



## Baghdad Seminar Report

### Iraq in the Middle East post-conflict: Strategic, political, and regional implications

**Iraqi Strategic Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) / Defense University for Military Studies (DUFMS) & Centre for Stabilisation (CFS) / Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC)**

**25-26th Feb, 2025**

#### **Introduction**

The Middle East region is one of the most prominent regions in the world in terms of energy resources, in addition to its civilizational, cultural, and strategic importance. For this reason, the region has always been a top priority for regional and international decision-makers throughout history. It is considered one of the most significant regions in the world due to its strategic location, rich natural resources, and historical, religious, and cultural dimensions. These factors have made it a center of attention for international and regional powers, leading to ongoing competition among these powers to achieve influence and secure their interests.

- A military, political, and strategic balance emerges as one of the key concepts for understanding the dynamics of the region, as various parties seek to achieve a state of balance or superiority in the face of changing challenges and threats.
- Iraq is located within the Middle East and possesses significant elements, whether in terms of its strategic location or its wealth of natural resources (**oil and gas**), as well as its access to the Arabian Gulf. Therefore, the competition and conflict among regional and international powers have an impact on Iraqi national security.

#### **Aim**

- To highlight the importance of the Middle East from where strategic, economic, and military balance, as well as the ongoing competition and conflict among regional and international powers over it, that clearly affects the Middle East.

### **Main Objectives:**

- key lessons learned (**L L**) from the seminar following as:
  - To analyze the military capabilities of influential states in the region and examine the role of armament and military alliances in shaping the regional balance of power.
  - To assess the political balance and explore the distribution of political influence among international and regional powers, and its implications for regional stability.
  - To review regional and international strategies, and evaluate the approaches adopted by major powers to achieve their objectives, such as utilize of soft power, economic sanctions, and diplomacy.
  - To foresight the future of the region by analyzing potential scenarios for strategic balance in light of geopolitical shifts, including armed conflicts, evolving international relations, and economic transformations. To enhance academic and political understanding by providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the dynamics of power balance in the Middle East.

### **Time and Date**

- A seminar and workshop were conducted at (1000) AM, on Tue -Wed, (25-26<sup>th</sup>) Feb, 2025.

### **Venue**

- Basra hall, Defense University for Military Studies (**DUFMS**).
- Meeting hall, Iraqi Strategic Studies and Research Centre (**SSRC**).

### **General Supervision**

- Mr. President of Defense University for Military Studies S.Lt.G (Aqil Mustafa Mahdi), and assisted him s.MG Abbas Lafta Oudah director of strategic studies and research center.

### **Key takeaways from the seminar**

- Below are the details of the seminar following as:

**Day One:** A seminar was held in the Basra Hall according to the sessions outlined bellowing as:

**1<sup>ST</sup>: Session One:** Pathways to Normalization: Israel-Hezbollah Relations, International Engagement and Regional Stability Implication, that included the following topics:

A session was moderated by Dr. Haider Taher Asker, the scientific deputy at the SSRC,

**First presentation:** Military capacity building as a tool for stabilization

Presented by Major Jan Werner Mathiasen from the RDDC, he was highlighting the role of military capabilities in building armed forces capable of fulfilling assigned military duties and missions. And He mentioned as an example of the Danish army's military capabilities during its operations in Afghanistan, as well as its role in contributing to security stabilization through training the Afghan armed forces and police. Major Mathiasen concluded that stabilization efforts must be locally driven, with a strong focus on context and ownership. As the West likely won't return to traditional peacekeeping missions, he emphasized the need for long-term investment, adaptability, and close cooperation—an approach reflected in the ongoing collaboration between RDDC and SSRC.

