

Türkiye's overarching aspiration for Iraq is a collaborative effort against the PKK

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In its efforts to combat the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) inside Iraqi territory, Ankara is seeking the aid of Iraqi military and security forces. However, this objective faces hurdles due to Baghdad's reluctance.



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Introduction

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's historic visit to Iraq [is not merely symbolic](#); it might have a positive and far-reaching effect on the two states' relationship.

Over the past few decades, [ties between Türkiye and Iraq have been unstable](#). At first, Türkiye took a cautious, neutral stance towards its Middle Eastern neighbour. But Ankara's stance shifted in response to Saddam Hussein's aggressive policies in the region. Türkiye's

involvement in Iraq shifted throughout the decades that followed, leading to tense relations with the central Iraqi government and little success in managing Kurdish factions.

In 2008, [Ankara made a significant decision to change direction](#). Hakan Fidan, Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs, played an important role in its diplomatic efforts. The new approach addressed both the needs of the larger regional economy and Türkiye's interests. However, in contrast to prior efforts, this recent approach shows some intriguing signs that, when coupled with current regional dynamics, provide grounds for optimism regarding a shift in the relationship between these important regional actors.

Given their historical, kinship, and geographic ties, Türkiye has many reasons to want to strengthen its relations with Iraq. Türkiye also sees itself as a regional power and has the potential to be a significant player in regional development. Türkiye declared that it was prepared to play a leading role in [rebuilding the Iraqi state](#), which is beset by severe structural issues and lacks a thriving, sustainable economy. Ankara believes that stronger economic ties will benefit regional political and security relations, as well as lead to the development of a longer-term strategic partnership.

Terrorist threats

One of Türkiye's greatest concerns and a major driver of stronger relations is the threat posed by terrorism. The presence of the [PKK](#), which is classified as a terrorist group by Türkiye, the United States (US), and the European Union (EU), among other international entities, is viewed as a severe danger to Türkiye's core stability and interests. In short, Ankara believes that Türkiye's security and stability are jeopardised if the PKK threat is not addressed or resolved; the [PKK is viewed as an existential threat](#) to the Turkish state's survival.

Was Erdoğan's visit a [paradigm shift](#)? Iraq and Türkiye's collaboration revolves around two major areas. First, systemic, or structural, dynamics heavily influence the relationship. The 2003 US invasion, the 2005 constitution, and the Maliki government's sectarian policies all disturbed Iraq's fundamental balances. However, subsequent administrations have been

unable to establish a new system; the Sudani government, in an effort to circumvent these obstacles, seeks to maintain close ties with Türkiye.

Ankara has consistently put pressure on Baghdad to [declare the PKK a terrorist organisation](#). However, a number of factors, such as Iran's influence over Baghdad, its friendly relations with the PKK, and Baghdad's limited power in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), hindered the achievement of this status.

A new model of collaboration between Türkiye and Iraq is being made possible by the Baghdad government's acceptance and adoption of Türkiye's Iraq policy. Iraq's recognition of the PKK as a 'banned organisation' is an illustration of this. The central Iraqi government seeks to increase its influence throughout the country by enlisting Turkish aid in the fight against the PKK. This effort will be bolstered by economic growth resulting from initiatives with Türkiye. Moreover, Türkiye's ongoing fight against the PKK has [deep implications for the security dynamics in the Middle East](#).

Shared economic interests

Turkish-Iraqi collaboration also includes a substantial economic component. In previous relations with Iraq, economic objectives and performance were always prioritised. Importantly, the trade volume between the two countries exceeded [\\$20 billion USD by the end of 2023](#). With an eye towards expanding its trade relations, Türkiye sees Iraq as a potential market for its goods.

Gulf countries see the Türkiye-Iraq [Development Road Project](#), a 1,200-kilometre transborder road and rail transportation network connecting the Persian Gulf via Al-Faw Grand Port with Türkiye, as a mechanism that will facilitate increased trade and cooperation with Europe while shortening the distance between China and Europe by sea via the Suez Canal. It would compete with the sole international maritime route currently traversing the region via the Red Sea. Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a preliminary agreement in Baghdad for joint co-operation on the ambitious project.

Announced in 2023, the project's estimated cost is \$17 billion USD. The project would directly benefit all four countries, while other countries would benefit indirectly. The project is expected to generate an annual revenue of \$4 billion USD and create at least 100,000 jobs. However, its feasibility diminishes as long as terrorist threats persist and remain unresolved in the absence of bilateral cooperation.

The [Houthi rebels' attacks against international shipping](#) from Yemen have glaringly demonstrated the vulnerability of chokepoints and international commercial arteries. If the area through which the project would be built is not secured, the lucrative Development Road Project in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq could be vulnerable to attacks by the PKK.

Despite Iraq's reluctance, collaboration between the two countries shows promise in meeting at least some of Türkiye and Iraq's ambitions, and it has the potential to benefit the broader region.

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