Dr., Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Türkiye
Mail: nuh.yilmaz@mfa.gov.tr,
ORCID: 0009-0008-5691-270X

Article Citation Information:	Yılmaz, N. (2024). "The Impact of the Development Road Project on Iraq and Middle East Geopolitics". *Journal of Transport and Infrastructure,* Year: 1, Issue: 1, p. (34-51)
Article Type:	Research
Received on:	05.11.2024
Accepted on:	22.12.2024
Published on:	30.12.2024
Publication Season:	July-December 2024 2024

THE IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT ROAD PROJECT ON IRAQ AND MIDDLE EAST GEOPOLITICS

NUH YILMAZ

ABSTRACT

The Development Road Project is a development project that has the potential to bring about significant changes in the Middle East geopolitics, particularly in Iraq. The project aims to increase cooperation among countries in the region through economic integration and infrastructure development. While Iraq, the owner of the project, is a critical actor for the project with its natural resources and strategic location, Türkiye stands out as a "strategic partner" for the project with its geopolitical position and its trade routes with the European continent. In this respect, the project has the potential to transform the geopolitics of Iraq and its neighboring countries, while also having a critical importance in terms of regional cooperation and competition. In this article, the risks and opportunities as well as the regional and global dimensions of the Development Road Project will be discussed and the approaches of regional and global actors towards the project will be analyzed.

Keywords: The Development Road, Iraq, Türkiye, Connectivity, Middle East, Trade Corridors, Geopolitics

1. Introduction

The geography of the Middle East, in addition to being the cradle of civilizations for centuries, has been at the center of ongoing geopolitical conflicts. The region's complex history, ethnic and sectarian diversity, rich natural resources and geographical location have always made it the focus of interest of global powers. Connectivity projects, which are currently being discussed intensively, are also coming into prominence in the dynamic and turbulent Middle East geography and are included in the foreign policy agendas of the countries in the region. The remarkable one among these projects recently is the Development Road Project between Türkiye and Iraq.

The Development Road Project is considered not only as an infrastructure investment, but also as a strategic move with the potential to reshape the geopolitical balances of the region. With this project, it is aimed to create a logistics corridor extending from the Persian Gulf of Iraq to the south of Türkiye and thus to increase the trade volume between Asia and Europe.

In this article, the Development Road Project, which currently stands out as a new connectivity project, will be discussed in all aspects, the project's effects on Iraq and Middle East geopolitics will be examined, various dimensions of the project will be addressed such as its reflection on relations between the countries of the region, energy security, economic development and security issues, and threats and opportunities for the project will be identified. In addition, the potential challenges to be encountered by the project and its long-term effects will be discussed extensively.

During the research process planned by adhering to qualitative research methods throughout the article, the answer to the research question "What is the regional and global importance of the Development Road Project and the transformative impact of the project on the geopolitics of Iraq and the Middle East?" will be sought. In searching for the answer to this question, a comprehensive literature review as well as a content analysis for articles and news articles published in the press will be carried out. The first part of the article will discuss the increasing importance of connectivity and trade corridors and where the Development Road is located among the existing trade corridors, and in the second part, the regional and global dimensions and the approaches of the actors to the project will be dealt.

At this point, it should be stated that the Development Road Project is a fairly new initiative, thus there are not many academic publications on the subject. This deficiency has been deeply felt in the article writing process, and has led to the necessity of using media reports and content analysis in order to create a comprehensive general framework. Therefore, it is thought that a comprehensive and informative study to be conducted on the Development Road Project, which has been published in press and media organs and research reports of think tanks so far, will fill an important gap in the literature and turn into a reference source on the subject.

2. The Increasing Importance of Connectivity and Trade Corridors

The international system is undergoing a significant change and transformation today. During this period, while countries are facing multiple and continuous crises, it is observed that the current system is insufficient to respond to today's tests. The interaction capacity between states and other actors (national and multinational companies, regional organizations, investment banks, etc.) in the transforming multilateral system gains importance, and the phenomenon of connectivity also becomes prominent as a field that increases this interaction capacity. It is obvious that the concept of connectivity has been used more frequently since the 2010s and points to a story that brings a new dimension to economic integration. It is understood that the concept was first used by ASEAN (ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity, 2010).

The trade transactions in the world is increasing day by day and the trade relations between the countries are developing at a fast pace. Even today's global exports have exceeded $25 trillion with the end of the polarization during the Cold War and the transformation of the international system, and it has become strategically important for states to develop their regional and global economic relations (İMMİB, 2023). This situation boosts the importance of the corridors established between different geographies where commercial relations are maintained. In addition to enabling logistics to be realized in safe, fast and easy way, trade corridors also have a very strategic place in terms of ensuring regional development. In this respect, countries, today, have attempted to identify their strategic goals for owning or becoming a part of these corridors.

In other words, countries have prioritized the issue of trade corridors and connectivity on their agendas in seeking to increase their share in world trade and taking the lead in the ongoing power wars. It should be emphasized that the issue of trade corridors and connectivity was included on the agenda of international politics, especially with China's announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and has become a much more discussed topic since then. China, which has risen and become a global power with its economic breakthroughs in the Asian region, started to shape its foreign policy based on this project with the participation of 155 countries in 10 years. The fact that more than 70 countries are directly involved in the implementation of the project in the Belt and Road Initiative and that the project is spread over a geography covering two thirds of the world's population and half of global gross product undoubtedly demonstrates its success (Öztop, 2024; Kahraman, 2022).

