

С В І Т О В Е   Г О С П О Д А Р Т С Т В О

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## A FUTURE VISION FOR THE GRAND FAW PORT PROJECT AND ITS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN IRAQ

The research examines the Grand Faw Port project as one of the most important strategic projects in Iraq, given its immense geographic and economic importance in linking East and West, and making it a gateway for international trade between Asia and Europe. The project aims to diversify sources of national income, promote sustainable development, and transform Iraq into a regional and global logistics hub.

The research examines the economic opportunities associated with the port, such as boosting trade, attracting foreign investment, improving the trade balance, and creating job opportunities. It also discusses the challenges hindering the project's implementation, including regional competition, particularly from Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port in Kuwait, as well as political, financial, and environmental obstacles affecting the development of the Grand Faw Port in Iraq.

The research presents a three-scenario vision for the port (decline, continuation, and progress), analyzing the impact of each scenario on the Iraqi economy and politics. It also emphasizes the need to adopt futures studies to guide public and investment policies and encourage regional and international partnerships to ensure the project's success.

**Keywords:** *maritime transport, development path, boosting trade, regional competition*

**JEL classification:** *R11, R12, R41, F14, F15, L91, O18*

У дослідженні розглядається проект порту Гранд-Фау як один з найважливіших стратегічних проектів в Іраку, враховуючи його величезне географічне та економічне значення у зв'язку між Сходом і Заходом, а також у перетворенні його на ворота для міжнародної торгівлі між Азією та Європою. Мета проекту — диверсифікувати джерела національного доходу, сприяти сталому розвитку та перетворити Ірак на регіональний та глобальний логістичний центр.

У дослідженні розглядаються економічні можливості, пов'язані з портом, такі як стимулювання торгівлі, залучення іноземних інвестицій, покращення торговельного балансу та створення робочих місць. Також обговорюються проблеми, що перешкоджають реалізації проекту, включаючи регіональну конкуренцію, зокрема з боку порту Мубарак Аль-Кабір у Кувейті, а також політичні, фінансові та екологічні перешкоди.

У дослідженні представлено три сценарії розвитку порту (занепад, продовження та прогрес), аналізуючи вплив кожного сценарію на економіку та політику Іраку. Також

наголошується на необхідності використання підходів майбутніх досліджень (*futures studies*) для формування державної та інвестиційної політики, а також заохочення регіональних і міжнародних партнерств з метою забезпечення успішної реалізації проєкту.

**Ключові слова:** морський транспорт, шлях розвитку, стимулювання торгівлі, іноземні інвестиції, регіональна конкуренція

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### **Introduction**

Mega-maritime projects are among countries' most prominent tools for enhancing their economic capabilities and achieving regional and international integration, particularly in light of the rapid transformations in the global trade landscape. In this context, the Grand Faw Port project stands out as a strategic initiative with multiple dimensions, extending beyond the economic aspect to encompass political and geopolitical dimensions. Since its announcement, the project has attracted widespread interest due to its potential to change the balance of trade in the region by linking the Arabian Gulf to Europe via Iraq's territory. This could restore Iraq's pivotal role in regional and international trade.

However, the project's importance extends beyond its economic ambitions. Regional political considerations, competition over ports and shipping lanes, infrastructure and financing challenges, and internal Iraqi dynamics, including political stability and government orientations, are also intertwined. Hence, there is a need for a thorough analysis of this project from two interconnected perspectives: economic and political, with the aim of understanding its nature and future dimensions.

Based on this, the research relies on the analytical-forecasting approach, based on a review of relevant literature and studies, in addition to an analysis of economic and political indicators related to the project, with the aim of drawing future scenarios for the Grand Faw Port and proposing strategic directions that could contribute to strengthening its developmental and geopolitical position in the region.

### **The importance of research**

The importance of this research lies in providing a comprehensive vision of the Grand Faw Port project and its

role in promoting economic growth and political stability in Iraq. The research also contributes to shedding light on the opportunities and challenges facing the project's implementation, which may help decision-makers formulate effective policies to enhance its success.

