

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



Report Summary

Strategic planning in Iraq Problems and solutions

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IRAQ

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Introduction:

Countries adopt long-term strategic plans to achieve their visions through a scientific approach that accounts for variables. However, the experience in Iraq has faced complex challenges that rendered successive strategies ineffective or unable to achieve their goals. This failure stems from a structural imbalance caused by the overlap of plans with ministerial programs, a lack of understanding of the institutional and political environment, and an absence of seriousness in implementation and oversight, which created a wide gap between planning and reality. To overcome this, there is a need for a planning model based on institutional separation between the stages of formulation, approval, implementation, and follow-up, ensuring a practical structure that gives national plans real feasibility in the future.

Planning in Iraq:

Iraqi state institutions operate under a hierarchical system based on top-down planning, where the annual plans of ministries and governorates are limited to repetitive routine procedures aimed at easy implementation within the minimum available resources without deviating from the traditional bureaucratic system. As for the institutional strategic plans designed for five-year periods, they are often mere repetitions of annual plans or serve as a formal facade to announce the existence of a strategy. Regarding the national sectoral strategies involving multiple institutions, they face failure due to being formulated by employees within the bureaucratic structure using the same traditional patterns, in addition to their overlap with the ministerial curriculum and the government program established by each new government. This structural overlap leads to the neglect of previous plans and ongoing projects, as each government focuses on its own priorities without considering continuity, reflecting a clear distortion in the implementation

of strategic plans in Iraq.

A fundamental flaw exists in Iraq's planning structure, as the Ministry of Planning, under Law No. 19 of 2009, lacks executive or supervisory authority over the plans of other institutions, rendering the Five-Year National Development Plan a merely theoretical framework. Internationally, Iraq adopted the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) as general frameworks without formulating a binding national plan for their implementation, limiting their inclusion to formal documentation.

Internally, planning departments within ministries and entities suffer from functional marginalization and weak staffing, dominated by a routine planning mindset that focuses on scheduling traditional daily activities. Instead of driving reform, these departments have become tools for maintaining the status quo with formal objectives that lack the will for genuine change and innovation.

Strategic Planning Process in Iraq

The strategic planning process undergoes four main stages, including formulation, approval, implementation, and follow-up and oversight. In the Iraqi context, all these stages face numerous overlapping and complex challenges and issues, each of which will be discussed as follows:

1. Formulation:

Strategic planning formulation entails two pivotal dimensions: the first involves a comprehensive environmental scanning—covering institutional, political, and social contexts—to conduct a rigorous analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats. This complex process necessitates high-level analytical discourse from multi-faceted perspectives, underpinned

by robust data sets. The second dimension concerns the strategic capacity to define operational objectives amidst environmental uncertainty. Furthermore, effective formulation requires technical precision to ensure a coherent framework that facilitates flawless execution, which can be synthesized into the following prerequisites:

- **Defining Strategic Direction:** Are the overarching strategic goals clearly defined, and do they effectively align with the broader vision?
- **Analysis and Diagnosis:** Does the strategy accurately reflect the scale of existing challenges and the various drivers of the current environment?
- **Consultative Processes:** Is there a comprehensive understanding of the relevant stakeholders and institutions, and have their perspectives been integrated?
- **Operational Implementation Plan:** Is there a well-defined chronological roadmap established for the execution phase?
- **SMART Objectives Framework:** Are the sub-objectives specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the strategic goal, and time-bound?
- **Programs and Projects:** Are the individual projects systematically organized within programs designed to fulfill the sub-objectives?
- **Allocation of Roles:** Have responsibilities and roles been assigned with such precision that they leave no room for subjective interpretation or ambiguity?
- **Budgeting:** Have financial estimates been established according to the projects and programs for strategy implementation?
- **Impact Metrics:** Qualitative and quantitative indicators.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Has a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation been identified?

Most national plans developed by executive state institutions often fail to adhere to these formulation requirements. They frequently employ generic terminology and broad objectives prone to procrastination and detached from reality, which complicates the successful implementation of these national plans within their overall framework.

2. Endorsement:

National strategies are endorsed by the Council of Ministers, being the supreme authority responsible for this matter pursuant to Article (80/First) of the effective Iraqi Constitution of 2005. This article pertains to the powers of the Council of Ministers, stating its mandate to: “Plan and execute the general policy of the state, general plans, and oversee the work of ministries and entities not affiliated with a ministry.” The fundamental problem during the endorsement stage lies in the following:

- No financial budget is allocated for strategies within the state’s general budget.
- The ministerial curriculum and the resulting government program are not taken into consideration when endorsing national strategies.
- National strategies are endorsed outside the timeframe of their designated tenure.
- National strategies are endorsed without defining the entity responsible for oversight.

