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## THE IRAQI OIL INDUSTRY: HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

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### **Abstract:**

The first attempt at producing oil in Iraq dates to the nineteenth century, when Germany explored oil in Iraq during the period (1860-1880). A series of dramatic changes have occurred in the Iraqi oil sector, as well as the agricultural sector, because of revolutions, conflicts, wars, instability, and uncertainty. The Iran-Iraq war occurred from 1980 to 1988, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the subsequent Gulf War, UN sanctions, the 2003 war, and regional destabilisation caused by the Islamic State terrorist group, contributed to restrictions and underinvestment. Despite the positive effects, such as increased export revenues and development opportunities, resource-rich states are often plagued by the resource curse. Conflicts resulting from resource curse raise serious questions about international security. Poor oil revenue has plagued Iraq's economy since the second half of the 20th century. Its economy was heavily influenced by the oil sector. However, oil wealth benefits the government first and last, and the Iraqi people appear to benefit little, consequently there are protest demonstrations by citizens in various Iraqi cities against widespread unemployment, poverty, corruption, deterioration of electricity supply, education, health, and the intensification of the housing crises. Due to the lack of other productive sectors such as agriculture, industry, tourism, mining, the Iraqi economy remains a rentier economy based primarily on crude oil exports. Khrushchev used Iraq's land to threaten the West without consulting the Iraqis. Iraq still faces many threats today as Iran and the United States negotiate the Iranian nuclear issue.

**Keywords:** conflicts, history, Iraq, Jonah, Mesopotamia, oil, petroleum, pipeline, war, Yunus

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## 1. Introduction

Iraq, which in ancient times was called Mesopotamia, refers to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was once the centre of business, colossal fortune, culture, and military and bureaucratic power (Nafi, 1967). As they flow from the Anatolian mountains into the Persian Gulf, they originate from the highlands of Anatolia. Iraq's oil seeps were not overlooked by explorers and geologists in the 19th century as they mapped the Zagros Mountain range and foothills. As Owen (1975) recalls that Tietze in 1879 noted: *"Near Kerkuk, Tuz Kurmatti and Kifri, an intriguing area of the Old World awaits exploration; as soon as it becomes more accessible to European skill, it will become very significant."* The Akkadian-Assyrian word *napta*, which means liquid petroleum, is the basis for both the Arabic-Persian word *naft*, as well as the Greek-Latin word *"naphtha"* derived from the middle Persian word in Mesopotamia. As a result of the abundance of oil and bitumen seeping into Mesopotamia throughout history, many travellers and geographers have marvelled (Sorkhabi et al. 2014). Brick-walls and road pavements in Mesopotamian cities were constructed using bitumen as a water-proof mortar. The vast amount of asphalt found in Babylonia is one of the most incredible miracles the world has ever seen (Gill, 2019).

Attempts to produce oil in Iraq date back to the nineteenth century, when the Germans were the first to try to explore oil in Iraq in the period (1860-1880), when they were brought by the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, Medhat Pasha, and they established a refinery in Baquba to filter the oil extracted from Mandali in 1882, Sultan Abdul Hamid II issued a firman from the high gate to annex the lands of Mosul, including Ain Zala and Qayyarah (Al Eidani, 2013). In 1902, the first oil well was drilled with English skills in the Gia Sorkh field near the Iranian border. Despite the lack of production, it was a qualitative leap and attracted the attention of other companies to Iraq. In 1905, French and German companies tried to extract oil from the fields of Qayyarah. After that, British influence expanded in the region to become the most significant player in the World Oil Arena for three decades, 1910-1940. Meanwhile, international companies known as the Seven Sisters began, a term coined by Italian oil trader Enrico Mattei on seven companies the largest oil companies at the beginning of the twentieth century were companies (Exxon, BP, Shell, Gulf, Texaco, Chevron, Total) (Alshuwaili, 2017, BP Global, 2022).

For millennia, Kirkuk has been home to a diverse population, making it Iraq's most multilingual city. The first oil was also discovered in Iraq here in 1927 by a foreign company. As Iraq's petroleum industry flourished over the following decades, Kirkuk became its hub. In the City of Black Gold, we learn how oil, urbanisation, and colonialism shaped Kirkuk's identity, giving rise to ethnic conflict among its citizens. At the time of the Iraqi state's formation under British administration in the early 1920s, Kirkuk's group identities were fluid. The oil industry, however, was a source of colonial power and Baghdad's influence over Kirkuk. The result was intercommunal violence and competing claims to Kirkuk's past. A century of urban development, interactions between communities, and political mobilisation formed the ethnicities of Kurds, Turkmens, and Arabs in Kirkuk (Bet-Shlimon, 2019).

