

Beat: Politics

Iraq and the Summits of Exclusion

Between Riyadh and the Absent Baghdad

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USPA NEWS - In the shifting political sands of the Middle East, summit invitations are more than diplomatic formalities—they are indicators of relevance, credibility, and alignment. Iraq's exclusion from the upcoming Arab-American summit, set to be held in Riyadh with the presence of U.S. President Donald Trump and key Arab leaders, is not a clerical omission. It is a calculated signal: a reflection of how far Iraq has drifted from the regional and international frameworks of statehood, sovereignty, and strategic independence.

A Deliberate Absence

The May 17 summit in Saudi Arabia is being shaped as a forum for security, economic cooperation, and regional stability. Iraq's absence from this high-level gathering sends a message louder than any official communiqué: that a state which has surrendered decision-making to foreign powers and militias cannot credibly sit at the table of nations.

This is not about sectarian identity, geography, or history. It is about the condition of the Iraqi state itself—its weakened institutions, compromised sovereignty, and the growing perception that it is no longer an autonomous actor but a proxy theater of external influence, particularly from Iran.

From Influencer to Bystander

Once a central pillar of the Arab world, Iraq today finds itself relegated to the sidelines. This marginalization is not a punishment imposed from outside; it is the outcome of internal choices. The empowerment of militias over institutions, the erosion of national decision-making, and the steady transfer of power to non-state actors have left Iraq's voice diluted and its role diminished.

The Arab-American summit is not simply about building alliances—it is about recognizing which states are contributing to regional stability and which are enabling its unraveling. Iraq's absence is thus a verdict. Not final, but firm.

Saudi Arabia's Message: No Space for Proxies

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with other moderate Arab states, has drawn a clear line: ambiguity is no longer acceptable. In today's Middle East, there are two camps—those building toward cooperation and reform, and those entrenched in sectarianism, ideological militancy, and geopolitical subservience. Iraq, under current conditions, no longer fits into the former.

The exclusion delivers a precise diplomatic message:

- No place for governments run by militias and beholden to foreign capitals.
- No room for states that open their airspace to sanctioned regimes while ignoring the voices of their own people.
- No dialogue with those who do not control peace or war within their own borders.

The Problem Is Political, Not Sectarian

It must be emphasized: Iraq was not excluded because of its sectarian composition, but because of the failure of its political model. Sectarian governance, when weaponized, fragments society and invites foreign manipulation. Iraq's current leadership—anchored in a narrow, partisan vision—has reduced the idea of the nation to a slogan, and governance to a transaction.

The tragedy is not in the religious identity of the state, but in the transformation of that identity into a justification for control, coercion, and dependency.

The Two Faces of Baghdad

There is the Baghdad of history—the city of intellect, civilization, and pluralism. And there is today's Baghdad—paralyzed by dysfunction, overtaken by paramilitary interests, and disconnected from the region it once helped shape. The symbolic distance between these two Baghdads is vast, and growing.

The absence of an Iraqi-hosted summit, or even an Iraqi seat at the regional table, underscores this transformation. Where Baghdad once convened, it now observes. Where it once led, it now follows.

The Real Lesson: Sovereignty Is Earned, Not Claimed

True sovereignty is not declared—it is demonstrated. It is measured by the ability of a state to govern independently, defend its borders, represent its citizens, and formulate policy in pursuit of national, not foreign, interests.

The Arab-American summit offers Iraq—and others—a mirror: legitimacy cannot be outsourced. Respect is not automatic. Inclusion must be earned through governance that reflects national will, not foreign agendas.

Conclusion: A Nation at a Crossroads

Iraq's exclusion from Riyadh's summit was not a betrayal by the Arab world—it was a symptom of deeper dysfunction within. The country has not been abandoned; it has abandoned its own trajectory.

But this moment also carries an opportunity. Iraq's history is too deep, its people too resilient, for marginalization to be permanent. The path back to regional relevance is open—but it requires choices: to restore institutions, reassert sovereignty, and reimagine the state as a unifying project rather than a contested prize.

Until then, Iraq will remain absent—not only from summits, but from the very future it once helped define.

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