

**THE SABAN CENTER
FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY**

AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

“IRAQ: THE ROAD AHEAD”

A LUNCHEON DISCUSSION WITH:

**HOSHYAR ZABARI,
FOREIGN MINISTER
OF THE IRAQI GOVERNING COUNCIL**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2003

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

KEN POLLACK: Thank you. We would like to get this session underway. Welcome to all of you to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at The Brookings Institution. I think just about all of you know our guest speaker, so I'm going to keep my remarks very brief. I'm only going to say that I met Hoshiyar I think about nine years ago, and while I was delighted with his company, by his insight into Iraq -- and I certainly had great hopes -- I will say that nine years ago I was a bit skeptical that we would ever be where we are today. And while it is true that the Governing Council is still only an interim authority inside Iraq, it is still a great pleasure for me to welcome Hoshiyar Zebari, longtime KDP leader, as the foreign minister of the new Iraqi government.

Hoshiyar?

(Applause.)

HOSHYAR ZEBARI: Thank you, Ken. Thank you very much. I'm very honored to be here today at this prestigious institute to address these distinguished guests. It is indeed an honor for me to be with you here as the interim Iraqi foreign minister, as I'm sure Iraq's foreign minister has not been here for many years.

As we look back over the last year, we, the Iraqis, have no doubt that the U.S.- and British-led war on Saddam Hussein was fully justified. For too many years, the people of Iraq have been the victims of repression, brutality, and a conspiracy of silence, viewed to the indifference of the international community to our plight at the hands of one of the most brutal dictatorships the world has ever seen. Today, we all hear the bad news, the negative news about the lack of security in Iraq, the breakdown of law and order, and the lack of basic services and the policies not working, but thanks to their liberation, the people of Iraq, who have long tolerated many of these difficulties in their daily lives, are dealing actively with the situation and will continue to forge resolutely ahead.

None of these setbacks can be compared to the first taste of freedom experienced by the Iraqi people, and nothing can be worse than what we suffered under Saddam. And for that, a majority of Iraqis are grateful to President Bush, to Prime Minister Blair, and to the coalition, who took the very courageous decision to free them from the evil of Saddam Hussein.

We, as the formal Iraqi opposition, always maintained that the Iraqi army would not fight for Saddam and that he and his regime were isolated from the people. The magnificent military victory of the coalition and the people's antipathy toward that regime proved our point. We also maintained, like many of you, that the might of the U.S. military force would be able to defeat Saddam's regime easily, but the difficult part would be winning the peace and stabilizing the country after the fall of the regime. Indeed, the outcome of the overthrow of Saddam's regime betrayed the analysis and

assessment of many pundits, commentators, and politicians because they failed to account for the unique way in which Saddam molded the Iraqi state and appropriated the workings of its apparatus to his own end.

The moment when the regime was overthrown, the Iraqi state vanished almost. The Iraqi army was defeated, but instead of surrendering, its conscripts and soldiers just went home. Like a pyramid standing on its head, the moment the head was removed, the remainder of the pyramid simply collapsed, which left us facing the task of reconstruction.

Six months on from liberation, we face many challenges in the new Iraq. Security is the main challenge to the coalition, to the Iraqi Governing Council, and to the new cabinet, and we feel very strongly that resolving Iraq's internal security problems can only be realized by empowering and engaging the Iraqis themselves, in close coordination with the coalition forces. To achieve that, there must be a reassessment of the security concept advocated by coalition, civilian, and military authorities.

The security threats are twofold. The first threat comes from the remnant of the old regime, which have access to financial resources, intelligence, and weapons. These supporters of Saddam, who continues to evade capture, have managed to regroup and attack coalition forces and Iraqis working with the coalition. And they have carried out attacks of sabotage against essential services, including power supplies, oil pipelines, and water facilities. They lack a clear political agenda other than to disrupt the process of stabilization and democratization of the country.

The second threat is far more serious: the threat of global terrorism. Believe me when I say that this is not U.S. propaganda, but an ominous reality. Many Muslim fundamentalist groups, ranging from al Qaeda to Ansar al-Islam to Takfir-and-Hijra groups, have teamed up to fight the U.S. in Iraq. We know that hundreds of these terrorists have entered Iraq from most of its neighboring countries to conduct operations, and we believe that most of the suicidal attacks on American or Iraqi targets are the work of these groups.