## 2. Industrial Development

The newly founded Turkish Petroleum Company that held prospecting rights in Mesopotamia was jointly owned by British and German companies just before World War I. After the war, the German-allied Ottoman Empire was exposed to direct British attacks, resulting in an end to the Anglo-German oil partnership. As a result of the secret Sykes-Picot Accord of early 1916, the British ceded much of the oil-producing region in northern Iraq to their French ally. It has been reported that British prime minister David Lloyd George and his French counterpart Georges Clemenceau nearly came to blows during the Versailles Peace Conference over Mesopotamia (Iraqi) oil. US President Woodrow Wilson intervened a few minutes later, but they were barely restrained. As a result of the secret San Remo Agreement of 1920, the two rivals traded rights for the Turkish Petroleum Company's German quarter. After the end of 1920, the Anglo-French accord became old-fashioned imperialism, according to the U.S. press, because it left them nothing! The quarrelling parties were finally resolved in 1928 by signing the 'Red Line Agreement'. There was a deal made to jointly develop fields in many Middle East countries within the red line drawn by negotiators on a map between a consortium led by the U.S. For this phase of Iraq's oil history, national military power, government pressure, and private corporate power were combined to capture and hold oil. After the Ottoman Empire and its ally Germany were defeated and dismembered, all oil rights were lost to the three victors based on their relative power. There was no consultation with Iraqis, and none of these arrangements benefited them. Nearly half of the vote went to Britain, while close to a quarter went to the United States and France (Paul, 2002). According to the [Iraq Petroleum Company Limited](#) (2001), as a result of a revised Group Agreement enacted in 1948, the 1929 Red Line Agreement was superseded. Mosul Petroleum Company Limited obtained additional concessions in 1942, and Basrah Petroleum Company Limited in 1938. In the 1930s and 1940s, the company completed the Mediterranean pipeline and acquired significant interests in Middle Eastern concessions outside Iraq as well.

Due to its narrow coastline, Iraq has relied heavily on transnational pipelines to export its oil. This has been complicated by its proximity to Iran, with which it has historically had strained relations. When the Jewish state was established (1948), oil was originally pumped to the Mediterranean Sea through Haifa, Palestine (now in Israel), a practice the Iraqis abandoned. In the following years, pipelines to the Mediterranean were built to Bāniyās, Syria, and through Syria to Tripoli, Lebanon. The Turkish Mediterranean coast at Ceyhan was reached by a large pipeline completed in 1977. The Syrian pipelines were no longer used by Iraq after the first Turkish line was completed, as it relied on Turkish ports and Persian Gulf terminals (although exports through Syria briefly resumed in the early 1980s). All three gulf terminals Iraq had built by 1979 were damaged by one or both of the recent Iraqi wars. The Petrolina (in Saudi Arabia) was connected with Iraq by a new pipeline built in 1985. Yanbu is a port on the Red Sea that terminates at the port. As a result of Kuwait's invasion by Iraq in 1990, the old pipeline was replaced with a more efficient one in 1988. But it never reached full capacity and was

shut down like all other Iraqi oil pipelines. Turkish pipelines were reopened in December 1996 under the oil-for-food program. In 1998, repairs were started on Syrian pipelines. The Iraqi pipelines were repeatedly sabotaged after the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 (Khadduri et al., 2022).

Agriculture was Iraq's primary economic activity prior to the development of the petroleum industry. It represents a small, but vital component of the country's economy. Over half of Iraq's population was employed in agriculture in 1976, contributing nearly 8% to its GDP (Schnepf, 2004). Approximately 60 percent of Iraqis live in agriculture, according to a report prepared by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) in 1952. The figure is commensurate with the rural population's size at that time. Due to the lack of storage capacity, a lot of water is wasted. Water usually became scarce in the fall after the spring floods continued to sweep large areas and were repeated eight times between 1923 and 1949. Irrigated lands also suffer from high salinity in the soil, which makes agriculture difficult (Ali, 2018). Iraq's involvement in military conflicts, particularly the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 Iraq War, has heavily influenced agriculture's role in the economy over the past several decades. Also, the government has intervened in agricultural production to promote and control it to varying degrees. In the mid-1960s, the need to import food steadily increased due to rapid population growth, limited arable land, and stagnant agricultural productivity (Schnepf, 2004).

