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IRAQ: ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH?
A CONVERSATION WITH SPEAKER OF IRAQ'S
COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES
USAMA AL-NUJAYFI

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning, and welcome. I'm Tamara Wittes, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution. And I want to thank you all for braving the frigid weather to be with us this morning for what I think is a very important and timely event.

You know, with the end of America's military engagement in Iraq, I think many in the American public turned their attention elsewhere. At the same time, America's partnership with Iraq, its interests in Iraq, its engagement with Iraq did not end. And Iraq's challenges in reconstruction, in building democratic governance, in the midst of diversity and very fierce politics -- those did not end.

Iraq continues to work on those challenges, and it is challenged today, as well, by the turmoil roiling its neighborhood. At this moment, after a year of tragically escalating violence in his country, I can think of no more important time to hear from our guest this morning, Speaker Usama al-Nujayfi. And we are very honored, Mr. Speaker, that you have chosen to join us this morning.

It is a moment, I think, for all of us to hear from the Speaker about the challenges Iraq is facing, how the United States can play a role in helping Iraq meet these challenges to stabilize his country, to stabilize the region, and to advance American interests in, I think, a long-term U.S.-Iraqi partnership.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for being with us.

Let me now turn the podium over to my colleague Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow here at the Saban Center, to make formal introductions. Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Tamara. And welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. We're absolutely delighted to have you all here to hear from Speaker Usama al-Nujayfi. There are few people I can think of who I would more like to hear from -- or, I think, Washington, more needs to hear from -- than Speaker al-Nujayfi at this moment in time, given the developments in Iraq.

A few quick administrative announcements before the Speaker takes the podium.

First, if I could everyone to please silence their cell phones. I would never ask a Washington audience to turn of its cell phones, but if you could at least silence them, we would be greatly appreciative of that.

Second, there will be simultaneous translation. You should all have translation devices at your seats. If not, please raise your hand, we'll make sure that you get one. But please do be prepared for that, for those of you who will need it, for English, for Arabic, for whatever it is that you may need.

Third, the way that we'll be doing this is I will briefly introduce the Speaker, the Speaker will take the podium and give some prepared remarks on the situation, and then he will join me, and I will ask him a number of different questions about the general situation. Unfortunately, our time this morning is somewhat short, and because of the need of simultaneous translation, we've agreed that we would simply keep it to that. I hope that I will be a decent, honest surrogate for all of the different issues that all of you would like to hear about. And, hopefully, it will give the Speaker an opportunity to elaborate on his prepared remarks.

And so with those bits of administrative trivia taken care of, let me simply say a few remarks about Speaker al-Nujayfi.

Speaker al-Nujayfi -- I think, for those of you who know anything about Iraq -- has been one of the most important, one of the most constructive voices in Iraq over the past six or seven years. He started out life trained as an engineer, which I think has been a critical element in his ability -- and if you'll pardon the pun -- to build bridges between the different communities of Iraq. He began life, in fact, as an electrical engineer, a talent that Ira, of course, is in desperate need of these days.

He went on to found his own very successful business -- a talent which I think many in Washington see as kind of an arcane science, a mystery to all of us, but

something that, nonetheless, we all recognize as being of critical importance everywhere around the world, but in particular to Iraq.

He was Minister of Industry and Minerals at one point in time. He is, of course, a member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, Iraq's parliament. And since 2009, he has been the Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

With that bit of introduction, let me please ask you to give a warm reception to Speaker Usama al-Nujayfi. (Applause.)

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: In the name of God the Merciful, I'm very happy to be here with you today. As you know, Iraq is a central and important country, and the world at large concentrates on Iraq. And you do know that we in Iraq went through a very particular experience in the Middle East. We first got rid of an oppressive regime, and it was followed by a military occupation, then a constitution that was written in unfavorable conditions and circumstances.

There was also a road map that was set. The Iraqis were not able to contribute to this road map because we were in a rush. And we wanted Iraq to be an exemplary democracy.

The constitution in Iraq was written in very difficult circumstances, and in a very sensitive period in the country. And on the hand of politicians who suffered a lot in the past, who were arrested or condemned to execution, or exiled, or imprisoned. So the psychological environment was very hard, and there were mutual fears between the Iraqi components. This was the reason why the constitution has some problems, and some articles in the constitution can be interpreted in different ways.