### **Research problem**

Iraq faces numerous challenges in implementing the Grand Faw Port project, including its ability to achieve its desired goals, such as strengthening the national economy, attracting investment, and achieving balance in political and economic relations with neighboring countries. Questions also arise about Iraq's preparedness to face regional competition and the logistical and security challenges that could impact the project's success.

### **Research objective**

The research aims to explore the future of the Grand Faw Port project and analyze its economic and political implications for Iraq, through the following objectives:

1. Studying the expected impact of the port on the Iraqi economy and sustainable development.
2. Analyzing the project's role in strengthening Iraq's position as a global logistics hub.
3. Discussing the challenges facing the project's implementation and propose appropriate solutions.

### **Research hypothesis**

The research is based on the following hypothesis: "The Grand Faw Port project represents a strategic opportunity for Iraq to strengthen its economy and achieve logistical independence, but its success depends on overcoming the financial, logistical, and political challenges it faces."

### **First: The Grand Faw Port Project...**

#### **Location and Economic Importance**

Iraq has a single seaport on the Arabian Gulf, approximately 60 kilometers long. This

maritime outlet includes four ports: Umm Qasr Port and Khor al-Zubair Port on the Khor Abdullah Canal, in addition to the ports of Maqal Port and Abu Flus Port on the Shatt al-Arab. These ports have formed a vital link between Iraq and the rest of the world. Given the great strategic importance of these ports and the economic benefits they provide, there was an urgent need for the Iraqi government to build new ports to boost the national economy. The idea of the Grand Faw Port emerged as a strategic link between Iraq and Europe and Africa on the one hand, and East Asia and South Asia on the other. The idea of establishing this port dates back to 1985. It is considered a potential alternative to the port of Hong Kong in terms of its strategic location, as it is situated at the southern end of the Khor Abdullah Canal. This location is one of the most prominent international maritime positions, opening broad prospects for the prosperity of Iraqi and global trade by reducing transit time between East and West [12, p.6].

The Grand Faw Port is located on the Faw Peninsula, south of Basra Governorate, and has an estimated area of approximately 54 square kilometers. It is located in the Ras al-Bisha area, at the end of the continental shelf directly overlooking the Arabian Gulf, with a depth of up to 19.8 meters, making it capable of receiving giant ships. This project is considered one of the most important strategic projects in Iraq and one of the largest ports in the Arabian Gulf region. The project cost is approximately 1,880 million euros, with a capacity of up to 2 million containers per year, according to a study prepared by the Italian company Technetel, which was approved by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in 2009. The Iraqi Ministry of Transport signed a contract with the Italian company in 2010 to develop the project designs. The current site for the port was selected after comparison with eight other proposed locations, based on criteria such as cost, safety, proximity to the coast, lack of silt deposits, and avoiding interference with oil pipelines [23].

The geographical importance of the Grand Faw Port lies in its connection between

the East and the West of the world. In addition to its large size and vast storage areas, it will increase its capacity to accommodate huge quantities of goods that will be transported to other countries [20, p.64-94].

As for the economic importance of the Grand Faw Port project, its establishment will enhance Iraq's economic potential, thus achieving economic development. Operating the project at full capacity will contribute to diversifying sources of income and creating new job opportunities, in addition to strengthening the transportation and international trade sector in Iraq. Based on the above, the economic benefits of the project can be summarized as follows [15, pp.105-163].

#### ***Promoting regional and international trade***

Given Iraq's geographical location, linking Asia and Europe, which gives it the opportunity to become a vital trade corridor, the construction of the Faw Port will contribute to reducing reliance on long sea routes via the Suez Canal, due to its lower shipping costs and increased cargo transport speed. This will contribute to Iraq's attractiveness as an important commercial center, enhancing its economic independence and increasing its commercial revenues, thus diversifying sources of income [18].

#### ***1. Improving the work environment and creating diverse job opportunities***

The port is expected to provide thousands of direct and indirect job opportunities, both in construction and operations, and in supporting sectors such as transportation and logistics. It could also lead to the development of related industries such as warehouses and free zones, contributing to an improved business environment and increased investment [19].