On the other hand, the increasing geopolitical tensions and conflicts in the world enhances the importance of trade corridors and connectivity each day. So much that, today, sparking of the conflicts that were once suspended to be solved, increasing regional conflicts, international terrorism continuing to pose a global threat, global epidemics and problems such as climate change consti-

tute a threat to global trade and supply chains and disrupt international trade. Regional tensions and conflicts not only threaten the autonomy and stability of countries, but also provide an understanding of the importance of international trade, regional prosperity and development.

The Ukraine-Russia war disrupting the trade in the Northern Corridor and the Black Sea, the Covid-19 pandemic disturbing the global supply chains, the Israeli attacks starting with Gaza and then spreading to the countries of the region, and the missile attacks by the Houthis in Yemen on ships in the Red Sea demonstrate the strategic importance of trade corridors and the issue of security of international trade (Özçubukçu, 2024). The emergence of the Ukraine-Russia war, before the global economic structure had recovered from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, left the countries alone with the food crisis, especially grain, and brought with it the need to redefine trade relations and routes. Similarly, as a result of the attacks on commercial ships passing through the Red Sea, ships carrying commercial cargo have preferred to reach the West by going around the Cape of Good Hope instead of using the Suez Canal as a safer way, which has increased shipping costs and expenses while extending the ships' journey by 3 months (Hizmetix, 2024). Daily cargo volumes in the Red Sea region dropped by about 65% more than expected in a short period of time. The average daily number of transits through the Suez Canal decreased to 75 on December 2023, to 45 in January, and to an average of 38 ship transits in February (Red Sea Situation, 2024).

All these developments have led to safe land trade coming to the fore and gaining importance through trade corridors. For this reason, a large number of trade corridor projects have been put forward by various actors today. In addition to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the EU's Global Gateway Initiative, India's India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), the Middle Corridor of Turkistan countries or the Development Road of Iraq are among them.

Türkiye has also become one of the countries that put connectivity projects at the heart of its foreign policy in recent years. One of the main objectives of Türkiye's foreign policy is to strengthen peace, stability, security and prosperity in its region and at the global level. In line with this goal, decision makers constantly address that Türkiye will increasingly focus specific attention in the upcoming periods on investments in energy, transport and logistics and connectivity projects supporting these investments with the advantages of Türkiye's geopolitical position, human and economic infrastructure. (SAM, 2024). In this context, it should be emphasized that Türkiye plays an active role in the implementation of the Caspian Middle Corridor and the Development Road Project, especially in terms of connectivity, and closely follows other connectivity projects in which it is not involved. In this regard, it should be also highlighted that Türkiye aims to contribute to regional and global peace and stability, promote economic development, and increase its influence and visibility in the international arena by placing connectivity at the center of its foreign policy.

In terms of connectivity, important developments have also been taking place in the Turkic world recently. In this context, the importance of the Zengezur Corridor has emerged upon the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, and efforts for harmonization and integration, including the customs, between the Turkic Republics have gained momentum thanks to the Organization of Turkic States (TDT). Thus, the activities for the realization of the Caspian Transit Middle Corridor and the Caspian Transit natural gas pipeline have also gained pace. It should be stated that Türkiye is the driving force behind all these processes and it is envisaged that TDT will play an increasingly significant role in the next years within the scope of connectivity projects for the Turkic world.

3. The Development Road Project: Threats and Opportunities

The concept of the Development Road Project (DRP) dating back to early 2000s puts the Al Faw Port at the center of the project, which is located in Basra, the only province of Iraq with the sea connection; the construction of the port was undertook by the South Korean Daewoo company with a 5 billion USD contract. The project, with the starting point at the Iraqi port, is a trade corridor project aiming to connect to Türkiye by 1.200 km long two-way highway and railway, and transport goods from Gulf countries and Asia to Europe and vice versa. Despite being announced as "Dry Canal" at the beginning, the name of the project was later replaced by Development Road (Alaca, 2024). H.E. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on the other hand, describes the project as the "New Silk Road" (TCCB, 2023). It is a comprehensive project that is planned to reach Türkiye by passing through Nasiriyah, Qadisiyah, Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, Tikrit, Mosul starting from Al Faw Port in the Persian Gulf and continuing both towards Europe and the Caucasus (Asia) along the existing lines on Türkiye. In particular, the commercial corridor will be connected to Türkiye from the Fişhabur/Ovaköy region and will improve the transportation of Iraq and the region by using the infrastructure in Türkiye and strengthen regional connectivity along with development. Thus, the Iraqi authorities regard Türkiye as a "strategic partner" in terms of the implementation of the project (Alaca and Karaalp, 2023).