**Second presentation:** The strategic role of regional and international powers in the Middle East has changed after Israel's war on Gaza and Lebanon, and change in the political system in Syria, Presented by Dr. Basim Khamis Khairallah from the SSRC, The speaker discussed the series of events that happened in the Middle East following the Israeli war on Gaza and Lebanon and their consequences on regional security and stability, especially the assassinations of senior leaders in Gaza and Lebanon, the destruction of infrastructure, and the displacement of civilians including women, children, and the elderly. These events were accompanied by a rapid shift in the Syrian political system that leading to the withdrawal of Syrian armed forces and the takeover of Damascus by various armed factions, followed by the declaration of a new state administration. These

developments posed significant political, security, economic, and military challenges and pressures, particularly on the Arab region and the broader Middle East. Amid these challenges, multiple Arab and foreign actors emerged in efforts to end the war in Gaza and Lebanon. These international actors, under the supervision of the United Nations and the Arab League, assisted to broker a ceasefire, facilitate the return of refugees, and coordinate the exchange of prisoners.

**Q&A:** During the following discussion, Dr. Bassem was asked by Mr. Vestenskov about Iraq's future security challenges over the next 5 to 10 years. Dr. Bassem highlighted that while Iraq has made strides in building military capacity, significant strategic challenges remain. Regional instability, shifting alliances, and internal readiness continue to impact Iraq's ability to maintain long-term security. He emphasized the importance of diplomacy alongside military preparedness, underlining that without strategic and political balance, sustainable stabilization will be difficult to achieve. Major Mathiasen responded to a question from a staff officer at the Directorate of Training regarding whether achieving stability is an end state or part of a transitional process. Major Mathiasen argued that global power structures are being renegotiated, and that stability should be viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome. Drawing on lessons from recent conflicts, he stressed the importance of local ownership and adaptable strategies that reflect the evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly the shifting roles of major powers like the U.S. and China.

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Session Two:** Restoring Faith Israel, Hamas and International Responses to the War in Gaza, this session included the following key points, as outlined below:

Session Moderator by David Vestenskov, Director of the CFS,

**First presentation:** Strategic communication in the war in Gaza Presented by Major Adam Christian Kaas Buschard from the RDDC,

the speaker focused on how strategic communication, as defined by NATO doctrine, plays a central role in modern conflict. He outlined five key

categories—public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations—emphasizing that every communication creates effects both informationally and operationally. Using the Gaza conflict as a case study, he examined Israel's use of Hasbara (public diplomacy) and cognitive warfare aimed at shaping both adversaries' and international audiences' perceptions. Israel sought to undermine Hamas's morale and legitimacy through intense airstrikes and public messaging, including disclosure of intelligence to influence behavior. However, despite these efforts, Major Buschard concluded that Israel's strategic communication largely failed—international criticism grew, and the attempt to control the narrative backfired, weakening Israel's position in the information domain.

**Second presentation:** The Future of Iraq's Role in shadow of Strategic Balances of Regional and International Powers after Israel's War on Gaza and Lebanon, Presented by Col. Dr. Muhannad Jabbar Abbas from the SSRC, the speaker discussed the strategic importance of the Middle East and Iraq's central role in it, particularly regarding its geographic location, natural resources, and strategic positioning at the crossroads of the world's continents. He highlighted the shifting military and political balances in the region following the Israeli war on Gaza and Lebanon, as well as military interventions along the Syrian border in the context of the regime change in Syria after President Bashar al-Assad's 50-year rule.

The speaker outlined the threats to Iraq's national security resulting from these developments, especially the security vacuum along the Syrian border, accompanied by political, military, and economic challenges. He emphasized the role of the Iraqi government in treating these challenges and noted that Iraq is located at the heart of regional and international power dynamics, playing a vital role in foreign policy and diplomacy to shield its national security from entanglement in regional and international conflicts.

