

Iraq Initiative Conference 2025

Wednesday 1 October

**@CH_MENAP
#IraqInitiative**

menap@chathamhouse.org

Iraq Initiative Conference 2025

As Iraq approaches a pivotal election in 2025, the country stands at a crossroads – balancing fragile stability with deep-seated governance challenges. The current economic climate shows positive momentum, driven by steady oil revenues, renewed infrastructure development, and expanding regional trade partnerships. Yet, beneath this progress lie mounting pressures: entrenched political fragmentation, a frustrated and growing youth population, an increasingly volatile regional environment, and escalating vulnerabilities to climate change.

With economic sustainability tied to the volatility of global oil markets and further complicated by uncertain regional and international trajectories, Iraq is striving to diversify its economy, attract foreign investment, and capitalise on its strategic position as a vital trade corridor linking Asia and Europe. Yet regionally, Iraq remains deeply enmeshed in shifting geopolitical currents. The reconfiguration of the 'axis of resistance,' Iran's recalibrated influence amid its war with Israel, the evolving dynamics of the US–Iran confrontation, and the aftermath of regime change in neighbouring Syria all carry profound implications that shape Iraq's security landscape, economic prospects, and political future.

Amid these shifting dynamics, Iraq must carefully navigate its relationships with regional powers, and manage and broaden its partnerships with the US and other global powers to safeguard its stability and foster sustainable growth, all while undertaking critical domestic reforms to address governance shortcomings.

Chatham House's 7th annual Iraq Initiative conference explores key questions including:

- How can Iraq foster long-term stability in an era marked by regional and global uncertainty?
- What measures are essential to build a more resilient and inclusive economy that prioritises societal well-being?
- What roles should regional and international actors play in these efforts?

Join Iraqi and international policymakers, experts, and civil society as they convene in London to examine the pressing challenges facing Iraq and explore the country's trajectory in the year ahead.



09.00 – 09.30 *Registration and refreshments*

09.30 – 10.00 **Opening Keynote | In conversation with Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani**

Speaker: HE Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani, Prime Minister, Republic of Iraq (*via Zoom*)

Chair: Dr Renad Mansour, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Iraq Initiative, Chatham House

10.00 – 11.15 **Plenary Session 1 | Iraq's in an election year: Navigating the 2025 political landscape**

Over the past two years, Iraq has experienced a period of relative political and security stability and modest economic progress, despite mounting instability across the region. As the country moves towards its 2025 parliamentary elections, power has consolidated around the Shia Coordination Framework, with Prime Minister Sudani carefully balancing competing interests. Yet this equilibrium is under growing strain. Rivalries within the Shia camp are deepening, the Sadrists are actively positioning for a return to the formal political scene, and Erbil–Baghdad relations remain mired in unresolved disputes. Meanwhile, both Sunni and Kurdish parties remain fragmented, having seen their influence and autonomy significantly curtailed vis-à-vis the central government. Public disillusionment continues to mount, as the reformist momentum once carried by Tishreen-backed MPs has largely stalled under pressure from the political system.

The first plenary session brings together policymakers and experts to examine the shifting positions of Iraq's key political actors and movements. It will explore whether the 2025 elections might offer a recalibration of power-sharing in Iraq or instead reinforce the dominance of the current ruling coalition. The discussion will also address the implications of this trajectory for the upcoming government formation process, as well as its broader impact on Iraq's political stability.

11.15 – 11.45 *Refreshments break*

11.45 – 13.00 **Plenary Session 2 | Infrastructure in the twilight: Can Iraq sustain its progress**

In recent years, Iraq has witnessed a visible wave of infrastructure development – new roads, revitalised public spaces, and ambitious state-led projects – that signal a country on a positive trajectory. Yet beneath this surface-level progress lies a critical question: is this development sustainable? The answer can only be found by examining the deeper social and political foundations that support (or undermine) it. While these developments signal progress, they risk primarily benefiting urban elites, leaving rural areas and broader populations underserved. Environmental pressures, including water scarcity and pollution, remain unaddressed due to insufficient long-term planning. Rapid urban expansion further threatens cultural and religious heritage by disrupting traditional community ties through changing ownership. Without targeted reforms, these imbalances risk deepening social divides and fuelling instability.

