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## WHAT'S BEHIND US PRESSURE ON IRAQ TO BECOME ENERGY INDEPENDENT?

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by Arwa Ibrahim

Iraq's reliance on Iranian gas imports to satisfy its consumer needs has raised tensions with the United States in recent months as Washington tries to roll back Tehran's influence in the region.

Washington reimposed sanctions on Iran's oil sector in November, citing concerns over the country's nuclear and missile programmes and what it called meddling in the Middle East, including in Iraq, where Tehran has deep political and economic influence.

The US initially gave Iraq a 45-day waiver for imports of gas from Iran. It has since continued to exempt it from adhering to the sanctions by extending temporary waivers for Baghdad to import Iranian gas and electricity.

Despite this, Washington has insisted that Iraq must quickly achieve "energy independence" and seek "alternative and diversified" energy imports away from Iran.

By pushing Baghdad towards energy independence, Washington hopes to isolate Iran economically, according to analysts, while at the same time taking advantage of Iraq's expansive energy resources.

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