This security problem is regionalized rather than a national trend, concentrated mainly in Central Iraq or part of it. To illustrate, Iraqi Kurdistan, the northern provinces of Mosul and Kirkuk, and the southern provinces of Iraq have been relatively stable and peaceful, where there has not been a major security threat apart from a few isolated incidents and ordinary crimes.

We feel that the terrorist challenge can be overcome by empowering those Iraqi political forces with the resources and the ability to operate under the command of the Interior Ministry and in close coordination with the Coalition Provisional Authority, with safeguards to prevent the emergence of private militia and the culture of warlords. How do you think it makes us feel to witness those young GIs being killed in the street of Tikrit, in Ramadi, and Baghdad? Frustrated and ashamed, and ultimately powerless: unable to do anything, yet knowing that we have the capacity to secure ourselves.

The Iraqi people have shown a remarkable sense of national unity, and they have failed all those critics who questioned our people's ability to work together in one country and to work for the success of the new era. If you look at the composition of the Iraqi Governing Council, you can see a true reflection of the reality of Iraq's multiethnic, multi-religious, and cultural society.

After security, our second challenge is a provision of basic services to the people and the creation of jobs. Progress has been made in both these areas. For example, ordinary Iraqi workers and employees receive now six times more than the salary they earned during Saddam's era. However, nearly 60 percent of the workforce remain unemployed, and shortages of basic services are still there. The Governing Council recently passed a package of a number of liberal economic laws that – they are unique, actually, and never have been introduced in the region. These are welcomed, in fact, by many countries, by many companies that ask for ownership of hundred percent of foreign investment in Iraq. It has passed laws on liberalizing the tax formation in the country as well, and customs dues.

At the same time, we need to accelerate, I believe, the political process towards establishing a legitimate Iraqi government. The formation of the Iraqi Governing Council and the cabinet, as well as the formation of the Preparatory Committee to look into ways of convening a constitutional conference, has given the people great hope as partners in the process of rebuilding Iraq.

We believe the most important element and challenge is the convening of the Constitutional Conference. That would address two critical issues for the new Iraq: firstly, a federal system of governance; and secondly, the role of Islam in the new society and new government. The Preparatory Committee has launched a national debate throughout the country by meeting people in town hall style throughout the provinces to discuss and exchange views on the new constitution. Iraqis are united in their desire to see that the constitution is written by Iraqis and for the Iraqis.

The Preparatory Committee presented its report to the Governing Council yesterday, and already two ideas are emerging from this debate. The first is to have direct elections for members of the constitutional convention, a system advocated by the Shi'ite religious leaders, such as the Grand Ayatollah Sistani and others. The second is to have a partial election in all the 18 provinces, according to specified population criteria, by the community representative attending the town hall meetings, who will elect delegates to the constitutional convention. We strongly believe that the more the political process moves forward, the better the security situation will become, since the two are undeniably interlinked.

Relations between the Coalition Provisional Authority, the CPA, and the Iraqi Interim Authority have significantly improved in the light of better understanding and improved cooperation and communication. We see our relationship as a kind of power-sharing arrangement during this interim period, and the more Iraqi new institutions feel in

charge of their own affairs, the better support they receive from the Iraqi people. Nobody should question or override the Iraqi people's desire and willingness to achieve their independence, their sovereignty, and to be the masters of their own destiny.

However, we do realize that this is not a black-and-white situation. Progress must be gradual, and we must go through the necessary steps to realize Iraqi sovereignty by drawing up a new constitution and devising a legal framework for holding national, free elections to elect a new, legitimate Iraqi government. Here we have a convergence of interests with the United States and the Coalition Provisional Authority to follow steadily – steadfastly through the necessary steps.

Now, President Bush has offered a generous supplementary aid package of \$87 billion, approximately \$20 billion of which could be for reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Iraq. We see this as our Marshall Plan, and we are grateful to the United States for this generous offer of assistance. Nonetheless, we feel that the Governing Council should have a certain amount of input on how the financial aid is allocated, and further recommend that Congress should offer this assistance as a grant rather than a loan. We also intend to actively seek further assistance from members of the international community for the reconstruction plans of Iraq at the proposed donor conference in Madrid in late October.

As for Iraqi foreign policy, I'm honored to have been named by the Iraqi Governing Council to lead the Iraqi Foreign Ministry during this interim period, a challenging and daunting job envied by no one, given the magnitude of the task of rehabilitating Iraq into the international community. Our vision is to change the perception of Iraq from an outlaw state and a violator of human rights and international law to a civilized, responsible, and peaceful Iraq which may once again regain its rightful place among the community of civilized nations. Iraq's new foreign policy will be open, transparent, and non-confrontational, to promote the national interest of the Iraqi people and defend their rights.

