



SUMERIA

Sumer Foundation for International Affairs

مؤسسة سومر للشؤون الدولية

Climate Change and Armed Conflicts in Iraq



Introduction

The phenomenon of climate change has received great international attention because of its direct and indirect impact on all areas of life. With the scientific and technical progress that countries have reached, the international community has become more aware of the need to move to restrain the repercussions of this phenomenon and its negative impact, as the current generation has the means and also bears the responsibility to avoid the dire consequences of the aggravation of climate change.

In Iraq, which is known for its extreme climatic characteristics throughout the year, where the temperature reaches (50) degrees Celsius, climate change has begun to show its features and effects clearly, as almost every month of the year is not without a phenomenon of climate change. There is no doubt that this matter shows its repercussions on the political situation, economy in general and security in particular.

Scientific panel discussions about the effects of climate change in Iraq have often been limited to the environmental and economic aspects, but the focus on the consequences of climate change and its impact on conflicts has not received sufficient attention, as the country suffers from dangerous phenomena that threaten societal peace due to climate change, foremost of which is water scarcity, along with rising temperatures, increasing desertification and rising dust waves. This report highlights the outcomes of the panel discussion held by SUMERIA on the impact of climate change on the outbreak and exacerbation of armed conflicts in Iraq.

First: The Relationship Between Climate Change and Conflicts in Iraq

There is no doubt that the effects and repercussions of the phenomenon of climate change in Iraq are no different from other countries, relatively speaking, and perhaps classifying the phenomenon of climate change as one of the dangerous phenomena threatening international security does not exclude Iraq, especially after its classification as one of the countries that most vulnerable to climate change. Therefore, climate changes have effects that may vary in severity from one place to another, but they include all countries. This is what makes the main challenge for the foreign policy of the twenty-first century is to face the increase in population, rising



temperatures, scarcity of water resources and air pollution, in addition to the spread of diseases and epidemics, and sea level rise. This will lead to an increase in migrations to regions and lands ready for agriculture, which would ultimately lead to conflicts and mass disputes if actors in the international order did not rush to cooperate in order to address the potential effects of climate change.

Focusing on climate change in Iraq. Iraq often witnesses only two seasons per year, summer and winter, in comparison to neighboring countries that witness four seasons and with regular periods of time. In fact this actually has repercussions on the society's psychology, the national economy, and the increase in the causes of violence. In the last decade, the climate changed and the temperature increased dramatically that exceeded (50) degrees Celsius. this rise in temperatures on the one hand and the decrease in rainfall on the other hand imposed on the Ministries of Agriculture and Water Resources in 2021 reducing the land available for the growing of vital crops by (50%) due to the acute shortage of water, as Iraq annually loses about (14.7%) of its water storage as a result of evaporation, in addition to the high population growth in Iraq. This puts pressure on economic resources and basic services and exacerbates indicators of violence resulting from climate change.

Iraq faces major challenges regarding climate change and requires quick response before the potential effects exacerbate. Although, Iraq has taken steps on climate change and ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate 2021, there are many challenges that still require serious actions. The includes the insufficiency of institutions concerned with transferring adaptation policies into projects on the ground, the lack of data and analyzes related to the impacts of climate change on various sectors and societies, and the weak monitoring and reporting procedures, as well as ineffective funding strategies that require international support and cooperation between national institutions. Also, the increase in desertification in Iraq and water scarcity and the regression of the level of services lead to the emergence of violence and rebellious tendencies, especially in a situation in which arms spread in the hands of the population and the forces parallel to the state grow.



