CHATHAM HOUSE

Iraq Initiative Conference 2026

Wednesday 11 November

The 8th annual conference convenes Iraqi and international policymakers, business leaders, experts, and civil society to assess whether Iraq's new government can navigate growing regional and domestic pressures and reinforce national sovereignty.

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Conference overview

As Iraq moves into a new political phase following the 2025 elections and the formation of Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's government, the country faces a defining test: can it reform and strengthen state institutions while navigating the unprecedented pressures generated by the regional war.

The conflict has exposed Iraq's vulnerabilities across multiple fronts. Militarily, Iraq has again become a theatre in the wider regional confrontation. Iran-aligned armed factions in Iraq have launched attacks inside the country and across the region, while the US and Israel have targeted actors and infrastructure on Iraqi soil, raising questions about sovereignty and the government's ability to establish a monopoly over the use of force.

Economically, disruptions to regional trade and global energy flows have placed Iraq's oil-dependent economy under acute strain, reducing revenues at a time when the state faces growing pressure to sustain salaries in an already expanded public sector. In parallel, constraints on energy imports threaten electricity generation, risking further public dissatisfaction amid rising living costs and unemployment.

These challenges are unfolding against the backdrop of intensifying competition for influence inside Iraq. Washington is pressuring the Zaidi government to strengthen government control over weapons and confront armed groups, while Tehran continues to view Iraq as central to its regional strategy. As the balance of power shifts across the Middle East, Baghdad faces the difficult task of managing relations with both powers while safeguarding its own stability and autonomy.

- Can the government advance meaningful reforms, strengthen state institutions, and preserve economic stability? Or will mounting security, economic, and geopolitical challenges further constrain Iraq's ability to chart an independent course?
- How has the new government fared in its first months in office?
- What steps are needed to diversify Iraq's economy away from volatile energy markets and respond to growing public demands?
- How can Baghdad navigate rising regional tensions while balancing relations with international actors?
- What role should regional and international partners play in supporting Iraq's long-term stability and development?



Agenda

08.30 – 09.15 **Registration**

09.15 – 09.20 **Welcome remarks**

09.20 – 10.10 **Plenary session 1 | Iraq's new government: Governing through crisis**

Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi entered office with an ambitious agenda to strengthen institutions, tackle corruption, bring militias under greater state control, and restore public confidence in government. Yet his administration has quickly found itself governing in an exceptionally challenging environment. Regional conflict, economic pressures and persistent security challenges are testing the government's ability to deliver on its early promises while responding to rapidly evolving crises.

Since taking office, the government has launched a high-profile anti-corruption campaign, sought to assert greater authority over armed groups, and confronted the economic and political consequences of a changing regional order. These early initiatives offer insight into the administration's governing style, priorities and the political constraints it faces. This session assesses the government's performance to date and examines the challenges that are likely to shape its agenda in the year ahead.

- Has the government established a clear strategic direction for Iraq?
- What progress has been made on the government's key priorities, and where have ambitions collided with political realities?
- What do the government's early decisions reveal about the prospects for reform over the coming years?

Speakers
Dr Yousif Al-Dunainawi, Chairman, Prime Minister's Advisory Commission, Republic of Iraq
Mina Al-Oraibi, Editor-in-Chief, The National
Hoshyar Zebari, Senior Member, Kurdistan Democratic Political Party Bureau

Moderator: Dr Renad Mansour, Director, Iraq Initiative & Deputy Director, MENA Programme, Chatham House

10.10 – 10.40 **Spotlight session | The future of US-Iraq relations**

The Trump administration has taken an increasingly active role in Iraq, seeking to reduce Iran's influence, expand opportunities for US investment and reshape the bilateral relationship. Against the backdrop of the US–Iran conflict and the end of Operation Inherent Resolve's mission in Iraq, both countries face important questions about the future of their partnership. For Iraq's new government, balancing relations with Washington and Tehran while strengthening its sovereignty and attracting international investment presents both opportunities and challenges.

In this spotlight session, US Special Envoy for Iraq, Tom Barrack, discusses the Trump administration's priorities for Iraq and the future of US-Iraq relations.

- How does Washington envision the future of the US-Iraq partnership?
- What is the future of US-Iraq relations following the end of Operation Inherent Resolve and the military transition?
- What are the prospects for a new US-Iraq partnership built around security cooperation, economic investment and regional stability?

