

political
reports

6 April
2022



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The regime of Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has been keen to boost the country's relations with Iraq, amid the latter's confrontation with ISIS and other militant groups that spread in Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In January 2015, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi met with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo, where al-Sisi stressed the importance of enhancing the two countries' joint counterterrorism efforts, praising al-Abadi's efforts to reach a consensus among all segments of Iraqi people to face the threat of ISIS and extremist groups¹.

However, the visit of Iraqi President Fuad Masum to Egypt in early March 2016 was a culmination of a series of visits by Iraqi officials to Egypt, which led to the signing of military, security and economic agreements between Cairo and Baghdad, which was considered a new beginning for a developing and strategic relationship between Egypt and Iraq, the eastern gateway to the Arabs and the heart of the Arab Mashreq.

Since the rise of Sisi after overthrowing Egypt's first civilian President Mohamed Morsi, he has recurrently emphasized the significance of the unity and sovereignty of Iraq on its lands. Furthermore, Egypt also supported the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. In April 2015, the Egyptian government rejected a proposal by the US Congress to divide Iraq on a sectarian basis, into three regions, among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds.

On the other hand, the military relations between the Egyptian and Iraqi military institutions have witnessed a remarkable development, up to a strategic alliance, to combat the increasing terrorist activities in the region, which Iraq has been suffering from since 2003, and steadily since 2014, with the rise of the "Islamic State" organization that seized the city of Mosel.

¹ Amr Sobhi, Iraq in the Egyptian Strategy, Arab Democratic Center, 29 May 2021, [link](#)

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In line with the escalation of the strength of the military relations between the two countries, Egypt and Iraq, the political and diplomatic relations proceeded at the same pace, but in a different way, through exchange of visits from senior officials of the two countries.

The visit of Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry in the summer of 2014, immediately after assuming his position, was the beginning of restoration of warm relations between Egypt and Iraq, support the new Iraqi government, and push the political consensus between the political forces in the two countries to focus on combating terrorism.

The visit of Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament Salim al-Jabouri, in February 2016, to congratulate Egypt on the election of the new parliament, was a continuation of the progress of relations between the two countries. The Egyptian Parliament also sought to form an Egyptian-Iraqi Parliamentary Friendship Association. Also, the visit of President Fouad Masum to Cairo came to culminate mutual visits of senior officials of both parties.

Cairo's permanent diplomatic solidarity with Baghdad was manifested with the escalation of terrorist operations by the so-called "Islamic State", and Egypt's political blessing of the Iraqi army's success in liberating the city of Ramadi at the end of 2015.

In October 2016, following a small crisis between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the Egyptian authorities announced that the Saudi state-owned Aramco had halted its oil supplies to Egypt, despite the two countries' understandings reached during a visit by Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz to Cairo in April 2016, that the Kingdom would supply Egypt with 700,000 barrels of oil per month, for a period of 5 years, on easy-payment terms.

Subsequently, there were official moves on the Egyptian and Iraqi arenas, in indication of further rapprochement after a frost in relations for over 10 years following the US occupation of Iraq in March 2003. Egyptian Minister of Petroleum Tariq Al-Mulla, visited Baghdad, where he reached an agreement to import Basra oil (in southern Iraq), in order to meet his country's needs for oil derivatives at the time, after Aramco halted its oil supplies to Cairo. Also, The Iraqi Minister of Electricity Qassem Mohamed Al-Fahdawi, visited Egypt at the time, to discuss aspects of joint cooperation in between the two countries in areas of electricity and energy.

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However, the visit of the Egyptian Minister of Petroleum to Iraq had been preceded by demands by a number of members of Iraqi Parliament -representatives of the "National Alliance" (Shiite), the largest blocs in parliament- from Iraqi government to grant Egypt crude oil on credit in response to what they said was "blackmail" practiced by Riyadh against Cairo.

On 17 October 2016, Iraqi Minister of Petroleum Jabbar al-Luaibi, invited Egyptian companies to participate in oil investment contracts. During one of the meetings with Egyptian Ambassador in Baghdad Hassan Ahmed Darwish, the Iraqi minister said that it was necessary to strengthen Egyptian-Iraqi relations, especially in the field of oil.

On the same day, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi spoke with Sisi by phone to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries and unify efforts to fight terrorism².

In October 2020, in what appeared to be a strong supportive stance for the Iraqi state against the growing Iranian influence in Iraq, after the latter's victory over ISIS, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry affirmed that Egypt was fully prepared to assist Iraq in facing challenges and interference in its affairs. During a press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Fouad Hussein in Cairo, Shoukry said that his country understands the challenges facing Iraq, pointing out that they are common challenges.

For his part, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein praised the Egyptian role in his country's foreign relations, stating that: "Cairo plays a key role in Baghdad's foreign relations." Hussein also stressed the need for coordination between the Egyptian and Iraqi sides in facing the threats in the region.

While receiving the Iraqi ambassador to Cairo, Sisi affirmed his country's support for Iraq and boosting its Arab and national role, as well as provision of everything that would achieve Iraq's interests at various levels, and helping it overcome all challenges, including fighting terrorism and maintaining the nation's security and stability.

² Mohamed Al-Rayes, the Egyptian-Iraqi rapprochement...a "tactical maneuver"? Analysis, Anadolu Agency, 18 November 2016, [link](#)

Al-Sisi also expressed Egypt's keenness to enhance cooperation with Iraq, whether at the bilateral level, or at the trilateral level, along with Iraq and Jordan³.