### **3. International Relations**

To international relations scholars, oil is a valuable natural resource not only because it is precious but also because it has a profound effect on countries that have it in abundance. Resource-rich states are often considered plagued by the resource curse, even though it brings positive effects like increased export revenues and development possibilities. Resource curses lead to the unfortunate reality of conflict, which raises serious questions about international security stability (Lazarovska, 2020). Iraq has suffered the economic curse of oil revenue. Its economy was shaped by the international oil sector in the second half of the 20th century, forcing it to heavily rely on oil revenues. Iraq has failed to diversify its economy with copious oil rents and is now suffering a severe economic recession. The country's overreliance on oil revenues combined with the consequences of its war with Iran and the Gulf War, as well as sanctions, has led to economic destruction, sanctions, and huge debt. Iraq is an oil-producing nation, a founding member of OPEC, and has the world's second-largest oil reserves. Thus, the availability of capital is not a sufficient condition for economic growth, and has a detrimental effect, as it did in this now-reviled and wrecked country (Alnasrawi, 2002). The Mosul oil company was founded in 1936, and the Basra oil company was founded in 1938, and the Kirkuk field was discovered in 1927. In 1964, the national oil company was established, reassessed seismic surveys, recruited Iraqi competencies, and formed seismic survey teams on uninvested Iraqi lands, which amounted to 95% of Iraq's total territory. As a result of long, complex negotiations with the Iraqi oil company, which failed to yield

to the Iraqi government's demands, the Iraqi government announced in June 1972 that the Iraqi oil company would be nationalised. In 1973, Iraq took control of Mosul Oil, while Basra Oil was nationalised in 1974. In the seventeenth, after nationalisation, the oil industry experienced significant growth, with increased production capacity, pipelines for oil derivatives, gas, and associated gas, and crude oil export ports. Moreover, the National Oil Company has developed ambitious plans to increase production capacity to 5.5 million barrels per day after the discovery of several huge fields such as Majnoon, Halafa, West Qurna, and others, as well as the Ministry has developed a plan to double the capacity of gas processing and filtering to invest in the entire associated gas and use it for laboratories, factories, and power plants (Ali, 2022).

In the extractive industry (crude oil) and other agencies and institutions affiliated with the Ministry of oil, the company's equipment and results expanded significantly as soon as the national oil company took over its duties. In the manufacturing sector (refining, oil and gas processing), it successfully explored, drilled, and identified new fields. The company expanded its production capacity from about two million barrels per day (bpd) to about 4 bpd. The actual production in 1979-1980 amounted to more than 3.5 bpd, but it was almost completely disrupted due to the Iran-Iraq war. However, the construction of giant oil and gas projects continued since 1973 and during the Eighties (Chalabi, 2012). Marefa.org (2015) reported that the competition between France, Russia, Japan, and China to make oil deals in Iraq intensified in the 1980s and 1990s. However, international sanctions prevented those deals from being fulfilled from 1990 to 2003. When international sanctions began to wane in 1997, Russian Lukoil, French Total, Chinese national and other companies began to make oil deals with Iraq. Lukoil has an exploration and extraction agreement in Western Qurna, Total in Majnoon, and Chinese national in northern Rumaila. However, the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) was established in 1966 by the Iraqi government. In 1987, Saddam Hussein's regime split the (INOC) up into regional companies in order to increase direct government control over the oil industry. Since then, these regional companies have been under the oil ministry's umbrella. A tension between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over the federal budget led parliament to vote in March 2018 to re-establish INOC. In January last year, the Iraqi supreme court declared a number of articles to revive the national oil company unconstitutional, including revenues, profits, distributions, and provincial rights (Argus Media, 2020).

#### **4. Results of Conflicts**

As a result of revolutions, conflicts, wars, instability, and uncertainty, the Iraqi oil sector has undergone a series of critical changes, such as the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent Gulf War, restrictions and underinvestment resulting from UN sanctions, the 2003 war and regional destabilisation caused by the Islamic State terrorist group, as shown in the following table. Moreover, an archaeologist investigating the destruction of Jonah's tomb by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil) has made a surprising discovery that could provide new insights