Speaker: Thomas J. Barrack, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Türkiye and Special Presidential Envoy for Syria and Iraq

Moderator: Dr Sanam Vakil, Director, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

10.40 – 11.00 **Networking break**

11.00 – 11.50 **Debate | Can public pressure still influence politics in Iraq?**

Popular pressure and protest movements have been a recurring feature of Iraq's political landscape since 2011, driven by widespread frustration with corruption, unemployment, poor public services, and weak governance. This pressure has taken different forms, including street protests, electoral participation and boycotts, civic campaigns, and public advocacy, The 2019 Tishreen movement marked a turning point, forcing the government's resignation, contributing to electoral reforms, and creating space for independent and movement-linked candidates to enter parliament.

Yet many of Tishreen's core demands remain unmet. Reform-minded and movement-linked MPs struggled to sustain a coherent political force, while established parties reasserted their dominance over government formation, and subsequent electoral reforms reversed many of the changes introduced after 2019. While popular pressure has demonstrated its ability to disrupt established political arrangements and secure concessions, Iraq's political system has also proved capable of absorbing and containing such pressure without undergoing fundamental transformation.

This debate asks whether popular pressure remains capable of producing meaningful political change in Iraq, and under what conditions public demands can translate into lasting institutional and political outcomes.

- Did the Tishreen movement and the wider popular pressure surrounding it fundamentally reshape Iraq's political system, or merely disrupt it temporarily?
- Can popular pressure achieve lasting change without sustained organisation, political representation, and institutional allies?
- Are successive Iraqi governments responding to public demands, or simply containing dissent?
- Does Iraq's increasingly securitised political environment limit the ability of protests to influence political outcomes?

Speakers
Abdulla Al-Kalisy, Research Fellow, Institute of Regional & International Studies, AUIS
Dr Luay Al-Khatteeb, Honorary Professor, University of Exeter; Minister of Electricity of Iraq (2018–2020)
Prof Toby Dodge, Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science
Hanaa Edwar, President, Iraqi Women Network; Founder, Iraqi Al Amal Association

Moderator: Hayder Al-Shakeri, Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

11.50 – 12.30 **Spotlight session | Iraq's security outlook**

Iraq is again caught in the middle of a wider regional war between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other, with its territory both a target for attacks and a base from which attacks can be launched within Iraq and across the wider region. As the US/Israel-Iran conflict reshapes the regional security environment, the activities of armed groups operating in Iraq risk drawing the country deeper into conflicts beyond its borders. For the al-Zaidi government, this presents a fundamental challenge to Iraq's sovereignty and security, while raising broader questions about the government's ability to control the use of force, the capacity of its security institutions and the prospects for meaningful security-sector reform.

This spotlight session brings together senior security officials to examine Iraq's evolving security landscape, the role of armed groups and the prospects for strengthening state control over security and the use of force, while insulating Iraq from wider regional conflicts.

- How are escalating tensions affecting Iraq's security environment and strategic choices?
- What would it take to strengthen state authority over armed actors and deliver meaningful security-sector reform?
- What role, if any, can Iraq play in promoting regional de-escalation and stability?
- How can international partners support Iraq's efforts to strengthen state authority over armed groups and promote regional stability?

Speakers
Judge Qasim Al-Aboudi, National Security Adviser, Republic of Iraq
Dr Basim Al-Badri, Head, National Security Service, Republic of Iraq

Moderator: Lahib Higel, Deputy Program Director, Middle East and North Africa, International Crisis Group

12.30 – 13.45 Networking lunch

13.45 – 14.35 Plenary session 2 | Is Iraq ready for the digital economy?

Technology and artificial intelligence are rapidly reshaping economies, governments and societies around the world. In Iraq, digital payments, mobile banking, e–commerce and digital government platforms are beginning to transform how citizens access services, communicate, and conduct everyday business.

Yet, Iraq's digital transformation remains uneven. The economy continues to rely heavily on cash, while weak infrastructure, limited digital literacy, unreliable electricity and internet connectivity, and cybersecurity risks constrain progress. The Iraqi government is also grappling with how to regulate rapidly evolving technologies. From restrictions on cryptocurrencies and digital assets to questions surrounding AI governance, data privacy, consumer protection and financial crime, regulation must strike a balance between managing risk and enabling innovation.