We also set mechanisms to built institutions, but the implementation of the constitution was not as it should have been because of the political tension and divisions. And the institutions stipulated in the constitution were not built as it should because of the problems. For instance, the federal supreme court, which is the highest judicial body, and which rules on the conflict between different powers in the country, so

far we were not able to implement it, because this law needs two-thirds of the votes in the parliament, and all the political parties do not agree so far on this tribunal.

Now, we have a court that does exist, but it does not have the constitutional prerogatives to be able to rule on the issue of interpreting the constitution, or deciding if the laws are constitutional, or also ruling on differences between the provinces and the center, between the Kurdish province and Baghdad, or between the legislative and the executive powers.

All this made political life more complicated in Iraq. And our path towards (inaudible) the democratic system that we seek was not (inaudible).

There are bad implementations of the law, and selective implementation. Parliament adopted some 215 laws, some important for the stability of Iraq, and for providing service to the people, and for building the state as it should be built. But some of these laws were not implemented. They were adopted, published in the journal, official journal, and theoretically should have been implemented but, so far, were not because there are unilateral political decisions not to implement them -- for instance, the law on the provinces, that gives important prerogatives to the provinces and enough funds and means to implement decentralization of the state. But this law was not implemented because some in the country believe that it shouldn't. Also, the law about customs, it was adopted two years ago, but it was paralyzed on purpose.

So, we are facing many obstacles when it comes to building institutions, and to building the state of Iraq. There is selectivity in implementing the law. Sometimes the law is implemented on some Iraqi parties and not on some other Iraqi parties -- hence a lack of confidence by the citizens in the political process and the state institutions, and also in the participation in the political process.

Iraq is now facing a terrorist threat, as we've seen since the beginning of the year, where changes started. And now we need to know how to defeat this terrorism at the security and at the ideological level. We do know that in 2007, with the surge of

the American forces, confessional violence ended in the country, and we set a plan to fight Al Qaeda and the terrorist groups with the support of the Sunni clans, more especially in al Anbar. They were armed, financed, and got promises that they will be part of the armed forces and of the state. And the clans were able to defeat Al Qaeda, and security was restored in al Anbar, that represents 30 percent of the surface of Iraq. So, we were able to bring stability back, and the world has witnessed.

But after this victory, there was no follow-up on the promises that were given to them, and they did not get their rights as, for instance, to integrate the armed forces, to get the salaries that they need to protect them from being targeted by the terrorists. Very few of them go salaries that were very, very low, some of them were expelled from their jobs, many of them were arrested because of systematic (inaudible) by confessional parties, or even by Al Qaeda, because they wanted to undermine the role of the clans.

So, from 2009 until a few months ago, these forces were almost completely destroyed, and Al Qaeda came back stronger than before. Al Qaeda was able to paralyze the clans, and the central state did not follow up on its moral and literal promises. So, Al Qaeda is back, and it's exploiting political differences and the general feeling of frustration amongst the Iraqi people.

It also is exploiting the systematic corruption at the political and economic level. And it's finding support, finances and means, in some provinces in Iraq. And in 2013, more than 9,000 Iraqis were killed, and more than 25,000 were wounded. And this is the highest figure in the last 10 years.

So, the political components in Iraq were not able to build the Iraqi political system, or to implement the constitution, and to reach a genuine partnership and a genuine reconciliation. They were not able to implement the laws as it should be, and get rid of corruption and abuses. And they did not respect all the Iraqi components as to represent them in equitable way in the armed forces, according to the constitution. They

did not provide the provinces with enough funds, still according to the constitution, on a pro rata according to the population. So far, also, we did not adopt the law on hydrocarbons, oil and gas, which is very important to set a balanced relation between the provinces and the center for the production and exportation of oil.

So each one, or some parties, are implementing the constitution based on their own perspective, and this is hindering the building of the state, the national cohesion, and is leading to more division. And more and more people, at this point, do not trust the political process anymore. And this is something that we have seen by the very low turnout in the last general elections and the one before.

We believe that Iraq is, at this point, on a crossroad. The key to the solution is clear, and we can find a solution. What we need, though, is a strong determination, is a political will, is for everyone to agree on the constitution and to forget about the problems of the past -- to move beyond the fears, and to stop punishing the Iraqi people, and move towards a reconciliation that can prevent Iraq from even greater problems.