Our priorities have begun with the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the ministry, and a proactive campaign to regain Iraq's seat at both international and regional organizations to demonstrate to the world and to the people of Iraq that our country is back on its feet. Under Saddam, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry was turned into a nest of security and Mukhabarat operatives, intent on spying, intimidating, and using their diplomatic credentials to commit unlawful crimes. For this reason, we have been in the forefront of applying de-Baathification measures that have resulted in the removal of nearly 470 or so employees of the ministry. This process will continue as we simultaneously plan to rehabilitate and introduce new blood into the ministry: professional diplomats that would be the face of the new Iraq.

We have succeeded in the presenting Iraq and occupying Iraq's seats at the Arab League ministerial meeting in Cairo, and our message to our brothers and colleagues there was the new Iraq will be part of this Arab and Islamic environment; it will not disconnect with them in any way. We also have reoccupied or occupied Iraq's seat at the

United Nations at the current General Assembly meeting, at the IMF and World Bank, and OPEC, and the Non-Aligned Movement, and the G-77 Group, and we have plans to be represented at the Organization of Islamic Conference in Malaysia later this month. And of course, we have plans to reopen Iraqi diplomatic missions in the Gulf States, in Jordan, Beirut, London, and Washington. We currently are in talks with the U.S. State Department and the British Foreign Office to renegotiate the protectorate powers agreement over the Iraqi missions both here and in London.

The vision we share for the future is one of a new Iraq that will be law-abiding in the international community; an Iraq that respects its international obligations and responsibilities; an Iraq that enjoys good neighborly relations and shares mutual respect with other countries and their national interests; an Iraq that seeks peaceful means to resolve differences. The new Iraq will respect human rights, the role of law, personal freedom, and it will encourage civil society. We are all committed to Iraq's unity, territorial integrity, and reconciliation with its people first and the world at large. And the public wealth of the country should be equitably spent on the welfare of the Iraqi people, not on wars, weapons of mass destruction, and palaces.

When I began my speech, I said that we, the Iraqis, have no doubt that the U.S.- and British-led war on Saddam Hussein was fully justified. If we achieve what we have set out in this vision, we don't just need to look to the mass graves or to the threat of weapons of mass destruction posed by the old regime to justify its removal, but we can be sure that the world can only be a safer place with a budding democracy emerging in the heart of the Middle East. No one is saying that the road ahead will be easy, but there is a great deal of determination and focus to move forward with this vision and achieve our shared objective of a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal, and united Iraq.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

Q: My name is George Hishmeh, and I write for Gulf News and The Daily Star of Beirut, Lebanon. I have noticed in your remarks you haven't mentioned anything about Iraq's position on the Arab-Israeli question, certainly the Palestinian question; more specifically, the barrier which the Israeli cabinet, this morning or last night, agreed to build in the very controversial area 20 miles deep into the Palestinian territories. Do you have any position on that?

MR. ZEBARI: Well, the Governing Council have not developed yet a policy on that, to be honest with you. I mean, we are accountable to the Governing Council, but surely Iraq has a policy on that. We will say that Iraq will establish one, let's put it that way, but it will be different from the way the Baathists pursued that policy. I think the feeling among members of the Governing Council is really that we, the new Iraqis, will not be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves; that definitely the new Iraq will not outbid Arab countries and their political positions vis-à-vis their arrangements with the state of Israel; that definitely the new Iraq will stand by the legitimate leadership of

the Palestinians and will agree whatever decision they make or choose, you know, for the welfare of their people. This is the general view, but there is not, so far, a policy, let's say, by the Governing Council as such. Of course, Iraq will respect all the Security Council resolutions related to a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. I think this is the general view. Thank you.

Q: Barbara Slavin of USA Today. I was curious about the formation of this budget proposal by the CPA. I have been given to understand that there wasn't that much consultation with the Council when this was put forward. Is that the case? Are you concerned that there may be some items in there that you don't really need, and would you like, perhaps, to have the ability to be flexible and revise some elements if you do get the \$20 billion?

MR. ZEBARI: I think there was some consultation with the ministries, but because of the time shortage, it's really on our way, let's say, here. So the Governing Council, I don't think there has been much debate on that, but what we have asked and requested yesterday from congressional leaders is really to have some flexibility on some of the allocation. I think that's all what the Governing Council is asking. Otherwise, we know this is U.S. money; the CPA will administer it and spend it.

