



Strengthening Iraq-Türkiye Ties amid Regional Tensions

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Headquarters

International Crisis Group

Avenue Louise 235 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • brussels@crisisgroup.org

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Principal Findings

What's new? In the past few years, Türkiye and Iraq have found new ways to cooperate on issues that have sometimes been a source of friction – including the Turkish state's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), water management and oil exports. They are also collaborating on building a major trade corridor.

Why does it matter? A sustained rapprochement could defuse tensions between the neighbours, boost the economic resilience of both and help shore up stability in a region better known for upheaval. While much rides on whether the PKK follows through on its pledge to disband, there may still be room to continue improving relations.

What should be done? In order to keep moving toward settling their differences, Ankara and Baghdad should take legal and other steps to help enable progress concerning the PKK, while also advancing collaboration on water management and oil export issues, and working through obstacles to bringing the Development Road project to fruition.

Executive Summary

After years of fraught relations, Türkiye and Iraq are charting a path toward a rapprochement that holds promise for both countries and for the Middle East as a whole. Deepening cooperation could ease long-standing frictions, bolster economic resilience and contribute to greater stability in a region that often seems to lurch from one crisis to another. Much depends on how the two sides (and other parties) manage the intertwined processes of disarming the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and integrating the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Syrian state, along with other sensitive issues such as water management and oil exports. The challenges in these domains are considerable. Yet the present trajectory of bilateral ties is encouraging: by advancing initiatives such as Iraq's Development Road project, which they have undertaken together, Ankara and Baghdad have in effect chosen cooperation over confrontation. They should make every effort to sustain the momentum that has begun to take hold.

Parallel developments in Iraq and Türkiye have helped Baghdad and Ankara reframe their relationship. Iraq has begun to enjoy greater stability since Iraqi forces, with the help of a U.S.-led coalition, dealt ISIS its territorial defeat in late 2017 and a wave of popular protest swept the country in 2019-2020. The relative calm has allowed officials to start turning their attention from security to economic growth, better public service delivery and a foreign policy that advances those priorities. Closer ties with Ankara hold out the hope of not only deeper trade and energy cooperation but also joint efforts to address water stress in Iraq, which depends for its dwindling water supply primarily on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers that originate in Türkiye.

Meanwhile, Türkiye has come to terms with the political ascendancy of Iran-backed Shiite armed groups in Iraq, which helped mount the Iraqi part of the counter-ISIS campaign. It had been worried by these factions' prominence, due not only to their ties with Tehran but also to their links to the PKK and the SDF in north-eastern Syria. Gradually, however, Ankara accepted Iraq's post-ISIS political reality, broadening its engagement to include several of the Iran-backed Shiite elements and, in turn, gaining their support for broader bilateral cooperation. In tandem, Türkiye began to see value in pursuing regional integration with Iraq as a means of stabilising its periphery, expanding economic connectivity and shielding itself from conflict elsewhere.

The increasing pragmatism on both sides has paved the way for progress on the thorniest issue irritating the neighbours' relations: the PKK bases in northern Iraq and the recurrent Turkish military operations to neutralise them. In March 2024, the Iraqi government designated the PKK a banned organisation. It did so by securing

the tacit consent of Iran-backed groups to work with Türkiye in reining in the PKK, in hopes of securing a Turkish military withdrawal from Iraqi territory.

The following month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Iraq for the first time in over twelve years. He and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shiaa al-Sudani signed a strategic framework agreement, as well as 26 related memoranda of understanding, committing the two countries to enhanced collaboration in security, trade, energy and water management.

Since then, the two countries have partnered on several other initiatives. Chief among them is the Development Road, which promises to link Iraq's southern Faw port in Basra to Türkiye for trade between Asia and Europe via a parallel road-railway-oil pipeline network. To alleviate Iraq's water woes, Ankara and Baghdad have agreed on a mechanism whereby Iraq's oil sales will fund Turkish investment in improved water infrastructure. They have also overcome a dispute that had halted Iraqi oil exports through the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline for two and half years.

At the same time, the situation with the PKK has taken a turn for the better, with Ankara launching a new peace initiative to end the conflict in late 2024, after which the group declared a unilateral ceasefire and, the following July, said it would disband and disarm. If the PKK is serious about this pledge, and if Ankara takes appropriate steps to nudge the group in this direction, it could lend momentum to cross-border cooperation. A lasting resolution to the PKK conflict would remove a major impediment to strengthening bilateral ties. But the PKK's fate is also closely linked to that of its affiliate in north-eastern Syria, the SDF, which is in talks with Damascus about merging its institutions into the new Syrian state. Should those discussions stall, peacemaking with the PKK could be disrupted, along with joint Iraqi-Turkish enterprises. Iraqi politics could pose another problem: Prime Minister Sudani, who has encouraged the warming in relations with Ankara, is unlikely to be reappointed following Iraq's November elections.

But bilateral ties need not suffer. Even if the PKK peacemaking efforts come to naught, Ankara and Baghdad would still have strong incentives to cooperate on security, economic ties and regional stabilisation. Those goals would be worth pursuing, even if the PKK question remains an obstacle they can skirt but not surmount. The coalition that will name Sudani's successor is the same one that appointed him and gave its consent to rapprochement with Türkiye; it is hardly pre-ordained that this group will want whoever the new prime minister is to change course.

Amid host of risks, Ankara and Baghdad should redouble their efforts to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation – notably through initiatives such as the Development Road – while striving to resolve outstanding differences over the PKK, water management and oil trade. Iraq should institutionalise the technical committees that work on various bilateral issues, so that they survive alternations of power following elections. For its part, Türkiye should maintain broad-based engagement with the diverse Iraqi political spectrum. By focusing on shared interests and keeping up steady dialogue, the two countries can consolidate the progress made so far in moving from mistrust to partnership.

Ankara/Baghdad/Brussels, 9 December 2025

Strengthening Iraq-Türkiye Ties amid Regional Tensions

I. Introduction

Iraq and Türkiye have had deep and often complicated ties since emerging as independent states from the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. While the two countries have never gone to war, their relations have often been tense. They have sometimes found common ground in concern about Kurdish separatism, but that issue has more often been a source of discord. In the mid-1980s, Türkiye started making incursions into Iraq to strike militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – a terrorist organisation, according to Ankara, the U.S. and the European Union. With time, these sorties began to raise hackles in Baghdad, where government officials saw them as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. That Iraq was in upheaval for more than three decades made it particularly difficult for the two countries to smooth out the disagreements between them.

But, in recent years, the situation has begun to improve. Growing stability in Iraq, along with turns in both Baghdad and Ankara toward more pragmatic policies, have spurred new momentum toward addressing mutual grievances.

Start with Iraq. Since an international coalition defeated ISIS in 2017 and popular protests shook the political establishment in 2019-2020, Iraqi governments have turned their attention to domestic affairs: settling conflicts among armed factions, bolstering the economy and delivering better services to their constituents. Baghdad has also worked to allay concerns among its Sunni-majority neighbours about Iranian influence over its security, intelligence and other agencies.¹ In the last five years, Iraqi leaders, who view their country as a borderland between states where Sunni and Shiite Islam predominate, have sought to turn it into a constructive force in Middle East politics. In 2021 and 2022, they facilitated talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, helping lay the groundwork for an official rapprochement between the two regional powerhouses in 2023.²

To be sure, Iraq has continued to grapple with systemic problems that could make it hard to find an economic and political footing in the foreseeable future – including ailing infrastructure, over-dependence on

¹ Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, "Can Iraq's new prime minister achieve a balanced foreign policy?", Royal United Services Institute, 30 January 2023.

² "Iraq to host another round of Iran-Saudi Arabia talks", Reuters, 12 March 2022.

oil revenue, rampant corruption, water depletion and climate-driven internal displacement.³ Exacerbating these vulnerabilities is political dysfunction (including failure to make needed constitutional reforms) that the country's leaders have thus far seemed either unwilling or unable to address. But they are, at least, starting to acknowledge these issues and even to make incremental progress on some. Prime Minister Mohammed Shiaa al-Sudani, who came to power in October 2022 and made infrastructure upgrades his government's top priority, has delivered small yet tangible improvements that many Iraqis have long demanded. These include easing Baghdad's traffic congestion through completion of several bridge construction projects that had been stalled since 2003.⁴

As for Türkiye, officials have expressed cautious optimism about Iraq's apparent trajectory toward greater stability and improved governance. In part, they may simply have become more comfortable with the landscape.⁵ After ISIS's territorial defeat in Iraq and Syria, Ankara adjusted to the political rise of Iran-backed armed groups in Iraq (notwithstanding ties between some of them and the PKK) and has invested in developing relationships with them.⁶ It has also changed its outlook on the neighbourhood, focusing increasingly on fostering regional connectivity and economic integration.

Ankara might alter its attitude further if there is further progress in peacemaking efforts undertaken by Türkiye and the PKK, which saw the group pledge in May to disband and end its armed struggle. Should the group make good on that promise, Türkiye might decide that it can scale back its military presence in northern Iraq, clearing the way for both countries to pivot from security priorities to economic integration. Should the PKK peace process falter, however, bilateral coopera-

³ Justin Salhani, "Iraq's overreliance on oil threatens economic, political strife", Al Jazeera, 28 March 2024. "Migration, Environment and Climate Change in Iraq", International Organization for Migration (IOM), 9 August 2022.

⁴ "Iraq government marks two years: PM highlights 62% project completion and economic gains", *Shafaq News*, 29 October 2024.

⁵ A Turkish official said Ankara has come to view Iraq as a more reliable neighbour because it sees "more accountability, a more balanced foreign policy and less sectarianism" in its present orientation. He also characterised Sudani as "project-minded" and "skilful in navigating the Iraqi political scene". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2024.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials and analysts, Ankara and Istanbul, May and December 2024. Six years later, in a sign of this shift, Faleh al-Fayadh, the leader of the Hashd al-Shaabi – the umbrella organisation of Iraqi Shiite armed groups that fought ISIS – visited Ankara in February 2024, meeting Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. "Turkish FM meets with head of al-Hashd al-Shaabi", *Yeni Şafak*, 20 February 2024. Turkish officials have reportedly engaged with other prominent leaders of Hashd groups, including Qais al-Khazali, head of Asaib Ahl al-Haq. "Does Turkey have new approach to Iran-backed groups in Iraq?", *Amwaj*, 15 September 2023. The U.S. designated this group as a "foreign terrorist organisation" in 2020, also listing Khazali and his brother Laith al-Khazali as "foreign terrorists".

tion could take a blow. The departure of Prime Minister Sudani, who is unlikely to gain a second term after Iraq's November elections, could also hurt Iraqi-Turkish relations. (Sudani's coalition won less than a third of the Shiite seats in parliament and the group of politicians that appointed him for his first term have said they will not give him a second.⁷ He also lacks the numbers to forge the sort of cross-sectarian alliance that could return him.) But, as discussed below, neither of these developments would necessarily spell the end of progress.

This report is a collaboration between the Middle East and North Africa and Europe and Central Asia Programs at Crisis Group. It offers ideas for how Iraq and Türkiye – amid significant turbulence in the region – can keep shoring up the foundations for cooperation in security, trade, water management and energy. It is based on over 70 interviews with government officials and diplomats in Ankara, Baghdad, Erbil and Suleimaniya, as well as with leading Iraq and Türkiye experts and civil society representatives in both countries. It also draws upon Crisis Group's years of field research in Iraq and Türkiye, as well as pertinent information supplied by national and international media outlets, academia and think-tanks. While seeking a balance of input from men and women was a priority, most of the government officials and experts cited in this report are men, reflecting their dominance in those professions in both countries.

⁷ Crisis Group interviews, politicians and advisers from the Shiite Coordination Framework, Baghdad, November 2025.

II. The PKK in Iraq: An Irritant in Bilateral Ties

For more than four decades, the PKK's entrenchment in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan has been a cause of friction between Baghdad and Ankara – but change could be coming. The Turkish government has justified its military operations on Iraqi soil by citing the PKK's use of northern Iraq as a sanctuary and a launchpad for attacks inside Türkiye. Iraq has repeatedly protested these actions as violations of its sovereignty. In May, however, the PKK leadership took the unexpected decision to stop its armed struggle and disband. Its move has created an opportunity not only to end one of the world's longest-running conflicts, but also to remove a main obstacle to improving Türkiye-Iraq relations. Challenges still abound, however, as the peace process moves ahead slowly under a cloud of regional volatility.