In the Kurdish problems, there was a law adopted to amnesty everyone who committed a crime against the Kurdish people and worked with the previous regime. Some of them are accused of many crimes, but they decided to amnesty everyone. And the situation in the Kurdish province is stable, and everyone is participating in the political process. And the Kurdish province is now an example of security and successful investment, and wise politics.

But in Iraq, we are still arresting people, and we are also implementing the law on justice and accountability in a partial, sectarian way. We are still punishing some of the Iraq people who were not part of the previous regime, with only -- for reasons that are political and unfair. So we failed in implementing this law.

I believe the political process is now threatened, and you need to act seriously and quickly. The next elections are very important, and may solve many

problems. But the situation should be stable and calm. We should put an end to the violence and the killings, and we should avoid any political measures that are provocative, as happened the day before yesterday -- the decision to start a military campaign against four provinces, which led to lots of reactions. Also, what is happening in the Anbar province. Of course, Al Qaeda is there, and we should fight Al Qaeda, we believe so. And the clans are fighting terrorists at this point.

But not everything in al Anbar is terrorist. There are political demands and rights, and problems that need political solutions, not military arrangements.

So, I am ready to answer your questions. But let me state once again that Iraq at this point is on a crossroads: either it will move toward success and enhance democracy, and give successful example of a democratic system in a troubled era, or, God forbid, we will move into something similar to the Syrian situation, and this is to be expected if the problems are not safe [sic] in the right way.

Iraq, at this point, needs national reconciliation, wisdom, understanding, and partnership between the Iraqis, instead of the marginalization that we are seeing in Iraq.

Thank you so much. (Applause.)

MR. POLLACK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And, again, welcome to Brookings. It is wonderful to have you here. And thank you for your remarks, in particular, because I think you justified my comment that you are one of the most important and most constructive Iraqi politicians out there. And I think that you laid that out very nicely in your remarks.

I wanted to start my questions for you where you began your own prepared remarks, with the constitution, and the nature of the Iraqi state. You said that the constitution had been rushed. And, obviously, we've all heard from a whole wide variety of different Iraqi politicians and Iraqi leaders who have different ideas about the

nature of the Iraqi state and what it ought to look like, who have different visions of a future Iraq.

And I wanted to begin, Mr. Speaker, by asking you about your vision of a future Iraq. I mean, you were very eloquent and very passionate about the missteps that have been taken in the implementation of this constitution, and the laws and the politics that have followed the implementation of the constitution. But I wanted to begin by simply asking you what your vision for Iraq was, what your vision of Iraqi democracy looked like and, in particular, whether you felt that your vision of a future of Iraq was somehow different from your sense of the prime minister's vision of a future Iraq.

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Well, of course, I have a vision about Iraq, and Iraq democracy. Of course, it has its specificities. It is not similar to all democracies. We have our traditions, our legacy, our history, and also to be respected.

But we do also agree on many of the international criteria when it comes to democracy. And I do believe that Iraq is able to become a very important model in the Middle East.

Now, the constitution has many flaws, as I said. But, nonetheless, at this point, it guarantees liberty and freedom. It guarantees partnership and the building of a strong state.

So, again, some articles would need to be amended. And this is stipulated by Article 142, that says that some of the articles should be amended. But at this point, the constitution can bring Iraq into a better era.

Now, I do not agree with Mr. Prime Minister in the way he manages the country. And I believe that committing to constitution, and applying the rule of law, is not obvious in the policies of the government. As I said, it's a selective policy. Sometimes laws are implemented in specific circumstances, and in other circumstances they are not. And the issue of justice and accountability -- the law says that people who reach some levels in the Bath Party should not be nominated at certain high levels in the government

or the armed forces, and so on. But when we move to what's happening on the ground, many of the military commanders that are in charge of very important unit in the army, in charge of many military operations, and have high-ranking posts in the federal police or the Ministry of Interior, where, previously, members of the Bath Party were also, at that time, in high-standing position. But this was simply put aside and ignored, and they remained in their job, while counterparts, officers from other provinces -- and I have to say it -- from the confessional perspective, are being ignored, are being marginalized, are almost pushed in to the arms of the terrorists.

