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# INDIA'S IRAQ POLICY

PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

PRABHAT JAWLA



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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*To Maa*

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All the errors and omissions are mine.

Prabhat Jawa

New Delhi

April 2023

# POLITICAL MAP, IRAQ



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, University of Texas.



## INTRODUCTION

Instinctively, the title of the monograph, *India's Iraq Policy: Past, Present, & Future*, provokes two immediate yet reasonable inquiries: why Iraq? And, why now? But before any queries about Iraq are heeded (see chapter two), the question about the timing needs consideration because that provides the essential context for the monograph. To this end, two excerpts from prominent personalities driving the mandate of Indian foreign policy need attention. On 15 August 2019, during his annual Independence Day Address, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi avowed:

“We [Indians] now need to unitedly think about what dreams we want to achieve as a nation. Time demands that we live, fight and move ahead in unison to fulfil these dreams. Keeping this in mind, we have set a dream target of building a five trillion-dollar economy.”<sup>1</sup>

The same year, in November, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S. Jaishankar, in what he called an “unsentimental audit” of Indian foreign policy, remarked:

“A changing world is clearly a more actionable one for those who do not wish to get left behind ... we are now at the cusp of change ... A nation that has the aspiration to become a leading power someday cannot continue with unsettled borders, an unintegrated region and under-exploited opportunities.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “PM's Address to the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 73rd Independence Day,” Prime Minister's Office, 15 August 2019, at [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-address-to-the-nation-from-the-ramparts-of-the-red-fort-on-the-73rd-independence-day/?comment=disable](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-to-the-nation-from-the-ramparts-of-the-red-fort-on-the-73rd-independence-day/?comment=disable) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>2</sup> “External Affairs Minister's speech at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ramnath Goenka Lecture,” Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), 14 November 2019, at <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32038/External+Affairs+>

Essentially, these two extracts highlight India's ambitions and give vantage to the role that India seeks to play at the global level. What's more, such statements evoke the cumulative Indian desires to become a leading global power that would mandate — if not wholly dictate— a proactive and expansive role globally, including in the critical region of the Middle East<sup>3</sup> (or West Asia).

Indeed, these sentiments are not recent phenomena since such ambitions had started gaining ground in 1990s after the liberalisation of the Indian economy, which in turn was followed by India's increasing participation in global affairs. Part of this growing role manifested in increased engagements and deliberate departures from traditional patterns of behaviour in its foreign relations. Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whether it was India's stand on the 'Nuclear Question' or its disavowal to join the 2003 US-led invasion (or the Iraq War), Indian foreign policy has approached various states and non-state actors with fresh pragmatism even though the illusions of idealism and naïveté continue to beleaguer its conduct.

India's articulation of policies of 'Look East' and 'Look West'<sup>4</sup> and their respective metamorphosis into 'Act East', and 'Act West'<sup>5</sup> are

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Ministers+speech+at+the+4th+Ramnath+Goenka+Lecture+2019  
(Accessed 26 February 2022).

- <sup>3</sup> The debate on the term 'Middle East' and 'West Asia' is profound and extensive. The monograph employs both terms interchangeably.
- <sup>4</sup> Prasanta Kumar Pradhan, "Accelerating India's "Look West Policy" in the Gulf," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), 4 February 2011, at <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/AcceleratingIndiasLookWestPolicyintheGulf> (Accessed 26 February 2022); Guy Burton, "India's "Look West" Policy in the Middle East under Modi," *Middle East Institute*, 6 August 2019, at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/indias-look-west-policy-middle-east-under-modi> (Accessed 26 February 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> Anil Trigunayat, "'Look and Act West Policy, biggest success of Modi government'," *The Hindu*, 22 August 2019, at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/look-and-act-west-policy-biggest-success-of-modi-government/article29225208.ece> (Accessed 26 February 2022); Abhishek Mishra and Premeśha Saha, "Act East and Act West: Two different prisms for India's Indo-Pacific strategy," Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 4 January 2020, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/act-east-and-act-west-two-different-prisms-for-indias-indo-pacific-strategy-59850> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

appropriate illustrations of this changed approach. The vicissitudes in India's foreign policy in the Middle East have been prominent and perceptible. India reached out to Israel and established full-fledged diplomatic relations, the expatriation to the Gulf have burgeoned, and the Pakistan factor — a constant irritant in its engagement with the region — had become less dominant.

Over the last decade, New Delhi's relations with Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Muscat have strengthened. The Diaspora has emerged as an entirely new dimension of India's bilateral ties with these Gulf countries. Particularly, in the post-2014 period, Prime Minister Modi's government has made it a point to expand foreign relations. Meanwhile, engagement with many countries, notably Tehran, Baghdad and Istanbul, has suffered setbacks owing to distinctive explanations. The diffidence in political will and lack of follow-up remain critical factors that underscore India's conduct with the Middle East. In short, it can be concluded that there have been some positive and certain negative developments in India's approach vis-à-vis the Middle East in the last thirty years.

It has been argued that India should decrease its one-dimensional relationship within the region. Moving beyond the energy-dependent ties, India must endeavour to establish strategic partnerships based on the commonality of interests and shared views about global and regional affairs. In the last two decades, India has made some strides in this regard. A recent example is the Middle Eastern Quad, where India has engaged with the United States, Israel, and the UAE.<sup>6</sup> However, India has veritable challenges in contributing to the initiative.

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<sup>6</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, "New Quad signals India's strategic shift in Middle East," *The New Indian Express*, 23 October 2021, at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/columns/2021/oct/23/new-quad-signals-indias-strategic-shift-in-middle-east-2374582.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022). Also, see Hasan Alhasan, "Is India Abandoning Iran for a Middle Eastern Quad, or Merely Signaling China?" *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, 1 November 2021, at <https://agsiw.org/is-india-abandoning-iran-for-a-middle-eastern-quad-or-merely-signaling-china> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Keeping in mind such an argument, consider Iraq, a crucial country because of its energy resources and geostrategic significance. Politically too, it has been and will continue to remain a vital country, particularly as a crossway between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In a way, Iraq “represents the coming together of threads from the entire region and can become a valid interlocutor in the region.”<sup>7</sup> The rise of the Islamic State gave salience to a security dimension to Iraq that had so far gone unrealised.

As such, riding on assertions made by Prime Minister Modi and EAM Jaishankar about India’s quest to become a “leading power” with its evolving foreign policy approach, it is fitting that India’s relations with Iraq, one of its primary energy partners and a key country in the region, should be given meticulous attention.

### **WHY THIS MONOGRAPH?**

In essence, there are two chief rationales for writing the monograph. Foremost, Iraq constitutes an essential part of India’s extended neighbourhood, not merely for its ineluctable geopolitical and geo-economic significance but also because of its vast historical and cultural importance. Moreover, as New Delhi increases its footprint in the region, Iraq would play a determining role. Hitherto, Iraq has featured prominently in India’s energy security calculus. However, the current binary relationship needs to be expanded, and relations must be advanced beyond the quest for energy resources. To these ends, studying India’s relations with Iraq becomes necessary.

Another critical reason for conducting this study was the absence of literature on Indo-Iraq relations. Even after decades of close relations, and despite being one of the top suppliers of crude to India for over a decade, the literature that examines the dynamics of India-Iraq relations, is meagre to say the least. Most of the scholarship on the subject is essentially a part of oral history, often articulated in opinion

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<sup>7</sup> Rajendra M. Abhyankar, “India finally reconnects with Iraq,” Gateway House, 28 June 2013, at <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/india-finally-reconnects-with-iraq> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

pieces, news items, and a handful of articles written about the issues in vogue, rather than any systemic inquiry of the bilateral relations. As a result, the general review of bilateral ties has remained unexplored. Therefore, taking note of this severe research gap in the literature, this monograph aims to conduct a historical survey of Indo-Iraq bilateral relations to provide a comprehensive picture of the bilateral relations. Moreover, the monograph provides policy recommendations based on past bilateral experiences.

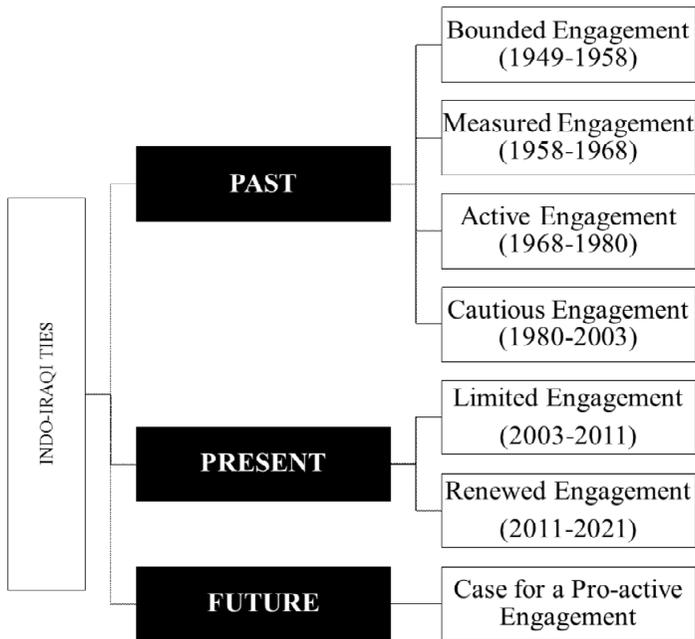
The research builds on an extensive review of India's foreign relations documents over 70 years (1947-2021). The monograph has examined official documents, including official declarations, communiqués, press releases, parliament speeches and official statements, apart from conducting interviews with former officials who have been involved with Iraq in varying capacities. The monograph also utilises the news reports, commentaries, and op-eds written about the subject in secondary sources. The idea behind engaging secondary sources is to comprehend the socio-political realities and geopolitical environment in which the bilateral ties germinated and progressed. The monograph is titled "India's Iraq Policy" for the simple reason that the research exclusively consults Indian foreign policy documents and incorporates the Indian perspective on bilateral relations. Even though several international (non-Indian) sources are taken for reference. In its final analysis, the study is reflective of an Indian perspective on bilateral relations. The language barrier and the unavailability of Iraqi sources were obvious impediments in engaging with the Iraqi perspective, which is a perceptible limitation of the study.

A historical examination reveals that bilateral ties have gone through various periods of engagements, manifesting extreme trends over the years as relations vary from friendly in the 1970s to barely existent in 2003-04. Various factors are responsible for this. Strong domestic governments had been a precursor for increased cooperation, which eventually led to multi-sector and multi-domain cooperation. Equally important has been the role of external players in the bilateral engagement between the two countries. Therefore, the monograph makes a case that as Iraq gains domestic stability and as the preponderance of external actors diminishes within the country, India must step in to strengthen bilateral relations, which would consequently

lead to a transition from existing energy-centric to more multi-sector cooperation.

Accordingly, the monograph makes a conscious effort to discuss bilateral relations in three phases: past, present and future. The first phase covers the period from 1947 to 2003, whereas the present phase will underscore the events and relationships between 2003 and 2021. Finally, the last phase (i.e., future) will explore the opportunities and challenges in bilateral relations and make suggestions to strengthen the Indo-Iraqi ties further. These three phases can be divided into more elaborate sub-phases (or periods) of engagement to explicate the changing trends thoroughly within the bilateral relations. These periods of engagement, alongside the broader phases, are depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Periods of Engagement in Indo-Iraqi Relations**



*Source:* Author.

## DESIGN OF THE MONOGRAPH

To better contextualise Iraq's importance for India and address the question of 'why Iraq', the second chapter, *Why Iraq is important?*, enunciates the importance of Iraq as a country in the region, and more specifically, why a bilateral relationship is valuable for India. The third chapter (called *The Past*) traces the evolution of the bilateral relationship, starting in 1947, until the US-led invasion (or the Iraq War) in 2003. Accordingly, the fourth chapter (*The Present*) picks up from chapter three. By taking two broad periods of engagement, this chapter describes how the two countries manoeuvred the bilateral ties during three critical events – 2003 the US invasion and the rise of the Islamic State. Finally, chapter five (*The Future*) undertakes a policy-oriented approach by making policy suggestions based on lessons learnt over the years.

## WHY IS IRAQ IMPORTANT?

The question of ‘why Iraq is important’ is a logical extension of the question posed in the Introduction – ‘why study Iraq?’ This chapter is an attempt to edify these two fundamental questions. It looks at three broad dimensions to understand: 1. Iraq as a country, 2. its position within the region, 3. its importance to India.

### IRAQ: AN OVERVIEW

Bordered by six countries, Iraq is the fourth-largest territory in West Asia.<sup>8</sup> To its East lies Iran, sharing an approximately 1,600 km long border.<sup>9</sup> In the West, it borders with Jordan and Syria, while Saudi Arabia connects with it in the South. In the North, it is bordered by Turkey through its Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR). On the Southeast side, Iraq has access to the strategic waters of the Persian Gulf while also sharing a border with the Kingdom of Kuwait. The country is bestowed with natural resources and varied terrain. Perhaps the biggest prize for Iraq is its vast reserves of petroleum. According to BP, Iraq’s proven oil reserves (145 thousand million barrels) accounts for 8.4 per cent of the total proven reserves globally.<sup>10</sup> These qualify as

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<sup>8</sup> “Surface Area (sq. km): Middle East & North Africa,” World Bank, 2018 at [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.SRF.TOTL.K2?locations=ZQ&most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.SRF.TOTL.K2?locations=ZQ&most_recent_value_desc=true), (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>9</sup> “CIA World Factbook: Iraq,” Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), March 04, 2021 at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Figures are taken from BP’s Total Proven Reserve section. See “BP’s Statistical Review of World Energy (69<sup>th</sup> Edition),” BP, 2020, at <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2020-full-report.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

the fifth-largest oil reserves after Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Canada and Iran.<sup>11</sup> In terms of topographical distribution, nearly one-third of the reserves lie in the Northern Kurdish region, while the rest are concentrated in southern Iraq.<sup>12</sup> The two most prominent rivers in the region—Tigris (*Dijla*) and Euphrates (*Furat*)—stream from the northwest to the southeast. The capital city Baghdad (meaning “Gift of God”) is located at the centre of Iraq, at the banks of the River Tigris. Both rivers contribute immensely to agriculture, which remains the largest employing sector after the petroleum industry. The rivers meet in the north of Basra and make *Shatt al-Arab*<sup>13</sup> that dispenses into the Persian Gulf.

Over the last century, Iraq<sup>14</sup> has had a rich history of rulers, revolutions and foreign interventions. In the aftermath of the First World War,

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<sup>11</sup> Figures are taken from BP's Total Proven Reserve section. See “BP's Statistical Review of World Energy (69<sup>th</sup> Edition),” no.10.

<sup>12</sup> “Update: Kurdistan and the Battle Over Oil,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2018, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/08/business/update-kurdistan-and-the-battle-over-oil.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>13</sup> The river is called *Arvand Rud* in Iran.

<sup>14</sup> Numerous studies (academic, biographical and journalistic) related to Iraq's historical, religious and cultural aspects have been written. Like most literature pertaining to the Middle East, they represent different viewpoints. To understand the history and Iraq's predecessor polities, see Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000. In terms of journalistic reporting, see George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2005; Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*, Verso, London, 2000; Patrick Cockburn, *The Age of Jihad: Islamic State and the Great War for the Middle East*, Verso, London, 2016. For military/operational aspects, see Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2003. To understand landmark political transition in Iraq, see Hizb Al-Ba'th Al-'Arabi Al-Ishtiraki, *The 1968 Revolution in Iraq: Experience and Prospects: The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq, January 1974*, Ithaca Press, London, 1979; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, KPI Limited, London, 1987.

Iraq was carved out from the Ottoman Caliphate and was placed as a mandate of the League of Nations, which were to be administrated by the British under the title of 'State of Iraq'. Often referred to as the "most successful" mandates in the region, Iraq fell under the rule of the Hashemite monarchy that reigned over it until the bloody *coup d'état* in 1958, also known as the '14 July Revolution'. A decade later, in 1968, the successor regime that ousted the monarchy was itself toppled in a *coup d'état* by Iraq's Arab Socialist Party (also Ba'ath Party), with Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr as the President, and Saddam Hussein as the Vice-President. Initially, the Ba'athist regime (supported by the Soviet Union) pursued cordial relations with its neighbour, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), Iraq was engaged in war with Iran in a protracted conflict known as Eight-Year War (or Iran- Iraq War) (1980-88). Two years later, in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, prompting the international community to intervene militarily. The UN-sanctioned coalition forces led by the US pushed Iraq out of Kuwait in the Gulf War of 1991. After more than a decade of sanctions, the US-led invasion took place in March 2003.

The US-led invasion (2003) deposed Saddam Hussein, and for the first time, Iraq had a democratic government. Post-2003 chaos led to a severe transformation in the regional balance of power. Traditionally, a Sunni seat of power, the invasion left Iraq under the control of the Shia community for the first time in centuries. This happened mainly because, at the time, consensus in Washington was that empowering Shias against Sunnis would help maintain balance of power within the region. Meanwhile, the Sunni rulers would be dissuaded from following on the footsteps of Saddam Hussein. Additionally, many in Washington, like Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, were convinced that Shia-ruled Iraq would be a better friend to Washington than Sunnis.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, after the invasion, Iran actively pursued policies that enabled it an overwhelming influence in major governance sectors within Iraq. The Iran-backed militias, armed with Improvised Explosive Devices

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Mansfield and Nicolas Pelham, *A History of the Middle East* (Fifth Edition), Penguin Random House, London, 2019.

(IEDs) and armoured vehicles, waged a proxy war against the US until it left the country in 2011. Majority of the leaders of various armed militias that Iran supported soon entered politics and became part of the country's political machinery. The government of Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia leader close to Tehran, enabled some stability to the pandemonium that had plagued Iraq. However, the new-found order was short-lived. Soon the phenomenon of 'Arab Spring' unravelled, giving birth to a new set of problems throughout the region, including in Iraq. In neighbouring Syria, the instability gave room for the expansion of Sunni terror groups, which combined with similar groups within Iraq (majorly born out of post-2003 sectarian schism) led to the creation of one of the most sinister and repugnant terror groups in the recent history— the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq<sup>16</sup> (or ISIS) (or Da'esh). The ensuing battle to retrieve Iraqi territory from under Da'esh control left Iraq in shambles (politically, economically and culturally).

In terms of culture, Iraq is an assortment of distinctive identities that unite and divide along diverse linguistic, religious, sectarian, and ethnic lines. In Iraq, every individual is part of more than one of these identities simultaneously. The Iraqi population stands at an estimated 40.2 million (2019),<sup>17</sup> where the Arabs are the dominant ethnic group (75-80 per cent), followed by Kurds (15-20 per cent) alongside others, such as Turkmen, Assyrians, Yazidi, Shabaks, Armenians, Circassians, and Sabians.<sup>18</sup> An overwhelming population is Muslim, of which Shias constitute nearly 64-69 per cent, followed by Sunnis who are around 29-34 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Several other religious groups and sects exist, including

<sup>16</sup> Also, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Da'esh, and the Islamic State (IS). All are used interchangeably throughout the monograph.

<sup>17</sup> *World Populations Prospects 2019*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Pichon, "Minorities in Iraq: Pushed to the brink of existence," *European Parliamentary Research Service*, February 2015, at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/548988/EPRS\\_BRI\(2015\)548988\\_REV1\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/548988/EPRS_BRI(2015)548988_REV1_EN.pdf) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>19</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, Md. Muddassir Quamar, and Sameena Ahmad, *Persian Gulf 2019: India's Relations with the Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, New Delhi, 2020.

Christians (Chaldean, Assyrians and Syriac Catholics), Kaka'i, and Baha'i. The north-based Kurdish people follow different religions and sects, but they are overwhelmingly Sunnis, besides a few Shias (known as Feyli Kurds). Arabic is the main language (spoken by 75-80 per cent of the population), followed by Kurdish (15-20 per cent), both of which are counted as the State's official languages.<sup>20</sup> Other languages like Turkmen (a Turkish dialect), Syriac (Neo-Aramaic), and Armenian are also spoken by different groups. Notably, Iraq houses two of the holiest shrines in Shia culture—Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala and Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf.

### **IRAQ AND THE REGION: AN OVERVIEW**

For three millennia, the modern-day Iraqi territory has stayed a central player in the region for its political, economic and social character. Islam arrived in Iraq soon after the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 632 CE. The Abbasids, however, raised the profile of Iraq by establishing their Caliphate in the capital city of Baghdad, which they founded in 762 CE.<sup>21</sup> After the Abbasids, Iraq existed less as a separate political entity but more as a component of other dynasties, notably the Ottoman Caliphate that took over Baghdad in 1534 CE. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British captured the city of Baghdad in 1917. Thereafter, the modern State of Iraq was created by carving out territory from the Caliphate. Before this, there was no country Iraq, although the territory had existed for centuries, mainly Baghdad as the focal point. This had led many to conclude that Iraq is an 'artificial state'.

After the end of the Ottoman Caliphate, Iraq's relations with its neighbouring states were far from peaceful. There were border troubles with Persian State (Iran) that persisted for decades after. Iraq's relations with Saudi Arabia also began on fairly unpleasant terms, starting with

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<sup>20</sup> *Classroom Country Profiles: Iraq*, Henry Jackson School of International Studies, September 2015 at <https://jsis.washington.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/iraq.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Ibrahim Al-Marashi, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, Routledge, New York, 2019.

territorial disputes that were later “exacerbated by Hashemite-Saudi rivalry.”<sup>22</sup> Eventually, the British had to intercede to reduce tensions. To its north, the relations with Turkey remained acrimonious, in part due to the ‘Vilayet of Mosul’ (carved out of the Ottoman Caliphate) that both jostled to keep under their control. Mosul, as it happened, was a coveted territory for its oil reserves.<sup>23</sup>

Over the last few decades, Iraq’s geopolitical destiny had often mingled with developments in Iran, particularly after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Iraq had been home to Ayatollah Khomeini during his exile. The relations with Iran have oscillated between friendly to hostile in the last four decades. Even before the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Iraq had troubles with the Iranian regime of the Shah, mainly on territorial borders. However, the Algiers Agreement (1975) had served the relations in good stead until Saddam Hussein pulled out of the treaty on 17 September 1980, days before the commencement of the War. The two countries witnessed the most significant inter-State conflict after the Second World War till the ceasefire was agreed upon in 1988. After that, the relations remained tense while Saddam Hussein stayed in power.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Iraq’s regional profile gained new dimensions, with Iran gaining a substantive foothold within Iraq. The increased role of external players became a characteristic feature of Iraqi polity, with Tehran and Washington locking horns. Many scholars opined that Saddam’s departure had disturbed the balance of power in the region by tilting it in Iran’s favour. As Ibrahim Fraihat astutely remarks, “American intervention undoubtedly changed the region’s balance of power, positioning Iran to pursue what Saudi Arabia calls ‘an expansionist policy’ in the Arab world.”<sup>24</sup> The expansive role and influence of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards (or IRGC) within Iraq further substantiates such a line of argumentation. The rise of sectarianism

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Mansfield and Nicolas Pelham, no. 15, p.223.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.222-225.

<sup>24</sup> Ibrahim Fraihat, *Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, p.67.

within Iraq also coincided with the rise in sectarianism in the region, with Saudi Arabia and Iran sitting in the opposing corners and Iraq being ground zero for the Iran-Saudi rivalry. Incidentally, the fiend of sectarianism spread into Iraq well before it became more pronounced in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

In addition, the US-led invasion had other long-term consequences as it led to the creation of groups that challenged the idea of Iraq, going back to its formation as a separate political entity in the 1920s. The repugnant episode of the Islamic State (2014-18) is a case in point. The terror group sought to undermine Iraq's identity as an independent modern State by labelling their organisation as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The references and vilification of key agreements concluded in the 1920s, like Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), the group wanted to undermine the idea of Iraq as a Westphalian State.<sup>25</sup> Presently, although the Islamic State may not possess a territorial hold, and initiatives to manage Iran-Saudi rivalry may be underway in Iraq, the destabilising elements continue their attempt to undermine Iraq's position within the region.

## **INDIA AND IRAQ: AN OVERVIEW**

Frequently, modern States employ the phrase "historical ties" to emphasise the importance of past relations and to gloss over present relations. In the case of Indo-Iraqi relations, the relations are indeed historic as they go back to two millennia BC (see annexure 3). Modern-day Iraq is the descendant of the Mesopotamia-based Sumerian<sup>26</sup> civilisation (4500-1900 BC), while India is the successor to the Indus Valley Civilisation (3300-1300 BC). Barring some periods, the two civilisations were contemporary and belonged to what is sometimes

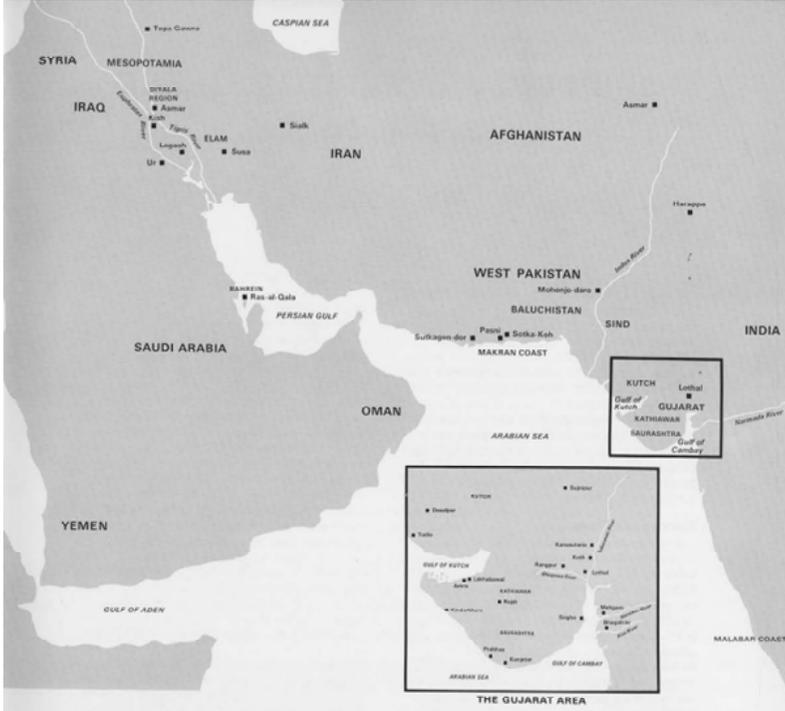
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<sup>25</sup> Kabir Taneja, *The ISIS Peril: The World's Most Feared Terror Group and its Shadow in South Asia*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Sumerian Civilisations belonged to the Sumer people that lived in Mesopotamia (modern-day southern Iraq). For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as Mesopotamian civilisation.

referred to as the “Cradle of the Civilisation” (also known as the First Civilisations).<sup>27</sup>

### Map 1: Major Trade Cities in the Indus Valley and Mesopotamian Civilisations



Source: S.R. Rao, “Shipping and Maritime Trade of the Indus People,” *Expedition*, 1965, 7(3).

During this era, there was trade in precious goods and luxury items, aside from exchanging ideas and knowledge. One of the notable traded

<sup>27</sup> It is readily argued that there was no single “cradle of civilisation”, but various contemporary civilisations existed independently. Within Fertile Crescent, Nile Valley (Ancient Egypt) Civilisation and the Mesopotamian Civilisation existed. Then, there was Indus Valley Civilisation and Ancient Chinese Civilisation in Asia. There were also the Norte Chico Civilisation in Latin America and the Olmec Civilisation around the Gulf of Mexico.

items was lapis lazuli. A blue-coloured metamorphic rock used for ornaments, lapis lazuli was found at Bhirrana in modern-day Haryana. The rock was not indigenous to the region, and therefore, its presence was synonymous with the movement of goods. Among various articles dating to the Indus Valley civilisation, workmanship beads have been reportedly found at multiple sites in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. The etched carnelian beads (a decorative variant of beads) have been discovered at Susa, Ur, Troy, Hissar, Kish, and Tell Asmar in Iraq (see map 1).<sup>28</sup> Also, the cubical weights have been found in Kish, Ur, and Susa. The spread of these artefacts was not restricted to coastal regions like Ur and Susa in modern-day Iraq, but items like 'square steatite seals' from the Indus Valley period have been found inland (to the North) as far as the Diyala region.

Similarly, at Harappan sites, hut-shaped steatite vessels, a bronze amulet with couchant bull figure (evocative of those from Susa) and various pins of copper and bronze with heads of animals and birds have been recovered. The artefacts related to pottery (ceramics) are also found at Lothal (modern-day Gujarat) and Mohenjo-Daro.<sup>29</sup> The Reserved Slip Ware (a kind of pottery) at both these places was identical to ware found in Sargonid levels of Ur, Brak and the Diyala region in Iraq. A terracotta head recovered in Lothal was excavated that carried Sumerian features, which suggest Lothal's contact with the region.<sup>30</sup> Thus, several items, including the seals, pottery products and utensils, have been found on both sides, confirming the trade connection between Mesopotamia and Indus Valley. Thus, modern India-Iraq relations have historical antecedents.

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<sup>28</sup> Joan Aruz with Ronald Wallenfels, *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2003, pp. 395-396.

<sup>29</sup> Bal Krishen Thapar, "India's Place On Ancient Trade Routes," *Senri Ethnological Studies*, 32, 1992, pp.117-125.

<sup>30</sup> S.R. Rao, "Shipping and Maritime Trade of the Indus People," *Expedition*, 7(3), 1965, at <https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/shipping-and-maritime-trade-of-the-indus-people/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Later, during the Medieval period and under the British Raj, the link between India and Iraq essentially had an Islamic connection that traversed cultural and societal aspects. More particularly, Shi'ism had been a fundamental link in this period.<sup>31</sup> Historically, the affluent Shias in India, largely coming from Uttar Pradesh (UP), contributed immensely to *mujtahids* and religious groups based in shrine cities of Iraq.<sup>32</sup> Primarily, this connection with Iraq started in 1722, with the rise of the Shi'ite state of Awadh (Oudh) in North India. The kingdom of Awadh made an immense contribution to shrine cities. These contributions came from both the ruler and the affluent families of traders and merchants, who made contributions to specific *mujtahids* in the cities of Najaf and Karbala. Notably, in the 1780s, the Chief Minister of Awadh, Hasan Reza Khan, financed the construction of the Hindiyya (also Asafiyyah) Canal in Najaf, which costed 500,000 rupees.<sup>33</sup> The canal, which finally finished in 1803, was not the only project at the time, which was built by funding from Indian Shias, but several such projects were undertaken in Najaf and Karbala. "The Awadh government also had a Shi'i Mosque at Kufa rebuilt in 1786 and endowed a hostel for Indian pilgrims and a library in Najaf with 700 autograph manuscripts."<sup>34</sup>

Reportedly, "Between 1780 and 1844, rulers, ministers, and other notables of Oudh remitted more than one million rupees for

<sup>31</sup> For more on the Indian link with Iraq during the British Raj, see Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994; Meir Litvak, "Money, Religion, and Politics: The Oudh Bequest in Najaf and Karbala', 1850-1903," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33(1) 2001, pp. 1-21; Juan R.I. Cole, "'Indian money' and the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1986, 22(4), pp. 461-480; Juan R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994. p.215.

<sup>33</sup> Juan R.I. Cole, "'Indian money' and the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22(4), 1986, pp. 461-480.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

philanthropic purposes, economic projects, and religious functions in the shrine cities.”<sup>35</sup> The money from India led to the rise in the influence of Persian *Mujtahids* in the shrine cities, given the closeness of Lucknow *mujtahids* with Persian *mujtahids*, based in Najaf and Karbala. This is attributed to the common “origin and culture” of these *mujtahids*. Such moves allowed the Persian *mujtahids* to gain the upper hand over the Arab *mujtahids*. Meanwhile, the Hindiyya canal allowed ample water supply to Najaf, making it attractive to Arab tribes. Yitzhak Nakash notes, “The ecological changes caused by the construction of the canal led to the attraction of Arab tribes to the area near Najaf, exposing them to Shi’i propaganda.”<sup>36</sup> This continued even after the Oudh was annexed by the British in 1856. A critical mention here is the concept of “Oudh Bequest,” which served as the primary source for the Indian money to reach Iraq.

Earlier, in 1825, when the ongoing war in Burma put a strain on British resources, the incumbent Governor-General took a perpetual loan of one crore rupees from King of Oudh (Awadh), Ghazi al-din Haydar. The nature of the loan dictated that the principal amount of the loan was not to be repaid, but the interest of five per cent per annum was to be paid by the Government of India to specified beneficiaries in perpetuity. The King put four women as beneficiaries: Nawwab Mubarak Mahal Sahiba (10,000 rupees), Sultan Miriam Begum Sahiba (2,500 rupees), Mumtaz Mahal (1,100 rupees), and Sarfaraz Mahal (1,000 rupees).<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the “allowances amounting altogether to Rs.929 a month were assigned to servants and dependents of Sarfaraz Mahal.”<sup>38</sup> The agreement provided that after the demise of these beneficiaries, one-third of the amount would be paid to anyone they appoint in their wills, whereas the rest two-thirds was to be given to *mujtahids* residing in Najaf and Karbala.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in case either person

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<sup>35</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, no. 32. p.211.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Meir Litvak, “Money, Religion, and Politics: The Oudh Bequest in Najaf and Karbala’, 1850-1903,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33(1), 2001, pp. 1-21.

<sup>38</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, no. 32, pp.211-212.

<sup>39</sup> Meir Litvak, no. 37.

died without a will, the entire amount would go to *mujtahids*. These allowances paid to Najaf and Karbala were known as the “Oudh Bequest.” Annually, the cities would obtain nearly 1,86,148 rupees from Oudh Bequest. In the later period, the funds became a source of disparagement because of their selective funding to *mujtahids* in these shrine cities.<sup>40</sup>

Subsequently, in the early-1940s, nearly a decade before the diplomatic relations between Iraq and independent India would be established, Indian soldiers under the British Indian Army played a vital role in Iraq, which constitutes an essential part of history between India and Iraq. The graves and names on the plaque of Indian soldiers can still be found in Baghdad. As it happens, in both the World Wars, Indian military contribution remains utterly overlooked by scholars. In particular, the Indian role in securing the Middle East for its colonial ruler Britain receives little attention within academic discourse. In 1941, when a pro-German junta took over the Iraqi monarchy, the British relied on the Indian forces that were rapidly dispatched to secure Iraq and numerous other territories in the Middle East and Africa. Iraq was crucial for Britain since, under German control, Iraq had been serving as the primary source of oil to the German war machinery. Moreover, the British regime was concerned that Iraq and Persia (Iran) would serve as a doorway for the Germans to reach India, its most prized and resourceful colony. Both these factors led the British to launch an offensive in the region to regain the territories from German control.

The Indian forces reached Iraq (at Basra) in mid-1941 with the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division leading the charge, soon followed by the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions (September 1941). Indian forces led a swift offensive and quickly gained control over the oil fields and the capital city of Baghdad, winning the theatre honour of “Iraq 1941.”<sup>41</sup> Later, Indian

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<sup>40</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, no.32, pp.211-212.

<sup>41</sup> R Prasanna, “We were there, everywhere,” *The Week*, 2 August 2020, at <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2020/07/23/we-were-there-everywhere.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

soldiers constituted the primary contributors into Persia and Iraq (PAI) Force (headquartered at Bagdad) that developed “ports, roads, river and canal routes from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic reaches of Russia, through which tens of thousands of soldiers carried 62,000 tonnes of aid.”<sup>42</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, formed in India, was also employed in the Middle East in late-1940 and was a part of the PAI Force before returning to India in 1943.<sup>43</sup> Besides, Indian troops from Iraq were involved in capturing Syria (June/July 1941) and Persia (August 1941).<sup>44</sup> Indian brigades, in association with forces from other colonies, such as Australia, also helped the British to secure control over Damascus, Syria, Lebanon and the mandate of Palestine.

In recent history, India's relations with Iraq are frequently discussed in connection with the Saddam regime. Talmiz Ahmad<sup>45</sup> defined Indo-Iraq ties as “a very substantial relationship with a lot of emotion.”<sup>46</sup> When the Ba'athists came to power in Iraq, bilateral ties expanded and grew stronger. A party-to-party affinity was also<sup>47</sup> formed around the close relationship between the two countries' leadership. In fact, Saddam Hussein used to refer to his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as ‘Sister Indira’.

During that phase of bilateral relations, India gained numerous reputed contracts and industrial projects in Iraq. “We [India] were not just

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> “Documents: Persia & Iraq 1941–1947,” *British Military History*, at <https://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/docs-persia-iraq-1941-1947-indian-infantry-divisions/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Talmiz Ahmad is a career diplomat and a noted commentator on regional affairs. He was ‘Special Envoy to Iraq’ (in 2004) dispatched to secure the release of Indians captured by the armed groups.

<sup>46</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>47</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador K.P. Fabian. He is a career diplomat and noted author who writes frequently on the region. Notably, as Joint Secretary, he headed the Gulf Division, Ministry of External Affairs during the Gulf Crisis in 1990-91.

labourers, but contractors, plus we were consultants.”<sup>48</sup> The imports of crude oil became the mainstay of the relations for the first time in the 1970s. For its part, Iraq expressed support for India on the Kashmir issue, a rare achievement for India at that time in the Arab world.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, India rendered support to Iraq in military, economic and industrial capacity-building, apart from the political partnership that regularly manifested itself at the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). Furthermore, India gave diplomatic support to Iraq at the United Nations (UN) after the Gulf crisis. India was among the few countries that argued against the imposition of sanctions on Iraq.

However, in the 1990s, the Indian State faced numerous challenges on the domestic front, especially in its economy. The challenges led India to pursue the liberalisation of the economy and abandon its socialist disposition. India started to become more interconnected to the world economy, its energy demands soared, and India started diversification of oil suppliers, purchasing increasingly from the Gulf countries and Iran. Meanwhile, the Saddam regime was put under UN sanctions for its transgressions in Kuwait. India tried putting its weight behind Saddam Hussein at international forums, but nothing substantial came out of it. After the Gulf crisis, despite the international aversion to Saddam's regime, there was sympathy for him in India. In fact, during the Gulf crisis, inhabitants of a village in Kerala renamed one of their beaches to “Saddam Beach” to express solidarity with Saddam Hussein.<sup>50</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a series of regional developments pushed Iraq farther away from normalcy. Events like 9/11, the US-led invasion, the Arab Spring and the emergence of the Islamic State all had direct consequences for Iraq. Like other states worldwide, India's bilateral relations with Iraq became extremely vulnerable to these unfolding

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<sup>48</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>49</sup> A.N. Jha, “Indo-Iraqi relations, 1947–86: Need for fresh initiatives,” *Foreign Affairs Reports*, 35 (6–7), 1986.

<sup>50</sup> V.M. Thomas, “Saddam Beach: In Sour Mood,” *Arab News*, 16 December 2003 at <https://www.arabnews.com/node/241644> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

events. Simultaneously, an important development concerning Iran, which had enormous consequences on the regional calculus was the discovery of Iran's nuclear programme that sent shockwaves throughout the world, particularly in Washington, which for long had viewed the Islamic theocracy with suspicion.<sup>51</sup> Throughout that period, India's position remained entirely consistent with the international community, which characterised Iran's nuclear programme as undesirable and a threat to regional peace and security. It is important to note here that at this time, India was also steering negotiations with the United States on its civil nuclear programme to lift sanctions after the nuclear tests of 1998.

India also witnessed changes in its relationship with other countries in the region. As the Indian economy gathered momentum and the energy demand grew, India's engagement with the broader region increased. As a result, India's trade with the region expanded, and its bilateral ties diversified. Traditionally, the space occupied by the likes of Iraq and Egypt was substituted by the GCC countries and Israel. This insistence on a de-hyphenated policy afforded India a unique position in regional politics. Correspondingly, Israel and the GCC countries reciprocated the Indian approach by pursuing policies bereft of the Pakistan factor.<sup>52</sup> This was a stark change, as ever since 1947, successive regimes in Pakistan have continuously looked at the region to support its puerile obsession with Kashmir. As such, the de-hyphenation policy afforded India larger space to navigate foreign relations.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bilateral ties with Iraq diminished with a number of challenges that Iraq faced in the aftermath of the US-invasion. The

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<sup>51</sup> What ensued was a decade-long attempt at multilateral diplomacy, which ended, or so was thought at the time, with the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also referred to as the 'Iran Nuclear Deal'. A substantial part of the negotiations was carried out while Iran was placed under international sanctions by the United Nations to build pressure on the regime, to dissuade them from pursuing proliferation of nuclear weapons.

<sup>52</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2010; P.R. Kumaraswamy and Md. Muddassir Quamar, *India's Saudi Policy: Bridge to the Future*, Palgrave, New Delhi, 2019.

first decade proved incredibly challenging with a host of setbacks.<sup>53</sup> Although the circumstances in Iraq improved in the decade thereafter, the overall relationship remained limited as the two states found themselves unable to rise beyond the energy trade. The rise of the Islamic State posed a further challenge to bilateral ties. Surprisingly, over this period, the relations with Iraq deepened in the energy sector, as evidenced by Iraq being among the top three crude oil suppliers to India over the last decade. Such consistency was startling for a host of reasons. Despite the phenomenon of the Islamic State, upheavals caused by the Arab Spring, and Iraq's domestic turmoil, the crude supply to India continued, which had not been seen since the 1990s. At present, Iraq maintains a full-diplomatic mission in New Delhi and vice-versa.

Iraq is the fifth-largest import source for India in terms of trade, while in terms of total trade, Iraq is India's eleventh-largest trading partner. For FY 2020-21, Iraq was the third-largest trade partner in the region, following the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (US\$ 43.3 billion) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (US\$ 22.04 billion).<sup>54</sup> For the same period, India's bilateral trade with Iraq amounted to US\$ 15.78 billion (2.31 per cent of India's total foreign trade), back from US\$ 25.61 billion for FY 2019-20 (3.25 per cent of India's total foreign trade).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the pandemic has caused this notable slope in the quantity of total trade, as crude consumption was a record low throughout the world. The drop in Iraq's percentage share in India's total trade results from India's overwhelming crude imports that make up most of the bilateral trade.

