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## **Baghdad Summit; Different dream in the same bed**



On August 28, 2021, a regional summit was held in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has called on the leaders of neighboring countries to join the summit. France was the co-organizer. More than a dozen VIPs at the level of the head of state attended the summit including President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt and King

Abdullah II of Jordan.

The purpose of summit was to frankly exchange views among leaders in chase for the peace in the Middle East. There were no specific issues. Ambiguity of the meeting brought up mixed speculations within the participants. The responses of each country were roughly divided into three categories: active groups who tried to utilize the summit for its diplomacy, careful groups who paid attention to the attitude of other countries, and reluctant groups who only appealed their presence.

The active groups were Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and Iran in addition to co-organizers, Iraq and France. From these countries presidents and prime ministers were attended. Iran sent foreign minister. UAE and Turkey, careful groups, dispatched vice president and foreign minister respectively. Vice President of UAE is No. 2 of the federal government and Emir of Dubai. In UAE, he is assigned to control economic issues but does not handle diplomatic and defense issues at all. These issues are handled exclusively by Emirates of Abu Dhabi. The reluctant faction is Saudi Arabia with foreign minister in attendance. Saudi Arabia is in trouble about civil war in Yemen and its international credibility has been lost by the assassination of Mr. Khashoggi in Istanbul, Turkey. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is not in a position to take the initiative in regional diplomacy. Saudi Arabia attended the summit because they have no due reason to absent at the summit.

Prior to the summit, the Iraqi government itself admitted that it was meaningful to hold a summit even though no concrete results. The summit was different dream in the same bed. As a result, there was no joint statement or press conference after the closing at all. The leaders of active group, in return, put their energy to hold bilateral talks with other VIPs or to visit the neighboring country after summit. At present, most of international conferences are teleconference without meeting face to face due to COVID-19. Baghdad summit was a rare chance for participants to meet face to face. Egyptian President El-Sisi met with Qatari Emir and UAE Vice President. Iranian foreign minister visited Syria after summit and met with President Assad. Syria was taken for granted to participate to the summit, but they were not invited. This is because that the United

States, which imposes economic sanctions, has put pressure on Iraq. However, Iranian foreign minister did not miss the chance to meet Syrian President and has strengthened ties with its ally. They impressed other countries strong ties between two countries.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia which was reluctant for the summit showed little presence. It was reported that Saudi Arabia had meetings with Iran several times by Iraq's mediation. But bilateral talk between them were not held at the summit. Saudi king and crown prince might ban delegations to get in touch with Iran. They had strong anti-Iranian sentiment due to the proxy war in Yemen.

Efforts of Iraq and France, co-organizers of the summit, resulted in null. Iraq intended to take the opportunity to stand at the front stage of Middle East diplomacy. However, for the time being, Iraq had to prepare for domestic security and economic recovery. Iraq is frightened by the revival of the Islamic State (IS) and economic crisis.

France intended to take over initiative after the United States withdrew from the Middle East. France aimed to monopolize Iraq's reconstruction project. France also planned to introduce oil money from the Gulf countries in order to recover the collapsed former colony of Lebanon. It is a common practice of France to induce business for its own interest using other country's money. French ambition has gone away.

Without US superpower the Middle East has to remain chaotic for the time being.

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