#### ***2. Improving the trade balance***

The port will provide significant financial resources through freight, storage, and logistics fees, contributing to improving Iraq's trade balance. It will also increase the competitiveness of Iraqi products by reducing transportation costs and improving access to global markets [13].

### 3. Promoting foreign investment

The port represents an opportunity to attract foreign investment in various sectors, such as manufacturing and logistics. Therefore, the presence of modern infrastructure will improve the investment environment in Iraq, supporting long-term economic development plans [24].

#### **Second: The impact of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port on the Grand Faw Project**

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing the Grand Faw Port project is the construction of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port on the Kuwaiti coast, opposite the Grand Faw Port. The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project was launched in Kuwait in 2011, as part of the Kuwaiti government's plans to develop port infrastructure and strengthen Kuwait's position as a commercial and logistics hub in the Arabian Gulf region. The project aims to build a massive port on Bubiyan Island, north of Kuwait, and is one of the most ambitious maritime projects in the region. It came a year after the Iraqi government announced the establishment of the Grand Faw Port project in 2010 [1].

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port is being built on Bubiyan Island, a strategic island in northern Kuwait, near the maritime border with Iraq. Kuwait is building its port in a narrow shipping lane leading to the planned Al-Faw Port and the existing 70-year-old Umm Qasr Port.

Therefore, it is clear from the maps that Iraq and Kuwait are crowded within a narrow passage (Khawr Abdullah), meaning that the passage will be crowded with three seaports: the Grand Faw Port, Umm Qasr Port, and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port [6, p.12].

This is considered a violation of international agreements, according to Iraqi navigation experts, for two reasons:

First: The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project cuts off a significant amount of water from Umm Qasr Port, leading to a drop in water levels. This indicates that Kuwait could restrict maritime navigation to the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr.

Second: Kuwait will also confiscate what is known as the land navigation route, which is open to all countries, presumably.

Kuwait has the right to establish maritime projects on its coasts, but it established Bubiyan Port on the right side located inside the narrow shipping lane. It did not establish it on Bubiyan Island; rather, it established the port's foundations three kilometers away from Iraqi ports. This makes the latter unable to receive sea vessels due to the shallow waters of their coasts and the low water level of their ports, making it difficult for sea vessels to dock, which affects the Iraqi economy [10, p.5].

This was confirmed by a member of the International Arab Maritime Organization, Yassin Abdul-Ilah, who stated that "the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port will deprive the Grand Faw Port of its economic value because ships will refrain from entering the depths of Khor Abdullah Canal, considering that about 95% of the water bodies are located within Kuwaiti administrative borders [9, p.56].

It is noteworthy that Iraq and Kuwait signed an agreement to regulate maritime navigation between the two parties in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 833 of 1993, which ends at the borders of Bubiyan Island, along the line opposite Khor Abdullah Canal, meaning that about 95% of the deep waters lie within the borders of Kuwait. The UN resolution also stipulated a condition that this arrangement should not cause harm to the economic reality agreed upon by Iraq and Kuwait within the joint committee between them.

#### **Third: The future vision of the Grand Faw Port**

1. The importance of futures studies:

Futures studies is a field that seeks to predict the future by anticipating developments based on current data. Despite its success in the field of natural sciences (due to the stability of their laws), it faces difficulties in the behavioral sciences, such as Political Science, due to the difficulty of predicting human behavior, which requires intensified efforts to reach accurate results. Interest in this field has increased for several reasons, the most important of which are:

- Futures studies are no longer a scientific luxury; they have become a strategic

necessity to keep pace with technological and political transformations, especially after the Cold War.

- Developed countries' spending on futures studies is estimated at approximately 97% of global spending, compared to approximately 3% spent by developing countries.

- They provide indicators for the long-term future plans pursued by countries.

Dr. Mazen Ismail Al-Ramadani sees the future as the cumulative result of the events and processes of change that are being observed, emanating from society or occurring within it [14, p.13].

The University of Minnesota developed a futures division that has become known by its name, distinguishing between the immediate future, the near future, the intermediate future, and the distant future. The immediate future is defined as a period of time of two years or less; the near future as a period of more than two to five years; the intermediate future as a period of five to twenty years; and the distant future as a period of more than twenty to fifty years [21, p.17].