So there are double standards in implementing the laws and in dealing with the citizens, which is leading into a lack of confidence in the political process, and a lack of respect by the people towards the state. This democracy, some believe, is selective. It is a democracy for some and it is an oppression for others.

So the problem is a problem of commitment. We have diagnosed more than 30 violations of the constitution by the government in the last two years, and these violations are pretty obvious. There is also an attempt to undermine the role of the parliament, to prevent the parliament from voting and passing laws, and saying that laws should be edicted by the government. They also are undermining the constitutional court. The court was created before the constitution, and the court decided that what the government is doing is right. Therefore, we are not being able to legislate. We adopt laws, and the government rejects them. So then there are double standards in the country, which is obvious. And the current policies will not lead to a strong democratic Iraq.

We need to review this. We need to have a separation of power. We need to respect the constitution and the laws, and to build the institutions. The institutions should be built.

Some decisions are taken unilaterally, and at the security level, as you know, all the decisions are in the hands of the prime minister, whilst all the Iraqis should be able to contribute in such an important decision.

MR. POLLACK: I want to press you a little bit further on this, and, in particular, I want to ask you about a particular word that one hears a fair amount in Iraq, and when talking about Iraq, and that word is "federalism." As you know, there are many people who believe that some of the answers to the problems that you yourself have raised is moving toward a more federal structure.

And first, I'd like to ask you if that is your sentiment, as well. And if that is -- if that isn't the case, I'd be delighted to hear why not. If it is, what would you mean by "federalism?" What would greater federalism for Iraq look like?

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Well, the Iraqi constitution is encouraging the creation of provinces. And you do know that the system implemented in Iraq at this point is a federal system.

Now, we have the Kurdish problems, and there is clear text in the constitution about the Kurdish province. And there is also a mechanism about creating new provinces according to the constitution and to laws that were passed in 2008 about the mechanism to create a province.

Now, in the beginning, some of the Iraqi components were against federalism. They believed this was some sort of divisional partition of Iraq. But after we went through the political process, and we started seeing the double standard and the lack of fairness, many of the people started demanding federalism, not only in the Sunni provinces, but even in the south -- for instance, the Basra province, there is a majority who is supportive of federalism.

And the federalism that we are talking about is that of the provinces. The administrative borders of the province determined that this is a province, two-thirds of the council of the province would submit a demand to the prime minister -- not to be agreed

upon, but just to be officially submitted to the High Commission of the Elections, that would then organize a referendum in the said province. And if half of the voters, 50 percent of the voters, agree -- meaning 50 percent of those registered to vote agree -- then we will have a province, with decentralized prerogatives. And the aim is not to create confessional, sectarian provinces, but it is more of an administrative division. And the provinces would have the necessary financing, the necessary management capabilities, the necessary prerogatives.

I do believe in federalism, and I do believe it is a solution to many of the problems we are facing in Iraq. Now, Baghdad would be in charge of the main ministries -- finance, defense, oil, and other issues related to sovereignty. And the provinces would manage their own local business. And this is completely constitutional issue. And it has a potential to solve many problems, and many of the Iraqis do believe that federalism could calm the political tension.

Now, more than a year ago, the Salah ad-Din province, and the Diyala province submitted a request, but it was not followed by a referendum, as the constitution and the laws stipulate, but it was kept in the drawers of the office of the prime minister. They simply didn't follow up. And this is a huge violation of the constitution and the laws.

The day before yesterday, the province of Ninawa, in the north, presented a request to become a province, and more than two-thirds of the members of the council of the province sent the request to Baghdad. I believe other provinces would do the same, and this is something I do encourage. Because I believe that this will enhance the unity of Iraq, and will help solving the political and security problems.

MR. POLLACK: As a proud son of Ninawa, I'd like to follow up on the last point that you made, and ask the question: Given the state of tensions, if the government does not follow up on this petition for regional status in Ninawa, what is your sense of how the people of the province would react? How will that gov over with them?

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Of course, when we cannot refer to the constitution and the laws anymore, and when those in charge do not respect the law, so the citizens would not consider that they are committed to implementing the laws anymore. And if they are not committed, they will have other alternatives -- and this is very dangerous, and we are warning against this.

