

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF IRAQ AMID REGIONAL TURMOIL

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. Good evening. My name is Salman Shaikh and many of you probably know me, some of you have not come to the Center before, so welcome. I'm the director of the Brookings Doha Center.

It's wonderful to be able to start again our public lecture series and workshop series here with such an esteemed panel. It is the first of the season and I think rightfully so, we're addressing a topic tonight which is urgent, something that I was mentioning to our guests we wanted to do even before the summer, which is certainly timely and relevant today, which is the political future of Iraq amid regional turmoil.

Let me welcome straight away our three esteemed guests, Mr. Falah Al-Nakib. Of course, he's a prominent Iraqi politician. He served as the Minister of Interior under the Iraqi interim government of former Prime Minister (inaudible). He was named the governor of (inaudible) after the fall

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of Saddam Hussein.

In 2011, Dr. Nakib was nominated as Defense Minister by the Iraqi national court as part of a power sharing agreement, but as many of you would know, his nomination was at the time rejected by the al-Maliki government.

Dr. Nakib, wonderful to have you here.

Thank you for making the trip.

Dr. Nisar Talabany, welcome. It's great to have you here. You're, of course, the Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government. You're also the head of the Office of Governance and Integrity, something that we had talked about before, and which you take very, very seriously.

Nisar, if I may, you began your career with the KRG in 2005 as the Director of Communications for the KRG-UK Representative Office. Then in 2006 you returned to Kurdistan to help establish the KRG's Department of Foreign Relations as the Assistant Director. Again, thank you for making the trip.

And certainly not least, Dr. Ali Al-Dabbagh,

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you, of course, are an Iraqi politician well known to many who served as the government spokesman in Nouri al-Maliki's government until November 2012. Born in Kerbala, you're a member of the Iraqi National Assembly, the Iraqi Foreign Relations Committee, and the Constitution Committee. You're also the founder of the Iraqi Strategic Institute based in the U.S., which aims to promote education and training in Iraq and assist (inaudible) planning for Iraq NGOs.

Again, it's wonderful to have you here and wonderful to have all three of you here. How we do this, especially for first-timers, is that I will ask a series of questions and we will have this as a conversation, an interactive conversation for the first half, first two-thirds of our discussion, then of course I'll begin to open it up for your own questions. I would also just again welcome our friends from the media, particularly from al-Jazeera, who I know are taking this, and this will feature on that channel soon as well.

Let me start by asking you, and focusing a

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little bit on Iraq first, and asking you -- let us start with Dr. (inaudible), -- sure, Mister -- this new Iraq that's been built, is it built on sound political foundations? Please, we have simultaneous --

SPEAKER: No, not really. The political process in Iraq had many gaps in it right from the start and unfortunately it seems that the situation is really, really difficult now. I don't think the political situation in Iraq is heading in the right direction and this is due to many different reasons including some internal causes. The situation in Iraq with all the divisions and also due to political or other reasons, the regional situation -- of course, the security situation in Iraq is really dire and this will reflect negatively on the political situation. The economic situation also is very bad.

In fact, there is no state as such an Iraq. There may be a government in charge, but there is no state, and unfortunately the suffering of the Iraqi people is very (inaudible).

If we take into consideration the regional situation, the Arab countries, this impacts the Iraq situation, of course, in addition to interferences by other regional and international powers, which has a very negative impact on Iraq since 2003 until the current times.

We hope that there will be some reforms, but until now there are no positive indications. If the situation continues, it will remain very bad.

MR. SHAIKH: And I'll go to first names now. Again, around similar question, but let me expand it a little bit. You see political and sectarian violence now surging in the last few months. More than 5,000 Iraqis have been killed and 12,000 injured this year, and in fact many, many are saying they saw the highest number of politically related attacks in the last five years.

Given the unprecedented scale of what seems to be Sunni-Shi'a polarization -- and you can correct me on how we should characterize it (inaudible) -- and the likely prospects of reviving a sectarian civil

strife, what measures is it that the government is taking, do you think, to deescalate the violence and to diffuse the sectarian tension? What should it take?

SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Salman, thank you very much for -- to you Brookings and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for taking the time and trouble and attending this evening.

Undoubtedly, Iraq has a huge potential to be a very important country in the region. We all know about Iraq's history. We have the resources -- natural resources, human resources, all of this is known, but quite simply put, Iraq is going through a crisis. This has many different facets. Some is political, some security, some in Iraq's regional relations. I don't want to take too much of your time, I'll be brief, to get to the heart of the matter.

The crisis in Iraq is a political one, a crisis between partners because of the very birth of the political process, which was surrounded by many

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difficulties.

You know that (inaudible) agreement -- and many people are complaining -- and also since the formation of the government in 2010 and the withdrawal of the American forces, I just want to remind you that the withdrawal of American forces was a landmark in Iraq's history and history will record this. This is not the source of pride for one faction, but as a result of all Iraqi's exerting joint efforts.

But the country now is very fragile politically and this point that Iraq managed to convince bigger (inaudible) its forces, and this is something which has not had any parallels in history.

Now the problem lies between the head of the government and the different parties. It's not a crisis between different political partners and parties, but it's between the head of government and the different partners within the government. This started with the Kurds up north and moved to the problem with the Sunnis and then the security situation exploded in a way which reminds us of 2007,

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2008. And maybe the country was on the brink of civil strife.

Also, now, there in the horizon looms some warning signs that this crisis is very political because the security situation is just one aspect of an attack on a prison and the liberation of a large number of the heads of terrorist organizations is just one organization of this situation, the security situation, and the problem between Mr. al-Maliki and the rest of the regions of Iraq and now the western region is returning to providing cover for the violent groups and actions.

The situation in Syria also has a direct impact on Iraq and if there is a country which was to be impacted adversely because of the situation in Syria it will be Iraq and this is very known and understood by everybody.

The third aspect is Iraq's regional relations. Iraq could not manage as a country to convince its Arab neighbors that it can be an active country. Unfortunately, Iraq, in its relations, now

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you have (inaudible) with Turkey, with the Gulf countries, with Saudi Arabia, and these relations have not given Iraq its right and proper share of its (inaudible) region.

Iraq could have been an accepted partner and broker in the Syrian crisis, but unfortunately part of Iraq seems to be embarrassed and neutral towards Syria and it's not like the Turkish position or the Saudi position. Yet despite all of that, Iraq could not manage to convince the neighboring countries that it can play an active role as a broker in the Syrian crisis. And this impacts Iraq directly -- the Syrian crisis, that is because the situation in Iraq is effected and impacted and also can impact the situation in Syria.

I don't think the situation is not as bad as people perceive it. In Iraq, when we talk about the different components of the community in Iraq, Iraq is more mixed than any other country. Twenty-five percent of Iraq's countries are intermarried, sectarian, like Sunnis married to Shi'as and vice

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versa.

There is a problem not in the communal relations, but a problem between politicians. I cannot deny for one second that some regions have some sort of a sectarian impact and extension, which led to some divisions in Baghdad itself as a city divided on sectarian lines, but in fact it's not easily expected that Iraq will fall into civil war.

Yet, between now and the forthcoming political elections, I don't think there can be an improvement in the situation because all the hopes are pinned now on the elections itself. The situation in Syria remains likely to impact Iraq as much as it's likely to impact Jordan and others. I hope I'll elaborate more during the rest of this evening. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: They're both related to Iraq playing a bigger regional role, which we can get back to, particularly regarding Syria. But you also said that the situation maybe is not as bad as people perceive it, and here is probably a good time to come

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to you, Nisar, and the KRG area is an area of relative safety and security. There has been economic progress, investment.