Iraq, which does not have an important commercial port on a global scale on the short coastline of Basra, the only province with a sea connection, aims to eliminate this deficiency with the Al Faw Port, which is under construction and is stated to be one of the largest ports in the Middle East. The Iraqi government intends to complete the first phase of construction of the port and start operations by 2025, which was first designed in 2005; and to strengthen its economic integration with Europe by means of Development Road Project that is planned to be completed in 2028 allowing it to stand out as a regional actor (Aydın, 2023). The project does not only include the Al Faw Port, it is also planned to create a transit route with roads and railways, industrial zones, modern cities, fiber optic infrastructure, new oil and gas pipelines to be built along the route.

The will for cooperation in the project was emphasized by both countries at the highest level with the adoption of "Ankara Declaration between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Iraq on Cooperation within the Scope of Trade, Transport and Development Road Project" during the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia Al-Sudani to Türkiye on March 21-22, 2023. During the visit of President Erdoğan to Iraq on April 22, 2024, "The Memorandum of Understanding on the Development Road between the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye and the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Iraq" was signed (Melikoğlu and Hatipoğlu, 2024). Furthermore, at the same visit, "The Memorandum of Understanding for Joint Cooperation on the Development Road Project" was signed by Türkiye, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar; this revealed the greatness of the project in terms of regional ownership and inclusiveness, and indicated its strategic importance in the region.

One of the significant opportunities provided by the project is that the Development Road is highly advantageous in terms of time and cost compared to other trade corridors. Even, the effectiveness and advantage of the project compared to other trade corridors are obvious according to the expressions of the authorities that "there is a 15-day gain between the journey time of a ship departing from Faw Port in the Persian Gulf, reaching Europe through Suez Canal, and the journey time of the same freight reaching Europe through Development Road" (Kuş and Türk, 2024). In addition, the fact that the Development Road will use the existing infrastructure of Türkiye located on the east-west corridors and is complementary to the current transport corridors are among the most significant opportunities and advantages of Türkiye. In this respect, the trade corridors in the East-West direction will be connected in the North-South direction as well with the Development Road Project and will provide an important connectivity for the smooth and secure realization of global trade. In these aspects, it should be emphasized that although the Development Road Project is an Iraqi project, it also has parallel features with Türkiye's "Multilateral Transportation Policy" and is seriously supported by decision-makers in Ankara (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

At this point, it should be underlined that there are various threats / risks against the implementation of the project. Among these threats, (i) the issue of financing the project, which has a high cost, (ii) the discussions taking place within Iraq regarding the route of the project and (iii) ensuring the security of the trade corridor become apparent. It is known that the Development Road Project will have a serious cost that Türkiye and Iraq cannot bear alone. Although it is said that it will be difficult to finance the project, it is also aimed that the Gulf countries including Qatar and the UAE will stand out in terms of financing the project which is estimated to cost about 20 billion USD. Moreover, it was announced that the World Bank and international loan institutions will be used for the implementation of the project. In this context, a delegation consisting of officials from the ministries of transport in Iraq and Türkiye held a meeting with World Bank officials in Istanbul at the beginning of May 2024 regarding the

financing of the project. It is planned to implement the Development Road Project through all these actors and organizations, to contribute to development by facilitating regional and global trade and to create added value.

The Development Road will use Türkiye's existing infrastructure, thus it will prevent the cost of the project from getting higher. Türkiye has undertaken to provide uninterrupted transportation of the route in Iraq up to London by committing to invest in a 320 km long highway between Şanlıurfa and Ovaköy within the scope of the project (Öztürk, 2024). It is beyond doubt that the bridges and highways constructed so far by Türkiye which connect Asia to Europe by road and railways will increase the operability and impact of the Development Road.

The discussions about the route within Iraq are also seen as one of the other important risks for the project. The route of the Development Road Project and the border crossing to be used for the connection to Türkiye has become a serious political debate and competition issue within Iraq. Türkiye, on the other hand, which is an important strategic partner of the Development Road Project, does not involve in the debates taking place within Iraq about the route to be followed by the project. No solution has been found for the route discussions yet (Peyamakurd, 2024).

One of the important threats for the Development Road Project is the security of the trade corridor and route to be built. Taking into account the damage caused by the war between Ukraine and Russia to the Black Sea maritime trade, and the attacks by the pro-Iranian Houthis in the Red Sea against the stability of the transport route in the Red Sea, the strategic importance of the security and stability of trade routes is quite clearly understood. It should be noted that the security of the Development Road Project is also very important, and the success of the project and the corridor depends on the political stability and security conditions in Iraq. Although there have been significant improvements in the security field in Iraq since 2017, it is known that terrorist organizations such as the PKK and DAESH are active on the northern route of the corridor, and uncontrolled armed groups maintain their activities in areas such as Mosul. Especially considering the terrorist organization PKK's attacks on the Iraq-Türkiye oil pipeline (ITP) in the past to harm Türkiye, or the occasional attacks by local militias on military bases and presence of Türkiye in Iraq, it should be considered as a serious possibility that the PKK or non-state organizations intending to sabotage Türkiye-Iraq relations will continue attacks on the roads and railways that will be built along the route. Thus, it should be emphasized that the success of the corridor is closely associated with the improvement of security conditions in the north of Iraq and in Mosul, in particular.