Q: Thank you. Dave Pollock from the State Department. Delighted to see you again. You mentioned in your remarks that the Governing Council I think you said is actively seeking other international sources of support for Iraq's reconstruction, looking toward the Madrid conference coming up later this month. Could you tell us something about what steps you're taking, how it's going, what kinds of prospects you see for international assistance? And in particular, are you thinking – do you have a mechanism for trying to tap into NGOs and other organizations – women's organizations, private groups, the private sector – for that sort of reconstruction support, not just official sources of assistance? Thank you.

MR. ZEBARI: Yes, we have in fact began and started our discussions and negotiations with many of the countries who would be invited to the Madrid conference. Japan and Southeast Asia, there is a road show in a few days' time to visit a number of countries there. We have had talks with the EU Troika in New York and in Baghdad. Actually, we met the foreign policy commissioner of the EU, Chris Patten. We have also approached the GCC members; we asked for their contribution into this. So, support is building up, we have noted.

At the same time, we are trying to reach out to other groups – private business, NGOs – but really this is a very important event for us, and I have said all the time I think this would be the first time Iraq is going to beg for money. And it's hurting, but because of Saddam's policies, unfortunately, that has ruined this country, we are forced to go and beg for money for this period. We hope that those countries would come forward, would participate. We believe this supplementary funding represents the U.S. contribution, which is huge and generous. We hope it will encourage other countries, not discourage them, to come forward. So we are optimistic, but still there is some work to be done.

Q: My name is Said Arikat. I'm from the Jerusalem-based Al-Quds newspaper. Mr. Minister, you mentioned Ansar al-Islam.

MR. ZEBARI: Yeah.

Q: Could you explain to us, sir, why they were allowed to operate for a very long time before the war? And on the ratio of attacks conducted by foreign jihadists and volunteers versus the national indigenous, I think, and now the economic track, how do you guard against – in light of the new total privatization, how do you guard against the local economy being swallowed up by big companies such as Bechtel or Halliburton, or even falling into a mafia-like -- the reason I say this, sir, is because I was in Moscow in the spring and summer of '93 and I saw how the Russian economy was hijacked by mafia-type economics.

And my last point, sir, on the foreign issue: do you adopt or do you – will you continue to honor the Arab peace plan adopted at the Beirut summit conference of March of 2002? Thank you.

MR. ZEBARI: Well, to start with the first one, Ansar al-Islam, yes, have operated inside Iraq, in Northern Iraq specifically in the remote mountain areas. They are a front, really, for the al Qaeda organization and their links to al Qaeda have been established by intelligence, by their operatives. There are fundamentalist groups who have attacked the local people there first and then moved to other targets. They were attacked during the war and their bases were hit by U.S. missiles and by a joint Peshmerga-Special Forces operation. They managed to slip, to disappear, and then to regroup. So I think in that geographical environment they will be able to have some presence. Whoever has seen those mountains and this region will realize and recognize it's not easy to bring them under control. We know that they are very active, in fact, and they are the one who are providing the main infrastructure for other groups to launch operations inside Iraq.

As for safeguards against this, yes, this possibility is there -- really, we don't deny it -- but because of the need for reconstruction and recovery at the moment, we need as much international aid and support and engagement of other companies, multinational and so on. As for safeguards against this, yes, there will be definitely safeguards against protecting the interests of the Iraqi business community and the Iraqi people, but there is very little capital in Iraq now. Most of the capital really has been owned and acquired by Saddam's cronies, most of them, so if they will be the new businessmen – (chuckles) – I don't know, you see. But yeah, we have a problem, but I agree with you: there should be safeguards against protecting (sic) the interests of the Iraqi people.

As for your third point, yes, I think even during the previous regime, despite all its rhetoric and so on, the regime approved that peace plan. So the new Iraqi government, I think – or administration, interim administration, I think will follow that. This is a consensual Arab, let's say, approach on how to address this issue.

Q: Thank you. Guy Dinmore, Financial Times. On the constitution, I have to note that maybe our newspaper carried an erroneous report today because it was our understanding from Baghdad that the Constitutional Preparatory Committee had not managed to meet yesterday's deadline for producing its recommendations, but you say they have. Could you elaborate again on what those two alternatives are to drawing up the constitution? And secondly, if it does emerge that the process of drawing up a constitution takes rather longer than the U.S. administration envisages, this six months or so, are there sort of alternative plans possibly to set up a provisional government that would operate under the 1958 constitution and then go on from there to holding elections? Thank you.