And there has been, recently, in terms of the politics, a rapprochement, an effort, again, between President Massoud Barzani and Prime Minister Maliki to talk through some of the issues, particularly as related, of course, to the oil and gas draft law in terms of governance of the wealth of the country.

Where do KRG central government relations stand at this moment? And I ask you that in the context of the broader lessons that can be learned with regards to Iraq and what sort of developments in this relationship do you envisage for the future?

And, again, I'll take one step back, if I may. You and I discussed earlier, in terms of the basis, including the Constitution itself, so if you could give us a sense of both background, but also the current situation, between the central government and the KRG.

MS. TALABANY: Thank you so much for this question. (Inaudible) hope to be able to take some questions for you later on.

In terms of Iraq, when we discuss the security situation in Iraq and the lack of it, actually, we always tend to forget that there is a region in Iraq -- we are part of Iraq, there is a region that is prosperous, that is open for investment, there are plenty of -- it's a huge job market for Iraqis, including Kurds, Turkmen, Syrians, any of the minorities, religions or non-religious. This part of Iraq is the Kurdistan region in Iraq and we exercise the constitutional right that is given to all of Iraq. It's the three provinces, a population of more than five million there.

The economic prosperity has been a key aspect and a key vision for our leaders there. So, for example, if we were to look at the GDP per capita, it has jumped from \$500 about six to seven years ago, now it's plus \$5000 per capita, which is a huge increase.

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The investment law is very open and very forward looking. The FDI is increasing by the day and (inaudible) are being visited by many Iraqis. On public holidays we have about 50,000 families visiting over the (inaudible). We have about 35,000 Iraqi families in the rest of Iraq who would relocate into the Kurdistan region for reasons of better security and better prosperity. A majority of them are actually also Christians, because there is a true application of the Iraq constitution, basic human right principles, which are all embedded in the Iraqi constitutions, which 78 percent of Iraqis voted for in the year 2005.

So, there is a brighter part of Iraq which we don't tend to hear about and perhaps this part of Iraq can be a model for the rest of the regions and the provinces in Iraq.

And we've had our difficulties in the 90s, but we learned to dialogue together and understand each others' views and put our differences aside and focus on the human -- the Iraqi, the Kurd -- in

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regards of what is best for the Iraqi citizen and how can we (inaudible) and make that tear into a hope, because (inaudible).

As you all know that Kurds have suffered throughout the years from (inaudible) campaigns in the 1980s we had -- we suffered from genocide, more than 200,000 Kurds were buried alive. We've suffered from ethnic cleansing (inaudible). We have suffered from the use of chemical weapons. We are really actually hoping that we would be the last people that chemical weapons are used on in this time and age, but unfortunately we see other signs elsewhere.

So, it is ongoing and the discussion is -- I hope it will take a chance to discuss the brighter side of Iraq rather than focus on the negative parts of the country.

And in terms of the question how are the relations between Baghdad and (inaudible) at the moment, there is open dialogue, there is continuous dialogue. Let us not forget that the Kurds are part of the solution in Baghdad. The foreign minister is

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Kurdish, but we are all Iraqis at the end of the day and there is open dialogue between Prime Minister Maliki and President Massoud Barzani. There have been visits between them and there are committees that are working on finding long-term and short-term solutions for the pending issues that you discussed, some claim that it was the oil and gas issue, some are about the law that has been pending for years in Parliament, the oil and gas law, others are to do with the security forces and security.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. I'm going to come back to Falah and I do want to focus as much as we can on (inaudible), but I will come back to, I think, a question that many of us would have is what are the major Sunni grievances here when it comes to the current situation in Iraq? And how can we bring those provinces and those people back into the political fold inside Iraq?

MR. Al-NAKIB: Well, I don't think that the problem is a sectarian one in Iraq. After 2003, the Americans committed strategic mistakes in Iraq

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starting with dissolving the Iraqi army, also the de-Ba'athification process and others, which really alienated many people who could have played an active role in the construction of Iraq.

One of the positive things that our brothers in the Kurdish region will benefit from was the general pardon amnesty, which solved many problems. When these mistakes were committed and on top of that came other mistakes, this led a group of people, the extremist thinking in Iraq take over political thinking. This has been what compounded the situation is the action of the government.

Before al-Maliki's government and the other current governments, we did not have a sectarian problem in Iraq. The problem started after the second half of 2005 when huge campaigns were waged against the Iraqi army, emphasized the number of -- in February 2005 it was 15 in total for the entire population. The numbers started increasing. By September 2005 it reached 497 people who were assassinated on sectarian grounds.

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This led to a situation of chaos and more sectarian strife.

Then the question of (inaudible) shrines and explosion and (inaudible) rituals really deliberate act and immediately followed by certain actions, which leads me to think that this was all preplanned and determined effort to do certain things after that.

Al-Qaeda was not in Iraq before 2003. Who brought them into Iraq and who led them to come into Iraq? These are all questions we must answer. I don't think the solution lies in a reconciliation (inaudible) because what we saw before, a similar example, did not lead to much because ultimately their government was trying to make sure it has total control of the political situation and power of the country, not really a basis for a partnership or a dialogue.

I don't anticipate huge changes in Iraq although it's the fate of the entire country now on the brink. And like Mr. Al-Dabbagh said, the Arabs and Kurds, Sunni and Shi'a, Turkmen and Arabs and

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Kurds, all of them live in harmony as people, but in most of the cases we have witnessed in the recent past, we say that the hegemony and the power and government attempt to have exclusive right to rule the country to the exclusion of all others leads to these problems.

We have huge unemployment figures in Iraq, illiteracy now is more than 34 percent, 50 percent of people in the university degrees are suffering now, both on the Sunni and Shi'a side, and there is now a tendency towards violence, even though violence didn't achieve much. But the sit-ins and other forms of protest were the first step, though it was not followed by a second step (inaudible) to follow. People that planned for these sit-ins did not have a vision to follow that by more action.

The government, for it's part, the current government, I mean, has no strategy, no solutions to offer and we are on the verge of elections. I don't know how the situation will turn. I don't think the security situation will change in the months to come

before the elections because the basic problem remains, and that is -- this is in addition to other political problems between the political partners, there are agreements which were not implemented and many other things -- strategies which should have been implemented but there were all put aside and annulled.

There is a strategy for the security situation, but it's being implemented wrongly. It's the same strategy which the Americans followed in 2007, 2008, and by that I mean to involve large numbers of the army. American had around 60,000 around that and more than quarter of a million Iraqis are just divided (inaudible) and areas surrounded by concrete, fences and Baghdad's areas. This is not a political situation; this is a military solution.

And then (inaudible) military solution can be of some benefit for some period of time, but it will never solve a deeply rooted crisis and in the aftermath of the Americans, the Iraqi government used the same tactics. But remember, the American army was a foreign army and was behaving as an occupying

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military power. The Iraqi government now is behaving as if the Iraqi army, the national army, is an army of occupation.

MR. SHAIKH: To your criticisms here, if there was one thing that could be done now politically to start to address some of the grievances that you've said, what should that be? What would your advice be?

MR. AL-NAKIB: (Inaudible) and I think it is too late because we are close to election in less than one year. So (inaudible) government now in power since 2010, therefore I don't see any solution -- (inaudible) solution for the time being. I hope there will be, but I don't think (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. It's a good time to turn to Ali. On the same track, where is it that we can build greater strength now moving forward? And, you know, you've heard some of the grievances, I think, perhaps very representative of some of the grievances you've talked about to each other and have been expressed in Iraq. In any case, could you address that?