This session examines whether Iraq is keeping pace with the global digital transformation and how the country can harness new technologies and AI to build a more dynamic, inclusive economy.

- Is Iraq prepared for digital transformation across government, business and public services?
- Can Iraq develop the skills, institutions and regulatory frameworks needed to employ these technologies, or will it remain dependent on foreign platforms, expertise and digital infrastructure?
- How can Iraq protect digital rights, personal data and online safety as technology becomes more embedded in everyday life?

Speakers
Opening remarks: Mohammed Al-Darraji, Minister of Digital Economy and Governance, Republic of Iraq

Aws Al-Saadi, Founder and President, Tech4Peace
Sally Hamandi, Strategic Communications Advisor, For Star Sphere

Moderator: Alex Krasodomski, Director, Digital Society Programme, Chatham House

14.35 – 15.25 Plenary session 3 | Can Iraq build a more resilient energy future?

The disruption of the Strait of Hormuz in 2026 has exposed Iraq's dependence on a single maritime route for the vast majority of its oil exports, threatening government revenues and economic stability. The crisis has renewed urgency around diversifying Iraq's export routes and developing new regional energy connections, including pipelines through Turkey, Syria and Jordan. At home, Iraq also faces the challenge of attracting investment into its energy sector, improving infrastructure and delivering reliable electricity to its population.

This session discusses the future of the Strait of Hormuz, the prospects for alternative export routes and regional energy connectivity, and how Iraq's new government can attract investment, strengthen domestic energy production and improve electricity provision while navigating political, financial and security obstacles.

- How has the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz reshaped Iraq's energy outlook, and what does the future hold for this critical export route?
- What alternative export routes and regional energy partnerships can Iraq realistically develop to reduce its dependence on Hormuz, and what are the main obstacles?
- How can Iraq's new government attract investment into its energy sector, strengthen domestic production and infrastructure, and deliver more reliable electricity to its population?

Speakers
Opening remarks: Muhsin Al-Mandalawi, Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs, Republic of Iraq

Dunia Chalabi, Managing Director – Country Chair, Company Representative in Iraq, TotalEnergies
Majid Jafar, CEO, Crescent Petroleum; Vice-Chairman, Crescent Group
Ahmed Mufti, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, Kurdistan Regional Government

Moderator: Dr Ziad Daoud, Chief Emerging Markets Economist, Bloomberg; Senior Fellow, Middle East Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School

15.25 – 16.00 Networking break

16.00 – 16.50 Plenary session 4 | Iraq's foreign policy amidst a regional war

For much of the past several years, Iraq managed to insulate itself from regional conflicts through a policy of balanced engagement, maintaining relations with competing powers while avoiding becoming a frontline in their rivalries. The 2026 Iran war fundamentally challenged this strategy. Iraq became both a battleground for conducted military operations by external actors, and a launching pad for attacks beyond its borders, exposing the limits of its ability to remain on the sidelines.

The crisis has reshaped Iraq's regional relationships. From Iran and the Gulf states to Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, as well as its strategic partnership with the US, Baghdad now faces difficult questions about how to rebuild trust, protect its sovereignty and navigate a rapidly changing Middle East. Prime Minister Al al-Zaidi has sought to strengthen Iraq's international partnerships while reaffirming state authority at home, but persistent regional conflict and domestic constraints continue to test this approach.

This session examines the future of Iraq's foreign policy and regional role in an increasingly volatile Middle East.

- Can Iraq move beyond being an arena for regional confrontation and emerge as a sovereign actor?
- Is there still scope for Iraq to act as a bridge, convener or mediator between rival powers?
- How can Iraq strengthen its strategic partnerships while preserving its sovereignty and balanced foreign policy?

Speakers
Dr Abbas Al-Anbori, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Iraq
Dr Yousuf Al Bulushi, Chairman, Muscat Policy Council
Dr Sanam Vakil, Director, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

Moderator: Owen Jenkins, Research Director, Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Asia-Pacific, Chatham House

16.50 – 17.20 Closing spotlight | Iraq's judiciary and the future of political stability

Despite a turbulent government formation process and the wars engulfing the wider region, Iraq's political system has demonstrated a degree of resilience, navigating successive crises while avoiding a broader breakdown. Throughout this period, the judiciary has played an increasingly prominent role in managing political disputes and shaping the country's institutional landscape. Yet this expanding role also raises important questions about the balance of power between Iraq's institutions and the long-term sustainability of its political system.