A. *A Long, Grinding Conflict*

To understand the importance of the PKK's renunciation of armed struggle, it is helpful to survey how the Kurdish quest for self-rule has evolved in Türkiye and Iraq. Each country has wrestled with its Kurdish minority for decades, a legacy of the Ottoman Empire's carve-up at the end of World War I, which left the Kurds without a state. In Türkiye's case, unresolved tensions with the Kurdish population came to the fore with the PKK's rise in the early 1980s and its leaders' later decision to establish their headquarters in the Qandil mountain range that hugs the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Concern about Kurdish secession movements at times prompted a measure of cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye. A high point in the relationship came in the 1980s, when Ankara and Baghdad had a tacit understanding under which Turkish forces were allowed to go in hot pursuit of PKK fighters in northern Iraq's rugged mountain terrain. This unspoken agreement was in force while Iraq was fighting a war with Iran and facing a Kurdish insurgency of its own, led by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).⁸

But whatever convergence existed went off the rails after the 1991 Gulf war. In that conflict, the U.S. supported the creation of a safe zone in northern Iraq that facilitated the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region on Türkiye's border. Ankara viewed this development as a step toward an independent Kurdish state that would threaten its interests by serving as an expanded haven for the PKK and a separatist model for Kurds in Türkiye to follow. From 1997 onward, Türkiye kept

⁸ In 1983, the Iraqi and Turkish governments signed an Agreement on Border Security and Cooperation, which granted Türkiye the right of hot pursuit 5km into Iraqi territory.

a substantial number of troops in northern Iraq; in 2008, it had some 2,000 soldiers (down from a high of 5,000) deployed just across the border.⁹

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the subsequent reformulation of the Iraqi state enabled the institutionalisation of Kurdish autonomy. Iraq's 2005 constitution granted federal status to the Kurdish region under a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) based in Erbil. This development unnerved Turkish officials, who feared the designation could lead to full Kurdish sovereignty. Their concerns grew when the KRG began reaping benefits from the area's oil wealth: Erbil signed lucrative contracts with international companies to secure revenue, create an independent oil sector and increase its leverage vis-à-vis both Baghdad and Ankara. The Turkish government's hostility toward Iraqi Kurdish aspirations led it to avoid cooperation with Iraqi Kurdish parties.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the PKK entrenched itself in the border region, despite Türkiye's periodic military incursions targeting PKK members.

Feeling that its approach was ineffective in protecting its interests, Ankara changed tack around 2008 and struck a deal with the KRG, including its most powerful component, the KDP. The alliance was founded on shared antipathy for the PKK, which the KDP regarded as a threat to its rule in the Kurdistan region.¹¹ The KDP's assistance in battling the PKK opened space for the Kurdish region's economic integration with Türkiye. This cooperation manifested in a number of oil deals, described in greater detail in Section IV below.

For some years, the combined efforts of Türkiye and the KDP succeeded in containing the PKK. But the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011 allowed the PKK to establish a Syrian affiliate, the People's Protection Units (YPG). When the U.S. backed the YPG in fighting ISIS, this PKK affiliate (and the Syrian Democratic Force, or SDF, of which it is the strongest part) gained control of swathes of the predominantly Kurdish and Arab areas of north-eastern Syria.¹² In the course of confronting ISIS in Sinjar, a district in Iraq's north-western corner, the PKK expanded its reach even further into Iraqi territory.

⁹ Gareth Jenkins, "Unwelcome Guests: The Turkish Military Bases in Northern Iraq", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 6, no. 6 (24 March 2008).

¹⁰ Iraq and Türkiye even signed a security agreement in September 2007. The agreement did not give Türkiye the right of hot pursuit, however, because the KRG opposed it. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°81, *Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation*, 13 November 2008, p. 5. Regardless, Türkiye unilaterally launched cross-border raids on PKK bases later in the year. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Turkish officials view the YPG as an extension of the PKK. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, May and December 2024.

Türkiye, in turn, bolstered its garrison in Iraq. In 2015, after joining the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition, it established a new military base, Zilkan, near Bashiqa in Ninewa province, much deeper into Iraqi territory than its previous military positions.¹³ This move coincided with an escalation of its conflict with the PKK inside Türkiye, following the breakdown of a two-and-a-half-year ceasefire in mid-2015.

After several years of intense fighting in several majority-Kurdish districts of Türkiye, from 2019 onward the conflict shifted to northern Iraq – particularly the Kurdistan region. There, the Turkish military pushed PKK militants out of their strongholds, aided by rapidly growing drone capabilities, which improved reconnaissance and enabled precise strikes in previously hard-to-reach locations. KDP forces acted as Türkiye’s main local partner, helping gather intelligence on PKK movements and securing areas cleared of PKK members.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Ankara accused the KDP’s government partner and political rival, the PUK, of providing the PKK with shelter, political cover and logistical assistance.¹⁵ The PUK denied these allegations but acknowledged supporting the YPG in the anti-ISIS fight in Syria.¹⁶

More recently, in 2023 and 2024, Ankara reportedly carried out drone strikes on suspected PKK militants in Suleimaniya province in northern Iraq.¹⁷ In April 2023, it also prohibited Turkish flights in and out

¹³ Türkiye established the base, with the KDP’s approval, in the vacuum created a year earlier, when Iraqi forces withdrew from the Ninewa province following the ISIS onslaught. The Iraqi government at the time strongly opposed this move but could do little to reverse it. In the lead-up to the offensive to recapture Mosul from ISIS in 2016, Türkiye trained some 3,000 Sunni tribal militiamen to take part. Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°51, *Turkey and Iran: Bitter Friends, Bosom Rivals*, 13 December 2016. See also Patrick Martin, “Turkey Unilaterally Deploys a Battalion near Mosul”, Institute for the Study of War, 6 December 2015.

¹⁴ Berkay Mandıracı, “Türkiye’s PKK Conflict: A Regional Battleground in Flux”, Crisis Group Commentary, 18 February 2022. See also Crisis Group Visual Explainer, “Türkiye’s PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer”.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024; Iraqi officials, Baghdad, April 2025.

¹⁶ “PUK denies aiding PKK following Turkish president’s accusation”, *The New Region*, 20 February 2024. See also Crisis Group Middle East Report N°183, *Winning the Post-ISIS Battle for Iraq in Sinjar*, 20 February 2018; and “Turkey steps up pressure on PUK’s Bafel Talabani over alleged PKK ties”, *Middle East Eye*, 22 July 2024. The PUK also embedded a small number of PKK fighters on its battlefield with ISIS in Kirkuk in 2014-2017. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°215, *Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk*, 15 June 2020; and “The PUK’s Role in Preserving Kirkuk from Bloodshed”, PUK Media, 16 October 2024.

¹⁷ Examples include a reported Turkish drone strike on Arbat airport in Suleimaniya in September 2023 that killed PUK officials and PKK militants. “Airport in Iraq’s Kurdish region hit by deadly drone attack”, Al Jazeera, 18 September 2023. A year later, another drone strike killed two journalists near Suleimaniya on 23 August 2024. “Authorities in northern Iraq report casualties from Turkish drone strike”, Al Jazeera, 23 August 2024. Türkiye has not claimed responsibility for these incidents.

of Suleimaniya, claiming that the PKK had been using an office at the city's airport for operations. Türkiye said it would maintain the ban until the PUK put in place measures to curb PKK activities in the areas under PUK control.¹⁸ The PUK has denied this allegation as well. Ankara lifted the ban in October 2025.

During this same period, Ankara intensified its operations against the YPG, viewing its control of north-eastern Syria through the U.S.-backed SDF as a long-term threat. In 2023 and 2024, the Turkish military often responded to PKK attacks in Iraq or on Turkish soil with strikes on YPG/SDF targets and infrastructure in Syria.¹⁹

Ankara's pursuit of the PKK in northern Iraq and northern Syria also at times pitted it against Iran-backed Shiite groups that participated in fighting ISIS from 2014 onward, emerging with enhanced political power in Baghdad. These groups forged tactical ties with the PKK and its affiliates on both sides of the border, and they remain embedded with the PKK in Sinjar.²⁰ Baghdad and Ankara appear to have bracketed this corner of the conflict theatre pending progress in the Ankara-PKK process and talks in Syria over the integration of the north east into the Syrian state.²¹

B. Turning a New Page in Iraqi-Turkish Security Cooperation

The year 2024 saw a breakthrough in Iraqi-Turkish cooperation regarding the PKK. That March, Baghdad designated the PKK a "banned organisation" and affirmed that the group posed a threat to Iraq as well as Türkiye.²² Justifying the decision, Iraqi officials explained that merely calling attention to Türkiye's military presence on Iraqi territory had yielded no change in Turkish behaviour. They acknowledged that Baghdad itself was unable to counter the PKK, and they further recognised that if the Iraqi government failed to address Ankara's con-

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024. After extending the ban several times, Ankara lifted it in October. "Sulaimani airport set to resume flights to Turkey after President's Barzani request", *Rudaw*, 2 November 2025.

¹⁹ One such retaliation occurred after the PKK killed 21 Turkish soldiers in a wave of attacks in northern Iraq's Mattin mountain range in December 2023-January 2024.

²⁰ In Sinjar, the Yazidi Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) named a district mayor in alliance with Hashd groups in late 2017. Baghdad did not approve the appointment, while the KDP moved the formal Sinjar administration that it dominated to Duhok inside the Kurdistan region, where many Sinjar residents who had been displaced in 2014 were living in camps. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°235, *Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar*, 31 May 2022.

²¹ For additional detail concerning political and military dynamics around Sinjar, see Appendix A. See also Crisis Group Report, *Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar*, op. cit.

²² "Iraq bans PKK as security ties with Turkey gain momentum", *Al-Monitor*, 14 March 2024.

cerns in this respect, other priorities would suffer.²³ “The prime minister is trying a different approach”, an Iraqi government adviser said. “But Türkiye should not interpret this as a *carte blanche*, because it is a delicate balance for Sudani”.²⁴ Türkiye welcomed the Iraqi move, though it did not fully satisfy Ankara’s ambitions.²⁵ The ban in effect directed the Iraqi government to stop the PKK’s political activities – but, unlike a terrorist designation, it did not enjoin Iraqi forces to pursue the group militarily, as Ankara would have preferred.²⁶

Then, in mid-August 2024, Ankara and Baghdad signed an agreement cementing their prior commitments to collaborate on the PKK and other files. The pact called for establishing a Joint Security Coordination Centre in Baghdad and a Joint Training and Cooperation Centre at Zilkan, the Turkish military base in Iraq, to facilitate intelligence sharing, operational cooperation and Turkish training of Iraqi forces.²⁷

Treading carefully for fear of opposition from Iran-aligned parties, the Iraqi government also pursued other means of limiting the PKK’s influence through its ban on the organisation. It shut down offices related to the group in Baghdad and, in August 2024, the Federal Supreme Court dissolved three Yazidi and Kurdish parties over their links with the PKK following a request filed by the National Security Advisory.²⁸

As for direct military cooperation, Baghdad limited itself to lending Turkish forces road access in order to strengthen supply lines to their military outposts.²⁹ The Iraqi army also beefed up its positions – mainly with Kurdish units – along parts of the Turkish-Iraqi border.³⁰

²³ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi officials, Baghdad, May 2024 and February 2025. One official explained that the government was in no position to fight the PKK, as the group is active mainly in areas of Kurdistan that have their own forces. In Sinjar, the government does not want to be seen as fighting the Yazidis, many of whom are aligned with the PKK.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Iraqi government adviser, Baghdad, May 2024.

²⁵ On several occasions, Turkish officials said they had demanded that Baghdad designate the PKK as a terrorist organisation. “Turkey wants Iraq to designate PKK a ‘terrorist’ organisation: Top diplomat”, Al Jazeera, 23 August 2023.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Iraqi official, Baghdad, February 2025. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, May 2024; and Turkish officials, Ankara, May and December 2024.

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish and Iraqi government officials, Ankara and Baghdad, May 2024. See also “Türkiye ve Irak’ın imzaladığı askeri mutabakat zaptı neler öngörüyor, neden önemli?” [What does the military memorandum of understanding signed by Turkey and Iraq envisage, and why is it important?], BBC Turkish, 15 August 2024.