The loss of livelihoods in rural Iraqi areas – with family and clan ties – as a result of water scarcity and drought constitutes an important entry point for understanding the nature of the relationship between conflicts and climate change in Iraq, especially in the drier areas or governorates. Climate change in Iraq is distributed unevenly on groups and clans, and it is generally greater for people deprived of development, as is the case for the regional differentiation between the governorates of Iraq, as the south of Iraq differs from the middle and north. The more we head towards the south from the north, the greater the incentives for violence as a result of climate changes. There is no doubt that the risks of local violence as a result of climate changes in the rentier agricultural areas seem clearer than the centers of cities. For example, the people of the marshes in the south suffer from poverty and regression of main services, such as drinking water, lack of electricity and insufficient health and education services. Climate change poses a double burden to them and threatens their lives and livelihoods. This threatens with the emergence of violent disputes over the sources that guarantee livelihood, but the matter is not that easy in Iraq, where residents of rural areas often resort to well-known provisions called "sanaen" – unofficial local legislation – according to which disputes and differences between the parties to the conflict are resolved. Therefore these "sanaen" may be a safety buffer along with the Iraqi laws in force in alleviating the severity of conflict and violence in areas subject to climate change.

Although the interrelationship between climate change and armed conflicts is still under study and debate in Iraq, the participants in the workshop unanimously agreed that water scarcity, along with rising temperatures, increasing desertification and rising dust waves are the most important climate variables that should be confronted as soon as possible. They expect that the near and medium-term future warns of armed conflicts as a result of climate change. These conflicts may hide behind the political and security dispute. They also identified the range of potential conflicts resulting from climate change in the outskirts of the cities where the tendency of armed conflicts is higher than the city centers and this is what causes the migration of people from the countryside to the cities. In a related way, the participants also did not ignore that the history of Iraq is full of evidence of violence and conflicts between political and tribal groups in order to meet basic needs, and that this violence will not stop in the near future and climate



change may be the stimulator for the upcoming conflicts, especially with the spread of weapons and the growth of sub-identities at the expense of the inclusive national identity.

The participants concluded that climate change has repercussions on the reality and future of conflicts in Iraq. These repercussions may be reflected in the main images and trends that represented in the following:

- 1. Internal violence and tribal conflicts:** climate change and conflicts may be indirectly related. This means that the factors that play a role in increasing the risks of conflicts may be enhanced by climate change, especially since its presence has become very strong at the current time after its transformation into a variable that threatens the future of local communities that are completely dependent on natural resources, especially since the impact of climate change on natural resources is coupled with demographic, economic and political pressure that contributes in undermining the ability of states to meet the needs of their citizens and provide them with basic resources that guarantee their livelihoods. This in turn leads to the fragility of countries and the escalation of internal conflicts fuel conflict hotspots. The weaker the ability of the government and state institutions to provide these resources, the greater the opportunities for violence and conflict in Iraq will be. In general, it can be said that the continued escalation of climate change risks in Iraq will inevitably have repercussions on internal violence and conflicts of tribes that rely on reinterred agriculture, which threatens the stability of Iraq and the legitimacy of governments.
- 2. The increase in incubators for terrorist groups:** Climate change is often accompanied by geopolitical changes whose impact clearly appears when they occur in security-fragile areas. Iraq is still witnessing attacks from time to time of terrorist groups that exploit variables to carry out their attacks or increase their numbers by recruiting the locals. Accordingly, the risks are multiplied by the presence of terrorist entities and their supporters, especially with the rising rate of poverty and weak development opportunities. Also, terrorist organizations seek to fill the gaps left by the state, as they work to secure the requirements of the locals or their supporters in order to obtain legitimacy and build confidence in order to extend their influence in those areas. Also, water scarcity and food insecurity in security-troubled areas in which the population is more vulnerable



to recruitment by terrorist organizations that can provide economic incentives and alternative means of livelihood for those that the state was unable to secure.