At this point, it should be underlined that the actors make serious efforts to solve the security problem. Iraq's declaration of the PKK as a banned organization has been one of the most important developments in this context (BBC Turkish, 2024). In particular, the "Memorandum of Understanding on Military, Security Cooperation and Counter-terrorism" signed between Türkiye and Iraq

on August 15, 2024 is regarded as a historic agreement and constitutes a concrete step towards Türkiye and Iraq acting together on security (BBC Turkish, 2024). It should be highlighted that the security agreement with Iraq will not only contribute to the security and stability of Türkiye and Iraq, but also help reducing the obstacles and threats to the project by establishing the stability of the Development Road. As a matter of fact, developments such as the declaring the PKK as a banned organization in Iraq and the memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries have been strategically important steps that will directly serve the development and prosperity of Iraq. The improvement and institutionalization of security cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq will allow minimizing possible problems that may arise from the "PKK or other terrorist organizations" along the route and will bring more cooperation environment and stability along the Development Road particularly.

4. Regional and Global Dimensions of the Project

The Development Road Project has regional and global dimensions, and these dimensions bring with them the opportunity to transform the geopolitics of the Middle East. It is important to emphasize the importance of the project for Iraq, the concept of regional ownership in order to better understand the possible regional impacts of the Development Road before moving on to its regional and global dimensions. The principle of regional ownership is based on the perception that the best solution to the problems of the region can be found by the actors within the region (Müderrisoğlu, 2024; Tarhan and Dinçer, 2024). The concept, therefore, embraces that when a regional problem arises, countries of the region should make efforts to adopt and solve the problem without waiting for the global powers or hegemon. The fact that global powers deal with the problems from their point of views without taking into account the interests, sensitivities or regional balances of the powers in the region leads to the actors in the region taking a passive position in facing the problems. This situation results in the inability to develop an approach to threats or opportunities within the region, as well as the adoption of roadmaps imposed by global power which are often not in the interests of the countries of the region.

The Development Road Project is also a very consistent and holistic project in terms of the principle of regional ownership and has strategic significance for the development of the region. The Iraqi government expresses that the project is entirely owned by Iraq and shows its determination on this issue on all occasions. Considering that trade corridors increase economic integration, interdependence, prosperity and peace on the axis of "peace through development" principle (Degang and Lieying, 2021), the project led by Iraq and Türkiye will contribute to the improvement and prosperity of the region, and an important step will be taken to make both Iraq and the region recognized with peace and cooperation, not with wars and conflicts. In this respect, the project is also kept active and prioritized by the Sudanese Government in Iraq. At this point, both Türkiye and Iraq support

the participation of other countries in the region in the project in line with the principle of inclusiveness as well as regional ownership. In this context, Türkiye, Iraq, Qatar and the UAE are among the first ones being a stakeholder of the project and the visibility of the project among other countries of the region has been increased on the basis of regional ownership.

Of course, increasing the regional impacts of the project and the prosperity accompanied by it will require the integration of many more countries of the region into the project in line with the principle of inclusiveness. Since the Development Road allows the Gulf countries to connect to Türkiye through Iraq and integrate into the East-West trade routes, not only Qatar and the UAE, but also all Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, should support the project. Especially, taking into account that the Red Sea and the Suez Canal have 30% of the global container shipping volume and about 15% of global trade, and the strategic importance of these two trade routes for global shipping and trade, the strategic importance of the Development Road for the region emerges increasingly. The successful completion of the project will provide flexibility, independence and autonomy for the trade of the countries of the region by creating an alternative to these routes while the risks, threats and pressures that regional conflicts and wars may pose on the trade of the Gulf countries will be minimized.

It should be highlighted, at this point, that it is very significant to involve not only the Gulf countries, but also countries outside the region, such as Pakistan, in the project. Moreover, it should be underlined that the Development Road Project initiated in Iraq may be the shortest way to reach Europe from Gwadar Port, one of the significant import and export gates of Pakistan. Explaining the advantages and opportunities of the Development Road to regional actors who may be involved in the project will increase regional ownership and inclusiveness of the project on the one hand, and contribute to economic integration between countries and regional peace on the other hand. In addition, Pakistan's inclusion in the Development Road will show that the Development Road can also be a great alternative to the IMEC project, which emerged in India and began to raise serious doubts about its viability due to the Israeli-Palestinian war. Furthermore, the Development Road will also improve the connectivity of the Middle East and Europe for the Islamabad government, which attempts to strengthen its connectivity with the Asian geography through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Gwadar Port will become a strategically important point for both Eastern and Western trade corridors (Yumak, 2024). In addition, expressions of Iraqi authorities that they hope to integrate Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran into the Development Road and that Oman may also be involved in the project reveal that they attach great importance to the inclusiveness of the project.

Here, it should be specifically mentioned that the Development Road has a particular importance for Iraq. It should be stated that the Development Road, which the Iraqi authorities define as the "one hundred percent Iraqi project", has a supra-governmental nature from the Iraqi point of view and is a state project. The Iraqi government does not regard the project as just a trade route, but

expects that the project will allow achieving positive progress in terms of agriculture, transportation, sustainable development, renewable energy, financial infrastructure and regional stability, emphasizing that Iraq will have a central position thanks to the project. This is clearly revealed by Nasser Al-Asedi, the Transportation Advisor of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, stating that they see the project as a multi-dimensional initiative which will provide regional integration beyond a simple transportation project and connect the East and West, and that conflicts in the region will decrease thanks to partnerships to be established with Iraq's neighbors and regional countries (al-Asedi, 2024).

