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Iraq in the Light of the Current Situation in the Region and the World

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Lecture Report

- As concerning the Iraqi – Czech relations, these two countries had very strong bilateral cooperation during the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's
- At the beginning of the 1990's with its shift to democracy, Cz was one of the few states who supported the Iraqis in their attempt to build a free and democratic country. It had an important role in training the Iraqis
- At present, Czech companies are taking part in the post-war reconstruction, and bilateral relations are going in the right direction in order to develop further relations
- At the end of 2010, there was a second democratic elected government. However, the persistent division within the Iraqi forces and society exists. Iraqi political leaders have learnt that using violence as a political tool is useless and have begun to use a means of dialogue more.
- In 2011, the focus of Iraq has been mainly in implementing power-sharing agreements, increasing its presence and powers, giving more power to provinces and local authorities, fostering economic development, improving the capabilities of its forces (etc.)
- It is important to develop the relationship between Iraq and the U.S. in a better direction because there has been a lack of cooperation. All the parties share the will to address the shortcomings and move in the right direction. Many Western states fear the development of the situation in Iraq. There has been progress in the security sector. However, there is a challenge to carry on with the same determination. Iraq needs regional cooperation in order to succeed. It also needs to enhance its cooperation with the Europe and other countries.
- The “so called” Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia, and spread to other countries presents a threat. According to Iraq, a lack of democracy led to these uprisings. Iraq is against all kinds of violence - casualties and the unnecessary use of force against demonstrators is not acceptable. Rather, there is a need for a peaceful dialogue. Iraq calls on Arab regimes to listen to their people and not use force against them
- As related to its role in the Arab League, concerning the economic boycott on Syria, Iraq expresses its concern regarding the nature of the conflict and the powers involved in it. The

deteriorated Syrian situation will have impact on the region security-wise and could compromise its stability. A possible chaos would have direct consequences. Therefore, it is important to manage conflicts in a peaceful manner and pre-emptively

- Iraq has elaborated the Arab League. It supports other countries to withdraw their army units from the streets and to begin a peaceful dialogue with all opposition forces, primarily to convince the Syrian government to sign a protocol for accepting the Arab league initiative. This initiative has almost reached a deadlock. There are concerns about the events in Bahrain and Yemen. People in the Arab world have broken the barrier of fear and no longer accept oppressive regimes of a one family or clan. The new feature of the Arab Spring did not come from official military forces or political parties, but from the streets - from the people who organised themselves and mobilised their forces through high-tech means, such as facebook
- The main challenge is to ensure a peaceful and inclusive development of the revolutions which would reach their ultimate goals of establishing democratic regimes with a free election and representation and with no interference from the outside world

Discussion:

Elaborate about Iraqis involvement and its position on Syria?

Iraq supports the uprising which is aimed for justice and freedom. What promoted, or (what) was a trigger for these uprisings were many years of oppression. Before that, people had never thought they could come to this point. Through good relations with the Syrian regime; e.g the Lebanese regime is very fragile. A fragile regime has direct impact on Iraq, and could pose a danger of regional instability that could spread to other countries.

Iraq has been a victim of sanctions for thirteen years by the United Nations Security Council. It was not the regime and political elites that suffered this condition, but the people. The Arab initiative 'stop the killing', and 'open-up a dialogue' in the Arab League was aimed to convince the Syrian regime to accept dialogue with its nation in an attempt to provide them help. On December 16th, there will be a meeting in the Arab League to decide on the future development of Syria. The internationalisation of the Syrian problem is very dangerous. What is happening in the Arab world is not only a change in power but this is rather a revolution with a change in the social structure and institutions, a new polarisation of political forces, new Islamic forces (out of which some are fundamentalist). These were chosen by the people. Even though many people do not even accept the teachings of their ideology, they vote because they see this is a solution and a just to their reaction forward ongoing situation.

What is better - secularism or dictatorship? Is Islam seen as the solution?

In Egypt, the people of the revolution they were not well organised and were disunited because they did not have a clear and consistent goal. There was a disagreement on some key issues. This is one of the most critical points. With a political vacuum, people could organise themselves based on their social needs (employment, freedom, dialogue to express themselves, to feel equal, not to be treated based on religion). These features have been spread among the Arab nations.

External role on Syria. Turkey is taking a proactive role in Syria. Of course, it is important to mention the national interests which are involved in their approach. They feel this is the time when they can play more determinative factor in order to influence the events in the Arab world which would lead to economic gains for them.

Who is the most important partner for Iraq? Does it view the EU as a whole (as one political player) or does it negotiate with countries separately?

Iraq was destroyed during the wars, economic sanction, terrorists bombs etc. Its infrastructure, institutions, industry, economy, capacity of people, tourism, and so on. More than three decades, the Iraqi people did not use some basic electronic devices, such as cell phones satellite channels, and they had no access to quality education. Iraq has to begin building everything all over again. Europe is more open to assisting Iraq in the post-war reconstruction. There is also a strategic framework developed with the U.S., and it is much easier to negotiate with the U.S. than the EU, as it is harder to agree with the EU because there are 27 countries and there is a lack of consensus among them. With the new development concerning the energy sector there will hopefully be more agreement on some key issues, both side signed memorandum of understanding on energy sector. According to some oil experts, Iraq will be able to export 8 to 10 million bpd (barrels per day) of oil and it could be a viable economic partner for Europe. At present, there is a competition between Iraq and some Asian countries regarding this. The four major Arab countries in the region are Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Iraq is one of the richest country in the region as it has significant oil and gas reserves, minerals, and other unexploited resources as well as human. Also, internal waters which are very important. Iraq has a potential to develop quickly and become very influential in the region. Even now, within the Arab League, Iraq has started to take more firm position - more independent. The initiative started with the Gulf States which wanted other countries to sign it. Iraq took an independent decision based on its self-interest. At present, Egyptians, Tunisians, Libyans are consulting Iraq on some key issues, and Iraq has been assisting them in their transition to democracy.