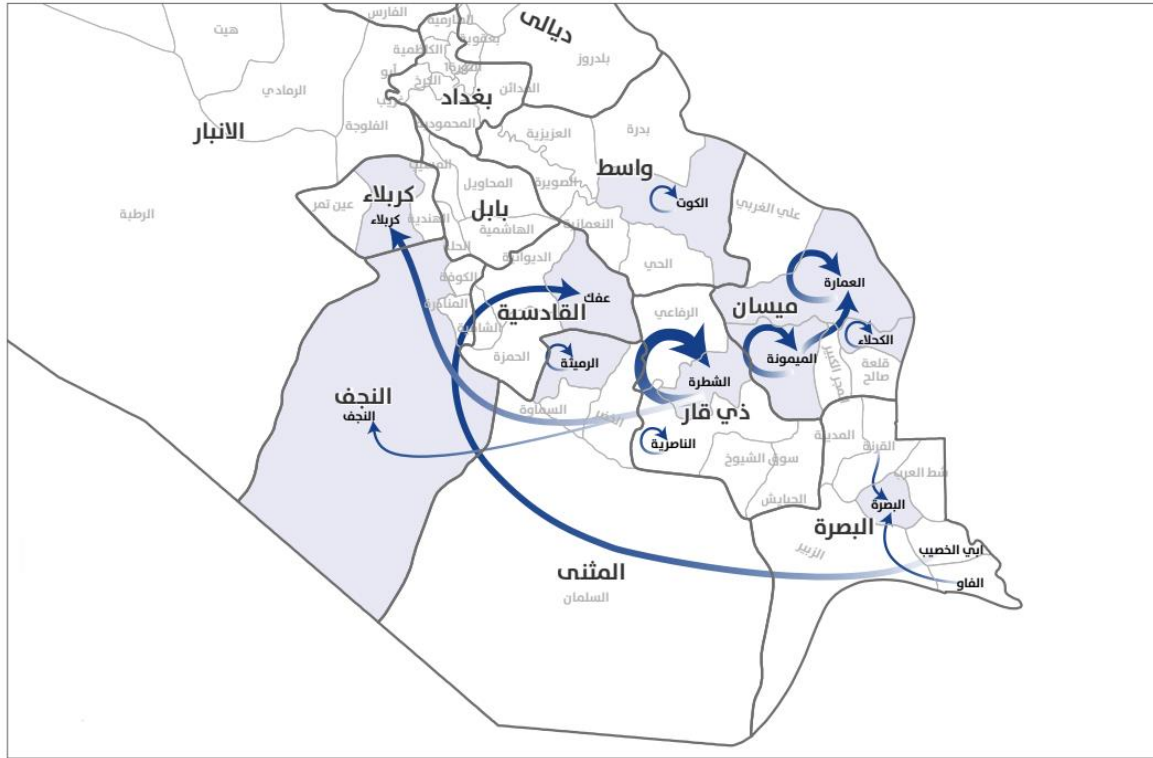
3. Social Tensions over Access to Water and Food: the indicator of the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and some international reports claim that Iraq suffers from severe water scarcity which its repercussions are clear on the local communities in southern Iraq, especially the marshlands. This was confirmed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Iraq, Mrs. Jenin Hennis-Plasschaert in her briefing to the Security Council on the 24th of February 2022. The reasons for water scarcity in Iraq are due to the increase in the population on one hand and the regression of infrastructure and irrigation projects on the other hand, as it is in other parts of the country, as the shrinking in agricultural spaces increases the chances of escalating social tensions over access to food and water.

4. The growing phenomena of gender-based violence: Climate change stimulates the growth of violence against children and women, especially since many international climate reports confirm this relationship and warn of its effects and repercussions, as the displacement of women and children is due to the impact of economic and social insecurity and the disparities resulting from climate repercussions on agriculture and livelihoods, makes women and children more vulnerable to the risks of domestic violence, child and forced marriage, and the increase in the percentage of those who fail to enroll in educational institutions, including sexual violence, especially since Iraq is still lagging behind in combating gender-based violence, as it suffers from a lack of legislation and legal restrictions that put limits for gender-based violence, in addition, fears increase with the spread of the phenomenon of human trafficking, as women displaced due to climatic conditions become more vulnerable to blackmailing and violence.