We note that there are multiple time periods for futures studies depending on the research topic (a future vision for the Grand Faw Port project and its economic and political repercussions in Iraq). The near future is not suitable due to the limited time period, which does not allow sufficient variables to occur that could produce a change in the future vision for the Grand Faw Port project. Likewise, when considering the distant future in relation to the research topic, we cannot, according to our available research tools, accurately track such a long-term horizon. As for the intermediate future, it represents the most appropriate upcoming period for examining a future vision of the Grand Faw Port project and its economic and political repercussions in Iraq. Accordingly, the research adopts three scenarios, which are examined as follows:

#### A: Decline scenario

The Development Road Project in Iraq is a major initiative aimed at strengthening infrastructure, improving the economic

situation, and deepening regional integration between Iraq and neighboring countries. Despite the ambitious goals of this project, it faces several challenges that affect its progress and success. These challenges range from political, economic, social, and security issues. Therefore, it is important to adopt a comprehensive academic perspective to assess the reasons leading to the decline of this project (in preparation for proposing practical solutions to overcome them), the most important of which are:

- The complex internal conditions in Iraq affect the establishment of a long-term strategy, in addition to political conflicts that influence the formation of a unified political decision. Iraq also suffers from administrative and financial corruption, which stands as an obstacle to the financing of major development projects [7, p.14].

- Iraq faces regional competition from the Gulf states, especially Kuwait, which is establishing the Mubarak Port project on the sea coast between Iraq and Kuwait. This could create economic competition between the two parties and negatively impact maritime trade at the Grand Faw Port. This was confirmed by Iraqi economic expert Riyad Jawad (according to preliminary studies, the Grand Faw Port will lose approximately 60% of its economic value in Iraq due to Mubarak Port). Any economic or political tension between Iraq and Kuwait will lead to tension in relations with the Gulf states, which tend to show solidarity with one another. This would affect Iraq's relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is a key supporter of Iraq's development path. This is especially true given the presence of political parties that support Iranian influence in Iraq, which could create tension between Iraq and the Gulf states that oppose Iranian policy [16, p.22].

- The Development Road Project, which will connect the two continents of Asia and Europe, is a major competitor to the Suez Canal in Egypt, which is a major conduit for global trade between the two continents. Therefore, when Iraq announced the establishment of the Development Road and invited regional and international countries

to a conference in Iraq, Egypt did not attend. The conference called for cooperation among regional and international countries to support Iraq's development. The presence of competing countries may hinder Iraq's development path.

- The environmental and climatic changes facing Iraq, such as water shortages and rising temperatures, may hinder funding for the Development Road Project and limit foreign investment in the country. Water scarcity threatens desertification and the degradation of agricultural land. This requires development strategies that take into account the protection of the environment and natural resources [2, p.19].

#### B: Continuation scenario

Iraq, with its vast natural and human potential, is considered one of the countries with great opportunities to achieve sustainable development. However, despite these potentials, Iraq faces significant challenges that affect the progress of its development projects. These challenges include security, political, economic, and social factors.

Therefore, Iraq seeks to stimulate supportive internal factors and direct cooperation with external powers to enhance development projects through the following points:

- The Iraqi government seeks to achieve security stability, which in turn will encourage economic investment in Iraq and create a stable environment to open the doors to global trade by establishing projects in Iraq and exploiting its strategic location to link the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe [25, p.12].

- Establishing development projects in Iraq provides significant opportunities for the unemployed. The project will provide approximately 100,000 job opportunities upon completion of the first phase by 2028, driving development in Iraq and advancing the Iraqi economy.

- Dealing diplomatically and establishing mutually beneficial economic and political agreements with the Gulf states will support development projects in Iraq and the prosperity of the maritime

route through the Arabian Gulf, and then to Turkey and Europe. This will strengthen relations between Iraq and Kuwait and work to establish cooperation agreements between the two countries to manage their seaports and regulate trade flows.