It should be expressed that the project will also have a transformative and revolutionary place in Iraq's economic and commercial relations. Iraq has close relations with Asian countries in economic terms and carries out the vast majority of its commercial activities with these countries. It is observed that 60%-75% of the countries with which Iraq has economic relations are Asian countries such as India, China and the Republic of Korea. So much so that considering the data for 2023, countries such as China (33%), India (28%), USA (8%), South Korea (7%) stand out among the countries Iraq exports to, while China (30%), Türkiye (27%), India (7%) are the primary countries for Iraq's import activities. (Ministry of Commerce, 2024). Thus, it is understood that Iraq has quite poor economic and commercial relations with Western countries. In this respect, the Development Road Project will provide Iraq with opportunity to connect to the East-West trade corridors, as well as to develop its economic relations with Western countries through Türkiye and expand its commercial range. Therefore, it should be underlined that the project can serve the purpose of further integrating Iraq into international markets, offer access to new markets and especially the markets in distant countries, and form the basis for signing new bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements. In other words, the Development Road will allow to diversify the Iraqi economy, advance the development efforts and create new business opportunities by increasing Iraq's foreign trade capacity.

In addition, it is well known that the structure of Iraqi economy is based on oil revenue. Even the oil revenue accounts for 2/3 of Iraq's national income (Ministry of Commerce, 2024). So, the increase or decrease in the international oil price or the impact of the regional conflicts on energy prices directly affect Iraq's economic income. There is no doubt that Iraq will enhance its foreign trade capacity with the Development Road Project, thus, will achieve a much more stable economic structure.

In conclusion, it should be stated that the Development Road Project will also bring security and stability both for Iraq and for the countries of the region. Strengthening the commercial relations among the countries of the region will increase prosperity and development in the region and facilitate the resolution of disputes by creating mutual interdependency. Terrorist organizations, which are known to rely on instability, crisis and insecurity, will gradually lose their dominance in Iraq which has a growing, institutionalized and strengthening economy. When Iraq achieves a stable and robust state structure and increase its internal

prosperity, it will be to the benefit of all regional actors intending to trade with it, and this will also restrict area of movement of terrorist organisations by destroying all elements they feed on.

It should be highlighted that the Development Road has not only regional but also global dimensions. The connection of the project to the East-West trade corridors through Türkiye increases its importance and strategic value both in regional global terms. In particular, given the economic relations of Türkiye with the Balkans and European countries and its connectivity, it should be stated that the project will not be limited to the Gulf or the Middle East region. In this respect, it should be noted that the Development Road is among the main agenda items of countries such as Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany.

Moreover, the global importance of the Development Road Project has also grown since the IMEC Project, launched with a memorandum of understanding signed by India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, the European Union (EU) and the United States (USA) within the scope of the G20 Summit held in New Delhi on September 9-10, 2023, seems hard to implement in the coming period due to the reflections of Israel's attacks on Gaza and Lebanon in the region. For this reason, it is likely that the countries of the region will recognize the importance of the Development Road and support the project. The fact that the project will contribute positively to regional stability, security and integration reveals a strategic importance not only for the countries in the region, but also for the countries located in the immediate geography.

In addition, the Development Road is not only a project bearing the value in itself, but also emerges as a positive example in the form of a hope to rise from its ashes for a country that has been destroyed by war, civil war and terrorism for decades. Especially the countries encountering similar experiences of war and violence in the region closely follow the Development Road as an example of development which will, in their opinion, serve as a model for them in the future.

5. Approach of Regional and Global Actors towards the Development Road Project

At this point, the approaches and perspectives of regional and global actors towards the Development Road Project are also significant. Today, when concept of connectivity and regional ownership becomes prominent, the success of the Development Road, which is the project of Iraq and with Türkiye being a natural partner, is closely connected to the support and integration of regional and global actors in the project. It is of strategic importance to include other actors in the project in line with the principle of inclusiveness. In this regard, the Iraqi authorities organize meetings at the technical level within the scope of the project, invite the countries of the region, especially Syria and Iran, to these meetings and exchange information about the project. Thus, studying the positions of actors such as the United States, China, Iran, the Gulf countries, and Egypt will give notable messages about the future of the Development Road Project.

Iran's position here, which has fairly high level of influence on Iraq and relationship with the groups in the country, will be decisive for the future and success of the project. It is obvious that Iran gives priority to the North-South transit corridor passing through its own territory. In particular, it is claimed that the Development Road will block the Basra-Chelemce railway connection of Iran, which was started with the groundbreaking ceremony in September 2023, there have been striking remarks that Iran will be the one to get the highest loss due to the project. Although the Tehran administration does not object to the Development Road on their expressions, it has taken a cautious approach so far with concerns such as the decrease in the importance and weight of its own ports, the strengthening of Iraq's ties with Türkiye and the Gulf countries. Of course, it is promising for the future of the project that there has not yet been a significant reaction about the Development Road Project from Iranian side, which once reacted to the Zengezur Corridor in a vehement manner. It will be important to closely monitor the approach of Iran, which has significant influence in Iraq, to the project and to ensure Tehran government supporting the project. Because the Development Road is an important project that contains multidimensional opportunities not only for Türkiye and Iraq, but also for Iran's extraterritorial connectivity and since it will increase the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz (Toğa, 2024). In addition, the trade corridor passing through locations with high number of Shiah population, such as Najaf and Karbala, will increase the prosperity of these regions, while "It will bring them closer to each other by increasing the integration among the groups within Iraq" (Toğa, 2024).

