



THE SABAN CENTER
for MIDDLE EAST POLICY
at THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Welcoming remarks of

Haim Saban
Chairman of the Saban Center

to

Jalal Talabani
President of the Republic of Iraq

at

the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution

September 9, 2005

[Embargoed until 9 a.m. EST, September 9th, 2005]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. My name is Haim Saban and I am the Chairman of the Saban Center at Brookings. On the platform with me today is Martin Indyk, the Director of the Saban Center.

The Saban Center fosters research and dialogue on the critical issues facing the United States in the Middle East. At the heart of these concerns today is Iraq—its reconstruction, security and the future prosperity of its people.

It is, therefore, a special honor for us to welcome His Excellency, Jalal Talabani, the President of Iraq, to the Saban Center. President Talabani was elected to his current position by the Iraqi National Assembly on April 6, 2005, making him the first democratically elected president in Iraq's history, and the first Kurd to become President in a Middle Eastern country.

President Talabani is the founder and Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two main Kurdish parties in Iraq. He has been active in politics for some sixty years, during which time he has been an extraordinarily dedicated advocate

for freedom, democracy and Kurdish rights in Iraq. He has led his people through the harshest times, fighting against the brutal and ruthless dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. In March 1988, Saddam used chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians, killing thousands and maiming many more. During these darkest of days President Talabani provided leadership to the Kurds of Iraq and other Iraqi resisters, inspiring them to persevere with their campaign for a more democratic and open society.

President Talabani, a staunch ally of the United States, is a man of great courage and statesmanship. He comes to Washington to meet with President Bush at a critical moment in the struggle for a democratic and stable Iraq.

We are honored to have him here to address you today as the first democratically elected President of Iraq. In English, "Welcome, Mr. President," and in the words of your two official languages *Ahlan wa Sahlan, Zor Be Kheer Beyt.*