Cooperation agreements in various fields

According to a report by the "Almarsad Almasry" website, issued in late 2020, there are many areas of cooperation between Egypt and Iraq, most notably in the following:

Construction

Within the framework of the Egyptian-Iraqi Higher Committee, it was agreed to sign a 'reconstruction for oil' agreement, whereby Egyptian companies implement development projects in Iraq in exchange for oil that Egypt would import from Iraq. In addition, an agreement was signed between the two countries to supply Egypt with 12 million barrels of crude oil for a period of 6 months, where Egypt imports crude oil from Basra oil fields at an average of 1.5 million barrels per month in exchange for exporting liquefied gas to Iraq.

Housing

The Egyptian experience will be devoted for the reconstruction of Iraq, as Iraq suffers from a housing deficit estimated at 3 million housing units. Accordingly, the Egyptian contracting companies will have a share in the reconstruction of Iraq, in addition to Egypt looking forward to Iraqi investment in the real estate sector at home.

Trade

The volume of trade between Egypt and Iraq in 2019 amounted to nearly \$486 million, as Egyptian exports to Iraq amounted to \$479 million, and Egyptian imports from Iraq amounted to \$7 million.

Investment

Cooperation between the Egyptian General Investment Authority and the Iraqi National Investment Authority to train Iraqi cadres in Egypt through investor service centers.

³ Egyptian-Iraqi talks to strengthen bilateral relations, Sky News Arabia - Abu Dhabi, 12 Oct. 2020, [link](#)

Industry

The Iraqi market will be opened to Egyptian products, in light of Iraq's endeavor to organize a permanent exhibition for Egyptian products in the Iraqi market and provide it with all forms of support, taking into mind that there are several industries that may represent an opportunity for Egyptian companies in the Iraqi market, including leather, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, iron and petrochemicals.

Mining

The Egyptian expertise in the field of mining will be transferred to Iraq through training a number of Iraqi workers on various mining activities, cooperation between the Iraq Geological Survey and the Mineral Resources Authority in Egypt, and the transfer of Egyptian expertise in amendment and ratification of legislation and effective mechanisms in the field of optimal exploitation of minerals and mineral wealth.

Electricity

The Egyptian expertise in the field of electricity in terms of manufacturing cables, establishing electricity production stations, and manufacturing modern meters will be transferred to Iraq, and contribution to the reconstruction of the Iraqi network; In addition to the likeliness of Egypt exporting electricity to Iraq, where Egypt achieved a surplus in electricity production of more than 27 thousand gigawatts as a result of the electricity production projects that it has completed over the previous six years.

Transport

Both Egypt and Iraq are looking forward to cooperation in the air transport industry through cooperation in aircraft maintenance between EgyptAir and Iraqi Airways, and provision of Egyptian expertise to the Iraqi civil aviation sector in this regard.

Farming

The Egyptian experience in the field of agriculture will be transferred to Iraq through training Iraqi cadres in Egypt, in addition to the aspiration of the two countries to establish an Egyptian-Iraqi agricultural technical committee for further coordination between the two countries; in addition to cooperation in the field of agricultural scientific research and exchange of experiences in the field of

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artificial insemination, as well as cooperation in the production and export of seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and veterinary vaccines.

Security

Cooperation between Egypt and Iraq, especially in the field of countering terrorism, through joint coordination, exchanging experiences, training programs, raising capabilities, to achieve stability and development in Iraq.

Education

An executive program was signed between the two countries in the field of higher education from 2020 to 2022, which includes the exchange of university teaching staff in various disciplines to present lectures and exchange experiences; in addition to provision of the necessary documents to researchers from both sides, and exchanging scientific theses, curricula, scientific periodicals and translated literature; as well as organization of joint cultural and educational events, including conferences and training courses with the participation of Egyptian and Iraqi university teaching staff, scholars and researchers. In addition, the Egyptian expertise will be transferred to Iraq in the field of scientific research, with a view to increasing the number of scholarships for Iraqi students in Egypt. It is noteworthy that there are about 22,000 Iraqi students in Egypt in the undergraduate and postgraduate levels⁴.

Many Egyptian and Iraqi experts and researchers confirmed that this rapid growth in Egyptian-Iraqi relations contributes to restoring Iraq to its natural place among the Arab countries.

For example, Dr. Abdul Karim Al-Wazzan, an Iraqi political researcher, stressed that "The Egyptian-Iraqi relations are going through an important turning point, both in terms of developments and timing, because the interaction and development of relations between the two countries is tantamount to returning Iraq to its natural place among the Arab countries. In addition, the threats that Iraq is exposed to from neighboring countries, makes coordination between Baghdad and Cairo important."

⁴ Mohamed Ali Hassan, Egypt and Iraq.. Rooted Relationships and Lasting Cooperation, Al-Watan website, 14 December 2020, [link](#)

Also, Ahmed Rifaat, a journalist specializing in Egyptian national security affairs, said: "Since Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took power in 2014, he has attached great importance to Iraq."

Rifaat also stressed that "The two countries have taken important steps, not only in the agreements signed between them in various economic fields, but will extend to cooperation at the highest levels, militarily and politically"⁵.

Following its victory over ISIS years ago, Iraq has become the focus of interest of regional countries, especially Egypt, in light of the gradual American withdrawal, militarily and politically, from Iraq and the Middle East, which may explain the Egyptian rush to activate relations with Iraq, to achieve economic and commercial objectives and interests.

In this context, one may understand what is meant by the so-called New Levant Project, which brings Egypt, Iraq and Jordan together within a new economic alliance, with political, security, and perhaps strategic dimensions that are not yet clear⁶.

⁵ Iraqi and Egyptian researchers to Russia Today: Iraqi-Egyptian relations are developing rapidly and there is great coordination between the two countries, 10 Dec. 2020, [link](#)

⁶ The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Egyptian Institute for Studies