this rampant corruption in all aspects of the state, Qatar is taking the risk of investing in Iraq in key sectors such as energy, housing, tourism, and other projects, just like other companies and countries that invest and deal realistically with this corruption. Qatar is less concerned with the risk of the invested sums than with the political and strategic aspects of this investment. There are multiple strategic reasons driving Qatar to expand its relations with Iraq, and it is in Iraq's interest to welcome such Qatari engagement, as it helps restore balance to its relations with Iran and the Arab world and helps improve Iraqi relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in general. Strengthening Qatari engagement in Iraq could also attract more investment into the Iraqi economy, stimulate economic diversification, and introduce the young Iraqi generation and the local entrepreneurial community to alternative regional markets.

2. Political Obstacles and Security Challenges

Once Qatar's expanding economic role in Iraq takes effect, it could give Doha greater political influence, both in Iraq and geopolitically. However, this depends on the ability of these investments to withstand Iraqi political volatility. In August 2022, clashes between supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr and armed factions nearly pushed the country to the brink of civil war. These tensions could resurface at any time. In addition to the risks of security setbacks, the Iraqi political arena is divided, characterized by targeted assassinations, the exploitation or confiscation of state institutions, civil unrest, and widespread kidnappings by unknown criminal groups, while the government is weak in its ability to prosecute these groups and hold them accountable (Alrubaye, 2022).

These conflicts have extended into economic life, as competition over the most attractive and profitable sectors and projects can turn violent among

political parties and armed groups (Swenson, 2017). For example, the "Associated Gas Development Project" agreement was postponed for a year due to internal political disputes over the project's implementation and management. Members of parliament accused the Iraqi Ministry of Oil of violating proper procedures and demanded that parliament review the terms of the agreement, citing its lack of competition and transparency. The project was then temporarily suspended due to the parliamentary elections and the delay in appointing new ministers of oil and finance (Mohammed, Rowena Edwards and Dmitry Zhdannikov, "EXCLUSIVE Iraq's \$27 bln TotalEnergies deal stuck over contract wrangling, 2022). Furthermore, parliament has the authority to compel the government to review or cancel such agreements. This is something Qatari and other foreign investors are taking into consideration, given the diverse composition of parliament, dominated by pro-Iranian members of parliament, and the unstable political situation in the country, which negatively impacts parliament's performance and transforms it from a legislative and oversight role to a political function serving the interests of specific parties (Davison, 2022)

Moreover, the Iraqi government can intervene to allow or exclude major investment projects. The previous Iraqi government (Mustafa al-Kadhimi's government, 2020-2022) suspended a joint venture between Sinopec and Lukoil to develop the West Qurna-2 oil field and thwarted attempts by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and PetroChina to acquire ExxonMobil's stake in the West Qurna oil field. An Iraqi official said, "We do not want the Iraqi energy sector to be described as a Chinese-led energy sector, and this position is agreed upon by the government and the Ministry of Oil." (Mcfarlane & Mohammed, 2022). This is something that the Sudani's government later backed down from in early 2024. Bassem Mohammed, Iraq's deputy oil minister for upstream affairs, said in an interview with Reuters: "We are gathered today to bid farewell to ExxonMobil, and at the same time, congratulate PetroChina on taking over as the prime contractor." PetroChina holds the largest stake in the field after Exxon's departure. Last year, Iraq signed an agreement to sell ExxonMobil's 22.7% stake in the West Qurna 1 field to the state-run Basra Oil Company, while Indonesia's state-owned Pertamina bought the remaining 10% of Exxon's stake, bringing its stake to 20% (Alaaldin, 2024).

Similarly, under the Kadhimi government, the South Korean company Daewoo was awarded the contract to develop the Grand Faw project in Basra, with the support of Muqtada al-Sadr, who has a large support base in southern Iraq. However, Sadr competes for influence in the south with Iran-aligned factions such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Asaib Ahl al-Haq responded to plans to award the contract to Daewoo by pushing for the contract to be awarded to a Chinese company instead, and pushed its allies in the government, including former Minister of Transport Amer Abdul Jabbar, to criticize the award of the contract to Daewoo (Amwaj Media, 2021).



Conclusion

Iraq is of major geopolitical importance. From this perspective, Qatar's economic acumen in Iraq enhances its network-based capabilities, built as a small state, to protect its interests. This makes Doha an indispensable element in reviving the Iraqi economy, and, more importantly, an indispensable element for countries with vital foreign policy and security interests in Iraq, including the United States. However, Qatar must be mindful of the unforeseen repercussions and unintended consequences of its growing relationship with Iraq. Anticipating and mitigating these risks requires solidifying Qatar's commitment to Iraq and engaging with it within the framework of a long-term strategy.

1. It can be argued that the differences in political positions between Iraq and Qatar have affected the level of cooperation between the two countries, creating challenges in achieving each other's foreign policy objectives.
2. Iraqi-Qatari relations have emerged as an opportunity to enhance regional stability, especially in the context of political tensions in the Middle East. Cooperation between the two countries can contribute to containing regional crises such as those in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and others.
3. Growing relations can contribute to achieving common economic interests, and Qatari investments may boost economic growth in Iraq, helping achieve sustainable development in Iraq.
4. The political transformations that occurred in the region following the Al-Aqsa Intifada on October 7, 2023, such as the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, the destruction of Hezbollah's capabilities in Lebanon, and the arrival of the Trump administration in early 2025, indicate an influential geopolitical shift in the region. Iraqi-Qatari relations may play a role in shaping the countries' policies toward future crises, which may contribute to Iraq's preparedness to confront security challenges.
5. It is promising that the existing political relations between Iraq and Qatar will enhance cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism and regional security, contributing to a stable environment that benefits both countries.
6. Qatar's planned investments in Iraq will give it influence and leverage in the country, provided they are part of a long-term commitment to Iraq. In the absence of a strategic commitment to Iraq, dominant Iraqi armed factions will remain able to obstruct Qatari investments, potentially exacerbating rampant corruption and making investments hostage to political fluctuations, as well as exposing Qatari investors to sanctions violations.
7. Qatar's aspirations to increase its economic presence in Iraq will require emergency measures capable of legally and politically protecting its investments. Doha must therefore seek assurances from the Iraqi state—the government, legislature, and judiciary—that its investments in Iraq will not fall victim to the ongoing shifts in the political climate.

8. Iraq and Qatar must bear in mind that the development of shared interests will help consolidate and strengthen bilateral relations further and will contribute to coordinating common positions on a number of pressing regional and international issues, particularly in light of the new Trump administration, the regime changes in Syria, and the geopolitical transformations that the region will witness in the coming period. This will require intensive efforts between the two countries and their engagement in a long-term strategy to protect their shared interests.

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