

SEMINAR

Iraq at a crossroads

Internal, regional and international dynamics

Madrid, December 3rd 2014

From its prominence in the media, its widespread brutal methods and the announcement of a US-led coalition organised to fight against it, the rise of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq has become a serious concern for world stability. It is hard to find previous examples of Islamist extremists that were able to expand on the ground as quickly and as significantly as IS has done. Its outreach and its recruiting strategy, its resources and its organising capacity have come as a surprise to the majority of the Middle East's actors and observers.

But the case of IS also has to be considered in a broader perspective. The MENA region is undergoing significant changes. With the beginning of the regional "awakenings" in 2011, the resilience of nation-states and their institutions are being tested on a daily basis. As territorial integrity of various countries is subjected to multiple pressures, there is a risk that borders could be reshaped throughout the Middle East, the often-cited "end of Sykes-Picot". Although with different underlying dynamics and causes, four specific MENA countries are under particular strain: Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Alongside the civil war in Syria, the future of Iraq will be pivotal to future developments across the Middle East.

A laboratory of regime change and forced democratization since the removal of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has undergone a *de facto* division between at least two types of actors: Kurdistan in the north, ruled by the Kurdistan regional government (KRG); and the rest of the country, officially ruled by the Iraqi central government, while provinces are submitted to local political and/or sectarian dynamics. As non-state actors proliferate, the traditional institution-centred dimension of the country has therefore to be revisited. Hyper-centralized management is proving to be inadequate, especially after the detrimental Maliki years. Populations and governments in Iraq as well as in the rest of the region have often seen decentralisation processes as direct threats to territorial unity and triggers for partition. But it seems we have now entered a new era in which both decentralisation and federalism have to be considered as part of the solutions for guaranteeing stability and prevent the potential dismembering of nation-states. Whatever solution is required for Iraq, it will most certainly involve regional and international actors.

To discuss these prospects, Casa Árabe, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and FRIDE are organising a one-day seminar in Madrid, directed at other specialists and policy-makers, which will bring together experts who will delve into the situation in Iraq and beyond. Besides a deep analysis of the dynamics that are at work, scenarios for the future and possible exits will be suggested.

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P R O G R A M M E

09.30-10:00 Welcome and foreword by the organisers

10:00 -11:45 Session 1: Internal dynamics

- Prospects within Sunni-populated regions – Myriam Benraad, CERISciences Po
- The Kurdish perspective – Kawa Hassan, HIVOS-Carnegie Middle East Centre
- Shia power dynamics – Haydar al-Khoei, Chatham House
- Trans-border movements - Murad Batal al-Shishani, BBC

Moderator: Emma Hooper, CIDOB

Coffee Break

12:15-14:00 Session 2: The regional context and its interactions with Iraq

- Syria and Iraq: links and differences – Fabrice Balanche, GREMMO-Université Lyon 2
- Turkey's role and expectations – Ziya Meral, University of Cambridge
- Iran: How much influence? – Mohammad Ali Shabani, SOAS
- Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States – Eckart Woertz, CIDOB

Moderator: Haizam Amirah Fernández, Real Instituto Elcano

Lunch break

15:00-16:45 Session 3: International dimension and scenarios for the future

- Military, political and economic negotiations– Ali Khedery, Dragoman Partners
- US shifting strategies and coalitions– Jean-Loup Samaan, NATO Defence College
- Differing policies? The EU and its members – Ellie Geranmayeh, ECFR
- Humanitarian dimension and spill-over effects – Pedro Rojo, Fundación Al Fanar

Moderator: Karim Hauser, Casa Árabe

Synthesis and closing statements – Barah Mikail, FRIDE

*Each speaker will have 15 minutes, followed by a debate with the other participants