This is why there should be a commitment to implementing the constitution, because we do not have, we do not want to have negative repercussions on the constitutions, and on the elections. We do not want people to start working on installing their own laws and provinces. We should implement the constitution. We should allow for the provinces to be created -- and, again, not on a sectarian or confessional basis, but on an administrative basis.

And when I'm talking about Ninawa, for instance, we have Sunni, Shiites, Kurds, Turkmens, Christians, Yazdis, and so on. So, it's a very diverse profile. It doesn't mean that it is a Sunni province, but it's an administrative subdivision. And this applies to Basra, as well, which is very diverse.

And the last law on the provinces, in one of its articles says that each province would take \$5 from each barrel of oil produced in the said province, and, also, when it comes to refining the oil in the province. But the budget that was submitted to the parliament a few days ago only gave \$1 to each province on one barrel, and kept the 4 remaining dollars. When we asked why, we got no legal answer. It's just the will of some members of the government not to implement the law -- simple as that. Basra, Nasiriyah, and Amarah threatened that if you do not give us our legal right according to the law, we will stop producing oil. We will go to the streets, we will start a rebellion. This is what the governor of Basra said, and Amarah, as well.

So why do we push the Iraqis into taking such difficult decisions? We have to be committed to implementing the law and the constitution.

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MR. POLLACK: This gets us into a very interesting and important discussion. I think one of the great questions that a great many Americans have about what's going on in Iraq today is the question of where do average Iraqis stand? How do they see their situation?

And, in particular, because of your status as one of the principal leaders of Iraq's Sunni community -- and you'll pardon me for using that confessional moniker, but I think that is a fair way to put things -- I think it would be very helpful for our audience, for Americans, in general, to hear a sense from you of where do the people of Anbar, Salah ad-Din, of Ninawa, of the Diyala, how do they see the situation? What is it that they want, what is it that they're looking for? How do they look at the current crisis? How do they feel about the government? How do they feel about Al Qaeda? How are they seeing their own lives, and what would they like from it?

If you could give us some sense of where the people of these provinces are coming down, and how they're viewing issues, I think that would be enormously helpful for all of us.

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Well, as I said, justice was not implemented as it should, and the authority of the state, the huge capabilities of the state were used into implementing a selective system which is encouraging the supporters and partisans of the government, and punishing those who are opposing the government.

And there was also a confessional way of dealing with the citizens. And this is something we've seen at all levels, starting with the ordinary citizens, and moving to high-ranking politicians. And this is leading to a feeling of frustration, and therefore to rebellion.

The people believe that the state is not respecting the rights of some of the provinces, and therefore we should react and clearly say that we are against these policies, and that you should deal with us fairly. So politicians from these provinces talked a lot about these issues within the parliament, in political meetings, political circles,

with the government, and so on, and during the negotiations about forming a government, and also when it comes to the Erbil Agreement of 2010 that led to the formation of this government.

And we set a road map for broad reforms, for rebalancing the institutions, and giving these provinces their rights for a partnership in decision-making. But, quite simply, there was no follow-up. The agreement was that the minister of senate should be a Sunni, the minister of interior a Shiite and, potentially, a ministry of security from the Shiite, and other intelligence for the Sunnis, others for the Kurds.

But, regretfully, this is not what happened. The provinces requested legitimate rights, and there were huge demonstrations that lasted more than a year. They had peaceful slogans -- they requested justice, equality, and the right to implementation of the laws, and the releasing of the innocent detainees. And they wanted the government not to use the Accountability and Justice Law in order to punish people of these provinces for no reason at all.

In the summit held in Baghdad two years ago, thousands of young people were arrested all around Baghdad. And when the authorities were asked, "Why are you arresting them," they said it's a preventive arrest -- I mean, "We have a summit, and we have doubts about some of these people being terrorists." Some of them remained under detention two years after the conference was held. They are still in prison.

And there was also one of the elected members of the council of Diyala who was arrested and accused of being a terrorist. He was in charge of the security committee. He stayed in jail for six years, and was released two months ago without any change being posted against him.

So, the provinces are asking for their rights, but are getting no positive feedback.

The Hawijah demonstration was militarily dispersed. Many were arrested, and the demonstrations were accused of harboring terrorists, being against the state, undermining the authorities, and so on. And the problem started with dispersing demonstrators in al Anbar.