**Q&A:** During the Q&A part, an audience member asked Major Buschard whether Israel's failure in strategic communication could also be seen on the side of Iran and its so-called axis of resistance. Major Buschard responded that, in contrast to Israel, Iran has been relatively successful in shaping a narrative of resistance. While Israel struggled to control international perception, Iran managed to gather regional sympathy by presenting itself and its allies as defenders against aggression. Their strategic messaging has resonated more strongly, especially within the Middle East. Mr. Vestenskov directed a question to Col. Dr. Abbas, asking how the conflict might influence Iraq's future security posture. Col. Dr. Abbas emphasized that Iraq must remain neutral, particularly avoiding direct opposition to Iran. He noted that Iraq has so far relied on diplomacy and international engagement but may need to reassess its position if the conflict deepens or shifts further. Col. Dr. Abbas concluded that maintaining internal stability and navigating external pressures will be crucial in the years ahead.

**Day Two:** Several activities were conducted at the SSRC Hall, bellowing as:

● **Internal Workshop between SSRC and RDDC**

- An Internal Lecture "The Dangers of Social Media on the Military Institution," Delivered by researcher Ali Abdul-Jaleel speaker from SSRC, the researcher highlighted the critical role of social media in relation to national security, noting its positive aspects, such as promoting development and progress, staying informed about global events, and benefiting from scientific, academic, and global information technology resources. However, he also emphasized the potential harms of social media, particularly its negative impact on the military institution in terms of information security, individuals, weapons, and other sensitive fields. Lastly, he stressed the significance of awareness and education in encouraging military individuals to avoid the misuse of social media and obligation strictly to the instructions issued by higher authorities in this regard.

- Discussion of the Outcomes of the Person seminar Held on Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025. while a session was held to review and discuss the outcomes of the first day of the seminar, conducted in Basra Hall, with participants exchanging perspective to formulate key findings and directives for submission to higher authorities.
- Formulating Future Visions for Joint Cooperation Discussions were held to establish a future vision for continued collaboration among SSRC, NATO Mission advisors, and the Center for Stability at the Royal Danish Defense College

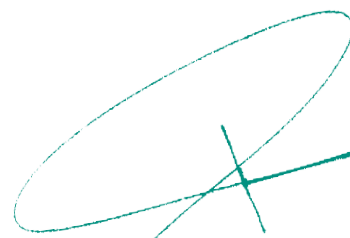
### **KEY FINDINGS**

- The seminar reached the following key findings:
  - a) This is the fourth in-person seminar held between the Center for Stability (CFS) at the Royal Danish Defense College (RDDC) and the Strategic Studies and Research Center (SSRC) at Defense University for Military Studies (DUFMS).
  - b) As a result of active cooperation and participation via (VTC) with the NATO Mission in Iraq and the Danish Center for Stability, these engagements culminated in a successful in person seminar held at the Basra Hall of Defense University for Military Studies (DUFMS).
  - c) The selection of topics was both significant and impactful, focusing on issues with regional and international influence on developments in the Middle East, particularly in the aftermath of the Israeli wars on Gaza and Lebanon.
  - d) The seminar highlighted the extent to that regional and international military and political power balances affect the Arab region, especially following the political regime change in Syria, and examined how these military, political, and economic challenges impact Iraqi national security in light of ongoing shifts in the Middle East.

### **Recommendations**

- Based on the key findings of the seminar, the following recommendations were made:

- To continue scientific and academic collaboration with the NATO Mission in Iraq and the Center for Stability at the Royal Danish Defense College, in addition to expanding cooperation with similar centers within NATO countries. This collaboration should support the Iraqi military institution in areas such as research, studies, scientific methodology, conferences, and lectures.
- To obtain official approvals for establishing joint research cooperation between researchers at the Strategic Studies and Research Center and researchers at the Danish Center for Stability. This aims to facilitate publication in refereed journals in NATO countries and enhance the academic and scientific standing of Defense University for Military Studies on international academic platforms.
- To adopt a strategy of active participation and collaboration in international forums that support peace and international security in the Arab region and the Middle East. Additionally, to contribute to maintaining security and stability in Iraq by providing financial, moral, and military support to the forces securing Iraq's borders, and by directive the relevant institutions within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) to highlight the role and importance of the military institution in protecting the country, through field engagements, posters, and various media outlets



**S. Major General  
Abbas Lafta Oudah**

**Director of Strategic Studies and Research Center**

**April, 2025**