Major exports to Iraq include agri-products, cosmetics, rubber manufactured products, paints, ceramics, machine tools, electrical

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<sup>53</sup> Talmiz Ahmad, "Indians in Iraq - A Reverie," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2 July 2014 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?23545/Indians+in+Iraq++A+Reverie> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>54</sup> Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

machinery and instruments, transport instruments, electronic goods, handicrafts, cereals, sugar tea, garments and pharmaceuticals. Meanwhile, imports from Iraq include crude oil, dates, figs, pineapples, fleece wool, tanned skins, crust skins of lambs, and Sulphur variants. In FY 2020-21, the crude oil import from Iraq constituted approximately 21.6 per cent of India's total crude oil imports,<sup>56</sup> compared to FY 2019-20, when imports stood at 23.1 per cent.

Despite the potential, bilateral relations remain limited in scope. Ultimately, in a region of instability and unpredictability, India-Iraq relations are perhaps one of the most promising bilateral relationships that so far remain under-utilised, under-appreciated and under-explored. As the aspirations of the States and the people of the Middle East increase, India would want to align its ambitions in international affairs to its advantage. This would require a thoughtful approach towards countries like Iraq, and therefore, it becomes expedient to take stock of the past, present and future dimensions of the bilateral relationship.

To summarise, Iraq is a crucial country that features prominently in the geopolitical matrix of the region. It has immense historical and cultural importance for India and the region itself. All the global and regional powers have sought to maintain their presence in Iraq in varying capacities. India has had decades of close relations with Iraq that were ruptured after the US-invasion. Presently, Iraq carries enormous value for India as a source of crude supply (roughly one-fourth). Given India's ambitions as a rising power and a host of other reasons, it is fitting that a suitable Iraq policy must be formulated for the future. However, before one delves into the temptation to look at the future, attention must be given to the rich history of bilateral relations.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

## THE PAST

Baghdad has been known to us for centuries. All great civilisations took their origin on river banks, the Nile, the Ganges, the Tigris and the Euphrates. In the great days of Baghdad City when there was such an outburst of cultural activities, people from this country went to Baghdad, physicians, scholars, scientists, for advancing their knowledge. That connection which we established in matters of spirit and culture still continues. The city itself means the abode of peace.<sup>57</sup>

No two countries have known and dealt With one another longer than Iraq and India.<sup>58</sup>

For the most part in history, traders from the Middle Eastern region have had contacts with traders in the Indian subcontinent. Both Sumer<sup>59</sup> (modern-day Iraq) and the Indus Valley Civilisation (Indian subcontinent) personify two of the oldest civilisations in existence. Although historians have somewhat differing views on the precise dates, both civilisations have illustrated the earliest examples of organised agriculture and domestication of animals, among various other transitions from their earlier nomadic cultures. As the polities of the time waned, and new polities of distinctive social and cultural outlook emerged, their interaction continued, albeit varying in momentum and scope.

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<sup>57</sup> Part of the speech that Indian President Dr S. Radhakrishnan made during the official state visit by Iraqi President Mohammad Arif in 1964. See Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1964. p.99.

<sup>58</sup> Veerendra Patil, Indian Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals, while hosting a dinner for Iraqi Minister of Oil, Tayeh Abdul Karim, in April 1980 in New Delhi. See Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1980. p.88.

<sup>59</sup> Inhabitants of the Sumerian Civilisation based in Mesopotamia, modern-day Southern Iraq.

The connections between the two have manifested through various indentations in collective memory and are reflected aptly in post-independence relations. For instance, the two excerpts featured above are clear examples of how the past connections persevere in collective memory on both sides. Two statements are nearly 16 years apart, yet both were aimed at invoking the historical connection to reinforce contemporary bilateral ties. However, does this mean that the bilateral ties were the same in 1980 as they had been in 1964, or were there any differences?

To such end, the chapter will inform about changes in India's engagement with Iraq after 1947. In consonance with the model outlined in the Introduction, the 'Past' is merely used as a frame of reference to discuss the events from 1947 to 2003. Accordingly, the time-frame is distributed into four periods of engagement—Bounded Engagement (1947-58), Measured Engagement (1958-68), Active Engagement (1968-80) and Cautious Engagement (1980-03).

### **BOUNDED ENGAGEMENT (1947-1958)**

This era was marked by limited bilateral trade and limited diplomatic engagement. The engagement is identified as "Bounded," not owing to failure to engage but because of limited areas of convergence between the two countries. There were hardly any high-level exchanges between the two countries. However, the exchanges at the Secretary-level were frequent since most political engagements were carried out at the Secretary level.

As mentioned earlier, Iraq maintains the Holy Shrine of Imam Hussein in Karbala and Imam Ali's Shrine in Najaf. Thus, a significant level of cooperation existed over the issue of Shia pilgrims visiting these holy shrines in Iraq. Historically, there has been high mobility from India to Iraq due to pilgrimages. For the first time in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Indians started moving to Iraq and settling in the shrine cities. Later also, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was increased movement of Indians to Iraq, not merely as pilgrims but as settlers. Besides, there was also movement of students who visited Iraq for obtaining education in Shia theology. However, the "massive influx of Indians to the shrine cities took place only from the 1860s, after the

British annexation of the Kingdom of Awadh and the Indian Mutiny.”<sup>60</sup> Notably, several Nawabs of Awadh went to Iraq and along with them various affluent families settled in Iraq at this time. Mostly, the first-generation Indians who settled in Iraq came from a prosperous and noble backgrounds and thus, were engaged in the distribution of “large sums of money to the poor and made endowments for public works.”<sup>61</sup> However, by the third generation, a large number of them had meagre resources. Part of the reason for this was the termination of allowances and disbanding of the “Indian Fund,” which received money as part of the Oudh Bequest.

Predominately, Iraq received pilgrims from Iran and India (mainly from UP, Bombay and North-West Frontier Province) who travelled through Basra. Apart from Najaf and Karbala, these pilgrims also visited Baghdad, Kazimayan and Samarra. When the public transportation facilities expanded, the Iraqi Railways offered tickets to pilgrims from Iran and India. There were reportedly nearly five thousand Indians living in Najaf and Karbala in 1929. However, these numbers fell after 1930, when stringent policies were introduced to discourage the pilgrims from settling in these holy cities, given the rising problem of destitution.

Earlier, many pilgrims left India searching for employment opportunities in these cities, which started burdening the available resources in Iraq by that time. Officials in India and Iraq pushed for policies to manage the migration. For instance, a strict visa regime was introduced; individuals were not allowed to take the pilgrimage unless they had sufficient funds to travel back, and the duration of the pilgrimage was reduced to three months a year. In some way or the other, all these contributed to reducing the stay of Indians in Iraq, as a result, the total number of Indians in these cities also started decreasing. The number of Indians in Najaf and Karbala, fell from roughly 5,000 (in mid-1920s) to 2,362 by the end of the decade (as per the 1932 census) after

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<sup>60</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, no. 32, p.16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

the introduction of the Iraq Residence Law (1923) and the Iraq Nationality Law (1924), and the law prohibiting certain trades to foreigners (1935), and the introduction of cheap railways tickets to return in the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> Afterwards, when both countries gained sovereign control over their affairs, the issue of pilgrims became an important area of cooperation.

Diplomatic relations were established with the exchange of diplomatic credentials in 1949.<sup>63</sup> Three years later, the two countries signed the 'Treaty of Friendship' in 1952, which gave express recognition to the "ancient ties" between the two countries. Mainly worded as a standard text, the 'Treaty of Friendship' noted,

The President of India and His Majesty the King of Iraq recognising the ancient ties which have existed between the two countries for centuries and their mutual need for cooperation in strengthening and developing these ties and urged by the mutual desire to establish peace between the two countries with a view to the common benefit of their people and the development of their respective countries, wish to enter into a Treaty of Friendship with each other.<sup>64</sup>

In terms of trade, there was a standard trade agreement that was renewed annually. The major traded goods included animal skins, pelts, and various varieties of fruits. The terms of the agreement were vague, no clear markers were identified, thus, restricting the agreement's utility only to the paper. Notably, India and Iraq signed the 'Bilateral Air Transport Agreement' in July 1955, later ratified in September 1957. Broadly, the agreement aimed to establish conditions to govern the

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<sup>62</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, no. 32, p.173.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), *Letters of Credence & Commission of Appointment in Favour of H. E. Syed Ali Zaheer as Indian Minister to Iraq*, Nos. 1(67)-PT, 1949; Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), *Arrival Reception and Presentation of Credentials by Mohd. Salim Al Radi as Iraqi Minister to India*, Nos. 3(12)-PT, 1949.

<sup>64</sup> See Annexure 5.

operation of air services between India and Iraq. It provided acknowledgement to the air routes by the two countries. Remarkably, Iraq was one of the very few countries with whom India had signed a cultural agreement at that time in 1954.

On the front of multilateral engagement, Iraq was an attendee at the Bandung Conference in April 1955, where 24 Third-World countries including India participated. Further, India and Iraq were part of the 'Asian Legal Consultative Committee', formed under the auspices of the UN. Headquartered in New Delhi, the Committee was mainly mandated to exchange views and information on legal matters of common concern of the participating countries: Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan and Syria. Additionally, the Committee was supposed to examine various issues under the International Law Commission while arranging "the views of the committee to be placed before the said Commission."<sup>65</sup>

Primarily, the bilateral relations illustrated an indifferent political and economic attitude from both sides. The sharing of multilateral forums hardly served any purpose for advancing the bilateral relationship. Part of the reason for such indifference was the fact that India's foreign policy was more consistent with Arab nationalism exemplified best by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Not to mention, the close and personal ties between Nehru and Nasser had created a unique affinity between India and the Arab nationalist movement that continued to inform Indian foreign policy for decades. Meanwhile, the Iraqi monarchy appeared less inclined to bandwagon with 'Third World' solidarity. In fact, the Hashemite monarchy had found a friend in the West, as it became part of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), established in 1956. Also known as the Baghdad Pact, this military alliance consisted of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, aiming to curtail and limit the Soviet influence in the Middle East.

### **MEASURED ENGAGEMENT (1958-1968)**

In 1958, King Faisal II's regime was toppled in a *coup d'état*, carried out by the Iraqi Army. The overthrow came to be known as the '14 July

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<sup>65</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1956.

Revolution' and resulted in the execution of the entire royal family. Like most other contemporary governments, the Nehru government soon recognised the new government (23 July). Although the Indian Parliamentary discussions around the Revolution in Iraq were myriad and multifarious, a major concern was that Indian engagement with Iraq should not push India into bloc politics of the Cold War. These fears and concerns were accentuated since Abd al-Karim Qasim's new leadership in Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact and established friendly relations with the Soviet Union. This shift rived Iraq from the US-led bloc and into the influence of the Eastern bloc. Naturally, such a shift prompted concerns and fears among Indian policymakers who wished to avoid Cold War politics.

India's response to the change in leadership in Iraq is reflected in three major statements. All of these statements indicate a sympathetic response to the new government of Abd al-Karim Qasim. First, on 14 August, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made a speech in the Indian Lower House of Parliament (Lok Sabha) reviewing the developments in the West Asian region. With regard to the Revolution, he acknowledged:

"the coup d'état in Iraq on 14 July which resulted in a new Government coming into power in Baghdad... There were also deplorable acts of violence by the crowd. But by and large, the new Government of Iraq avoided excesses and was soon in full control of the whole of Iraq and maintained law and order. It was evident that this new Government was popular."<sup>66</sup>

Later, in a separate statement to the Parliament on 19 August, the Prime Minister, defending the Indian position on Iraq, affirmed:

"The new Republic of Iraq is now recognised by, if not all, a very large number of countries, big and small, by the western countries, by the countries of Eastern Europe and most Asian countries. It is a stable and popular Government as one can expect."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1958, Ministry of External Affairs, p.136.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.142.

Thereafter, the Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Shri Arthur S. Lall, who, while addressing the Third-Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly on the 11-Power Draft Resolution on the West Asian situation on 21 August 1958, stated:

“...relatively orderly revolution which occurred in Iraq on 14 July there were cries in this very building from responsible spokesmen of outrage at the horror and the violence which was being perpetrated. It is not anyone's desire—and I am sure that it is not the desire of the Iraq people or its Government—to praise violence, but the salient point here will emerge only if those who have deplored violence in Iraq will just look at the process of the development of the nationalism and its effects nearer their own homes. Besides, have those who raised their voices against violence forgotten the violence and unfortunate brutality of the period in Iraq immediately before the revolution? Would they not agree that the new Government of Iraq is conducted itself in a manner which is far more humane than that of its predecessor? And this is very understandable because the uprising in Iraq was the uprising of a people which had suffered too much oppression, too much concentration of power in the hands of a few, too little respect for the people, too little attention to its needs and aspirations... Thus we can now see in Iraq the logical process unfolding itself, a process of liberation from many bonds. And this is a process which in itself will greatly enhance stability and peace in the area of Middle East... Those who have read their history correctly cannot but see in the recent events in Iraq a development which, in spite of the element of violence which was involved, is very much to be welcomed.”<sup>68</sup>

The crucial elements contributing to change in India's engagement with Iraq was the latter's decision to desert the Baghdad Pact and Iraq's growing predisposition towards Arab nationalism. This was perceptible when Prime Minister Nehru contrasted changing trends in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, while speaking in the context of rising Arab

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.130.

nationalism in the region. Prime Minister Nehru believed that a rise in Arab nationalism would lead the Arab countries to “coming nearer to one another.”<sup>69</sup> He noted, during a Parliament speech,

“[Amongst] the countries associated with the Baghdad Pact, there was a divergence, a hiatus between the Government of the country and the people, the people looking more and more towards Arab nationalism and the Government looking in another direction and rather ranged [*sic*] against this spirit of Arab nationalism. How big this hiatus was can be seen from the coup d’etat in Baghdad which surprised everyone... [This] shows how utterly divorced from public opinion the Government of Iraq was.”<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, he maintained that the Baghdad Pact fundamentally diverged from reality, as it “did not represent the country, the people.” As such, “the people threw out the group at the top; and, there you are, the Baghdad Pact high and dry, one day thrown out from the mansion it had built for itself.”<sup>71</sup>

A part of the concern in India about the Baghdad Pact was consistent and, in a way, dependent on Pakistan’s rising influence in the West, particularly in Washington. As mentioned earlier, the CENTO was conceived as a military alliance against the Soviet Union. From an Indian perspective, this change in dynamics of the Baghdad Pact posed serious concerns, as it allowed Pakistan a strategic foothold especially after. Pakistan (alongside Iran and Turkey) signed agreement(s)—known as the Pacts of Mutual Cooperation—with the United States in March 1959, at Ankara. These agreements provisioned that the US would come to the rescue of the signatory countries if any aggression were committed against them.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Reply to Foreign Policy Debate in Lok Sabha on 9 December 1958. See no. 66. p.318.

<sup>72</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1959. p.75.

These agreements with the United States should not be read in isolation but with a subterranean understanding of the prevalent US doctrine in the Middle East, regarded as Eisenhower's 'Doctrine of the Middle East'. The doctrine authorised the US President to undertake "military assistance programmes with any nation or group of nations of that area [Middle East] desiring such assistance." As such, the doctrine allowed the United States to,

...use armed forces to assist any such nation or group of such nations requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism: provided, that such employment shall be consonant with the treaty obligations of the United States and with the Constitution of the United States.<sup>73</sup>

This loose iteration of "armed aggression" worried New Delhi because (at times) Pakistan had underscored its objectives of entering into such defence agreements and pacts with the United States as a means to "strengthen Pakistan against India." However, Washington made clarifications over such issues. Meanwhile, there were several instances at the time when Pakistan had used some US procured equipment in sabotage operations in India's Jammu and Kashmir, thus nullifying assurances and clarifications that the US had made. Essentially, the risks primarily lay not with Washington but with Islamabad's "wider interpretation" of the agreement.<sup>74</sup> Even with Washington's assurances to New Delhi against the possible misuse of American military hardware, the difficulty in defining aggression made such agreements disquieting for New Delhi.

The United States concluded similar agreements with Iran and Turkey shortly after Iraq's withdrawal from CENTO. Soon after the coup of

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<sup>73</sup> United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (1967), *U.S. Commitments to Foreign Powers: Hearings, Ninetieth Congress, First Session, on S. Res. 151*. US Government Printing Office, p.312.

<sup>74</sup> Foreign Affairs Records, no. 72, p.76.

'July 14', a ministerial meeting in London was attended by the US, the UK, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. The meeting aimed to reconfigure the positions of the signatory countries of CENTO after Baghdad's departure. The new arrangement allowed Pakistan closer cooperation with the United States, more than it previously had under the Baghdad Pact. Even though the foundation of the new agreements was rooted in the Baghdad Pact, Islamabad's intentions led to increased suspicion within New Delhi.<sup>75</sup> To illustrate this, consider Article I of the 'Pact of Mutual Cooperation' between the US and Pakistan, which stated:

The Government of Pakistan is determined to resist aggression. In case of aggression against Pakistan, the Government of the United States of America, in accordance with the Constitution of the United States of America, will take such appropriate action, including the use of armed forces, as may be mutually agreed upon and is envisaged in the Joint Resolution to promote peace and stability in the Middle East, in order to assist the Government of Pakistan at its request.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Article II of the Pact affirmed:

[US Government] will continue to furnish the Government of Pakistan such military and economic assistance as may be mutually agreed upon between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Pakistan in order to assist the Government of Pakistan in the preservation of its national independence and integrity and to the effective promotion of its economic development.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> India's position with regard to the changing dynamics in the Baghdad Pact can be best understood in Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's statement in the Lower House of the Parliament on 17 March 1959, as part of the House's debate on demands of grants for the Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>76</sup> Article I of the Pact of Mutual Cooperation, signed between the Governments of the United States of America and Pakistan in March 1959.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

In 1964, Pakistan emerged as an irritant in India-Iraq relations when controversy erupted during the Iraqi President Field Marshal Abdul Salam Mohammad Arif's official visit. Despite being the first such visit by a head of state, the entire visit remained engulfed in the pretences and the manner in which President Arif arrived in India, generating widespread criticism against the ruling government. Essentially, the derision emerged because President Arif arrived in a plane sent by the Pakistani government. Even though the Indian side had made various counter efforts to avoid such diplomatic solecism, the outcome dismayed the opposition. India also failingly insisted that President Arif cancel the offer made by Islamabad and instead accept a flight arranged by New Delhi. As Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru reasoned in Parliament,

"I think an Hon. Member was very angry at the fact that President Arif of Iraq came here in a Pakistani plane. I might tell him that this made us unhappy too, but we could not help it. That is to say, we offered him our plane to come here. A reply came from him that he has already accepted Pakistan's offer to bring-him here in their plane and he could not get behind it. We still pressed him to come in our plane, which we offered to send, but he said he could not go behind his promise to Pakistan."<sup>78</sup>

Apart from this controversy, the visit proved crucial as it led to the first perceptible strengthening of bilateral ties. Various points of convergence emerged between the two countries. President Arif showed interest in "India's progress in the industrial, social and scientific fields." It also provided a foundation for international cooperation between the two countries, especially on disarmament, anti-imperialism, racial discrimination and support for Global South countries in development. As noted in a joint communique,

The President [Arif] and the Prime Minister [Nehru] acknowledged the identity of views between India and Iraq, on world issues such as nuclear disarmament, colonialism, racial discrimination,

<sup>78</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1964. p.114.

arising from the policy of non-alignment followed by both countries and their common devotion to the objective of ensuring an early end of imperialism and colonialism in all their form and manifestations.<sup>79</sup>

In December 1958, a trade agreement was inked with the new government in Iraq to “promote closer trade and economic relations” while conferring each other with most-favoured-nation status.<sup>80</sup> This was the first sentient effort on both sides of political leadership to expand the bilateral trade beyond the traditional items (like dates from Iraq and tea from India) to include exports of cotton textiles, jute manufacturers, and plastic goods. The principal aim was to diversify the trade basket. However, the trade agreement’s validity was restricted to one year that had to be renewed annually until an agreement for two years was signed in 1962.

Concurrently, the 1960s witnessed the rise of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), which later had a substantial role in solidifying and sustaining Indo-Iraq cooperation on bilateral and various multilateral forums. In September 1961, Iraq was among the attending members at the first NAM summit in Belgrade. This was highlighted by Prime Minister Nehru during President Arif’s visit, “Our two Governments have a common policy based on peaceful co-existence and active contribution towards non-alignment and world peace.”<sup>81</sup>

To sum up, the discussions surrounding the ‘14 July Revolution’ and the Baghdad Pact illustrate, among other things, that the Indian position with the new government in Iraq relied more on external variables than India’s own willingness to pursue closer bilateral relations with Iraq. A significant and decisive element was the Pakistan factor that informed Indian behaviour bilaterally and on international forums, such

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<sup>79</sup> Part of the joint communique issued at the end of the official visit by President of Iraq, Mohammad Arif, between 26 March – 1 April 1964. See Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1964.

<sup>80</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), no. 66, p.362.

<sup>81</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), no. 79, p.101.

as the United Nations. Undoubtedly, there was an improvement in trade and commerce, but the overall approach in essence, remained measured.

### **ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT (1968-1980)**

In July 1968, President Mohammad Arif and Prime Minister Tahir Yahya were toppled by the Ba'ath Party in a coup that came to be known as the '17 July Revolution'. The Arab Socialist Party (or Ba'ath Party) led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr as *de jure* leader and Saddam Hussein as *de facto* ruler came to power. These socialist predilections contributed immensely to bringing the two countries closer in the coming decades. For instance, in 1972, the Iraqi government nationalised the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), and IPC assets were transferred to the Iraq National Oil Company.<sup>82</sup> Indian Minister of External Affairs Sardar Swaran Singh welcomed this socialist move. In a statement issued in June 1972, he stated that India,

“...appreciates and supports the Iraqi Government's desire to exercise control over their natural resources, among which oil plays a vital part in the economy of the country. An Indian oil delegation was in Iraq a few days ago and good progress [*sic*] has been made in the purchase of crude for our immediate needs. There is considerable scope for the development of our trade in this and many other fields which will bring increasing benefits to Iraq and India.”<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately, this period could be described as the golden age of Indo-Iraq relations. The convergence on issues, themes and sectors increased significantly after the Ba'athist regime came to power in 1968. In terms of convergence of themes, the relations were grounded in Third-World solidarity and anti-imperialist sentiments, which manifested most emphatically through the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). The

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<sup>82</sup> Michael E. Brown, “The Nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1), 1979, pp.107-124.

<sup>83</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1972.

principal issues that brought the two countries together politically were: the Palestinian cause, non-proliferation and disarmament, which primarily reflected their ostensible cooperation at various multilateral forums, particularly the United Nations. As for the Indian side, an immense respite came with Iraq's support to the Kashmir issue that had boiled over in the last decade after Pakistan's vigorous diplomatic efforts on multilateral platforms, especially the UN and the Arab League. The period was also marked by a close party-to-party relationship between India's Congress Party and Iraq's Ba'athist Party.<sup>84</sup> In fact, in 1978, Indira Gandhi's defeat in elections was bemoaned in Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, the period witnessed unprecedented cooperation in the industrial sector, oil trade, defence diplomacy and capacity-building.

### **State Visits**

Although not a definitive sign of increased cooperation and closer bilateral relations, the official visits and high-level delegations provide platform for closer cooperation between countries. The increased visits by officials (at political and bureaucratic levels) provided mechanisms for an active engagement between India and Iraq. After President Mohammad Arif's visit to India in 1964, various landmark visits occurred in the 'Active Engagement' period, starting with Iraq's Vice President Saddam Hussein's official visit to India in 1974. Hosting a dinner for Iraqi Vice-President, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi remarked,

"In our own times, Iraq and India have been together in the fight against colonialism and feudalism. The Indian National Congress offered consistent support to Arab nationalism. Through sacrifice and struggle, we both achieved political freedom and are now endeavouring to bring a better life to our people. We in India have watched with admiration the progress made by Iraq in recent years under the dynamic guidance of the Arab Baath Socialist

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<sup>84</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad and former Ambassador K.P. Fabian.

<sup>85</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

Party and the revolutionary leadership of His Excellency President Bakr and of His Excellency Mr. Saddam Hussein... Iraq and India belong to the Asian-African community of nations which have been brought together in their quest for freedom and by their determination to retain independence of judgement and action. The conference of non-aligned nations in Algiers last September demonstrated the important role which non-alignment continues to play in ensuring international peace and equality.”<sup>86</sup>

Like Indira Gandhi, Vice-President Saddam Hussein during his visit also highlighted the elements of anti-imperialism, the spirit of non-alignment, historical ties in the context of Indo-Arab relations, which he inextricably linked with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Vice-President Saddam Hussein said,

“Madame Prime Minister, I think you are fully aware of the strength of the historical ties binding India and Iraq on the one hand and the Indian people and the Arab people on the other hand. The further promotion of relations between our two peoples and countries has been a prominent goal which we have been most keen of- achieving ever since the Revolution of 17th July 1968...It is our firm conviction that the visit of our delegation to your country whose ancient civilisation is well known to us will constitute a new element in the promotion of peace and stability in this vital part of the world. This is because our objective falls within the framework of the policy of nonalignment and our keenness to develop this concept which is inimical to the imperialist aggression and exploitation as well as our striving to accelerate the process of development of our two countries along socialist lines and to promoting our economic independence and exploit our resources to the benefit of the present and future of the masses and our keenness on a stable peace and security in the Indian Ocean and the Arab Gulf and resistance for the presence of any foreign military bases in any part of the world

<sup>86</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1974, pp.101-102.

and of curbing the imperialists and their agents and aborting their dark schemings...the question of Zionist aggression which is supported by world imperialism, particularly American imperialism, occupies the position of priority in the foreign policy of Iraq which is an Arab country led by nationalist and socialists parties. This is because this question is indissolvably linked with the march of our revolution which harbours enmity towards imperialism, its positions and interests and which has for its aim the building of a strong and balanced economy free from the hegemony of imperialist monopolists."<sup>87</sup>

Furthermore, at another reception in New Delhi, Vice-President Saddam Hussein noted:

"The friendship between India and Iraq is not based on the historical foundation alone but it is also based on the interests of the two countries and the joint struggle of the two countries against colonialism provides wide possibilities for cooperation and coordination between the leaders of the two countries which will bring great benefit to our great struggling peoples...As regards our common concern for the peace of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf, the Iraqi Government upholds its opposition to the presence of any foreign military base in these regions. We are very sincere and serious in supporting the nonaligned movement and to show itself against imperialism in the old and the new colonialism form and to lay the foundations for the peoples for self-determination and to refuse all foreign intervention in their internal matters."<sup>88</sup>

Later, these themes echoed in the joint communique issued at the end of the official visit. The communique read: "The two sides reiterated their resolve to support the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and racial discrimination and the struggle for freedom, independence, sovereignty and progress of all peoples."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>88</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1974, no. 86, pp.102-103.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp.104-105.

The visit established the permanent 'Indo-Iraqi Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation', signed in New Delhi on 28 March 1974.<sup>90</sup> The Commission intended to "promote and coordinate cooperation between the two countries in trade, economic, agricultural, industrial and cultural fields and in science and technology."<sup>91</sup>

In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi undertook her maiden, and so far, the only visit by an Indian head of state since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Prime Minister Gandhi visited Baghdad and Mosul, wherein the University of Baghdad conferred on her an honorary doctorate in law. She also visited places of cultural and industrial significance. She "expressed admiration" of Iraq's progress under the "leadership of Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party."<sup>92</sup> At the time, the decolonisation had picked up pace in Africa, wherein colonies in Africa were regaining their sovereignty from the European colonists. During the visit, both nations "welcomed" such developments in the African continent, especially the independence of Angola. Such solidarity was in consonance with the Third-World themes that two countries sought to champion.

Additionally, the visit also witnessed the Indo-Iraqi Joint Commission's first meeting, established under the agreement that was signed during Vice-President Saddam Hussein's visit to India in 1974. Since then, the Joint Commission has been a foundational institutional apparatus for coordination of trade between the two nations.<sup>93</sup> Later, both leaders met several times, including in May 1980 in Belgrade, during President Josip Broz Tito's funeral.

In February 1976, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Dr Saadoun Hammadi, also visited India. At the time, the demand for the Indian Ocean to remain a zone of peace was also on the agenda of Indo-Iraqi relations, which essentially meant that the region should be free from military

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<sup>90</sup> See Annexure 8.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>92</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1975, pp. 6-7.

<sup>93</sup> For a detailed list of Joint Commissions Meetings, see Annexure 1.

setups, bases and great-power struggle. This issue resonated in speeches, statements, and communiques issued during Vice-President Saddam Hussein's visit to India and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Iraq. The issue of Palestine was also one of Iraq's foreign policy issues, as it appealed to its disposition as an Arab State. Therefore, the support for Palestinian statehood emerged as one of the major pillars of convergence for Indo-Iraq political relations. As outlined in a joint communique, released after Iraqi Foreign Minister Dr Saadun Hammadi visited India in 1976,

The Iraqi and Indian sides reiterated their unqualified support for the national rights of the Arab Palestinian people. They also expressed their belief that a just peace cannot prevail in the region without the liberation of all occupied Arab territories and the restoration of the full rights to the Arab people of Palestine.<sup>94</sup>

In 1978, Iraq's Vice-President Taha Muhyiddin Marouf paid an official visit to India. Third-World solidarity and demand for the new international economic order were, yet again, common points that were emphasised during the visit. As Indian Vice-President Shri B. D. Jatti remarked during the visit by Iraq's Vice-President Taha Muhyiddin Marouf, "As members of the third world, our two countries are brought together by our common concern for the demand for a new international economic order, which alone, in our view, can usher in a just and more equitable relationship within the world community."<sup>95</sup>

## Trade

In the follow-up to the 1962 Indo-Iraqi Trade Agreement, a joint committee met in New Delhi in October 1969 to discuss and explore the bilateral trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. The joint communique noted that both sides "felt that there was considerable scope for further expanding the level of trade and

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<sup>94</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1976, p.65.

<sup>95</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1978, p.251.

diversifying it.”<sup>96</sup> The committee further ascertained that the trade would reach Rs. 13.5 crore in the period 1969-70.<sup>97</sup> In order to promote cooperation in technical and scientific spheres, the two countries signed an agreement on “friendship and technical and scientific cooperation” in 1970. For the first time, the Agreement allowed for “exchange of technical personnel, grant of scholarships, exchange of visits of experts, exchange and supply of technical documentation and the equipment of indigenous manufacture, cooperation and scientific work between the scientific and technical organisations and institutions of the two countries and provisions of consultancy services and carrying out the feasibility of studies on subjects of mutual benefit.”<sup>98</sup> Addressing the signing ceremony of the ‘Agreement on Friendship and Technical and Scientific Cooperation’, the Indian Ambassador to Iraq, Mahboob Ahmad, noted that, “India and Arab countries have been friends traditionally and so this signature is merely placing a seal on the friendship that already exists,” as both India and Iraq “have in the past been fountains of scientific knowledge.”<sup>99</sup>

This followed the signing of a new Agreement on “Trade and Economic Cooperation” aimed at a three-fold increase in bilateral trade, especially through joint ventures. The existing trade of US\$7 million in 1971 was expected to rise to US\$23 million in 1973.<sup>100</sup> Among other things, the Agreement allowed for the addition of crude oil and sulphur to the list of items that India would import from Iraq. Prior to this Agreement, India primarily imported dates from Iraq. Furthermore, the Agreement provided the two countries to open trade centres and host trade fairs to boost trade and commerce. The economic cooperation was to be extended beyond trade and would involve joint ventures, for instance, between oil refineries in India and

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<sup>96</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1969, p.218.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1970, p.16.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1971, pp.179-80.

Iraq, while India would encourage joint ventures in cement plants, railway communication systems and steel mills in Iraq.

Later, during an official delegation from India to Iraq, five broad areas of cooperation and collaboration were identified: Trade; Oil and Minerals; Development Projects; Agriculture Development; and Technical and Scientific Cooperation. Both sides agreed to suggest a High-Level Joint Commission on Economic, Technical and Scientific Cooperation that materialised in the negotiation and subsequent formation of the Joint Commission.

In 1966, the negotiations started for the India-Iraq Economic and Technical Agreement, finally leading to the Agreement's signing in 1973. Another crucial agreement was signed the same year, as New Delhi and Baghdad agreed on a cultural agreement that superseded the 1954 cultural agreement (see annexure 7). Unlike the prior Agreement, the new Agreement was more comprehensive and elaborate in its scope.<sup>101</sup> It discussed various points of convergence, including the exchange and recruitment of professors, researchers, teachers and encouraging collaboration in cinema and television. Highlighting these trends in Indo-Iraq trade relations, Sardar Swaran Singh, Minister of External Affairs, apprised the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament) in April 1973,

“Sir, with Iraq we have recently signed important agreements on oil supplies both in the short and in the long term and there is considerable scope, which experts are now studying for participation in joint projects both in Iraq as well as in India. In other commercial, technical and cultural fields also, we both intend to intensify our collaboration. We have with Iraq an identity of views on a number of fundamental issues, such as on non-alignment, peaceful co-existence and both of us are following a socialistic pattern of society suited to the genius and capacity of our respective peoples. We are glad to observe that Iraq has

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<sup>101</sup> For the Agreement, see Annexure 6.

mastered her initial difficulties in the nationalisation of her oil resources.”<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, while addressing the joint session of Parliament in 1974, President V. V. Giri noted: “The Oil and Natural Gas Commission has started exploration in a prospective area in Iraq and similar venture elsewhere are under consideration.”<sup>103</sup> He acknowledged the valuable support from Iraq during the oil embargo. “The growing friendship between India and Iraq is reflected in the positive response of Iraq in finding a solution to the problems arising from the rise in oil prices,”<sup>104</sup> he further added.

### **An Era of Agreements**

India's advancement in various fields, including industrial growth, production of industrial components, machinery and training of personnel in civil and military domains, provided ample opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with Iraq. India's increasing cooperation in different sectors allowed India to obtain “prestigious projects” within Iraq. For instance, India received the reputed contract for constructing Iraq's Council of Ministers building. An agreement was signed in October 1976 on the subject of industrial cooperation. As per this Agreement, India would assist Iraq in setting up industrial projects in technical consultancy, training, and machinery components. A major reason for this Agreement was India's advancement in the industrial sector and Iraq's relatively poor industrial growth. This was also India's effort to diversify its trade portfolio with Iraq, as the Indian delegation expressed India's intention to enter into the food-processing industry in Iraq, alongside other sectors, such as “bakeries, vegetable oils and hydrogenated oils, sugar and confectionary and the distillery industries.”<sup>105</sup> India hosted and participated in a number of exhibitions (such as Hind exhibition) and trade fairs (mostly in Baghdad) that helped

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<sup>102</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1973, Ministry of External Affairs, p.179.

<sup>103</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1974, no. 86, p.42.

<sup>104</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1974, no. 86, p.44.

<sup>105</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1976, no. 94, p.272.

traders connect and contribute to increasing trade relations between the two countries.

Another area of growing cooperation was agriculture and the development of water management projects in Iraq. Since Iraq is naturally gifted with water resources in the form of two rivers—Euphrates and Tigris—there was ample scope for development in these sectors. The Indian Ministry of Agriculture agreed to assist its Iraqi counterpart in two major fields: Hydrological observation and Project Hydrology. In doing so, India hosted Iraqi engineers at the International School of Hydrology at the University of Roorkee, while Indian experts undertook visits to Iraq to train and advise their Iraqi counterparts. Furthermore, the cooperation was extended into topographic surveys, supervision for drainage and irrigation projects, conducting research for the feasibility studies on various megaprojects, and technical evaluation of various projects undertaken by the Iraqi government.<sup>106</sup>

An agreement to advance research and development in agriculture was also signed in February 1979. On the lines of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAI), the Agreement aimed to establish an Agricultural Research Institute in Iraq, wherein India would provide training and expertise to create an institute that would further establish a stronger bilateral relationship. India also provided training facilities at post-graduate levels at various agricultural universities and research institutes in Iraq, including in soil physics, soil and water conservation, agricultural meteorology and agricultural engineering.<sup>107</sup> For its part, Iraq also agreed to promote Indian consultancy firms in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry and inland fisheries.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of industrial cooperation, the role of Indian Railways is essential to mention, given its contribution and reputation within the region. The earliest cooperation came about in 1970 when the Indian

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<sup>106</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1977, p.4.

<sup>107</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1979.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

Railways conducted a feasibility-cum-cost study for a 400-km railway line between Baghdad and Hsaibah, followed by similar studies of Alqairma-Kashat Extension (150-km) and Baghdad-Hsaibah-Akashat Railway Project (550-km), undertaken in 1973.<sup>109</sup> These studies were carried out by the Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), a Government of India undertaking working under the aegis of the Ministry of Railways.<sup>110</sup> In 1978, India's Engineering Projects India<sup>111</sup> (EPI) Limited, another Indian public enterprise under the Ministry of Industry, successfully finished building one of Iraq's largest training centres worth Rs. 10 crores. At that time, EPI had been one of the leading companies operating in the Middle East, with projects worth Rs. 600 crores.<sup>112</sup>

By 1979, Indian firms were executing 21 projects in Iraq worth Rs 400 crores.<sup>113</sup> These included constructing bridges, grain silos, fly-overs, water supply and sewerage schemes, housing complexes. Moreover, by 1979, India became the largest importer of Iraq's non-oil products like sulphur, urea and dates, while Iraq was also India's largest supplier of crude oil with an estimated six million tonnes in 1979.<sup>114</sup> The cooperation through the newly-established Commission provided a boost to the bilateral trade and commerce. As highlighted during the sixth Joint Commission Meeting (1979), both sides agreed that India had emerged as a crucial contributor in Iraq's development programmes through the deputation of Indian experts to Iraq in varying capacities.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1977, no. 106.

<sup>110</sup> RITES is responsible for imparting "technical expertise and know-how of the Indian Railways." As such, it has been assisted by various institutes like the Research, Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO).

<sup>111</sup> EPI has established projects on a turn-key basis, i.e., projects carried out from conception to commissioning. It imparts "training know-how, design and engineering, civil, electrical and air-conditioning, procurement, supply, delivery, inspection, erection, testing and commissioning of all the equipment required for the training centre."

<sup>112</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1978, no. 95, p.84.

<sup>113</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1979, no.107, p.153.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, during the Havana Summit of Non-Aligned countries held in September 1979, India acknowledged and appreciated Iraq's decision to change all surcharges on oil prices into long-term interest-free loans for India, effective from 1 June 1979.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, India and Iraq also signed an agreement to foster and further strengthen bilateral trade relations pertaining to joint ventures (JVs) collaboration in Iraq and third countries. The projects linked through such an agreement were largely turn-key projects, i.e., the contracting firm was responsible for design, construction and manufacturing of the product before turning the project to the client, in return for a certain remuneration.<sup>117</sup> In this regard, National Projects Construction Corporation (NPCC), a public sector construction company under the Indian Ministry of Energy, and Iraq's State Construction Contracting Company (SCCCO) signed a cooperation agreement in September 1979. The press release stated:

This agreement strengthens the existing cooperation between India and Iraq and provides for the design and execution of suitable civil turn-key projects in Iraq and India and taking up joint ventures in third countries on mutually acceptable terms and conditions for individual projects. It is expected to initiate intensive deliberations on joint ventures to construct projects like power stations, bridges, roads, water supply sewerage schemes, industrial structures and other civil works.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, the onus was to diversify and build capacity that including cooperation in third countries throughout the period. To sum up, the period witnessed the pinnacle of the bilateral relationship since the diplomatic relations were first established. It was marked by several high-level visits of officials and delegations from both sides, including the Indian Prime Minister's maiden visit. The visits led to the consolidation of relations around the principles of Non-Alignment,

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.180.

<sup>117</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1979, no. 107, p.170.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

anti-imperialist sentiments and support for the Palestinian cause. The bilateral trade flourished in the backdrop of the oil embargo of the 1970s and the increasing demand for crude oil—domestically and internationally—as Iraq emerged as the largest supplier of crude oil to India. Accordingly, India enabled training and capacity-building programmes in Iraq in the primary, industrial and service sectors. Although trivial, the military cooperation also started as a crucial field of cooperation, with India designing and executing short training modules for the Iraqi Army and Air Force. Iraq's secular and socialist disposition under President Hassan al-Bakr and later under Saddam Hussein coincided with India's similar proclivities under Indira Gandhi.

### **CAUTIOUS ENGAGEMENT (1980-2003)**

After the advancement in bilateral relations over the previous two decades, the Indo-Iraqi relations were subjected to numerous challenges from 1980 onwards. Most of these challenges were induced due to two geopolitically significant events: the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) and the Gulf Crisis (1990-91). Both events allowed increased participation of the regional and extra-regional players in Iraq, impacting Iraq's bilateral relations with India. In both cases, India pledged neutrality; however, Indian responses and approaches differed during these two events.

The Iran-Iraq war was a prolonged conflict between neighbours both of which India had cordial relations.<sup>119</sup> Naturally, the protraction of the war impaired Indian investments in Iraq, but the engagement persisted. The period witnessed the fifth meeting of the Joint Commission. After the War, trade relations were restored, and engagement was renewed to the pre-War level. The Non-Alignment Movement remained a preferred medium for engaging both countries. During this, India impressed upon the values and spirit of NAM to seek an end to the conflict. Another critical point of convergence – the

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<sup>119</sup> For India's position on the Gulf War, see Annexure 9.

