

Notes on Revisiting the 'Fertile Crescent'

The American archaeologist, James Breasted's, concept of a Mesopotamian "Fertile Crescent" is now being revived after nearly a century of review and reevaluation. The triangular geographic area that lies within the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley is not only the scene of trenchant tribal and sectarian strife, but also home to concentrated efforts to revitalize Iraq's struggling agrarian sector through the infusion of \$500 million from the 2008 national budget. (1) Prospective projects are being aimed, partially, at an infrastructure development that had been delayed, or had strenuously declined and fragmented, with one result being the fact that participants in an historically thriving agricultural landscape are now known to produce only 30% of their country's annual internal requirements.

Less transparent are the workings of the urban side of an ancient balance, which saw increasing agricultural production contribute vitally to the rise and support of expanding metropolitan areas and populations. Nevertheless, media observers have noted the continuation of pilgrimage economies along well-traveled routes to today's holy sites, as well as markets and small-scale shops that continue to link countryside and city despite curfews and the disruption to routines brought about by frequent closure and reopening.

Recent considerations of EU foreign policy underscore the challenges of achieving unity among 27 member nations, so that a situationally-derived approach to external affairs often appears evident. (2) However, pan-European links to Iraq have maintained stability over the past few years. The growth of energy cooperation has been a major focus. So, too, has been an allocation of Euro 800 million since 2003, a portion of which has engendered both macro and micro-projects aimed at the reduction of poverty and water and sanitation improvements, or issues that act to cross-cut existent sectarian and tribal cleavages as well as that which in the historic experience might have been looked on as an artificial urban-rural divide. (3)

Conditions of conflict are obviously not the optimal for the collection of detailed survey materials on the quality and quantity of urban small business enterprise, which continues to provide employment opportunity to nearly 80% of all Iraqis. Studies from 2003 and 2005 are dated yet nonetheless indicate a respective 54% and 69% level of confidence about national and local economies on the part of over 600 selected small and medium size managers in major Iraqi cities. (4) Comparisons and contrasts with similarly designed contemporary studies might provide needed clarification given the apparent capacity of urban entrepreneurship to retain an organizational continuity under trying conditions and the significant contribution of small and medium size Iraqi enterprises to the metropolitan labor force. The outcome of future research might also provide materials useful to current debates about on-going Iraqi security needs and mid-April's planned overview of the EU's budget for 2013 to 2020.

(1) Al-Jumaily, Subhi. "Iraqis 'Ambitious' To Upgrade Agricultural Sector." Embassy of the United States. Embassy News. (3/12/2008) (2) Safarikova, Katerina. Olympics: Gold-Plated Foreign Policy. Transitions Online. (4/3/2008) (3) European Commission. "ENPI Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013- and Regional Indicative Program 2007-2010". (2007). Ibid: "EU and Iraq Discuss Ways of Enhancing Energy Cooperation." Press Release. (1/31/2008) (4) Omar, Road and Sabah Kheshak. "Conditions and Expectations For Private Enterprise In Iraq: Findings From a Survey of Small and Medium Size Business Owners and Managers". Iraqi American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Center For International Private Enterprise. (2003); "The Future of Iraq: Survey of the Iraqi Business Community." Center for International Private Enterprise, Zogby International Poll. (9/28/2005)

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