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MR. AL-DABBAGH: I think there is a crisis of confidence between the partners -- this was huge and the gaps were never filled, but on the contrary, they increased and they got bigger and bigger through the different positions taken by both parties in order to be fair to all. When we analyze the current situation in Iraq, there is a crisis of confidence between all the components and all the political partners. There is a crisis of confidence with the Kurdish region, Kurdistan, and the crisis with Kurdistan may be of a different nature than the one with other political partners, but ultimately it's a crisis of confidence nonetheless.

This could have led to a limited (inaudible) between Baghdad and the Kurdish region, which could have lasted for a few days, and this would have meant a total collapse of the political situation in Iraq.

What's happening with the western region, this has delayed all the reconciliation attempts that Mr. Falah has been talking about because there a little bit had been achieved, but as a result of the

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huge anger experienced by the western regions and the protest, this was ignited by politicians because of a political crisis, which developed into a communal genuine sense of anger and (inaudible) and resentment, which is compounded throughout the western region.

The time which remains for this government, in my estimation, is not enough to fill all these gaps in the crisis of confidence, although the relations with (inaudible) and the Kurdish region had improved and the Baghdad government or Mr. al-Maliki, in fact, the crisis was not between all the government, but it was between Mr. al-Maliki and Mr. Massoud Barzani.

As for the gas and oil, I don't think this current government will manage to pass any legislation regarding that because there is disagreement on everything, on the draft, on the process, on the aims, et cetera, et cetera. So, the only thing which remains to talk about is the elections.

I think any postponement of the elections will lead to a serious threat and the very active parties will not allow that no matter how better or

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worse the security situation gets.

The biggest -- now all the hopes are pinned on the elections now and because everybody expects the minimum possible of an agreement as a result of the election process to build the state's institutions. It's not just an election we're talking about. Iraq lacks the institutions which will safeguard the elections, the results of the vote, and these institutions are not being established properly.

All institutions we have, all the leaders of the army have no approval by the parliament. They're all working in the acting capacity not as approved by the parliament. And also, all other parallel organizations to government have not been built in a way which is the subject of agreement between different partners. This is another cause which continues to the crisis.

Building confidence and building the institutions and the participation, and if participation is not in just the council of ministers, but also should be spread to all decision making

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institutions.

MR. SHAIKH: I also want Nisar, please, to comment, and of course you may want to say a couple of other things as well, Nisar, and that is, as has been pointed out, there has been some economic process, at least in certain areas and certainly in the KRG area, and more generally, Iraq's GDP has grown from something like \$20 billion to \$120 billion between 2002 and 2012, in the last decade, and yet, as we've discussed before, probably about 75 percent of Iraqis still identify themselves as a priority being to reduce poverty as the country's most pressing need. Seventy-nine percent of households still rate electricity as bad or very bad, and only 26 percent of the population says that it has adequate water and sanitation, particularly (inaudible). What is it that the government could be doing in this regard to address these issues? And surely are they not also part of the grievances that feed into the broader political position? I'll first address that to you, Ali, and then come to Nisar.

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MR. AL-DABBAGH: Yes, there is a problem of services in addition to the other problems that are suffered by the country, so, the services are in a state of deterioration. In excess of ten years, we have a problem of electricity, and it is not expected the situation would be solved in the next coming years.

There's a problem in education, problem in employment, in health services, so many problems in services.

The most important of these crises is the management which is not planned, which is not a kind of a rationalized -- rational plan in our management, so the political parties that won the elections unfortunately did not come with people who have a potential technical and potential capacity to be able to manage the states, and consequently these people, whether they are ministers or under secretaries or below that, do not have neither a vision nor planning capacity in order for them to be able to solve the current situation and crisis in the states.

In the past we had the cars -- ration cards that are used by the citizens, so -- and they used to be used by the citizens. Now we have only four components, four items in this, and they also now we do not have sugar and the formula milk for children, so we have a crisis in management. And this is reflected in the different services presented to people. Not all of them, because of the political situation, but mostly due to the management, because it is not a rational management, and this can only be achieved through building institutions in the state.

There is a pressure from the people on all political parties, so, I mean, those people, they punish those who do not give them services during the elections, and this is very important. This is something that they want to do as people because they want to develop the situation and reinforce the situation.

If we have a rational management, that would reinforce the situation or solve the situation.

We had many, many problems in the different

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governments, especially in the south during Ramadan because, I mean, there were promises that this was going to be the last year that they will have cuts of electricity and also drinking water and promises regarding education. So, many, many things have been promised, and I would like to go back to the first point that I mentioned at the beginning and I said we have many, many resources in Iraq, and I think through these resources we can build our country.

Through rational management we can have rational departments that can give and cater for all the services required by the people. I think certain sectors in Iraq are even worse than some sectors in Afghanistan taking into account the limited resources that are available in Afghanistan.

So, I think that people are not making the utmost of the resources, and I'm talking here about the human resources and not the financial resources.

MS. TALABANY: Mr. Ali Al-Dabbagh, the lack of good governance in the majority of Iraq and the lack of transparency in the process of decision making

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is one of the major obstacles.

You mentioned basic services such as electricity. We used to have two to four hours of electricity up to five, six years ago, but due to sound economic policies, due to sound policy in the oil and gas sector, because we also have a regional oil and gas law which was passed back in 2007, and also because the government has clear policies and a vision for the future where we want to be, we have a vision 2020 for example, for health and education. We know where we want to be. We still are lacking a lot of the basic needs, let's say, in the health sector because Iraq was one of the top in terms of health in the 80s and the 70s.

However, now we have 24-hours of electricity in the Kurdistan region. Sometimes it goes down to 23

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MR. SHAIKH: So, you said you've gone from two to four hours.

MS. TALABANY: Yes.

MR. SHAIKH: When was that?

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MS. TALABANY: Two to four hours, four to five years ago.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay, four to five years ago.

MS. TALABANY: Yes, yes.

MR. SHAIKH: To now 24 hours --

MS. TALABANY: Almost. Almost. Sometimes it goes down to 23, 24 because people are yet to be educated about energy conservations and so on and so forth, but still we moved from two to 24 hours almost, which is a drastic change. You see the Iraqis that come to the Kurdistan region and they see this development, your heart goes out to them because they could have this and more.

Iraq is a wealthy country, as Mr. Al-Dabbagh said, not just wealth wise, from the human capital as well. So, the practice of democracy is crucial, understanding or having better understanding for federalism as a system in Iraq by our politicians, and entrenching that into our education system might help open the eyes of the ordinary Iraqi citizen about this, even public debate about the benefits of

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decentralization and federalism in general would add to this improvement in the sectors as well as the security situation.

Give a man a job and he will not be engaged in any terrorist acts, unless, of course, there is always a very small minority that do want to disturb the country. But believe me, having a better economic situation, better job market, more investment, will improve Iraq. And I am hopeful -- we must remain hopeful for all of Iraq keeping the dialogue open.

But having said that, if I may just go back to history, how the creation of Iraq in the 20s when it was under the British mandate, even back then, Kurdistan -- southern Kurdistan and the other part of Kurdistan, which was part of the Ottoman Empire, even at the time the Kurds were given the right to self determination and then later on -- it is actually in President Woodrow Wilson's speech when this case was made for the League of Nations in 1922, I think, if we go back to that time, and the Treaty of Sevres was drafted and so on and so forth, so even back then

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there was this model for having the right to self determine, but also it is a reasonable mind frame for all Iraqis to believe in federalism.