Palestinian issue – was used to emphasise the relations. The role of external actors in the Persian Gulf increased in the wake of the war, but external involvement in Iraq was limited, as the West backed Saddam's regime against the newly-established Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. Domestically, the political and economic condition in the 1980s remained relatively favourable for India to engage Iraq.

In contrast, the Gulf War that followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was a relatively short affair. The sanctions placed on Iraq afterwards for its transgressions in Kuwait adversely further affected its bilateral relations with India. The Iran-Iraq War had affected the ordinary Iraqis to a limited degree. Only those who fought in the War and were at crosshairs during the "War of Cities" were most affected. In contrast, the Gulf Crisis affected all Iraqi citizens. The blockade and the sanctions made it difficult for Iraq to import even essential items, causing high inflation. The inability to sell oil, which was the country's largest source of revenue, led to decreased economic activity. The situation became stark with the health crises that followed the war. Iraq performed horribly on key health indicators, including the Infant Mortality Ratio, which increased considerably after the war.<sup>120</sup>

For India, severe economic challenges and political upheavals had played critical role in its conduct with Iraq and the wider Middle East. The failure to obtain crude oil from Iraq disturbed India's economic equilibrium, effectually causing a balance of payment (BoP) crisis. Both the BoP crisis and the shortage in crude oil supply pushed India to look for alternative oil suppliers. The revamping of India's foreign policy under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao allowed for the expansion of India's relations in the Middle East. The increase in engagement with the Gulf countries and the establishment of diplomatic

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<sup>120</sup> Tim Dyson, "Child Mortality in Iraq since 1990," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41(42), 2006, pp. 4487-4496. Also see Michael Spagat, "Truth and death in Iraq under sanctions," *Significance*, 7(3), 2010, pp. 116-120.

relations with the State of Israel were momentous decisions in the Indian foreign policy.

### **NON-ALIGNMENT MOVEMENT (NAM)**

Perhaps the one thing that India persistently continued during the Iran-Iraq War was the insistence on and advocacy through the Non-Alignment Movement to end the War. In Parliament, as a defence for the NAM, it was reasoned,

“It is true that this war has had a deleterious effect on the image of the movement as such. But without trying to justify the war, I would like to say that this criticism also is rather unwarranted. The nonaligned had never said that there are no differences among them. They are not a monolith. A movement consisting of about 100 countries - more than 95 countries - of all kinds of ideologies, all kinds of systems, all kinds of persuasions, all kinds of relationships inter se - a movement like this at any given time cannot be expected to have absolutely no differences within itself. This kind of a scenario is not possible. It would be ideal if it is so. We all want it to be so. I am sure every member of the movement wants it to be so. But when it comes to certain national aspirations, certain historical vicissitudes reflecting in disparities between States, whether they are non-aligned States or aligned aligned [*sic*] States or non-nonaligned States, certain conflict situations do arise however sadly. We have to deal with these situations and try to see that an early end to the conflict comes about. India has been engaged in doing this.

The situation today is that after several attempts to bring them together, after several visits to both countries, after several meetings of the four Foreign Ministers who were constituted into a committee to go into this question and after constantly being in touch with other bodies and individuals who were engaged in the same effort, namely, Mr. Olaf Palme of Sweden and the Islamic Conference, after doing all this, all of us, not only the nonaligned but Mr. Palme himself and the others of the Islamic Conference have come to the conclusion that as of today conditions are not yet ripe, are not yet congenial for taking the next step, the concrete step in bringing about peace. We have put

forward several alternatives. We have put forward several directions in which solutions could lie.”<sup>121</sup>

Despite the failure of the NAM during the Iran-Iraq War, India remained committed to its non-aligned credentials by arguing for the peaceful settlement of the conflict while simultaneously protecting its interests in Iran and Iraq. Both countries reiterated their commitments to the principles of non-alignment even during the Joint Commission meetings.<sup>122</sup> During the Eighth Joint Commission Meeting, the two countries contended that India-Iraq relations present “an excellent model that could be usefully emulated by other countries of the Non-aligned Movement.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, in August 1982, when Iraq insisted that India host the seventh summit of the Non-Alignment Movement scheduled in Baghdad, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi instantly obliged.<sup>124</sup>

India, for its part, continued evoking the term “non-alignment” throughout the War and appealed to both warring parties to cease hostilities, since India viewed the increasing role of the external players—in particular in the Persian Gulf—as harmful for Indian interests and a cause for destabilising the wider security dynamics of the Middle East. For instance, when the United States and others announced that they would position their naval forces in the Persian Gulf during the Tanker War, India expressed its apprehension about such a proposal. Two Indian statements on the issue highlight Indian annoyance:

The Government of India does not accept the thesis behind this idea, and has serious misgivings about the proposal. India wishes to express the hope that the countries that are planning to send an international naval force to the Gulf area will desist from doing so.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1982, pp.86-89.

<sup>122</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1983.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>124</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), no. 121, p.206. Also, see Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), no. 122, p.52.

<sup>125</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1980, p.228.

In our view, any internationalisation of the unfortunate situation caused by the present conflict between two non-aligned countries, by introducing an international naval force into our region, would be a dangerous move carrying with it the risk of further escalation of the conflict.<sup>126</sup>

Similarly, the Ministry of Defence's Annual Report for 1987-88 also restated "India's concern" over the "enormous increase in Great Power Naval presence" in the Persian Gulf, which India viewed as a wider security concern in the Indian Ocean Region.<sup>127</sup> And apart from the Indian Ocean and Pakistan, India regarded the Gulf Region as a "great concern" to its security calculus.<sup>128</sup> Since, India holds an "abiding interest in the Gulf region and any future regional security arrangement in the area."<sup>129</sup> The trepidation was borne out of the suspicion that such conflict might spill over into the Indian subcontinent. Such suspicions were not unfounded as there were countless examples of conflicts between the US and USSR spilling over into Third-World countries. As an Indian statement in 1981 highlighted,

In recent times, India has noted with great concern the setback to detente because of growing competition for extension of influence by the superpowers in various parts of the world. Developments in Afghanistan and the war between Iran and Iraq posed a threat to peace and security around the Indian subcontinent.<sup>130</sup>

In short, India's insistence on putting its weight behind the NAM rested on two concerns. First, India was worried that conflict within the two non-aligned countries would not be suitable for the movement itself

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.227.

<sup>127</sup> *Annual Report 1987-88*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, pp.01-02.

<sup>128</sup> Noted in the National Security Environment of India. See *Annual Report 1987-88*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, p.01.

<sup>129</sup> *Annual Report 1990-91*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, p.01.

<sup>130</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1981, pp.17-18.

and weaken its spirit. It was believed that “the conflict [Iran-Iraq War] weakens the solidarity of the nonaligned and developing countries.”<sup>131</sup> Second, it feared that the Iran-Iraq conflict would cascade into the Persian Gulf, thus jeopardising Indian interests in the region.

In contrast to this, the usage of NAM as India's primary stratagem for calling an end to the conflict diluted considerably during and after the Gulf War. By the end of the period of ‘Cautious Engagement’, it becomes apparent that the NAM-spirit had faded, as the fervour that existed in the 1960s and 1970s began to mellow down as the Iran-Iraq War unfolded. After the Gulf War, the NAM movement increasingly lost currency even within its founding members. This also coincided with India opening its economy for foreign investment and becoming a beneficiary of globalisation. Although non-alignment, as a concept, stayed within Indian foreign policy parlance, its use, particularly in Iraq's context, became less pronounced. The apprehensions about the mellowing down of the NAM spirit were felt and acknowledged in the government's statements. “It is not merely a war between two countries, but its implications go deeper because this brings a bad name to the Non-Aligned Movement itself,” observed P. V. Narasimha Rao, Minister of External Affairs, in an Address to Parliament.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, in his statement to Parliament, he remarked,

“Several critics outside the movement have got the opportunity and have made full use of this opportunity of condemning the movement, criticising it and showing it up as something of a sham, because when a movement which stands for peace and swears by peace finds two of its important members engaged in an endless war, what kind of nonalignment is this? What kind of peacemaking is this? These questions have been thrown at us.”<sup>133</sup>

Such open criticism within and wider scepticism outside India about the NAM forced the government to introspect. Although this did not

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<sup>131</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1980, no. 125, p.231.

<sup>132</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1982, no. 121, pp.86-89.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

mean that India abandoned the movement, but the reliance on NAM as a go-to tool for its foreign policy approach in the region became less frequent. Further, this diminishing of the NAM needs to read in consonant with simultaneous developments in contemporary geopolitics. The end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union had a considerable and long-lasting impact on the Non-Aligned Movement.

The experience of the previous decade also contributed to such conclusions about the NAM. At the beginning of the 'Cautious Engagement' period, India made active efforts to resolve the differences between Iran and Iraq under the NAM spirit. However, any effort from the Indian side, at any level or forum, failed to garner any headway in resolving the conflict, rendering the service of NAM as a foreign policy tool futile.

Notwithstanding this apparent futility of the NAM in the Middle East during the critical moments, India continued invoking NAM principles, albeit in a limited and rhetorical manner. While India defended its decades-old foreign policy principle, NAM's failure to resolve the conflict among the NAM members discredited the Movement. In short, by the end of the period of 'Cautious Engagement', the NAM spirit had disappeared, and one of the critical platforms for India-Iraq cooperation lost its significance.

### **The Palestinian Issue**

India's support of the Palestinian cause had been a common factor that united the two countries for long, particularly on international forums. The earliest notable example of this came in 1964 during the visit of President of Iraq Mohammad Arif. The joint-communique juxtaposed the substantial Muslim population in India and Indian support to the Palestinian cause to illustrate the common grounds in India-Iraq relations. The joint-communique read:

In keeping With India's traditional friendly relations with the Arab countries, the Prime Minister expressed his support for the just claims of the Arab countries to the waters of the river

Jordan and for the rights of the Palestinian refugees wishing to return to their homes.<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, Iraqi President acknowledged India's support as a basis for closer bilateral relations. The joint-communique noted,

The President expressed gratification at the fact that India was the homeland of 50 million Muslims and millions of persons belonging to other faiths, who enjoyed the fullest freedom of religious faith and worship on a basis of complete equality under the law.<sup>135</sup>

In April 1980, Veerendra Patil, India's Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals, while hosting a banquet for his Iraqi counterpart Tayeh Abdul Karim, stated,

"The Indian and Arab civilizations have inter-acted beneficially in past centuries and it is but natural that, following the recession of the colonial tide in our own era, the Government and people of India have wholeheartedly supported our Arab brothers in their struggle for a just and lasting peace in West Asia, a peace that restores the rights of the Arab people of Palestine to a homeland and the restitution of their lands which have been illegally and forceably [*sic*] occupied by Israel."<sup>136</sup>

As mentioned elsewhere and highlighted in the previous section, apart from their unique historical relations with the Arab world, both India and Iraq emphasised their commitment to the Palestinian issue to solidify their position in the Arab world, bilaterally and individually. For his part, Saddam Hussein had laboured to champion the Palestinian cause in his own right, as it afforded Iraq political currency within the Arab world. The Eight-Point National Charter for Arabs that Saddam Hussein issued, was also such an attempt. In 1981, when Israel launched *Operation Opera* targeting the Iraqi nuclear facility, India expressed serious

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<sup>134</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1964. p.118.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1980, no. 125, p.89.

concern.<sup>137</sup> India “strongly condemned the Israeli aggression in Lebanon and the attack on Iraqi nuclear installations which, [according to India] have created an explosive situation” in the region.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, in September 1981, at the 25<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, the Chairman of Indian Atomic Energy Commission, Dr H. N. Sethna, noted:

“Mr. President, the agenda before us has, an item relating to the highly reprehensible act of unprovoked and unjustified military attack by Israel on the Iraqi Nuclear Research Centre. My Government has condemned this brutal aggression as stark adventurism and blatant intervention.”<sup>139</sup>

India also approached the Iran-Iraq War from a Palestinian angle. India noted while iterating the concern for the Palestinian cause,

“Iran and Iraq are amongst the foremost supporters of the Palestinian cause. Their continuing conflict is a cause for anxiety to us both. It is bringing destruction and hardship to the people of the two countries and deep anguish to their common friends. At this time the Palestinian people need complete solidarity among their supporters and well-wishers. The P.L.O. and India are members of the Nonaligned group which has been entrusted with the task of assisting in resolving the conflict.

So far, the group has not made much headway. I sincerely hope that a settlement which is just and honourable to both can be found. This war and the unresolved crisis in West Asia, as well as political developments in other parts of the Asian continent are being used as convenient excuses for the induction of armaments on a large scale, and the increase of foreign pressures into this entire region. Such actions are not conducive to security. On the

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<sup>137</sup> *Operation Opera* involved aerial strikes by Israel targeting Iraq's (French-supplied) Osirak nuclear reactor.

<sup>138</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1981, p.182.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p.257.

contrary, by encouraging suspicion and confrontation, they add to insecurity.”<sup>140</sup>

However, just like the NAM, the Palestinian issue lost significance as a point of convergence in Indo-Iraqi ties after the Gulf War. For Iraq, there were more pressing issues in the country. Meanwhile, India started full diplomatic relations with Israel and did not find it worthwhile to raise the issue with Iraq. In short, the Palestinian issue as a common denominator between Indo-Iraq relations lost currency during this period.

## Trade

The Iran-Iraq War heightened Indian apprehension as Indian interests were at stake not only in these two countries but in the wider Persian Gulf region. And such fears came to realisation soon when the conflict cascaded into the Persian Gulf waters in the form of the Tanker War. This buttressed India’s apprehensions early on when the conflict was taking shape; as India had noted, “the war between Iran and Iraq, has made many people deeply anxious for the security of oil supplies from the Gulf.”<sup>141</sup>

Despite the insurmountable challenges posed by the Iran-Iraq War, India continued to maintain its presence in Iraq, as Indian firms and companies continued to carry out projects within Iraqi territory. Although there were concerns within the Indian side about the financial claims, the Iraqi side assured during the eighth joint commission “for the fair and speedy settlement of these claims, taking each individual contract and project into consideration together with the level of performance of each individual contractor.”<sup>142</sup> The critical success of the eighth meeting of the Commission led to the establishment of the

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<sup>140</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1982, no. 121, p.153.

<sup>141</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1981, no. 138, p.139.

<sup>142</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1983, no. 122.

three sub-committees on trade; economic and industrial cooperation; and cultural and technical cooperation to promote “rapid developments in trade, economic cooperation and the technical and cultural relations.”<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, in January 1988, the Indian Railway Construction Company Ltd (IRCON), a public-sector undertaking under the Indian Ministry of Railways, announced the completion of the Al-Muthanna Railway Project. By that time, the IRCON had gained several such contracts because of its past work in the country, particularly the completion of the Rs 400 crore Samawa Railway Project. The finished project included, among others, railway line construction, a high-speed Standard Gauge Track with several bridges, installation of signalling and telecommunication equipment, a vast housing complex with all the relevant ancillary facilities.<sup>144</sup> Also, in October 1990, a 10-member Empowered Committee under the Commerce Secretary was constituted to deal with the problems of exporters to the Gulf. Among other things, the Committee perused the issue related to the ‘Agreement on Payment Deferment’ and ‘Oil embargo’.<sup>145</sup> From India, a 79-member Goodwill Delegation visited Iraq in 2001, headed by Dr Najma Heptullah.<sup>146</sup> The delegation also had members from the business community, academia and civil society, where the endgame for all was to strengthen the relationship in the fields of trade, commerce and culture.

During this period, India also ventured into a participatory role in Iraq’s energy sector. Since 1999, ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the national enterprise Oil and Natural

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1988, p.12.

<sup>145</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1990, pp.215-16.

<sup>146</sup> “Dr Najma Heptullah Meets President Saddam Hussein,” Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 1 September 2001 at [https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/ArchiveSecondPhase/PRIME%20MINISTER/2001-JULY-DEC-PM-II/PDF/PRI-2001-09-01\\_022.pdf](https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/ArchiveSecondPhase/PRIME%20MINISTER/2001-JULY-DEC-PM-II/PDF/PRI-2001-09-01_022.pdf) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Gas Corporation (ONGC), has chased opportunities in Iraq. India pursued two projects in Iraq: first, an exploration block (Block-8) in Southern Iraq, and second, a discovered field (in Tuba). The former was undertaken solely by the OVL, while for the latter, the “participating interest” was expressed in partnership with Reliance Industries (of India) and Sonatrach (of Algeria). For Block-8, the OVL signed an Exploration and Development Contract with its Iraqi counterpart, Oil Exploration Company of Ministry of Oil, in November 2000, which the Iraqi government then ratified for implementation.<sup>147</sup> Before the award of exploration for Block-8 could be implemented, the US-invasion took place. Interestingly, despite the fall of the Saddam regime, the Block-8 project continued to feature in the Ministry’s Annual Reports under the “ongoing exploration and production projects (E&P Projects).”<sup>148</sup> In 2007, the new Iraqi government allowed the OVL to retain the Block-8 project, but the contract terms had to be re-negotiated,<sup>149</sup> while the other project in Tuba was put for auction by the new regime. Thus, the end of the Saddam regime ended India’s preferential benefits in projects, which earlier were obtained by India by nomination rather than auction.

Even though India’s investment in Iraq’s oil sector came to a halt, the OVL’s other projects witnessed steady growth in other countries. In 2006-07, India had been involved in 25 E&P projects in 15 countries,<sup>150</sup> which had scaled to 39 projects in 39 across 18 countries in 2017-18 (some in joint collaboration).<sup>151</sup> The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC),

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<sup>147</sup> “Annual Report 2000-01,” Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India at <https://mopng.gov.in/files/TableManagements/AR99-00.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>148</sup> “Annual Report 2005-06,” Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India at <https://mopng.gov.in/files/TableManagements/AR05-06.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>149</sup> “Iraq to review ONGC Block 8 terms, to auction Tuba,” Reuters, 25 May 2007 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-india-ongc/iraq-to-review-ongc-block-8-terms-to-auction-tuba-idUKDEL20763320070525> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>150</sup> “Annual Report 2006-07,” Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India at <https://mopng.gov.in/files/TableManagements/AR06-07.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

another giant public enterprise in India, had also been engaged in providing expertise to Iraq (as it did in several other countries like Libya and Iran) in niche domains like refining, transportation, R&D and marketing.<sup>152</sup>

### **The Iran-Iraq War (or The Eight Year War)**

In the early stages of the War, in its own words, India “actively, but quietly, attempted to do whatever was possible to restore peace between our two valued friends and to protect and help our nationals, wherever required.”<sup>153</sup> India’s position on the War is best described in P. V. Narasimha Rao’s statement in the Indian Parliament in late 1980.<sup>154</sup> Rao insisted, “From the very beginning of the war, India has made it clear that it, has not taken and will not take sides and has expressed its anguish at the loss of life and property being suffered by both sides.”<sup>155</sup> India also assigned Special Envoys to both the countries that held consultations while attempting to “better understand the points of view of the two sides.”<sup>156</sup> Rao’s speech markedly emphasised how the NAM would be weakened by the War, a forewarning that later came true. In addition, he scrupulously explained the Indian efforts to bring an end to the conflict through diplomacy, specifically through the ‘Non-Aligned Initiative’ (a proposal made by Yasser Arafat). He also discussed the repatriation issue concerning Indians in the Gulf since a few Indian

<sup>151</sup> “Annual Report 2017-18,” Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India at <https://mopng.gov.in/files/TableManagements/AR17-18.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>152</sup> “Annual Report 2003-04,” Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India at <https://mopng.gov.in/files/TableManagements/AR03-04.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>153</sup> Address by P.V. Narasimha Rao, Minister of External Affairs in the Indian Parliament, 18 November 1980. See Annexure 9.

<sup>154</sup> For India’s position on the Iran-Iraq War, see Annexure 9; Address of P. V. Narasimha Rao, Minister of External Affairs in the Indian Parliament, no. 153.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. See Annexure 9.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

casualties were reported at the beginning of the War. India had established a "Repatriation Cell" to pull out Indian citizens stuck in the region. At the time, Air India operated 17 flights conducting airlifts through Kuwait and Amman, with embassies coordinating ticketing for stranded Indians (sometimes, even on credit).

Although India proclaimed neutrality in the War, the support to Iraq remained amply conspicuous. The defence cooperation and trade with Iraq continued satisfactorily. India carefully distinguished its military support as a capacity-building measure in sync with its pledged neutrality. Though never entirely clarified, such a position came to be observed in various press notes that repudiated media reports about India's support to Iraq. For instance, in early 1987, media reports emerged that alleged that India had been providing military training conducted by Indian Air Force and the Indian Army's Artillery Regiments to the Iraqi Air Force and Iraqi Army, respectively. Ideally, this would not be unruly behaviour, but the reports mentioned that Indian training had enabled the attacks on Iranian cities, prompting India to clarify its position. Such were the circumstances that when these reports started floating, the spokesperson for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs had to issue an official statement concerning such reports. The MEA denied all such reporting and stated such reports as "false and baseless."<sup>157</sup>

A similar case came to light concerning Iran too. As the War started unfolding in 1980, the media circulated rumours that India supported Iran in circumventing sanctions while supplying military machinery to Iran, such as planes and tanks. Such rumours could have inflicted damage on Indo-Iraq relations, precipitating a prompt press release from the Indian side disavowing such reports. The Press Note regarded the reports as "mischievous," as India reiterated its neutrality while urging an end to the "fratricidal conflict."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1987, p.58.

<sup>158</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1980, no. 125, p.254.

In 1998, India was prompt in welcoming the Security Council Resolution 598 to bring “peaceful settlement of the conflict” between Iran and Iraq.<sup>159</sup> On 9 August 1988, when both Iran and Iraq affirmed Resolution 598, India hailed the ceasefire announcement and proclaimed its commitment to engage in the post-War reconstruction in both countries.<sup>160</sup> “India has the closest of ties with Iran and Iraq and we know that the two countries are anxious to get on with the stupendous task of reconstruction,” averred P. V. Narasimha Rao, Indian Minister of External Affairs, in his address at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in October 1988.<sup>161</sup>

### **Gulf Crisis (1990-91)**

In August 1990, both the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly the Organisation of the Islamic Conference) were in session when the news broke of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.<sup>162</sup> The hurried frenzy that followed posed critical challenges for all the stakeholders in the region. For India, the concerns and challenges were varied and impending in all senses of the term. Broadly, three challenges merit attention. Firstly, there was the curious case of crude supply. Both Iraq and Kuwait constituted fundamental suppliers of crude to India (nearly 40 per cent). Hence, the invasion and ensuing sanctions meant India had to look for alternative suppliers, understandably at much higher prices.

Secondly, at the time, a substantial number of Indians were residing in Kuwait and Iraq. Their safety became an impending concern for New Delhi. Yet, the reactions to Saddam’s invasion were muted.<sup>163</sup> Soon

<sup>159</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1988, p.85.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.267.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.335.

<sup>162</sup> For details, see Majid Khadduri and Edmund Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf 1990-91: The Iraq-Kuwait Conflict and Its Implications*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, pp.175-176.

<sup>163</sup> Dilip Bobb, “Muted reaction to Gulf crisis isolates India,” *India Today*, 15 October 1990 at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/diplomacy/story/19901015-muted-reaction-to-gulf-crisis-isolates-india-813116-1990-10-14> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

after the invasion, Iraq also declared that no Embassy would be allowed to operate in Kuwait after 24 August 1990, causing more frenzy about the security of expatriates in Kuwait.<sup>164</sup>

Thirdly, on the domestic front, an era of coalition and fragmented politics was afoot in India. This encumbered any bold moves or long-term foreign policy decisions virtually impossible to execute. From August 1990 to March 1991, India had two governments and four foreign ministers. Ultimately, all these challenges panned out in the most convoluted manner possible for India. A shortage in oil supply led to an economic catastrophe, while the pressure of bringing back expatriates caused a political storm within the already fragile political ecosystem.

India needed to deal with the Iraqi regime to arrange the logistics for pulling out expatriates. The crisis proved to be the “turning point” for India’s policy vis-à-vis the Middle East.<sup>165</sup> In response, India carried out the world’s biggest civilian airlift, with 170,000 people airlifted over roughly three months.<sup>166</sup> Air India Jumbos flew approximately four sorties every day. Nearly 500 flights were flown from Amman in Jordan.<sup>167</sup> Besides these largely domestic difficulties, India also faced several international challenges. Particularly, India had to deal with international pressure at the United Nations, where it assumed the non-permanent membership of the Security Council in January 1991. Thus, the Gulf crisis turned out to be an assortment of extreme challenges for India’s domestic and foreign policy.

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<sup>164</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1990, p.117.

<sup>165</sup> Md Muddassir Quamar and P.R. Kumaraswamy, “The Kuwait Crisis of 1990–1991: The Turning Point in India’s Middle East Policy,” *Contemporary Review of Middle East*, 6(1), 2019, pp. 75–87.

<sup>166</sup> I. K. Gujral, *Matters of Discretion—An Autobiography*, Hay House Publishers, New Delhi, 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Constantino Xavier, “India’s Expatriate Evacuation Operations: Bringing the Diaspora Home,” Carnegie India, 4 January 2017 at <https://carnegieindia.org/2017/01/04/india-s-expatriate-evacuation-operations-bringing-diaspora-home-pub-66573> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Different verdicts exist on India's approach in dealing with these challenges, but the events had a far-reaching impact on India-Iraq relations. On the expatriate issue, one sees a highly frantic Iraqi regime that resorted to arm-twisting to acquire certain items in return for allowing the airlift of Indian citizens.<sup>168</sup> Iraq denied entry to the Indian ship *Tipu Sultan* that was intended to ferry Indians back. Iraq also "banned IAF flights to Iraq and Kuwait unless they brought along food items."<sup>169</sup>

Immediately following the invasion by Iraq, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), I.K. Gujral, undertook multiple state visits to secure India's impending interest while also assembling information about the unfolding dynamics. He held meetings with his Iraqi counterpart Tariq Aziz, who assured Iraq's support concerning oil suppliers and the safety of Indians in Kuwait. The EAM also called on President Saddam Hussein in a meeting that became unforgettable with its famous (or infamous) embrace between Saddam Hussein and I. K. Gujral. The Indian side justified the embrace as a mere courtesy.<sup>170</sup> However, Kuwait and other foreign regimes criticised the move. For Gujral, personally, the move had a lasting impression when he became Prime Minister, as no Gulf country was ready to court Gujral.<sup>171</sup>

Incidentally, the picture placed India in a tight spot when it came to the international community. The official Indian response to Saddam's aggression against Kuwait was to "deplore," instead of using more forceful wording like "condemn" or "condone." India's refusal to address Saddam's actions as "aggression," and their "condemnation," as it turned out, was extremely important for Kuwait. When Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah asked his Indian counterpart Gujral to condemn Saddam's aggression, Minister Gujral said, "Excellency, we

<sup>168</sup> I. K. Gujral, no. 166.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.319.

<sup>170</sup> K.P. Fabian, "Biggest Ever Air Evacuation in History," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, 7(1), 2011, pp. 93-107. Also see I.K. Gujral, no. 166.

<sup>171</sup> Md Muddassir Quamar and P. R. Kumaraswamy, no. 165.

deeply deplore Saddam's action, and we are 110% with Kuwait." To which Sheikh Sabah replied, "Excellency, 100% would do, we do not want anything else, we only want the great nation of India to *condemn*."<sup>172</sup>

Meanwhile, during his meeting with Gujral, Saddam buttressed his actions against Kuwait. Calling India an "old friend," he made assurances regarding Indians stranded in Kuwait.<sup>173</sup> Notwithstanding such assurances from the President and Foreign Minister of Iraq, many Indians in Kuwait were subjected to mistreatment and detention by the Iraqi military. The Indians trapped in Kuwait had two options: either travel by land to the Jordan border, and be picked up by the Air India flight from Amman to New Delhi or travel to Iraq and then, consequently, fly from Baghdad to New Delhi.<sup>174</sup> Eventually, these limitations truncated the government's responses and contributed immensely to the difficulties of the troubled expatriates.

## Indian Response

The Indian position with regard to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait came under intense scrutiny and continues to be a subject of controversy decades after the Gulf crisis. India's initial approach was in line with the doctrine of Non-Alignment, as India expressed its opposition to the "use of force in any form in inter-State relations," while also urging for the "soonest possible withdrawal" of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait.<sup>175</sup>

Notably, after the controversial 'Oil for Food' Programme was announced, a steering committee was constituted to oversee the Programme's implementation by Boutros Boutros Ghali (UN Secretary-General at that time). The committee was headed by India,

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<sup>172</sup> Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, "Revisiting the War that Changed West Asia Forever," *The Wire*, 1 July 2015 at <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/revisiting-the-war-that-changed-west-asia-forever> (Accessed 26 February 2022). Emphasis Added by Author.

<sup>173</sup> I. K. Gujral, no. 166, pp. 317-318.

<sup>174</sup> K.P. Fabian, no. 170, pp. 93-107.

<sup>175</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1990. p.180.

which had assumed its role as a non-permanent Security Council member at the Security Council, starting on 1 January 1991. In his account of the Gulf War diplomacy, former Ambassador C.R. Gharekhan<sup>176</sup> informs that India was reportedly hesitant to take an anti-Iraq position.<sup>177</sup> However, in the end, India ended up supporting the United Nations Resolution 687 that sought to employ force, if needed, to end Iraq's aggression.<sup>178</sup> But this change was neither instant nor obvious.

Speaking about India's vote for the Resolution, Gharekhan makes two observations. First, although Saddam Hussein was considered a friend, his actions in Kuwait were indefensible, even (at times) to his foreign minister. "However, since what Saddam had done was totally unacceptable and he had not shown any sign of regret, it was not possible, nor indeed desirable, to give Iraq the benefit of doubt all the time."<sup>179</sup> Second, he alludes to the arbitration process that came out of the Resolution. The Resolution set up an "arbitration procedure" on the alignment of the Iraq-Kuwait border that was binding. A binding United Nations Resolution on settling borders was bad precedence from the perspective of a country with a mistrustful neighbour with which two wars had been fought, and the whole last decade was spent on rumours and reports of its nuclear programme. In other words, "We saw a parallel with Kashmir [and Pakistan]," remarks Gharekhan.

This evocation of the Kashmir issue (and by extension Pakistan) may appear far-fetched at first glance, but the issue featured prominently within the Indian strategic community at the time. The suspicions about Pakistan misusing the crisis for its advantage seemed entirely reasonable

<sup>176</sup> Chinmaya Gharekhan was India's Permanent Representative to the United Nation during the Gulf crisis.

<sup>177</sup> Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, no. 172.

<sup>178</sup> "Resolution 687 (1991)," United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 3 April 1991 at <https://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>179</sup> J. Mohan Malik, "India's Response to the Gulf Crisis: Implications for Indian Foreign Policy," *Asian Survey*, 31(9), 1991, pp. 847-861.

to many in Indian strategic circles. For Pakistan under Benazir Bhutto (at the time) had merely criticised Saddam's regime but refused to impose sanctions and send in troops to Multinational Forces (MNFs), arguing for its long-running commitment to not agree to sanctions on an Islamic country. However, when her government was dismissed in August 1990, the same month Saddam invaded Kuwait, Pakistan changed its position. Citing a "special request" by Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, Pakistan expressed its full support with boots-on-ground for the US-led MNF. Highlighting the Indian concerns about Pakistan's role, J. Mohan Malik observes,

Islamabad's decision to send troops and abide by the United Nations sanctions against Iraq was interpreted in New Delhi as an attempt by Pakistan's military-dominated interim regime to exploit the Gulf crisis to further its own objectives of acquiring economic and military support from the United States and other Arab countries, and it revived memories of Pakistan's role during the Afghanistan conflict.<sup>180</sup>

Since independence, India had fought two full-fledged wars with its neighbour in the East. For its part, Pakistan has looked to the West Asian nations for support and patronage, including on the critical issue of Kashmir. Meanwhile, Iraq was one of the countries India had looked to for support on the Kashmir issue. And before the Pakistan factor became less pronounced in India's conduct with the West Asian countries (as it is today), the support for the Kashmir issue was one of the strategic concerns for India vis-à-vis its relations with the Middle Eastern countries.

In the beginning, the Indian position on Iraq's actions was ambiguous at best, followed by a marked shift in November 1990.<sup>181</sup> Hardly two weeks after Chandra Shekhar became Prime Minister, India called on Iraq to leave Kuwait and observe the Security Council Resolutions during a joint statement at the South Asian Association for Regional

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

Cooperation (SAARC) summit. Days later, India also expressed its support to the Security Council Resolution 687. "By the end of November 1990, New Delhi's originally low-key condemnation of the Iraqi invasion had become stronger and explicit," observes J. Mohan Malik.<sup>182</sup>

Meanwhile, in India, the controversies and heated debates about the Gulf War never seemed to end until Iraq's withdrawal. To this end, in January 1991, another controversy emerged when it was revealed that India had provided for the refuelling of American (and later Australian) aircraft at Bombay that was flying to Iraq from the Philippines. New Delhi reasoned that the aircraft was carrying non-lethal supplies, and the arrangement was part of Indo-US bilateral relations rather than the efforts in the War. There was also an intelligence-sharing agreement between India and the US at that time. As a consequence, two groups had emerged up to that point. One side regarded this decision as a manoeuvre by Washington to force New Delhi's hand in the War. Others viewed it as a strategic move by India to preserve its relationship with the US.<sup>183</sup> In this way, the actions of the Chandra Shekhar government polarised the strategic community. One side viewed these actions as 'pragmatic', while the other side disparaged them as a 'sell-out', which deserted long-held Indian foreign policy principles of Non-Alignment and Third-World solidarity.

There was also an economic (and energy) dimension to these debates. Over the last decade, India's trade with Iraq had come down as the latter had been engaged in a protracted war with its neighbour. On the other hand, Indian trade with the likes of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was on an upward trajectory. Since the 1980s, Iraq had also been faltering on its contractual payments to Indian projects in Iraq. The expatriate population in the Gulf was more compared to Iraq. "In short, India had a direct and parallel interest with the major Western powers in

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> J. K. Baral and J. N. Mahanty, "India and the Gulf Crisis: The Response of a Minority Government," *Pacific Affairs*, 65(3), 1992, pp. 368-384.

seeing to it that it continued to get reasonably priced oil imports from the Gulf region,” concludes J. Mohan Malik.<sup>184</sup> Thus the economic woes emerged as a factor in India's foreign policy choices. Subramaniam Swamy, Indian Minister of Commerce at the time, informed (on 6 January) that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved US\$ 1.8 billion as credit to India.<sup>185</sup> The date becomes crucial because, in late January, it was revealed that India had been refuelling the American fighter planes 9 January onwards, roughly a week before *Operation Desert Storm* began (17 January). Therefore, in less than two weeks, the IMF loans to India had been approved, India had allowed refuelling of American aircraft, and the War had begun.

Those who had opposed the government's overtures to the US and argued for supporting Saddam's regime were now openly criticising the government. The controversies continued unabated, and their fallout resulted in Chandra Shekhar's government withdrawing the refuelling arrangement in mid-February. Similar debates prevailed outside India, where the pro-US and pro-Saddam coteries ended up accusing India of falling short in its commitments to them. Thus, India was not enough pro-US, nor was it sufficiently pro-Saddam. And, as it turned out, India was not enough of a peacemaker. In the end, India's fragile factional politics and its collapsing economy proved to be more significant concerns for the leadership, instead of an idealistic foreign policy. The economic and security realities began to take shape in Indian foreign policy that continued over the next decade when India concluded a civil nuclear agreement with the United States.

To conclude, during the crisis, India's policy on Iraq was inarguably more than just a bilateral matter. The regional players, domestic politics and the economic woes (in India) dictated India's approach. In some sense, the Gulf crisis impressed upon India, one of the fundamental concepts of international relations, 'self-interest'.

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<sup>184</sup> J. Mohan Malik, no. 179.

<sup>185</sup> J. K. Baral and J. N. Mahanty, no. 183.

## Post-War Iraq

Later, in late-1997, Iraq expelled the US members of the UN inspection teams, which led to a stand-off that continued till December 1998. Subsequently, Washington carried out four-day air strikes against Iraq. Ever since January 1998, reports had been circulating which suggested that Washington was contemplating military action against Iraq. As such, India's Prime Minister I. K. Gujral expressed concern over this and penned letters to UNSC members, US President Bill Clinton, the UN Secretary-General and many world leaders urging all to adopt a "restrained and statesmanlike" approach with regard to developments in the region.<sup>186</sup>

Between 1998 and 2000, India had a brief period of congenial relations with Iraq. This lined up with relative domestic stability in India and Saddam's support to India's nuclear tests. The upturn in the relations started with the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Joint Commission convening after a decade in 1998. India hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> edition in which Petroleum Minister Vazhappady K. Ramamurthy announcement of extending a loan of US\$25 million to Iraq within the ambit of sanctions. In 1999, an Indian parliamentary delegation also visited Iraq. Interestingly, such moves have been said to incur "bitter complaints" by the US mission in New Delhi.<sup>187</sup> However, the overarching restrictions that were in place after the Gulf crisis, continued to influence relations. Later, the events of 9/11 dramatically changed things for the region.

### *Defence Cooperation*

India's involvement in Iraq also had a defence dimension. Within this, the two sides majorly cooperated in training and capacity-building of the Iraqi Armed Forces, which began as early as 1958 (Measured Engagement), where Indian Air Force officials were first deputed to Iraq as Qualified Flying Instructors (QFI's) to train the Iraqi Air Force

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<sup>186</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), Ministry of External Affairs, 1998.

<sup>187</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

in defensive roles, primarily helicopters.<sup>188</sup> This cooperation was later extended to the Army and the naval forces. In 1975, the Indian Army sent teams to help the Iraqi Army to increase its inter-force mobility and military preparedness. The Indian military personnel taught courses at Iraq's National Defence Academy.<sup>189</sup> This was followed by the establishment of a naval academy in Iraq's port city Basra by the Indian Navy.<sup>190</sup> In a tripartite agreement, India teamed up with France to render technical support to the Iraqi Air Force.<sup>191</sup> India and France were developing the 'Adnan' AWAC aircraft, a variant of the Soviet Il-76, for Iraq. Three such aircraft were produced, yet, none became operational.<sup>192</sup> Another report claimed that the Indian Air Force had carried out support missions for the Iraqi Air Force in their offensive against the Kurds in 1975. The reports also note that Indian instructors were asked to stay away from frontlines.<sup>193</sup>

The defence cooperation picked up in the period of the Active Engagement. The interoperability of Russian equipment that India used extensively at the time, also helped to further the defence cooperation between the two countries. During the early phases of the Iran-Iraq War, India trained Iraqis in combat roles that continued until 1989.<sup>194</sup> The memoirs of Air Marshal (Retd) Philip Rajkumar give a vivid description of how the Indian Air Force officials trained the Iraqi forces at Tikrit Air Force Base (in the North of Baghdad), Saad Air Force Base (located about 400 km West of Baghdad), and Walid Air Base

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<sup>188</sup> Memoirs of Air Marshal (Retd) Philip Rajkumar, who was an instructor on deputation in Iraq during 1981-83. See Air Marshal (Retd) Philip Rajkumar, "The Indian Air Force in Iraq," *Bharat Rakshak*, 16 June 2017 at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/history/1970s/1168-rajkumar-iraq.html#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>189</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>190</sup> David Brewster, *India's Ocean: The Story of India's Bid for Regional Leadership*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp.108-109.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Air Marshal (Retd) Philip Rajkumar, no.188.

(near the Jordanian border). He describes his tenure, wherein he trained more than a dozen Iraqi pilots and flew 729 sorties, in his two years of deputation.

India provided many advanced and tactical training modules, including basic tactical formations, air combat manoeuvres, and more advanced dogfights. Indian instructors were deployed on training with MiG-21, Sukhoi 7, and other helicopters. Indian instructors were paid in Iraqi Dinar by the Iraqi exchequer, aided by occasional gifts by President Saddam Hussein. For instance, in an anecdote, Air Marshal (Retd) Rajkumar mentions the visit by President Hussein to the Base. During his visit, Saddam presented 1,000 Iraqi Dinars (approximately US\$ 3,300) to each of the 100 instructors present at the base. The instructors also received expensive wristwatches for themselves and their spouses. These Universal Genève watches had the Iraqi state emblem inscribed on them and were signed by Saddam Hussein.<sup>195</sup> Such recompenses were not restricted to instructors but included the Iraqi pilots, who were presented an automobile (Toyota Camry) in the graduating ceremony. Indeed, such rewards for the instructors and the pilots were a way to prompt the individuals to perform better in the midst of the war with Iran.

There was also an urgency in training more fighters and rewards were a way to encourage them. However, there was a negative side to such measures. For instance, during a training module, an Indian instructor asked the commanding officer at the Base to excuse a candidate due to his inability to handle the training. However, the Iraqi official denied the request and exclaimed that Iraq needed fighter pilots badly in their squadrons and that the instructor should continue his training. Fatefully, the candidate was killed a fortnight later in a landing accident.<sup>196</sup>

Predictably, India was not the only country Iraq relied on to train its forces. Between 1981 and 1983, Iraqi Air Force pilots were trained by Czech (conducting only basic flight training), Russian, Indian, Jordanian,

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

Egyptian, British, and even Pakistani Air Force instructors, even though Indian and Russian instructors were predominant.<sup>197</sup> Air Marshal (Retd) Philip Rajkumar's description of an Iraqi training facility at Tikrit Air Base is a brilliant illustration of this. He notes, "We later learnt that these shelters had been built by a Spanish construction firm. Next, we were issued with our flying kit consisting of a RAF flying overall and jacket, Russian 'g' suit, French flying boots, gloves, Russian helmet with integral mask, and a Breitling pilot's watch."<sup>198</sup> At the time, Iraq also imported arms from China that usually came with Chinese technicians on the bases, although there are hardly any reports that China had contributed through capacity-building. However, between 1983 and 1989, Iraq purchased conventional arms worth US\$ 5 billion from China that included artillery, tanks and fighter jets.<sup>199</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At the start of this period of 'Cautious Engagement', the major points of convergence between India and Iraq were the spirit of Non-Alignment, support for the Palestinian cause, and robust economic and energy trade. However, by the end of this period, most of these trends had dissipated and were substituted by others. The spirit of NAM waned as India started dwelling more on liberalisation and globalisation; the Palestinian issue took a backseat, as India established diplomatic relations with Israel and started a de-hyphenated policy vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine; trade with Iraq declined (partly because of the War and partly due to sanctions after the Gulf War), and also because others like Saudi Arabia had stepped up as lucrative trade partners. The high-level<sup>200</sup> visits ended and the frequency of the Indo-Iraqi Joint Commission also diminished.

