

file Rep Solarz

MEMCON: Meeting of Congressman Solarz with Saddam Husayn

Summary: During the course of a two and a half hour meeting, a wide range of issues were covered, including US-Iraqi relations, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran-Iraq war and Iraq's position on international terrorism.

President Husayn expressed a desire for improved US-Iraqi relations, saying it was unnatural for Iraq not to have diplomatic relations with one of the two superpowers. He criticized the US for its "unbalanced" support of Israel, and for allowing Israel and other allies to supply weapons to Iran.

With respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict, he indicated that "no responsible Arab leader" included the destruction of Israel in his policy. He stated several times that whatever solution that was acceptable to the PLO was acceptable to Iraq.

Husayn vehemently denied that Iraq was providing any support to terrorist movements.

US-Iraqi Relations

Husayn began his remarks by indicating that America needs to understand Iraq better. Contrary to American perception, Iraq is not pro-Soviet and does not hate America.

In Husayn's view, the countries of the region need to undertake development. The means for development, growth and progress are in America and the West, not the Soviet Union.

There are 2 main reasons for the poor state of US-Iraqi relations. First, the US has made the mistake of asking its friends "to become lackeys without any freedom to act". In recent years, the US has tried to alter its behaviour. Second, the United States' support for Israel has been an impediment to relations.

In response to Solarz's observation that many Arab countries which share Iraq's view about US support for Israel nevertheless maintain diplomatic relations with the US, including Algeria and Syria, Husayn replied that it was not correct or natural for Iraq to have diplomatic relations severed with one of the two superpowers. Before the start of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq was reconsidering its relationship with America. But then the war came. Under these circumstances, if Iraq resumed diplomatic relations with the US, the Iraqi people would imagine that they had been resumed because we needed you. This is not a good basis for a relationship.

Arab-Israeli Conflict

Husayn stated that the Arabs don't have the right to expect that America should stand entirely on their side. But they do have a right to ask America to have a balanced position. Israel has been expanding at the expense of the Arabs. In light of this, the US stand is "unbalanced and unjust".

Solarz asked Husayn if the resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute and the creation of a lasting peace required Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and the right of the Palestinian people on the West Bank and Gaza to self-determination, or does the resolution of the conflict require instead the establishment of a secular democratic state in the West Bank, the Gaza strip, and what is now Israel (i.e. the elimination of Israel as a Zionist entity)? Husayn responded that "Not a single responsible Arab leader put that in his policy". Concerning the specific elements of a solution, he stated: "Anything the PLO rejects, we reject. Anything the PLO accepts, we accept."

When asked about participation in the Camp David process, Husayn called it "a hateful name" and noted that Camp David had been rejected by all the Arabs except Egypt.

Solarz asked if Iraq would accept arrangements whereby a Palestinian entity on the West Bank and Gaza was linked with Jordan. Husayn said this wouldn't solve the problem but would rather create problems between Jordan and the Palestinian people. However, if the Palestinians chose, without any pressure and of their own free will, to accept such a relationship, that was acceptable to Iraq.

Husayn also warned that the United States would be "committing a grave mistake" if it thought that Jordan could be a good state for the Palestinians. If the East Bank became a Palestinian state, all Arab entities would feel threatened.

Iran-Iraq War

Husayn expressed the belief that the United States was not doing enough to try to stop the war. When Solarz noted that the US was not in a good position to act, given the state of its relations with both countries, Husayn strongly disagreed. He said that if the US, and also the Soviet Union, wanted to end the war, as superpowers, they could do so. However, Iraq was not confident that the superpowers wanted to end the war.

Husayn criticized the US for allowing arms to be delivered from its "friends" to Iran over the past two years. This included not only Israel but also NATO members. Solarz suggested that Israel might have sold Iran arms that it had produced itself, rather than US-manufactured arms. Husayn said there was evidence that Israel was transferring US arms. When Solarz pressed for this evidence, he said that if the US didn't have this evidence, it should replace its head of intelligence.

Solarz asked Iraq's position on the various conditions that Iran has set for ending the war: Concerning an Iraqi admission of guilt about starting the war, Husayn said that Iraq had "sufficient documents" to prove that Iranian aggression began the war. Iraq is so confident of its position on this point that it is willing to submit the issue to arbitration in the United Nations, the Islamic Conference, the Nonaligned Movement or elsewhere.

Until such time as it was clear who the aggressor was, it was "irresponsible" to talk about reparations.

On the question of withdrawal to the international border, Iraq had already done this. But after it withdrew, Iran crossed Iraq's border and tried 5 times to take Basra.

With respect to the Iranian demand that thousands of Iranians be permitted to return to Iraq, Husayn stated that this amounted to interference with Iraqi sovereignty.

In response to a question about what will happen in Iran after Khomeini dies, Husayn noted that either before or after Khomeini's death, he wanted Iran to be united, coherent, prosperous, strong and nonaligned. It was up to the people of Iran to choose their own regime. Husayn commented further that he thought more harm had been done to Iran during Khomeini's rule than would be done to Iran by his death. However, he thought the war had to be ended before Khomeini's death, because there might not be a leader strong enough to end the war after him. "Once the war is over, Khomeini should die the next day."

Iraqi Support for Terrorism

Husayn stated that Iraq was against terrorism. Terrorism will not serve the Palestinian cause, although it may increase because of events in Lebanon. He has told all Palestinian organizations that terrorism was a backwards means.

It is true that Iraq gives identity cards to its "Palestinian brothers" who come to Iraq. However, if a Palestinian with an Iraqi identity card leaves Iraq to carry out a terrorist act elsewhere, is it Iraq's fault?