MR. ZEBARI: Really, the deadline I have was the end of September that the constitutional – I mean, provisional – the Preparatory Commission (sic) should submit its report to the Governing Council. So when I said that, we learned yesterday that they have presented their report.

And as I said, there are two ideas emerging from their debate and discussions with the Iraqis. One is that there is some support for the idea of direct elections of members of the delegates of the Constitutional Convention by the people. This is advocated by, you know, the religious leaders in Najaf and Karbala, and it is problematic really because it will take more time. We don't have the infrastructure in place: we don't have a voter registration, we don't have a census yet, the population. So this will take time, you see, to realize. The second view is to have some partial elections and each province to elect a specific number of delegates to the Constitutional Convention indirectly.

I mean, I really don't know which view will be adopted or will be – but the second one is closer to the first one, was to satisfy the needs of the Shi'a religious leaders that this is the closest to an elected body to write the new constitution. I mean, for Ayatollah Sistani and others, what is important is to see Iraqis write their constitution; not Americans, not foreigners. This is our way of life. And I think that point has been made very clear, and even the CPA, the coalition, are fully aware and conscious and to their credit, really, they have kept away completely of the constitutional process.

So I don't know, actually, what it will be, but since there would be a referendum on the new draft constitution, so it would be another form of popular mandate of elections, approval of the constitution.

So the two positions are closed. I think we will be able, I think, as a Governing Council, to reach some understanding or a compromise, because this is the most important challenge, really, for all of us, and it is the starting point, really, for rebuilding Iraq, in my view. And everybody is working very hard to see – to get the process started.

As about the timeline of this how long will it take, I believe, according to my experience in working in this political process with many of my friends and colleagues, I think we can do it within six weeks, personally, I mean, if we focus on this – no, I'm

sorry, six months – (laughter) – I’m sorry. Six weeks is too short, but six months, indeed, it is a real possibility. And of course we will benefit from previous constitution, from previous ideas. They have done some work on that and I think they will need some foreign expertise, assistance, which many countries have offered us that opportunity to consult with them; not to be part of a drafting committee, but from outside.

Q: Robin Wright, Los Angeles Times. Could you – you mentioned accelerating the political transition. Can you elaborate on how long you think the whole process will take before Iraqis assume sovereignty? And also, is there a mechanism that you can find a compromise between the French position and the American position on the political phase of the transition and the issue of, for example, authority versus sovereignty, transferring some authority to the Iraqi Governing Council now and how you do that versus sovereignty at the end of the process?

MR. ZEBARI: About the whole political process -- how long will it take? -- initially we envisaged really we can do this, to draw up a new constitution, to prepare for elections, and to have elections within a year. I mean, that was the view of most members of the Governing Council. It might be ambitious, let’s say, timetable, but that was the feeling among many of them.

Now, a great deal will depend on the security environment. Definitely the security will not improve – definitely it would be very difficult, let’s say, to have elections, to have people, to have many of the other processes in this. So, it’s difficult for me really to give you a definitive timetable, let’s say, for that, but that was what we discussed, what we agreed, and we hope that by the end of 2004 or before that we will be able to have many of these at least set in motion or moving, or gathering.

The key issue is the Constitutional Convention, I think. That’s the most important part of it. And the main challenge is to have a starting line because this convention will be in session; it will not disappear. They may be recalled every now and again to look and review, you know, the draft text and so on.

As for the French position, in fact we in the Governing Council have said really nobody, whether the French or whoever, should act or behave to be more Iraqi than the Iraqis themselves. And we were conscious and aware in the Governing Council not to allow France or any other country to drive a wedge between us, the Iraqis, and the coalition because at the time we are both in the same boat, and the success of the country I think is a priority for both of us.

We appreciate, actually, the good intention in making these ideas and putting them forward, but at the same time, really we don’t want, as the Governing Council, to be caught in this match, let’s say, between these two giant members of the Security Council.

Now, the French ideas have some positive elements – I mean, to give them the credit – but at the same time, we think that what they are asking needs to be -- as I said in my remarks, has to be a gradual, organized, you know, and phased away, and nobody

really should act with the Iraqis or question their willingness to regain their sovereignty and independence.

But I believe what President Chirac said at the General Assembly -- he left room for some accommodation -- and we believe that a new resolution is a possibility, and it will emphasize a number of points that is shared among many of the members of the Security Council that will emphasize the need to stabilize the country in terms of security, to improve that; the threat of global terrorism, I think. The new role for the U.N. has expanded what responsibility the U.N. would assume in this interim period. Also, there might be a call for more transparency in the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq, so to give other countries the opportunity to contribute or to -- plus the view of the Governing Council should be taken into consideration in this process.