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff, "China's Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications," RAND Corporation, 1999 at [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1119.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1119.html) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>200</sup> There was just one notable high-level visit by Iraq's Vice-President, Taha Y. Ramdan, in May 1999.

The bilateral relations witnessed a transition from hopeful at the start of the 1980s to scepticism in the 2000s. On both sides, domestic factors became an essential determinant for their conduct of foreign relations and for change in their respective priorities. India, for its part, remained cautious in approaching Iraq, first under the banner of NAM and later as part of its humanitarian support. India's growing engagement with the Gulf countries, which served as an alternative source for oil imports and a lucrative destination for the Indian Diaspora. India's changing foreign policy approach from its earlier Nehruvian predilections, made India more careful, if not hesitant, in pursuing relations with Iraq. The falling popularity of Saddam Hussein in the West (public and government alike) also prevented the government to pursue pro-Saddam policies. Iraq's domestic circumstance restricted its own keenness and seriousness to focus on bilateral relations. The Oil-For-Food Programme aimed at mitigating the humanitarian crisis in Iraq became a den of corruption, and later the Natwar Singh episode fared poorly for bilateral relations. Since 1947, Indo-Iraqi relations had seen a steady rise, followed by a boost in growth and friendliness, and ultimately saw a slow decline in trade and the level of engagement. For India, the Gulf Crisis demonstrated the need to make tough foreign policy choices. 'Saddam the friend', a characteristic feature of bilateral ties for decades, was also proven wrong as the Gulf crisis illustrated that the "value of the Saddam regime to India was much less than was popularly believed."<sup>201</sup> Broadly speaking, by the end of the century, the bilateral relations took a full swing to reach same levels at which they had started in the 1950s.

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<sup>201</sup> J. Mohan Malik, no. 179.

## THE PRESENT

This chapter covers the events of India-Iraq relations in the period following the 2003 US-invasion. Prior to 2003, the Indian relations with Iraq was mainly bilateral, even though external actors impacted the relations. In contrast, the relations after 2003 witnessed the decisive role of external actors, mainly the United States and Iran, followed by an increased role by China and Russia. This period presented a new set of challenges for India, as bilateral relations became intertwined with the presence of external actors, all with their respective self-interests. The following chapter will outline the Indian engagement with Iraq in two broad periods: Limited Engagement (2003-11) and Renewed Engagement (2011-20). The phase following the US-led invasion was marked by a brief phase of stability in relations; however, it was soon overshadowed by the emergence of the Islamic State.

### **LIMITED ENGAGEMENT (2003-11)**

It has been widely believed that, like most other countries at the time, India had no interactions with Iraq in the post-Saddam period. However, such a line of argument remains flawed due to the fact that India did not undertake a full diplomatic withdrawal from Iraq, as various other countries had done. More precisely, India had only called back its Ambassador from Iraq in 2004 while continuing its presence there at the *charge d' affairs* level, which suggested a 'limited' level of engagement rather than being entirely shutting diplomatic relations, as is erroneously believed. The political engagement returned to pre-2003 levels after India reinstated its Ambassador to Baghdad in 2011. As such, this section appraises that period of Limited Engagement that was marked by certain restrictions, given engagement at times was carried out through the United Nations and at others through selective interactions with the newly elected governments in Iraq.

## India and the 2003 Iraq War

When the United States and the United Kingdom urged action against Saddam Hussein's regime,<sup>202</sup> India chose not to join the "Coalition of the Willing," a decision India reasoned was "based on its principles and national interest."<sup>203</sup> Understandably, there were trepidations about the future of political order in Iraq.<sup>204</sup>

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government insisted that any action in Iraq should be on the basis of a "collective decision through the United Nations."<sup>205</sup> On 15 March 2003, days before the War started, Prime Minister Vajpayee maintained, "If unilateralism prevails, the U.N. would be deeply scarred, with disastrous consequences for the world order. The Government of India would strongly urge that no military action be taken, which does not have the collective concurrence of the international community."<sup>206</sup>

In India, there were extensive discussions with regard to Iraq within public discourse and behind closed doors, starting in late-2002 and lasting until July 2003. At this stage, broadly, there emerged two camps within the Indian strategic circles with contradictory positions. One

<sup>202</sup> For Iraq and the United Nations, see Poorvi Chitalkar and David M. Malone, "The UN Security Council and Iraq," Working Paper Series, United Nations University, November 2013 at [https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5/wp01\\_theunscandiraq1.pdf](https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5/wp01_theunscandiraq1.pdf) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>203</sup> For India's position on the Iraq War, see *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, p. 54.

<sup>204</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "Iraqi Shia's date with history," *The Hindu*, 17 April 2003 at <https://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/14067/Iraqi+Shias+date+with+history> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>205</sup> "Statement by Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in both Houses of Parliament on the situation relating to Iraq," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 12 March 2003 at [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4347/Statement\\_by\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_Shri\\_Atal\\_Bihari\\_Vajpayee\\_in\\_both\\_Houses\\_Of\\_Parliament\\_on\\_the\\_situation\\_relating\\_to\\_Iraq](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4347/Statement_by_Prime_Minister_Shri_Atal_Bihari_Vajpayee_in_both_Houses_Of_Parliament_on_the_situation_relating_to_Iraq) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

group contended that India should join the US-led Coalition as it would help strengthen Indo-US relations. Part of the reason for such an argument was the apprehension about the US-Pakistan relations that had rekindled after 9/11. Thus, the 'Pakistan factor' once again became part of the equation. Pakistan under President Parvez Musharraf had supported Washington in its 'War on Terror' thus, generating apprehension that increased Washington-Islamabad cooperation may come at the cost of New Delhi-Washington relations. One of India's foremost strategic thinkers, K Subrahmanyam wrote:

There is a good case for India helping the stabilisation process by sending troops to Iraq, not merely to oblige Washington but to help the Iraqi people . . . Our attitude should be similarly pragmatic, forward looking and mindful of our national interest. We should bear in mind that Islamabad is ready to send troops to Iraq and thereby increase US dependence on itself.<sup>207</sup>

Meanwhile, C. Raja Mohan, carped over the government's insistence to wait for an "enabling resolution" from the UN. He cautioned, "An India that evades this opportunity will put out the word that it is not yet prepared to break out of the narrow South Asian political box."<sup>208</sup> Similarly, journalists like Shekhar Gupta criticised the government's foolhardy faith in the UN, questioning, "What has the UN done specifically for India besides providing lucrative secondments to so many in our very bored and underpaid bureaucracy and a plethora of do-nothing multilateral postings for our foreign service?"<sup>209</sup> In a similar vein, the Editor of *India Today*, remarked that the decision is an

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<sup>207</sup> K. Subrahmanyam, "Constructive Engagement: India Must Send Troops to Iraq," *The Times of India*, 23 June 2003 at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/leader-articlebrconstructive-engagement-india-must-send-troops-to-iraq/articleshow/37156.cms> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>208</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "India's decision time on Iraq," *The Hindu*, 26 May 2003 at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/indias-decision-time-on-iraq/article27773993.ece> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>209</sup> Shekhar Gupta, "UNshackle, seize the moment," *The Indian Express*, 15 March 2003 at <https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/unshackle-seize-the-moment/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

opportunity “to be on the right side of history.”<sup>210</sup> For this line of thinking, the decision to support the US against Saddam was driven by the perspective of security-based “national interest.”<sup>211</sup> C. Raja Mohan astutely summarised the dilemma facing New Delhi as,

The safe diplomatic position that India had constructed for itself in the current Gulf crisis would soon begin to unravel. Pious platitudes about avoiding the dangers of war serve no purpose except deluding oneself. Calls for restraint of the type the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, issued this week are of no consequence when war is imminent.

India's arguments that a war against Iraq could have grave consequences for itself ... do have merit. But if war is inevitable and India cannot prevent it, New Delhi must begin to move to the next questions ... [like] How does New Delhi protect its many interests in a post-Saddam Iraq and the Middle East?<sup>212</sup>

Meanwhile, the other camp reasoned restraint in getting involved in Iraq.<sup>213</sup> Many across the political spectrum opposed the intervention in Iraq, especially the Left parties in India.<sup>214</sup> Notably, the Congress party

<sup>210</sup> “One bad resolution on Iraq and India loses a place on the right side of history,” *India Today*, 21 April 2003 at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/editor-s-note/story/20030421-one-bad-resolution-on-iraq-and-india-loses-a-place-on-the-right-side-of-history-792848-2003-04-21> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>211</sup> K. Subrahmanyam, no. 207.

<sup>212</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “Preparing for regime change in Iraq,” *The Hindu*, 30 January 2003 at <https://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/14585/preparing+for+regime+change+in+iraq> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>213</sup> Salil Tripathi, “Let India's Troops Go to Iraq,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 July 2003 at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB105787450384750000> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>214</sup> “Left parties against sending troops to Iraq,” *The Hindu*, 26 May 2003 at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/left-parties-against-sending-troops-to-iraq/article27773990.ece> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (which had earlier supported the US efforts against the Taliban in Afghanistan) opposed the War.<sup>215</sup> Some cited the Indian approach with Sri Lanka in 1987, while others protested the lack of evidence to link terrorism with Saddam's Iraq. Further, there was also a belief that India would stand to lose its standing among the Iraqi people, who had viewed the Indian military positively. The defence cooperation in previous decades and the role that the Indian Army played in liberating Iraq during the Second World War were considered major reasons for India's positive image in Iraq. Former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad reasoned, "When Indian soldiers went into Iraq in the 1940s, Iraqi[s] forgave us [India] since we were under colonial rule, but they would not forgive us now when we as a free country go to Iraq as part of the coalition."<sup>216</sup>

Understandably, such fissures were also reflected within the Cabinet, but as it happened, the majority sided with Prime Minister Vajpayee's position to avoid the conflict in Iraq. Vajpayee insisted on taking the decision to as many stakeholders as possible, including the Cabinet, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance), and the Parliament. In the end, the government refrained from joining the coalition. India decided that it "neither wants to oppose the Bush Administration, which has made up its mind nor risk sticking its neck out in defence of Baghdad," concluded C. Raja Mohan.<sup>217</sup>

On 8 April 2003, both Houses of the Indian Parliament adopted a unanimous Resolution that "deplored"<sup>218</sup> the "military action" in Iraq since it lacked the vital endorsement of the United Nations Security

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<sup>215</sup> Radhika Ramaseshan, "Sudarshan speaks up for Saddam," *The Telegraph Online*, 10 February 2003 at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/sudarshan-speaks-up-for-saddam/cid/837746> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>216</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>217</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "Iraq: The Fog of War," *The Hindu*, 23 December 2002 at <https://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/12880/Iraq+the+fog+of+war> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>218</sup> The Resolution in Hindi used the word *ninda*, which the government insisted was 'deplore' not 'condemn'.

Council (UNSC). The Parliament Resolution affirmed that the military action in Iraq that aimed at changing government in the country was unacceptable. While expressing sincere regards and sympathies for the Iraqi people, the Resolution called for the immediate cessation of war and the Coalition forces' quick withdrawal. Further, the Resolution provided INR 100 crore in humanitarian support, which included the supply of 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat through the World Food Program (WFP).<sup>219</sup>

Notwithstanding the American takeover of Iraq by May 2003, India was continually roped in for joining the Coalition and sending troops to Iraq. The US made "active efforts" to convince New Delhi.<sup>220</sup> The Deputy at the US Mission in New Delhi, Albert Thibault Jr., confirms the US's efforts in "lining up as many other countries as possible to join us, particularly with, as they say, boots on the ground." He further noted:

"In that regard, we came very close to getting a large Indian contingent in Iraq. We were in a very intense dialogue with them ... The Indian army was institutionally disposed to dispatching up to a division, as I was well aware, dealing personally with several of the senior generals ... The Defense Department was extremely keen to get that presence in Iraq because the Indians, unlike some other nations, represent a serious fighting force. They've had plenty of experience, they're well regarded, and they have large numbers.

The Indian army was quite ready to go, quite prepared. They had identified the units that would be deployed, and it seemed that it would happen. But as word of the dialogue between the two governments began leaking to the media, there was a counter-

<sup>219</sup> "Resolution regarding situation in Iraq" adopted in 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Session Number XII) on 8 April 2003, and later also passed by Upper House (Rajya Sabha). The source link only provides for Hindi version, which the author translated and paraphrased. For more, see <https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/714292/1/5585.pdf>; *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.58.

<sup>220</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador K. P. Fabian.

reaction, particularly among the opposition parties and, therefore in Parliament, expressing reservations about this.”<sup>221</sup>

However, even by June, India was undecided on the issue. Washington claimed that New Delhi was giving mixed signals to join the Coalition. In a meeting with Vice-President Dick Cheney, Indian Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani is said to have given positive assurances to Cheney during his official visit to Washington DC. Similar sentiments were expressed during the visit by Assistant Secretary of State Peter Rodman to Delhi a week later.<sup>222</sup> However, on 14 July 2003, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) issued a Press Release that noted: “Were there to be an explicit UN mandate for the purpose, the Government of India could consider the deployment of our troops in Iraq.”<sup>223</sup>

The decision or the policy to refrain from the US-led invasion had clear advantages and disadvantages. India’s risk-free approach cut-off India from its closest regional partner. Meanwhile, India ended up witnessing others like China, Russia, and manifestly, the United States becoming essential player in Iraq. And now, no longer were their preferential contracts or discounted crude supplies available to India. By and large, the Indian leadership looked at the decision to enter the US-led Coalition from the prism of past and present, but not from the future standpoint. The apprehensions were about past ties, the relations with Saddam Hussein and how India would appear in the present. But very few arguments catered to the future. For instance, C. Raja Mohan anticipated:

India should know that where it stands before the war will significantly shape its influence when the peace treaties are drafted,

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<sup>221</sup> “Interview with Albert A. Thibault Jr. by Charles Stuart Kennedy,” *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, 18 April 2005, at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/mss/mfdip/2007/2007thi01/2007thi01.pdf/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>222</sup> Devirupa Mitra, “How India Nearly Gave in to US Pressure to Enter the Iraqi Killing Zone,” *The Wire*, 08 July 2016, at <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/india-nearly-gave-us-pressure-join-iraq-war> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>223</sup> “Statement on Sending Indian Troops to Iraq,” Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 14 July 2003, at <https://archive.pib.gov.in/newsite/archivepage.aspx> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

and spoils from the war are distributed. Sitting on the fence until it is all over is a risk-free option. But such timidity might also marginalise India in the potentially historic arrangements that could emerge in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.<sup>224</sup>

## Political Engagement

After this clear stand on the issue, India “emphasized the need for an early restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people and reaffirmed the right of Iraqi people to freely determine their political future and control their natural resources.”<sup>225</sup> As such, India welcomed the UNSC Resolution 1511 of 16 October 2003,<sup>226</sup> which recognised the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC)<sup>227</sup> as the interim administrative unit that would make appointments to the cabinet and a ‘preparatory constitutional committee’.<sup>228</sup> India took “note” of the intention of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)<sup>229</sup> to hand over sovereignty to the IIG by

<sup>224</sup> C. Raja Mohan, no. 212.

<sup>225</sup> *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.58.

<sup>226</sup> “On Security Council Resolution 1511 on Iraq,” Ministry of External Affairs (Government of India), 17 October 2003 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/7852/On+Security+Council+Resolution+1511+on+Iraq> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>227</sup> IGC (13 July 2003 to 1 June 2004) was a representative body under the CPA that consisted of 13 members from Iraq’s various political and tribal groups (including recently returned exiles). The CPA appointed these members, and the IGC was created to render policy advice to CPA until the transfer of sovereignty to the ‘Iraqi Interim Government (IIG)’ in June 2004. For more see Sharon Otterman, “IRAQ: Iraq’s Governing Council,” Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), 19 March 2007 at <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/iraq-iraqs-governing-council> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>228</sup> United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1511 was passed on 16 October 2003. For more, see [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1511\(2003\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1511(2003)) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>229</sup> Established in April-May 2003, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) took over the responsibilities of the executive, legislature and judiciary branches in Iraq after the fall of the Saddam regime, and it continued until it was dissolved and succeeded by the transitional government, officially referred to as ‘Transitional National Assembly’ in June 2004. CPA is known for arbitrary orders, mismanaging finances and general lack of understanding of Iraqi society. American diplomat L. Paul Bremer was made the chief executive of the CPA.

30 June 2004, for which the 'Iraqi Governing Council' helped in preparing a roadmap.<sup>230</sup>

After Saddam Hussein was captured by the US forces in 2004, India had pressed that the appropriate judicial process should be followed under the Geneva Convention with the requisite transparency and fairness. India "expressed the hope that the sentence of the former President Saddam Hussain will not be carried out and expressed disappointment after the execution was carried out."<sup>231</sup> Later on, India also voiced its discontent over the execution of Saddam Hussein. The official statement by the MEA read: "We had already expressed the hope that the execution would not be carried out. We are disappointed that it has been. We hope that this unfortunate event will not affect the process of reconciliation, restoration of peace and normalcy in Iraq."<sup>232</sup>

After 2003, India argued for a "free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq."<sup>233</sup> In June 2004, India cautiously hoped that the country would drive towards normalcy after the sovereignty was restored to the Iraqi people. However, the ensuing political turmoil forced India, like other countries, to reassess its bilateral ties with Iraq. As the crisis started unfolding, India established a "special cell" to monitor the situation. In the mayhem and confusion that erupted in Iraq, three Indian truck drivers were captured by an armed group. At that time, the Indian Ambassador to Oman, Talmiz Ahmad, was asked by the then External Affairs Minister E. Ahamed to travel to Iraq to negotiate the release of Indians kidnapped in Iraq. The Minister himself was also extensively engaged in ensuring the release of the kidnapped Indians.

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<sup>230</sup> *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.58. Also see annexure 2.

<sup>231</sup> *Annual Report, 2006-07*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.47.

<sup>232</sup> "Statement by External Affairs Minister on the execution of former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 30 December 2006, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/3804/Statement+by+External+Affairs+Minister+on+the+execution+of+former+President+Saddam+Hussein+of+Iraq> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>233</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations: Iraq, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 2020.

"Ahamed had local contacts especially among the clerics in Iraq who had a great deal of influence in the country and it was with the help of the clerics that we were able to bring back the truckers after weeks of negotiation," said Dr Zikrur Rahman, another diplomat on the team dispatched to Iraq.<sup>234</sup> Previously, Ahamed had also rendered his support through his connections in ensuring the safe return of Indians in Libya in the 1990s. By 2004, India had imposed a travel ban to Iraq that stayed in place for the next six years until June 2010.<sup>235</sup> Although the overall volatile situation explains India's decision, the events such as the kidnapping of three Indian truck drivers in July 2004,<sup>236</sup> and the recalling of the Indian Ambassador to Iraq, B. B. Tyagi, augmented the decision to impose the ban.<sup>237</sup>

### ***New Institutions in Iraq***

The unfolding process of democratisation in Iraq took place under the Brahimi timetable.<sup>238</sup> It was endorsed by the UN Security Council

<sup>234</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, "Diplomats recall E. Ahamed's role in 2004 rescue operation in Iraq," *The Hindu*, 1 February 2017 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Diplomats-recall-E.-Ahamed%E2%80%99s-role-in-2004-rescue-operation-in-Iraq/article17127415.ece> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>235</sup> *Annual Report, 2004-05*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.52.

<sup>236</sup> Hostages were captured on 21 July 2004, but were released unharmed on 02 September as a result of sustained diplomatic efforts from both sides. For more, see *Annual Report, 2004-05*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 235, p.08.

<sup>237</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations, no. 233.

<sup>238</sup> As per Brahimi's Timetable that intended to democratise the Iraqi political system, the elections were held on 30 January 2005, which resulted in the formation of the 'Iraqi National Assembly' (legislature) that approved the Iraqi Transitional Government (executive). IIG was a caretaker government that was in place between May 2005 and May 2006. Subsequently, the 'Iraqi National Assembly' (legislature) drafted the constitution and ratified it in the form of a referendum, held on 15 October 2005. This Iraqi Transitional Government overlooked the drafting process. This followed the elections on 15 December 2005, which provided the First Permanent Government (Executive and Legislature) that assumed responsibilities in May 2006 and replaced the Transitional Government. See *Annual Report, 2005-06*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.62. Also see annexure 02.

Resolution 1546, which was unanimously adopted on 8 June 2004. As the plan was provisioned, an Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) took over sovereignty on 30 June 2004, from CPA, and both the CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council were dissolved. This newly-created IIG entirely took over the responsibility to govern and administer Iraq. In the second step of the Brahimi Plan that was implemented in mid-August 2004, the UN-facilitated the convening of a representative 'National Conference', composed of over a few thousand delegates, who in turn, selected the members of the Interim National Council, a body established to advise the IIG on policy issues.

The UN played a crucial yet limited role in organising elections that took place in January 2005, which resulted in the appointment of a Transitional Government in May 2005 (comprising both an executive led by Ayad Allawi and a legislature called 'Iraqi National Assembly'). A major aspect of the UN Security Council Resolution 1546 addressed the critical issue of the multinational force's status and its impending relationship with IIG. It provisioned for a security partnership between the Multinational Security Force (MSF) and the IIG, which was made contingent upon the discretion of the IIG. Moreover, it discussed the complete transfer of economic powers, including the disbursal of the Development Fund of Iraq and the Oil-For-Food Programme.<sup>239</sup>

India also welcomed the UNSCR 1546,<sup>240</sup> calling it the "first step in the evolution of political process in Iraq."<sup>241</sup> India established relations with the Interim Government and felicitated interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and interim External Affairs Minister Hoshiyar Zibari.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1546 was adopted unanimously on 8 June 2004 that endorsed the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor Lakhdar Brahimi's timetable for a political transition in Iraq, which was formulated in consultation with Iraqis. Notably, the Resolution intended the United Nations to play a leading role in the process, as per the request of the Iraqi Governing Council and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq.

<sup>241</sup> *Annual Report, 2004-05*, Ministry of External Affairs.

India also expressed its intention and commitment to play a role in reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in Iraq. The Special Envoy for West Asia, Ambassador C. R. Gharekhan, paid an official visit to Iraq in May 2005 (after the Transitional Government was announced) to reiterate India's cooperation in economic rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in Iraq. Afterwards, when Nouri al-Maliki formed the First Permanent Government in May 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh promptly congratulated Maliki on his victory. He also conveyed "India's willingness to continue its assistance in the reconstruction of Iraq and to cooperate with Iraq in all areas of mutual interest" while hoping for lasting peace, prosperity and stability in Iraq.<sup>242</sup>

**Table 1: Tenures of Iraq's Prime Ministers**

PRIME MINISTER	TERM
Ayad Allawi	1 June 2004 – 2 May 2005
Ibrahim al-Jaafari	3 May 2005 – 19 May 2006
Nouri al-Maliki	20 May 2006 – 7 Sept 2014
Haider al-Abadi	8 Sept 2014 – 24 Oct 2018
Adil Abdul-Mahdi	25 Oct 2018 – 5 May 2020
Mustafa Al-Kadhimi	6 May 2020 – Present

**Source:** Compiled by author from MEA Annual Reports and several media items.

By 2010, Iraq seemed to have consolidated its democratic processes and institutions. The elections to the 325-member Council of Representatives (COR) were held successfully in March 2010. After eight months, all parties reached an agreement on forming the new national unity government. Jalal Talabani was re-elected as President, and incumbent Prime Minister Nuri Kamel al-Maliki retained his post for the second consecutive term. India's President and Prime Minister congratulated Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Prime Minister Nouri Kamel al-Maliki, respectively, on the assumption of their offices.

<sup>242</sup> *Annual Report, 2006-07*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.65.

Partly because of Iraq's complex transition to democracy and in part, due to India's non-participation in the process, the bilateral relations hardly witnessed any significant events. This was also manifested in the low-brow engagement with the democratically-elected governments that came after CPA—the interim government of Ayad Allawi and the transitional government of Ibrahim al-Jafari (see table 1). The rest of this period was marked by low-frequency visits: the Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Ali-Shariastani's visit (in May 2007), a visit by seven-member trade delegation (in February 2009) and the visit by a 21-member delegation of officials, along with a business delegation led by Fauzi Franso Hariri, Iraq's Minister of Industries and Minerals (in February 2010).<sup>243</sup> Meanwhile, in February 2009, Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, while transiting through India, urged India to participate in the reconstruction and development sectors in Iraq, particularly its power sector.<sup>244</sup>

### ***Economic Engagement***

Regarding trade-related aspects, the import of crude oil from Iraq restarted in FY 2006-07. The same year, India imported crude that amounted to 11.70 per cent of India's total crude imports for that financial year.<sup>245</sup> Although crude continued to constitute an overwhelming majority of the trade, other smaller items—mostly food items—were again placed into the trade basket. Later, the crude import in FY 2009-10 amounted to US\$ 6.9 billion, which stood nearly 9.01 per cent of India's total crude imports, with Iran and Saudi Arabia exporting roughly 18.13 per cent and 13.15 per cent to India, respectively.<sup>246</sup> During the same period, India's bilateral trade with Iraq totalled US\$ 7.5 billion (1.61 per cent of India's total trade), of which crude represented the lion's share.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations: Iraq, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 2020. For more, see annexure 4.

<sup>244</sup> *Annual Report, 2008-09*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.12.

<sup>245</sup> Figures obtained from Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

India expressed and pursued its strong commitment to humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Iraq.<sup>248</sup> Accordingly, Indian investments in Iraq focused primarily on reconstruction and infrastructure developments. In 2003, soon after the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's "Flash Appeal" to the international community to support Iraq, India committed US\$ 20 million for assistance in terms of "supply of milk powder through [the] World Food Programme, training of Iraqi Foreign Service officers in diplomacy, and other Iraqi officials in Information Technology."<sup>249</sup> Following these commitments at the Madrid meeting in October 2003, India committed US\$ 10 million through Trust Funds in the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI), which was created to ensure investments, reconstruction and development of Iraq.

In February 2004, Indian career diplomat R. M. Abhyankar led a delegation to the 'Iraq Donors Conference' held in Abu Dhabi, which was a successor to the earlier Madrid Conference. This Conference led to the formation of a 13-member Donors Committee that pledged to utilise the funds in the reconstruction of Iraq through two trust funds administered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), respectively.<sup>250</sup> The next round of the Donors Conference on International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IFFRI) took place in Doha (May 2004), followed by another in Tokyo (October 2004) and Jordan (July 2005). The same year, the Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) K. Natwar Singh also attended an International Conference on Iraq in Brussels that discussed the peculiarities of reconstruction efforts in Iraq, which the US/EU had organised.

### ***Capacity-Building***

Apart from supporting the reconstruction of Iraq, India launched various training programmes and modules that aimed to build and enhance Iraqi capacity at the government and the people's level. Under

<sup>248</sup> *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.54.

<sup>249</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations, no. 243.

<sup>250</sup> *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 248.

its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, India trained Iraqi officials in various training and professional institutions. Moreover, India has carried out humanitarian programmes in association with the UN to provide food to the Iraqi people and also pledged US\$ 1.2 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) to procure and supply infant formula milk.

In addition, India contributed US\$ 2.5 million to the Iraq Trust Fund.<sup>251</sup> Under the Government of India's ITEC Programme, India provided communication and information technology programmes that enabled Iraqis' training and expertise. R. M. Abhyankar, then Secretary for West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Division at the Ministry of External Affairs, made multiple visits following the 2003 invasion. In February-March 2003, India trained 15 Iraqi diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) sent a post-War delegation to Iraq while also organising a "Focus Iraq" Conference in New Delhi in October 2003.<sup>252</sup> The number of training slots allotted for Iraqi officials under the ITEC Programme was increased from 75 (earlier) to 125 annually in 2005.

Similarly, there was an increase in the number of higher education scholarships offered to Iraqi students from an earlier 30 to 50.<sup>253</sup> Notably, India has also trained 30 Iraqi electoral officers in India.<sup>254</sup> In 2008-09, India increased the existing technical training slots for Iraqi to 100.<sup>255</sup> Similarly, the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC) provided 228 Iraqi officials in the oil sector with requisite training. Meanwhile, India continued to provide academic opportunities, with scholarships to 50 Iraqi students for higher education under the Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme CEPSS and the General Cultural

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<sup>251</sup> *Annual Report, 2003-04*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 248, p.54.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.

<sup>253</sup> *Annual Report, 2004-05*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.52.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Annual Report, 2008-09*, Ministry of External Affairs.

Scholarship Scheme (GCSS) each year.<sup>256</sup> A large share of visas granted by the Indian Embassy, were for tourist and medical purposes, which indicates the recognition of quality and trust in Indian medical services among ordinary Iraqis.<sup>257</sup>

India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between its Election Commission and the United Nations, for 'Cooperation in Electoral Assistance' on 29 August 2004. The MoU aimed at providing training to electoral officials in Iraq in conducting the elections with the help and support of the United Nations. An amount of US\$ 5 million was also allocated from the IRFFI.<sup>258</sup>

The year 2010 proved notable for Iraq and India-Iraq bilateral ties. The Parliamentary elections for the 325-member Council of Representatives (COR) were successfully organised, and the new National Unity Government came to power. While Jalal Talabani was re-elected, incumbent Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki continued for a second term. India welcomed this return to normalcy in Iraq as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh congratulated his Iraqi counterparts for their re-election. This positive attitude was further reflected in Indian decisions: lifting the 'Advisory against travelling to Iraq' in May 2010 and reinstating an Ambassador to Baghdad the following year. These decisions aimed to foster confidence within Indians who wanted to travel to Iraq for employment and pilgrimage. For 2010-11, the ITEC slots for Iraq were increased from an earlier 100 to 120. A similar increase was witnessed in other capacity-building programmes. Under the Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme (CEPSS) and the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSS), sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), India had increased the number of scholarships for Iraqi students to 55 per year for pursuing higher studies in India. The IOC also expanded its training programmes to cover various subjects related to the downstream oil sector. These

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<sup>256</sup> *Annual Report, 2009-10*, Ministry of External Affairs, pp.69-70.

<sup>257</sup> *Annual Report, 2008-09*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 255, p.67.

<sup>258</sup> *Annual Report, 2004-05*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 253, p.123.

relaxations and boost to increase people-to-people contacts was illustrated with a significant upsurge in visa applications approved by the Indian Embassy in Baghdad. Between January-December 2010, the Embassy of India in Baghdad issued nearly 27,848 visas to Iraqi nationals who travelled to India for educational, medical and tourist purposes.<sup>259</sup>

## **Oil-For-Food Programme**

In April 2004, Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed the Independent Inquiry Committee (or Paul Volcker Committee) to investigate the misappropriation of funds, misdealing and corruption in the UN's Oil-For-Food Programme.<sup>260</sup> The sanctions in the aftermath of the Gulf Crisis (1990-91) created severe crises in terms of food shortages, infrastructural needs and basic medical needs. The Oil-For-Food Programme was meant to provide ordinary Iraqis with food, medicines, and other humanitarian needs in exchange for Iraqi oil sold in the international market to pay for these items only.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, the Programme was designed to avoid the mounting pressure of sanctions on the Iraqi public. The logic of imposition of sanctions was to avoid the misuse of oil revenues by Saddam Hussein for military purposes, thus ensuring safeguard measures against Saddam's potential military ambitions.

Since the Programme was the single major source for generating revenue for Iraq, Saddam Hussein used the loopholes in the Programme

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<sup>259</sup> *Annual Report, 2010-11*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.42.

<sup>260</sup> For the Report of the Volcker Committee, see "Manipulation of the Oil-For-Food Programme by the Iraqi Regime: Oil Transitions and Illicit Payments, Humanitarian Goods and Illicit Payments, The Escrow Bank and the Inspection Companies, Other Related Issues," Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-For-Food Programme, 27 October 2005, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130823070841/http://www.iic-offp.org/documents/IIC%20Final%20Report%2027Oct2005.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>261</sup> "Resolution 986 (1995)," United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 14 April 1995, at [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/986\(1995\)](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/986(1995)) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

to funnel money. The intricate process involved kickbacks and payments to various third-parties and sometimes States to obtain funds. The corruption in the Programme was endemic and had been sustained for years before an official inquiry committee examined its misgivings. The Volcker Committee named India's Congress Party and Natwar Singh's family—who at the time was serving as India's Foreign Minister in the Congress-led UPA government—in the list of recipients of kickbacks in the Programme. Soon, when the evidence suggesting the same emerged, Natwar Singh had to resign from the position of EAM.<sup>262</sup> The Committee noted that a company called Hamdan Exports associated with Jagat Singh (Natwar's son) and Andaleeb Sehgal (Jagat's childhood friend) purportedly played the role of an intermediary for illegal sales of oil to a Swiss firm named Masefield AG. The firm (Masefield AG) paid kickbacks (referred to as surcharges in the transaction) to Iraq, as well as the intermediary company and people associated with it. Natwar Singh is said to have facilitated this transaction by introducing his son and his friend to representatives of Masefield AG.<sup>263</sup> Anil Mathrani, the then Indian Ambassador to Croatia and previously a confidant of Natwar Singh, affirmed that Natwar Singh

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<sup>262</sup> Hari Kumar, "Indian Minister Stripped of Post Amid Charges of Kickbacks," *The New York Times*, 8 November, 2005, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/08/world/indian-minister-stripped-of-post-amid-charges-of-kickbacks.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>263</sup> A domestic inquiry, led by former Supreme Court judge Raghunandan Swarup Pathak (known as the Justice Pathak Committee) also averred the allegations, confirming that Natwar Singh's relatives (son and few others) had received financial payoffs (kickbacks) by procuring oil coupons based on the recommendations given by Natwar Singh. However, the Committee gave a clean chit to the Congress Party of all charges. Following the Committee's report, Jagat Singh was expelled from the Congress party, while Natwar Singh was dismissed from the Cabinet, after which his party membership was also suspended. See Saurabh Shukla, "Oil-for-food scandal: How Natwar Singh used 2001 Iraq visit to secure deals," *India Today*, 12 December 2005, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20051212-oil-for-food-scandal-how-natwar-singh-used-2001-iraq-visit-to-secure-deals-786455-2005-12-12> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

used an official visit to Iraq (2001) as an opposition party member to seal the deal.<sup>264</sup>

The oil-for-food episode cast a bad light on the already fragile Indo-Iraqi ties. This was further compounded by the absence of an Ambassador in Baghdad, which left India with limited scope to minimise the impact. Amidst the changing regional matrix, more fateful was the fact that while other actors were actively engaging Iraq, India made minimal efforts to resuscitate bilateral relations. By late 2008 and early 2009, the Iraqi political scene had become stable, as evident by the major oil firms' huge participation in the international conference in Baghdad. India, for its part, maintained its distance. And it was not before 2011 that an ambassador was reinstated or an official visit was organised. Two years later, in June 2013, Salman Khurshid, as the Minister for External Affairs, paid an official visit. Therefore, during the crucial period after the 2003 US-invasion, when the connection and communication were to be the highest, it had been the lowest since the relations were established.

### **RENEWED ENGAGEMENT (2011-20)**

The period between 2011 and 2020 witnessed the resuscitation of the bilateral relationship, beginning with the reinstatement of the Ambassador by India in Baghdad. It saw some high-level visits, notably by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to New Delhi in 2013. From the Indian side, consecutive Ministers of State for External Affairs have made recurring visits, although no high-level engagement at the level of EAM has occurred. Bilateral trade picked up, with Iraq regularly featuring among the top three suppliers of crude to India throughout the decade. Following the US withdrawal in 2011, various investment opportunities arose in Iraq, which involved Indian firms and industries.

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<sup>264</sup> Saurabh Shukla, Ibid; Saurabh Shukla, "Iraq oil deal scam: Subramanian Swamy charges Jagat Singh, Natwar's son denies any role," *India Today*, 14 November 2005, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20051114-iraq-oil-deal-scam-subramanian-swamy-charges-jagat-singh-788773-2005-11-14> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

In terms of challenges, the rise of the Islamic State posed innumerable challenges to India's interests in Iraq. However, this had relatively less impact on crude imports from Iraq.

Meanwhile, India also made overtures to Kurds in Northern Iraq, openly holding a meeting with the representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). India opened a Consulate in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, in August 2016. The programmes aimed at capacity-building also gained traction, in spite of Da'esh occupation. In short, after the Oil-For-Food fiasco in the previous decade, India's Iraq policy slowly started gaining some strength with renewed engagement across various sectors, particularly the energy sector.

### **Political Engagement**

Under the *pro tempore* governments of Ayad Allawi and Ibrahim al-Jaafari, there was scepticism from the Indian side as the Iraqi state struggled to adapt to the democratic setup. New Delhi showed signs of warming up to the Maliki government in Baghdad. However, engagement was limited until the Embassy was restored in Baghdad and the Ambassador was in place. Moreover, it was only in Maliki's second term that the Iraqi State developed some stability and India restored full diplomatic ties with Iraq. This was followed by resumption of official visits as visible in India's engagement with the Haidar al-Abadi government (8 September 2014 – 25 October 2018).

As noted earlier, the major shift in engagement occurred with the appointment of S. K. Reddy as India's Ambassador to Iraq in June 2011.<sup>265</sup> A further boost to bilateral relations came with the resumption of high-level exchanges between the two States. From the Indian side, the Minister of External Affairs, Salman Khurshid, paid an official visit to Iraq in June 2013, followed by a high-profile<sup>266</sup> visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to India in August.<sup>267</sup> The visit culminated

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<sup>265</sup> *Annual Report, 2011-12*, Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>266</sup> For details of the visit and the respective agreements signed during the visit, see annexure 11.

<sup>267</sup> *Annual Report, 2013-14*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.36.

in the signing of four MoUs: cooperation in the energy sector, cooperation between the Ministry of External Affairs of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, cooperation between the Foreign Service Institutes of the two countries and cooperation in the field of water resources management.<sup>268</sup>

Consequently, various high-level visits from both sides took place over the decade, which had been almost non-existent over the last two decades. In March 2011, Iraq's Minister of Oil, Abdul Karim al-Luaibi visited India, followed by a visit of Iraqi Minister for Science and Technology in April.<sup>269</sup> In April 2011, a delegation headed by Abdul Kareem Al-Samarai, Iraqi Minister of Science & Technology, visited India to explore cooperation in e-Governance. Labeed Majeed Abbawi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Iraq, visited India in May 2011. Later, in 2012-13, when the High-Level visits resumed, an Iraqi Parliamentary delegation of 28-members, led by Mr Osama Al Nujaifi, President (Speaker) of the Council of Representatives (Parliament) of Iraq, visited India. This December visit came as a result of the joint invitation from the Speaker of Lok Sabha (Lower House), Meira Kumar and Vice-President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha (Upper House), Hamid Ansari. Mohanad Salman Al-Sady, Iraq's Minister of Water Resources, also visited India in May 2013. Hussain Ibrahim Saleh al-Shahristani, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq for Energy Affairs, paid a visit to India in August 2013. In addition, Faleh al-Fayadh, National Security Advisor of Iraq, also visited India in December 2013 and held a discussion with his Indian counterpart.

During this period, the ministerial-level visits also increased in frequency, and their agendas began to expand beyond traditional energy-related issues. In November 2018, a camp was set up in Karbala in

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<sup>268</sup> "List of Documents signed during the State Visit of Mr Nouri al-Maliki, Prime Minister of Republic of Iraq to India," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 23 August 2013, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22114/List\\_of\\_Documents\\_signed\\_during\\_the\\_State\\_Visit\\_of\\_Mr\\_Nouri\\_alMailiki\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_of\\_Republic\\_of\\_Iraq\\_to\\_India\\_August\\_2225\\_2013](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22114/List_of_Documents_signed_during_the_State_Visit_of_Mr_Nouri_alMailiki_Prime_Minister_of_Republic_of_Iraq_to_India_August_2225_2013) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>269</sup> For more detail on visits, see annexure 4.

collaboration with a Jaipur-based organisation to provide artificial limbs to 500 victims of conflict in Iraq. In October 2018, Dr Abdul Razzaq Al-Issa, Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, participated in the DIDAC India-Asian Summit on 'Education and Skills & Exhibition' in New Delhi. Dr Fouad Qassim Mohamed, Deputy Minister of Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, attended the 14<sup>th</sup> Higher Education Summit held in New Delhi in October/November 2018.<sup>270</sup>

Notwithstanding such exchanges, there were no visits at the level of Heads of State after the Islamic State came into existence. From the Indian side, after Da'esh emerged, only the Minister of State for External Affairs (MoS) have been actively visiting Iraq. MoS for External Affairs, M. J. Akbar, made an official visit to Iraq in August 2016 after receiving an invitation from Dr Ibrahim al-Jaafari, Iraqi Foreign Minister. He also paid visits to Karbala while also addressing the small gathering of Indians in Iraq. His successor General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), further gained appreciation for his active diplomacy during the Da'esh occupation of Iraqi territory. During his tenure, he made four visits to Iraq that included a visit to bring back the mortal remains of 39 Indians that were killed by Da'esh and recovered by Iraq's Martyr Foundation. V. Muraleedharan, India's Minister of State of External Affairs, paid a visit to Iraq in September 2019, during which he called on the Iraqi President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In September 2019, Bhartruhari Mahtab, the Indian Member of Parliament, attended the Asian Parliamentary Assembly Meeting in Baghdad to explore parliamentary cooperation. Next month, EAM Dr S. Jaishankar had met with his Iraqi counterpart in Baku on the sidelines of the 18<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit. After the pandemic-induced lockdown ended and travel restrictions were lifted, Dr S. Jaishankar met with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein twice in 2021. The first meeting took place on the sidelines of the UNGA in September, followed by another in October during the Bani Yas Forum in Abu Dhabi.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> *Annual Report, 2018-19*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.114.