Although there are reports stating that China is cautious towards the project, it would not be surprising if the Chinese government supports the Development Road, which features as the biggest opponent of IMEC (Ze Yu, 2024). The Beijing government, which attempts to move its export power to other parts of the world through trade corridors such as the Belt and Road Initiative and is Iraq's largest commercial partner, should support the strengthening of connectivity to East-West trade routes and Europe by means of Development Road Project. China was also among the primary countries that actively involved in the reconstruction of Iraq after the war period. In this context, China, which produced more than 6 thousand 200 megawatts of electricity by establishing the Basra power plant, became the largest power plant builder in Iraq; moreover, Chinese companies played a role in the development of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities, water treatment plants, airports and schools in Iraq (Ze Yu, 2024). It is quite unlikely that China, which moved up its relations with Iraq to a strategic partnership, will not support the Development Road, which may be a rival of the IMEC project supported by powers such as the United States, the EU and India. Furthermore, although there are signs that the United States has positive approach towards the Development Road since it offers an alternative transportation corridor to existing ones, the extent to which China and Iran will participate in the project will also be decisive in shaping the attitude of the United States.

In receiving the support from other Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain or Oman for the project, the course of the existing maritime boundary problem (Abdullah Gulf) between Iraq and Kuwait may be effective. As can be recalled, the relations between Kuwait and Iraq were strained after the ratification law of "Agreement on the Regulation of Navigation in the Abdullah Gulf" signed in 2012 was cancelled by Iraqi Federal Supreme Court on September 4, 2023 (Kökçam, 2023). However, Kuwait announced that it was waiting for a guarantee that the agreement was legally valid and that it was in favor of resolving the issue through dialogue at the bilateral level, no progress has yet been achieved for a solution. In addition, it is stated that Al Faw Port, which will be the starting point of the Development Road Project, will be a serious competitor to Mubarak Port, which was invested by Kuwait and is under construction (Karahan, Çavuş, Özdemir, 2024). The transformation of the Persian Gulf into a basin of peace and stability and the settlement of existing disputes and conflicts of interest between the countries through negotiations will also constitute positive elements for the future of the Development Road and will strengthen and enhance the multilateral and multidimensional structure of the project.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider the approaches of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which have similar positions, to the Development Road Project. Both countries have refrained from taking positive or negative positions towards the Development Road Project. Although Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries to declare its intention to participate in the project, it later abandoned this attitude when India's IMEC project was put on the agenda. It is possible to predict that the Riyadh government will focus on its own mega-projects at first, while closely monitoring the progress of trade corridors that may concern it and the region, such as IMEC and the Development Road (Karahan, Çavuş, Özdemir, 2024).

On the Egyptian side, it is thought that there is a concern that the project will be an alternative to the Suez Canal and pose a threat. But considering that the Suez Canal allows the transportation of 18 million containers per year and that the projected capacity of the Development Road will be 3 million containers per year, it is understood that the Development Road will not be to the detriment of any country, including Egypt, but rather will serve to increase regional integration and create an alternative route. The Cairo government also gives the impression that it is moving away from these concerns gradually. Since it was remarkable that the Egyptian Minister of Transport and Industry, after meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani in recent months, announced that Egypt will contribute to the Iraqi Development Road Project, Egyptian companies will also take part in Iraqi infrastructure projects, and the studies on signing a memorandum of understanding between the two countries is continuing (Iraqi News, 2024). The fact that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia approach the Development Road by prioritizing regional development and prosperity and support the project will undoubtedly enhance the strategic importance of the Development Road in regional and global terms.

6. Conclusions

The transformation in global supply chains caused by conjectural factors such as Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Palestine conflict and the security problem in the Red Sea raises the importance and attractiveness of Development Road Project. With this perception, it would be beneficial to attract the attention of China in particular, and countries in the Gulf and on the Asian continent to the project by means of the cooperation opportunities and their increasing power in trade, investment, industry and technology.

As the competition between the countries continues to increase and the geopolitical fractures in the international system continue, trade corridors will continue to remain on the agenda and will maintain their strategic importance for the countries. As the increasing competition between the countries continues and the geopolitical fractures in the international system maintains, trade corridors will remain on the agenda and keep their strategic importance. Türkiye also becomes an active and strategically important actor of the "corridor wars" with its strategic position as a country located on the East-West trade corridors. In this respect, it has become an indispensable actor not only of the Development Road Project, which is characterized as a "project that can change the face of Iraq", but also of the leading trade corridor projects of global actors such as the Middle Corridor, the Global Gateway Program, the Belt and Road Initiative.