Panellists in this session will examine the impact of Iraq's infrastructure growth and explore what must be done to ensure that this progress is not only sustainable but also inclusive of society.

13.00 – 14.00 *Networking lunch*

14.00 – 15.15 **Plenary Session 3 | Iraq's economic-demographic dilemma: Is there a way forward?**

Iraq has one of the world's fastest-growing populations, with over 60 percent under the age of 25. Each year, hundreds of thousands of young Iraqis enter a labour market already under immense strain. Successive governments have continued to rely on an overstretched public sector to absorb this demand, pushing the state budget to its limits. While reform initiatives such as the 2020 White Paper laid out a vision for economic restructuring, implementation has stalled due to a lack of sustained political commitment. With oil revenues still forming the backbone of the economy and private sector growth limited, Iraq risks a growing gap between demographic realities and economic capacity.

This session will explore the structural challenges that continue to hinder Iraq's economic transformation, and what steps are needed to prepare for future labour market demands, reduce dependency on oil, and invest in the country's young population as a driver of long-term economic resilience and inclusive growth.

15.15 – 15.30 *Comfort break*

15.30 – 16.45 **Plenary Session 4 | Iraq's delicate balancing act in a shifting Middle East**

Iraq sits at the crossroads of a Middle East in flux, amid profound regional and geopolitical shifts. While the country has experienced a period of relative calm, this stability remains fragile - threatened by intensifying Israel-Iran rivalry, doubts over the US's long-term role, and uncertainty over shifting regional dynamics. Iraq's political leadership faces the complex task of sustaining a foreign policy of strategic multi-alignment: balancing relations with the US and its allies, while also maintaining close ties with Iran, China, and other emerging powers. This balancing act is shaped by competing pressures – domestic political consolidation, foreign influence, and a strategic yet at times strained partnership with Washington. As Iraq heads toward national elections, the durability of the country's capacity to navigate competing external influences will be tested.

Speakers will explore Iraq's evolving place in the shifting Middle Eastern landscape, the risks and opportunities posed by its regional relationships, and the future of the country's foreign relations.

16.45 – 17.00 *Comfort break*

17.00 – 17.45 **Closing Keynote Address**

17.45 – 19.00 *Conference close and networking reception*

Ruins, Rubble, and Renewal

The Chatham House Iraq Initiative Conference 2025 features an exhibition of Iraqi artwork which forms part of a collaborative research project titled [‘Ruins, Rubble, and Renewal: Exploring Iraq’s Mesopotamian Past through Contemporary Art’](https://www.3rrr.site).

The exhibition is curated by the project’s founder and principal investigator, Hanaa Malallah, and features works by Iraqi artists Reyah Abd Al-Redah, Mohammed Abd Al Wasi, Fatima Jawdat, Betoul Mahdey, and Kadhim Nwir.

This long-term, interdisciplinary project seeks to help Iraqis in reconnecting with their ancient Mesopotamian and cultural heritage sites, while inspiring them to reimagine their future by drawing inspiration from the past.

The project explores the potential for a form of artistic research that attends to Iraq’s political and social context, and to a new aesthetic where this ancient Mesopotamian heritage is reclaimed for Iraq’s current traumatic identity, and its people’s future.

Through collaborative research, the project engages with this ancient heritage as a reciprocal relationship with the unbroken continuity of its history – where ruins and their attendant rubble enable creative responses and where past and present merge into new possibilities – as renewal.



www.3rrr.site

This conference is organized by the Middle East and North Africa Programme as part of Chatham House's Iraq Initiative.

The Chatham House *Iraq Initiative* tackles the root causes of state failure to challenge assumptions held in Western capitals about stabilization and peacebuilding and reach a more nuanced approach to navigating Iraq's complex and interlinked political, security, and economic environment.

The work is based on original analysis and close engagement with a network of researchers and institutions inside Iraq. At the local level, it maps key political, business, military, tribal, clerical, and civil society figures across Iraq. At the national level, it explores the struggle over the state.

Field-based insights are used to inform international policy towards Iraq. Chatham House convenes Iraq Initiative activities in the Middle East, the UK, the US and Europe.



/CHMENAProg



ch-menap



@CH_MENAP