

To this day, rusty flagpoles stand in the courtyards of Baghdad's major hotels. They are reminders of a promising future that never materialized.

In 1983, Baghdad was to host a conference of nonaligned-movement nations, an honor that would, everyone hoped, restore some of the Abbasid-era glory of the city.

Ahead of the conference, Baghdad was a beehive, and tower cranes were all over the city. Hotels, roads, bridges, extravagant edifices and highways were well under construction. So was a [new international airport — complete with a Very, Very Important Persons Building](#). Italian, German and French contractors were moving freely around Baghdad to execute these projects.

The conference never happened. Iraq was, as it has been for the past 30 years, at war. The escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict — Baghdad fell within Iran's missile range — scared everyone away.

And now, after more than three decades and three devastating wars, Baghdad is hoping to reinvent itself by hosting yet another event: the Arab League summit meeting.

Subsequently, some of Baghdad's main streets and hotels are undergoing intensive rehabilitation.

Back in January, Amr Moussa, the secretary general of the Arab League, reassured Iraqi officials during an official visit to Baghdad that the summit meeting would be held in Baghdad. But because of Baghdad's precarious security situation, the level of representation was inconclusive.

Now it is no longer the venue that is preventing kings and presidents from attending. It is whether they are still hanging on to their jobs. Once again, [the summit meeting has been postponed](#), until at least 2012.

In contrast with the politicians, Iraqi builders seem unfazed by the shifting dates. Hussein Hadi, an engineer who works for the contracting company at the Ishtar Sheraton Hotel — not part of the international chain — was barely 6 years old when the hotel was at its peak. Hard at work on the site earlier this year, he said, "All I am hoping for is to retrieve the hotel's splendor."

One of his colleagues reminisced about how the Ishtar Sheraton was once one of the best five hotels in the Middle East in the mid-1980s, with a disco, nightclub, roof bar and casino. He remembers with nostalgia the day it was opened, on Iraq's national day, July 14, 1982, believing that it represented Iraq's future.

"It was lovely," he said. "We did not realize the significance of the event. We took it at face value. It was the first time in my life I had seen a panoramic elevator. I thought there was more to come."

At the nearby Babil Hotel Lamei Salih, one member of the team helping to carry out the renovations said that he and his colleagues would continue their work. "Of course we want the summit to happen," he said by telephone in April, after the announcement of a delay. "But if it doesn't, no harm done. The building will be open, to the public, I hope."

Years of abandonment have now left the hotels outdated and dilapidated, but Mr. Salih hopes that, with God's help, "the tide will turn in our favor."

Until that happens, Baghdad remains a ramshackle city, even with this minor facelift.

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