In the final conference session, Judge Faiq Zaidan will offer his perspectives on the judiciary's evolving role in Iraq's political system.

- What role should the judiciary play in resolving Iraq's political disputes and constitutional questions?
- How have regional and domestic crises affected the resilience of Iraq's institutions?
- How can Iraq balance judicial authority, political accountability and democratic governance?

Speaker: Judge Dr Faiq Zaidan, President, Supreme Judicial Council, Republic of Iraq

Moderator: Sir Simon Fraser GCMG, Chair, Chatham House

17.20 – 18.30 Networking reception

18.30 End of Conference

Seeing Iraq: A photo exhibition

Iraq is often represented through the lens of politics, conflict and crisis. The **Iraq Initiative Photo Competition** invited photographers to offer a different perspective – capturing the people, places, communities and everyday experiences that shape Iraq today. The competition sought photographs that tell compelling stories and offer insight into Iraq beyond the headlines.

This exhibition brings together the three winning portfolios from the competition, each offering its own story and insight, inviting the audience to engage with Iraqi people and landscapes through the eyes of those who photograph them.

The three winning portfolios are on display throughout the Iraq Initiative Conference, offering conference participants an opportunity to explore different perspectives on Iraq alongside the discussions and debates taking place across the programme.

Competition winners

First runner-up

Tiba Sadeq

Through her '*Harvest Season in Al-Mashkhab*' series, Tiba documents the enduring relationship between rural communities and the land they depend on. Set against the backdrop of water scarcity, climate change and declining Euphrates water levels, the images capture the challenges facing farmers as they adapt traditional livelihoods to a changing environment.

Tiba's photography highlights physical labour, generational knowledge, and cultural identity, emphasizing community strength and efforts to preserve rural life despite environmental and institutional challenges.

Winner

Ali Dab Dab

Ali's photography captures the tensions and contradictions shaping contemporary Iraq through a striking and imaginative visual lens. It depicts Iraq's environmental and social struggles: oil fires destroying land, protests exposing government hypocrisy, youth rejecting bureaucracy, capitalism clashing with political ideology, and the passion and resilience of rising generation of Iraqis.

Rich in symbolism and visual storytelling, Ali's photographs offer an insightful and thought-provoking reflection on a country undergoing profound change.

Second runner-up

Khalid Tawfeeq

The *Face of the Marsh* explores Khalid's enduring connection with the people of the Central Marshes and the profound relationship between people, water, and Iraqi identity. Through the photographs, he portrays the environmental and cultural richness of this unique landscape, revealing how generations of communities have shaped their lives around its waterways.

Through intimate and thought-provoking images, the project invites reflection on our shared responsibility to protect the Marshes and preserve their cultural and environmental heritage for future generations.

Speaker Profiles



Judge Qasim Al-Aboudi is the National Security Advisor of the Republic of Iraq and a distinguished judge, lawyer, and legal expert with extensive experience in national security, governance, electoral affairs, peacebuilding, and international criminal law. Prior to his current role, he served as Chief of the National Engagement and Support Office at the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD), where he worked closely with Iraqi government institutions, the judiciary, and other national stakeholders. Throughout his career, Al-Aboudi has held senior positions across Iraq's key legislative, electoral, and judicial institutions, including serving as Advisor to the Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, as well as leadership roles within the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Supreme Judicial Council. He holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Baghdad and has published widely on federalism, electoral systems, representative democracy, and Iraqi law.



Dr Abbas Al-Anbori is Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq. Prior to his appointment, he advised the highest levels of the Iraqi government, serving as Foreign Relations Advisor at the Prime Minister's Advisory Commission, and, prior to that, was Political Advisor to the Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee. He is also Founder and President of the Baghdad Rewaq Center for Public Policy. He holds a master's degree in public policy from the University of Malaya and completed his PhD at the National University of Malaysia. He has also completed academic programs at Hiroshima City University in Peace Studies and at the University of Marburg on political transformations in the Middle East.