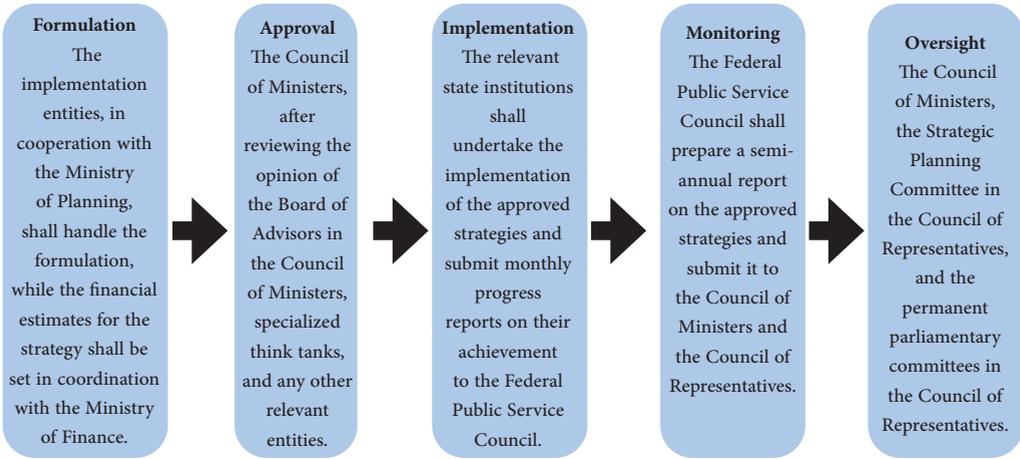
3. Execution:

State institutions—including ministries, entities not affiliated with a ministry, independent commissions, and governorates—execute the strategies formulated and approved by the Council of Ministers. However, these institutions often suffer from procrastination, delays, and a unidirectional bureaucratic pattern in dealing with the contents of these strategies. Consequently, implementation either becomes a mere formality or proves difficult due to numerous reasons, most notably the lack of financial allocations.

4. Monitoring and Oversight:

Article (2/Fifteenth) of the Internal Regulations of the Council of Ministers No. (83) of 2019 stipulates: “Monitoring the proper application of the general budget, development plans, and national strategies approved by the Council.” However, in practice, the Council of Ministers does not conduct any monitoring or oversight; instead, national strategies are endorsed without any supervision over their execution. The primary weakness lies in the absence of a specialized administrative body for strategic oversight, particularly since the Ministry of Planning has no involvement in the plans implemented by government institutions—neither in terms of (preparation and execution) nor in terms of (monitoring and evaluation), as previously mentioned.

Conclusion: A Proposed Framework for Strategic Planning in Iraq. The proposed framework serves as a functional model designed to overcome the challenges identified in this paper. We propose a structural separation between the institutions responsible for formulation, those designated for endorsement, and the entities tasked with execution, monitoring, and oversight, as illustrated in the following:



The aforementioned separation between institutions provides a good opportunity for mutual horizontal and vertical oversight and ensures the implementation of national strategies according to a systematic approach. We propose that the timings related to the formation of the government in this model be considered according to the following steps:

Formation of the Government and voting on the Ministerial Curriculum.

Voting on the Government Program 100 days after the formation of the government.

Adopting a unified manual for strategic planning in Iraq by the Ministry of Planning and the Board of Advisors in the Council of Ministers, to be approved by the Council of Ministers, with a specific budget line item for strategic plans included by the Ministry of Finance.

Reviewing previously approved and currently effective strategies in light of the manual, to ensure alignment with the new government's priorities and its term of office.

Developing sectoral strategies 100 days after voting on the Government Program, with the Ministry of Planning contributing to the formulation of strategic plans and the Ministry of Finance ensuring their budgetary allocations, provided that these strategies align with the government's lifespan and do not exceed its term of office.

Assigning a specialized administrative body (Federal Public Service Council) to monitor strategic plans, as Article (9/Twelfth) of the Federal Public Service Council Law No. (4) of 2009 stipulates: "Preparing an annual report for each ministry or entity not affiliated with a ministry and submitting it to the Council of Representatives and the Council of Ministers, including necessary recommendations and proposals to ensure proper work performance." We propose that the report be submitted every (6) months.

The Council of Ministers shall discuss the reports for each sectoral strategy in a session dedicated to national strategies and evaluate government ministers accordingly.

The Strategic Planning and Federal Service Committee shall send its evaluation, based on the reports prepared by the Federal Public Service Council, to the permanent parliamentary committees in the Council of Representatives.

Permanent parliamentary committees shall evaluate and monitor the work of the institutions they oversee, reviewing strategies and the extent to which their goals have been achieved as a means of evaluating these institutions.

References:

The Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

Ministry of Planning Law No. (19) of 2009.

Internal Regulations of the Council of Ministers No. (83) of 2019.

Federal Civil Service Council Law No. (4) of 2009.

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Research Identity

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About center

Al-Baydar Center for Studies and Planning is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established in 2015 and registered with the NGO directorate in the general secretariat of the council of ministers in Baghdad.

The center seeks to contribute to developing the state and its institutions, by proposing ideas and practical solutions to the main problems and challenges facing the state, including improving public sector management, policies, and strategic planning, using reliable data and best practices. The center engages the relevant authorities in the state with regular meetings to support this objective and utilizes the support of international organizations dedicated to assisting Iraq's development. The center also seeks to support economic reforms, and sustainable development and provide technical assistance to the public and private sectors. The center also seeks to support the development of the private sector to provide job opportunities for citizens through training and upskilling, in a way that reduces dependence on government institutions and contributes to supporting and diversifying the country's economy.

The center aims to utilize the vast amount of potential in Iraq's human resources by organizing programs to prepare and develop promising young people, including leaders capable of proposing, adopting and implementing visions and future plans that advance society and preserve its value-system based on the commitment to a high moral standard and rejection of all types of corruption.

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