It is working for us in the Kurdistan region, it could work for everybody else in Iraq.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay, go ahead please.

Actually, before you do, I have one question for you, Nisar, and that is maybe on the minds of some and let me just say, to what extent does the KRG see itself as a part of Iraq, you know, moving forward, particularly with regards to the increasingly complicated situation we're seeing in the region?

MS. TALABANY: We do see ourselves as part of Iraq. We are part of the solution and part of the problem as well, but most of the time, the Kurds, even during the days of the opposition, we have been seen as a unity, as a unifying force amongst the Iraqi opposition and the Iraqi President, Talabani, the President Barzani, they are all seen as wise, Iraqi politicians with plenty of experience and it is not about division at all because we would have had, and

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we have had, plenty of opportunity for separation and the Kurds, the ordinary Kurd, does believe in the right to self determination.

But as long as the constitution in Iraq is respected, as long as there is a practice of democracy, as long as there is respect for basic human rights, minority rights, religious rights, we would like to remain within Iraq, with a prosperous Iraq, an Iraq that respects the practice of democracy.

MR. AL-NAKIB: I would like to talk about infrastructure in Iraq. Iraq, as you know, has entered many wars since the 80s of the 20th century, and after that, we had the blockade, economic blockade or siege, and the infrastructure that we have in Iraq does not go beyond 14 percent, is not beyond 14 percent. It was built in the 60s and the 70s of the 20th century.

Iraq, in 2004, when I was governor of Salahaddin and because I am an engineer I do very much care about these things.

In 2004 -- the beginning of 2004, Iraq

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needed \$200 billion to rebuild the infrastructure, electricity, and so on and so forth. The problem, during these ten years, we did not have a strategy to rebuild Iraq and consequently we did not achieve anything strategic as far as infrastructure in Iraq. That is why money was wasted and otherwise these things would have been achieved in Iraq.

In Salahaddin we have eight regions and we don't have any drainage facilities in those regions and water is only 25 percent and roads constitute only 25 or 30 percent in any of those regions of the (inaudible). All these issues have not witnessed any advancement or development even as far as health is concerned.

So, I mean, health in the 70s -- the health sector in the 70s and the 60s was very prosperous, very much developed. We had many, many capabilities as far as human capacity is concerned and many of them have left the country and have emigrated to other countries due to the situation in Iraq.

And also agriculture has retreated a great

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deal and even the drinking water that we have in Baghdad is, I mean, imported from the GCC countries. We, people who have two rivers, can't imagine that.

So, we did not have a strategy as far as the economy, the infrastructure is concerned, all these things, we did not have a strategy and this is the reason why we have these problems. I think we have to revisit all the situation in Iraq.

MR. AL-DABBAGH: As far as services are concerned, I did not want to comment because Mr. Falah talked about this issue. The state is unable to cater for the services, so the country normally should cater for electricity and Ms. Nisar talked about electricity. And if the government of Kurdistan did not give this opportunity to -- I mean, public sector -- to the private sector, they would not have been able to have electricity plants and stations for them to cater for electricity.

I think the crisis because of the government does not have the resources due to the siege and locate and the different wars that we had, financially

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cannot cater it, and even administratively, it cannot take the country to the previous situation.

I think that the policy that has been followed nowadays, everything is in the hands of the government and this is the biggest mistake that is being committed by the state, that is why it was not able to attract investment, it was not able to build any infrastructure. I think the solution lies in the private sector and the privatization of many of these services that are presented in Iraq.

I mean, I give you an example, clearing of the streets. I mean, Iraq was not able to do that until they have used a number of companies in Basra, in other governments, so there are companies that do this job and now the situation is acceptable to some extent. I think the best policy would be to move towards privatization for us to be able to overcome the financial and administrative problem that we are facing.

MR. SHAIKH: (XXX Translator Speaking Arabic -- track didn't switch) -- and the legality of a

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military-led intervention, particularly a U.S.-led military intervention. I'd like to start just from here if I could get quick views from you, all three of you, do you think the comparison between Syria and Iraq, in this sense, makes sense? And how do we move forward on the Syrian issue, especially from where you are sitting in Iraq?

SPEAKER: (Track didn't switch to translator) -- completely different. Now the entire world situation is different. Syria's problem is rather complicated now in the current situation. I don't think any military intervention will solve the problem in Syria because Syria, until now the situation with opposition is very fragile and they cannot really unite their ranks and in addition to that, if there is a military strike, we have to think of the Diaspora, what will happen after that. Will Syria be able to absorb this strike and remain united and cohesive or will there be civil war? Is there an alternative leadership, which can replace the current Syrian leadership?

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I'm not claiming this current one is good enough, unfortunately the whole country has been destroyed in recent months, so unless the Syrian army does something particular insofar as running that part of the country, I don't see any alternatives.

MS. TALABANY: (Inaudible) -- all diplomatic means have been exhausted or not until now for a strike to happen. Certainly, I have my voice, like my co-panelists here, that this situation is different, of course, because of the reasons mentioned earlier, but is it in the interest of the United States to actually intervene? Have the risks and costs been analyzed and outweighed? And also, we need to make sure that the mistakes made in Iraq, if we were to see any similarities, not to be repeated. Is there a true exit strategy? Are the objectives clear? If there is a strike, is it going to be a major one? Is it to weaken the regime? Is it to remove the regime? Is it a basic threat? All these questions need to be, I hope, addressed and asked by the American citizens and by the Congress, of course, and definitely we need to

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focus on the diplomatic solutions.

It is not a good idea, definitely, to intervene without a UN Security Council Resolution at this point and again, I reiterate, we do not want the mistakes that were made in Iraq to be repeated again in a neighboring country because it is affecting all the neighbors, and the region, as well as globally. The United States lost some credibility after the war in Afghanistan as well as the one in Iraq. We need to regain this momentum. We need to believe in the transfer of a true and genuine democracy rather than just bringing in a product from the West. We all know that democracy is a product of the process.

So, are the Syrians ready to accept that? And we should not only look at the opposition and the regime, let's not forget the people of Syria, the academics, the middle class, and all those refugees. We have had 200,000 refugees in Kurdistan and only in the past two weeks we had an influx of 47,000. The weather is relatively okay at the moment, but we have very harsh winters and our resources are very

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stretched. How are we going to maintain that?

So, the questions are continuous. There are similarities, but politically there (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: Before I go to Ali, you had mentioned earlier, of course, the Kurdish people have suffered their own chemical attack in 1988 (inaudible) around those years, and yet you say that really not all diplomatic methods have been exhausted. It is very telling that you feel that that is still the way forward. Is that correct?

MS. TALABANY: Certainly, certainly. The Kurds in Iraq suffered multiple chemical attacks throughout the 80s. It was in Balisan and many other areas, but the images of Halibja were captured and everyone was able to see them. That's why we remember Halibja and Halibja became the symbol of genocide in Kurdistan against the Kurdish people.

But nowadays we see images, there is social media, there is new technologies, but still we, as the last people on earth that chemical weapons were used against, we still believe that diplomatic means are

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the best way forward. If there is an intervention, a military intervention, then it should be -- there should be a resolution, it should be a legal war. History will not be on our side if it was otherwise. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. And I come to you, Ali, and I also ask you the question, what measures can Iraq take to insulate itself from the effects of what's going on in Syria?