<sup>271</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations: Iraq, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 2022.

## Kurdish Issue

Soon after his appointment, India's new ambassador to Iraq, S. K. Reddy, made a maiden<sup>272</sup> trip to the Kurdistan Autonomous Region, and was well received by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).<sup>273</sup> At this time, along with other extra-regional players, India also realised the geo-economic significance of the Kurdistan region.<sup>274</sup> This was the first such visit by any senior Indian official, marking a shift in the Indian approach that had earlier overlooked the issue of the Kurds in favour of the government in Baghdad. One of the earliest instances when India discussed Iraqi Kurds came out in a statement by the Indian President S. Radhakrishnan during President Arif's state visit in 1964. While hosting his Iraqi counterpart, President S. Radhakrishnan commended the former's efforts in dealing with the Kurdish issue. President S. Radhakrishnan noted, "The way in which you [President Arif] have dealt with the problem of the Kurds gives us hope that you will be able to consolidate your country soon."<sup>275</sup>

Ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the Indian State had maintained a supportive posture for the government in Baghdad. However, given, India's increased interests and heightened involvement in Iraq's Kurdistan region have led many to speculate whether India intends to do a volte-face entirely. The engagement in terms of the visit by the Indian Ambassador to Iraq and the Indian decision to open a consulate in Erbil in August 2016 contributed to such speculations. However, in 2017, when the referendum on Iraq's

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<sup>272</sup> First such visit by any Indian Ambassador in an official capacity.

<sup>273</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, *Persian Gulf 2012: India's Relations with the Region*, Middle East Institute at New Delhi (MEI@ND)/Kindle Direct Publishing (Amazon), 2012.

<sup>274</sup> The Kurdistan Autonomous Region remains one of the most untapped regions in Iraq. In the post-2003 period, the business houses and energy giants from the US, the UK, Russia, Turkey and China became excessively participative in Iraq's energy sector, and the post-2010 period witnessed an increased interest in energy reserves in the Kurdistan region.

<sup>275</sup> Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1964. p.99.

Kurdistan region took place, India stopped such speculations as it reaffirmed its commitment to Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The official press release by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs read:

India has always remained steadfast in its support for Iraq in the ongoing war against terrorism and in the efforts to uphold its national sovereignty and preserve territorial integrity. We remain committed to a stable, peaceful, democratic and united Iraq that is able to settle its internal affairs amicably through a peaceful process of dialogue and other constitutional means, which serve the interest of the people of Iraq.<sup>276</sup>

In 2019, MoS paid a visit to Erbil in the Kurdistan Region, as he held discussions with the President and Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. During his visit, he unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi at Sami Abdulrahman Park in Erbil.<sup>277</sup> At the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference (2022), Dr Jaishankar held a meeting with President Nechirvan Barzani. In another meeting, Dr Jaishankar highlighted Indian intentions to carry out capacity-building programmes in the Kurdistan Region in the sectors of health, banking and academics.<sup>278</sup> Previously, while speaking at an education conference in Dohuk, President Barzani emphasised India's success in science, technology, and commerce. He

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<sup>276</sup> "India's position on the Referendum held in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," Ministry of External Relations Government of India, 17 October 2017, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29033/indias+position+on+the+referendum+held+in+the+kurdistan+region+of+iraq> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>277</sup> "President Barzani Receives Indian State Minister," Office of the President of Kurdistan Region – Iraq, 16 September 2019, at <https://presidency.gov.krd/en/president-barzani-receives-indian-state-minister/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>278</sup> "President Nechirvan Barzani meets with Foreign Minister of India," Office of the President of Kurdistan Region – Iraq, 19 February 2022, at <https://presidency.gov.krd/en/president-nechirvan-barzani-meets-with-foreign-minister-of-india/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

declared, "A country like India, despite a violent history of colonization, partition, low incomes, poverty and large population, following many years of continuing experiment, research and assessment have taken substantial steps forward. Today, there are few global companies with no Indian experts and specialists. The main reason behind this achievement was the radical and modern changes in the education system in all aspects and levels."<sup>279</sup>

## Capacity-Building

India continued and partially increased its commitments regarding reconstruction and capacity-building in Iraq, as it actively carried out training of Iraqi diplomats in India's Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi. In 2011-12, India gave out 55 scholarships annually to Iraqi students to pursue higher education under the Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme (CEPSS) and the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSS) of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.<sup>280</sup> During 2010-11, India helped Iraq with its deteriorating public healthcare system, providing training to nearly 50 Iraqi doctors. Similarly, once the travel ban was lifted, the Indian Embassy in Baghdad issued approximately 28,000 visas to Iraqi nationals between January and December 2011.<sup>281</sup> India allotted 120 slots to Iraq under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation, for capacity-building, while the Indian Council of Cultural Relations secured 25 slots under the 'General Cultural Scholarship Scheme'.

In 2012-13, India increased slots for Iraq to 150 under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme to train Iraqi government officials and continued with 55 scholarships to Iraqi

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<sup>279</sup> "President Nechirvan Barzani: We need to re-evaluate system of education and schooling," Office of the President of Kurdistan Region – Iraq, 19 September 2021, at <https://presidency.gov.krd/en/president-nechirvan-barzani-we-must-review-the-education-system/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>280</sup> *Annual Report, 2011-12*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 265, p.42.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

students for higher studies under the CEP and GCSS programmes.<sup>282</sup> The democratic values and cooperation on those values started strengthening, as illustrated by India's earlier efforts in training Iraqi election officials in collaboration with the United Nations.<sup>283</sup>

In 2018, after Iraq announced victory over the Da'esh, India undertook several humanitarian and developmental projects in Iraq. Notably, the Indian government assisted in restoring waterworks in the Sinjar region, supplying equipment to the Martyrs' Foundation, and supplying engineering books to the University of Mosul.<sup>284</sup> In terms of capacity-building, India continued to assist Iraq as the slots to Iraq were increased to 200 in FY 2019-20 under the ITEC programme. Two batches of Iraqi diplomats visited India for training at the FSI (in August/September 2019). In March/April 2019, 18 Iraqi officials from other government departments attended a training programme for English proficiency at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad.<sup>285</sup> From India, nearly 30,000-40,000 Indians visit Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf and Samarra in Iraq for pilgrimage annually. In March 2019, Air India<sup>286</sup> began direct flights from Lucknow to Najaf.<sup>287</sup>

### Islamic State (or Da'esh)

On 13 June 2014, a few days after the Sunni-terror group Da'esh took over Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the mantle of the Great Mosque of Mosul to deliver a sermon during the Friday congregation.<sup>288</sup> In his sermon, besides the boisterous

<sup>282</sup> *Annual Report, 2012-13*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.41.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.

<sup>284</sup> *Annual Report, 2018-19*, Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>285</sup> *Annual Report, 2019-20*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.106.

<sup>286</sup> At that time, Air India was a public corporation that was privatised in October 2021.

<sup>287</sup> *Annual Report, 2019-20*, Ministry of External Affairs, no. 285, p.106.

<sup>288</sup> Martin Chulov, "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi emerges from shadows to rally Islamist followers," *The Guardian*, 6 July 2014, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/06/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-isis> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

assertion of his ideology, Baghdadi made a clarion call to the Muslims globally to join his Caliphate. At an astounding pace, individuals joined the Islamic State,<sup>289</sup> as it took over substantial portions of Iraq and the civil war beleaguered Syria while simultaneously taking full control of the civil machinery in the captured territories. The governance tasks were vast and expansive, including collecting taxes, water supply and judicial responsibilities. The conflict economy and Da'esh's control over

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<sup>289</sup> The onslaught of the Islamic State attracted a wider scholarly community that analysed various religious, theological and strategic facets of the Islamic State. For this research, several studies have been consulted, but the discussions have been limited to India-Iraq relations and how Da'esh impacted bilateral relations. For the Islamic State and its India connection, see Kabir Taneja, *The ISIS Peril: The World's Most Feared Terror Group and its Shadow in South Asia*, Penguin Random House India Gurgaon, 2019; Stanly Johny, *The ISIS Caliphate: From Syria to the Doorsteps of India*, Bloomsbury, New Delhi, 2018. Kabir Taneja and Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "The Islamic State in India's Kerala: A primer," Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 15 October 2019, at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-islamic-state-in-indias-kerala-a-primer-56634/> (Accessed 26 February 2022); Vikram Rajakumar, "Tamil Nadu in the Shadow of ISIS," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 7(6), July 2015, pp. 2-17. For insights into Islamic State's efforts post-decline in the physical territory, see Charlie Winter and Haroro J. Ingram, "Why ISIS Is So Good at Branding Its Failures as Successes," *The Atlantic*, 18 September 2017, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/isis-propaganda/540240/> (Accessed 26 February 2022); Paul Staniland, "Whither ISIS? Insights from Insurgent Responses to Decline," *The Washington Quarterly*, 40(3), 2017, pp. 29-43. For a window into the Islamic State's ideology and *modus operandi*, see Adil Rasheed, *ISIS: Race to Armageddon*, Vij Books India, New Delhi, 2015. For a history of the Islamic State phenomenon, see Simon Mabon and Stephen Royle, *The Origins of ISIS: The Collapse of Nations and Revolution in the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, London & New York, 2017; Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016; For ideological perspectives of the Islamic State, see Sami Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*, I. B. Tauris, London & New York, 2015; Michael Griffin, *Islamic State: Rewriting History*, Pluto Press, London, 2016; Noah Feldman, *The Fall and the Rise of the Islamic State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008. For journalistic accounts, see Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, HarperCollins, London, 2015; Lester B. Stone, *ISIS: The New Face of Terrorism*, Alpha Editions, 2015; Shrikant Paranjpe, (ed.), *ISIS: The Challenge and the Response*, Kalinga Publications, New Delhi, 2015.

the oil-producing regions allowed them unprecedented access to funds and resources to expand and sustain their conquests. In short, Da'esh created and managed a proto-State within the captured territories of Iraq and Syria.

For Indo-Iraq relations, the Da'esh episode turned out to be the most significant test of bilateral ties since the US-led invasion of 2003. For all reasons and purposes, the ideological allure of the Islamic State, its fanaticism, its theatricality and obliviousness to human dignity garnered worldwide attention and presented *sui generis* challenges. For New Delhi, the rise of the Islamic State had two principal challenges: firstly, India's immediate interests in the region were directly threatened by Indian firms, companies, and expatriates living in the Middle East. Such apprehensions rapidly became a reality when reports emerged indicating the detention of Indians working in the Da'esh-captured territories. Secondly, for India, an even more frightening consequence of the rise of the Islamic State was the threat stemming from its ideological allure. Hitherto, Baghdadi's clarion call had successfully inspired individuals worldwide to join the group, including in the West. The fear of radicalisation and a move towards extremism has always been a fearful possibility for any State, but given the potency, reach, and ostensible impact of the Islamic State's propaganda, this presented a serious cause for concern for India.

The Iraqi Ambassador to India informed the media in 2017 about an offer made by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to provide humanitarian and military support to Iraq, sometime before the battle to re-control Mosul started.<sup>290</sup> However, nothing came out of it.

Meanwhile, the fears and suspicion of returnee foreign fighters have a different dimension of threat attached to it. Iraq's Ambassador to India, Fakhri Al Issa, had expressed such concerns while highlighting the fact

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<sup>290</sup> Staff Writer, "India Has Offered Military Assistance to Iraq in Fight Against ISIS: Iraqi Ambassador," *The Wire*, 19 July 2017, at <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-offered-military-assistance-iraq-fight-isis-iraqi-ambassador> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

that some Indians had joined and fought with the Islamic State. He said,

“We know that at least 12 to 15 Indians were among the large number of foreign fighters who fought against our security forces during the ongoing operations in Iraq. Foreign fighters came from different parts of the world, including China, Japan, North and East Africa, to fight in Iraq. We do not know what really happened subsequently to the Indians, but our information is that that (*sic*) is the total number of Indians in IS.”<sup>291</sup>

Furthermore, he noted, “We feel that some of the Indian fighters might have escaped and returned home in the way many foreign fighters returned home in Europe.”<sup>292</sup> Consequently, India responded to these challenges with varying degrees of success. With all the tools available at its disposal, India undertook numerous measures to facilitate the safe return of Indians stranded in the region. For decades, the region’s general precariousness has caused successive Indian governments to carry out vast evacuation missions for Indians working in the region.<sup>293</sup> Undoubtedly, the Gulf Crisis witnessed the largest-ever evacuation, but in the aftermath of ‘Arab Spring’ and with the onslaught of the Islamic State, the evacuation missions faced newer challenges that were previously unfamiliar. In most of the earlier cases, the major concerns remained about the assistance of the host government with evacuation, but with ‘Arab Spring’ and the Islamic State, the host governments had lesser control over the situations and therefore, at times, India had to engage with third parties to facilitate such missions.

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<sup>291</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, “12 to 15 Indians fought alongside IS against Iraqi forces, says Ambassador,” *The Hindu*, 19 July 2017, at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/12-to-15-indians-fought-alongside-is-against-iraqi-forces-envoy/article19307322.ece> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> In 2015, for ‘Operation Raahat’, India established an inter-ministerial “Standing Group for Repatriation of Indian Nationals from Abroad” to coordinate evacuation between the Home, Defence, Shipping and Civil Aviation ministries. However, it was merely an ad-hoc arrangement. Despite recurring events where Indians must be brought back, no mechanisms exist to coordinate between ministries to evacuate stranded Indians.

As per the MEA's admission, there were nearly 22,000 Indians present in Iraq when the conflict began. The detailed breakdown revealed that the majority of the Indians were in Kurdistan (15,000), followed by Basra (3,000), Karbala (1,000), Najaf (2,300), Baghdad (500) and 200 in other cities.<sup>294</sup> The Government categorised these into three categories: Safe, Captive and Stranded, assuring that 15,000 of these 22,000 belonged to the safe category.<sup>295</sup> The Government provided for the air tickets of most of the Indians who came back. As per the Ministry's Annual Report, by 2016, the Indian government had assisted nearly 7,195 Indians safely leaving Iraq.<sup>296</sup>

Early on in the conflict, two groups of Indians were taken captive by Da'esh or affiliated groups. In one case, in Tikrit (Al-Anbar province), 46 Indian nurses working in a local hospital in the city were stranded, needing imminent rescue. By the Government's account, the nurses were taken to Mosul on 3 July by an "unidentified group." They were released and brought back through a special Air India flight that brought back 134 other Indian workers a day later.<sup>297</sup>

In another case, in Mosul, reports emerged that 40 Indian nationals hired by a construction company had been taken hostage by an unidentified group (believed to have allegiance to Da'esh). The new Government in New Delhi pursued numerous diplomatic avenues to track them down. The local support from the Iraqi government proved inadequate, and the approach was made to other persuasive actors in

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<sup>294</sup> "Statement by External Affairs Minister in Rajya Sabha on 'Plight of Stranded Workers from India in Iraq on (04 August 2014)," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, 6 August, 2014, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/23847/statement+by+external+affairs+minister+in+rajya+sabha+on+plight+of+stranded+workers+from+india+in+iraq+on+august+04+2014> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2015-16.

<sup>297</sup> "Statement by External Affairs Minister in Rajya Sabha on 'Plight of Stranded Workers from India in Iraq on (August 04, 2014)," no. 294.

the GCC to get the status of these individuals, but without success. Domestically, the incident caused controversy, with the political opposition contending that the issue had been mishandled by the Government. At the time, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj proclaimed in Parliament that the Government had reason to believe that the stranded citizens were alive, citing more than six external sources. She also clarified that the contact with these sources was indirect. Further, alluding to these sources, the Government iterated that these 40 citizens were indeed alive.

Notwithstanding such details, controversy erupted after an individual named Harjeet Masih, one of the 40 stranded Indians, survived and was brought back home. Masih claimed that all the other abductees had been killed, and he was the lone survivor. There were intense debates within India after Masih's statement. The whole episode spanned over four years before any meaningful conclusion was reached on the issue. Sushma Swaraj cogently and continually argued that she would not declare the abductees dead until credible evidence suggests the same. Addressing Parliament, the EAM avowed:

"I do not have any concrete proof of them being alive, but I also do not have any concrete evidence of them having been killed. So it is not only wise but also obligation of responsibility that I should choose second option and keep on searching them."<sup>298</sup>

Later, she announced:

"...till the time I have no concrete evidence, I will continue the search because, I want to repeat this, declaring somebody dead

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<sup>298</sup> "English Translation of statement by External Affairs Minister in Lok Sabha on 39 Indian nationals missing in Iraq (26 July 2017)," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 27 July 2017, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/28734/english+translation+of+statement+by+external+affairs+minister+in+lok+sabha+on+39+indian+nationals+missing+in+iraq+july+26+2017> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

without any proof is a sin and I am not going to be a partner in this sin."<sup>299</sup>

The opposition in Parliament blamed the Government for misleading the people and mishandling the matter. To which, the EAM responded:

"After Harjeet's story we had two options, first that we believe it is true and declare them dead and stop searching for them. Second option, because of contradictions in his statement we would not accept his version and we keep on searching for them. So it was not only the obligation of wisdom but it was also obligation of government's responsibility that discarding his statement we must engage in their search and that is what we did ... After that I say this to the House that now the House should tell me whether I should believe in Harjeet's statement and stop their search or I should believe in our other good sources who are giving us hope that they have not been killed and keep on searching for them? I believe it is the obligation of my wisdom that I should continue with the search and it is the obligation of my responsibility also that I should continue with the search."<sup>300</sup>

India reached out to all the major stakeholders in Iraq to secure the release of the abductees. Besides the GCC, the Foreign Ministry approached Russia, Turkey, local Kurdish chieftains for information and help on the issue.<sup>301</sup> Later, in 2018, when the confirmation was

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<sup>300</sup> "English translation of Response by External Affairs Minister in Rajya Sabha regarding 39 Indian nationals missing in Iraq (27 July 2017)," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 28 July 2017, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/28757/english+translation+of+response+by+external+affairs+minister+in+rajya+sabha+regarding+39+indian+nationals+missing+in+iraq+july+27+2017> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>301</sup> "Iraq crisis: Besides Saudi Arabia, India seeks Russia's help to secure release of abducted Indians," *The Economic Times*, 28 June 2014, at <https://m.economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/iraq-crisis-besides-saudi-arabia-india-seeks-russias-help-to-secure-release-of-abducted-citizens/articleshow/37346660.cms> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

made about the killings of 39 abductees, the EAM admitted in the Rajya Sabha:

“Today I have come here to fulfil that promise of mine. Today I have concrete evidence for both the things. First, [the] story of Harjit Masih was not true, and the other, I am saying this with a heavy heart, that those missing people have been killed. And I would like to put the evidences of both the things in front of you.”<sup>302</sup>

Former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmed has distinguished these two hostage situations. In the case of the nurses captured in Al-Anbar province, he speculates that India might have communicated with former Ba’ath military officials who were part of the Da’esh cadre. In the case of Mosul, these connections were absent, and hence the Government failed even to obtain the correct information on the status of the abductees.<sup>303</sup>

## Indians the Islamic State

Regarding the threat of Indians joining the Islamic State, India had more encouraging outcomes. Astonishingly, the number of Indians who joined the Islamic State is estimated to be less than a hundred.<sup>304</sup> These numbers are minuscule when juxtaposed with the Indian Muslim population, which is nearly 17.2 million (14.23 per cent of the total population).<sup>305</sup> There have been different explanations for this. Some

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<sup>302</sup> “English Translation of EAM’s address in the Rajya Sabha on the issue of 39 Indians in Iraq (March 20, 2018),” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 22 March 2018, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29704/english+translation+of+eams+address+in+the+rajya+sabha+on+the+issue+of+39+indians+in+iraq+march+20+2018> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>303</sup> Author’s interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>304</sup> “Tracking ISIS’ Influence in India,” Observer Research Foundation (ORF). See <https://trackingisis.orfonline.org/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>305</sup> Figures obtained by (C-1) Population By Religious Community, Indian Census 2011, at <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

have argued (including then Home Minister Rajnath Singh) that India's family structure and value systems inhibit Muslims from joining.<sup>306</sup> Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad, forwards doctrinal, cultural and political reasons to explain this phenomenon.<sup>307</sup> Dr Adil Rasheed, Research Fellow at MP-IDSA, insists that the Indian democratic environment "inhibits the rise of exclusivist and violently extreme groups like Da'esh and al Qaeda to fester."<sup>308</sup> The logistical troubles and low passport holdings among Muslims were other major impediments.<sup>309</sup> Various reports of racism and mistreatment of Indian Muslims joining the Da'esh explain the reluctance on the part of other Indians to take the journey.<sup>310</sup>

Not to mention, the intense scrutiny by Indian authorities at the local, national and global levels has also provided a bulwark against the influence of the Da'esh.<sup>311</sup> Earlier, the Islamic State handled its

<sup>306</sup> Chethan Kumar, "Muslim families preventing ISIS influence from spreading: Rajnath Singh," *The Times of India*, 1 January 2016, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Muslim-families-preventing-ISIS-influence-from-spreading-Rajnath-Singh/articleshow/50408088.cms> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>307</sup> Talmiz Ahmad, "Why Indian Muslims Reject Extremist Doctrines," *The Wire*, 13 November 2019, at <https://thewire.in/religion/indian-muslims-reject-extremist-doctrines> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>308</sup> Adil Rasheed, "Why Fewer Indians Have Joined ISIS," *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA)*, 31 August 2020, at <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/why-fewer-indians-have-joined-isis-arasheed-310820> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>309</sup> Kabir Taneja, *The ISIS Peril: The World's Most Feared Terror Group and its Shadow in South Asia*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2019.

<sup>310</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "Indian student went to join the Islamic State, but all he got was this lousy job cleaning toilets," *The Washington Post*, 1 December 2014 at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/01/indian-student-went-to-join-the-islamic-state-but-all-he-got-was-this-lousy-job-cleaning-toilets/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>311</sup> Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "Understanding the Indian foreign fighter lacuna," Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 31 January 2020, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/understanding-the-indian-foreign-fighter-lacuna-60921/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

operations in India under its Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) province. Broadcast by the Amaq News Agency, in May 2019, the Islamic State declared *Wilayat-e Hind*, its provincial unit for India.<sup>312</sup> There have been claims of Da'esh-inspired attacks in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>313</sup> By 2019, Indian authorities have arrested 155 people for Islamic State-related activities,<sup>314</sup> followed by scores of arrests and raids in 2020 and 2021. It is hard to argue which of these factors contributed most to the low participation of Indians in the Islamic State; however, it is fair to say that all the factors, in some way or another, explicate the low participation of Indians in the foreign fighter legion of the Islamic State.

Broadly, Indian efforts to fight the Islamic State can be classified at three levels: diplomatic, national and local. At the diplomatic level, India tried to increase its regional and multilateral profiles to facilitate counterterrorism cooperation. On the one hand, India coordinated with other regional countries to bring back its citizens and on the other hand, it sought cooperation in apprehending those citizens trying to join the Islamic State. For instance, in 2015, Turkey deported nine Indians trying to enter Islamic State through the Turkish border. Similarly, in 2018, four Indians were apprehended in Syria who planned to join the Islamic State.<sup>315</sup> At the national level, India attempted to foster various de-radicalisation programmes. Even though the efficacy of such programmes is difficult to ascertain, given the absence of a suitable

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<sup>312</sup> "ISIS announces new 'branch' in India after clashes in Kashmir," *The Economic Times*, 12 May 2019, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/isis-announces-new-branch-in-india-after-clashes-in-kashmir/articleshow/69288536.cms> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>313</sup> In August 2019, the Indian Parliament changed the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir by reorganising it into three Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

<sup>314</sup> "Reply by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri G. Kishan Reddy, in the Lok Sabha on 25 June 2019," at <http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/171/AU526.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>315</sup> "Four Indian youth planning to join ISIS held in Syria," *The Economic Times*, 14 July 2018, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/four-indian-youth-planning-to-join-isis-held-in-syria/articleshow/50572961.cms?from=mdr> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

methodology of de-radicalisation programmes. Yet, the authorities have regarded such efforts as effective against the propaganda of the Islamic State. At the local level, intense scrutiny by state police have restricted the spread of the message and provided the necessary deterrent against individuals trying to become foreign fighters in the Caliphate.

That being said, in the context of the Islamic State, the Indian approach can be characterised as reactionary, where efforts were more in the form of responses to the unfolding crises rather than pursuit of any predetermined measures. Despite the common terror-related challenges, counterterrorism cooperation between India and Iraq has been limited so far. A part of the reason for this was the absence of the Iraqi government's authority during the Islamic State's occupation. However, even after the military defeat of the Islamic State, no concrete cooperation mechanism has been set up between the two countries. Unlike many other countries in the region, India has no MoUs or counterterrorism agreements with Iraq. Lately, India has tried to elevate its counterterrorism cooperation by developing joint working groups and setting up NSA-level engagement with partner countries in the region. However, no such mechanisms exist with Iraq.

As the crisis unfolded, the MEA responded by setting up a 24x7 helpline for communication and dispatched Ambassador Suresh Reddy to Baghdad to handle the situation. As expedient as such steps may be, they cannot compensate for a proper strategy to handle circumstances like these. There is always a vast difference between playing 'catch up' and being 'ahead of the curve'. It is fair to say that the rise and expansion of the Islamic State was shocking for nearly everyone, but the question remains: what mechanisms and practices have been established to avoid a repeat of such fateful events?

There was also a controversial view that the Indian Special Forces could have undertaken an operation to secure the nurses captured in Tikrit. However, this again boils down to the question of planning and preparation. Special Forces operations anywhere in the world are a highly complex phenomenon, necessitating a robust intelligence circuit and support from relevant defence liaisons, among other things. It is an unreasonable demand since the relations had hardly stabilised after the US-led invasion and sectarian conflict. Yet, since the elimination of the Islamic State's territorial control, no corrective measures have been

put in place, nor have any pre-emptive instruments been declared. Critics have correctly argued that the Indian defence capabilities and resources have been inadequately deployed to avoid such pitfalls and gain an edge in such circumstances.<sup>316</sup>

## Iran and the PMF

After the Da'esh occupation of Iraqi territory, Iraq was pushed into sectarian violence. The existing fault lines within Shia-Sunni communities widened as different stakeholders sided with different communities to forward their respective interests, thus, fuelling the existing sectarian conflict further.<sup>317</sup> Although various stakeholders fought against the Islamic State, two major coalitions: the US-led coalition and the Iran-Russia coalition failed to cooperate against the common enemy, illustrating the geopolitical contestation that lingers in the region.

A deleterious outcome of the reign of Islamic State was the indiscriminate expansion of militias in Iraq. This does not mean there were no such militia groups in Iraq earlier, but the sheer numbers and legitimacy that the militia gained during this period continue to haunt the present Iraqi State. The Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Front (PMF)<sup>318</sup> was formed in June 2014 after a *fatwa* (decree) was issued by Ayatollah Sistani. This umbrella organisation was organised under the

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<sup>316</sup> Prakash Katoch, "Iraq: India wastes Army's Special Forces resource," *Indian Defence Review*, 19 June 2014, at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/iraq-india-wastes-armys-special-forces-resource/>, (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>317</sup> Mustafa al-Kadhimi, "Iraqis dive deeper into sectarianism," *Al-Monitor*, 21 December 2015, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/12/iraq-sectarian-division-turkey-intervention.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>318</sup> Also, the Popular Mobilisation Front (PMF) is an umbrella organisation that includes scores of militias, most of which had previously fought the US forces until their eventual departure. See Hassan Abbas, "The Myth and Reality of Iraq's al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces): A Way Forward," Policy Paper, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Amman Office), 2017, at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/13689.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022). Also see Dylan O'Driscoll & Dave van Zoonen, "The Hashd al-Shaabi and Iraq: Subnationalism and the State," Middle East Research Institute (MERI), March 2017, at <http://www.meri-k.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PMF-Report-0.2.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

patronage of the Iraqi Prime Minister's office and was paid for by the Iraqi exchequer. The organisation, with the support of other anti-Islamic State coalitions was able to push the Islamic State out from Iraq.<sup>319</sup> The PMF was instrumental in the fight against the Islamic State, and Iran rendered critical support to them. The PMF remains an essential part of Iran's grand design to bring Shias (like the Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun brigades) from all over the region to fight the Islamic State.<sup>320</sup>

Here, the role of Iran needs critical attention. An open secret within the region, Iranian influence in Iraq's political, economic, religious and security spheres has steadily increased since the US-led invasion.<sup>321</sup> Different reasons and explanations have been given for why the Iranian influence expanded into Iraq. Some regard it as part of Iran's regional ambitions, while Iranians call it a 'forward defence' strategy to counter the US presence in the region.<sup>322</sup> The influence, as noted earlier, is multi-sectoral and expansive. However, security has been the mainstay of such influence, from which influence in other sectors has been expanded.<sup>323</sup>

Broadly speaking, the institutionalisation of the PMF had resulted in the institutionalisation of Iranian influence in Iraq. The commanders and senior leadership of the PMF are Iraqi Shias who had previously

<sup>319</sup> Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, "Iran's ISIS Policy," *International Affairs*, 91(1), 2015, pp. 1-15.

<sup>320</sup> Tobias Schneider, "The Fatemiyoun Division: Afghan Fighters in the Syrian Civil War," Middle East Institute, 15 October 2018, at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/fatemiyoun-division-afghan-fighters-syrian-civil-war>, (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>321</sup> Michael Rubin and Ahmad K. Majidyar, "The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column?," American Enterprise Institute (AEI), 18 July 2014, at <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-shiites-of-the-middle-east-an-iranian-fifth-column> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>322</sup> "Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East. Brussels: International Crisis Group," International Crisis Group, 2018, at [https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/184-iran-s-priorities-in-a-turbulent-middle-east\\_1.pdf](https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/184-iran-s-priorities-in-a-turbulent-middle-east_1.pdf), (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>323</sup> "Iran's Networks of Influence on the Middle East," International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), November 2019.

fought alongside Iran against Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. After the Iran-Iraq War, these militia leaders had been in exile in Iran, only to be brought back in 2003. These militia groups were at the forefront of the insurgency against the US (and Coalition) forces.<sup>324</sup>

However, when the US withdrew from Iraq and the political scene began to settle, these militia leaders replicated their influence and success on the political stage. They have been elected to the Iraqi Parliament and have even held ministerial positions.<sup>325</sup> As per a study, of 67 PMU major militias operating in Iraq, roughly 40 have close association with Iran.<sup>326</sup> Meanwhile, the support to their militias continued from Iran, which involved intricate balancing that never allowed either of the militia groups (or their leaders) to dominate. The alliance system (akin to India's coalition politics of the 1990s) in the Iraqi parliament is a testament to this fragmented power structure, which has allowed Iran to exert unique influence in Iraqi affairs.

After the war, the presence of the militias has become a challenge for the civilian leadership. These militias have not settled into post-war Iraq. From factional infighting to misconduct and corruption charges, Iraq is encountering myriad challenges. Further, they are unwilling to disarm, making it extremely difficult to control or regulate them. A stark example of this was when Prime Minister Kadhimi arrested 14 members of the Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) militia group close to Iran; the group responded by sending 150 odd militiamen to the safeguarded Green Zone, who then conducted a show of strength in front of the Prime Minister's residence. Needless to say, the charges against the KH members were dropped, and they were released.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Nader Uskowi, *Temperature Rising: Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Wars in the Middle East*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, 2019.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Nicholas Heras, "Iraq's Fifth Column: Iran's Proxy Network," Middle East Institute, 17 October 2017, at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iraqs-fifth-column-irans-proxy-network> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>327</sup> Prabhat Jawla, "Iraq under Mustafa Al-Kadhimi: Turning Over a New Leaf," *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA)*, 7 December 2020, at <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/iraq-under-mustafa-al-kadhimi-pjawla-071220> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

According to a report by the United Nations, in August 2020, more than 10,000 Islamic State fighters had been active in Iraq and Syria.<sup>328</sup> Such estimations tend to be credible when attacks are perpetrated by the Islamic State in Baghdad and other major cities of Iraq and Syria. As such, the supporters of the PMF have argued that given that the threat from the Islamic State continues under new facades, these militias are needed to support the hard-pressed Iraqi military to fight the Islamic State. However, at the same time, the presence of militias begs the critical question about their role when they are not fighting the Islamic State. Their creation was for the assistance of the traditional military units rather than being a parallel armed force. The law-and-order situation has become dire in Iraq, with militias picking fights with the US forces or, worse, carrying out retributive killings of opposing sects. Such are not isolated examples but widely documented facts illustrated repeatedly through the discovery of mass graves in the country.

### **Post-Islamic State Cooperation in Iraq**

After Iraq regained its territory from the Islamic State, reconstruction became the focus of all the actors involved. The International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq was organised in Kuwait in February 2018, where India was represented by the MoS for External Affairs, M. J. Akbar, who explained Indian's interests in the reconstruction of Iraq.<sup>329</sup> The MoS stated:

“We welcome Baghdad’s announcement that it is now open for investment. We will play our part with project-specific proposals.

<sup>328</sup> “Repatriating Detained Foreign Fighters, Their Families Key to Combating Threat Posed by Islamic State, Counter-Terrorism Officials Warn Security Council,” Press Release, United Nations, 24 August 2020, at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14282.doc.htm> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>329</sup> “Statement by Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs at the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq in Kuwait,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 February 2018, at <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29485/statement+by+shri+mj+akbar+minister+of+state+for+external+affairs+at+the+international+conference+for+reconstruction+of+iraq+in+kuwait+february+14+2018> Accessed 26 February 2022).

We support the important role assigned to private sector investors in the rebuilding of the terrorist-affected areas in Iraq... Our companies have long experience in undertaking projects in the Gulf Region, including Iraq. We are willing to play a substantive role in major projects in petrochemicals, health, education, infrastructure and other sectors. We will also look at any specific requests for rehabilitation projects and essential supplies like medicines, equipment, etc., as required for internally displaced persons as part of our assistance programme."<sup>330</sup>

Indo-Iraq security cooperation after 2003 largely remained inexistent. The only tangible cooperation came in response to the Islamic State. Even that could be described as a fragmentary and a knee-jerk response. The fact that India, a country with deep interests in Iraq's political and security apparatus, had to reach out to the GCC and other actors to secure its citizens' release is a glaring example of why India needs to engage.

Nevertheless, the visit by Iraq's National Security Adviser Fayah al-Fayadh in December 2013 was a welcoming step. The visit resulted in the signing of a bilateral agreement between India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)<sup>331</sup> in New Delhi and Iraq's Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies in Baghdad.<sup>332</sup> Al-Fayadh maintained that cooperation in the field of counterterrorism needs to be carried on in two forms: "information sharing" and "capacity building." However, there was no follow up on such efforts.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Earlier, the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) was renamed Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) in honour of former Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar. See "Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Renamed as Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses," Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India, 18 February 2020, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1603513> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>332</sup> "India and Iraq Must Cooperate to Counter Terrorism: National Security Advisor of Iraq," Press Release: *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)*, 20 December 2013, at <https://idsa.in/pressrelease/IndiaandIraqMustCooperatetoCounterTerrorism> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

All in all, the internal security challenges within Iraq have grown to become a crucial impediment for any cooperation in Indo-Iraqi bilateral relations. This may appear intuitive but the Indian MEA only in 2019-20 Annual Report acknowledged, "An unstable governmental structure and continued challenges of internal security in Iraq prevented both sides from being able to revive political engagement to its optimal."<sup>333</sup>

## **Economic Engagement**

The economic connect remained the most successful domain of cooperation since 2003. The economic cooperation only ended when the Islamic State took over power; however, as Iraq regained its territory, the economic dimension again strengthened. Inarguably, crude trade constitutes the majority component of the total trade between India and Iraq. Following the Gulf Crisis, the oil trade ceased, owing to sanctions on Iraq by the international community. India purchased oil sporadically during this period, but overall, the trade remained limited. This meant that the volume of trade was defined by non-oil commodities, which yielded very low value, particularly when compared to the figures when crude was imported. In 2003, crude imports were halted and did not resume until FY 2006-07 (see table 2). After this, Indo-Iraqi trade steadily picked up, registering gains in FY 2011-12 that could be ascribed largely to increased purchase by India (figure 2). Similarly, during the Islamic State occupation, trade again diminished but stayed high in value, even higher than the period from 2006 to 2011.

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<sup>333</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2019-20.

**Table 2: Oil Imports from Iraq (1996-2020)**

Year	India's Crude Imports From Iraq India's Total Crude Imports		India's Total Crude Imports (US\$ Millions)
	Quantity (Thousand Tonnes)	Price (US\$ Millions)	
1996-1997	-	-	5226.68
1997-1998	1503	185.37	4258.09
1998-1999	21762	150.93	3550.58
1999-2000	1159	194.03	9413.21
2000-2001	-	-	14467.21
2001-2002	-	-	12890.32
2002-2003	-	-	16060.65
2003-2004	-	-	18826.77
2004-2005	-	-	26469.63
2005-2006	-	-	38946.32
2006-2007	12831.51	5500.16	47018.75
2007-2008	12635.93	6834.57	64052.5
2008-2009	12222.34	7655.81	77310.75
2009-2010	13883.04	6979.59	77506.56
2010-2011	14767.45	8954.66	92651.77
2011-2012	23769.8	18826.19	134154.97
2012-2013	24240.1	19141.11	144519.72
2013-2014	24576.15	18348.42	143638.53
2014-2015	24017.37	14174.33	116442.86
2015-2016	35694.71	10758.45	65922.98
2016-2017	37759	11616.72	70705.39
2017-2018	45740.46	17544.24	87372.27
2018-2019	46612.69	22265.04	114042.12
2019-2020	51566.68	22764.55	102748.77

Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

**Table 3: India-Iraq Crude Oil Imports (1996-2020)**

Year	INDIA'S CRUDE IMPORT (Percentage)		
	Iraq	Iran	Saudi Arabia
1996-1997	-	*	*
1997-1998	4.35	*	*
1998-1999	4.25	*	*
1999-2000	2.06	*	*
2000-2001	-	*	*
2001-2002	-	*	*
2002-2003	-	*	*
2003-2004	-	*	*
2004-2005	-	*	*
2005-2006	-	*	*
2006-2007	11.70	23.19	13.87
2007-2008	10.67	23.64	15.24
2008-2009	9.90	20.47	14.27
2009-2010	9.01	18.13	13.15
2010-2011	9.66	17.59	9.95
2011-2012	14.03	19.61	8.67
2012-2013	13.24	19.64	6.63
2013-2014	12.77	21.56	5.88
2014-2015	12.17	18.72	6.05
2015-2016	16.32	20.46	6.50
2016-2017	16.43	19.34	12.60
2017-2018	20.08	17.47	10.28
2018-2019	19.52	18.75	10.62
2019-2020	22.16	19.81	0.97

- No Imports Took Place

\* Figures Not Computed

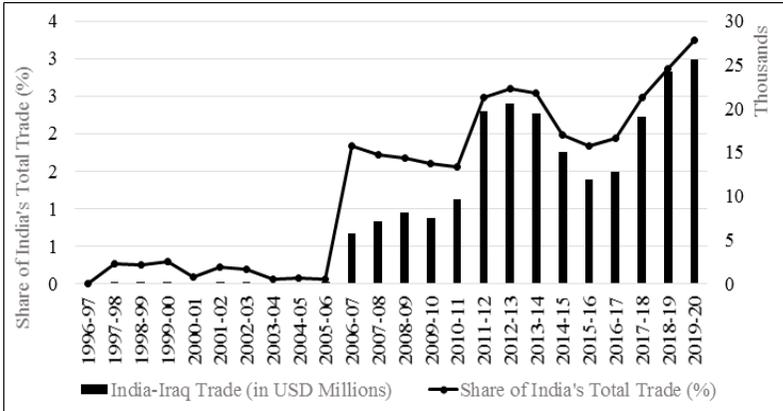
Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

**Table 4: Indo-Iraq Trade Figures (1996-2020)**

Year	India-Iraq Trade (US\$ millions)			India's Total Trade (US\$ millions)			Iraq's Share of India's Total Trade (%)
	Import	Export	Total	Import	Export	Total	
1996-1997	0.04	2.17	2.21	39,132	33,470	72,602	0.003
1997-1998	185	11.2	196	41,484	34,785	76,269	0.26
1998-1999	151	36.3	187	42,389	33,219	75,607	0.25
1999-2000	199	49.3	249	49,738	36,822	86,561	0.29
2000-2001	6.9	84.02	90.9	50,536	44,560	95,097	0.1
2001-2002	0.04	206	206	51,413	43,827	95,240	0.22
2002-2003	0.03	214	214	61,412	52,719	1,14,132	0.19
2003-2004	0.14	75.1	75.3	78,149	63,843	1,41,992	0.05
2004-2005	1.12	131	132	1,11,517	83,536	1,95,053	0.07
2005-2006	2.05	155	157	1,49,166	1,03,091	2,52,256	0.06
2006-2007	5,514	203	5,718	1,85,735	1,26,414	3,12,149	1.83
2007-2008	6,837	272	7,109	2,51,654	1,63,132	4,14,786	1.71
2008-2009	7,709	437	8,147	3,03,696	1,85,295	4,88,992	1.67
2009-2010	7,026	477	7,504	2,88,373	1,78,751	4,67,124	1.61
2010-2011	9,008	678	9,686	3,69,769	2,49,816	6,19,585	1.56
2011-2012	18,918	763	19,682	4,89,320	3,05,964	7,95,283	2.47
2012-2013	19,247	1,278	20,525	4,90,737	3,00,401	7,91,137	2.59
2013-2014	18,520	918	19,438	4,50,200	3,14,405	7,64,605	2.54
2014-2015	14,247	829	15,076	4,48,033	3,10,339	7,58,372	1.99
2015-2016	10,837	1,004	11,841	3,81,008	2,62,291	6,43,299	1.84
2016-2017	11,707	1,111	12,819	3,84,357	2,75,852	6,60,210	1.94
2017-2018	17,615	1,462	19,078	4,65,581	3,03,526	7,69,107	2.48
2018-2019	22,372	1,788	24,161	5,14,078	3,30,078	8,44,157	2.86
2019-2020	23,740	1,878	25,618	4,74,709	3,13,361	7,88,070	3.25

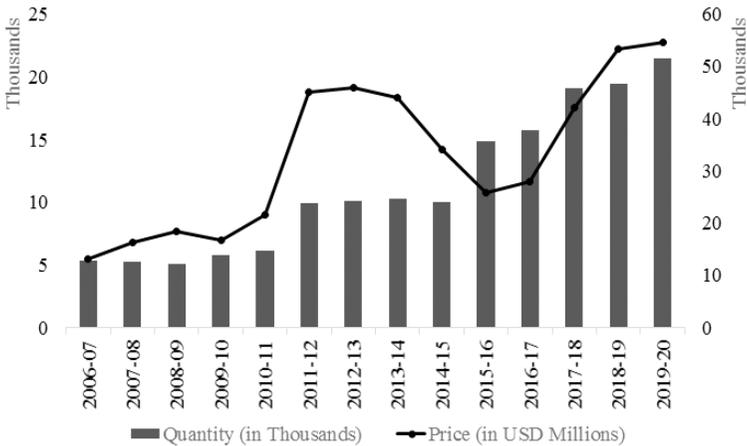
Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

**Figure 2: Indo-Iraqi Trade (1996-2020)**



Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Also, see the successive editions of the *Persian Gulf: India's Relations with the Region* Series (starting from 2012) by the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND), for a more detailed breakdown of trends.