into the world's first empire. The Nebi Yunus shrine - containing what Muslims and Christians believe to be the tomb of Jonah, as he was known in the Bible, or Yunus in the Koran - was blown up by Isil militants. There is a marble cuneiform inscription of King Esarhaddon that dates back to the Assyrian empire in 672 BC inside one of the tunnels. According to Prof Eleanor Robson of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, there's a lot of history down there. This is a chance to map the treasure-house of the world's first great empire (Ensor, 2017). According to Iraqi Joint Operations head Abdul Amir Rasheed Aarallah, counterterrorism forces liberated the neighborhood of Nabi Yunis and the tomb of Prophet Jonah, raising the Iraqi flag over the shrine after inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. IS (the so-called Islamic State) has not only demolished this shrine but has also dug several tunnels beneath it in search of artifacts. In order to earn money, they have stolen every artifact they could transport out of Iraq and destroyed anything they could not take. According to Iraqi archaeologist Sermed Alwan, president of the Mesopotamia Heritage Association, one of Mosul's most prominent archaeological sites is the shrine. The tomb attributed to the Prophet Jonah dates back six centuries, although its ownership has been disputed. Nevertheless, the site inspired hundreds of Muslims and Christians to annually pilgrim and pray under the same roof. Its archaeological significance, however, may be lost depending on the extent of the damage. As of yet, there has not been an expert evaluation of the site. Alwan said Iraq has lost yet another treasure and hopes to rebuild it in the future. There is a saying that if you want to destroy a nation, you have to destroy its history, and this is exactly what IS did (Hussein, 2017). Iraq has been negatively affected by the volatility of oil prices and the Coronavirus crisis, along with restrictions imposed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on production volume, similar to other countries heavily reliant on oil production and exports. As a result, Iraq committed to cutting its production by 2020 and 2021 as a result of the pandemic. Due to strong global economic growth and the boycott of Russian energy imports, oil prices have recently increased as demand has outstripped supply. Major oil suppliers like Iraq are therefore at risk. Iraq's OPEC+ production quota has been increased to 4.28Mmb/d (million barrels per day) for January 2022. However, an Iraqi oil minister, Mr Ihsan Abdul Jabbar, pointed out that continued high oil prices could accelerate the switch to electric cars (Hasan & Kiryushin, 2022).

It is noted in the "energy security report 2001" commissioned by then US Vice-President Dick Cheney -that "Middle East tensions," specifically the threat from Iraq, are the main source of disruption. Iraqi oil may be removed from the market for an extended period of time by Saddam Hussein in order to damage prices, according to the documents. In 2000, Iraq became a swing producer, switching on and off its oil as it saw fit. In addition to the threat of using oil as a weapon, Saddam Hussein has also manipulated oil markets with his own export program. This has destabilised the flow of oil from the Middle East to international markets. In order to assess Iraq's military, energy, economic, and political/diplomatic situation, the United States should conduct an immediate policy review. To reaffirm goals regarding Iraqi policy, and to rebuild a cohesive coalition of key allies, the United States should develop an integrated strategy with key allies in Europe and Asia, as well as key countries in the Middle East. According

to Bush, the invasion of Iraq was a crucial step in the war on terror by eliminating Saddam Hussein from power in March 2003. Instead of removing Saddam Hussein from power, the invasion was argued to be aimed at controlling Iraq's oil reserves. So, Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were not really the issue - and neither was Saddam himself (Ahmed, 2014). Iraqis lost out on a golden opportunity in 2003 as a result of Bush's neoconservative policies. It is a great opportunity to build the country anew on the foundation of multiple and solid economic pillars, without relying on oil, based on qualified human resources, ancient universities, an ancient history, and multiple natural resources. However, Bush's goal was to finance the newly formed government with oil money. This was for fear of upsetting the American taxpayer. However, he did not realise that he had fallen into a trap. As oil was the secret of Saddam Hussein's strength, arrogance and might, this oil will bring a new Saddam, albeit in a different guise, making Iraq spin in a vicious circle. In short, Iraqi oil has turned into a curse that haunts Iraqis! And all we hope from the Almighty is that he will turn this curse into a blessing (Aljazeera, 2019). According to Robert Fisk, an English journalist and writer specialising in Middle Eastern affairs and the Middle East correspondent for the British Independent newspaper, Saddam's decision in November 2000 to switch from the dollar to the European Euro as the currency for dealing with oil sales significantly influenced the United States' efforts to change the regime in Iraq. When Iran threatened to do the same, the United States added Iran to its list of enemies. The dollar is protected like oil by the United States. Further, by 2025, 70 percent of imported oil will be used for domestic consumption due to a decrease in oil reserves in the United States. As a result, the United States must control the world's oil resources and not attempt to convince me that the United States would have invaded Iraq if Iraq exported beetroot and did not have 25 percent of the world's oil reserves (Ibrahim, 2010).