MR. AL-DABBAGH: I'll agree that the similarities do not make us think that the situation is comparable between Syria now and Iraq in 2003, but the American invasion and the American occupation of Iraq, of course, when we say occupation it's because the United Nations designated it as such, has created a tremendous amount of pressure on the White House not to repeat the same experience.

And the Iraq situation impacted the American public opinion more than Vietnam, so therefore no American president will think of repeating the same foolish thing that could happen in Iraq. And if we

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look closely at Syria and the situation between those who want to bring down the Bashar regime and the Bashar regime's downfall, which can create a huge impact on Iraq. There is no real disagreement on the Syrian regime violating the rights of its own people, but we're talking about this military strike with one aim in mind, that is to force the regime into negotiations.

We know Taliban was created by three countries, one Arab country plus Pakistan plus the American administration. It was created by these three and financed by these three and they had full control over this and this movement, when they gained the power in Afghanistan for four years, they hit New York, Madrid, and Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, Iraq, and everywhere.

So, this Taliban government managed to do all of this and the countries which created it, financed it, supported it, and had all influence on it managed to avoid that. This was before 2000 in Afghanistan, which is isolated, which is poor, now

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Syria is at the heart of the world, Syria in 2012 or 2013, the violence it's experiencing a new version of Taliban and al-Qaeda, which is more violent than al-Qaeda, so therefore you can guaranty that the American's track will not lead to the collapse of the regime or parts of it, which can lead to a total collapse of the structure of government in Syria and the kind of chaos in Libya -- we saw in Libya and Iraq will not be repeated.

So, consequently, this can create a regional situation which will really be a huge fire, which is like a forest fire, you can use one matchstick to ignite a fire, forest fire, but you can never control the extent to which it can expand later on.

We are very sensitive, not because we support Bashar al-Assad. There are people who do so and there are people who fight along the side of Bashar al-Assad from Iraq and there are those who are against him, but many political wise men see that Iraq is faced with danger, the Kurds, the Shi'as, the Sunnis, if the situation in Syria collapses.

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So, therefore, for Iraq to isolate and insulate itself then the official position of Iraq does not agree with a military strike against Syria and we think the political situation is better. Unfortunately, the initiative by Mr. al-Maliki did not need approval of anybody because of (inaudible).

And going back to your question, what kind of measures can Iraq take, first Iraq should remedy its own internal situation, put its own house in order. Now we are all on the same ship. I do not deny that the Gulf countries also threaten with dangers and the neighboring countries, but Iraq will be at the heart of that because it's adjacent to Syria. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Of course, I focused on the U.S. and the U.S. intervention. We can also focus on the extremists that may be filling, probably, in areas filling, a vacuum which could be growing -- which is growing in Syria itself.

But let us go back to who has been principally responsible for killing tens of thousands

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of people, and not just with the alleged use of chemical weapons, but clearly with heavy weaponry, which has done the most damage, committing very egregious crimes against humanity and war crimes, which the UN itself and its Human Rights Commission and others have said, and that the main arsonist and threatening to be the arsonist of the entire region is Assad and the regime itself.

Why won't the Maliki government do more to take a position on that? And, you know, in terms of - - I understand the issue of military strikes, but in terms of trying to get the regime to stop some of that clear disproportionate use of force?

SPEAKER: I don't envy al-Maliki for the situation he finds himself in, the situation vis-à-vis Syria (inaudible) that vis-à-vis Iran. Some people see the relations with Iran as very good, strategic, and the others see it as very bad and harmful.

It's the same thing, some people view America as the biggest evil or the biggest devil or Satan. Others see it as a very good partner, so

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therefore Iraq and its policy, I don't think is similar to Turkey's policy or Qatar's policy or Iran's policy, for that matter. Iraq, unfortunately, did not develop a clear vision.

There is some sort of sympathy with Bashar al-Assad. Turkey took consideration of that. Iraq has suffered from Bashar al-Assad more than what the Lebanese have suffered from Bashar al-Assad in Lebanon and people think that 50 percent of the terrorist attacks in Iraq originated in Syria and Bashar al-Assad's Syria, and they even went to the UN to complain.

But nevertheless and having said that, people think that the collapse of his regime and the absence of an acceptable alternative is the real threat and now the idea of the fall of Bashar as a dictator, a despot who killed himself, not from (inaudible) Ba'ath regime, this regime has always been a despotic one and they bear responsibility for all the crimes they committed.

But the void and the vacuum created by the

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collapse of the regime is a bigger evil and the situation cannot be solved by a military strike, although even if it's limited in nature, even if it aims at bringing all the different parties into the negotiation table, the region is sitting on a powder keg and we have to salvage the situation, not ignite it.

And the American regime or administration has been (inaudible) hesitant, putting one-step forward and two backwards vis-à-vis Syria. Now they're (inaudible) trying to deal with the situation, but this dithering and the lack of a clear strategy and also nobody knows what this (inaudible) will be about. Is it to save the Syrian (inaudible)? Is it to create a regime change? I don't think even the administration itself has any answers because people who sit in this region see things differently than those who sit in Washington and theoretically deal with this.

We saw that happening in Iraq. Everything they wrote on Iraq on paper and planned for, when they

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came to Iraq, not even 1 percent of it turned out to be right and the other problem that the administration suffers from and people in Washington, they have a blanket point of view. They do not see beyond their offices and they cannot listen to anybody, they do not want to pull the curtain to see whether it's day or night outside. They only see what's presented on a piece of paper, put on their desk, and this is the biggest danger. We cannot trust the administration with the fate of this region and the situation in Syria is not linked to Bashar al-Assad only, but to Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and every other country in the region.

MR. SHAIKH: Do you two want to comment? I want to open it up to the audience. We have about 20, 25 minutes, just because we started a little bit late, but I would ask you, please, is to clearly give us your name and then your affiliation that you may have. That would be helpful, I think, to myself and to our guests as well, and I'll take a number of questions if you have them.

Would anyone like

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to start? Okay, let's start with our friend --

MR. ALEXANDER: Hello. Justin Alexander.

In the next four years, Iraq's oil production is probably going to at least double. The plan is it would quadruple, but that's not going to happen. But nonetheless, the resources will be much higher. Will that be sufficient to solve Iraq's problems? What else is needed?

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thanks. My name is Halid

(inaudible) Northwestern University in Doha. Well, my comment is on the somehow consensual and collective position vis-à-vis (inaudible) intervention in Syria, and somehow -- some kind of puzzling, maybe surprising that you have this kind of agreement across the board. And when you compare -- when you think of 2003 invasion of Iraq, that without that military intervention we would have had maybe three representatives here from Saddam Hussein government, so -- and now there is -- well, let me be very honest. I feel there is a lack of maybe moral solidarity with

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the Syrian people. When you think only (inaudible) with regional politics and the stability of Iraq, the stability of the region, all these considerations of course should be taken into account.

And yet, there is daily killing taking place in Syria, and if you say, well, diplomatic means have not been exhausted, well, there is a process of two years and a half, maybe three years they have exhausted all these measures and the killing is still there, and especially from Nisar, where the chemical weapons were used in Kurdistan, and I thought you would be more sympathetic to the people there because you have been through that kind of experience.

And now, if you maintain the situation, I think, the only maybe regional -- regionally speaking, the only winner is Iran, because, again, maybe it was a mistake to do -- if somebody says it was a mistake to do the intervention in Iraq 2003 because (inaudible) was maybe to present Iraq on a silver plate to Iran. Now it's another mistake not to intervene because another -- yet again another gift

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may be, but because of the lack of intervention,
again, to Iran.