²⁸ “Iraq dissolves three Yazidi and Kurdish political parties over alleged ties to PKK”, *The New Arab*, 7 August 2024.

²⁹ “Iraq warm to Turkey’s proposed anti-PKK joint ops centre, says Turkish official”, Reuters, 21 March 2024.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi and KRG officials, Baghdad and Erbil, February 2025; and independent analyst with access to the area, by telephone, June 2024.

In late January 2025, likely in response, the PKK allegedly killed two Iraqi federal border guards in the Zakho district.³¹ From Ankara's perspective, Baghdad's political and limited operational support has enabled it to step up pressure on the PKK, which helped set the conditions for the group to renounce armed struggle.

C. *An End in Sight?*

Following the gains it made in fighting the PKK in northern Iraq, Türkiye in 2024 launched a new political process to end the decades-long conflict. In October of that year, Devlet Bahçeli – leader of the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's main governing coalition ally since 2016 – unexpectedly shook hands with members of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (DEM) in parliament. A few weeks later, Bahçeli followed this symbolic act by suggesting that the state offer parole to imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan if he agreed to dissolve the organisation. Subsequently, the government allowed DEM members to visit Öcalan three times, which culminated in the PKK leader's surprise call on the group to disarm and disband on 27 February.³² Öcalan urged the PKK leadership in Qandil to convene a congress to decide on the group's future.³³ Two days later, PKK leaders announced a unilateral ceasefire. On 12 May, the group went further, stating that it had agreed to end its armed struggle against Türkiye and dissolve.

The process took a dramatic step forward in July. On 9 July, pro-Kurdish outlets aired a pre-recorded video message from Öcalan – the first time in 26 years that Turkish authorities had allowed the imprisoned PKK leader to make such an appearance. In the message, Öcalan reaffirmed his call for disarmament and declared that discussions with Ankara were “entering a new phase”.³⁴ The following day, Turkish authorities announced the establishment of a mechanism run jointly by the Turkish armed forces and the National Intelligence Organisation to monitor the PKK's disarmament.³⁵ On 11 July, approximately 30 PKK militants held a ceremony near Dukan in Iraqi Kurdistan, casting their rifles into a fire under the watchful eyes of Turkish, Iraqi

³¹ “Iraq ministry says two border guards killed by PKK fire”, *Arab News*, 24 January 2025.

³² In his statement, Öcalan declared that the PKK's armed struggle had become obsolete. He dismissed the previous goals of an independent state, federation or autonomy. He said Ankara's growing recognition of Kurdish identity had eroded the ideological basis that once justified the PKK's existence. “Call for Peace and Democratic Society”, DEM Party, 27 February 2025.

³³ Crisis Group Commentary, “A Promising Route to Peace in Türkiye's PKK Conflict”, 11 March 2025.

³⁴ “PKK leader Öcalan releases first video message in 26 years ahead of disarmament ceremony”, *Bianet*, 9 July 2025.

³⁵ “PKK silah bırakıyor: Terörsüz Türkiye yolunda tarihi gün” (PKK lays down arms: A historic day on the path to a terror-free Türkiye), *Ekotürk*, 11 July 2025.

and KRG officials, DEM representatives and journalists.³⁶ On 12 July, President Erdoğan hailed the occasion as “the start of a new chapter for Türkiye”.³⁷

Ankara is expected to take several legal and political steps to move the process forward.³⁸ In early August, it established a parliamentary commission for this purpose, comprising nearly all political parties.³⁹ In October, after almost two and a half years, it lifted the ban on Turkish flights in and out of Suleimaniya airport.⁴⁰ On 26 October, the PKK leadership in Qandil announced its decision to withdraw all its armed elements from Türkiye.⁴¹ The group’s fighters have also begun pulling out of key sites in northern Iraq, such as Mount Zap, as well as border areas.⁴²

These developments offer hope for resolving one of the world’s longest-running conflicts, but the impact on regional dynamics remains uncertain.⁴³ An end to the war would surely ease Turkish-Iraqi relations, as Türkiye would no longer have a reason to deploy its forces inside Iraq.⁴⁴ A troop withdrawal would assuage Iraq’s fears of being dragged into deadly fighting in which it has no stake, while addressing domestic criticism of the government for what many view as its weakness in the face of Turkish infringements on Iraqi sovereignty.⁴⁵ That should leave greater bandwidth for the two countries to tackle other contentious issues – including water, a topic that has bedevilled Iraqi-Turkish relations for decades.

³⁶ “Kurdistan Workers’ party fighters burn weapons in disarming ceremony”, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2025.

³⁷ “PKK disarmament opens new chapter for Türkiye: Erdoğan”, *Daily Sabah*, 12 July 2025.

³⁸ The Turkish authorities are set to form a parliamentary commission that will include representatives from all major political parties and will decide on legal measures – such as sentence reductions or conditional releases – for individuals imprisoned on PKK-related charges, as well as amnesties for a select group of PKK members based in Iraq. “Terror-free Türkiye commission to follow PKK disarmament, legal steps”, *Daily Sabah*, 16 July 2025.

³⁹ “Turkey sets up parliamentary commission to oversee PKK disarmament”, Reuters, 5 August 2025.

⁴⁰ “Turkey visit highlights President Barzani’s role as regional peace architect: Experts”, *Rudaw*, 9 October 2025.

⁴¹ “Kurdish PKK militants announce withdrawal from Turkey as part of disarmament”, Reuters, 26 October 2025.

⁴² “Turkish FM says Ankara-PKK peace talks ‘proceeding well’”, *Rudaw*, 28 November 2025.

⁴³ Crisis Group Statement, “The PKK’s Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace”, 16 May 2025.

⁴⁴ Turkish officials said Turkish troops would withdraw from Iraq once Ankara ceases to perceive a threat from the PKK. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, March 2025.

⁴⁵ Several Iraqi officials expressed concern that Ankara might not withdraw its troops even if the PKK issue gets resolved, saying they fear the Turkish agenda is expansionist. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, April 2025.

But the peace process is vulnerable to regional turbulence, including the unresolved status of the PKK-linked YPG/SDF in north-eastern Syria.⁴⁶ The SDF, which Ankara sees as an appendage of the PKK, is engaged in negotiations with Damascus over integration into the Syrian state. Should the talks fizzle, Türkiye is unlikely to regard the group as disarmed and will continue to treat it as a threat. It has even warned of military action.⁴⁷

A deal between the SDF and Damascus on 10 March mandated integration of SDF civilian and military institutions. But key issues have yet to be resolved, including whether the SDF and its autonomous administration in Syria's north east will retain its own forces under arms and a say in the area's governance. Arrangements for shared management of two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods in Aleppo and around the Tishreen dam have not spread to other areas.⁴⁸ The period since the March deal has also been marred by occasional eruptions of violence along the front separating SDF- and government-aligned troops in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. A deadly escalation in Aleppo in early October prompted U.S. Special Envoy Tom Barrack to mediate in order to avert a wider conflict that might have scuppered the talks.⁴⁹

Since then, the sides have established a preliminary framework for integrating SDF units into the national army, as other factions such as those under the rubric of the Syrian National Army have been. To that end, the SDF has agreed to submit information on its forces (eg, force strength and posture) to Damascus.⁵⁰ Still, the sides are far from resolving questions about military integration, and they have not agreed on other governance issues, including how to allocate revenue from the oilfields in the north east, where most of the country's deposits lie.⁵¹ At this rate, fulfilment of the March deal's terms, which had been envisioned by year's end, seems like an elusive goal at least in the near term.

⁴⁶ The YPG has not explicitly endorsed the PKK's disbandment decision. Crisis Group Statement, "The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace", op. cit.

⁴⁷ "Erdogan says Turkey will not allow Syria's fragmentation", Reuters, 1 October 2025. On 21 October, the Turkish parliament extended the government's mandate for cross-border military operations in Iraq and Syria for another three years. "Türkiye extends military mandates in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 22 October 2025.

⁴⁸ "SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward", Syria Direct, 7 April 2025.

⁴⁹ "Syrian army and SDF reach ceasefire deal in Aleppo city following clashes", Reuters, 7 October 2025.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, Kurdish official, October 2025.

⁵¹ "Syrian Kurdish leader says reached first deal on merging forces with regular army", *Arab News*, 13 October 2025.

For Türkiye, the SDF's military integration and the status of the autonomous administration are key indicators of the risk that Syria's north east will remain a PKK-aligned haven. Ankara is concerned about militants with Turkish citizenship who remain in the SDF command structure. Also worrying from Ankara's perspective is that, though the SDF welcomed Öcalan's call on the PKK to dissolve, it has made clear that it considers that process distinct from what it will do in Syria.⁵² Combined with uncertainties surrounding the PKK's disarmament in Iraq, several Turkish and Iraqi officials have alluded to the risk of the group fracturing, with some of its members possibly hanging on to their weapons and decamping, including to Syria.⁵³

⁵² Crisis Group Commentary, "A Glimmer of Peace in Syria's North East", 28 March 2025.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi and Turkish government officials and diplomats, Baghdad and Ankara, April and June 2025. PKK members could also move to Kurdish areas in Iran, where another sister organisation, the Kurdistan Free Life Party, has its bases.

III. Water Scarcity: A Sovereign Priority

Water has become a key point of contention in the Iraqi-Turkish relationship, partly because management of rivers entering Iraq from Türkiye is a factor (though just one) in the water shortages it periodically suffers. Baghdad's preoccupation with access to water is likely only to increase, owing to climate change and the expected growth of Iraq's population from 45 million today to 80 million by 2050.⁵⁴ Public outrage at water shortages in Iraq brought down an elected government in 2020. That precedent no doubt factored into the announcement by the Sudani administration in May that water security is a "sovereign priority" that will henceforth be under the prime minister's direct supervision.⁵⁵

A. A Growing National Security Priority in Iraq

Iraq and Türkiye have been at loggerheads over water for decades. Iraq has long accused Türkiye of unfair water management practices at upstream dams, which it claims have significantly reduced the flow of water into Iraq, causing repeated shortages.⁵⁶ In its own defence, Ankara says it must cope with water shortages itself, as Türkiye's domestic needs grow; it says it is sharing as much as it can. Turkish officials have stated repeatedly that Iraq should improve its own management of the water at its disposal, which they criticise as woefully deficient. They have expressed readiness to cooperate with Baghdad on this front, including by offering technical expertise.⁵⁷

The two countries' water dispute revolves around the management and allocation of water from the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, in particular. The two rivers' transboundary basins, including their tributaries, mainly cover Iraq (46 per cent), Türkiye (22 per cent), Iran and Syria. In the north of Iraq's Basra province, the two rivers merge into the Shatt al-Arab – an estuary that forms the border with Iran – before emptying into the Gulf.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ "Iraq's first nationwide census in decades uncovers population growth and demographic shifts", *Shafaq News*, 26 November 2024.

⁵⁵ "Drought nation: Iraq's worst water crisis in 80 years", *Kurdistan 24*, 25 May 2025.

⁵⁶ The dispute dates from the 1960s, when Türkiye began constructing dams on the Tigris and Euphrates for irrigation and electricity generation as part of the South-eastern Anatolia Project. The dams, along with other factors, have contributed to a stark decrease in the volume of water available to each Iraqi citizen, from 5,000 cubic metres in 1997 to 2,400 in 2009. "GEO-6: Global Environment Outlook: Regional Assessment for West Asia", UN Environment Program, 16 September 2017.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025.