Why do Iraqis always stay out of the game? The phrase "*Iraq is the most dangerous spot in the world*" was coined by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan while negotiating with the Soviet side led by Khrushchev in the West Berlin missile crisis, which threatened the Warsaw Pact countries in the eastern part of Europe in 1959. During the time when the streets of Iraq were controlled by the left, Khrushchev was pushing the Iraq paper on the western side, and his threat, which he was denouncing to the West, was to aid the Iraqi left to control the government and to invade the Gulf region, which is the backbone of Western economies. Khrushchev made this threat to McMillan without taking into account the opinion of any Iraqi. In the midst of a conflict involving two international parties that wish to use Iraq's land as a battlefield, Iraq is currently facing the same danger. Iran was able to take advantage of the changing situation in Iraq after the United States withdrew its forces in 2011 in agreement with the destabilized Iraqi government. This created a political and security vacuum. Due to the recent exchange of strikes between the two sides, Iraq has now become a battlefield for a war between Iran and America which has nothing to do with Iraq because it has been out of the equation of the Iranian - American conflict since the beginning. Iraq remains key parts of negotiations (Vienna) between Iran and the United States on the Iranian nuclear file, making it a field for manoeuvring +between them. In the same way that Khrushchev, the



former Soviet Union president, publicised the Iraqi paper, the Iraqis have left the game (Aday, 2021).

## 5. Conclusions

In 2016, Iraq ranked fifth in the world with 143,069,000,000 barrels of proven oil reserves (Worldometer, 2016). According to Hayan Abdul-Ghani, Iraq's Minister of Oil, during a visit to the Oil Exploration Company (OEC), the company's seismic teams have successfully added 6 billion barrels of oil and 32 billion standard cubic feet of gas to the country's reserves as of 24th January 2023. In an effort to enhance Iraq's hydrocarbon wealth and convert forecasts into fixed reserves, the Minister emphasized the importance of the oil exploration sector (Lee, 2023).

**Table 1:** Conflicts and wars involving Iraq

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1534-1920      | Iraq is conquered by the Ottoman Empire                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1914-1918      | WWI Mesopotamian Campaign<br>Ottoman Iraq against the British Empire                                                                                                                     |
| 1919-1924      | Mahmud Barzanji Revolts. Britain established the Iraqi kingdom in 1921, and in 1932 the nation gained independence. In World War II, Britain occupied the country again (1939-45).       |
| May 2-31, 1941 | The Anglo-Iraqi War: during WWII a British led campaign ousted Rashid Gaylani's government and the British re-occupied to revert control back to the Regent of Iraq: Prince 'Abd al-Ilah |
| July 14, 1958  | The monarchy is overthrown in a military coup, the Republic is proclaimed in Iraq and leader Abdul Karim Qassim takes over as prime minister.                                            |
| July 17, 1968  | A coup coordinated by the Baath Party and officers close to Arif overthrows him and Officer Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr is appointed president.                                                 |
| 1979           | Saddam Hussein becomes president of Iraq and eliminates opposition and becomes dictator                                                                                                  |
| 1980-1988      | Iran-Iraq War                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 1990           | Invasion of Kuwait                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 1990-1991      | Gulf War                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1991-2003      | Iraq experienced an embargo and an unsuccessful uprising in the south, as well as a civil war between Iraqi Kurds                                                                        |
| 2003-2011      | Invasion of Iraq                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2014-2017      | Conflict between Iraqi army and ISIS                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2017-Present   | Political instability                                                                                                                                                                    |

As long as the Iraqi economy is a rentier economy, Iraqi oil is not the property of the Iraqi people. Due to the rentier economy, the government is the first and last beneficiary of oil wealth, and the Iraqi people are not benefiting from the large oil revenues, as evidenced in the protest demonstrations of citizens in various Iraqi cities against widespread unemployment, poverty, widespread corruption of officials, the deterioration of electricity, education, health and the intensification of crises such as housing. In the absence of other productive sectors such as agriculture, industry, tourism, mining and others, the Iraqi economy remains a rentier economy based on crude oil exports. This

neglects other productive sectors. It will remain the same or worsen for as long as the system is based on sectarianism and quotas rather than citizenship, institutions, and law. To achieve Sustainable Development, the oil sector must be restructured so it can be a source of economic growth, rather than a burden. Diversifying the economy and finding alternative sources of financing for the general budget remain a central goal for Sustainable Development (Shabib, 2019).

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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