**Figure 3: Indian Import of Iraqi Oil (2006-20)**

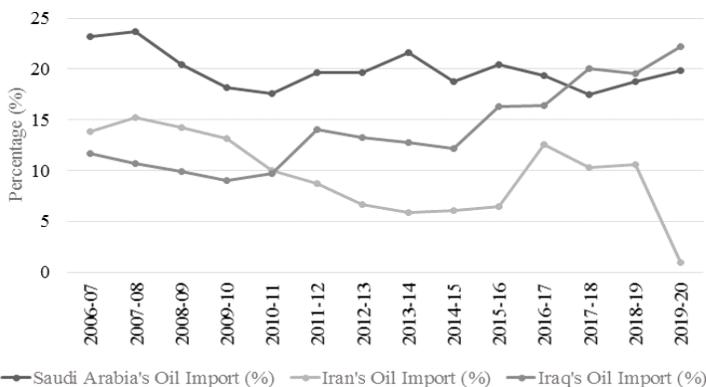


Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Also, see the successive editions of the *Persian Gulf: India's Relations with the Region* Series (starting from 2012) by the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND), for a more detailed breakdown of trends.

On the other hand, crude continued its progression once imports started in FY 2006-07 (see figure 3). In terms of quantity, Indian imports have risen steadily since 2006. However, there were notable variations in the price of crude imports, which reflects the fluctuations in the price of crude oil. In particular, between 2011-14, crude averaged at above a hundred (US\$ 104.7), which accounts for the inflated figures for the given years. Notwithstanding, from FY 2006-07 to FY 2019-20, the crude imports from Iraq multiplied by four, both in quantity and price (see table 4).

Interesting trends can be observed when India's top three crude oil suppliers are superimposed for the last one-and-a-half decades. The crude supply by both Iran and Saudi Arabia reduced. In FY 2006-07, Saudi provided 23.19 per cent, and Iran constituted 13.87 per cent of total crude imports in India. Iraq's share, during this period, was closer to Iran with 11.7 per cent (see table 3). Fast forward to 2019-20, Saudi (19.8 per cent), Iran (0.97 per cent), and Iraq (22.16 per cent) varied considerably in their total share. Iran's dwindling supply is to be attributed to sanctions. Yet, despite the Islamic State taking over power, Iraq was able to supply India with a steady source of crude, which meant that India's payment would have served well for the Iraqi government at a time of crisis.

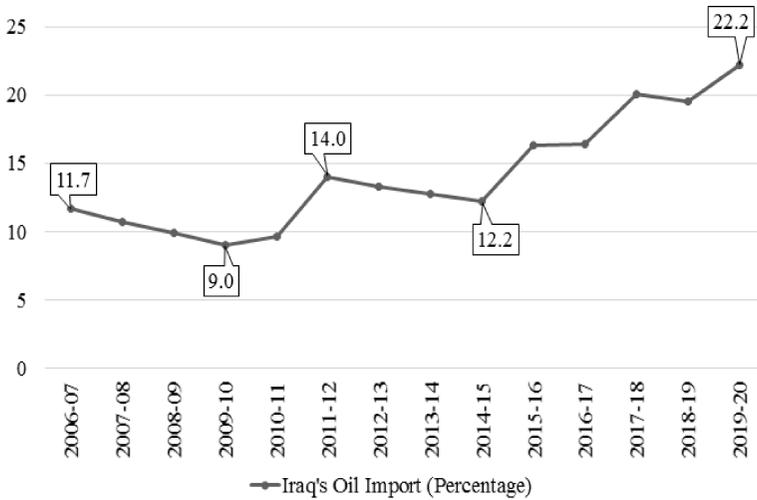
**Figure 4: India's Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq (Percentage of Total Oil Imports)**



*Source:* Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Also, see the successive

editions of the *Persian Gulf: India's Relations with the Region Series* (starting from 2012) by the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND), for a more detailed breakdown of trends.

**Figure 5: Import of Crude from Iraq (2006-2020)**



*Source:* Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Also, see the successive editions of the *Persian Gulf: India's Relations with the Region Series* (starting from 2012) by the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND), for a more detailed breakdown of trends.

A look at Iraq's crude supply trajectory reveals that it has emerged as a critical supplier of crude to India, no matter what the internal circumstances. Even during the heyday of the Islamic State, its share never dropped below 12 per cent (see figure 5). Moreover, since FY 2015-16, it took a swing of four percentage points in FY 2015-16 that continued until FY 2019-20. From FY 2010-11 to FY 2011-12, there was a sudden rise in Iraq's share in Indian crude imports, as one witnessed a jump of nearly five per cent in Iraq's share from 9.6 per cent (2010-11) to 14.3 per cent (in 2011-12).<sup>334</sup> Undoubtedly, this illustrates how

<sup>334</sup> Figures obtained from Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Iraq serves as a critical source of India's energy security. As India's Secretary (CPV & OIA) mentioned in a lecture addressing the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI),

“On energy security, 53% of India's oil imports and 41% of gas imports come from the region. India has stakes in oil blocks in Iraq, Syria, Libya, UAE, Yemen and South Sudan. The nature of our partnership has evolved from mere buyer and seller relations to participation in upstream [and] downstream projects, joint ventures in refineries and building of strategic oil reserves. But we can do more. . . Two-way investments can increase significantly, with sovereign wealth funds and portfolio investments from the Gulf region and Indian corporate investments playing a leading role. Similarly, diversification of the trade basket beyond hydrocarbons, to include engineering goods, gems and jewellery, precious metals, food products, textiles and chemicals in our exports and new products in our imports can give impetus to our trade relations.”<sup>335</sup>

So far, there have been some active efforts, guided by mutual interests, for strengthening energy ties, with several high-level visits being made. In October 2011, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) sponsored a business delegation comprising 15-major firms/companies, to Iraq after receiving an invitation from Iraq's National Investment Commission. The delegation discussed issues pertaining to diverse sectors, including but not limited to, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, medicine, vehicles, automotive components and infrastructure projects. The same year, Adel Mhoder Radhi, Iraq's Minister of Municipalities and Public Works, visited India in November at the invitation of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to explore the mutual areas of cooperation between the two countries that also involved the private sector.

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<sup>335</sup> “Keynote Address by Secretary (CPV&OIA) at LEADS 2020, FICCI Seminar on Gulf and West Asia Reimagining Business Beyond Oil,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 October 2020, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33119/Keynote\\_address\\_by\\_Secretary\\_CPV&OIA\\_at\\_LEADS\\_2020\\_FICCI\\_Seminar\\_on\\_Gulf\\_and\\_West\\_Asia\\_Reimagining\\_Business\\_Beyond\\_Oil](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33119/Keynote_address_by_Secretary_CPV&OIA_at_LEADS_2020_FICCI_Seminar_on_Gulf_and_West_Asia_Reimagining_Business_Beyond_Oil) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Indian Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Dr Veerappa Moily, co-chaired the 17<sup>th</sup> India-Iraq Joint Commission Meeting, at Baghdad in July 2013, aiming to restore the existing trade diversity while also exploring future areas of cooperation. During the Commission's meeting, it was agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on energy cooperation should be signed, followed by the restarting of negotiations on the terms of the contract on the Block-8 project. India also expressed its intention to participate in the revamp of the Nasiriyah Integrated Project and upgrading Iraq's refineries.<sup>336</sup> India proposed to Iraq equity participation in the Paradip Refinery Project. Meanwhile, Iraq offered undiscovered Middle Furat Field (Kifil, West Kifil and Merjan) to India on a nomination basis. However, even after nearly a decade, there have been no reports on the project's progress.<sup>337</sup>

Apart from trade in energy, Indo-Iraqi relations gathered momentum during the period of 'Renewed Engagement'. Indian firms in Iraq had undertaken various projects before the Islamic State took power. The initial high-level visits that took place at the beginning of this period served as the precursor for the increased investments in Iraq. Indian firms and companies bagged various EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) contracts in Iraq during this period. The contract to rebuild the sewerage system in Basra worth US\$235 million, the contract to build the Nassiriyah Power Plant, worth US\$246 million, the contract to build the Akaaz Power Project worth US\$81 million and the projects to rebuild a hotel in Basra worth US\$ 85 million, were notable.

Even though Iraq was plagued by terrorism, engagement with India continued as the Iraqi authorities started to regain control over its territory. In May 2015, a four-member delegation of the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, led by Deputy Minister-Distribution Affairs, visited Bharat

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<sup>336</sup> "Minutes of the Seventeenth Session of the Iraq-India Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation held in Baghdad during 7-8 July 2013," Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, 7-8 July 2013, at <http://petroleum.nic.in/sites/default/files/Protocolof17thIndia-IraqJCM8.7.13.pdf>. (Accessed 26 February 2022). For more see annexure 10.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and explored proposals for sourcing electrical equipment from India to Iraq. An Iraqi delegation also visited and organised talks with FICCI in November 2015.<sup>338</sup> In November 2015, the first bilateral Foreign Office Consultations were also held in New Delhi to increase cooperation in diverse sectors.<sup>339</sup> In September 2016, an Indian business delegation comprising 34 companies participated in the Najaf-India Trade Show held in Najaf. Later, in December 2016, Iraq's Oil Minister Hamid Younis Salih Addai al-Zubai led a business delegation during the Petrotech Summit in New Delhi.<sup>340</sup>

From the Indian side, various delegations visited Iraq to re-engage post-Da'esh Iraq. In November 2018, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) led a delegation of 40 companies to the Baghdad International Trade Fair, where India was also represented. Some twenty-five business leaders from various industries led by the Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI), visited Iraq. In December 2018, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) led a delegation to Baghdad and Erbil to explore potential business opportunities and identify developmental projects in post-Da'esh Iraq. Apart from oil, the steel sector was identified as a prospective area of cooperation.<sup>341</sup>

Post-US withdrawal from Iraq, the reconstruction projects provided immense opportunities for India. To that end, the Iraqi National Business Council organised the 'Iraqi Economic Forum' to attract investors from all over the world, including India. The Forum comprised 26 firms/companies from India. Another crucial business meet was in Mumbai, where Ibrahim Saleh al-Shariastani, Iraq's Deputy Prime

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<sup>338</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2015-16, p.60.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2016-17, pp.67-68.

<sup>341</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2018-19, p.114.

<sup>342</sup> Anjani Kumar Singh, "Iraq," in P. R. Kumaraswamy (ed.), *Persian Gulf 2014: India's Relations with the Region*, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2014.

Minister for Energy, delivered a lecture at the IISS-Oberoi event.<sup>342</sup> He urged Indian businesses and corporations to invest in Iraq, especially in its low-cost housing projects, as India was undertaking in Afghanistan.<sup>343</sup>

## Multilateral Diplomacy

India has received Iraq's support on various issues at international fora. Such expectation is not unfounded, and by and large, is an outcome of reciprocal behaviour. For India, the Iraqi support against Pakistan in 1965 was notable when at the time most Arab countries sided with Pakistan. Iraq happened to be one of the first countries in the region to recognise Bangladesh after its creation in 1971.

Another notable support came in 1998 when Baghdad supported New Delhi after the latter had conducted five nuclear tests in May that year. Virtually disparaged by all its partners, India found itself in a tight spot diplomatically. Saddam Hussein was one of the few leaders at the time who supported India's position.<sup>344</sup> *Al-Thawra*, a Ba'ath Party newspaper in Iraq, noted after India's tests, "We cannot see how anyone can ask India not to develop nuclear weapons and its long-range missiles at a time it is like any other big state with its human and scientific potential."<sup>345</sup>

This was not the first time that the relations involved a nuclear dimension. The book, *Saddam's Bomb*, written by British journalists Shyam Bhatia and Daniel McGrory, mentions an episode when Dr Raja Ramanna, India's senior nuclear physicist and later the defence minister (1989-90), was approached by Saddam Hussein to help develop Iraq's

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<sup>343</sup> Sonia Roy, "Iraq," in P. R. Kumaraswamy (ed.), *Persian Gulf 2014: India's Relations with the Region*, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2013.

<sup>344</sup> "Middle East Reverberations of the Nuclear Tests in India and Pakistan," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 19 June 1998, at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/middle-east-reverberations-nuclear-tests-india-and-pakistan> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>345</sup> "India's Nuclear Tests: Will They Open New Possibilities for Iraq to Exploit?" Institute for Science and International Security, 28 May 1998, at <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/indias-nuclear-tests-will-they-open-new-possibilities-for-iraq-to-exploit1/7> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

nuclear program. The book also mentions Saddam's shock and exasperation with India's peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974, which according to the authors, Saddam had wished for Iraq, which was evident by his proposal to Dr Ramanna a few years later while he was visiting Iraq.<sup>346</sup>

Iraq has also been a consistent supporter of India's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and India's candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council.<sup>347</sup> Later, Iraq expressed its support in the UN Resolution to mark 21 June as the International Yoga Day.

### **Health Diplomacy and Humanitarian Support**

In addition, India contributed US\$ 10 million in 2004 towards the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) for investments, reconstruction and development in Iraq. From time to time, India has been sending medical teams to help Iraq handle the "critical cases."<sup>348</sup> Mostly, these visits were humanitarian and not serious or sustained efforts in health cooperation. In September 2020, India

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<sup>346</sup> Aditya Sinha, "When Raja Ramanna turned down Saddam Hussein," *Hindustan Times*, 30 March 2003, at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/when-raja-ramanna-turned-down-saddam-hussein/story-kNpbBjnPe1XPHjN5H0c7HI.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>347</sup> For the year 2021-22, India won the non-permanent member seat at the UNSC. India was unanimously nominated in Asia-Pacific category by 55-countries including Iraq. See "India endorsed for non-permanent seat at UNSC: how are countries elected?" *The Indian Express*, 27 June 2019, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-endorsed-for-non-permanent-seat-at-unscc-how-are-countries-elected-5801651/> (Accessed 26 February 2022)

<sup>348</sup> MEA Annual Report, 1999-2000. p.35.

<sup>349</sup> Abhishek De, "Explained: India's Covid-19 air bubbles, and who can travel abroad," *The Indian Express*, 9 December 2020, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-air-bubbles-who-is-allowed-to-travel-to-these-countries-6605163/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

entered into an 'Air Bubble' arrangement with Iraq to facilitate air travel of citizens in the two countries in the wake of the pandemic.<sup>349</sup>

Another area of cooperation that India and Iraq have fostered for decades, is medical tourism. India's soft power in the low-income countries of the Middle East and Central Asia is well known. In Iraq, too, the popularity of Indian medical services can be observed by the dramatic rise in medical visas to Iraqis after the travel ban was lifted in 2010. As per the Ministry, within three months a record number of 27,848 visas were granted for medical purposes.<sup>350</sup>

### **Cultural and People-to-People Exchange**

As mentioned earlier, Indo-Iraq relations predate the modern-Westphalian notion of States and goes back millennia. These early contacts were not merely strategic or economic but also cultural. The precursors of modern-day India and Iraq emerged as critical learning centres, allowing more cultural and civilisational links. Such links have existed in various manifestations.

Sufi saints like Khwaja Hasan al Basri, Junaid Al-Baghdadi and Sheikh Behlul have had an impact on the spiritual movements in India that is said to inspired the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Saheb to visit Baghdad "to deliberate on the ontological and the epistemological questions with Sheikh Behlul who hosted him for nearly three months" in 1511.<sup>351</sup>

Indians have long been patrons to various holy shrines in Iraq, especially Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas in Karbala and Imam Ali in Najaf. After establishing the diplomatic relationship, pilgrimage to these Shia shrines had been a critical source of convergence for the two countries. Annually around 30,000-40,000 pilgrims from all over India continue

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<sup>350</sup> MEA Annual Report, 2010-11. p.42.

<sup>351</sup> Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations: Iraq, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 2020.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

to visit Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, and Samarra, although, after the Islamic State's takeover and ensuing security protocols, the number of pilgrims heading to Iraq has come down.<sup>352</sup>

Over the years, Indian soft power in Iraq has steadily grown, particularly in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region. In addition, International Yoga Day is also observed in Iraq, as Iraq was also among the 170 countries that co-sponsored the Resolution to mark 21 June as International Day of Yoga at the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>353</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The 'Limited Engagement' period started with Iraq experiencing the most tumultuous period since its creation. In the initial years, India's Iraq policy remained hostage to Saddam Hussein as India appeared unwilling to engage *an Iraq without Saddam*. The haggling in Indian politics about the US-led invasion was reminiscent of the domestic frenzy during the Gulf Crisis.

During the 'Renewed Engagement' period that started after 2011, the Iraqi Prime Minister visited India. Yet again, the oil trade became the fundamental aspect of the relations that flourished even during *Da'esh's* occupation. The most notable departure in India's Iraq policy was establishing relations with the Kurds in Iraq. In a sense, Iraq no longer meant Baghdad for India; it also meant the Kurdistan region, where most Indian expatriates now live and work. The overall nature of diplomatic engagement changed as India engaged with a democratic and inclusive Iraq.

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<sup>353</sup> "International Day of Yoga: Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly," A/RES/69/131, United Nations Digital Library, 12 December 2014, at <https://undocs.org/en/A/69/PV.69> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

## **THE FUTURE**

After an exhaustive review of bilateral ties, it remains a natural recourse for the research to recognise patterns and suggest some policy recommendations. The appraisal of 70 years of India-Iraq bilateral relations reveals extreme trends in relations that varied from 'very friendly' in the 1970s/80s to 'barely existent' in 2003/04. For the first four decades, domestic factors heavily influenced the course of bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the external actors were largely responsible for the nature of relations over three subsequent decades. In other words, the change in political leadership and the role of external players, by and large, have determined the nature and degree of cooperation between India and Iraq.

Currently, bilateral relations seem to be caught in a difficult situation. As noted earlier, oil trade has been the backbone of bilateral ties and perhaps the characteristic feature of the relationship. Several factors are to blame for the current situation, but political instability within Iraq is perhaps the most dominant factor. As the previous chapter has illustrated, various regional and extra-regional players have significantly influenced how India conducts its relations with Iraq after 2003. Certain capacity-building initiatives like ITEC and scholarship support to Iraqi students has been extended, but a proper strategy for long-term engagement is missing.

To this end, the chapter points out lessons that can be drawn from the past. The question is how India can move from its current level of involvement 'Renewed Engagement' towards a 'Pro-active Engagement'? As such, what would be the limitations and capacities of India? The chapter's purpose is to attempt to address these questions. In order to strengthen relations with Iraq, India must pursue 'Pro-active' engagement vis-à-vis Iraq. This would require India to take risks, exercise greater political will, and engage beyond the existing energy-oriented relations. The chapter put forwards a quadrilateral strategy to

achieve these objectives. Some of these elements already exist in bilateral relations. However, moving forward, new areas of cooperation need to be explored, while obsolete issues need to be discarded.

### **CASE FOR A PRO-ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

Unlike the previously discussed periods of engagement, the period of 'Pro-active Engagement' entails speculations grounded in certain axiomatic assumptions and lessons from the past. The more genuine and closer to the reality these assumptions are, the more veritable would be the speculations. Given Iraq's historic and strategic importance, the current state of bilateral relations remains underdeveloped, unexplored and unsatisfactory. A large number of factors and events are responsible for the current state of the relations. Apart from the factors beyond India's countenance, there is a need for conscious and systemic efforts to achieve the full potential of the relations. What would such concerted efforts look like? Broadly, the outcome of these efforts should entail a period of 'Pro-active Engagement'.

Over the last few years, Iraq has been "limping towards a democratic order," and there are several causes for optimism about the future of Iraqi politics.<sup>354</sup> Moving ahead, Iraq would play a critical role in the region's geopolitics with its vast energy reserves, and its position as an OPEC member makes it imperative for India to devise an informed 'Iraq Policy'. Its role as intermediary between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a welcoming development that would allow Iraq to play a more dominant role in the region.<sup>355</sup> India, in the past, had enjoyed close relations with Iraq, and as the country seek stability and development, it would be folly for India to disregard Iraq in the region. The decline in violence, electoral reforms, and growing resentment against the Iranian influence over Iraq are promising and vital changes that carry

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<sup>354</sup> Author's interaction with former Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

<sup>355</sup> John Davison, "Saudi Arabia, Iran held talks more than once in Iraq - Iraqi President," Reuters, 5 May 2021 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraq-has-hosted-more-than-one-round-saudi-iranian-talks-president-2021-05-05/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

enormous potential for perceptible changes in the country's future. Furthermore, India's quest for an increasing role in the region, as per the sentiments expressed in statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar, would encompass taking on an active role in Iraq.

To these ends, it is suggested that India should adopt a quadrilateral approach that needs to be executed in a phased manner (see figure 6). Instead of focusing on symbolic gestures, the need is to look towards substance. Following a two-step process, this would involve directing engagement across four broad themes (see Figure 4). In step one (called Consolidation), the efforts need to be focused on getting back to the level of cooperation that had existed during the period of 'Active Engagement'. The idea is to identify the existing areas of cooperation and reorganise them. As opposed to the notion of just venturing into new areas, say, renewable energy, the focus must be on creating an improved institutional mechanism through existing modes of cooperation. In step two (called Expansion), newer areas of cooperation can be identified and pursued. The effort would be to build on the success of step one. In addition, from the standpoint of value chains and logistics, it is far easier to extend cooperation into advanced fields once there is already cooperation in certain elementary areas. By doing so, the plans and projects that would be undertaken would strengthen the existing relations before expanding the areas of cooperation.

Figure 6: Quadrilateral Approach for Indo-Iraqi Cooperation.

QUADRILATERAL APPROACH FOR COOPERATION				
	Political	Economic	Security	Multi-Sector
CONSOLIDATION (Step-I)	Frequent Secretary-Level Visits	Appraisal of Joint Commission	Counterterrorism Cooperation	Medical Tourism
	People-to-People Contact	Encouragement in Investment by Indian Private Sector	Cooperation in Law and Order	Humanitarian Cooperation.
	Cooperation between Electoral Authorities	Capacity-Building through Skill-India Program	Task-Force on Islamic State	Cooperation in Health by neatly identifying areas of cooperation
		Moving Beyond by Buyer-Seller Relationship	Cooperation in Fin-Tech like Paytm and BHIM, Extension of RuPay	Capacity-building Program for Iraqi Police
EXPANSION (Step-II)	High-Level Visits at the level of EAM	Biennial Trade Conferences could be organised by the Chamber(s) of Commerce.	Joint-Military Exercises	Participatory Diplomacy at Regional and International Forums
	Parliamentary Exchanges	Investment in Telecommunication & Internet-based Technology	Defence Cooperation	Think-Tank Collaborations
		Advanced Banking Solutions: Mobile Banking, Easy Payment Methods	Promotion of e-Governance to fight Corruption	Cooperation in Innovative Agricultural and Irrigational Practices
		Cooperation in Electricity Sector: Electrification of Iraq, Revamping existing Infrastructure	Cooperation in Renewable Energy	Exploring Soft Power Avenues: Bollywood

Source: Created by the author.

## Consolidation

Before new avenues are explored, it is vital to consolidate the existing components. However, what does consolidation exactly mean in the context of India-Iraq relations? Essentially, the notion of consolidation here encompasses taking stock of the present status of relations to realise where one currently stands and improving on those areas, by setting up better institutional and logistic mechanisms.

First and foremost, there needs to be more Secretary-level engagement. Given the domestic situation in Iraq, the engagement at EAM or higher level would be an unreasonable expectation. However, Joint Secretary level meets need to be frequent from all the concerned ministries, especially Commerce and Energy. One of the biggest problems with India's policy vis-à-vis Iraq was the 'lack of communication' that has had enormous costs.<sup>356</sup> Before 2003, the individuals and officials that India had communicated with, were no longer in those positions and that posed significant challenges to keep up with political changes in Iraq, let alone following up on trade and commerce opportunities. Subsequent to 2003, the foreign policy of the Iraqi Republic has undergone perceptible change, a most notable feature of which has been a change in the political elites. This has involved the inclusion of diverse groups including the Kurds in Iraq's decision-making process.<sup>357</sup> India's efforts must be to connect with this new class of elites, akin to what India did when Ba'athist came to power.

Further, instead of directly appealing for high-level visits like Parliamentary Exchanges, one should focus on supporting democracy in Iraq. What India can do at this stage is share its vast experience in conducting elections in troubled regions. A majority of recent protests in Iraq are borne out of electoral dissatisfaction and frequent allegations of electoral fraud. Here, Iraq can benefit from the expertise of the

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<sup>356</sup> Author's interactions with an official in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

<sup>357</sup> Gareth Stansfield, "The Reformation of Iraq's Foreign Relations: New Elites and Enduring Legacies," *International Affairs*, 86(6), 2010, pp.1395-1409.

Election Commission of India (ECI) in conducting elections in complex areas. A MoU could be signed between the ECI and its Iraqi counterpart to train and provide logistic support in conducting elections. India provides Electronic-Voting-Machines (EVM) to many African countries; perhaps a similar exercise can be undertaken in Iraq. In 2021 elections, Ayatollah Sistani had invited the United Nations to observe the electoral process, which was not well received by political factions closer to Iran, which view the UN as subordinate to the US. Accordingly, India can offer to send observers in future elections.

Similarly, economic aspects would require more effort since energy trade has been the core of the bilateral ties for decades. The first thing that India needs to do is conduct an appraisal of the Joint Commission. The Commission had been the centrepiece for expanding economic relations between the two countries. However, the Commission is outdated, as the economic portfolios of the two countries has undergone change and newer avenues for economic engagement have garnered more prominence. Therefore, to move ahead, it needs to be regularised and reorganised in line with current requirements of both sides. The various ambitious policies of the NDA government, like 'Skill India' and 'Digital India', could be incorporated into the mechanism of the Joint Commission.

Counterterrorism has emerged as a critical area of cooperation between India and its Middle Eastern counterparts. Iraq is a crucial case because of the apparent fear of a resurgence of the Islamic State.<sup>358</sup> In the past, too, India cooperated with Iraq on this issue. Still, the fateful case of 39 Indians in Mosul should caution India to take a pre-emptive approach against such tragedies. India has had limited cooperation with Iraq on counterterrorism vis-à-vis institutional mechanisms. As such, attempts need to be made to sign a MoU to monitor Indians travelling to Iraq that can be organised through a small Task-Force. India has the world's

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<sup>358</sup> Ronen Zeidel and Hisham al-Hashimis, "A Phoenix Rising from the Ashes? Daesh after its Territorial Losses in Iraq and Syria," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 13(3), 2019, pp. 32-43.

largest police machinery, whose experience and expertise can be offered to Iraq. Whether it is institutional aspects or tactical training, India can offer to organise courses and short-term training programmes.

Finally, cooperation in sectors like IT, health, education and humanitarian efforts has been the often-repeated pattern of Indo-Iraq relations. What is needed is to pick out specific areas and set up attainable objectives to strengthen existing cooperation. Healthcare could be a worthwhile sector to explore, given that Iraq's fragile health machinery came under extensive pressure during the pandemic. Furthermore, India can work with various international organisations to increase cooperation on these issues.

## Expansion

No single area or sector can ensure robust bilateral ties. The efforts are needed at various levels and at different scales to achieve comprehensive relations in a multipolar world, where several countries compete to gain influence over limited resources. Once India can consolidate its presence in Iraq, it can move on to 'step two' called 'Expansion'. Here, the existing relationships in different sectors can be enhanced, and new areas of cooperation can be identified. Today, there are more areas for cooperation than in the 1970s, owing mainly to the rise in globalisation, expansion of technology and mindful recognition of critical areas. For instance, the issues like climate change, did not exist as veritable issues of concern. Other sectors, where India-Iraq have had a mutually beneficial relationship like oil trade, can be alleviated from the current 'buyer-seller' arrangement to a 'partner status' by pursuing collaboration at different levels—upstream, midstream and downstream.

Luay al-Khatteeb, Iraq's former Minister for Electricity (2018-20), has described the electricity concerns of Iraq as a "national security priority."<sup>359</sup> Indian firms could also render support in upgrading Iraq's

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<sup>359</sup> Abbas Kadhim and Sara Vakhshouri, "Iraq's Energy Security Strategy: A Path to Diversity and Energy Independence," Atlantic Council, December 2020, at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/iraqs-energy-security-strategy-a-path-to-diversity-and-energy-independence/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

electricity infrastructure. Prior to the Da'esh takeover, Indian heavy industries supplied components to improve Iraq's electricity infrastructure.<sup>360</sup> Iraq had also recognised Bharat Heavy Steel Limited (BHEL) as a "qualified equipment manufacturer" in the power sector.<sup>361</sup> This could be utilised as a stepping-stone for further collaboration in Iraq's electricity sector. As such, India could offer upgradation of existing infrastructure that comes undone nearly every summer. In addition, India can offer to build new electricity stations, many of which were destroyed by the Islamic State.

Furthermore, the two countries can cooperate in the field of renewable energy. Iraq has announced an ambitious project to meet 20 per cent of its energy needs from renewables by 2030. For this, Iraq has conceived the construction of a 755MW solar power grid for which the first phase of bidding was conducted in 2019.<sup>362</sup> The UAE's Masdar obtained a US\$1 billion contract for producing 2 GW of solar energy in southern Iraq.<sup>363</sup> India can follow similar initiatives. Besides the investments, a major concern for Iraq in this field is high-tariff charges. Although efforts have been made toward its mitigation, the problem persists. India has one of the cheapest tariff charges on solar energy. Therefore, this is an opportune moment to consolidate itself as a key player in Iraq's renewable energy sector. Also, Iraq is not a member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). As such, India can push for Iraq's membership in the group. This way, cooperation in one sector will pave the way for collaboration in another.

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<sup>360</sup> P. R. Kumaraswamy (ed.), *Persian Gulf 2012: India's Relations with the Region*, Middle East Institute at New Delhi (MEI@ND)/Kindle Direct Publishing (Amazon), 2012.

<sup>361</sup> See Annexure 11.

<sup>362</sup> "Iraq Advances 755MW Solar Projects," *MEES*, 64(8), 2021, at <https://www.mees.com/2021/2/26/power-water/iraq-advances-755mw-solar-projects/6a60c700-7845-11eb-b7b7-ad121fcbc262> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>363</sup> Salam Zidane, "Iraq invests in clean energy," *Al-Monitor*, 8 July 2021, at [Iraq invests in clean energy - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East](#) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Politically, assuming Iraq travels on a more stable road, the high-level visit at the level of EAM can be undertaken. Similarly, at the parliamentary level, exchanges can be organised to strengthen bilateral relations based on democratic principles. The MEA can consider creating a separate Division for Energy Resources at an administrative level, which could exclusively devote time and resources to manage India's energy security needs. Iraq would naturally be a focus area of this Division. It would also ensure clarity in India's Iraq policy that so far has been viewed only through an energy-security standpoint.

When economic activities between India and Iraq expand beyond oil into other sectors, cooperation can be considered on advanced issues, particularly Fin-Tech and banking solutions. During a trade delegation to Baghdad, a senior official had acknowledged the value and role of banking facilities in enhancing trade between the two countries. "Lack of formal banking system between the two countries is keeping the Indian exporters away from Iraq. Pre-2002, there existed a good banking system in place between the two," averred an official.<sup>364</sup> Studies have also illustrated the Iraqi economy's potential in venturing into newer domains like e-commerce and supply-chain management.<sup>365</sup> To allow and facilitate the development of such domains would require a faster and more secure digital transaction platform in which India has recently had notable success.

Another critical problem faced by the Iraqi State is corruption encompassing all sectors and domains of governance.<sup>366</sup> Iraq can benefit

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<sup>364</sup> Huma Siddiqui, "Are the Indian companies ready to tap the Iraq market? Huge opportunities for Indian companies in Iraq," *Financial Express*, 12 December 2018, at <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/are-the-indian-companies-ready-to-tap-the-iraq-market-huge-opportunities-for-indian-companies-in-iraq/1411989/> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>365</sup> "Iraq: eTrade Readiness Assessment," UNCTAD/DTL/STICT/2020/7, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2020, at [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2020d7\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2020d7_en_0.pdf) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>366</sup> Robert E. Looney, "Reconstruction and Peacebuilding Under Extreme Adversity: The Problem of Pervasive Corruption in Iraq," *International Peacekeeping*, 15(3), 2008, pp. 424-440.

from Indian success in digitising the massive governance machinery to create a more accountable and transparent governance structure. This is not to say that e-governance would solve corruption entirely, but this would pave the way to curb it. Digital payments would help ensure the safety of records and ensuring public convenience. The government in Baghdad may adopt digital payment as a preferred mode of payment within the public sector, for instance, to provide salaries to government employees, including the PMF, thus limiting, if not eliminating, the misuse of the money. Linked to this is the scope of enhancing investment in Iraq's technology and telecommunication industry. As per the Arab Youth Survey (2020), the region holds huge potential for internet-related services, with youth increasingly gravitating towards social media to receive news and communicate with others.<sup>367</sup> India has the world's lowest data charges to access the internet. Thus, the Indian private sector can consider Iraq a potential market for its services.

For long, Iraqis have relied heavily on farming as an occupation, with support from two major rivers in the region. Like many other regions in the world, the non-traditional security concern in Iraq has begun to emerge rapidly, particularly concerning its water resources. In the 1970s and 1980s, India had provided assistance and training in agricultural and irrigational practices. Given the fears of water scarcity, India and Iraq can collaborate on innovative agricultural and irrigational practices. Recently, India has been cooperating with Israel on this front. Eventually, such cooperation can be extended to include other like-minded States, including Iraq, who could benefit from Israel's expertise in this vital domain. In the past, education at the elementary and secondary level helped India create an impression on the Iraqis. Already, India provides various scholarships and capacity-building programmes for university-level students under CEPSS (Cultural Exchange Programme Scholarship Scheme) and GCSS (General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSS)). Earlier, teachers were posted in Iraq from two-to-eight years. India

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<sup>367</sup> "Arab Youth Priorities Survey," Arab Youth Center, Abu Dhabi, 2020, at <https://arabyouthcenter.org/en/article/our-research/arab-youth-priority-survey> (Accessed 26 February, 2022).

can build its soft power by aiming to educate the younger generation. Furthermore, Indian films have been a window for Iraqis into Indian society for decades. Hindi films have been immensely successful in Iraq since the 1970s. This could also be viewed as a potential sector for cooperation.

In the last two decades, India has signed numerous strategic partnerships in the region. The strategic partnership is illustrative of the shared vision for regional and global cooperation. Think tanks play an enormous role in developing, understanding, and formulating shared ideas and vision. As such, think tank-to-think tank cooperation needs to be encouraged and expanded before any push for signing a strategic partnership is made. As discussed in the context of the US-led invasion, the issue of 'boots on the ground' has been controversial and sensitive in the region. In the past, India had defence cooperation agreements with a few countries, including Israel and Iraq.<sup>368</sup> The defence cooperation can be restarted, and joint military exercises can be conducted. Already, India has started to expand defence cooperation with regional powers.<sup>369</sup> Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Indian General Manoj Mukund Naravane became the first General to visit the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia in 2020.<sup>370</sup> Similar efforts can be undertaken with Iraq. A more robust Iraqi military would mean lesser scope for terror groups like the Islamic State to re-emerge and to avoid foreign intervention.

In the end, there cannot be an exact recipe to develop bilateral ties instantly. In a way, the whole Quadrilateral Strategy should be viewed

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<sup>368</sup> Timothy D. Hoyt, *Military Industry and Regional Defense Policy: India, Iraq and Israel*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007.

<sup>369</sup> Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "India-Gulf Counterterrorism Cooperation," Middle East Institute, 21 December 2017, at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/india-gulf-counterterrorism-cooperation> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>370</sup> "Chief of Army Staff proceeds on a visit to United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 8 December 2020, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1679070> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

effectively as phronesis with feedback loops dictating the direction for advancing the relations. Here, India's historical understanding of relations with Iraq would be an incredible torchbearer to strengthen the existing ties and to expand them further.

## **CHALLENGES**

Not only would it be naive, but undeniably imprudent to assume that the proposed strategy would bring instant change in bilateral ties. In fact, the endeavours on this scale often get sidetracked, given the number of extraneous variables that are often beyond one's control. What's more, there would be various 'known and unknown' challenges that would encumber success. Since unknown and unforeseen challenges are difficult to anticipate, the known challenges need sincere attention to avoid follies and misplaced enthusiasm that usually accompanies such policy advices.

### **Domestic Instability**

It does not require a deep knowledge of the Middle East to know that domestic instability plagues the region, and even more so in Iraq. The onslaught of the Islamic State in the last decade was the recent factor that contributed to sustained unrest in Iraq. Other political and economic problems have also helped in exacerbating the situation. Notably, in Iraq, one of the fundamental causes of instability is the sectarian conflict that has taken root in Iraqi society over the years. Lately, Arab Spring and the Islamic State have further polarised Iraq to inconceivable levels. Also, interlinked to this issue is the problem of economic woes in Iraq that have compounded under the pandemic. It is hard to fathom which fuels which, but for a considerable population (particularly youth), violence and conflict are the only resort to making ends meet.

As part of its efforts, India would need to stress this aspect while approaching Iraq. Unlike the multi-billion-dollar companies that promise instant investment and payoffs for skilled individuals, India could provide genuine opportunities for the youth across all sectors (primary, secondary and service). This must serve as India's entry point to engaging Iraq. For the time being, India might have to deal with an unstable Iraq. However, despite focusing on the instability beyond its

control, India could benefit from presenting itself as a country that can help minimise the instability.

## The China Factor

China is a formidable actor in the region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is its principal tool to achieve its interests globally, including in Iraq. The Initiative has had success stories, but they were equally stained with criticism for its hegemonic tendencies, manifested best in debt traps that the host countries fall prey to. India cannot and should not be competing with China in Iraq. India's development diplomacy and reconstruction efforts always had a unique people-to-people and grounded approach that has garnered praise for its efforts. The biggest mistake that India can make in its Iraq policy is to grade it with Chinese policy.

In recent years, China has been expanding its role in Iraq<sup>371</sup> and has emerged as one of the most prominent beneficiaries of Iraqi oil after the invasion. Between 2007 and 2009, China obtained a host of contracts, including a joint contract (with Britain's BP) to develop Iraq's largest Rumaila oil field.<sup>372</sup> Reportedly, in 2013, China purchased half of Iraq's oil production—approximately 1.5 million barrels a day.<sup>373</sup> However,

<sup>371</sup> Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "Chinese investment in Iraq provides gains for Baghdad, Beijing," *Al-Monitor*, 26 September 2019, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/09/iraq-china-economy.html> (Accessed 26 February, 2022).