In addition to facilitating regional integration, the Development Road Project will accelerate the improvement and development of the countries included in the route by creating a strong and balanced Asian geography. In particular, it will enable Eurasian countries to get to know each other more closely by combining different actors, cultures and interests, as well as different economies. In these aspects, the success of the project will not only increase the development and prosperity of the region, but also contribute to regional and global security and stability by creating mutual interdependency.

REFERENCES

Alaca, M. (2024). "GÖRÜŞ- Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'nde güvenlik nasıl sağlanacak?". [POSITION: How will security be ensured in the Development Road Project?]. Anadolu Agency. 15.04.2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/gorus-kalkinma-yolu-projesinde-guvenlik-nasil-saglanacak/3191847 (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Alaca, M. (2024). "Irak'ı Türkiye üzerinden dünyaya bağlayacak 'çılgın proje' uygulanabilir mi?" [Can the 'crazy project' that will connect Iraq to the world through Türkiye be implemented?]. Fikir Turu. 04.04.2024. https://fikirturu.com/jeo-politika/iraki-turkiye-uzerinden-dunyaya. (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Alaca, M., Karaalp, H. (2023). "Iraklılar Türkiye'nin liderlik ettiği Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'ni bekliyor" [Iraqis are waiting for the Development Road Project led by Türkiye]. Anadolu Agency. 15.09.2023. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/iraklilar-turkiyenin-liderlik-ettigi-kalkinma-yolu-projesini-bekliyor/2992494 . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

The Asean Master Plan. (2010). "Master Plan On Asean Connectivity", December 2010, https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Master_Plan_on_ASEAN_Connectivity.pdf , (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Aydın, M. K. (2023). "Tarihi kervan yollarından Kalkınma Yolu Projesine" [From historical caravan roads to the Development Road Project]. Ihlas Foundation. 05.05.2023. https://www.ihlasvakfi.org.tr/tarih-kervan-yollarindan-kalkinma-yolu-projesine-tr-459.html . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

Aziz, S. (2023). "Iraq's Development Road: No Place for Kurdistan?", Carnegie Endownment. 08.08.2023. https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/08/iraqs-development-road-no-place-for-kurdistan?lang=en. (Access Date: 27.10.2024).

BBC News Turkish. (2024). "Irak, PKK'nın faaliyetlerini yasakladı: Karar ne anlama geliyor, ortak mücadele nasıl yürütülecek?" [Iraq has banned the activities of the PKK: what does the decision mean, how will the joint struggle be carried out?]. BBC News Türkçe. 15.03.2024. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/cmjml1lpdveo. (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

BBC News Turkish. (2024). "Türkiye ve Irak'ın imzaladığı askeri mutabakat zaptı neler öngörüyor, neden önemli?" [What does the military memorandum of understanding signed by Türkiye and Iraq envisage, and why is it important?]. 15.08.2024. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/ce38v83v7g1o . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Degang, S., Jıeyıng Z. (2021). "Peace Through Development". China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies, 07, 04, 383-408.

Al-Asedi, N. (2024). "Iraq and the Balance of Interests: Water, Energy and the Path of Development" Conference. October 5-6, 2024. Baghdad/Iraq.

Hizmetix. (2024). "25 trilyon dolarlık dünya ticareti tehlikede". [$25 trillion of world trade is at stake] 29.04.2024. https://hizmetix.com.tr/ekim-ayi-tuketici-guven-endeksi-verileri-aciklandi. (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Iraqi News. (2004). "Egyptian firms to participate in Iraq's Development Road". Iraqi News. 10.09.2024. https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq/egyptian-firms-to-participate-in-iraqs-development-road . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

İMMİB. (2023). Istanbul Mineral and Metals Exporters' Associations. 06.03.2023. https://immib.org.tr/tr/hizmet-ticareti#:~:text=Birle%C5%9Fmi%C5%9F%20Milletler%20Ticaret%20ve%20Kalk%C4%B1nma,art%C4%B1%C5%9Fla%2025%20trilyon%20dolar%20oldu . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Kahraman, A. İ. (2022). "Çin'in Küresel Siyasetinin Bir Unsuru Olarak Kuşak ve Yol İnisiyatifi: Bir Ekonomi Politik Analizi" [The Belt and Road Initiative as an Element of China's Global Politics: A Political Economy Analysis]. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Istanbul University.

Karahan, H., Çavuş, S., Özdemir, A. B. (2024). "Kalkınma Yolu şekilleniyor: Proje Körfez'e ne katacak?" [The Development Road is taking shape: what will the project contribute to the Gulf?]. Anadolu Agency. 03.05.2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/kalkinma-yolu-sekilleniyor-proje-korfeze-ne-katacak/3208859 . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

Kökçam, S. (2023). "Irak ile Kuveyt arasında deniz sınırı krizi" [Maritime border crisis between Iraq and Kuwait]. TRT News. 06.10.2023. https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/irak-ile-kuveyt-arasinda-deniz-siniri-krizi-801131.html . (Access Date: 27.10.2024).