So, this (inaudible) will be sustained. And I think back to Mr. Ali, I think the idea of the whole carefully may be calculated intervention this time is even to speed up the diplomatic process, which is to weaken, not to destroy, to weaken the regime so that to force them to come to the negotiation table.

So, I think there is a logic that I thought would have been maybe more kind of comprehended by the panelists. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I'm (inaudible) a journalist from Pakistan. Just a small clarification, which I would like to have from Mr. Ali. He mentioned that in formation of Taliban three countries are involved, including my country, and -- Pakistan -- and the attacked on New York, the attacked on Madrid plus, was there any one involved -- any Pakistani involved on New York attack?

MR. SHAIKH: I think we have three good questions here. Let's take this as a first round.

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The first in terms of Iraqi oil production and its potential in terms of revenues and what that can do, the second, you heard, I don't think I need to repeat it, and the clarification or the answer on Pakistan and the Taliban. Should we start -- well, let's start from here and we'll go through.

SPEAKER: No, I don't think Iraq's income and any increase with oil revenues will improve the situation, if the political situation remains as it is, unless there is a substantive change in the Iraqi constitution and the political process, amendments to the constitution and we have real democracy in Iraq, I don't think the revenues and any increase or decrease, for that matter, will improve the situation because there's a huge amount of wastage in Iraq's resources and there is very bad planning, or in fact, no planning. It's not even bad planning; it's no planning. There are no strategies for managing these resources. If we suppose that they administer to the political situation in Iraq remains as it is, I don't anticipate any change. All this money will only lead

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to more fighting, more arming, and this will impact negatively on the general situation of the country.

This is, as far as the gentleman who asked about it, we had no previous agreement between us before we came to this panel. In fact, we know Syria has a historic role to play amongst Arab countries and the Arab world in general, and Syria remains an important country in the region, and we are really, really annoyed why this country is being destroyed and the process of destruction it's been going through for over two years, so we do not want to see the calamities we face in Iraq repeated in Syria. We, of course, sympathize with the Syrian people and they sacrificed a lot for many Arab and Muslim causes, but there is a point here really, if this military strike takes place, will there be a leadership -- a Syrian leadership, which can hold the country together (inaudible), whether politically or militarily? We do not want this military strike to lead to total collapse in security and different gangs and bandits ruling the country and, you know, consequently, one of

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the important considerations here, and very serious, in Syria -- I think the fighting in Syria has moved from fighting against the regime to an inter fighting, a sectarian fighting in Syria, and the Syrian army still has not changed attitudes towards the general situation in the country.

As for the region -- other regional aspects of this, maybe some people here will agree or disagree with me, Iran has now a very major role to play. It is impacting the political situation in Iraq and Syria and Lebanon and the Palestinian -- of course, Iran has become the only country in the world -- in the region, sorry, which has a strategy.

Other countries, with all due respect, even Turkey, which was away from the Arab world, now is getting closer and edging closer, but without a real understanding, it has no clear strategy. So, therefore, many of the things which are happening are because of Iran's doing and planning whether to do with Iraq, Syria, or other places, and one of the mistakes the Syrian regime has committed is when it

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isolated itself from other Arab countries and put all its eggs in the Iranian basket.

The (inaudible) al-Assad can -- he used to use Iran as a playing card, but now Iran uses Bashar al-Assad as a card whenever it wants.

There is a question of Hezbollah, which is becoming a really thorny issue in the region, also in Bahrain, in Yemen, and many other regions, Iran is playing a major role. Even in Afghanistan now, Iran has its hands in -- Iran is the only country in the region which has what you can call a strategy and a policy and is exerting an effort. This is the situation how I see it. Thank you.

MS. TALABANY: (Inaudible) of Iraq if it is accompanied by sound economic policies, better institutions, better practice on democracy, certainly the outcome would be better for the Iraqi citizen, but if the current status quo remains, then I doubt that very much and we all know that.

Hopefully, let us see if the next elections will bring about some change in the policies.

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In terms of your question, sir, thank you for addressing that point in particular. It is because we suffered, that's why we know how difficult it is to be attacked. There are still allegations and we need further verifications now in the case of Syria, but when it happened between '86 and '88 in Kurdistan part of Iraq, it took us about 20 years for us to be able to start this debate in the international arena and only this year a few of the parliaments in Sweden and in the United Kingdom have started discussing the acts of genocide and passing on (inaudible).

So, it does take time, but I am not with a strike no matter what because we need to know the scope of the strike and who are you targeting and as Mr. Nakib said, what is the alternative? There needs to be an exit strategy, you need to know exactly when the targets happened, when the invasion happened in Baghdad, yes, the regime was weakened overnight, but we lost -- we have a lot of casualties.

And now it is a street war, it's a civil war

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as well, and plus the military, as Mr. Nakib said, is still the regime. So, you need further internal movement before and you need a unified and strong opposition in order to take place. Is there going to be a transition government? Is there going to be coalition forces? What are the alternatives? You can't lead a country like that. But there needs to be some form of intervention, not necessarily a military strike. The hard line, as we all know, has been crossed and we need to intervene, but what kind and how? Have we really exhausted all diplomatic means is the question. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKHA: Particularly address the point, also, about, you know, the threats of the use of force or even the use of force used in the right way can actually help the political side.

SPEAKER: If I understood the question -- maybe I understood it differently. My answer to you is, no, Iraq's resources are not enough. Seventy percent of the income goes on salaries, just to operate, pay for people, and 30 percent is for

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investments, and because there are high subsidies and the salaries keep going up, so therefore this is increasing. The remaining 30 percent of the 70 percent, which is only \$30 billion, are not enough to build (inaudible). Iraq needs three million housing units, 6,000 schools, 1,500 medical schools, all the road systems are collapsing, the communication system are collapsing, water and sewerage system. All these utilities and services are not working, so therefore we do not need rehabilitation, we need the rebuilding right from the start.

Iraq's resources for ten years will not be enough. The direction should go in parallel with privatization. Unless we move towards privatization for some quick rebuilding, I don't think Iraq can come out of the bottleneck it finds itself in. Good governance and the best practices, good usage and management of the resources, I think this is my answer to your question.

Mr. (inaudible), we -- this position means, if we stand in solidarity with the Syrian people, we

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can take a position similar to Qatar because Qatar is far away, it's not like Iraq. Iran is not an adjacent country to Syria. It is Iraq. That's why Iran uses Syria to withstand any source of danger, which can affect it and the political elite in Iraq, although some lived in Syria and served Syria, and there is some sort of favors bestowed by the half of al-Assad's regime upon these people, but the feeling that they accept this regime as acceptable is not the dominating feeling amongst the Iraqi elite.

But we know the Syrian people are a sisterly country and relations between Iraqis and Syrians are a lot more than the Syrians and the Egyptians or the Syrians and the Jordanians, so therefore there is that general feeling.

Now we have refugees, Syrian refugees who live in Iraqi houses, not refugee camps, and Mosul and Ambar too, (inaudible) who accepted most of the refugees, but there are others in Najaf and Basra and others. There is a lot of anger and resentment against the Syrian regime, but I (inaudible) for

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heeding the lesson from Iraq, not the positive things, not people -- look at any positive situation in the current Iraq situation. And what I am calling for is to learn the lessons from the negative aspects, to learn from the mistakes.

For example, in Libya, I was -- had lunch with some Libyan friends. They say the experience of Iraq post-Kaddafi regime is being repeated now in Libya. This is what we fear. If this military strike can safely lead to the downfall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, then a united position comes to take part like what happened in Iraq. I don't think any Iraqi are against that.