<sup>372</sup> Ahmed Rasheed, "China's CNPC ups, BP lowers stake in Iraq oil deal," Reuters, 3 October 2009, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-rumaila/chinas-cnpc-ups-bp-lowers-stake-in-iraq-oil-deal-idUSTRE5921HY20091003> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>373</sup> Tim Arango and Clifford Krauss, "China Is Reaping Biggest Benefits of Iraq Oil Boom," *The New York Times*, 2 June 2013, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/106/03/world/middleeast/china-reaps-biggest-benefits-of-iraq-oil-boom.html?hp> (Accessed 26 February 2022); Ahmed Mousa Jiyad, "China Consolidates Its Position In The Iraqi Oil Sector," *MEES*, 56(48), November 29, 2013, at <https://www.mees.com/2013/11/29/op-ed-documents/china-consolidates-its-position-in-the-iraqi-oil-sector/11a74a80-706c-11e7-8439-271c9c3c8acf>. (Accessed 26 February 2022).

today, it only constitutes roughly 25 per cent of its total oil exports, the same as India's share in Iraq's total export in 2019.<sup>374</sup> In this, the Chinese investment strategy in Iraq has also been instrumental. The so-called 'oil-for-reconstruction' agreement has enabled Beijing to obtain 100,000 barrels of crude every day in return for executing infrastructural projects in Iraq.<sup>375</sup>

Chinese CNPC, Zhenhua Oil and Sinochem are prominently active in Iraq and supported heavily by state-run China Exploration and Credit Insurance Corporation (CECIC). Both sides have witnessed multiple high-level visits, mainly from the Iraqi side. In 2015, the then Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi visited Beijing, wherein the two countries signed the "strategic partnership" agreement, followed by a visit by Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi in November 2019.<sup>376</sup> Mahdi was accompanied by a 55-member delegation, and signed eight MoUs, including Iraq's plan to join the BRI.<sup>377</sup> Yet, Iraq-China relations remain centred on Chinese investment in Iraqi oil. As was the case during Da'esh's occupation, China limited itself from any involvement and as a token, provided 12 CH-4B "Rainbow" combat drones to Iraq.<sup>378</sup>

Currently, most Chinese investments in oil are concentrated in southern Iraq. In the north, although Beijing operates a Consulate (opened in

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<sup>374</sup> "Executive Summary: Iraq," Energy Information Administration (EIA), 24 February 2021, at <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/IRQ> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>375</sup> Salam Zidane, "Iraq, China launch 'oil for reconstruction' agreement," *Al-Monitor*, 8 October 2019, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/iraq-china-india-oil-construction.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>376</sup> "Iraqi PM hails China visit as 'quantum leap' in China-Iraq ties," Xinhua, 19 September 2019, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/19/c\\_138405582.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/19/c_138405582.htm) (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>377</sup> John Calabrese, "China-Iraq Relations: Poised for a "Quantum Leap"?" Middle East Institute, 8 October 2019, at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-iraq-relations-poised-quantum-leap> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>378</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "China helps Iraq military enter drone era," BBC News, 12 October 2015, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34510126> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

2014) and engages with KRG principally on energy issues, the investments with Kurds have suffered since an earlier deal with KRG went awry. The Iraqi government in Baghdad has also stalled a prepayment deal with China worth more than US\$ 2 billion (in late 2020), even while the government was struggling to pay salaries to government officials.<sup>379</sup> Thus, the grand Chinese investments have limitations. In fact, their limitations have been India's strength, especially in the Kurdistan region. Since 2011, when India first engaged with Kurds, the relationship has been fruitful. India, therefore, can capitalise on this, particularly in the sphere of energy. The Russian engagement with the Kurds has also scaled new heights in the last few years. Accordingly, India can also pursue trilateral engagement with Russia and the KRG.

In addition, India can fall back on its cultural and civilisational links to connect with Iraq through its ambitious programmes like 'Project Mausam'.<sup>380</sup> Launched in Doha in 2014, this transnational project by the Ministry of Culture aims to "understand how the knowledge and manipulation of the monsoon winds has shaped interactions across the Indian Ocean and led to the spread of shared knowledge systems, traditions, technologies and ideas along maritime routes."<sup>381</sup> Besides these objectives, the Project is touted to carry a strategic dimension, largely as a counterbalance Beijing's Maritime Silk Route.<sup>382</sup> Hitherto,

<sup>379</sup> Simon Watkins, "The Real Reason Why Iraq Paused Its Major Oil Deal with China," *Oil Price*, 1 March 2021 at <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/The-Real-Reason-Why-Iraq-Paused-Its-Major-Oil-Deal-With-China.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>380</sup> This cultural project has to be implemented by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi as the nodal coordinating agency with additional support from Archaeological Survey of India and National Museum.

<sup>381</sup> "Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes," Ministry of Culture, Government of India, at <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/project-mausam/#> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>382</sup> Sachin Parashar, "Narendra Modi's 'Mausam' manoeuvre to check China's maritime might," *The Times of India*, 16 September 2014, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/narendra-modis-mausam-manoeuve-to-check-chinas-maritime-might/articleshow/42562085.cms> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

Iraq is not part of the countries conceived in the Project.<sup>383</sup> However, as noted earlier, the inhabitants of the Indus Valley Civilisation had trade relations with Mesopotamians through a sea route. India would benefit by enlisting Iraq as a component of its transnational cultural project to exploit the historical links with Iraq.

### **Less-Lucrative Option**

Undoubtedly, one of the biggest challenges for the India would be to configure Iraq in its hierarchy of priorities in the region. Given that more attractive options like the UAE (with more straightforward payoffs) are available, India would not ideally pursue such a concerted approach towards Iraq. Such an assessment is partially true, but such a reading illustrates a myopic and inadequate understanding of the situation. The crude supplies from Iraq provide roughly one-fourth of India's total crude imports. India needs to engage unless it wants to avoid the possible challenges to its interests, particularly to India's energy security. Moreover, the security concerns (from the Islamic State) may have been averted, but the resurgence of the Islamic State as an underground terrorist group poses a graver threat for the country that has the world's second-largest Muslim population.

Finally, India's ambitions of becoming a leading power cannot be fulfilled by selecting safe countries for engagement. Assuming that Indian efforts in Iraq flourish, India could make a compelling case for P5 membership at the United Nations for its ability to support peace and stability in a country that has been besieged consistently by conflict for decades. When India refused to take part in the US-led invasion (as many cautioned), India lost an opportunity to become an important player in post-2003 Iraq. On the other hand, China took full advantage of the opportunity by cashing in on oil contracts. And as such, merely closing its eyes to events in Iraq, will not make India, its people, or its

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<sup>383</sup> "Progress of Project Mausam," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 23 March 2021, at <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1707000> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

investments safer. India had robust and multi-dimensional relations with Iraq, and it can develop them again if it intends to. Failure to do so would have costs (both absolute and opportunity costs).

### **OPPORTUNITIES (POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS)**

It has always proved baffling to predict and speculate events and trends in the region. Moving ahead, three major themes – Oil Trade, Counterterrorism and Infrastructure Development – can be identified, around which cooperation is likely to occur. Nevertheless, other notable themes and issues could further foster India-Iraq cooperation. Building on the lessons from the history of relations (the Past) and the current status of bilateral ties (the Present), India's Iraq Policy (in Future) should entail the following responses.

**Increased High-Level Exchange(s):** Head-of-State level visits significantly impact bilateral ties. The visits by Saddam Hussein (1974), Indira Gandhi (1975) and Nuri al-Maliki (2013) gave a significant boost to the bilateral relations across all sectors. Similar efforts need to be undertaken to instil confidence among investors and concerned stakeholders. The visits from both sides can be gradually enhanced.

**Appraisal of the Joint Commission:** The Commission had been an essential tool for enhancing economic and social cooperation in the past. However, sporadic frequency and limited scope present impediments in its success. Moving ahead, the Commission needs to be updated and regularised to serve as the critical platform for advancing ties in different existing sectors and newer areas of cooperation.

**Counter-terrorism Cooperation:** Amidst the fear of a resurgence of the Islamic State, cooperation in this field has become prescient. The cooperation across different levels needs to be enhanced, starting with intelligence-sharing and organising high-level meetings (perhaps starting at the Deputy NSA level). A small Task-Force to monitor Indians travelling to Iraq could also prove instrumental in getting ahead of the curve. All such initiatives have better chances of success when appropriate institutional mechanisms are established through MoUs and legal agreements like the extradition treaty.

**Exploring Trilateral Cooperation:** India must explore the possibility of trilateral cooperation with other countries, like Egypt, which has moved to capture various key opportunities in Iraq's reconstruction sector.<sup>384</sup> Iraq's desperation to improve its economic condition is no secret. The four tripartite summits that Iraq has held with Egypt and Jordan in less than three years are a testament to this. Major agenda in these summits have been investment and economic cooperation that Iraq sees vital for ending its economic woes.<sup>385</sup> As such, the cooperation can initially focus on the reconstruction sector, which can follow other sectors like agriculture and irrigation.

**A New Investment Strategy:** Iraq has stated that it would necessitate roughly US\$ 88 billion in reconstruction efforts after the war with the Islamic State.<sup>386</sup> Such estimates should be read in consonance with the already decrepit infrastructure (particularly in the electricity sector) and the introduction of economic woes by the pandemic. Here, the private sector can contribute. However, the government would need to ensure certain confidence (afforded by high-level visits) and provide some financial incentives. The major sectors for such investments would be Iraq's electricity sector, reconstruction, information technology, e-commerce, among others.

**Explore Renewable Energy:** Prime Minister Modi announced India's intention to develop refining capacities from existing 250 million metric

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<sup>384</sup> Amr Mostafa, "Egypt wins strong foothold in Iraq's reconstruction," *Al-Monitor*, 8 December 2020, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/12/egypt-reconstruction-iraq-economic-workers-construction.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>385</sup> Ali Mamouri, "Iraq hosts historic summit with Jordanian, Egyptian leaders," *Al-Monitor*, 28 June 2021, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/iraq-hosts-historic-summit-jordanian-egyptian-leaders>, (Accessed 26 February 2022).

<sup>386</sup> Maher Chmaytelli and Ahmed Hagagy, "Iraq says reconstruction after war on Islamic State to cost \$88 billion," Reuters, 12 February 2018 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-reconstruction/iraq-says-reconstruction-after-war-on-islamic-state-to-cost-88-billion-idUSKBN1FW0JB>, (Accessed 26 February 2022).

tonnes per annum to 400 million metric tonnes per annum by 2025.<sup>387</sup> India has also sought to become a leader in clean energy production, and its efforts within the ISA are positive steps in this direction. Hitherto, Iraq has been reliant on non-renewable resources, even to meet its daily requirements. Iraq is also not a member of the ISA. As such, India can push for Iraq's membership and consequently, provide support in building Iraq's renewable energy sector.

**Focusing on Health Diplomacy:** India can ascribe a particular quota of visas while also providing incentives for treatments and certain medical procedures. India can engage with multilateral organisations like the WHO. Here, the private sector can also make an immense contribution.

**Capacity-Building (through Education):** The Iraqi generation after 2003 has witnessed unprecedented violence with limited to no education at all. India can help provide education at the primary and secondary levels (like in the 1970s). Education would contribute to India's soft power in Iraq while also supporting Iraqis to get better education after decades of conflict. India can start by creating e-learning platforms, followed by appointments to Iraqi schools on a limited-period basis perhaps starting with the Kurdish region.

**Capacity-Building (in Technical and Service Sector):** Although India provides numerous programmes regularly for this purpose, India would benefit by streamlining these programmes through 'Skill India' and 'Digital India', to help Iraqis advance while simultaneously contributing to India's soft power.

**Promotion of Defence Diplomacy:** Promotion of defence diplomacy can follow security cooperation in programmes and courses curated for the Iraqi Police. The vast experience of Indian forces in fighting terrorism would help the Iraqis fight insurgency and attain

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<sup>387</sup> Prime Minister's Office (PMO), "Text of PM's address at the inauguration of India Energy Forum," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 26 October 2020, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1667640> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

some modicum of stability. India has expanded its efforts through defence diplomacy in the GCC.<sup>388</sup> Similar efforts are needed in Iraq. India should also explore the possibilities of joint-military exercises.

**Capitalising on New Avenues:** India may not have direct links to the Iraqi power structure like it used to under Saddam Hussein, but it has new avenues to explore. Iraq's democratic outlook allows India to establish new engines of cooperation, mainly through democratic principles. Cooperation can start between the Election Commission of the two countries, followed by parliamentary visits to ensure a greater understanding of each other and their respective laws.

**Development Projects:** The Indian Mission can help facilitate business outreach while also following up on contracts. Indian efforts in building the Parliament and other critical infrastructures in Afghanistan was highly appreciated. Notably, in Iraq also, India has undertaken prestigious projects in the past, including the construction of the Group of Ministers' building in Baghdad. The initial investment may reflect a red balance sheet, but it must be recognised that such efforts would ultimately foster trust and confidence. The idea must be to impress the seriousness of the Indian commitment on the Iraqi people. In 2013, the joint statement during Prime Minister Maliki's visit and the case for the construction of low-cost housing in Iraq was noted but not followed up afterwards. The construction of low-cost housing projects would also increase India's soft power among the Iraqi people.

**Looking into Banking Sector:** India can help by providing digital platforms for the existing banking structure in Iraq. India's experience of benefiting from the interface between technology and the banking sector would be an excellent asset for Iraq. This can include India's superior expertise in Fin-Tech and internet services. India already provides the cheapest internet and allied banking services like Paytm. This would promote digital literacy and steadily help tackle the malaise

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<sup>388</sup> Roby Thomas, "Indian Defence Diplomacy: A Handbook," Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 2022, at <https://idsa.in/monograph/indian-defence-diplomacy-rthomas> (Accessed 26 February, 2022).

of corruption and lack of accountability in Iraq. Although Iraq took some unorganised steps in this regard during the pandemic in order to promote contactless transactions, India can provide the needed boost to the sector.

**Promoting Joint Ventures (JVs):** Already a government agenda, the JVs needs to be advertised more for other Indian firms to participate in the upcoming projects. Once there is an acceptance that more established companies have committed projects in Iraq, medium-scale JVs could be promoted.

**Move Beyond Buyer-Seller Relationship:** This essentially means that there must be diversification in terms of energy resources. There is no doubt that oil is the backbone of the relationship, but the fluctuation in the prices, slow recovery of the global market, and changing prices of ferry tankers make oil trade and the bilateral ties vulnerable. Here, India can push its limits beyond the buyer to a partner in the oil trade. Indian refineries can benefit by conducting streamlined projects from extraction to consumption. This outreach to upstream, midstream and downstream industries will diversify risks.

**Trade-in Non-Oil Commodities:** In 2018, nearly 90 per cent of Iraq's revenue came from oil resources, and roughly 98 per cent (2018) of its exports came from crude sales. As such, this is a desirable aspect for the Iraqi economy to focus on alternative sources of investment and trade. The recent summits and agreements Iraq had inked with Jordan and Egypt, are a testament to such shifting focus. There is enormous potential for India here. The government can facilitate investment and trade by creating mechanisms for negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with Iraq.

**Soft Power (Films):** Unknowingly, the Indian film industry exerts notable influence in the region, including in Iraq and even Kurdistan region.<sup>389</sup> Even during the Islamic State occupation, the packaged food

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<sup>389</sup> Ajaz Ashraf, "Iraq and India: A Forgotten Love Story," *FirstPost*, 21 June 2014, at <https://www.firstpost.com/world/iraq-and-india-a-forgotten-love-story-1581885.html> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

items outside Mosul reportedly featured Indian film stars.<sup>390</sup> As such, a conscious and willing effort may enable India to exercise enormous power within Iraq. Recently, a few films have been released based on the region, but more nuanced filmmaking can go a long way in creating lasting impressions. The government can promote and provide certain economic incentives to create feature films exploring the region, including Iraq.

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<sup>390</sup> Supriya Sharma, "The Backstory: When I Nearly Got Deported from Kurdistan," *Scroll*, 29 December 2017, at <https://scroll.in/article/862674/the-backstory-when-i-nearly-got-deported-from-kurdistan> (Accessed 26 February 2022).

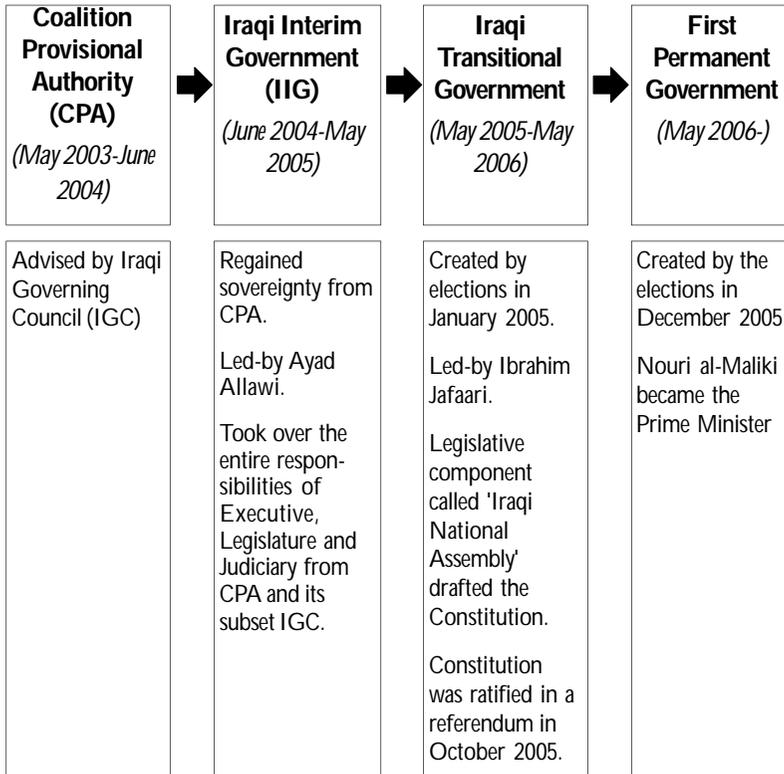
**MEETINGS OF INDIA-IRAQ JOINT COMMISSION  
FOR ECONOMIC, TECHNICAL AND CULTURAL  
COOPERATION**

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>
<b>First Meeting</b>	January 1975	Baghdad
<b>Second Meeting</b>	March-April 1976	New Delhi
<b>Third Meeting</b>	June 1977	Baghdad
<b>Fourth Meeting</b>	November 1977	New Delhi
<b>Fifth Meeting</b>	December 1978	Baghdad
<b>Sixth Meeting</b>	July 1979	New Delhi
<b>Seventh Meeting</b>	April 1980	Baghdad
<b>Eighth Meeting</b>	January 1983	New Delhi
<b>Ninth Meeting*</b>		
<b>Tenth Meeting</b>	October 1986	New Delhi
<b>Eleventh Meeting</b>	September/October 1988	Baghdad
<b>Twelfth Meeting</b>	August/September 1998	New Delhi
<b>Thirteenth Meeting</b>	July 1999	Baghdad
<b>Fourteenth Meeting</b>	November 2000	New Delhi
<b>Fifteenth Meeting</b>	July 2002	Baghdad
<b>Sixteenth Meeting</b>	May 2007	New Delhi
<b>Seventeenth Meeting</b>	July 2013	Baghdad

\* Details Unavailable.

*Source:* Compiled by author from Foreign Affairs Records (FAR),  
and Annual MEA Reports..

## EVOLUTION OF IRAQI DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AFTER 2003



*Source:* Prepared by the author. For more, see MEA Annual Report, 2004-05; 2005-06; 2006-07.

*Annexure 3*

## TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS IN INDO-IRAQI RELATIONS<sup>391</sup>

762	Abbasids founded Baghdad and declared it as their capital.
750-1258	Abbasid Caliphate.
1534	Ottoman Control of Baghdad
1917	British captured Baghdad
1919-1931	Iraq as a Mandate of League of Nations.
1932-1958	Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq.
1932	Monarchy established in Iraq.
1952	Treaty of Friendship is signed.
14 July 1958	14 July Revolution; Hashemite monarchy toppled in coup d'état. King Faisal II and Prince 'Abd al-Ilah are killed.
1958-1968	First Iraqi Republic (pre-Ba'ath Party).
23 July 1958	India recognises the new government in Iraq.
1-6 September 1961	First Conference of Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in Belgrade.
26 March - 3 April 1964	Abdul Salam Arif, Second President of Iraq, visited India.
1967	Iraq's Foreign Minister visited India.
1968-2003	Iraq Republic (under Ba'ath Party), also Second Iraqi Republic.
1972	Nationalisation of Iraqi Petroleum Company takes place.
25-28 March 1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Saddam Hussein, Vice President of Iraq visited India.</li> <li>● Agreement on establishing a permanent Indo-Iraqi joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation.</li> </ul>

<sup>391</sup> The following table does not include all the events related to India-Iraq relations but is merely a reference for all the major events covered in the monograph.

1975	Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Iraq.
1978	Iraq's Vice President visited Iraq.
1979	Islamic Revolution in Iran takes place.
1980	Eight-Year War commenced.
1981	Iraq's Nuclear facility attacked by Israel.
1988	Ceasefire agreed in Eight Year War, under Security Council Resolution 598.
August 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Iraq invades Kuwait.</li> <li>● I. K. Gujral as Foreign Minister visited Iraq.</li> </ul>
17 January - 28 Feb 1991	Gulf War (also First Gulf War).
20 March 2003	US-led invasion began (also Iraq War).
2003-2004	Iraq Governing Council is constituted.
2004-current	Republic of Iraq.
June 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sovereignty of Iraq is restored.</li> <li>● 3 Indian truck drivers were kidnapped.</li> <li>● India imposed travel ban to Iraq (that stayed until June 2010)</li> <li>● Indian Ambassador to Iraq, B. B. Tyagi is recalled back to India.</li> </ul>
27 October 2005	Volcker Committee alleges (incumbent Foreign Minister) Natwar Singh's family and Congress to obtain kickbacks in Oil-For-Food Program
30 December 2006	Saddam Hussein is hanged.
June 2011	New Delhi reinstates S.K. Reddy, as India's Ambassador to Iraq.
June 2013	Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid visits Iraq. (First such visit in decades)
August 2013	Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki made an official visit to India.
4-10 June 2014	Mosul takeover by ISIS
13 June 2014	India calls-off Indian Ambassador to Iraq.
29 June 2014	Islamic State's Caliphate declared by Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi.

June 2014	40 Indians are abducted in Mosul.
May 2014	BJP-led government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes to power in India.
December 2017	Prime Minister Mahdi declares defeat of Da from Mosul
March 2018	Confirmation on the demise of 39 Indians in Mosul received.

*Source:* Collated by the author from a pool of resources.

*Annexure 4***NOTABLE STATE VISITS BETWEEN INDIA AND IRAQ  
AFTER 2003<sup>392</sup>**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dignitary</b>	<b>Detail(S)</b>
16-17 September 2019	V. Muraleedharan, MoS for External Affairs	Called on Iraqi President, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister.  He visited Erbil and met with President & PM of Kurdistan Regional Government.  MoS addressed a gathering of Indian community and also unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi at Sami Abdulrahman Park.
3-6 October 2018	Dr Abdul Razzaq Al Issa, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq	Attended DIDAC India-Asian Summit on Education and Skills & Exhibition in New Delhi.
30 October - 1 November 2018	Dr Fouad Qassim Mohamed, Deputy Minister of Education and Scientific Research of Iraq	Visited New Delhi to participate in 14th Higher Education Summit.
1-2 April 2018	General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs	Made a special visit to Iraq to carry back mortal remains of the 39 Indian nationals that were killed in Mosul by the Islamic State.

<sup>392</sup> The following table does not catalogue all the official visits between India and Iraq, but is merely a reference for all the are major events covered over the course of the monograph.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dignitary</b>	<b>Detail(S)</b>
21 January 2018	General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs	MoS visited Baghdad and called upon Faleh Al Fayyadh (Iraq's NSA).
24-31 October 2017	General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs	MoS again visited Mosul to take stock of the things in Iraq. He held meetings with Dr Ibrahim Al Jaafari (Foreign Minister), Faleh Al Fayyadh (NSA), Othman Al Ghanimi (Chief of Staff of Iraqi Armed Forces), and Mahdi Al Alaq (Secretary General of the Council of Ministers of Iraq).
11-14 October 2017	Dr Adeelah Hamoud Hussein Saleem, Minister of Health of Iraq	Visit involved discussions around wide gamut of health-related issues. To that end, Minister held meetings with Anupriya Patel, Minister of State (MoS) for Health and Family Welfare (MHFM) and representatives of the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry. She paid visit to AIIMS, Medanta-The Medicity (Gurugram) and other health-related institutions in Delhi. Minister-led delegation attended an interactive session organised by Pharmexil in New Delhi.
23 September 2017	Shri M. J. Akbar, MoS for External Affairs	MoS met with Dr Ibrahim Al Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq in New York on the margins of UNGA session.
24-26 July 2017	Dr Ibrahim Al Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq	Minister-led delegation visited India and held meeting with EAM Sushma Swaraj on various bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. Foreign Minister called on Vice-President Dr Hamid Ansari, as he also held a meeting with Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of State (IC) for Petroleum & Natural Gas.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dignitary</b>	<b>Detail(S)</b>
12-14 July 2017	General (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd), MoS for External Affairs	Notably, visit took place soon after the liberation of Mosul. MoS visited Erbil and called upon the Kurdish leadership.
April 2017	Humam Al-Hamoudi, Deputy Speaker of Iraq	Visited New Delhi and held meetings with MoS and various other leaders.
5-7 December 2016	Dr Hamed Younis Saleh, Deputy Oil Minister of Iraq	Minister-led delegation attended the PETROTECH 2016 held in New Delhi.
21-23 August 2016	Shri M. J. Akbar, MoS for External Affairs	MoS held meetings with Fuad Masum (President of Iraq), Dr Salim Al Jabouri (Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament), Dr Ibrahim Al-Jaafari (Foreign Minister), Faleh Al Fayyad (National Security Advisor).  MoS vested the Holy city of Karbala, and met with Chairman of the Provincial Council of Karbala, and various other religious leaders.
November 2015	Nazar Al-Khairallah, Deputy Foreign Minister	First round of India-Iraq Foreign Office Consultations was held in New Delhi, as Indian-side represented Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs.
9-10 March 2014	FICCI-Delegation	A 12-member delegation under India's FICCI visited Iraq.  The delegation included, Exporters of Rice & Sugar from India.  Iraqi-side through the Ministry of Trade placed an order for 120,000 MT Basmati Rice (US\$150 million) and 25,000 MT of sugar (US\$15 million).  First such order was placed on the spot by the Iraqi Ministry of Trade through direct negotiations.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dignitary</b>	<b>Detail(S)</b>
December 2013	Faleh Al-Fayyadh, National Security Advisor of Iraq	An MoU on Cooperation between the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi and Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies, Baghdad was signed in New Delhi.
August 2013	Nouri Al-Maliki, Prime Minister of Iraq	Prime Minister led a vast delegation composed of Minister for Oil, Minister for Agriculture and leading Iraqi businessmen.  The visit witnessed the signing of four MoUs on: Cooperation in Energy Sector; Cooperation between the two Foreign Ministries; Co-operation between the Foreign Service Institutes of respective countries; and Cooperation in the field of Water Resources Management.
July 2013	Dr Veerappa Moily, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas	17th Joint Commission was held.
June 2013	Salman Khurshid, External Affairs Minister	First such visit by Indian EAM since 1990.  Held meeting that discussed areas of mutual interest.
May 2013	Mohanad Salman Al-Sady, Iraq's Minister of Water Resources	
February 2012	Rowsch Shaways, Deputy Prime Minister; Dr Khairalla Hasan Babiker (Minister of Trade); Dr Sami Araji (National Investment Chairman) and various other senior Iraqi officials	India's Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had extended an invite for the visit.  Under the pretext of 'Iraq Day', CII intended to promote trade and economic relations further in diverse fields.
May 2011	Labeed Majeed Abbawi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Iraq	

<b>Period</b>	<b>Dignitary</b>	<b>Detail(S)</b>
April 2011	Abdul Kareem Al-Samarai, Iraqi Minister for Science and Technology	To explore cooperation in e-Governance
March 2011	Iraq's Minister of Oil, Abdul Karim al-Luaibi	
February 2010	Fauzi Franso Hariri, Iraq's Minister of Industries and Minerals	
May 2007	Hussein Al-Sharistani, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq for Energy Affairs	Visited New Delhi and discussed prospects to increase the cooperation in oil sector.

*Source:* Prepared by the author. For more, see Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations: Iraq, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

*Annexure 5***TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN REPUBLIC OF  
INDIA AND HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF IRAQ**

BAGHDAD, 10 NOVEMBER 1952

The President of India and His Majesty the King of Iraq recognising the ancient ties which have existed between the two countries for centuries and their mutual need for cooperation in strengthening and developing these ties and urged by the mutual desire to establish peace between the two countries with a view to the common benefit of their people and the development of their respective countries, wish to enter into a Treaty of Friendship with each other and to this end have appointed as their Plenipotentiaries the following persons namely,

The President of India: His Excellency Mr. Khub Chand,

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary,

His Majesty the King of Iraq: His Excellency Syed Jamal Baban,

Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs,

who having examined each other's credentials and found them good and in due form have agreed as follows:

**Article 1**

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Governments of India and Iraq and the said Governments shall promote and strengthen such peace and friendship between the peoples of their respective countries.

**Article 2**

The High Contracting Parties agree to appoint diplomatic representatives at the capitals of the two countries, and consular representatives as

may be necessary and at such places as may be agreed upon. Each Party shall grant to such representatives of the other Party such privileges and immunities as are accorded under International Law.

### **Article 3**

The High Contracting Parties agree to strengthen and develop cultural ties between their respective countries and to assist each other as far as possible in industrial and agricultural progress.

### **Article 4**

The nationals of each High Contracting Party shall have, on a reciprocal basis, in the territory of the other, subject to the laws and rules in force in that territory, the right of establishing themselves and of residence, going from and coming to and moving freely within that territory.

### **Article 5**

The High Contracting Parties agree to conduct their commercial relations as well as those pertaining to customs, navigation, aviation, cultural affairs, extradition, and other matters of interest to both countries, in accordance with such special agreements as may be already in operation or may be concluded hereafter between them.

### **Article 6**

Any difference arising out of the interpretation or application of this Treaty shall be settled by negotiations through the ordinary diplomatic channels. If no settlement is arrived at within a reasonable time the matter shall be referred to arbitration in such manner as may be mutually agreed upon.

### **Article 7**

The Treaty shall be subject to ratification and shall come into force from the date of the exchange of the instruments of ratification, which shall take place as soon as possible at Baghdad.

IN WITNESS "HEREOF, the said Plenipotentiaries have signed the present Treaty in English, Arabic and Hindi, all three texts being equally authentic except in the case of doubt when the English text shall prevail.

DONE in duplicate at Baghdad this tenth day of November 1952 A.D. corresponding to the twenty-first day of Safar 1372 Hijri.

**For the President of India:**

(Signed) KHUB CHAND

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary

**For His Majesty the King of Iraq:**

(Signed) JAMAL BABAN

Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs

*Source:* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. See <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6897/Treaty+of+Friendship>

*Annexure 6*

## **TRADE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS OF INDIA AND IRAQ**

BAGHDAD, 29 DECEMBER 1958

The Government of India and the Government of the Iraqi Republic, animated by the desire to develop, extend and consolidate trade and economic relations between the two countries, have resolved to enter upon the following Agreement

### **Article 1**

The trade and economic relations between the two countries shall be established on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

### **Article 2**

The two Contracting Parties shall accord each other mostfavoured-nation treatment, with respect to all customs matters, taxes and other charges.

### **Article 3**

Each Government shall accord to the commerce of the country of the other Government treatment no less favourable than that accorded to the commerce of any third country.

### **Article 4**

The provisions of Articles 2 and 3 shall not apply to the grant or continuance of any privileges which are or will be granted by either of the two Contracting Parties in order to facilitate frontier trade;

advantages, favours, privileges or immunities accorded by India to any country existing on the date of this Agreement or in replacement

of such preferences or advantages that existed prior to the 15th August, 1947;

such privileges and advantages as are or may be accorded by Iraq to any Arab State or country.

### **Article 5**

The two Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote trade between the two countries in all possible ways, in particular I ar with regard to items mentioned in Schedules 'A' and 'B' attached to this Agreement.

Nothing in this Agreement shall be deemed to preclude trade in goods and commodities not mentioned in the said Schedules.

### **Article 6**

The two Contracting Parties undertake to grant import, export licences in accordance with their respective import, export and foreign exchange rules and regulations.

### **Article 7**

Each Government shall give full consideration to suggestions that may be made from time to time by the other Government with a view to the development and expansion of commerce between the two countries.

### **Article 8**

The merchant ships belonging to either of the two Contracting Parties, together with their cargoes, shall enjoy in respect of all matters relating to navigation free entry into the ports open to foreign trade, use of ports and harbour facilities, loading and unloading dues, taxes and other facilities, a treatment in no way less favourable than the treatment accorded to ships of any other foreign country, except that any concessions made to ships engaged in the coastal trade of either Party shall not be available under this Article to the other Party.

**Article 9**

The two Contracting Parties agree to accord, subject to their respective laws and regulations, reasonable facilities for the holding of trade fairs and exhibitiofis.

**Article 10**

The two Contracting Parties agree to consult each other, as and when need for such consultation arises, in respect of any matters arising from the implementation of this Agreement, or in connection with the export or import of goods thereunder.

**Article 11**

The Agreement shall take effect from the date on which Letters of Ratification are exchanged and shall remain in force for a period of two years thereafter, and shall, subject to such modifications as may be agreed upon, be extended by mutual agreement for a further period of one year.

DONE at Baghdad, on this twenty-ninth day of December, 1958 A.D., in six original copies in Arabic, Hindi and English languages, all of which are equally authentic.

For the Government of India,

Sd./- I.S. CHOPRA Ambassador of India.

For the Government of the Iraqi Republic,

Sd./- Dr. IBRAHIM KUBBA Minsiter of Economics.

**SCHEDULE 'A'****COMMODITIES FOR EXPORT FROM IRAQ TO INDIA**

**1. Animals, live:** Horses Mules

II. Cotton

III. Dates

IV. Foodgrains Barley Millets Pulses Rice Wheat Other Foodgrains including Beans, etc.

V. Gallnuts.

VT. Hides and Skins.

## SCHEDULES

### COMMODITIES FOR EXPORT FROM INDIA TO IRAQ

**Textiles:** Cotton and woollen, such as: Cotton and woollen piecegoods, Cotton Dhoties and Sarees, Hosiery and knitted Garments-Woollen, Cotton and Rayon. Silk Art Silk and Rayon Fabrics; Cotton Twist and Yarn; other Cotton, Woollen and Silk manufactures; Jute Manufactures.

**Food :** Tea, Coffee, Spices including Pepper, Provision. and Oilman's Stores.

**Agricultural Products:** Hydrogenated Oils, i.e., Vanaspati' or Vegetable Ghee, Vegetable oils and Oilseeds, Essential Oils;

**Chemical Products and Soaps:** Chemicals and Chemical Preparations, Pharmaceuticals, Drugs and Medicines, Naphthalene, Antibiotics, Sera and Vaccines, Toilet Requisites and Perfumery, Paints, Pigments and Varnishes.

**Engineering Goods:** Printing Machinery, Diesel Engines, Pumps Driven by Diesel Engines and Electric Motors, Sewing Machines, Bicycles and their parts, Textile Machinery, such as Carding Machinery and Weaving looms, Machine Tools, Hand Tools and Small Tools, Small River-Crafts, Sugarcane Crushing Machinery, Rice, Flour and Oil Crushing Machinery, Ball Bearings, Agricultural Implements, Automobiles and their parts, Gliders.

**Electrical Goods:** Electrical appliances and accessories such as, Conduit Pipes, Switches, Bells, Holders, Cut-outs, etc., Electrodes, Electric Bulbs and Tubes, Generators, Portable and Fixed, Radio Receivers, Electric Fans and their parts, Batteries (dry and wet), Electric Torch Lights,

Electric Motors, Telephone Apparatus, Ebonite Sheets, Rods and Tubes, Cables and Wires.

**Household and Building Requirements:** Utensils including Stainless Steelware, Cooking Ranges, Heaters, Electric Iron, Toasters, Kettles, etc. Household Electrical Fittings and Fixtures, Roofing Tiles, Linoleum, Sanitary ware, G. I. Pipes and Fittings, Manhole Covers and Plates, Hurricane Lanterns, Kerosene Stoves,

Incandescent Oil Pressure Lamps, Safes, Strong Boxes and Room Fittings, Crockery.

**Hardware:** Locks and Padlocks, Cutlery, Bolts, Nuts, Screws and Hinges, etc., Steel Furniture and Hospital Appliances, Scientific Instruments of all types, Weighing Machines, Surgical and Medical Instruments.

**Rubber Manufactures:** Tyres and Tubes, Other Rubber Manufactures, Artificial Leather Goods.

**Handicrafts and Cottage Industry Products:** Stationery and Paper.

**Miscellaneous:** Coir, and Coir Products, Dyeing and Tanning Substances, Lac and Shellac, Myrobalan and Myrobalan Extracts, Glassware including Tableware, Glass Bottles and B angles, Books and Printed Matter, Sports Goods, Plastic Goods, and such other items as may become available for export from time to time.

*Source:* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. See <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5920/Trade+Agreement>

*Annexure 7***OFFICIAL TEXT OF INDO-IRAQI CULTURAL  
AGREEMENT**

NEW DELHI, 19 APRIL 1973

The Government of the Republic of India and The Government of the Republic of Iraq, Inspired by the mutual desire to further strengthen the ancient cultural relations between the two countries, and keenly desirous of promoting and developing cultural, scientific and technical relations between India and Iraq in every possible way, Have decided to conclude an agreement on Cultural, Scientific and Technical Relations and Cooperation and, to this end, have appointed as their plenipotentiaries the following persons:

For the Government of the Republic of India:

H.E. Mr. K.R.P. Singh, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary;

For The Government of the Republic of Iraq:

H.E. Mr. Hisham. I Al-Shawi, Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research;

Who, after having exchanged their credentials and found them in good and due form have agreed as follows:-

**ARTICLE 1**

Each Contracting Party shall, in so far as may be possible, encourage the exchange and recruitment of professors, research workers, scientists, teachers, and other experts in educational, scientific, cultural, artistic and technological fields in and for the universities, colleges, schools and institutions of the two countries.

## ARTICLE 2

Each Contracting Party shall grant scholarships and other facilities and allocate seats to the nationals of the other Contracting Party, as well as facilitate their studies at its universities for higher education and training, schools of arts, technical schools and other institutions.

## ARTICLE 3

Each Contracting Party shall receive as far as its resources and requirements permit, employees or other persons deputed by the other Party for study, training and research in scientific, cultural, technical and industrial institutions.

## ARTICLE 4

Each Contracting Party shall encourage the closest cooperation between the learned societies and educational and professional organizations which are officially recognized or permitted in its respective territory for the purpose of giving effect to this agreement.

## ARTICLE 5

Each Contracting Party shall facilitate to scholars and students from the territory of the other, access, on the same terms as to its own scholars and students, to the monuments, collections, archives, libraries, laboratories and other institutions of learning.

## ARTICLE 6

The two Contracting Parties shall facilitate, within the limits of their legislation, research in the fields of science and medicine by suitable persons from the territory of the other.

## ARTICLE 7

The two Contracting Parties shall extend technical advice and exchange information and studies and shall give necessary facilities for translation and publication of Outstanding writings issued in the other Party's country.

## ARTICLE 8

The two Contracting Parties, shall encourage the cooperation between press, broadcasting, television and cinema institutions of their two countries.

## ARTICLE 9

The two Contracting Parties welcome the establishment of cultural institutes in each other's territory subject to the laws governing the establishment of such institutes in that country and the general policy of that Government. It is understood however, that prior clearance of the Government concerned would be obtained before a cultural institute is established. By the term "cultural institute" is meant centres of learning, libraries, scientific institutes imparting instructions, and institutions for the promotion of art, such as art galleries, art centres and societies, and film libraries.

## ARTICLE 10

The two Contracting Parties shall strive to promote cultural and intellectual exchange between the two countries by arranging concerts, lectures, art and scientific exhibitions by organising visits of scholars and students, by encouraging collaboration amongst scientific, artistic, literary and other learned societies And organisations devoted to the promotion of learning, by establishing chairs in Universities or other institutions of higher learning for, the teaching of subjects pertaining to each other's country, by exchange of books and periodicals, by exhibition of films, and by exchange of archaeological missions.

## ARTICLE 11

The two Contracting Parties shall encourage, as far as possible, sports competitions between their respective nationals and collaboration between their scout organisations.

## ARTICLE 12

The two Contracting Parties shall encourage exchange of tourists between the two countries in order to promote better understanding and strengthen friendship between their people.

### ARTICLE 13

The two Contracting Parties shall, so far as it lies within their powers, ensure that text-books prescribed for teaching institutions do not contain any errors or misrepresentations about each other's country.

### ARTICLE 14

The question of "equivalence" of diplomas and degrees will be subject of thorough and periodical studies by the two Parties.

### ARTICLE 15

The two Contracting Parties pledge themselves to take all appropriate measures and to provide all possible facilities for giving effect to the terms of this Agreement.

### ARTICLE 16

For the purpose of carrying out the terms of this Agreement, either Party may, If necessary, agree to set up a Committee consisting of representatives of the two Parties with the object of:

- (a) watching the working of the Agreement in the country;
- (b) advising the Party concerned, on the detailed manner of carrying out of the Agreement;
- (c) making recommendations for the selection of personnel regarding exchange of professors, students, etc.; and
- (d) generally advising the Parties concerned as to the manner in which the working of the Agreement may be improved upon. At intervals of not less than once in three years and by rotation at New Delhi and Baghdad, the two Governments will hold joint consultations to coordinate the working of the Agreement in the two countries and invite suggestions and advice from cooperating agencies as to the steps that may be deemed necessary for a more effective implementation of this Agreement.

#### ARTICLE 17

Nothing in the present agreement shall be deemed to affect the obligation of any person to comply with the laws and regulations in force in the territory of either Contracting Government.

#### ARTICLE 18

The present agreement shall be ratified with the least possible delay. The Agreement shall come into force immediately after the exchange of instruments of ratification which will take place in New Delhi.

#### ARTICLE 19

The Agreement shall remain in force unless terminated. It can be terminated by either Party by giving in writing an advance notice of termination of at least six months, at the expiry of which this Agreement shall cease to be operative.

#### ARTICLE 20

This Agreement supersedes and cancels the Agreement concerning Cultural Relations between India and Iraq dated 5th July, 1954.

In faith whereof, the said plenipotentiaries have signed the present Agreement, of which there are Hindi, Arabic and English versions, all the three texts being equally authentic, except in the case of doubt when the English text shall prevail. Done in duplicate in Baghdad on this the 29th day of Chaitra 1895 (S.E.) corresponding to the 19th day of April, 1973.

*Source:* Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1973.