Dr Basim Al-Badri is an Iraqi public official and security leader currently serving as Head of the Iraqi National Security Service. He holds a PhD in Political Science and Diplomacy, a Master's degree in Strategic Planning for National Security, a Higher Diploma in International Studies, and a Bachelor's degree in Law. Dr Al-Badri has built a distinguished career spanning security, governance, and public administration. His previous roles include Member of the Wasit Provincial Council, Director of National Security in Wasit Province, Member of the Board of Trustees of the Political Prisoners Foundation, Member of the Accountability and Justice Commission, and Chairman of the Accountability and Justice Commission. Since 2003, he has been actively engaged in political and administrative affairs, contributing to Iraq's security, legal, and transitional justice sectors.



Dr Yousuf Al Bulushi is Chair of the Muscat Policy Council, an independent think tank based in Oman that focuses on international dialogue, conflict mediation, and Gulf regional security. He has convened dialogue formats that bring together officials, analysts, and civil society actors from across the region, with the aim of building shared understanding where trust is limited. Alongside his work in policy dialogue, he is a practitioner in capacity building for mediators and diplomats, developing scenario-based methods that help negotiators translate diplomatic language into its underlying security and political interests.



Mohammed Al-Darraji is Iraq's Minister of Digital Economy and Governance of Iraq. He holds an MSc in Civil Engineering Information Technology from London South Bank University and has worked with UK-based companies, local authorities, and organisations in Qatar. Al-Darraji has been elected as Member of the Iraqi Parliament for three terms and has held several senior government positions, including Minister of Construction and Housing, Minister of Industry and Minerals, Head of the Defence Industries Commission, and Senior Technical Adviser to the Prime Minister of Iraq, prior to his current appointment.



Dr Yousif Al-Dunainawi is Chairman of the Prime Minister's Advisory Commission of the Republic of Iraq. He previously served as President of AlShaab University and held senior positions within Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. He has also contributed to national-level initiatives and committees focused on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, higher education, and institutional development. Dr Al-Dunainawi holds a PhD in Engineering from Brunel University London.



Abdulla Al-Kalisy is a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, and a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the University of St Andrews. He is also a Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Fiker Institute in Dubai. His doctoral research examines emerging forms of citizenship in Iraq through the lens of social movements, drawing on fieldwork conducted in Baghdad. He recently served as the Iraq lead field researcher for the XCEPT programme, examining cross-border trade between Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. His published work includes studies on competitive authoritarianism in twentieth-century Iraq and the role of political memoirs in narratives of rule. More recently, he has focused on emerging dynamics of Iraq's engagement with the evolving regional order. His wider research interests include state-society relations in weak states, informal institutions, social movements, and informal political economies. He holds a BA and MA in Political Science from Massey University.



Dr Luay Al-Khatteeb is an Honorary Professor at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom. He is a former Distinguished Fellow at Columbia University in New York and a former Joint Foreign Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. and Doha. He served as Iraq's Minister of Electricity from October 2018 to May 2020 under Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and briefly as Acting Minister of Oil. With more than 33 years of professional experience in business development and public policy, Dr Al-Khatteeb has held executive positions as a director and senior advisor to multilateral institutions, international oil companies, commercial banks, and management consulting firms. He is a frequent commentator and public speaker on energy security, political economy, and Middle East geopolitics. Dr Al-Khatteeb holds a BSc (Hons) in Business Information Technology from Kingston University, United Kingdom, and a PhD in Political Economy from the University of Exeter, with a focus on energy security and federal systems.



Muhsin Al-Mandalawi is an Iraqi politician and businessman, who serves as Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs. He has played a prominent role in Iraq's legislative and political institutions over the past decade. He served as a Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives and was elected First Deputy Speaker of Parliament in 2022, later assuming the role of Acting Speaker of the Council of Representatives. He has also served as President of the Arab Parliamentary Union and has been active in advancing parliamentary cooperation and legislative reform across the region.



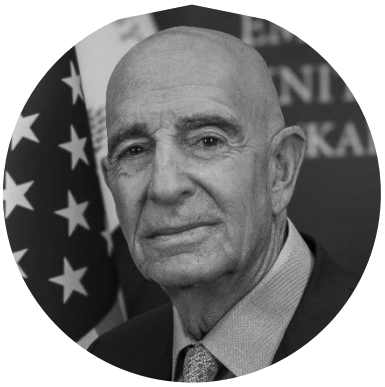
Mina Al-Oraibi is the Editor-in-Chief of The National, an English-language regional news outlet based in Abu Dhabi. She has over 20 years of experience covering Middle Eastern, European and American affairs. Prior to assuming her role at The National, she was a Senior Fellow at the Institute for State Effectiveness (ISE) and a Yale World Fellow. Al-Oraibi was the Assistant Editor-in-Chief of Asharq Alawsat and previously Washington Bureau Chief for the newspaper. She is a columnist for Foreign Policy magazine and a member of the International Media Council. She is also a member of the board of trustees of the American University in Iraq-Sulaimani. Al-Oraibi was named as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.