⁵⁸ Some 70 per cent of the water in the two rivers that reaches Iraq originates in Türkiye, 10-15 per cent in Iran and 10-15 per cent inside Iraq itself. "Transboundary River Basin Overview – Euphrates-Tigris", UN Food and Agriculture Organiza-

In Iraq, water shortages result primarily from outdated agricultural techniques, poor sanitation infrastructure, evaporation of lakes and uncovered canals, as well as a high per capita water usage rate.⁵⁹

In Türkiye, the use of hydropower and increasing irrigation for an expanding agricultural sector amid diminishing precipitation are among the drivers of freshwater scarcity both domestically and in downstream countries.⁶⁰ For example, data from the Iraqi water resources ministry suggests that the freshwater supply produced by the Euphrates in Iraq dropped from 79.6 billion cubic metres per year before the building of the Keban dam in Türkiye in 1974 to 47.14 billion cubic metres over the period 1999-2018. By 2021, the volume was closer to 30 billion cubic metres.⁶¹

Climate change compounds the challenges this water-stressed region faces. Precipitation data analysed by Crisis Group from the Euphrates and Tigris river basins (including its tributaries) in Türkiye, Iraq, Syria and Iran indicates that rain and snowfall patterns have become increasingly erratic in recent years, swinging between extreme highs and lows (see chart in Appendix C).⁶² Precipitation deficits and excesses attributable to growing climate volatility are affecting larger areas and persisting for longer periods than in the past.⁶³ They are increasing the risk of droughts as well as floods, placing further strain on water management systems and rendering political tensions over transboundary water sharing more likely.⁶⁴

tion, 2009; and “Iraq Trapped between Turkey and Iran, Two Hydro-Hegemons”, European Institute for Studies on the Middle East and North Africa, 29 July 2022.

⁵⁹ Natasha Hall and Husam Sobhi, “Whose Water Is It Anyway: How Political Violence and Corruption Has Become Iraq’s Existential Challenge”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 12 September 2023; “Learning Review: World Bank Sector Technical Assistance to Iraq FY19-21”, World Bank, 20 December 2020; and “Multi-tiered Approaches to Solving the Water Crisis in Basra, Iraq”, UNICEF, 2019.

⁶⁰ Goksel Ezgi Guzey and Bihret Önöz, “Turkey’s Hydropower Potential in the Near Future and the Possible Impacts of Climate Change: A Case Study of the Euphrates-Tigris Basin”, *Climate*, vol. 12, no. 10 (2024), p. 156; Achref Chibani, “Water Politics in the Tigris-Euphrates Basin”, Arab Center Washington DC, 30 May 2023.

⁶¹ Crisis Group obtained these numbers from the Iraqi water resources ministry in 2022. Türkiye has five major operational dams on the Euphrates, Syria has four and Iraq has one.

⁶² Crisis Group analysis based on CHIRPS data from the Climate Hazards Center, January 2025.

⁶³ Precipitation is only one of the factors contributing to water stress and crisis risks. Groundwater depletion, increasing water usage, especially in the summer, and ailing infrastructure compound the problems stemming from declines in precipitation.

⁶⁴ Turkish and Iraqi officials are pursuing greater cooperation in collecting and sharing reliable data on water flows, precipitation and vegetation, including as part of the joint standing committee they established in late 2023, which includes officials and experts from both sides who meet on a regular basis. Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi officials, February and April 2025; Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025.

This volatility has a direct impact on Iraqi farming. The water and agricultural ministries allocate limited areas for crop cultivation in each province for the summer and winter seasons. The general allocation for years with no drought is 10 million dunams (1 dunam equals 1,000 sq m) in winter and 5 million in summer; in drought years, these allocations are halved. In 2025 – a year that started with exceptionally low water reserves – the authorities cut the number further to 1.5 million dunams in the summer. The water ministry estimates that Iraq will have only 10 billion cubic metres instead of the 18 billion cubic metres it needs in 2025, due to a shortage of rainfall in Iraq and riparian states.⁶⁵ Crop yields have decreased as a result. In 2022 alone, agricultural output shrank by nearly 50 per cent.⁶⁶ From 2021 to 2022, wheat production dropped from 5.47 million metric tonnes to 3.25 million.⁶⁷

Declining water levels for farming have accelerated rural-to-urban migration, leaving some 147,000 people internally displaced in southern Iraq in June 2024 as a result.⁶⁸ A number of tribal conflicts have been linked to the growing scarcity of water, including in Basra, Misan and Qadisiya provinces in the south.⁶⁹ Buffalo herders in the southern marshes have seen their livestock die because of low water levels; many have been forced to abandon their millennia-old profession and move to cities in search of work.⁷⁰

Water scarcity has also harmed public health, engendering political backlash. In 2018, over 100,000 people in Basra province required hospitalisation when low water levels in the Euphrates and Tigris allowed seawater to contaminate the Shatt al-Arab.⁷¹ The health crisis, in turn, sparked widespread anti-government protests. State forces

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Iraqi water resources ministry official, Baghdad, May 2025.

⁶⁶ Tareq Alotaiba, “Drought in the Land of Plenty: The Impact of Climate Change on Iraqi Security”, *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 20 January 2025.

⁶⁷ “Grain and Feed Annual: Extreme Water Shortages and Policy Changes Impact Iraq Grain Production”, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 15 April 2022.

⁶⁸ “DTM – Climate-induced Displacement Southern Iraq”, IOM, 21 August 2024. The IOM started tracking population movement in Iraq in June 2018.

⁶⁹ In July 2022, a conflict erupted between two families in Basra when one was caught constructing illegal fish farms and diverting water from a canal to fill the ponds. In Missan, tribal competition over water has repeatedly pitted farmers against one another, often leading to standoffs as the farmers call on sheikhs to resolve disputes. In rural Qadisiya, a farmer dug deeper and deeper wells seeking to reach groundwater. Failing repeatedly and receiving no financial support either from the local authorities or his tribe, he could no longer feed his family and eventually committed suicide. Crisis Group interviews, southern Iraq, 2022 and 2023. See also “Drought Ignites Tribal Conflicts in Southern Iraq”, Clingendael Institute, 17 August 2020; and “Iraq’s water wars – Part 1”, Al Jazeera, 20 September 2023.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, buffalo herders, Basra province, April 2022.

⁷¹ “Iraq: Water Crisis in Basra”, Human Rights Watch, 22 July 2019.

suppressed these demonstrations with lethal force, killing dozens.⁷² Though the authorities have since introduced more robust monitoring systems to assess water quality, as well as upgrades to water infrastructure, Basra remains one of the parts of Iraq most vulnerable to water stress as the last downstream province along the Tigris and Euphrates.⁷³ Moreover, neighbouring Iran has diverted one of the Tigris's main tributaries in the south, the Karun River, for irrigation of farmland and hydroelectric power generation, further limiting freshwater levels in Basra.⁷⁴

On the occasions when floods still occur, Iraq's outdated sewage systems are incapable of capturing the water and putting it to good use. In urban areas, excess rainfall escapes down the gutter instead of being gathered in reservoirs or treated and piped back into the rivers. In rural areas, flood waters that are channelled into artificial lakes or uncovered canals also go to waste due to high levels of evaporation, especially in the summer months. Meanwhile, wastewater in both urban and rural settings is often directed back into rivers and channels untreated.⁷⁵

B. *Limited Progress in Water Diplomacy*

Iraq has long sought an agreement with Türkiye for it to provide fixed volumes of water. But in discussions, the Turkish government has repeatedly rejected this request, citing fluctuating precipitation levels and other factors, while criticising Iraq for inefficient and wasteful practices.⁷⁶ Iraq did find a way, for a time, to benefit from a Turkish

⁷² "Iraq: Deadly demonstrations continue in Basra", Al Jazeera, 9 September 2018.

⁷³ In order to increase freshwater availability, especially in southern Iraq, the government launched the first large-scale desalination plant project in Basra in July. The plant will be constructed by the Chinese company ChinaPower and is expected to be completed in 2028. See "Report: PowerChina wins \$4 billion contract for Iraqi water desalination plant", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 24 July 2025.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, provincial official, Basra, October 2022; water resources ministry official, Baghdad, May 2025. See also Kenneth Ray Olson and Sergey Stanislavovich Chernyanskii, "Karun and Shatt Al-Arab River System: Historic and Modern Attempts to Manage Iran's Lifeline", *Open Journal of Soil Science*, vol. 14, no. 7 (July 2024). Public works on the Karun have caused water woes in Iran as well. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°241, *Iran's Khuzestan: Thirst and Turmoil*, 21 August 2023, Section III.C.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, UN Development Programme official, June 2024. For millennia, Iraq relied on the flooding of its rivers for agriculture. It has yet to adapt the agricultural sector to the impact of climate change and upstream damming. Despite high levels of evaporation in the country, authorities have not stopped diverting water to reservoirs or planning the construction of new dams. Marwah M. Al-Khuzai et al., "Assessment of Untreated Wastewater Pollution and Heavy Metal Contamination in the Euphrates River", *Environmental Pollutants and Bioavailability*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2023).

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025. "Iraq uses water as a blockage on other issues", a Turkish official sighed. "When we

commitment to send a set volume of Euphrates water to Syria.⁷⁷ In 1989, two years after Ankara pledged to Damascus that it would supply 500 cubic metres per second, the Syrian government agreed on a sharing formula with Baghdad, allocating 58 per cent of its Euphrates waters to Iraq. But the arrangement proved unsustainable. Precipitation shortfalls and neglect of infrastructure over two decades, the latter due to wars in both countries, have rendered it moot.⁷⁸

Iraq thus turned its attention to the Tigris, pressing Türkiye to promise a fixed allocation, but without success. Türkiye is grappling with water issues like Iraq's – officials point to the country's own rising water and energy needs in the face of climate change and population growth – albeit not on the same scale. Its eastern and south-eastern regions have seen a dramatic reduction in precipitation over the past few years, with significantly less of the mountain snow cover that is critical for replenishing the rivers.⁷⁹ Water levels have thus dropped substantially, affecting both agriculture and domestic energy use. The Atatürk dam, one of the largest in Türkiye, has experienced a sharp decline in hydroelectric power production, dropping from 11 billion kilowatt-hours in 2020 to just 3.5 billion kilowatt-hours in 2023.⁸⁰

These figures highlight the challenges Türkiye faces in balancing its own water needs with the demands of downstream countries like Iraq. “Water levels are fluctuating, and we do not have a tap to open or close”, a Turkish official said.⁸¹ Turkish officials say they view water sharing as a humanitarian issue and do not want water shortages to become a cause of instability in Iraq.⁸² They are keen to work with Iraqi authorities to help them improve water management.⁸³

Ankara and Baghdad have signed several agreements and memoranda of understanding, the main ones in 2009 and 2014, to improve water management and cooperation.⁸⁴ Perhaps most significantly, as a part of the strategic framework agreement signed in April 2024, Ankara

want to talk about the PKK, they ask us, ‘What about water?’ When we try to talk about fibre-optic connections, they again ask us, ‘What about water?’” Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2024.

⁷⁷ “Turkey, Syria and Iraq: Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris”, *Climate Diplomacy*.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, water management experts and officials, Baghdad, May 2025.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, water experts, Istanbul, April 2024; officials, Ankara, May 2024.

⁸⁰ Dursun Yıldız, “The Effect of Climate Change on Hydroelectric Energy Production in the Upper Euphrates Basin: A Review”, *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2024), p. 741.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, March 2025.

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, Turkish official, Ankara, March 2025; and Turkish diplomat, Baghdad, April 2025.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025.

⁸⁴ Endemic instability in Iraq, however, has hindered these agreements' implementation. “Turkey, Syria and Iraq: Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris”, *op. cit.*

and Baghdad have stepped up bilateral water diplomacy, particularly on infrastructure cooperation. Both sides have expressed hope that, unlike the more aspirational 2014 memorandum it is based on, this latest agreement may culminate in concrete projects such as water treatment plants and enhanced irrigation systems.⁸⁵ The agreement reaffirmed the parties' commitment to the work of a joint permanent committee on water, which Ankara and Baghdad had agreed to establish in August 2023.⁸⁶

While follow-through on the agreement has been slow, both sides have taken small but important steps.⁸⁷ For instance, in May, Türkiye appointed a former water minister as special envoy to Iraq, showing its commitment to cooperating with Baghdad on water management.⁸⁸ Iraq and Türkiye have also moved toward greater data sharing, installing monitoring stations on the Tigris and Euphrates to gauge the inflow of water at Iraq's borders.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Iraq has sought to speed up infrastructure upgrades by suggesting the establishment of an oil-for-water fund in which the government would commit to supplying an agreed-upon volume of crude oil to Türkiye in exchange for Turkish investment in improved water management techniques in Iraq.⁹⁰ Such a funding mechanism came to fruition on 2 November, when the Iraqi and Turkish foreign ministers signed an accord in Baghdad allowing Turkish companies to bid on water infrastructure projects that will be financed with revenue from Iraqi oil sales to Türkiye.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025; and Iraqi officials, Baghdad, February and April 2025.