Now, on the issue of sovereignty, I think now we are acting really as the Governing Council and the cabinet as a de facto authority. The United States is going everywhere in the world promoting, you know, this new Iraqi Governing Council to help us be represented or to speak or to occupy our seat is another way of supporting this trend. I don't think there is any conflict of interest. I mean, some of the statements that have been made by our colleagues and so on missed the point that this is really some partnership -- this is some power-sharing during this interim period. So we don't have those differences, let's say, on approaching how to move forward.

Q: You mentioned the infiltration of militants -- Islamic militants from different areas who have converged in Iraq to attack American forces. Can you tell us how and where you think these infiltrators are entering the country and whether or not you have attempted to speak to any of your neighbors yet about the situation? Thank you.

MR. ZEBARI: Thank you. In fact, this is a very serious problem, and it's complicated also. Iraq has become a battleground for all these groups to fight the U.S. to settle scores. And it helped them, this logic of occupation, unfortunately, that was embodied in Security Council Resolution 1483, that this concept of occupation versus liberation became a rallying point for many of these groups really to come together and to assemble and team up in Iraq, whether coming from -- believe me, they are coming from all directions, from Kuwait, to Iran, to Turkey, to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia -- Syria. And we don't have any ratio or checkpoints to check which country, how many people are coming from this country to the other, but it's been an open-border policy for some time and have taken the liberty, you see, to enter Iraq from many, many neighboring countries.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. ZEBARI: We have; we have, indeed. We have spoken to all of them that this is very dangerous; we need your support, we need you to help us to stabilize the situation. We have the intelligence, we know how they are coming, why they are coming, and we expect you to help us to tighten control over border and so on. But a great deal will depend on us also. I mean, this is part of our new policy, as the foreign

minister, really, to introduce a new visa system, for instance, for the Interior Ministry to have more control over security of the border, to identify certain illegal entries. But I don't have any figures or numbers, how many people are coming from this country or that.

Q: Ömer Taspınar, Brookings Project on Turkey. What is your position on the possibility of Turkish troops in Iraq? And if this is a bad idea, have you communicated the issue to the U.S. government?

MR. ZEBARI: Can I pass this question? (Laughter.) No, in fact, our position has been generally – I mean, I'll be very honest in fact with you. What we did expect in the past was a policy by the Governing Council that they felt there is a need to internationalize the force, to share the burden, and I think they welcome contribution from different countries: Arab, Islamic, European and so on. But they have expressed some sensitivities that it is better not to involve any of Iraq's immediate neighboring countries, because Iraq, in the past, had difficulties, had problems, had wars with many of them, and there is the possibility that their engagement, their involvement may carry their political agenda with them. And King Abdullah was very candid and honest, actually, by confirming this, by confirming that even if the Jordanians were to go they will have its own agenda.

Now, it's nothing against Turkey, really. I mean, I tried to explain this to Foreign Minister Gül and the Turkish delegation in New York. In fact, in the past we've worked with the Turkish army, we've fought with them, and we're very proud – I think they did a very good job in fighting terrorism, stabilizing border security, and we've lost hundreds of men, you see, jointly.

So it's not a prejudiced position vis-à-vis, you know, Turkish involvement and so on. I think that is a principle every member of the Governing Council shares and doesn't apply to Turkey; it applies to Jordan, applies to Iran, to Syria, to Saudi Arabia, even to Kuwait. But with Turkish participation, I think they are looking for a new Security Council resolution, and also they want a welcoming gesture or invitation by the Iraqis because if now they were to send troops under the current circumstances, they fear that their troops will be part of an occupation force, according, you see, to them, Security Council 1483 Mandate. They don't want that so they are waiting for a new mandate from the Security Council

And the other point: that their deployment would be in Central Iraq. It wouldn't be in the northern parts of Iraq in the Kurdish region, but in Ramadi, Fallujah, Hadithah, Tharthar and so on. This I think can be managed. Still, the issue has not been resolved, but we as the Governing Council are talking with the Turkish government and with the coalition to find a way for their deployment, if there need to be, without causing any repercussions. That is really the position.