- Establishing global partnerships with specialized industrial companies to eliminate financial and administrative corruption, and cooperating with foreign economic companies to build development projects in Iraq in order to integrate with international economic development, as well as promoting technological development through the advancement of education in Iraq to create an educated and advanced generation that serves the interests of Iraq [8, p.56].

#### Third: The development scenario

Iraq's future development depends on concerted internal and external efforts. It is crucial for Iraq to adopt radical reform policies in the areas of education, health, the economy, and good governance, with a focus on economic diversification and combating corruption. At the same time, Iraq must strengthen international and regional cooperation and leverage foreign investment and modern technologies to achieve sustainable development goals through the following points:

- Iraq needs new ports to relieve pressure on its existing ports and contribute to the import and export of commercial goods, especially as Iraq is witnessing some improvement in the oil sector, which has helped finance many development projects. Despite the security challenges facing Iraq, the government has begun developing plans to create a more diversified economy and increase interest in non-oil sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and technology. This is in addition to Iraq's ability to export crude oil and create new investment opportunities to capitalize on its untapped natural resources, making Iraq a commercial frontier in the region and a commercial hub capable of attracting investment [4, p.6].

- Describing the Iraq Silk Road project as a strategic project that will support work in Iraqi ports, as it connects two continents, Asia and Europe, linking Iraq

to the Mediterranean Sea via Turkey and then to Europe, thereby enhancing global trade and developing the Iraqi economy. This is from the maritime side. As for the land side, it passes through more than ten Iraqi governorates to the Iraqi Fishkhabur port connected to the Turkish border. The project includes a land road with a length of 1,190 kilometers and an electric railway line with a length of 1,175 kilometers, which provides a huge investment opportunity for Iraq to rehabilitate the infrastructure of transportation, roads, and electricity, and to establish an integrated industrial city and train stations for goods and passengers, in order to diversify income sources in Iraq and reduce dependence on oil [22, p.10].

- The completion of this project will contribute to reducing the average transit time for goods between the Arab Gulf states, Asia, and Europe from 30 days to only 15 days, thus serving the Iraqi economy with revenues estimated at approximately \$4 billion annually from the transport of goods and \$850 million annually from passengers. This will contribute to the prosperity of economic investments in Iraq and raise the economic level in the country.

- Iraq needs a giant port to compete economically with neighboring countries. Furthermore, the presence of the Grand Faw Port will contribute to strengthening Iraq's maritime position and may support the delimitation of coastal boundaries with neighboring states such as Iran and Kuwait, which could help address some maritime boundary issues in the region.

- Improving the coastline, halting coastal erosion and the loss of coastal land, combined with internal factors and improved political and security conditions, will contribute to the establishment of major development projects that serve the country. The national interest in Iraq leads to strengthening economic relations between Iraq and regional and international countries, and restoring Iraq's position by

exploiting its wealth to establish a strong economy capable of competing with regional economies. This will help Iraq become a developed and stable country and enhance foreign investment [3, p.33].

### **Conclusion**

The Development Road Project in Iraq represents a significant strategic opportunity to advance the Iraqi economy and achieve sustainable development across various sectors. By leveraging Iraq's geographical location as a vital trade corridor between East and West, this project can contribute to strengthening regional and international partnerships, stimulating investment, improving infrastructure, and providing job opportunities for Iraqi citizens.

Given the challenges facing the country, such as security issues, internal conflicts, and corruption, the success of this project requires strong political will and a commitment to developing transparent administrative policies, as well as effective investment in education and skills training necessary to keep pace with global technological developments in Iraq.

Although Iraq faces numerous challenges, the Development Road Project represents a vital step toward achieving regional economic integration, balancing Iraq's various regions, and reducing economic and social disparities. By focusing on environmental sustainability, human resource development, and embracing innovation, the project can become a fundamental pillar of long-term growth.

In conclusion, it is crucial for Iraq to adopt a comprehensive approach to implementing the "Development Road" project, one that relies on collaboration between the government, the private sector, and academic institutions to achieve a sustainable economic and social vision that contributes to the well-being of Iraqi citizens and enhances the country's standing on the international stage.

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