⁸⁶ "Turkey, Iraq establish 'permanent joint committee' on water, says top diplomat", *Rudaw*, 22 August 2023. The joint committee held its first meeting in November 2023. "Türkiye ve Irak, Ortak Daimi Komite 2. Toplantısı ile su işbirliğine bağlılığını yineledi" [Turkey and Iraq reaffirmed their commitment to water cooperation at the Joint Permanent Committee's second meeting], *Anadolu Ajansı*, 10 July 2024.

⁸⁷ Turkish companies have already started scoping out areas in Iraq to introduce new technology for use in water treatment plants, irrigation systems and solar power generation. Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi government officials, Turkish water management expert and official of Turkish private company focused on water treatment, Baghdad, May 2025.

⁸⁸ "Turkey appoints former minister Veysel Eroglu as special envoy to Iraq", *Shafaq News*, 8 May 2025.

⁸⁹ While many more stations will be needed to make reasonable assessments of water flows, bringing the first two stations online is indicative of both countries' willingness to have a level of transparency that neither accepted in the past (when each kept water level data confidential). Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi official and Turkish water expert, Baghdad, May 2025.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi government adviser, Baghdad, May 2024; Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024.

⁹¹ "Iraq, Turkey sign deal on water infrastructure projects", *Reuters*, 2 November 2025.

Beyond these measures, international and regional water management experts suggest that the most sustainable approach to addressing the countries' water-related challenges would be to look at the Tigris and Euphrates river basins holistically, as water is best distributed if assessed based on basin boundaries rather than state borders.⁹² Such models exist elsewhere in the world where countries share water.⁹³ Until now, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Türkiye have discussed water sharing on a strictly bilateral basis.⁹⁴ Türkiye, in particular, has rejected a multilateral approach for both legal and political reasons.⁹⁵

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, officials and experts from the World Bank, UNDP, Stockholm International Water Institute and Blue Peace Middle East, Baghdad, May 2025. Water management experts suggest that, in ideal circumstances, riparian states would think through a “shared benefits” approach. Such an approach might entail mapping agricultural areas based on climate conditions, whereby the riparian country best placed to grow a certain crop produces it in quantities that can meet the needs of all the others.

⁹³ In the Senegal River basin, this model was translated into an inter-governmental body where all the riparian states jointly manage the river and its basin drainage, including common infrastructure projects for irrigation and water supply. See “Transforming Lives in the Senegal River Basin”, World Bank, 13 April 2013. On the arrangements in other major river basins, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°343, *Dammed in the Mekong: Averting an Environmental Catastrophe*, 7 October 2024; and Crisis Group Africa Report N°271, *Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute*, 20 March 2019.

⁹⁴ In the case of the Tigris, important tributary rivers – the Diyala/Sirwan and Karun, most prominently – originate in Iran, but agreements between Iran and Iraq have not gone as far as those between Iraq and Türkiye. That said, since the lion's share of Iraq's Tigris water comes from Türkiye, a bilateral approach continues to be the most realistic.

⁹⁵ Unlike Iraq and Syria, Ankara considers the rivers “transboundary” as opposed to “international”. It therefore argues that they should fall under national sovereignty and be managed solely among riparian states without external involvement. Legally, Ankara rejects the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention to avoid binding rules that could constrain its developmental use of the rivers. Politically, the bilateral approach preserves Türkiye's negotiating leverage and sovereignty in managing a key resource. See Katharina Tiroch, “The Waters of Euphrates and Tigris: An International Law Perspective”, Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, 2012. “Türkiye's Policy on Water Issues”, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

IV. The Dispute over Iraqi Oil Exports to Türkiye

Still another point of contention between Ankara and Baghdad has been Iraqi oil exports to and through Türkiye, though the reason has mainly to do with internal Iraqi politics.⁹⁶ The controversy, which is over a decade old, stems from efforts by Iraq's Kurdistan region to develop its own export relationship with Türkiye, giving rise to fears in Baghdad of encouraging Kurdish separatism. But while the Baghdad-Erbil dynamic complicates cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye, it need not be paralyzing.

The starting point for understanding the cross-border oil export relationship is the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline (ITP), which since 1976 has carried Iraqi oil from Kirkuk and other northern fields to international markets via Türkiye's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.⁹⁷

But the treaty providing for the ITP is not the only cross-border oil agreement between Türkiye and Iraqi actors. In 2013, at the height of Ankara-Baghdad tensions, Türkiye signed a separate energy deal with the KRG that afforded the former stakes in Iraqi exploration blocks and provided for pipeline exports of oil and gas directly from the Kurdistan region to Türkiye, bypassing federal Iraq.⁹⁸ When ISIS destroyed parts of the ITP a year later, Ankara was able to rely on spurs of pipeline that the KRG had built to connect Kirkuk and other main oilfields under its control to the ITP as an alternative to continued imports from northern Iraq. In doing so, it went around Iraq's oil export authority, allowing the KRG to pocket the revenue.

In response to the 2013 deal between Ankara and Erbil, Baghdad filed a case in May 2014 with the International Chamber of Commerce's International Court of Arbitration in Paris, charging that Türkiye had violated the ITP treaty (eventually saying the infraction persisted from that month through September 2018). The tribunal issued its verdict in February 2023, ruling in Baghdad's favour and awarding it \$1.47

⁹⁶ In the future, Iraqi energy exports to Türkiye may also include gas, which to date has been produced for domestic consumption only.

⁹⁷ The ITP was constructed under the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık Crude Oil Pipeline Agreement signed between Türkiye and Iraq on 27 August 1973 to transport crude oil produced in Kirkuk and other Iraqi fields to the terminal at Ceyhan. On 19 September 2010, the two countries renewed the 1973 agreement and related protocols for fifteen years. "Transit Boru Hatları – Irak-Türkiye Ham Petrol Boru Hattı (ITP)" (Transit Pipelines – The Iraq-Türkiye Crude Oil Pipeline – ITP), Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. In 2024, Türkiye imported most of its oil from Russia, with Iraq ranking second and Kazakhstan third. "Türkiye'nin petrol ithalatı geçen yıl kasımda yüzde 2,3 azaldı" [Turkey's oil imports decreased by 2.3% in November last year], Anadolu Ajansı, 30 January 2025. Türkiye has used Iraqi crude for both re-export and domestic consumption.

⁹⁸ "Exclusive: Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan clinch major energy pipeline deals", Reuters, 6 November 2013.

billion in compensation. Türkiye was awarded \$527 million for counterclaims relating to unpaid pipeline fees dating to the 1990s.⁹⁹

Baghdad paid a price for the win. A month after the tribunal rules, Türkiye shut down the ITP, citing the need for technical upgrades, thus preventing some 450,000 barrels of oil per day – around 370,000 from the Kurdistan region and 80,000 from Kirkuk – from reaching global markets.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, even when the upgrades were completed the pipeline did not come online.¹⁰¹ As a result, the KRG lost the bulk of its revenue, an estimated \$20 billion between March 2023 and September 2024.¹⁰²

Ankara and Baghdad then engaged in talks to reopen the pipeline while other litigation was running its course.¹⁰³ At first, Türkiye asked Baghdad to drop the award in exchange for reopening the pipeline, but in October 2023 it formally notified the government that it was ready to receive Iraqi crude.¹⁰⁴ By that time, however, Baghdad had seized on the arbitration court's ruling and the ITP's closure to cut the KRG off from pursuing independent oil exports – which had been giving it access to independent revenue and strengthening its position vis-à-vis the federal government.¹⁰⁵ In a sense, Baghdad was using these new facts on the ground to enforce a February 2022 ruling by Iraq's Federal Supreme Court. That judgment found unconstitutional the KRG's 2007 oil gas law and declared all KRG oil contracts with international oil companies and foreign states invalid.¹⁰⁶ With the ITP closed, the

⁹⁹ “Iraq v. Turkey: The Republic of Iraq v. The Republic of Turkey, ICC Case No. 20273/AGF/ZF/AYZ/ELU”, Jus Mundi, 12 November 2024. The judgment gave Iraq close to \$2 billion, but subtracting the court's award to Türkiye for counterclaims brought the total owed by Ankara to \$1.47 billion. See “Analysis: Iraq's arbitration win reshapes Baghdad-Erbil relationship”, *Iraq Oil Report*, 8 April 2023.

¹⁰⁰ “Turkey halts Iraq's northern exports after landmark arbitration ruling”, *Iraq Oil Report*, 25 March 2023; and “Explainer: Why oil flows through the Iraq-Turkey pipeline have been halted”, Reuters, 21 February 2025.

¹⁰¹ Baghdad has tried to partly compensate for the loss in exports through Türkiye by ramping up exports from Iraq's southern fields, sending an additional 75,000 federally marketed barrels per day through Basra, thereby meeting its OPEC quota.

¹⁰² “Baghdad-Erbil oil diplomacy raises hopes for pipeline progress”, *Iraq Oil Report*, 14 November 2023; and “Oil pipeline shutdown has cost Iraq \$20bn”, *Middle East Economic Digest*, 25 September 2024.

¹⁰³ A second case Baghdad has brought to the arbitration court concerning illegal oil exports from the Kurdistan region to Türkiye during the period 2018-2023 is still pending. Both have petitioned a U.S. court to guarantee payment of the French arbitral award. “Turkey seeks \$950m damages against Iraq over KRG oil dispute”, *Middle East Eye*, 8 September 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, KRG official, Erbil, February 2024. See also “Turkey notifies Iraq of oil pipeline readiness”, *Middle East Economic Survey*, 20 October 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group Middle East Report N°80, *Oil for Soil: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds*, 28 October 2008.

¹⁰⁶ “Iraqi federal court deems Kurdish oil and gas law unconstitutional”, Reuters, 15 February 2022.

KRG could no longer honour the agreements it had signed with international oil companies.

Against this backdrop, both the KRG and the oil companies found themselves forced to renegotiate the terms of their contracts with the federal government. Talks have focused on two main sets of issues. First, the KRG has sought a revenue-sharing mechanism to ensure that the KRG's allocation of the federal budget is distributed in a timely manner.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, the firms have sought assurances on compensation for past-due deliveries under KRG contracts and future Iraqi payments to them based on higher production costs in the region.¹⁰⁸

After months of negotiations, Baghdad and Erbil found a partial middle-ground solution in November 2024, which provided for future payments to the oil companies under contract with the KRG.¹⁰⁹ Then, the following September, the parties worked out a viable mechanism for distributing payments for production costs to international companies.¹¹⁰ The three-way agreement among Baghdad, Erbil and the oil firms allowed exports through the ITP to resume on 27 September, after a hiatus of two and a half years. Though it is tied to the current federal budget law, which expires at the end of the year, the deal can be extended if the parties agree.¹¹¹

Another hurdle coming up is what to do about the ITP treaty, which is set to expire on 27 July 2026. Türkiye has given notice that it does not intend to support renewal.¹¹² The treaty's lapse would not hinder the

¹⁰⁷ Like government employees throughout Iraq, civil servants in the Kurdistan region are paid from the federal Iraqi budget. Consecutive budgets since 2005 have set aside a ballpark proportion (which has varied from 12-17 per cent) for KRG salaries, based on the region's estimated population and its contribution from natural resources and customs revenues to federal coffers. Baghdad has repeatedly withheld public-sector salaries on the grounds that the KRG has not submitted its revenue contributions to the federal government.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials and experts, Ankara, March 2025; Iraqi officials and experts, Baghdad, Erbil and Suleimaniya, April 2025. See also "APIKUR calls for 'redoubling of efforts' for resumption of Kurdish oil exports", *The New Region*, 27 April 2025. (APIKUR is the Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan in northern Iraq.)

¹⁰⁹ They set the baseline price at \$16. "Kurdistan oil exports to resume in 2025 with new production cost agreement", *Kurdistan 24*, 19 November 2024.

¹¹⁰ They also agreed that an independent technical consultant will confirm production costs in the region within 90 days, during which time the federal government will authorise payments based on the compromise production price set in November 2024. "Kurdistan poised to restart pipeline exports", *Iraq Oil Report*, 22 September 2025.

¹¹¹ An Iraqi federal official expressed confidence that the arrangement will hold, as it provides a framework that the parties can extend. Crisis Group telephone interview, October 2025.