Q: Marvin Kalb with the Shorenstein Center at Harvard. Could you help us explain better – help us understand better the relationship that exists between Iraqi

religious and political leaders who lived through the Saddam regime that were left and those of you who left and now returned under the authority, in a sense, of the United States? What is the relationship that you have with the more native group?

MR. ZEBARI: In fact, this dichotomy of external/internal Iraqis no longer exist because most of the Iraqis are back to their country and they are trying to work -- help build this -- I mean, if this was true, before the war, exiled opposition was an internal problem. But many of those oppositions actually played a very important role in the liberation itself and took active part in this, so they have something to offer.

Now, as for the relation with the religious groups, even in opposition politics in exile there were many Islamic groups actually who were in exile: I mean, the Supreme Council, the Da'wa Party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Sunni, for instance, most of their leadership were abroad in London or in the Gulf and so on. But because of the political vacuum, in fact, and the delays in pushing this political process, those groups, both the Shi'ites and the Sunnis are gaining more ground and more audience. And some of the members of the regime, the defeated regime, also are protecting themselves and the wings of some of these groups. We know that for sure.

But they are fully represented, and both the Shi'a religious leaders and the Sunni religious leaders are fully represented at the Governing Council -- I mean, even in the cabinet. So that's why relations are far more better in fact, and we think those are moderates who are serving, let's say, on the Governing Council and the cabinet. There are some extremist trends, like Muqtada al-Sadr, who is challenging other groups, outbidding them and so on, but relations I think are good. They are working together and they have the same common interests for the new Iraq.

And I think that the key issue to differentiate their position would be the constitutional process and where they will be if we were faced with the issue of the rule of Islam. Of course, the majority of the Iraqi are Muslim, and definitely the new constitution has to reflect the identity of the Iraqi people, their attachment to Islamic values and ideas, definitely -- nobody questions about that -- but whether there would be a Shari'a law, for instance, in Iraq or not or would be a secular Iraq, this would be the key issue.

Q: Phebe Marr, no particular affiliation. I can't resist saying how nice it is to have a different voice coming out of Iraq. I wonder if I could get you to elaborate a little bit more, following up on this security issue, about the development of Iraq's military and security forces. I realize it's being speeded up and even some talk in the press about bringing in some of the former officers. I wonder how that fits with de-Baathification. And I read something else the other day that indicated that maybe at local level -- the lower units might be divided according to ethnic and sectarian affiliation. How do you see the development of the security forces? Could you tell us a little bit more about it?

MR. ZEBARI: Yes. I think they have started the process of rebuilding Iraqi security capacity. The police force now, there is nearly 40,000 newly trained Iraqi police.

The target is to have about 70 (thousand) for all of Iraq. I think that's moving smoothly, with difficulties, but I think there is more police on the streets of Baghdad and many other cities throughout the country.

Also now we are thinking seriously of having an intelligence organization because what is lacking in Iraq – you cannot run a country without an intelligence organization to identify all the sources of those threats and attacks and people coming in and out -- although it hasn't been announced, but I think everybody is seriously considering that option. Maybe there will be a need to recruit some security officers and so on whose reputation is not tainted, and that is very, very difficult to seek new recruits and so on. But that is paramount, really, especially now there is a lack of focus intelligence on the activities of the terrorists and so on.

Now, under military, I think the plan is to raise this year one Iraqi division. I'm not sure about their exact number, but I think it's about 15,000, 20 (thousand) something like that. Next year there would be another two divisions. They have started that. Both near Baghdad in the north and even in the south they are training new soldiers, let's say, for this new Iraqi army. Of course, it has to be professional, not too large, but to defend the Iraqi borders. It should not intervene in internal politics. There was a number of good safeguards against the rule of the army in the new society. This will take time, in my view, but it is moving; it is making progress.

Now, about the ethnic composition, really there is no ethnic unit as such. Now, for instance, they are employing Peshmerga, the Kurdish forces, but not as a separate Kurdish unit, part of an Iraqi unit, but it has Arabs from Mosul, from Tikrit, from Sinjar, it has maybe Turkomans, Assyrians and so on. It is a mixed formation. It's not Kurdish units or Arab units as such.

There are other elements. They are thinking of developing border guards, let's say formations, to protect Iraq borders from infiltration and so on, and this is – they have formed a number of battalions in the west, the east and the north. I'm aware of that.

The third element, they have introduced a new – (audio break, tape change). This is where we have difficulties. The police have their own function, the army also. There is a general feeling in Iraq that we will need the United States, the coalition, to stay there for a long time, at least to protect Iraq's border, its integrity from regional intervention or as a deterrent force; maybe not the same size as we have, 130,000 or so, but really, nobody disputes that, or even there should be some future arrangements and agreement with the United States, you know, or future defense agreements, whatever.