Aws Al-Saadi is the founder and President of Tech4Peace, an Iraqi organisation working on fact-checking, digital rights, digital security and peacebuilding, with a community of more than 2.4 million followers. He chairs the Iraq Internet Governance Forum (IGF Iraq) and serves as a member of the International Fact-Checking Network Advisory Board. Since 2014, he has worked at the intersection of technology, civic space and human rights, supporting journalists, activists and human rights defenders across the region and training more than 1,000 participants in digital security. He previously spent approximately a decade working in government IT and e-government in Iraq. Al-Saadi holds an MBA from the University of Greenwich and a bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering.



Hayder Al-Shakeri is a Research Fellow with the Middle East and North Africa programme at Chatham House. Prior to joining Chatham House, he supported the Arab regional cooperation programme at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. Before this, he worked with the UN and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency in Baghdad. He frequently provides commentary on Iraqi affairs on several platforms. Al-Shakeri holds a BA in public administration and political studies from the American University of Beirut (AUB), and an MSc in development studies from SOAS, University of London. He is also a fellow with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).



Thomas J. Barrack was nominated by President Trump to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Türkiye in March 2025 and confirmed by the Senate in April 2025. He was appointed to the role of Special Presidential Envoy to Syria and Iraq in May 2026. Ambassador Barrack is the Founder and former Chairman and CEO of Colony Capital, Inc., a Los Angeles-based global private equity investment firm (now known as DigitalBridge), one of the world's largest digital infrastructure investors with approximately $80 billion in assets under management and operations in 19 countries. Ambassador Barrack began his professional career as a finance attorney with a major international law firm, working and living in Europe and the Middle East. He later had tours on Wall Street and as a Principal of the famous Robert M. Bass Group, of Fort Worth, Texas. In 1982, Ambassador Barrack was appointed by President Ronald Reagan as Deputy Undersecretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and in 2016, was selected by President Donald J. Trump to serve as Chairman of the 58th U.S. Presidential Inaugural Committee. Ambassador Barrack is the grandson of Catholic Lebanese immigrants. He holds a B.A. from the University of Southern California and a J.D. from the University of Southern California and University of San Diego School of Law, where he was an editor of the law review. He has received numerous honours, including the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur from French President Nicolas Sarkozy.



Dunia Chalabi is TotalEnergies' current Managing Director- Country Chair and Company representative in Iraq, based in Baghdad. She oversaw negotiations on the multi-energies Gas Growth Integrated Project (GGIP), a multi-Energies 4-in-1 project signed on September 5th, 2021, and ratified by the new government in April 2023. Previously, she held several positions within TotalEnergies including vice president of Multilateral Affairs, Advisor to the Middle East President and Director of Government Relations to the President of Marketing, Distribution and New Energy Branch. She has been responsible for the French Iraqi business Council with the Medef International since 2010. Ms. Chalabi started her career in 1997 as a consultant, first in London, then in Washington DC and moved to Paris in 2001 as Director of the Middle East Program at the International Energy Agency. She has taught at "Sciences Po" in Paris and holds a MSc from the London School of Economics. In 2016, she was decorated with the Ordre National du Mérite.



Dr Ziad Daoud is the Chief Emerging Markets Economist at Bloomberg, and a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative. Prior to that, he was the Chief Middle East Economist at Bloomberg, Head of Economics at QNB Group, and an economist at Fulcrum Asset Management. He holds a PhD in economics from the London School of Economics and a BSc in economics and statistics from University College London.



Toby Dodge is Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and one of UK's leading experts on Iraq and Middle Eastern politics. His research focuses on state formation, governance, conflict, and the evolution of post-colonial states, with a particular emphasis on Iraq and its modern political development. Professor Dodge has held research and leadership roles at leading institutions and has advised policymakers on issues relating to Iraq, regional security, and international relations. He is the author of several influential books and studies on Iraqi politics, state-building, and the consequences of regime change and conflict. In 2025, he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition of his services to UK interests in Iraq.