¹¹² "Turkey signals end of Iraq-Turkey pipeline treaty", *Iraq Oil Report*, 22 July 2025. In theory, Türkiye could also decide to forego oil exports from federal Iraq

parties from using the pipeline should they agree to do so, but neither would be obligated to adhere to the treaty's terms. While Baghdad is ready to negotiate a new treaty, it is aware that it may no longer secure a deal in which it has exclusive access to the pipeline. Iraq has never used its full capacity of about 1.6 million barrels per day. With Iraqi exports amounting to a third of the pipeline's capacity at best, Türkiye may want to use the rest for domestic purposes or for transshipment from and to other countries.¹¹³

With oil exports through Türkiye now resumed, Baghdad, Erbil and Ankara should use the opening to settle on a more durable energy and revenue-sharing framework. The restart has already produced benefits for all parties. It has reduced Iraq's dependence on southern routes, restored critical income to the Kurdistan region and reaffirmed Türkiye's role as a key energy importer and transit country. The durability of this arrangement will depend on whether the sides can translate operational progress into institutional arrangements that ensure predictability, transparency and mutual benefit – minimising the risk of future disruptions and creating space for further dialogue on this file.

and pipe oil directly from the Kurdistan region. Such a move would almost certainly prompt a sharp deterioration in Iraqi-Turkish relations.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi diplomats and industry experts, Ankara and London, June and October 2025.

V. Developing the Development Road

As they explore options for greater cooperation on the PKK, water management and oil exports, Iraq and Türkiye are also working on new joint projects. A prominent example is the Development Road, which aims to promote regional connectivity and economic integration. The Iraqi government launched this initiative in May 2023 with the goal of connecting the seaport of Faw on the Gulf to Türkiye via a highway, a railway and, eventually, a pipeline traversing nine of Iraq's nineteen provinces. The project's initial phase, anticipated to be completed by 2033, is estimated to cost around \$17 billion. The total price tag by 2050 will be about \$38 billion.¹¹⁴

Turkish and Iraqi officials say the project will benefit both countries, as well as others in the neighbourhood.¹¹⁵ Though it will take much time and money to complete, it has already strengthened Turkish-Iraqi ties. At a press conference with President Erdoğan in April 2024, Prime Minister Sudani said the Development Road offers an unprecedented opportunity for integration between the two countries, while enhancing local markets and connecting them to the world.¹¹⁶ For Baghdad, the initiative aligns with the goal of serving as a regional trade corridor that diversifies export routes, which it believes will foster domestic development and stability. It follows years of investment in upgrading the Faw port, an effort that is scheduled to be completed later in the year. But the Development Road still faces significant obstacles in Iraq, including widespread corruption, which threatens to keep foreign investors away, a lack of financing and inadequate security. Broader support from local and regional actors has also not yet been forthcoming.

Ankara hopes the initiative can help bring much-needed stability to Iraq while also advancing regional integration and delivering trade and business benefits for Türkiye during a significant domestic economic downturn.¹¹⁷ Besides becoming a transit route for goods headed from Asia to Europe, the Development Road would also connect Türkiye more directly with Gulf markets, allowing Turkish exports to reach these destinations more quickly and at lower cost. Some Turkish analysts privy to government discussions of the matter predict that,

¹¹⁴ The project is envisioned in three phases, with the Grand Faw Port scheduled for completion in 2025 and the road network in 2028. Harith Hasan, "Iraq's Development Road: Geopolitics, Rentierism and Border Connectivity", Carnegie Middle East Center, 11 March 2024.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, February and April 2025; Ankara, May 2024.

¹¹⁶ "Joint press conference with Sudani and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan", 1News, 22 April 2024 [Arabic].

¹¹⁷ In 2023 and 2024, annual inflation in Türkiye fluctuated between 40 and 70 per cent. "Consumer Price Index, January 2025", Turkish Statistical Institute, 3 February 2025 [Turkish].

once completed, the route could serve as an alternative to the Suez Canal, at least for smaller volumes of goods – due to the required combination of sea and land transport – reducing delivery times to Europe by up to 25 days.¹¹⁸ Ankara hopes that the project will boost efforts to raise Türkiye’s profile as a hub for trade and energy supplies, especially as the U.S.- and EU-backed India–Middle East–Europe Corridor would bypass the country.¹¹⁹

In Iraq, the idea of connecting the Gulf with Türkiye by road and rail dates to the deposed regime of Saddam Hussein. Successive governments since 2011 have sought to revive these plans, but continued instability has hampered large-scale infrastructure projects. Sudani has now made the Development Road a priority, seeing it as an opportunity to improve public services and create job opportunities.¹²⁰ He commissioned feasibility studies for the route in his first year in office, and he has courted the United Arab Emirates and Qatar as primary investors.¹²¹ These two countries’ transportation ministers signed a quadripartite memorandum of understanding with Iraq and Türkiye during Erdoğan’s visit to Baghdad in April 2024. Representatives of the four countries have met a number of times since then.¹²²

With feasibility studies nearly complete, the project has entered the design phase, accompanied by active discussions about securing longer-term financing.¹²³ The Turkish government is unlikely to foot any significant portion of the bill, given its financial constraints, as well as the development and infrastructure upgrades in progress inside Türkiye.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish analysts, Ankara and Istanbul, May 2024.

¹¹⁹ Alberto Rizzi, “The Infinite Connection: How to Make the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor Happen”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 23 April 2024. The Corridor is projected to run from India through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel before reaching Europe via either Italy or Greece.

¹²⁰ An Iraqi official said he expected the project to create some 100,000 construction jobs and generate significant commercial activity. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2024.

¹²¹ See Watheq Al-Sadoon, “Katar ve BAE'nin Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'ne Katılımı: Nedenleri ve Beklenen Faydalar” [Qatari and Emirati Participation in the Development Road Project: Causes and Expected Gains], ORSAM Center for Middle East Studies, 13 May 2024.

¹²² “Türkiye, Iraq, Qatar and UAE sign ‘Development Road’ memorandum of understanding”, press release, Turkish Presidency, 22 April 2024.

¹²³ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish official and foreign policy experts, Ankara, March 2025; Iraqi officials, Baghdad, April 2025.

¹²⁴ On 3 February, the Turkish minister of transportation and infrastructure said Türkiye would invest some \$20 billion in the Development Road project to build 727km of railways and 331km of highways inside the country. “Kalkınma Yolu Türkiye'nin Ekonomik Statüsünü Güçlendirecek” [The Development Road Will Strengthen Türkiye’s Economic Status], Turkish Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, 3 February 2025.

On the Iraqi side, the 2023 budget (passed for three years) made no reference to the project. Whether the government can mobilise enough political support to finance the Development Road through its own budget will likely depend on the benefits that various political actors can reap from related contracts.¹²⁵ In the meantime, it has sought other funding, including from the World Bank, which in June committed \$930 million to help upgrade rail infrastructure along the route.¹²⁶

It will be a challenge for the Iraqi government to see the Development Road to fruition, not least because of public suspicion that money allocated to the project will get siphoned off by corruption.¹²⁷ Another risk is political disagreement between Baghdad and the KRG on the Development Road's trajectory in northern Iraq. As currently planned, it bypasses key cities in the region, such as Duhok and Erbil, connecting to Türkiye through federal Iraq at the new Faysh Khabour/Ovaköy border crossing between Duhok and Ninewa provinces, with only a narrow 10km strip running through the Kurdistan region.¹²⁸

Erbil is in talks with Baghdad to make sure that at least part of the route passes through Duhok province in the Kurdistan region.¹²⁹ This change would increase project costs, due to the area's topography, but it could also yield significant longer-term political benefits by easing tensions between the KRG and the federal government.¹³⁰ Ankara officials say they would accept that formula as long as Erbil and Baghdad

¹²⁵ Several Iraqi politicians, while supporting the project in principle, referred to it in interviews as a "pipe dream". Some warned that the Iraqi state would prove too weak to see through such a large undertaking, while others predicted that a future government would abandon it. Some also concluded that too many domestic political actors, especially those affiliated with Iran, would seek to undermine the route. Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi and Kurdistan region politicians, Baghdad and Erbil, February and May 2025.

¹²⁶ "Iraq: New US\$930 Million Project to Extend and Modernize Railways, Promote regional Connectivity and Boost Growth", World Bank, 25 June 2025.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2024. Others reiterated this point. Crisis Group interviews, academics and current and former parliamentarians, Baghdad, May 2024 and May 2025. An Iraqi political scientist explained that Iraq's power-sharing system requires any government to ensure that state rents and government contracts are split up among political parties and affiliated companies in order to ensure that most, if not all, will support large government-led infrastructure projects. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2025.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, KRG and Iraqi officials, Erbil and Baghdad, February and April 2025.

¹²⁹ "Will the Kurdistan region get a piece of the Development Road?", *Peregraf*, 29 July 2024; and "KRG denies Development Road deal with Baghdad", *Rudaw*, 28 March 2025.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Iraqi officials and experts, Baghdad and Erbil, April 2025. A PUK official said it is understandable that Baghdad would want to bypass the Kurdistan region, as the route would become longer and therefore costlier. He suggested that the Kurdistan region could still benefit from it through arteries that would connect to the main route. Crisis Group interview, Suleimaniya, April 2025.

can resolve their differences and the project moves ahead as quickly as possible.¹³¹ Failure to loop the route through the Kurdistan region could fuel grievances among parties who feel they lost out.¹³²

Another challenge is providing physical protection for the route. Parts of Iraqi territory that it would likely traverse remain unstable, especially the disputed territories claimed by both the Kurdistan region and federal Iraq, where myriad armed groups operate and Iraqi forces have only a weak hold. These groups may obstruct the project if it interrupts their activities – including illicit trade across the border with Syria – or otherwise harms their interests.¹³³

Türkiye is, moreover, concerned that Iran may view the project as unwanted competition, fearing that business at Tehran's own Gulf ports could suffer if Iraq's port at Faw emerges as a principal hub for cargo from Asia to Europe.¹³⁴ Iraq has tried to mollify Iran by offering it direct access to the Development Road through a 32km railroad and parallel highway – both under construction and marked for completion later in the year – that will connect Iran's Gulf port of Shalamcheh to Basra by bridge across the Shatt al-Arab. During the Iranian foreign minister's visit to Iraq in September 2024, Baghdad and Tehran signed a memorandum of understanding to complete the rail link, which, for now, will be used solely for passenger transport.¹³⁵ Should the trains start carrying Iranian exports, the railway might attract heightened U.S. and European scrutiny, as Western powers would worry about its potential to help Iran evade sanctions.

The parallel understandings between Iraq and its two neighbours are no guarantee that they will always be able to manage competing interests, but they position the Iraqi government to make the claim that it does not favour one over the other. A Turkish official said Ankara

¹³¹ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024 and March 2025.

¹³² An Iraqi official claimed that the KRG prime minister had threatened to block the project if it is not routed through the Kurdistan region. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad and Erbil, April 2025.

¹³³ Crisis Group interviews and telephone interviews, Iraqi officials, February and March 2025.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2024. Türkiye contends that the project will be beneficial to everyone in the Gulf. Erdoğan has characterised it as “a new Silk Road” and “an absolute win-win project” that would serve regional peace. “Turkish president's Iraq visit to boost momentum for Development Road project”, Anadolu Agency, 22 April 2024. In 2016, Iran presented the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor initiative, aiming to connect four maritime hubs, the Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, starting from Bandar Abbas in southern Iran and then passing through Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia before heading across the Black Sea to EU countries. Umud Shokri, “Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor: A new era for Iran-Europe trade or just another risk?”, Middle East Institute, 25 November 2024.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, April 2025. See also “Pezeshkian's visit highlights Iraq's strategic balancing act”, *Arab News*, 19 September 2024.

expects Baghdad to take the lead in dealing with Iran on the Development Road to help manage difficulties and avoid entanglement with already complicated Turkish-Iranian bilateral relations.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, May 2024.

VI. Strengthening Turkish-Iraqi Ties at a Time of Regional Upheaval

Seismic events in the region – including the twelve-day war between Israel and Iran, which could flare up again, and the fall of the House of Assad – are certain to shake the growing amity between Erdoğan’s Türkiye and Sudani’s Iraq. Changes at the top in both countries could also rattle the relationship. Despite his marginal win in Iraq’s November elections, Sudani, who has done much to accommodate Ankara’s demands regarding the PKK and promoted the mutually beneficial Development Road initiative, is unlikely to continue as prime minister, and there is no guarantee that his successor will be as dedicated to the burgeoning relationship with Türkiye as Sudani has been. But there is reason for hope. The governing coalition that appointed Sudani, the Shiite Coordination Framework, has consented to Iraq’s rapprochement with Türkiye, and it can ensure that the next government stays the course if its members maintain their political support for doing so.