Now, of course, in such demonstrations, where 100,000 people are participating, probably we can find some terrorists, some unacceptable slogans. But these do not represent all the people demonstrating, and the demonstrators are not responsible for the few terrorists amongst them.

But none of the people demonstrating ever attacked security forces. There were clashes here and there, but I don't believe that these demonstrations did anything to harm the central authorities. But still, they were dispersed by force.

Of course, there is a presence of Al Qaeda and the ISIL in al Anbar. They occupy some parts of al Anbar. There are a few dozens of -- a few hundreds. But this does not mean that all people in al Anbar are Al Qaeda.

But there is a political rebellion against the state, because people believe that they cannot reach an understanding with the state that does not respect peaceful demonstration, and is pushing people into carrying weapons. People of al Anbar, clans in al Anbar, and all the Iraqis agree should fight Al Qaeda, I feel, and get right of them. They are a dangerous scourge. But also, at the same time, we should have a political process that would listen to the demands of the people, that would provide them what they need, that would give them the funds stipulated by the constitution, the administrative and political rights, the armed forces that they need, that they be part of the political process of decision-making in Iraq.

If this does not happen -- again, we are at a crossroads. We cannot -- I mean, the picture is not either white or black, it is gray. And we need to work on solving the political problems constitutionally.

MR. POLLACK: That last point is a very important one for Americans, because I think that it's one of the things that Americans have the greatest difficulty understanding right now: The rise, the re-emergence of Al Qaeda in Iraq. You know, I can remember two, three, four years ago, in Iraq, driving around, and you forgot that Al Qaeda even existed, because the security situation improved so much, Al Qaeda in Iraq was dead. It was nothing. It was no longer an issue.

And today, they're back, they're controlling parts of Fallujah, parts of Ramadi. They're contesting other areas in Anbar, in Salah ad-Din, even in Diyala and Ninawa.

And I think that a lot of Americans have a great deal of difficulty trying to understand how it is that they have come back.

So I think it would be very helpful if you could explain a little bit more. Because I think you were starting to touch on it, this fact that most Iraqis, most Anbaris, most Muslawis, do not have any love for Al Qaeda, but yet nevertheless, Americans, we watch TV, we see the black-clad me, we see the black flags flying in Fallujah, and it's very hard for us to understand how it is that Al Qaeda in Iraq is back, if it isn't the case that the people of Fallujah and Ramadi didn't want them back.

So, please help us to understand what seems like a real puzzle for many Americans.

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Of course. As I said awhile ago, Al Qaeda was defeated; it was defeated because the people decided to assist the Iraqi government, and the government forces, at that time. But after the battle ended, the promises made to those people were not kept. And the government dealt with them as if they were opponents and enemies. They were not allowed to join the armed forces, and this was based on weird standards, as if they did not want to have military units from these provinces. They were mistreated.

And this led to frustration and mistrust. People became convinced that they should not deal with Baghdad, because there is a confessional perspective, because their representatives in the government and the parliament are not able to get them their rights back, or to move their legitimate demands forward. And they feel that the government was trying to marginalize some Iraqis, and not giving them the role they were elected to play. So, at the psychological level, there was a lot of mistrust and lots of frustration. And this allowed Al Qaeda to come back.

Because when the people do not trust the army, and see Al Qaeda, they are confused. If they fight Al Qaeda, they believe the situation will go back to what it was before, in 2006. If they fight Al Qaeda, they will be a target afterwards. If they do nothing, they will be caught between the fire of the army and the fire of Al Qaeda, because they know that Al Qaeda would be bringing worse kind of repression back.

But the psychological situation at this point makes it easier for Al Qaeda to come back.

Now, we need to convince the people in these provinces that they are part of the decision-making, that the government and the state are theirs, too -- that they should deal with the government in order to defeat the extremists, and that, afterwards, their rights will be kept. This is the most important equation at this point.

Al Qaeda is limited in force, but they are exploiting the situation -- I mean, as some germs can exploit a sick body. But if this body is healthy again, it's easier to fight germs. Many countries in the region are facing Al Qaeda. But, Al Qaeda, for instance, cannot find a stronghold in Saudi Arabia or in Kuwait, but at this point, it can do so in Iraq. It can find a safe haven and carry attacks.