*Annexure 8*

**OFFICIAL TEXT OF THE AGREEMENT FOR THE  
ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT INDO-IRAQ  
JOINT COMMISSION FOR ECONOMIC AND  
TECHNICAL COOPERATION**

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH 1974

Shri D. K. Barooah, Minister of petroleum and Chemicals,  
Government of India, and

Mr. Fakhri Qaddouri, Chairman, Economic Bureau, Revolutionary  
Command Council Government of the Republic of Iraq

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ,

BEARING IN MIND their mutual friendship and common interests  
and aspirations,

DESIROUS OF facilitating and coordinating implementation of the  
various existing as well as future cooperation agreements between the  
two countries,

HAVING IN VIEW further development and expansion of their  
relations in the trade, economic, agricultural, industrial, cultural, technical  
and scientific fields, and

CONFIDENT THAT the existing relations in all these fields shall  
expand rapidly on the basis of equality and mutual benefit,

HAVE AGREED as follows:

ARTICLE I

The Government of India and the Government of the Republic of  
Iraq have agreed to establish a permanent Indo-Iraq Joint Commission

for Economic and Technical Cooperation with an overall responsibility for promotion and coordination of trade, economic, agricultural, Industrial, cultural, technical and scientific cooperation between the two countries.

## ARTICLE II

The objectives of the Joint Commission shall be:

- (a) to coordinate and to oversee the functioning of the various bodies in the two countries engaged in the execution of existing and future agreements protocols concerning cooperation between the two countries, unless otherwise provided for specifically in any of the agreements;
- (b) to facilitate speedy implementation of the existing as well as future agreements\protocols for cooperation in the fields referred to in Article 1; and
- (c) to explore and identify new avenues for broadening the cooperation between the two countries in the fields referred to in Article 1.

## ARTICLE III

A. In the fields of trade, economic, agricultural and industrial cooperation, the tasks of the Commission shall be:

- (a) to explore the prospects, conditions, and forms of cooperation with the object of identifying specific areas\projects\programmes in the two countries which would provide opportunities for mutual cooperation and to initiate such studies or investigations as may be necessary for this purpose;
- (b) to formulate specific programmes in mutually agreed spheres for the purpose of reinforcing economic growth in the two countries through mutual cooperation;
- (c) to review, from time to time, programmes of cooperation between the two countries, with a view to facilitating their expeditious execution;

- (d) to explore possibilities of intensifying economic contacts between financial, industrial and commercial institutions in the two countries; and
- (e) to study and utilise for mutual benefit the planning activities of the two countries to further the above-mentioned objectives.

B. In the fields of technical, scientific and cultural cooperation, the tasks of the Commission shall be:

- (a) to discuss plans of technical and scientific cooperation between the two countries materialised through:
  - (i) mutual exchange of specialists for the purpose of specialised studies, granting of technical assistance, execution of projects and setting up of institutions;
  - (ii) organisation of technical consultations;
  - (iii) provision of training facilities.
  - (iv) exchange of technical documentation;
  - (v) cooperation between organisations engaged in design and consultancy services;
  - (vi) cooperation between the cultural organisations of the two countries; and
- (b) to devise measures for coordination of technical, scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries, their agencies and other organisations.

#### ARTICLE IV

- (a) The Commission shall be composed of representatives at the ministerial and official levels, appointed by the respective Governments.
- (b) Each Government shall appoint a Co-Chairman of the Commission.

- (c) Each Government shall also appoint an Executive Secretary to the Commission.
- (d) Each Government shall appoint the Co-Chairman and other members of the Joint Commission within three months of the signing of this Agreement.
- (e) The two Co-Chairmen shall notify each other the names of the members representing their respective Governments and any alteration which may take place in regard to their representation on the Commission.
- (f) Each Government may appoint a number of experts and advisers to attend the meetings of the Commission.
- (g) The Commission may set up such standing or ad hoc committees as it may deem appropriate.

#### ARTICLE V

The decisions and recommendations of the Commission shall be recorded and signed by its two Co-Chairmen. Such decisions and recommendations shall come into effect after exchange of letters between the two Co-Chairmen notifying each other of the approval of their respective Governments.

#### ARTICLE VI

The Commission shall function in accordance with this Agreement and the Internal Regulations attached hereto. The Internal Regulations may be amended upon a recommendation from the Commission and on exchange of letters of approval between the two Co-Chairmen.

#### ARTICLE VII

- (1) All agreements protocols concluded after the coming into force of this Agreement between India and Iraq in the fields referred to in Article I shall be notified to the Joint Commission within one month of the conclusion unless otherwise provided for specifically in such Agreements Protocols.

- (2) The recommendations and findings of the Committees set up under the existing or future agreements protocols in the fields referred to in Article I shall be reported to the Commission through the Executive Secretaries.

#### ARTICLE VIII

The Permanent Joint Commission now established under this Agreement shall be deemed to be a continuation of the Joint Commission set up through the exchange of letters on the 6th day of April, 1973 between the two Governments.

#### ARTICLE IX

This Agreement shall come into force upon signature. It shall remain valid unless terminated by either Government by giving a six months' notice in-writing to the other Government.

DONE IN NEW DELHI on the 28th day of March, 1974 in three original copies in Hindi, Arabic and English languages, all of which are equally authentic.

*Source:* Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1974.

*Annexure 9*

**OFFICIAL TEXT OF THE STATEMENT BY THE  
MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, SHRI P. V.  
NARASIMHA RAO, IN INDIAN PARLIAMENT ON THE  
SUBJECT OF IRAN-IRAQ CONFLICT**

NEW DELHI, 18 NOVEMBER 1980

Sir, the House is aware that for the past few years strains have been evident in the relations between countries in West Asia. This has caused us much anxiety and it has been India's endeavour to prevent any destabilisation of the entire region. Since Parliament rose in August, a further unfortunate development has taken place in the form of an open armed conflict between Iran and Iraq.

The continuing war between Iran and Iraq, two countries with whom India has close and long-standing ties, is a matter of deep concern and distress to India. From the very beginning of the war, India has made it clear that it, has not taken and will not take sides and has expressed its anguish at the loss of life and property being suffered by both sides. India has consistently held that disputes between countries should be settled bilaterally and by peaceful means without recourse to war. We have also expressed our deep concern that prolongation or escalation of the present conflict could have grave implications on both regional and global peace and security.

Sir, when the first news of the beginning of the war came on September 22, 1980, I was in New York for the UN General Assembly which had already been in session since September 16, 1980. I immediately held consultations with several other Foreign Ministers, including those of countries that are currently members of the Security Council. The general feeling of concern voiced in these consultations resulted in the Security Council meeting on September 28, 1980. The resolution adopted by the Council, however, did not succeed in securing a cease-

fire. I also took the earliest opportunity of meeting the Secretary-General of the United Nations with whom my discussions centred around the manner in which the UN could act in resolving the conflict.

I also met the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko, and the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Muskie. I was assured that both the U.S. and the USSR would remain neutral in the Iran-Iraq conflict. These decisions naturally helped in Preventing the conflict from the danger of escalation and possible enlargement.

### ELUSIVE CEASE-FIRE

Since the resolution of the Security Council could not bring about a cease-fire. the logical step was to find a solution which included a cease-fire coupled with a process of negotiation to resolve the causes of the conflict. This, I regret to say, has eluded the international community so far. The initiative of the Islamic Conference did not yield any result, as also the appeals of the Secretary-General of the U.N.

### SPECIAL ENVOYS

Meanwhile, Special Envoys of both Iran and Iraq visited India on September 28 and October 8, 1980 respectively to explain to our Prime Minister the points of view of their respective Governments. In response, we counselled restraint and brought to their attention the dangers of possible intervention and interference by outside powers and the effect that this would have on the independence and non-aligned position of both the countries. Our Prime Minister's Special Envoys have also been to both Baghdad and Tehran in order to better understand the points of view of the two sides.

At the UN General Assembly on October 3, 1980, I had stated that the tinuing conflict between the two countries would "only weaken the solidarity of the nonaligned and developing countries". It was our belief that Iran and Iraq being themselves nonaligned countries, would perhaps be more willing to accept a group of non-aligned countries to help towards a resolution of the present conflict. However, it was obvious that no initiative could succeed unless properly timed.

## NON-ALIGNED INITIATIVE

Subsequently a suggestion was made, at the instance of Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, that the Coordinating Bureau of Nonaligned countries should meet in New York on October 21, 1980 to consider the possibility of a Non-aligned initiative. The Bureau, meeting at the level of Ambassadors, decided that a Committee of Goodwill be set up to offer its good offices towards that end. Subsequently, after consultations held with all concerned, including Iran and Iraq, a seven-member Committee was constituted at the level of Ambassadors the members being Algeria, Cuba, India, Pakistan, P.L.O., Yugoslavia and Zambia. It was also decided that a meeting be held at Belgrade where the Committee would constitute itself at Ministerial level and deliberate on further details regarding its functioning; the Bureau also recommended that the Committee should visit Baghdad and Tehran.

On the morning of October 30, I received an invitation from the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia to a meeting to be convened at Belgrade on November 2 and 3, 1980. The next day, only hours before I was due to leave for Belgrade, we received news that Iraq had objected to the inclusion of Algeria on the Committee, stating that it had reservations, in principle, to the inclusion of any Arab member, except P.L.O. as a special case. It was also reported that Iraq had suggested a few other countries out of whom a seventh member could be selected, acceptable to Iran. However, on learning personally from the Yugoslav Foreign Minister that this last-minute development could be sorted out, and that all the other Foreign Ministers would be present at the meeting, I left for Belgrade. Soon after my arrival in Belgrade, we received news that Iran was not in a position to accept the above mentioned proposal and insisted on Algeria being included.

## BELGRADE MEET

The Belgrade meeting, owing to this unforeseen development, started under a cloud. As a result, we had to devote the major portion of our time to discussing the technicality of whether the six Ministers present were within their rights in constituting themselves as the Goodwill Committee. Consequently, the Foreign Ministers could not proceed to the stage of discussing substantive issues. It was ultimately decided to

issue an Appeal to the Governments of Iran and Iraq, in the name of the six Ministers, in the following terms: "The Ministers are prepared if agreed to by both Iran and Iraq, to constitute themselves as a Goodwill Committee, and function as such, or to enlarge its membership as may be acceptable to both Iran and Iraq, so as to constitute the goodwill committee. The Ministers, therefore, appealed to the Governments of Iran and Iraq in the spirit of nonaligned solidarity, to consider these alternatives and signify their agreement in order to enable the constitution and functioning of the goodwill committee.

"The Ministers are prepared to exert, in accordance with the policy and principles of non-alignment, as defined in the declarations of their Heads of State and Government, utmost efforts with a view to contributing towards the commencement of a peaceful process to find a just and honourable solution to this conflict between two non-aligned countries. To this end, the Ministers are ready to visit Tehran and Baghdad on the invitation of the respective Governments or to take any other step conducive to this purpose".

"The Ministers would like to express their full respect to the Governments of Iran and Iraq." The Belgrade meeting had to be concluded at that point. The initiative was based on the conviction that an attempt should be made to find a solution to this conflict within the non-aligned movement. In our view, the effort was worth making. The initiative is being continued and effort are being made in order to enable the Goodwill Committee to be constituted and to undertake its intended mission. The Ministers decided to meet again in New Delhi at the appropriate time.

## COMPLEX SITUATION

The Government of India is fully aware of the difficulties and complexities of the situation and the need for the emergence of circumstances more conducive to the success of a peace mission. We, however, continue to believe that we must not relent in our efforts in meeting this serious threat to regional stability and world peace. On my way back from Europe, I stopped over briefly at Beirut to meet Chairman Yasser Arafat. I had the opportunity of benefiting from his personal assessment of the conflict and of the various mediatory efforts

made so far. Chairman Arafat continued to hold the view that the non-aligned initiative had a better chance of helping to find a solution. He assured me that this effort would continue in spite of the setbacks and that he would constantly keep India informed of further developments. Since my return, the Secretary General of the United Nations has appointed the distinguished former Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr. Olof Palme as his special representative to go to both Iran and Iraq and try to help towards a resolution of the conflict. I can only wish him well in his endeavour.

### REPATRIATION OF INDIAN NATIONALS

As Members are aware, there are a large number of Indians working in Iraq and Iran in various capacities - doctors, engineers, teachers, skilled and unskilled labour etc. Their safety has been our major concern. We have taken all possible steps including arranging their repatriation to India where necessary. As a result of the Iranian bombing of Basra on 23rd September, there were some Indian casualties. As the conflict intensified, demands for the repatriation of foreigners of many nationalities mounted. Large groups of foreign nationals converged mainly on the Iraq-Kuwait border from 23rd September onwards.

Many of these including Indian nationals, were stranded there without food and shelter, or entry and travel arrangements in the absence of Kuwaiti entry transit visas. With inadequate facilities at the border checkpoint and the local officials unprepared for a crisis of this dimension, All foreigners crossing the border, including our nationals, initially faced hardships at this checkpoint in the desert. I transited through Kuwait on 11th October while returning from New York after participating in the UN General Assembly session, in order to be able to obtain a first hand account of the arrangements being made to provide succour to our nationals and to facilitate their return to India. My enquiries show that after the handicaps of the first day or two, which were reported in the Indian Press, all possible arrangements were made by our Embassy in Kuwait to facilitate the reception and smooth transit of our nationals through Kuwait. A team of officials has been working practically round the clock at the checkpoint on the Kuwait-Iraq border assisting in arranging transit visas for the evacuees, supplying travel documents on the spot to those who had left them

behind, arranging their shelter, medical attention and food during their stay in Kuwait, and planning their flight schedules for their return to India. I am glad to say that in extending hospitality to the Indian evacuees, the help of the local Indian community and enterprises based in Kuwait which was sought for by our Embassy, was readily extended. Some of our correspondents, not to mention the Arab and the international press, had occasion to pay a visit to the checkpoints and see for themselves the arrangements made there. The manner in which this exodus from Iraq has been tackled by our mission personnel has received very favourable mention in the press. I may mention that the help of our personnel was also availed of by nationals of other countries and it was readily forthcoming. We have received letters from some nationals of other countries thanking our personnel for the help rendered to them.

#### REPATRIATION CELL

A special cell was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs to coordinate all arrangements connected with the repatriation. Seventeen Air India flights, over and above the normal schedule, were operated to airlift the evacuees through Amman and Kuwait. Special teams of 3 officials each were rushed to Kuwait and Amman to assist our missions there. Our Embassy in Baghdad and our Consulate General in Basra were also strengthened despite the prevailing war situation there. Indian Embassy officials have been present at the border checkpoints on the Iraqi-Kuwait and Iraq-Jordan borders whenever evacuees have passed through, to facilitate their entry and transit to the airports. Missions were also authorised to arrange for issue of Air India tickets on credit to Indian companies wishing to repatriate their employees and lacking immediate liquidity as well as to repatriate any destitute Indians lacking means to buy air tickets. Full cooperation was extended by Governments of neighbouring countries like Jordan, Syria, Turkey, USSR, Pakistan and Kuwait for the transit of our nationals through their territories. The Central Board of Excise and Customs was requested to extend necessary facilities to the returning Indians for the import of personal baggage. A special officer was also designated to handle all queries relating to the welfare of Indian nationals caught in the war zone.

In Iran, our nationals seeking repatriation were able to do so without much difficulty through neighbouring countries like Turkey, USSR and Pakistan. A number of Indian ships are also stranded at Khorramshahr and Basra on account of the war. There has been some damage to these but fortunately the crew of all these vessels have been repatriated with the exception of three Indians, one belonging to an Indian ship and two to a Panamanian vessel, who are reported missing.

The total number of Indian casualties so far has been 15 killed and 25 injured. To sum up, Mr-Speaker Mr. Chairman, Sir, I wish to assure the Members that the Government of India has actively, but quietly, attempted to do whatever was possible to restore peace between our two valued friends and to protect and help our nationals, wherever required. We will continue to offer our good offices in whatever way that both the countries or the international community may require of us. We are prepared to play this role because we believe this conflict to be one of the most unfortunate developments that have taken place in recent times.

*Source:* Foreign Affairs Records (FAR), 1980.

*Annexure 10*

## **MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE IRAQ-INDIA JOINT COMMISSION OF ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION<sup>393</sup>**

BAGHDAD, 7-8 JULY 2013

### **MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE IRAQ-INDIA JOINT COMMISSION OF ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION HELD IN BAGHDAD DURING 7-8 JULY, 2013**

The 17th Iraq-India Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) for Economic and Technical Cooperation was held in Baghdad during 7-8 July, 2013 in Baghdad, Republic of Iraq.

The Indian delegation was led by H.E. Dr. M. Veerappa Moily, Minister of Petroleum & National Gas, Republic of India. The Iraqi delegation was led by H.E. Mr. Abdul Kareem Luaibi Bahedh, Minister of Oil, Republic of Iraq.

H.E. Dr. M. Veerappa Moily called on H.E. Mr Nouri Al Maliki, Prime Minister, and H.E. Dr Saleh Al Mutlaq, Deputy Prime Minister.

During the deliberations of the 17<sup>th</sup> JCM, H.E. Mr. Abdul Kareem Luaibi Bahedh, Minister of Oil, Republic of Iraq welcomed the delegation by H.E. Dr. M. Veerappa Moily, Minister of Petroleum & National Gas, Republic of India and referred to the discussions held with H.E. the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and proposed that the deliberations focus on identifying specific areas of cooperation and prepare the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

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<sup>393</sup> The text has been typed by author verbatim from the government document provided in the end. For any clarification, see <http://petroleum.nic.in/sites/default/files/Protocolof17thIndia-IraqJCM8.7.13.pdf>

for signing during the proposed visit of H.E. the Prime Minister of Iraq to India.

H.E. Dr. Veerappa Moily reciprocated the warm sentiments expressed and agreed on the proposed areas of discussion and on the need for preparing specific MOU for signing during the visit of H.E. the Prime Minister of Iraq to India. He thanked the Iraqi Minister for the warm welcome and stressed on the political will of the two countries to enhance and diversify bilateral cooperation. He affirmed that India would participate actively in development projects in Iraq. He called for greater efforts to enhance economic ties between the two countries particularly in the energy sector and in the areas of trade, industry, infrastructure development, water resources, housing, scientific & technical cooperation.

The two sides reviewed the progress with regard to various decisions taken at the 16<sup>th</sup> JCM held in New Delhi on 22-25 May 2007.

The deliberations of the JCM were marked by cordiality and warmth, which was characteristic of the traditionally close friendly ties prevailing between the two countries, and the two sides agreed as follows:

## **1 Cooperation in Trade & Financial Services**

### **1.1 Bilateral Trade**

In terms of bilateral trade, Iraq ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in the West Asia region. According to the Indian side, the bilateral trade of India with Iraq for 2011-12 & 2012-13 is as under:

Value: US\$ million

2011-12			2012-13			% Growth	
Exports	Imports	Total Trade	Exports	Imports	Total Trade	Exports	Imports
763.97	18,939.63	19,703.60	1,278.13	20,155.94	21,434.07	67.30	6.42

India's top imports from Iraq include crude oil and dates. India's top exports to Iraq include Steel Pipes, Basmati Rice, Sugar, Meat & and Preparations, etc. Both sides agreed to expand the trade basket and make it more diversified.

The Iraqi side proposed cooperation in capacity building for trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO), participation in international trade fairs, cooperation in the field of automobile and automobile parts, facilitation in grant of visas, information exchange, activation of business councils etc. The Indian side mentioned that they are looking to diversify their export basket and welcome this cooperation. The Indian side suggested that an MOU could be signed on Trade Cooperation between both the sides during the forthcoming visit of H.E. the Iraqi Prime Minister to India. The Iraqi side agreed to send a draft MOU on Cooperation in Trade, sufficiently ahead of the visit. Both sides then discussed other areas of potential export between India and Iraq. Iraq expressed willingness for cooperation in areas such as tea mixing, steel, cement and automobiles. Indian side also suggested pharmaceuticals for exports. It was pointed out that India's largest export to Iraq was in the field of steel pipes but lately Iraq has issued some instructions stopping purchase from India. The Iraqi side agreed to look into the matter.

## **1.2 Settlement of Outstanding Dues**

The Indian side handed over the company-wise details of the long pending outstanding dues of US dollars 2.29 billion as on 31.3.2013 as calculated by the EXIM Bank of India. The Indian side informed the Iraqi side that this amount cannot be waived as it was not a Government-to-Government debt but a commercial debt of individual companies and hence the same would have to be recovered from Iraq. The Iraqi side agreed to examine the issue and revert before the visit of H.E. the Iraqi Prime Minister to India.

## **1.3 Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement**

The Iraqi side handed over the draft Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement between Iraq and India. The Indian side agreed to forward the document to the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance of India for their comments.

## **1.4 Customs Cooperation Agreement**

The Iraqi side is interested in putting in place a customs cooperation agreement between India and Iraq and requested a draft of the same from India. The Indian side agreed to convey their interest to the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance on this issue.

## **1.5 Cooperation in Banking**

The Iraqi side proposed cooperation in banking including capacity building of banking staff, setting up of Indian banks in Iraq etc. The representative from Central Bank of Iraq handed over a list of areas on which Central Bank of Iraq and Reserve Bank of India could cooperate. The Indian side mentioned that all matters relating to Central Bank of Iraq will be referred to Banking Division of Ministry of Finance and Reserve Bank of India and their comments will be conveyed to the Iraqi side.

## **1.6 Information on Free Zones**

Iraq suggested a bilateral agreement to provide facilities and privileges to investors and goods produced in free zones in both countries. India agreed to revert on the possibilities in this regard.

## **2 Cooperation in Energy, Fertilizer, Industry and Civil Aviation**

### **2.1 Cooperation in Energy**

After detailed deliberations, the following were agreed upon:

#### Block-8

Both sides agreed that OVL and PCLD re-initiate negotiations for Block-8 contract in line with the Model Contract of the Fourth Licensing Round. Revised contract will have a Remuneration Fee (dollar / barrel equivalent) in accordance with the outcome of economic model, which will be prepared by OVL.

Both sides agreed to conclude discussions at the earliest to facilitate signing of the contract, hopefully at the time of the visit of H.E. the Prime Minister of Iraq to India.

#### Nasiriya Integrated Project

Indian side expressed the desire for participation of its companies in the Nasiriya Integrated Project. Iraqi side welcomes the participation of Indian companies in the project after being qualified.

### Revamp of old refineries

Indian side proposed for undertaking revamp, upgrading and debottlenecking of existing Iraqi refineries. Iraqi side agreed in-principle with the proposal and agreed to share the relevant details/data, wherever such projects can be undertaken.

### Equity Participation in Paradip Refinery Project in India

Indian side invited Iraqi's equity participation in the upcoming greenfield Paradip Refinery Project, along with long-term tie up for supply of Iraqi crude oil for meeting its feedstock requirements. In this regard, Indian side will furnish relevant details of refinery configuration, feedstock and product slate and order of the magnitude of investment. Iraqi side agreed to look into the proposal.

### Long term crude supply agreement and better credit term for supply

Indian side proposed long term agreement (10-year duration) for meeting the additional crude requirement for the upcoming refineries. Iraqi side assured to meet the Indian demand. Indian side requested for better commercial terms like removal of LC requirement for crude oil payments and increase in interest-free credit period from 30 days to 60 days. Iraqi side agreed to consider, which would be subject to approval of the authorized Governmental entities.

### Natural Gas

Indian side requested allocation of associated gas in various fields to Indian companies for processing and possible construction of petrochemical project & liquefaction terminal in Iraq for export to India. Indian side offered equity participation of Iraqi companies nominated by Ministry of Oil in the entire value chain, including re-gasification and downstream facilities in India. Iraqi side requested Indian side to submit a proposal to be reviewed and agreed to provide requisite information to Indian companies for formulation of the proposal.

### Outstanding Dues

Indian side requested SOMO to settle the long-pending demurrage claims amounting to US\$21 million. Iraqi side assured that claims for

the period 2011 onwards will be settled soon, and thereafter the prior period claims would also be settled expeditiously.

### Training

Indian side offered training and development of Iraqi technical personnel both in upstream and downstream, which may be done either in Iraq or in India. Iraqi side welcomed the suggestion and agreed to look into their specific training & development and scholarship requirements.

### Middle Furat Oilfield

The Iraqi side offered discovered undeveloped oil field namely Middle Furat Field (Kifil, West Kifil and Merjan) on nomination basis which had not been awarded in the Second Licensing Round. The Indian side welcomed the offer and requested for details to be shared.

Ministry of Oil of Iraq and Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas of India agreed to enter into an MOU on cooperation in the field of energy.

## **2.2 Electricity and Power**

Indian side informed that BHEL manufactures gas turbines at its manufacturing facilities in India under license from GE and has contracted orders for over 220 gas turbine units so far. It is eligible for participation in tenders financed by World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other leading multilateral financing institutions. Indian side requested Iraq to include BHEL as an Original Equipment Manufacturer for Iraqi power sector. It was highlighted that BHEL would endeavor maximum localization as well as enhancing local skills through training etc. for its ventures in Iraq.

## **2.3 Cooperation in Planning**

**2.3.1** Indian also offered to Iraq, assistance in training and capacity building in areas such as:

- Planning in Transport
- Telecommunication

- Planning process
- Urban Planning and local development

**2.3.2** India also offered bilateral cooperation in the field of:

- Housing and Modern Techniques in building complex development
- Urban Planning and local development
- Development of manufacturing sector and reinforcement of private sector
- Planning process at local & national level
- Statistical issues and electronic governance
- Quality control and standardization

## **2.4 Cooperation in Agriculture and Allied Sectors**

Four broad areas of cooperation were proposed in agriculture:

### Capacity building:

Agricultural biotechnology, nanotechnology, animal husbandry (animal breeding), poultry science, remote sensing, seed technology, feed and forage sciences, agricultural extension, biodiversity conservation, regulations relating to land use/land management, intellectual property rights; Mechanisms: student exchange programmes (masters/PhD/postdoctoral levels) and faculty/scientist exchange programmes (short and long periods)

### Exchange of germplasm (plant/animal/fish etc.):

Date palm, arid legumes, wheat and other crops, especially biotic and abiotic stress tolerant varieties, animal (cattle/buffalo) and poultry breeds

### Development/exchange of technologies for:

Weed control, combating desertification, soil and water conservation, salt affected soils, precision agriculture (micro irrigation), integrated

nutrient management, integrated pest management, organic agriculture, conservation agriculture, agro forestry, bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides and quarantine.

Cooperation between Indian and Iraqi firms on seed technology and farm mechanization (seed processing equipments, tractors, combines)

Both sides agreed that with the above objectives, a draft MOU will be exchanged and decision taken expeditiously.

## **2.5 Cooperation in Fertilizers**

The Indian side informed that it is interested to invest in the existing and new Ammonia-Urea plants of Iraq through Indian companies subject to the condition Indian companies are given national treatment and are treated at par with those of Iraqi Fertilizer companies. The Indian side requested the Iraqi Government to provide all the details so that the same may be circulated to Indian companies for proceeding in the matter.

After detailed deliberation, both sides agreed to have a letter of intent and confidentiality agreement to establish an urea plant and phosphate fertilizer unit as joint sector project in Alkaim / Alanbar area in Iraq which has all requisite material such as natural gas phosphate, sulphur, water and railway connectivity to the port. The Iraqi government will allocate natural gas for the fertilizer plant. A technical committee from India will visit to examine the proposal in detail.

Considering the abundant availability of Phosphates and Sulphur in Iraq, Indian side expressed its intention to explore import of Sulphur in larger quantities from Iraq. The Iraqi side welcomed the proposal.

## **2.6 Steel Sector**

Both sides agreed to work together to enhance cooperation in steel sector including through joint venture to set up a steel plant in Iraq with Indian companies, long term contract for supply of API grade rounds for manufacturing steel pipes and supply of alloy or non-alloy steel pipes and other steel products. India proposed participation of Indian companies for revival of existing steel plants of Iraq and training of personnel in operation and maintenance of

steel plants and other areas of mutual interest. Iraqi side will provide all investment details in this regard.

## **2.7 Cooperation in Civil Aviation**

Both sides agreed to expedite finalization of the revised Air Service Agreement between India and Iraq. The Indian side requested the Iraqi side to expedite the response to Air-India's request for operation to Najaf, Iraq via Bahrain.

## **2.8 Cooperation in Water Resources**

Both sides agreed to expedite inhalation of an MoU on bilateral cooperation in water resources development and management. The Indian side stated that India's expertise and experience in management of transnational river water can be shared with Iraq in the Joint Working Group meeting, which is proposed to be formed in the MoU. The Iraqi side expressed its desire for cooperation in water resources management using satellite imageries.

## **2.9 Cooperation in Road Transport & Highways and Railways**

IRCON expressed its business interest in turnkey execution of Railway projects including Civil and Track works, Electrification, Signalling and setting up of Workshops/Production units of rolling stock and its supply.

## **3 Cooperation in Sports, Culture & Education, Science & Technology, Health and Public Sector Enterprises**

### **3.1 Culture**

The Indian side informed that Indian Council for Cultural Reactions (ICCR) us offering scholarship slots to Iraqi nationals under various Scholarship schemes as per details given below:

#### **GENERAL SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME**

Year	Offered Slots	Application received	Confirmation	Utilization
2011-12	20	21	11	4
2012-13	50	15	0	7

ICCR has already offered 50 scholarship slots to Iraqi nationals for 2013-14.

### Culture Exchange Programme

Year	Offered Slots	Applications received	Confirmation	Utilization
2011-12	30	37	18	7

Both sides agreed to work together to find ways to ensure full utilization of scholarship slots offered to Iraqi side. In order to ensure that information is available in time the Indian side agreed to endorse a copy of notification of scholarship to Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Culture, Iraq.

Both sides agreed to make efforts for early signing of cultural exchange programme after receiving proposals from the Iraqi side.

## 3.2 Education

The Indian side shared the draft Educational Exchange Program (EEP) with the Iraqi side and it was agreed to conclude the same at an early date. Both sides also appreciated the role Educational Consultants (India) Limited (EdCIL) in facilitating the admission of International students in Indian institutions and for other aspects of educational collaboration and it was agreed that EdCIL may provide its services as a facilitating agency for Iraq for this purpose.

Iraqi side requested to the Indian side to streamline the visa process for the scholar so that they are able to join their courses in time. The Iraqi side also proposed that the short term deputation of academic and professionals to the Iraqi universities in order to upgrade their teaching programmes.

## 3.3 Sports and Youth Affairs

The Iraqi side proposed a cooperation agreement between the two Ministries of Sports and Youth Affairs and agreed to exchange drafts in this regard.

## 3.4 Cooperation in Healthcare Sector

Iraqi side requested for training of doctors and nurses by India. The Indian side offered training through exchange of medical specialists

as also through telemedicine. Both sides agreed to expedite signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Iraq on cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine.

ICCR offers 15 scholarships slots to Non-BIMSTEC Countries under Ayush Scholarship scheme. No applications were received from Iraq during 2012-13.

### **3.5 Science & Technology**

The Iraqi side proposed a cooperation agreement between the two Ministries of Science & Technology and agreed to exchange drafts in this regard.

### **3.6 Public Sector Enterprises**

Both sides agreed to sign an MoU regarding sharing of knowledge and experience in the implementation of innovative policies, strategies and effective management practices for the sustained growth and enhanced performance of public sector enterprises. For this regular exchange visits of Government officials and public sector executives of the two countries would be encouraged. Opportunities of joint ventures between public sector enterprises and public-private partnerships which are mutually beneficial would also be explored.

## **4 Other matters**

### **4.1 Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)**

The Indian side proposed to consider signing of MLAT in civil matters which is a comprehensive agreement for reciprocal arrangement with foreign countries for service of summons under Section 29(c) of Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (CPC), for execution of Civil Decrees under Section 44 A CPC, for issuing Letter of Request and for enforcement of Arbitral Awards under Section 44 (b) of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. The Indian side agreed to provide the draft at an early date.

**4.2 Cooperation between Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iraq and Ministry of External Affairs, India:** India and Iraq agreed to sign an MoU between the two ministries for enhancing cooperation

and exchange of diplomatic expertise. They also discussed the proposal of signing an MoU between the respective Foreign Service Institutes.

**4.3 Other Issues:** The Iraqi side proposed cooperation in areas such as human rights, environmental laws, social welfare and craft training. The Indian side welcomed the proposed cooperation and agreed to look into the proposals.

### **Next Meeting of JCM**

Both sides agreed that the 18th Session of the JCM will be held in New Delhi. The exact dates and agenda of the meeting will be worked out through diplomatic channels.

The minutes of the 17th Session of JCM are signed on 8th July, 2013 in Baghdad in two originals in English, both being equally authentic.

**Dr. M. Veerappa Moily  
Minister for Petroleum &  
Natural Gas Republic of  
India**

**Abdul Kareem Luaibi Bahedh  
Minister of Oil Republic of  
Iraq**

*Source:* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. See <http://petroleum.nic.in/sites/default/files/Protocolof17thIndia-IraqJCM8.7.13.pdf>

## JOINT STATEMENT DURING THE STATE VISIT OF H.E. MR. NOURI AL- MALIKI, PRIME MINISTER OF IRAQ TO INDIA

NEW DELHI, 22-25 AUGUST 2013

August 23, 2013

1. At the invitation of H.E. Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, H.E. Nouri Al-Maliki, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq paid his first State visit to India from 22-25 August 2013. Prime Minister Maliki was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising ministers, senior officials and business leaders. Prime Minister Maliki was accorded a ceremonial welcome in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 23 August. During his official engagements in New Delhi, Prime Minister Maliki held detailed bilateral consultations with Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. He also called on the President of the Republic of India, Hon'ble Shri Pranab Mukherjee and the Vice President of India, Hon'ble Shri Hamid Ansari. Prime Minister Maliki also met Minister of External Affairs Hon'ble Shri Salman Khurshid. He attended a business luncheon meeting jointly organised by the three business chambers, FICCI, CII and ASSOCHAM. In addition to New Delhi, Prime Minister Maliki and his delegation will also be visiting Agra and Mumbai.
2. The two Prime Ministers held wide-ranging discussions in a sincere, cordial and friendly atmosphere. They exchanged views on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest and reached a broad consensus. The discussions enabled better understanding and appreciation of each other's concerns and perspectives and helped in forging closer understanding at the highest political level.
3. **Areas of cooperation:** The two sides expressed satisfaction at the recent high-level political exchanges and agreed to further

strengthen the bilateral relations through regular exchanges at political, business and people-to-people levels. In this context, both leaders welcomed the constructive outcome of the 17th Joint Commission Meeting recently held on 7-8 July, 2013 in Baghdad, which has been an effective institutional mechanism to discuss the entire gamut of the bilateral ties.

4. The two leaders reiterated the necessity to build a forward-looking relationship by deepening the bilateral engagement and better leveraging existing complementarities between the two countries in key areas of mutual interest, earlier identified in the JCM, including among others energy security; agriculture and food security; water resource management; education; infrastructure development; pharmaceuticals and medicare; information technology and low-cost housing. The two sides reached a common understanding to further diversify the trade basket.
5. **Energy sector:** Expressing satisfaction at the rapidly growing bilateral trade in the oil and energy sector, with Iraq becoming India's second largest supplier of crude oil, the two sides agreed to focus on enhancing cooperation in energy security, in particular, through joint efforts to develop capacities to maximize the utilization of energy resources, through joint ventures in oil exploration, petrochemical complexes and fertilizer plants. The two sides expressed happiness at the signing of an important MOU in the energy sector to further deepen the existing cooperation.
6. **Revalidation of the contract for Block-8:** Both sides noted with satisfaction that OVL and Petroleum Contracts and Licensing Directorate (PCLD) have initiated negotiations and expected that they conclude negotiations for Block-8 contract.
7. **Middle Furat group of fields:** The Indian side welcomed the Iraqi side's offer, made during the latest Joint Commission meeting, of three new oil blocks in the undeveloped Middle Furat Oil Field viz. Kifil, West Kifil, and Merjan on nomination basis to Indian public sector oil companies. The Indian side agreed to study and submit a proposal to PCLD for discussions/negotiations.
8. **Nasiriya Integrated Project:** The Indian side thanked the Iraq side for prequalifying the Indian companies such as ONGC Videsh

Limited, MRPL and Reliance for participation in the Nasiriya Project Bid Round and for favourable consideration of Indian companies. At the request of the Indian side, the Iraqi side agreed to consider the pre-qualification of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd for downstream project.

9. **Iraqi Investment in Indian Refinery:** The Indian side welcomed the Iraqi side's expression of interest in investing in the upcoming 15mmt oil refinery at Paradip in India as indicated during the 17th Joint Commission meeting. The two sides decided to work together to arrive at a mutually beneficial model for such investment.
10. **Fertilizer Plants:** In the field of fertilizers, the two sides agreed to actively explore the possibilities of establishing a urea plant and phosphate fertilizer units by utilising natural gas resources from Iraq as joint ventures in Iraq.
11. **Long-term crude supply agreement and better credit term for supply:** The Indian side proposed long-term agreement (10 years) to meet the increased crude oil demand in the new refineries. The Iraqi side assured to meet the Indian demands. The Indian side requested better terms, including abolition of LC and increase in interest free credit period from 30 days to 60 days. The Iraqi side will consider after consulting authorities.
12. **Steel sector:** The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in steel sector, including through joint ventures to set up steel plant in Iraq or in India for production of steel pipes with the purpose of transporting oil in Iraq. The Indian side invited Iraq to invest in an upcoming steel project of Rahstriya Ispat Nigam Limited.
13. **Power sector:** Recognising the existing capabilities of BHEL in manufacturing gas turbine units, the Iraqi side agreed to include BHEL as a qualified Equipment Manufacturer for its power sector.
14. **Railway sector:** The Iraqi side welcomed the expression of interest by IRCON in turnkey execution of railway projects in Iraq including civil and track works, electrification, signalling, setting up of workshops/production units for rolling stock and its supply.

15. **Low-cost housing sector:** Keeping in view the demand for low-cost housing in Iraq, both sides agreed to explore the possibilities of involvement of reputed Indian public and private sector companies in the low-cost housing sector in Iraq.
16. **Agriculture sector:** Both sides agreed to cooperate in agricultural education and research activities through signing of an appropriate institutional framework MOU for mutual benefit.
17. **Water resource management sector:** The two sides expressed satisfaction at the successful conclusion of an MOU on water resource management to enhance the bilateral cooperation in this critical area for Iraq. The MOU provides for collaboration and sharing of experience and expertise between the two sides.
18. **Medicare and health sector:** Keeping in view the increasing number of Iraqi nationals visiting India for medicare, the two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the health sector, including exchange of health personnel, medical personnel, nursing personnel, training, participation in conferences in both countries and cooperation in pharmaceuticals.
19. **Education sector:** Recognizing that the number of Iraqi students studying in India has grown considerably over the past few years, with over 10,000 currently studying in India, the two sides identified education as a key area of mutual interest and further collaboration. The authorities concerned will work out necessary modalities in this regard.
20. **Reconstruction activities in Iraq:** Extending support to the Government of Iraq in its ongoing rebuilding and reconstruction efforts, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh renewed India's commitment to participate constructively in this process through the involvement of Indian companies in infrastructure projects.
21. **Terrorism:** The two leaders condemned the phenomenon of terrorism and extremism, affirming that it threatened all societies and was not linked to any race, colour or belief. The international

community must, therefore, resolutely combat terrorism. The two sides further agreed to cooperate on counter-terrorism.

22. Recognising that the two countries face similar challenges being pluralistic societies, the two leaders noted that tolerance, religious harmony and brotherhood, irrespective of faith or ethnic background, were part of the principles, ethos and values of the two countries. India reiterated its commitment to supporting the emergence of a stable, peaceful, united and democratic Iraq.
23. **Regional and International issues:** The two sides discussed several regional and international issues, including the security situation in West Asia, Middle East and South Asia. There was convergence of views on the subject.
24. **Afghanistan:** The two sides agreed that the Afghanistan issue concerned regional security and stability. They reiterated their support for an “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned” reconciliation process and their commitment to working with regional countries and the international community to help Afghanistan achieve its objective of peace, stability, independence and development at an early date.
25. **Syria:** The two leaders called upon all sides in Syria to abjure violence and resolve all issues peacefully through dialogue taking into account the aspirations of the people of Syria. Both leaders agreed that any external military intervention in Syria’s internal affairs should be excluded.
26. **UN Reforms:** Both leaders emphasized the importance of an effective multilateral system, centred on a United Nations reflective of contemporary realities, as a key factor in tackling global challenges. In this context, they stressed upon the urgent need to pursue reforms of the United Nations, including of the Security Council through an expansion in both categories of its membership, to make it more representative, credible and effective. Prime Minister Maliki reiterated his country’s support for India’s candidature for the permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

27. Expressing his happiness to visit India, Prime Minister Maliki thanked Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to him and the members of his delegation during their stay. He invited Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to visit Iraq at a mutually convenient time. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh gladly accepted the invitation. The dates of the visit will be worked out through diplomatic channels.

New Delhi

August 23, 2013

*Source:* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. See <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/22115>

Iraq is a vital country in the region. It is an essential part of India's extended neighbourhood, not merely for its ineluctable geopolitical and geo-economic significance but also because of its vast historical and cultural importance. In the past, India had close and diverse relations with Iraq that have undergone profound changes over the years. Iraq is India's third-largest trade partner in the region and among the top three suppliers of crude oil. However, the bilateral ties have never been subjected to serious systemic inquiry. As New Delhi seeks to increase its footprint in the region, it is of utmost importance that India's relations with Iraq are accorded critical attention. This study analyses India's Iraq policy over the years by building on an extensive review of 70 years of India's Foreign Affairs Records (FAR). In addition, the study makes suggestions based on India's past interactions with Iraq on how the relations can be expanded and strengthened with Iraq.

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