Ankara and Baghdad will be in the best position to further deepen their relationship if the Ankara-PKK process progresses. Bilaterally, the two have already taken useful steps to address mutual grievances when it comes to the group. Baghdad has demonstrated its acknowledgement of Ankara’s threat perceptions by cooperating to curb PKK activity in Iraq. Similarly, Ankara has recognised Baghdad’s perception of the threat posed by its military presence on Iraqi soil and taken ameliorative measures: formalising security cooperation, especially around the Zilkan base – which Türkiye established unilaterally over a decade ago – has drawn some of the poison out of Iraq’s internal debate over what many see as Turkish sovereignty infringements, at least for now.

But the only sure way to keep these steps from becoming mere stopgaps is to end the PKK conflict, and that is easier said than done. Progress on PKK disarmament has slowed since Öcalan’s May declaration and the July ceremony in Suleimaniya. In the near term, moving forward hinges on two main factors.

The first factor concerns whether Türkiye and Iraq will take the steps that are needed on the PKK’s disbandment in accordance with its pledge. On Ankara’s side, these include legal arrangements that would allow a contingent of disarmed PKK members to reintegrate, as well as reforms that address longstanding demands of Türkiye’s Kurds, including on Kurdish-language education and political representation.¹³⁷ As for Iraq, both the central government in Baghdad and the KRG have endorsed the PKK’s decision to disband and signalled their read-

¹³⁷ Crisis Group Commentary, “A Promising Route to Peace in Türkiye’s PKK Conflict”, 11 March 2025.

iness to help.¹³⁸ Coordination between Ankara and Iraq on the PKK's disarmament and reintegration, if it proceeds, will be important for the success of the process.

The second factor concerns the progress of talks with Damascus over how to absorb the SDF into the new Syrian state. Should those negotiations sputter, Türkiye could decide that its best recourse lies in military action against the SDF, which in turn could revive support from PKK elements across the border in Iraq. Rather than be drawn down this road, Ankara should use its direct channels with Damascus and the SDF to help advance discussions, including by working toward a mutually tolerable formula for the area's future governance model. As for Baghdad, while the government can do little to influence the process in Syria, it should support the initiative under way between Ankara and the PKK, as well as promote the Turkish-SDF dialogue being facilitated by the Kurdistan region's president, Nechirvan Barzani.¹³⁹

Farther afield, fallout from the Iran-Israel war, the prospect of renewed hostilities and tensions between Türkiye and Israel are wild cards for Iraqi-Turkish ties. Israel and Türkiye hold opposing visions for Syria. Ankara seeks a stable, unified neighbour that curtails the SDF's aspirations for autonomy. But Israel views the consolidation of power in Damascus as a possible long-term threat and has shown sympathy for the SDF's aspirations for autonomy. Iran has been on the back foot in the region since the Gaza war broke out in October 2023, and it is unlikely to reactivate its Iraq-based affiliated groups in the near future. But should the PKK process lose momentum or Damascus-SDF talks fail, both Iran and Israel could paradoxically see an interest in exploiting the chaos that such developments might unleash in Syria's north east. For Israel, trouble in north-eastern Syria would undercut the integrity of the Syrian state to its perceived strategic benefit. For Iran, it could open an avenue to re-enter Syria.

To help protect Iraq from such a scenario, Ankara should maintain, and where helpful, expand its lines of communication with Iraq's Shiite establishment, including with members of the Iran-backed network that object most strongly to Türkiye's garrison and potentially expanding footprint in the country. Doing so may help manage risks and threat perceptions in both directions. These ties will be especially important for maintaining security cooperation should Sudani be replaced in the aftermath of November's polls.

¹³⁸ Their involvement could include overseeing the collection and disposal of weapons, verifying adherence to disarmament terms and facilitating the reintegration of former fighters into civilian life. Crisis Group interviews, KRG officials, Erbil and Suleimaniya, April 2025.

¹³⁹ "President Barzani praises Erdogan, Ocalan peace efforts", *Rudaw*, 21 March 2025.

Meanwhile, seeing the Development Road to completion should be a higher strategic priority for both Iraq and Türkiye. In order not to lose momentum, Ankara and Baghdad need to secure the funding that Gulf states have promised. Particularly in Iraq's case (given the endemic corruption that slowed its post-2003 recovery), the government should put in place mechanisms to ensure that this money is used for the intended purposes. These could include increased transparency in procurement and bidding processes, coupled with independent financial and technical audits at various stages of implementation. To showcase its own commitment to investors, Baghdad should allocate funds in its next budget. Baghdad and Erbil should also expedite talks about the corridor's precise route. Though sending its path through Kurdistan will be more expensive, the longer-term political and developmental benefits of including the KRG are likely to be significant. A middle way would be to guarantee the KRG that arteries will connect Iraqi Kurdistan to the main route even if the latter passes outside the region's boundaries.

Ankara and Baghdad also need to reassure countries that they stand to benefit from the project. Iraq, in particular, will need to mollify Iran by completing and bringing online without delay its side of the rail and road connection between Shalamcheh and Basra for commercial traffic. Those in Sudani's governing coalition who support the project should also continue efforts to convince Türkiye sceptics among the country's political class that enhanced trade through the corridor will yield both desperately needed revenue and private-sector jobs. Some Iraqi actors aligned with Iran will be mindful of Tehran's priorities when they calculate whether to support, oppose or even sabotage the project. They are less likely to try wrecking it if they stand to gain from the business opportunities it will generate.

Last come the oil and water questions. On the former, Ankara and Baghdad will have to reach agreement on how to resolve pending bills from the Paris arbitration cases, including the second one. But the brunt of the dispute is borne by Baghdad and the KRG. Now that the pipeline is back online, Baghdad needs to ensure that the arrangement it has struck with the KRG and international oil companies will hold beyond the November elections and include the deal in the next budget. Should exports be interrupted again, Türkiye will be less motivated to negotiate a new treaty when the current one expires in mid-2026.¹⁴⁰ If Ankara and Baghdad can make a new deal that would upgrade the ITP treaty, it would help create a predictable framework for managing exports and revenues, reduce the risk of future disruptions, and give investors greater confidence in the stability of cross-border energy flows.

¹⁴⁰ "Exclusive: Iraq set to reopen own pipeline as Kurdish talks stall", Reuters, 8 April 2024.

The longstanding water question may prove harder to tackle. Establishing standing committees to improve water cooperation was a positive step; both countries need to shield these technical working groups from political interference. Iraq will need to speed up efforts to develop infrastructure allowing it to use water more efficiently and increase data sharing with Türkiye. It can do so with Türkiye's help if it allocates funding for technical upgrades that Turkish as well as European companies can provide. Ankara is unlikely to agree to Baghdad's request for fixed water release quotas, given significant precipitation fluctuations and its own growing needs. But the two sides could at least explore the possibility of setting up joint emergency measures in case of severe downstream drought. Both should also discuss a format in which Syria's new authorities can be brought into trilateral talks (even if informally at first, as the SDF continues to control areas around the Euphrates) on how to equitably manage water flows through the river basin.

Finally, whoever leads Iraq going forward should take steps to safeguard progress in Iraq-Türkiye relations so they can be sustained. For Turkish officials, the continuation of Iraq's current trajectory is critical to institutionalising ties. "Over the years, we have seen officials sitting across the table on the Iraqi side change frequently", one said. "Each overhaul meant we needed to start from scratch and rebuild trust". For this reason, he explained, Ankara has insisted on establishing standing committees on water, energy, trade and other areas of cooperation as part of the 2024 framework agreement with Baghdad.¹⁴¹ To ensure continuity, the current Iraqi caretaker government and future governments should make efforts to keep mid-level and technical officials in their jobs irrespective of shifts at the ministerial level, so that their expertise on relevant files is not lost.

At the political level, unprecedented progress in Iraqi-Turkish ties has been made possible through obtaining broad buy-in from Iraqi political actors, including many who have historically been sceptical of Turkish policy in Iraq. One positive step was including the Hashd leader, Faleh al-Fayyad, in Iraq's negotiations with Türkiye. The Shiite Coordination Framework, which as noted will select the next prime minister and includes a spectrum of Shiite parties, will continue to wield significant influence over Baghdad's foreign policy. It is therefore in Ankara's interest to keep engaging with these and as many other Iraqi parties as possible.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, May 2024. The same Turkish official said, "We will closely observe what happens in Iraq six months before and six months after the elections, until the dust settles, to assess the impact on our bilateral ties".

VII. Conclusion

After years of tense relations, Türkiye and Iraq have found themselves in a better place in recent years, raising hopes that further progress could be in the offing. Continued advances in Turkish-Iraqi cooperation could help both Ankara and Baghdad advance toward their economic and security objectives, giving a boost to regional stability. But further progress will require more effort to address each other's grievances and threat perceptions; diplomatic engagement to keep regional flashpoints from derailing bilateral relations; and creativity and compromise in managing competing interests. Such investments could hardly be more worthwhile. Whether it relates to the PKK, water management, oil trade or transportation infrastructure, the neighbours can accomplish more working together than apart.

Ankara/Baghdad/Brussels, 9 December 2025

Appendix A: The Struggle Over Sinjar

Sinjar became a theatre of the Türkiye-PKK conflict in northern Iraq after ISIS targeted its majority-Yazidi community in August 2014. After KDP forces stationed in the area fled the ISIS onslaught, the PKK entered to help surviving Yazidis escape into Syria. In the subsequent months, the PKK boosted a local armed group, the Yazidi Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ), which with U.S. support drove out ISIS a year later, and has controlled Sinjar ever since.

Ankara regards YBŞ control of Sinjar as a threat, mainly because it has allowed the PKK to use these mountains as a hub for logistics and personnel movements between Iraq and Syria, in effect creating a land bridge to the YPG.¹⁴² The Turkish military has conducted occasional airstrikes in the area on both PKK and YBŞ positions, which are sometimes co-located.¹⁴³ But Türkiye's attacks on the YBŞ have been controversial, as its members are Iraqi citizens and few have anything to do with PKK operations outside Sinjar. In some instances, Turkish bombs and missiles have harmed civilians along with PKK or YBŞ militants.¹⁴⁴

For Baghdad, Sinjar straddles a web of conflicting interests that it has so far been unable to reconcile. The Yazidi community's loyalties are divided among several political and armed groups, most prominently the YBŞ and the KDP, but also Iran-backed Hashd elements. The KDP has made repeated attempts to come back to the district since fleeing in 2014, making return a condition for facilitating the repatriation of some 200,000 Yazidis who remain displaced under KDP control in the Kurdistan region.¹⁴⁵ But Baghdad is pulled between the KDP and Iran-backed parties, including groups that support the YBŞ, and that are involved in cross-border trade and smuggling with the PKK and YPG in Syria.¹⁴⁶

In October 2020, the Baghdad government and the KRG – with support from the UN – signed the so-called Sinjar agreement, which aimed to restore governance and security in Sinjar by removing external armed actors from the area, integrating local groups into a new police force and electing a new mayor. The exclusion of local actors in Sinjar from the agreement, along with resistance from the PKK and affiliated groups, have hindered its implementation, however. Ankara has supported the agreement, and it would like to see Baghdad and the

¹⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May and December 2024.

¹⁴³ See Crisis Group Visual Explainer, "Türkiye's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer", op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ See "Civilian Casualty Archive", Airwars.

¹⁴⁵ "Nearly 200,000 Yazidis still displaced ahead of crucial census", *Rudaw*, 17 November 2024.

¹⁴⁶ See Crisis Group Report, *Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar*, op. cit.

KRG fulfil the terms, but it remains pessimistic about prospects of revitalising the deal.¹⁴⁷ An attempt by the Iraqi army in 2021 to replace checkpoints staffed by local armed groups failed amid clashes.¹⁴⁸

Iraqi federal forces and the YBŞ have skirmished occasionally since then.¹⁴⁹ In the absence of a solution to Sinjar's governance and security predicament, Baghdad and Ankara appear to have bracketed this corner of the conflict theatre for now, but it could erupt again.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, May 2024. See also "Turkey welcomes Sinjar deal", *Daily Sabah*, 6 December 2020.

