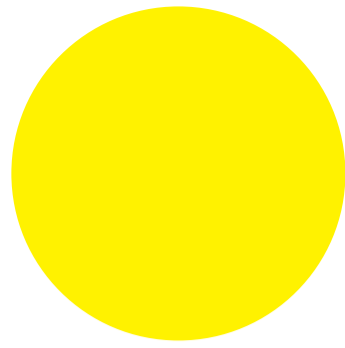


Putin lauds
'strategic'
relations
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Iraq; packed, productive itinerary



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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Iraq can be assessed from multiple angles. Firstly, the selection of Iraq as the president's first foreign destination was a noteworthy choice. Iraq is a neighboring country that enjoys a strong strategic partnership with Iran, and the two countries have a significant level of trade exchanges, with bilateral commerce flourishing between them. Furthermore, being an Arab country, Iraq's perspective on regional issues is of considerable significance to other Arab nations, making it essential for them to be cognizant of the agreements or memoranda signed during the visit, as well as the stances of the officials towards each other and the region. In addition, there are many cultural, political, and economic commonalities between the two countries, and it was expected that with the trip of Pezeshkian and his accompanying delegation to Iraq, the level of trade and economic, political, and security cooperation would increase.

Another point is that Iraq has always been a common ground between Iran and the United States, and in this regard, the choice of this country for the first foreign trip of the president is noteworthy. The hospitality extended to the Iranian president and his delegation by Iraqi officials was impressive, especially during President Pezeshkian's trip to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region — a strategic move that serves Iran's national interests both from a political and security perspective.

In general, it can be stated that this trip had a dual focus and pursued two distinct objectives. One aspect of the trip was the strengthening of bilateral relations and cooperation, which, with the signing of new agreements and the emphasis by both sides on the implementation of previous agreements, can serve as a significant catalyst for increasing the level of cooperation in various fields. Iraq relies on Iran to meet part of its basic needs, such as electricity and gas, and in return, Iraq is a major destination for Iran's trade exchanges. Building on such extensive cooperation and the existence of numerous opportunities for further development, Pezeshkian, in addition to visiting Baghdad, also traveled to Iraq's Kurdistan Region, Basra, Najaf, and Karbala, where he met and engaged in negotiations with local officials.

In this regard, as noted before, the trip to the Kurdistan Region is particularly noteworthy. The Iranian president's meeting with the officials and the leaders of political parties in the Kurdistan Region, as well as the satisfaction expressed by its officials with the trip and the discussions, can lead to the consolidation of relations between Tehran and Erbil and the resolution of some misunderstandings between the two sides. Furthermore, it can also facilitate the implementation of previous security and political agreements, thereby contributing to the establishment of stability and security in the border regions.

The other objective of this trip appears to be related to the government's public diplomacy efforts. The trip to Iraq, which was a packed and productive itinerary, demonstrated that the new Iranian government, at the very least, places significant importance on public diplomacy in its relations with neighboring countries. After all, from the perspective of public diplomacy, numerous neighboring countries, the region, and even the international community were eagerly awaiting the opportunity to gauge the spirit of this new government in the field of diplomacy. In this regard, the Iranian delegation made a notable impression in Iraq.

Therefore, I believe that the president was successful in achieving both objectives, strengthening bilateral relations with Iraq and prioritizing public diplomacy. The first foreign trip, by all accounts, appears to have been a busy and fruitful move.

Western Neighbor; Launch Pad of Pezeshkian's Diplomacy

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) walks alongside his Iraqi counterpart, Abdul Latif Rashid, after arrival in Baghdad, Iraq, on September 11, 2024.
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