Now, the third element is a civil defense force. This was introduced after pressure from us that really, until you build your military police capacity, there is a gap until you train them. Sometimes it takes 18 months, let's say, for training the police force abroad and so on. So this gap, how you are going to fill this gap when you are under attack here and there? Well, this idea came to raise a civil defense force from local people, and most of the regions raised some units who would be trained, not extensively or sophisticated,

because all the Iraqis, really, know how to use weapons, to carry weapons, to fire them – to fire them seems to be their life, unfortunately, for the last 24 years.

We think there is a need, just like many other countries, like Turkey, like France, like Spain, like Italy, something between the police and the army: the gendarmerie or carabinieri or civil defense. This is the concept. We think this has to be developed more quickly and should use the resources of the local Iraqi leaders or parties and so on to be put under the command of the Interior Ministry. And I think it will help a great deal to improve security. We are at this stage of developing, you know, those ideas with the military authority in Baghdad.

MR. POLLACK: Hoshyar, I'm going to take the prerogative to ask you the last question.

MR. ZEBARI: Please.

MR. POLLACK: We've talked a great deal about the neighbors.

MR. ZEBARI: Yes.

MR. POLLACK: The neighbors obviously have a big role to play in stabilizing Iraq, with building out prosperous Iraq. They also have real concerns and real interests inside of Iraq. How would you like to see the neighbors dealt with throughout the course of this process? Do you have a process in mind by which the neighbors' various interests could be dealt with; a way to deal with it in a more regular fashion than simply ad hoc basis, or do you think there's a better way to deal with it on a bilateral basis?

MR. ZEBARI: Well, I think our neighbors, give them the benefit of the doubt, they are afraid of what has happened in Iraq. I mean, this was a political earthquake, really. It has affected everybody, for this regime who ruled, you know, for 35 years, they're accustomed to, is gone; it will never come back. But the new Iraq, new open, democratic, you know, pluralistic, occurred – kind of presented Iraq in a new face, for instance, not necessarily an Arab nationalist or so on. But as long as we are one people, one country, we belong to one country, I think this is the new Iraq. In fact, we reassured them in Cairo about this possibility: you have to live with this fact because Iraq is not going to be as before, never again Saddam regime or Baathism to come back.

Now, I think they have some concerns. Some of their perceived fear, really, is that the United States will not stop there and it will turn to Syria, it will turn to the Gulf or Saudi Arabia, but this is perceived – Syria is unconcerned, really, as far as we can tell. First they were afraid that the country will disintegrate: if you remove the centralized regime, the Kurds will go their way, the Shi'a will prefer their own, the Sunnis will be massacred, the Turkomen will be slaughtered and so on. After six months, none of that has happened. I mean, all the Iraqi came together with a remarkable sense of working together, with showing this national unity and working for the common good.

I think each neighbor has a different agenda and different perspective, but that is the overriding fear. All of them are afraid because of what's taken place and this massive U.S. force who they have next to Iran, next to Syria, next to the Gulf and so on. It's frightening; it's terrifying. And they were surprised by the speed, by the professionalism of concluding this war and removing this dictator with all the power he had.

I think we should address them bilaterally to reassure them. I think that's very important. Secondly, to assure them that the new Iraq will work with them, will be part of, as I said in my remarks, to be part of the same environment, part of the same region, will not disconnect with that, will not go away. It will be part of the Arab League, it will be part of the Islamic Conference, it will do business with them, it will work with them, it will develop relations and work for the common good of the people of the region. I think it's very important.

Secondly, I think many of them are happy that they are done with this ideological regime, see, who outwitted them on everything and tried to intervene, undermine each and every one of them. But Turkey's fears are different from Iranian, let's say, concerns. Jordan's concern is different. All of them don't want to see a new theocracy in Iraq – apart, maybe, from Iran if they were supporting of the Shari'a – but all the other countries, really they don't want to see an Islamic regime being installed in this process, rather through election, through some political upheavals and so on.

Secondly, none of them want to see Iraq disintegrate, divided one way or another. That's another thing that needs to be reassured along this. But bilateral relation, economic relations and encouraging them, inviting them to take part in the reconstruction effort is another way, actually, of building good relations with them.

MR. POLLACK: Please join me in thanking Hoshyar.

(Applause.)

MR. ZEBARI: Thank you.

(END)