¹⁴⁸ See Crisis Group Report, *Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar*, op. cit.

¹⁴⁹ See "Iraqi army deploys heavy weapons to Sinjar following clashes with YBS", *Kurdistan 24*, 21 March 2025; and "Protests in Iraq's Sinjar: Locals threaten escalation over YBS detainees", *Shafaq News*, 25 March 2025.

Appendix B: Map of the Euphrates-Tigris Basin

Iraq and Türkiye have long been at odds over how to share and manage the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. The two rivers form a basin that sits among Iraq, Türkiye, Syria and Iran.



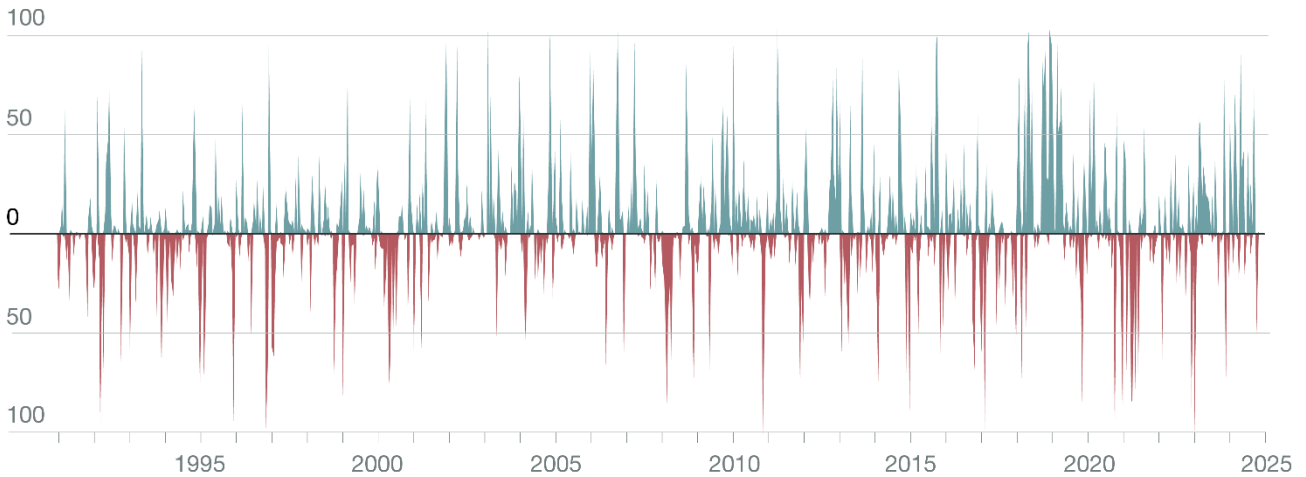
Source: OpenStreetMap; Crisis Group research, December 2025. CRISIS GROUP

Appendix C: Abnormal Precipitation in the Euphrates-Tigris Basin

Rising climate volatility is widening precipitation deficits (red) and excesses (blue), affecting larger areas (height) and lasting longer (width). These shifts may further strain water management in the Euphrates-Tigris basin.

Excess or deficit precipitation between 1991-2025

BASELINE 1991-2020, BY PERCENTAGE OF AREA



Source: Calculations based on CHIRPS data from the Climate Hazards Center, January 2025.

Methodology: The chart depicts monthly precipitation anomalies, based on CHIRPS data at a spatial resolution of approximately 5km per pixel. Z-scores are considered at the pixel level, comparing each month's precipitation to that of the same month of previous years, 1991-2020. $Z\text{-score} = (\text{precip}_{m,y} - \text{Mean_precip}_{m}) / (\text{SD_precip}_{m} + 0.01)$, with i , m and y denoting the pixel, month and year, respectively. A small value of 0.01 is added to the denominator to avoid high z-scores in areas with low inter-annual precipitation variability. Next, the sum of pixels with z-scores below (above) 1 are summarised to derive the portion of the country affected by rainfall deficit (excess) in a given month.

Appendix D: Map of the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline

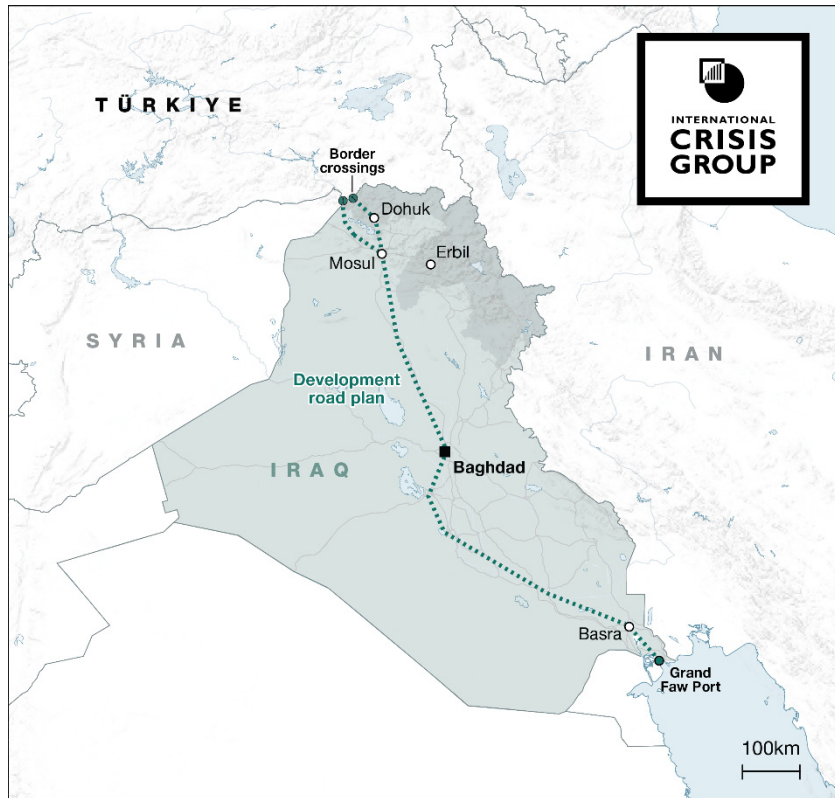
The Iraq-Türkiye pipeline (ITP) carries Iraqi oil from Kirkuk and other northern fields to international markets via Türkiye's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. It has been a source of tensions between the Iraqi federal government and Kurdistan Regional Government as well as between Ankara and Baghdad.



Source: OpenStreetMap; Crisis Group research, December 2025. CRISIS GROUP

Appendix E: Map of the Development Road Initiative

The Development Road initiative is a corridor that aims to link Iraq's Grand Faw Port to Türkiye. While Baghdad favours a route connecting Mosul to the Faysh Khabur/Ovaköy border crossing, Erbil wants at least parts of the Road to pass through the Kurdistan region.



Source: OpenStreetMap; Crisis Group research, December 2025. CRISIS GROUP

Appendix F: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes CrisisWatch, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kyiv, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. The ideas, opinions and comments expressed by Crisis Group are entirely its own and do not represent or reflect the views of any donor. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Austria (Austrian Development Agency), Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, DG INTPA), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), France (French Development Agency), Germany (Federal Foreign Office), International Organization for Migration, Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Japan (Japan External Trade Organization), Latvia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Principality of Liechtenstein (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), Malta (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), The Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Qatar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Republic of Korea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Slovenia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), United Nations World Food Programme, and the World Bank.

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Appendix G: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2022

Special Reports and Briefings

7 Priorities for the G7: Managing the Global Fallout of Russia's War on Ukraine, Special Briefing N°7, 22 June 2022.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2022-2023, Special Briefing N°8, 14 September 2022.

Seven Priorities for Preserving the OSCE in a Time of War, Special Briefing N°9, 29 November 2022.

Seven Priorities for the G7 in 2023, Special Briefing N°10, 15 May 2023.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2023-2024, Crisis Group Special Briefing N°11, 14 September 2023 (also available in French).

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2024-2025, Special Briefing N°12, 10 September 2024 (also available in French).

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2025-2026, Special Briefing N°13, 9 September 2025 (also available in French).

Eastern Mediterranean

Rethinking Gas Diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East Report N°240, 26 April 2023 (also available in Arabic).

Israel/Palestine

The Israeli Government's Old-New Palestine Strategy, Middle East Briefing N°86, 28 March 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Realigning European Policy toward Palestine with Ground Realities, Middle East Report N°237, 23 August 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Managing Palestine's Looming Leadership Transition, Middle East Report N°238, 1 February 2023 (also available in Arabic).

UNRWA's Reckoning: Preserving the UN Agency Serving Palestinian Refugees, Middle East Report N°242, 15 September 2023 (also available in Arabic).

A Way Out for Gaza, Middle East Briefing N°90, 9 December 2023 (also available in Arabic).

Stopping Famine in Gaza, Middle East Report N°244, 8 April 2024 (also available in Arabic).

Stemming Israeli Settler Violence at Its Root, Middle East Report N°246, 6 September 2024 (also available in Arabic).

Sovereignty in All but Name: Israel's Quickening Annexation of the West Bank, Middle East Report N°252, 9 October 2025 (also available in Arabic).

Gaza's Ceasefire is Vital, but Only a Start, Middle East Briefing N°97, 21 October 2025 (also available in Arabic).

Iraq/Syria/Lebanon

Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar, Middle East Report N°235, 31 May 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, Middle East Report N°236, 18 July 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Limiting the Damage of Lebanon's Looming Presidential Vacuum, Middle East Briefing N°88, 27 October 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, Middle East Report N°239, 7 March 2023 (also available in Arabic).

Containing Domestic Tensions in War-hit Lebanon, Middle East Briefing N°94, 27 February 2025 (also available in Arabic).

The New Syria: Halting a Dangerous Drift, Middle East Briefing N°95, 28 March 2025 (also available in Arabic).

Supporting Effective Policing by Lebanon's Embattled Security Agencies, Middle East Report N°251, 27 August 2025 (also available in Arabic).

Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, Middle East Report N°253, 26 November 2025.

North Africa

Steering Libya Past Another Perilous Crossroads, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°85, 18 March 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Saïed's Tunisia: Promoting Dialogue and Fixing the Economy to Ease Tensions, Middle East and North Africa Report N°232, 6 April 2022 (also available in French).

Tunisia's Challenge: Avoiding Default and Preserving Peace, Middle East and North Africa Report N°243, 22 December 2023 (also available in Arabic).

Egypt's Gaza Dilemmas, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°91, 16 May 2024 (also available in Arabic).

Getting Past Libya's Central Bank Stand-off, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°93, 1 October 2024 (also available in Arabic).

Managing Tensions between Algeria and Morocco, Middle East and North Africa Report N°247, 29 November 2024 (also available in Arabic and French).

Frozen Billions: Reforming Sanctions on the Libyan Investment Authority, Middle East and North Africa Report N°249, 24 April 2025 (also available in Arabic).

A Window for Diplomacy in Western Sahara, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°96, 20 October 2025 (also available in Arabic and French).

Iran/Yemen/Gulf

The Iran Nuclear Deal at Six: Now or Never, Middle East Report N°230, 17 January 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Brokering a Ceasefire in Yemen's Economic Conflict, Middle East Report N°231, 20 January 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Truce Test: The Huthis and Yemen's War of Narratives, Middle East Report N°233, 29 April 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Is Restoring the Iran Nuclear Deal Still Possible? Middle East Briefing N°87, 12 September 2022 (also available in Farsi).

How Huthi-Saudi Negotiations Will Make or Break Yemen, Middle East Briefing N°89, 29 December 2022 (also available in Arabic).

Iran's Khuzestan: Thirst and Turmoil, Middle East Report N°241, 21 August 2023 (also available in Arabic).

Great Expectations: The Future of Iranian-Saudi Détente, Middle East Briefing N°92, 13 June 2024.

Man on a Wire: A Way Forward for Iran's New President, Middle East Report N°245, 30 July 2024 (also available in Arabic).

Calming the Red Sea's Turbulent Waters, Middle East Report N°248, 21 March 2025 (also available in Arabic).

Grievance and Flawed Governance in Iran's Baluchestan, Middle East Report N°250, 19 August 2025 (also available in Arabic).

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