Kuş, A. R. A., Türk, Y. (2024). "Bakan Uraloğlu: Kalkınma Yolu Projesi katılımcı ülkelerin kalkınmasına ve gelişmesine önemli katkı sağlayacak" [Minister Uraloğlu: The Development Road Project will make a significant contribution to the development and improvement of the participating countries]. Anadolu Agency. 29.08.2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/bakan-uraloglu-kalkinma-yolu-projesi-katilimci-ulkelerin-kalkinmasina-ve-gelismesine-onemli-katki-saglayacak/3316294 . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Melikoğlu, Y. M., Hatipoğlu, M. (2024). "Türkiye ile Irak arasında 26 anlaşma imzalandı" [26 agreements have been signed between Türkiye and Iraq]. Anadolu Agency. 22.04.2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/turkiye-ile-irak-arasinda-26-anlasma-imzalandi/3199270 . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

Müderrisoğlu, O. (2024). "Bölgesel Sahiplenme Girişimi" [Regional Ownership Initiative]. Sabah. 02.03.2024. https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/muderrisoglu/2024/03/02/bolgesel-sahiplenme-girisimi . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

Özçubukçu, M. G. (2024). "Orta Koridor'un Önemi; Türkiye'nin Konumu Yükseliyor mu?" [The Importance of the Middle Corridor; Is Türkiye's Position Rising?]. *Türkiye Araştırmaları Vakfı (TAV).* https://turkiyearastirmalari.org/2024/06/09/yayinlar/analiz/analiz-orta-koridorun-onemi-turkiyenin-konumu-yukseliyor-mu. (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Öztop, M. (2024). "Koridor Savaşları: Kuşak Yol & Kalkınma Yolu & IMEC" [Corridor Wars: Belt Road & Development Road & IMEC]. *Türkiye Araştırmaları Vakfı (TAV).* 24.04.2024. https://turkiyearastirmalari.org/2024/04/24/yayinlar/analiz/analiz-koridor-savaslari-kusak-yol-kalkinma-yolu-imec. (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Öztürk, K. (2024). "Ortadoğu'nun çehresini değiştirecek proje: Kalkınma Yolu Projesi!". [The project that will change the face of the Middle East: the Development Road Project!]. Kemalozturk.com. 08.05.2024. https://kemalozturk.com.tr/blog/ortadogunun-cehresini-degistirecek-proje-kalkinma-yolu-projesi. (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

The Red Sea Situation. (2024). "Red Sea Situation Bulletin". ISS Shipping. 16.02.2024. https://www.iss-shipping.com/advisories/red-sea-situation-bulletin . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

SAM (2024). "Güçlü Köklerden Sağlam Bir Geleceğe Türk Dış Politikası" [Turkish Foreign Policy from Strong Roots to a Robust Future]. Strategic Research Center Information Note. https://www.sam.gov.tr/bilgi-notlari/guclu-koklerden-saglam-bir-gelecege-turk-dis-politikasi-0 . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Tarhan, M., Dinçer, S. D. (2024). "Bakan Fidan: Güney Kafkasya'ya bakışımızın temelinde bölgesel sahiplenme anlayışımız bulunmakta" [Minister Fidan: Our understanding of regional ownership is at the heart of our view of the South Caucasus]. Anadolu Agency. 18.10.2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/bakan-fidan-guney-kafkasyaya-bakisimizin-temelinde-bolgesel-sahiplenme-anlayisimiz-bulunmakta/3366083 . (Access Date: 26.10.2024).

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. (2023). "Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'ni bölgemizin yeni 'İpek Yolu' hâline dönüştüreceğiz" [We will transform the Development Road Project into the new 'Silk Road' of our region]. The Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. 21.03.2023. https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/144353/-kalkinma-yolu-projesi-ni-bolgemizin-yeni-ipek-yolu-h-line-donusturecegiz- . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Republic of Türkiye the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "Türkiye's Multilateral Transportation Policy". Basic Foreign Policy Issues. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_nin-cok-tarafli-ulastirma-politikasi.tr.mfa . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Republic of Türkiye the Ministry of Trade. (2024) "Iraq Country Profile". . Ministry of Trade Directorate General for International Agreements and the European Union. https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5efddfdd13b876a83c6f2fba/IRAK%20%C3%BClke%20profili%202024.pdf . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Toğa, O. (2024). "İran'ın Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'ne Yaklaşımı" [Iran's Approach to the Development Road Project]. *Center for Iranian Studies (IRAM).* 29.04.2024. https://www.iramcenter.org/iranin-kalkinma-yolu-projesine-yaklasimi-2481 . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Yumak, M. (2024). "What is the Development Road, CPEC project? (Part-2)". Strasam. 10.04.2024. https://strasam.org/ua-iliskiler/uluslararasi-iktisat/kalkinma-yolu-cpec-projesi-nedir-bolum-2-3133 . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).

Ze Yu, P. (2024). "Çin'in Irak'ın Kalkınma Yolu Projesi'ne temkinli yaklaşmasının dört nedeni" [Four reasons why China is approaching Iraq's Development Road Project cautiously]. Şarkul Avsat. 06.08.2024. https://turkish.aawsat.com/arap-d%C3%BCnyasi/5047866-%C3%A7inin-irak%C4%B1n-kalk%C4%B1nma-yolu-projesi%E2%80%99ne-temkinli-yakla%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1n%C4%B1n-d%C3%B6rt-nedeni . (Access Date: 25.10.2024).