Hanaa Edwar has been a human rights, women's rights, and democracy defender for over 50 years. She is the co-founder of Iraqi Al-Amal Association. Established in 1992, the association promotes human rights, gender equality, peace building and development. She is also a co-founder and president of the Iraqi Women Network, and has led numerous campaigns against Gender-Based Violence, for gender equality, and for enhancing women's role in decision-making positions and in building peace, security, and justice. She has also been involved in human rights advocacy campaigns and lobbying. In 2011, she was awarded the Sean MacBride Peace Prize in 2011 by the International Peace Bureau (IPB). In 2013, she was awarded Arab Woman of the Year by the TAKREEM Foundation. She is also a member of the Advisory Arab Committee of Human Rights Watch. She holds a law degree from Baghdad University.



Sir Simon Fraser is the Chair of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He was previously Deputy Chair from 2016 to 2022. Sir Simon is also a Founding Partner of the business consultancy Flint Global, which advises on policy, political and regulatory issues in international markets. From 2010 to 2015, he was Permanent Under-Secretary of the UK Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service. He ran the global network of British embassies and was on the National Security Council.



Sally Hamandi is a strategic communications advisor with more than 20 years of experience in corporate communications, brand reputation and market expansion. From 2014 to 2025 she headed Apple's communications and corporate affairs across the Middle East and Africa. There she led the launch of Apple Retail in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, directed Tim Cook's first visit to the region, and championed the first Apple Developer Academy for Women in Saudi Arabia. She also oversaw the rollout of Apple Pay across eight markets, working closely with central banks, regulators and government stakeholders. Before Apple, she held senior communications roles at Nokia, TBWA and Ernst & Young. Today she advises leaders and organisations on communications strategy, executive visibility and growth. She holds degrees in Communications and Psychology from George Mason University.



Lahib Higel is Deputy Program Director for the Middle East and North Africa at International Crisis Group. From 2020-2025, she was Senior Analyst for Iraq. Before joining Crisis Group, Higel worked for the mediation organisation Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG), where she facilitated discrete dialogues with non-state armed groups in Iraq, Libya and Syria. She has worked as a security adviser for the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) in Baghdad and conducted research for a wide range of organisations throughout the Middle East, including the EU, UNDP and Minority Rights Group (MRG). She holds an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and an MA in International Security from Sciences Po, Paris.



Majid Jafar is CEO of Crescent Petroleum, the Middle East's oldest and largest private oil and gas company, and vice-chairman of the Crescent Group, which has assets in energy, port management, logistics, venture capital, private equity, and other sectors. He is managing director of the Board of Dana Gas, the leading natural gas company in the Middle East, in which Crescent Petroleum is the largest shareholder. Jafar serves on several international boards and advisory bodies, including the Board of Fellows of Harvard Medical School, the International Energy Forum, the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED), the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, and The Atlantic Council. He was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. Majid Jafar graduated from Cambridge University with Bachelor and Master's degrees in Engineering. He holds an MA in International Studies and Diplomacy from the SOAS University of London, an MBA from Harvard Business School, and an Executive Certificate in Public Policy from Harvard Kennedy School of Government.



Owen Jenkins is the Research Director for Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Asia-Pacific at Chatham House. Owen is a highly experienced leader in international affairs. Before joining Chatham House, he worked for nearly 35 years as a British diplomat, including serving on the FCDO Board as Director General for the Indo-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and previously as HM Ambassador to Indonesia and Timor-Leste. Earlier in his career, he worked as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan to two Prime Ministers, and held diplomatic roles in Turkey, Argentina, Brussels and India.



Alex Krasodomski leads Chatham House's Digital Society Programme, where he focuses on AI, emerging technology and centres of tech power. He leads work aimed at strengthening state capacity and cooperation, identifying feasible paths towards global technology governance, and on routes to market for public technology. Until 2022, he was research director at Demos, director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media and co-founder of the AI start-up CASM Technology. He led the Good Web Project and is a fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD).