But now the Desert Fox, 1996, which targeted Saddam Hussein regime, Saddam survived, but many people were killed. And Bashar will not be effected, (inaudible) effect from this strike. What we fear is an open-ended interference without a clear strategy, clear targets, clear goals, because this is what we have become accustomed to from the administration.

I don't have intelligence reports whether

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any Afghanis took part in the attacks. I have no idea because I'm not an intelligence man.

MR. SHAIKH: (Inaudible) and the gentleman at the back. We start with the lady. If you could put your hand up, please.

SPEAKER: Good evening. Before we talk about Iraq's ability to face the regional situation, we cannot face any external (inaudible) and you cannot do that with a government which is so weak. If we want real democracy in Iraq, the prime minister in Ramadan had a meeting with economists. He really sent a message to his own partners in the -- and he seems that he is suffering from his partner's more than his enemies.

The essence of his message saying that he has no real power when he admits that the militias have all the power and the parliament does not pass any laws and when he says (inaudible) and the Ministry of Health managed that -- any authority to stop establishing five hospitals. So, if this is the situation that the (inaudible) government are very

weak and fragile constitution, how can we withstand any outside threat?

I don't (inaudible) some people got to the positions they are in, such important decision making, I don't see how (inaudible), he used to be a spokesperson for the government.

The prime minister's speech was very clear, very serious on Ramadan.

Secondly, we, as Arab people, are not yet ready for democracy, not at all, for one simple reason, because democracy is freethinking. We -- all our ballots are directed by religious figures. They tell us who to vote for. We talk about a civil state and we are not civil states. What's happening in Iraq, there are political and religious powers that support certain paths to bring them into power, and at the regional level, they made the Arab world into an arena to fight their differences.

MR. SHAIKH: I appreciate your assessment. Do you have a question?

SPEAKER: No, this was just an intervention,
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not a question, a message I wanted to send.

MR. SHAIKH: (Inaudible).

SPEAKER: My name is Ekra Hassan from Strategic Study Center. I have a comment on the general direction of this workshop.

I was under the impression that part of the questions I hope to hear that the title was the political future of Iraq amid the regional turmoil. I wanted to hear something about Iraq's relations with the major powers, America, Russia, China, as well as the regional power. And maybe our excuse that there is not enough time to cover that side of the agenda, but the strategic agreement signed between Iraq and the United States before the withdrawal of American forces, what are the latest developments, especially in view -- and you know better than me -- that Iraq now in a situation is much closer to an Iranian election access and we know the exchange of visits at the highest level and also arms deals, some are canceled, but nonetheless, this is my first question.

My second question, very briefly, the three

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panelists seem to be in agreement in their refusal of a military strike against Syria and I think Iraq, one way or another, is involved in the Syrian crisis. Maybe the official level is pretending to be neutral, but right from the start, the Iraqi government refuses any military strikes despite the fact that part of the situation in Syria now has active Iraqi participation and some armed groups from Iraq are going into Syria and fighting there and also the movement of arms and individuals across the borders between Iraq and Syria. My question, therefore, specifically, don't you see the situation in Syria now as more serious on Iraq and the Sunnis in particular and therefore we must move from a policy of non-interference into taking a more active role, to feel one way or another, especially in view of the situation in Syria now is open to interference by many parties?

MR. SHAIKH: In the front.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) from Qatar University.

Mr. Ali Al-Dabbagh said one of the main mistakes committed by Bashar al-Assad that he was not very

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close to the Arab region and Arab countries. My question, do you think that al-Maliki government, isn't it also very far from the Arab neighboring countries and they have created a division between Iraq and the Arab countries and also between Iraq and the other GCC countries? And to what extent does the GCC countries intervene in supporting the opposition in Iraq? This is one quick question.

The second question, to what extent do you think Iraq is very much interested in hosting the Gulf or the GCC football cup in Basra? Does that have -- does it lead to disagreement or does it have a dimension that it includes or it refers to the disagreements between Iraq and the GCC countries?

MR. SHAIKH: I'll allow you to speak to them directly. We're actually running out of time, so I'll ask you just to take maybe one or two of those points and each one of our panelists just to respond.

I'll start with Ali first since a lot of the questions were directed to him.

MR. Al-DABBAGH: Yes, we agree. Yes, at the
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end of the day the situation is very complex in Iraq, nobody can deny that, and that is why we need to revisit, to review the situation -- the political situation. This revision is very important indeed. And this is similar to a small tree. I mean, if you try to take care of this small tree when it is still small you would have, I mean, positive future, but if you do not do that at the beginning, after that it would be very difficult.

As far as the situation in the future strategic relationship with the United States of America, I think that the agreement that was signed with the United States of America is very important and we have seen a time that it was not activated, prior and after the elections, until the withdrawal of the forces and we have seen a transition from military cooperation to civil cooperation and we hope that we would be able to benefit from these agreements and all the competencies and capabilities that the United States have administratively, educationally, and the different systems that are available in the United

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States.

So, Iraq, I mean, the main agreement between Iraq and the United States was a military agreement or military cooperation, but we would like to move now to capacity building after all these wars that have been waged.

But up to now, we haven't seen a real effort exerted by the United States to move technology to destroy the country for them to be able to -- for the Iraqis to be able to rebuild their own states.

You talked about danger on Sunnis. I do not want to answer all the questions, but I'll just try to answer some of them. One point, when al-Qaeda entered Iraq, when it started, it started in the Sunni's area, they started with the different -- I mean, with the killing and the uprising was in the western regions, and it started by the Americans. And these groups have violated all the tribal and the morals, rules, customary rules in those regions. That is why we had the big uprising against all this behavior that was exercised, that is why I have to

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tell you that the American administration benefitted from this anger.

So, this danger is not a danger on Shiite or Sunnis. Each person who was moderate, these groups, these extremist groups are against any moderate person. I mean, we have that in Lebanon, in Saudi Arabia, they kill the Christians, the Muslims, they are against moderate human beings, so in Iraq, if we have extremist groups, it doesn't mean that the Shiites will benefit or Sunnis will benefit from them.

As far as the GCC is concerned, yes, there is a big -- an agreed feeling that there is regional interference in Iraq and these interferences are not from Iraq or the GCC countries or some of the but there is a crisis in the relationship between the GCC and Iraq because of this situation, this bad situation, gives the opportunity to other countries to intervene and interfere.

So, a relationship built and based on respect, this is not something that we can see now, that we have now, because we have a crisis

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politically, I mean, in the region and also in Iraq, and naturally that is why we have a crisis in relationship and still we have not reached a relationship that is based on respect.

So, our brothers in the GCC, they talk about the security for Iraq to be able to host a kind of a sports competition and they are right in doing so, the justification because of the security situation, but Iraq is still not ready to do that. Yes, I agree with them. But I have to tell you that the political relationship is not yet ready to have a normal relationship and to have a cordial relationship between Iraq and the GCC countries.

I think the first step is to try to rebuild this relationship before we do anything else. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: (Inaudible) and that was, do you think that Iraq is part of the Russian-Iranian axis and its support for Assad sort of proves that? Or is this a gross simplification of where Iraq is in the regional mix?

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MS. TALABANY: Thank you. Iraq needs to establish ties with all its neighbors and regional powers in the area, whether it is Syria or Turkey or Iran or the Gulf states, Russia is a super power, you must not deny that, as well as the United States. Iraq, as a sovereign state, must establish better ties with its neighbors, particularly in the current situation in Syria. We must be a platform for dialogue, for our sake and for our neighbors and for the sake of the people in Syria.