5. Increasing waves of mass displacement and forced migration: The dangers of climate change represented by water scarcity and increased salinity in rivers and tributaries and in the middle and southern governorates of Iraq warn of unprecedented levels of displacement and migration from agricultural areas to city centers or to neighboring provinces, as shown in (Map-1). These changes led to pressure on the agricultural sector, and the weakening of the population's ability to keep up with the harsh conditions climate change, which made many families dependent on agriculture unable to ensure their livelihoods in a sustainable manner, so the fragile reality forced them to migrate towards nearby or neighboring cities.



Map 1: Climate-induced displacement in the middle and south of Iraq



Source: IOM Report: Climate Change Displacement – Southern Iraq 2021

The Second Chapter: Final Results and Recommendations

First: Direct Actions and Measures

1. Forming a crisis cell to deal with the effects of climate change, similar to the crisis cell for economic and financial reform associated with the Prime Minister Office.
2. Obliging the concerned institutions and beneficiaries to abide by the government's decisions regarding regulating the division of water between agricultural areas in a fair manner to reduce the risks of climate change and armed conflict.
3. Speeding in linking Iraq with regional and international projects and initiatives concerned with mitigating and tackling the effects of climate change, such as the Green Middle East Initiative.



4. Expanding the mandate of the UNAMI and international climate organizations, in order to advise, support and assist Iraq in addressing the negative repercussions of climate change and environmental degradation to include support to reduce climate-related security risks.
5. Integrating the file of the effects of climate change on the liberated areas with efforts to combat extremism and eliminate ISIS.
6. Raising community awareness of the dangers of climate change and motivating them to participate individually and collectively in mitigating and tackling its effects by preserving the environment and rational consumption of water resources.

Second: Medium-term Actions and Measures

1. establishing a higher authority or council for water and climate change, so that its recommendations are binding on the government institutions, private sector companies and civil society, as well as specifying a percentage of the abundance of oil income to prepare a financing strategy for projects related to mitigating and tackling the effects of the climate change, especially in the most vulnerable and affected provinces.
2. Developing a long-term strategy for water policies and climate change, a (green paper), with the help of international organizations, in line with Iraq's commitment to Paris Agreement on Climate, and to invest in the climate challenge and turn it into an opportunity for cooperation in post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts.
3. Drafting new legislation and laws and mandating the laws in force in line with international requirements to address climate change.
4. Supporting civil society and volunteer teams working on mitigating climate changes, in addition to supporting the establishment of study centers and think tanks specialized in studying climate changes, or establishing departments in colleges and universities that concerned with climate sciences and its changes, as well as holding an annual conference to follow up on climate changes in Iraq and its surroundings.



5. Developing monitoring and follow-up systems to determine the directions and trends of the impact of climate change, and its effects on peace and societal stability.

Third: long-Term Measures

1. Contracting mutually beneficial partnerships and long-term agreements with the upstream countries of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

2. Making Sustainable investment of groundwater through the use of modern technologies and encouragement of clean energy projects

3. Desalinating of sea water – and river water when required – with the use of renewable energy to supply water desalination plants with alternative energy.

4. Raising the efficiency of irrigation water use and working to find modern, high-efficiency irrigation methods, and reduce consumption in accordance with the quality of crops, the nature of the soil and climate conditions, in order to adapt to the severe scarcity in water resources, and to rehabilitate the main irrigation projects.

5. Increasing the agricultural sector's resilience to climate change to protect and enhance the country's food security, reduce soil degradation, and increase revenues from agriculture to achieve economic diversification, reduce poverty, and support rural women through the use of modern techniques and technologies as part of achieving sustainable development goals.

Conclusion

Iraq faces many challenges related to the climate, especially drought, water scarcity and high temperatures, especially after the high-percentage reduction in rainfall rates and thus the increase in its dependence on the neighbors to secure water flows. These challenges have clear repercussions on the society structure on one hand and the national economy on the other hand, as well as its impact on security which aggravates with the spread of weapons in society and the growth of sub-identities. Therefore, it is required to placing climate change among critical priorities that require quick response, and working hard to alleviate risks regarding climate through cooperation with international organizations and government institutions.