Bronwen Maddox took up the post of Director and Chief Executive of Chatham House in August 2022. Prior to this, she was Director of the Institute for Government (2016-2022), an independent think tank based in London promoting better government. From 2010 to 2016 she was editor and chief executive of *Prospect*, the monthly current affairs magazine. Before that, she served as chief foreign commentator, foreign editor and US editor at *The Times*, after a period at the *Financial Times* where she ran award-winning investigations and wrote economics editorials. Before becoming a journalist, Bronwen was an investment analyst in the City and a director of Kleinwort Benson Securities, where she ran its highly rated team analysing world media stocks. Bronwen is an honorary governor of Ditchley, an honorary fellow at St John's College, University of Oxford, and an honorary fellow of the British Academy. She writes frequent op-ed columns for the *Financial Times* and broadcasts widely.



Dr Renad Mansour is Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme and Director of the Iraq Initiative at Chatham House. He is also a senior research fellow at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, and a research fellow at the Cambridge Security Initiative based at Cambridge University. Dr Mansour was previously a lecturer at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where he taught the international relations of the Middle East and, from 2013, he held positions as lecturer of international studies and supervisor at the Faculty of Politics, also at Cambridge. He was previously a senior research fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut and was adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Civil Society Ministry between 2008 and 2010. He received his PhD from Cambridge University. He is co-author of *Once Upon a Time in Iraq*, published by BBC Books/Penguin to accompany the critically acclaimed BBC series.



Ahmed Mufti is Deputy Minister of Natural Resources in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. He has more than 14 years of experience in energy policy, resource management and development, helping the KRG more than double its gas production capacity since 2018. Mufti's work centres on advancing the Region's gas-to-power strategy, strengthening energy security and promoting sustainability. He has overseen major initiatives, including the KM250 expansion at Khor Mor and associated gas capture to generate 165 megawatts of electricity, reducing flaring and improving domestic resource efficiency. He has also overseen efforts to supply natural gas to industrial facilities in KRI, supporting the transition from heavy fuel oil to cleaner fuel, improving efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. His wider responsibilities encompass sector governance, investment and production development. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and a master's degree in natural resource management, both earned in the Netherlands.



Dr Sanam Vakil is the director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House. Her expertise spans Iranian and Gulf politics, regional security dynamics, and US foreign policy, with a particular focus on the evolving strategic landscape of the Middle East and its global connectivity. She provides nuanced analysis of Western policy priorities – particularly those of the UK, US, and Europe – while also offering strategic insight into the growing influence of China and Russia across the region, and regularly engaging with government, corporate and research sectors. In addition to her policy work, Dr Vakil holds the James Anderson Professorial Lectureship in Middle East Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS Europe) in Bologna, Italy, where she has taught Middle East politics since 2008. She previously served on the faculty of SAIS Washington's Middle East Studies Program. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and serves on other advisory boards and is regularly consulted by high-ranking government officials in the US, Europe, UK, and Middle East.



Judge Dr Faiq Zaidan is the President of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq and President of the Federal Court of Cassation, the country's highest judicial authority. He was appointed President of the Supreme Judicial Council in 2017, after serving in a series of senior judicial positions, including Vice President and President of the Federal Court of Cassation. Judge Zaidan holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Baghdad, a Higher Diploma from the Judicial Institute in Baghdad, a Master's degree in International Law, and a PhD in Public Law. Over a judicial career spanning more than two decades, he has played a central role in strengthening Iraq's legal institutions, overseeing major judicial reforms, and promoting the independence of the judiciary. He is widely recognized for his contributions to constitutional law, judicial governance, and the rule of law in Iraq.



Hoshyar Zebari is an Iraqi-Kurdish politician and a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) Political Bureau. He has held various elected positions within the KDP since entering its leadership's Central Committee in 1979. Following the 2003 transition, he became Iraq's first post-regime Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving until 2014. He then served as Deputy Prime Minister and subsequently as Minister of Finance until 2016. He holds a master's degree in sociology from the University of Essex and frequently contributes to international policy dialogues on Middle Eastern governance.

CHATHAM HOUSE

The 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 fragmentation in Iraq, and challenges assumptions in Western capitals about stabilization and peacebuilding. The aim is to reach a more nuanced approach to navigating Iraq's complex and interlinked political, security and economic environments.

The Initiative 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.

The Initiative uses these field-based insights to inform international policy towards Iraq. Chatham House convenes Iraq Initiative activities in the Middle East, the UK, the US and Europe.

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