Lebanon and Jordan are going to be hit badly, even worse than us maybe. They are smaller, the countries, their wealth resources are very limited, and internal conflicts in Lebanon will be escalated.

So, it's not in anybody's interest. If this issue is simplified, it is of course in everybody's interest if there is better dialogue and better ties amongst the other neighbors. That's my -- I don't want to take up too much time.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me ask you, do you think

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that the Maliki government has moved away from the Arabs?

MR. AL-NAKIB: Sure. There is no doubt about this, there is no doubt about this. It has moved away from the Arabs. We have seen the policies that have been devised in the recent time, even with Syria -- even with Syria, we have seen -- I mean, when Syria was not in agreement with the regime in Iraq, it used to be accused of so many things, some of them are right and some others are not, but Iran has changed different directions as far as the government -- as far as the Iraqi government's policy is concerned and the situation now is, as you said, we have moved away from Arab nationalism from the Arab countries, from the GCC countries, and consequently, I mean, Iran can be taken advantage of if it stays alone. It can be divided on a sectarian basis, on a nationalistic basis, so I would like to comment on something very important, which is al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda, this topic, this issue should be studied in more detail. I'm talking here about all

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extremist, Salafis, Sunnis, al-Qaeda. Let me tell you here as an example, Iraq, we didn't have al-Qaeda in Iraq and look, all of the sudden, we found al-Qaeda in Iraq. What happened in the south, we have the militias did repress many of the Arab tribes in the south, but these militias cannot have any control on the Sunni regions because they do not know these regions.

So, we have to create something, they have to create something to disintegrate this country to have an extremist group that would kill the Sunnis themselves, and consequently, whoever wants the interest of the country and fights for the interests of the country is targeted by these people. I mean, people who are educated, university lecturers, I mean, judges, be it in the south or in the north, I mean, the Kurds were able to protect themselves and safeguard their region, but in the other regions, all nationalistic people have been targeted.

I haven't heard once that militias had any clashes with al-Qaeda. This never happened. We

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didn't have any direct clashes between these militias and al-Qaeda members, and how these people such as al-Zarqawi to have somebody who was not an Iraqi, how was he able to build this very strong group and we did not have al-Qaeda in the first place in Iraq?

I think there should be, I mean, a great country behind them and a country with their great intelligence and financial resources and capabilities for them to be able to support such kind of organization.

Going back to Syria again, Syria did not have al-Qaeda before. Is that true? I lived a good period of time in Syria and I did not see al-Qaeda. I mean, in no time we have seen al-Qaeda and in whose interest, is it in the interest of the Syrian people? That is why these -- we have to really think really deeply about these things before we can reach the solution or result about these things.

The other thing that the Baghdad government can benefit from, I think Iran and the United States, the only thing that they agree upon is Iraq and this

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is something that is very much surprising to me. So, Iran is very happy with the situation in Iraq and the United States is as well. So, how can they agree on something and disagree on everything else?

So, these are indicators -- I mean, this is a situation that has many, many indicators, but we hope that we're going to surpass this crisis.

If you allow me, Salman, talking about the relationship between Iraq and the Arab countries, it is not true that one side should be blamed for it. I think who should be more blamed is the Arab countries since between 2003 and 2010 all those were closed from the part of the Arabs. I mean, Iran was very clever. They have relations with the Sunnis, with the Kurds, and with the Iraqi government, so it is not true that the Arab region is adopting one component of society. And we are not people of different components, we are Iraqi people, we are a diverse country, yes, but the Arab countries, when they close their doors, they have moved us towards Iran. And I think that we need to review -- critically review the relationship with

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Iraq.

I think we are not beseeching to have a relationship with anybody else, but I think Iraq, with its resources, with its location, I think the Arab countries should revisit the situation. They should not try to explain and justify the situation from a sectarian point of view.

I think we should not put it within a sectarian framework and I think we have to have a wise relationship with Iraq. Iraq, with all its history, I mean, is an Arab country and we always tell our Arab brothers, you played a role, I mean, a major role as far as the relationship is concerned.

MS. TALABANY: A simple comment, even the diplomatic missions in Iraq, the Arab countries did not send missions. All the Europeans, the United States, Iran, they all sent missions, even if their excuse was the security situation in Baghdad, although they were inside the Green Zone. Well, come to Kurdistan. I drive myself around at midnight absolutely safe in Erbil. Sometimes I don't do that

in London.

So, you have to think about these realities and practicalities. Why did the Europeans start -- now we've got the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Jordanians, and slowly, the Gulf states? Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Ten seconds, please.

SPEAKER: Just to talk about the relations between Iraq and the Arab countries, when (inaudible) was in power, who started to open up to the Arab countries and we built fairly good relations and we conducted many visits whether to the GCC countries, to Syria, or Jordan or Egypt, even the North African countries, and we started better understanding. Many Arab countries had a vague understanding of Iraq and its government.

If this situation is to continue along that path, maybe our relations with Arab countries would have been much better, but unfortunately (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: We asked ourselves the question, the political future of Iraq amid regional turmoil, and I thank the gentleman at the back for

reminding us of the broader picture as well as (inaudible) for eliciting the discussion we just had in terms of Arab support.

I think I can't summarize everything that was said, but I think a picture that at least emerges to me is that Iraq still has some ways to go ten years on, there's still fragility and weakness in governance and in the state and the political deal between Iraqis themselves -- somebody used the phrase there's still a crisis of confidence in that particular respect.

I'm grateful for the discussion that you had with regards to the socio economic situation and its impact in terms of what needs to be done, and here we heard phrases about still, no vision, nor planning capacity or a lack of focus on catering for services and things like that, which are an important part of it.

Politically I heard that, at the end of the day, we're waiting for elections, maybe next year, and hopefully to get to them, and we hope that we've got the institutions.

A thought that keeps coming up in my own mind is that if Iraq is at a standstill, potentially, and there are bright spots, particularly with regards to what is going on in Iraqi Kurdistan and perhaps lessons to be learned there and also lessons regarding a federal model built on a constitution, which is respected, which is about rights and the rule of law and all the rest of it, but nevertheless, what strikes me is that perhaps Iraq is still pretty much at a standstill.

My worry is -- and here bringing in the regional tumult as well -- that it doesn't start sliding backwards in that vein. And it was very interesting to finally -- to hear your comments, and as was observed as well, with regards to the U.S. strategy in Syria. I've never heard such enmity when it comes to a lack of -- the lamenting of a lack of strategy here, and from three people who lived the Iraqi experience in that respect, and I have not heard so much about taking one step forward and two steps back, in terms of an American presidency.

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And more generally, again, we were struck with regards to Syria and the moral case here, and what comes across is the dangers that you feel in the Iraqi state from a weak and, let's say, imploding Syria with the vacuums and all of that, the focus on the alternatives, as much of course as a change and a stopping to the killing of -- largely that's being perpetrated by the Iraq regime.

So, a lot to say, I'm sure. We could continue the discussion for a very long time, but I will stop it, I will stop myself.

You will have on your chairs, I would just point out, a survey. This is our first debate of this year. It would be great if you could have a look at that and it would be even better if you could just fill in some of it or all of it in terms of comments to help us make this better.

All I would like to do now is to thank Falah Al-Nakib and Nisar Talabany and Ali Al-Dabbagh for making the trip and for making this such an enjoyable discussion. To you and to the rest of our guests I

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would invite you also to come and have some
refreshments next door and thank you very much for
your attention.

(Applause)

* * * * *

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