

New Road Map for Iraq to Support Stability and Growth

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Brief Analysis

Iraq’s stagnant political and legal environments today indicate that the country still faces a deep strategic impasse as a result of international obligations and limitations.

Decades after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq continues to feel the effects of the dozens of UN resolutions and sanctions placed on the country as a result of Saddam Hussein’s aggression. Though Iraq was officially removed from the UN Charter’s Chapter VII sanctions in June 2013—and even completed its final payment of over \$50 billion in reparations to Kuwait in February 2022—numerous aspects of a formal peace between Iraq and Kuwait remain unresolved, and Iraq has struggled to earn the status of a “normal” state within the international community.

Indeed, the many UN resolutions placed on Iraq have necessitated complicated and lengthy procedures for Iraq to come back from being known as “a state that resorts to violence.” Iraq’s difficulty in integrating into the international community is only compounded by an internal cycle of crises. Since 2003, successive governments have embroiled Iraq in a number of complex issues involving regional conflict, terrorism, corruption, and political polarization. Rather than attempting to restore Iraq to its normal position, however, these governments quickly became “caretaker governments,” simply passing on their crises to the next government.

As a result, Iraq has long assumed the position of a subject in need of international guardianship. Even today, the country is not capable of fulfilling its obligations under the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) with its most vital ally, the United States. Despite the best efforts of the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani, Iraqi officials must recognize that their country cannot truly develop without ensuring its full commitment to Chapters VI and VII in the UN Charter with regard to Kuwait and other issues.

The following is a brief assessment of both the roadblocks Iraq still faces and the potential steps it can take in order to maintain a reputation of stability and responsibility on the international level.

Staying Away from Chapter VII Violations

Though the Chapter VII sanctions placed on Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait were removed in 2013, Iraq is currently at risk of violating numerous UN resolutions, which could in turn cause Chapter VII to be put back in effect. In particular, Iraq needs to pay attention to Paragraph 32 of [UN Resolution 628](#)

[\(https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IQ%20KW_910403_SCR687%281991%29_0.pdf\)](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IQ%20KW_910403_SCR687%281991%29_0.pdf)

which “requires Iraq to inform the Council that it will not commit or support any act of international terrorism or allow any organization directed towards commission of such acts to operate within its territory.”

Unfortunately, Iraq has long been a willing host to a number of dangerous Iranian-backed militias, including U.S.-designated terrorist groups such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and Kataib Hezbollah (KH). With the Shia Coordination Framework now in power, these terrorist organizations have risen to unprecedented heights. Indeed, Iraq’s Minister of Higher Education, Naim al-Aboudi, is a member of AAH, and the head of the Prime Minister’s press office, Rabee Nader, has long been affiliated with both AAH and KH.

Though undoubtedly an ambitious undertaking, Iraq must work to systematically disband the armed groups that have taken root within its borders, ensuring they cannot threaten national or regional security. In the long run, this initiative will work hand in hand with Iraq’s efforts to adhere to the democratic mechanisms of the political process and the peaceful transfer of power without resorting to violence, which has become commonplace in the last few decades in Iraq. Likewise, gaining control over the militia situation and combating these terrorist groups will help Iraq to earn the international community’s trust, distancing them from possible Chapter VII violations and even minimizing the need for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Meeting Its Obligations Under Chapter VI

As for Iraq’s obligations under Chapter VI, Iraq’s differences with Kuwait need to be peacefully resolved in three areas: missing Kuwaitis, Kuwait’s missing archives, and border disputes.

As for the missing Kuwaitis, Iraq is off to a good start in that it has formed a joint committee with Kuwait under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss and resolve this issue, and to exert more consistent efforts to determine the status of all missing Kuwaitis since 1990. Both states are likewise coordinating their efforts to restore the Kuwaiti archives that were stored in the headquarters of the Iraqi intelligence that was bombed and looted in 2003. These initiatives must be followed through to their resolution.

The demarcation of the maritime borders that lay beyond marker 162 remains a key point of dispute between Iraq and Kuwait. Recently, proposals for this demarcation have been **rejected** (<https://www.newarab.com/news/iraqis-reject-proposed-demarcation-borders-kuwait>) by Iraqi officials and much of the Iraqi public, leading the Iraqi parliament to form a committee of its own to deal with the issue. An easy way to resolve this dispute, however, would be for both states to accept the findings of the UN committee, which demarcated the borders between Iraq and Iran in 1993. Another option is to appoint an international, technical committee to take over this task. The two parties may ultimately resort to the International Court of Justice, if all these efforts fail.

Improving Its Relationship with the United States Through the SFA

With more international credibility, Iraq can focus on its [SFA \(https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/12/20081204-6.html\)](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/12/20081204-6.html) with the United States to ensure that it remains a strategic ally of the United States in any regional conflict. Stabilizing the Iraqi national security apparatus in line with the SFA’s purpose will in turn aid the development of key Iraqi infrastructure in cooperation and coordination with U.S. agencies and international organizations. More specifically, Iraqi national security must be restructured in order to free Iraq from international defense and security restrictions, especially in four main areas: regional and international defense and intelligence cooperation; counterterrorism and corruption; security and

stability in the Iraqi and democratic political process; and integration of armed entities into sovereign ministries. To oversee this restructuring, Sudani should reinvigorate the Iraqi National Security Council as an effective, reliable source of sound national security strategies. Sudani can likewise improve the transparency and trustworthiness of Iraq’s banking and financial sector—a key sticking point in the Iraq-U.S. relationship. Another means of confidence-building between Iraq and the United States is for Sudani to avoid interacting with China or other countries in a way that would violate its obligations to the terms of the SFA.

Internally, the Sudani government must work to restore voter confidence in the political process while preventing the use of coercion and force in the electoral process. Involving the international community in overseeing election integrity is a great way to both build citizen’s confidence in the electoral process and gain international recognition and trust. Finally dealing with the internal issues of displaced persons and the rights of minorities and women will also go a long way in building Iraq’s reputation as a reliable, stable country,

These steps constitute a road map to restore Iraq as a normal state in the eyes of the international community. If Sudani succeeds in implementing these steps by handling them as a single package of “indivisible” measures and policies, Iraq could make a quantum leap in its modern history, accelerating the rebuilding and development of the entire country. However, Iraq’s failure to implement these obligations and steps will open the door to chaos, conflict, and further division. ❖

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