So, we need to win the population back in these provinces. We need to give those people their rights, to support them at the political, economic, and security levels. And then Al Qaeda would be defeated within days.

MR. POLLACK: I think that's an excellent point, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like to press you, I'd like to ask you a hard question that I think is important to ask from the other side, which is: As I think you are aware, there are other communities within Iraq -- again, to speak quite bluntly -- the Shia community within Iraq that is very frightened by the re-emergences of Al Qaeda, that is subject to terrorist attacks from Al Qaeda and other groups within Iraq, and that is pressing very hard on the government to come down hard on Al Qaeda, and to root it out.

And I would ask you, how do you speak to the Shia of Iraq? And many, I know, that you are very close to, very friendly with, that these are important elements of your own constituency, whom you care deeply about, as well.

But how do you speak to them? These people are very frightened of this re-emergence of Al Qaeda and the attacks that they are facing, who want nothing more than to see Al Qaeda crushed, and basically are saying, until Al Qaeda is crushed, how can we have these negotiations?

How do you reach out to them? How do you help them to explain what needs to happen, to allay their fears, as well?

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Let me correct an information first. Al Qaeda is not only targeting Shiites, it's targeting all Iraqis: tens of thousands of Sunnis -- of thinkers, of politicians, of normal, ordinary citizens -- who are killed amongst the Sunnis. And, of course, amongst the Shiites, tens of thousands were killed by Al Qaeda.

But in Iraq we also have Shiite militias, that also kill, that also impose forced displacement on people, especially in Diyala, in Baghdad, in some other parts of Iraq. And in some way, they are protected, and they are not being held accountable.

So, the killing is turning confessional at this point, and this is hugely dangerous. The Sunnis and the Shiites should work on reconciliation, on being committed to the constitution, to get rid of the militias and the Al Qaeda. Adopting the logic of the militias and Al Qaeda is very dangerous for Iraq, and we believe that the

Shiite leaders do understand what's happening. They're not blaming the Sunnis; they are blaming Al Qaeda specifically. And they do know that Al Qaeda is killing as many Sunnis as they are killing Shiites. And they believe, as we believe, that citizens should feel that there is justice and equality, and this will allow us to get rid of the terrorists.

So, it is not true to say that the Sunnis are all Al Qaeda. The Sunnis are also a target of Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda is targeting Sunni leaders. It killed many of the Sunni leaders. Sunni politicians cannot move freely in Sunni provinces at this point, because they are targeted by Al Qaeda.

At the same time, they are targeted by the government, and some militias, who are doing something similar to what Al Qaeda is doing. Shiite politicians are more free to travel around Shiite provinces. We need to determine which is the common enemy. It's each and every one who carries weapons outside the legitimacy of the state in order to fight Iraqis. And this applies to Al Qaeda and to the militias. And Al Qaeda is an international enemy, to all countries, and should be fought. And I believe the Shiites clearly understand what is happening in Iraq, and do know where the solution lies. And the majority of them agree with us that if justice is genuinely back in Iraq, Al Qaeda will be very easily defeated.

MR. POLLACK: The last issue I'd like to talk to you about is the United States. You're here in Washington. I don't think that it's because of our weather, or the desire to see our monuments one last time. I imagine that there's some purpose here that has something to do with Iraq, and its future, and its security.

And so I'd like to ask you to tell us a little bit about your sense of the role that you'd like to see the United States playing in all of this. How can the United States be constructive? What is it that we might do?

And, of course, I'd like to ask you to recognize, of course, that America's influence is obviously lessened from where it once was, in 2006, 2007, 2008. And, of

course, many Americans are feeling, let's say, reluctant about greater involvement in the Middle East.

So, with those caveats in mind, what is it that you're saying to our leaders, what is it that you'd like to say to the American people, about how the United States can nevertheless play a constructive role, perhaps a more active role, in helping Iraq move forward from this delicate situation?

MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Well, I believe that the relation between the United States and Iraq is about a strategic contract, and stability in Iraq is a stability not only for the country and the interest of the United States, but for the whole world. And if Iraq were to collapse, or to enter a civil war, this will have very negative impact on the interests of the United States and the countries in the region, and it will be a genuine disaster worldwide.

So, of course, I do not call for an interference in Iraq. And I reject it, even if it's the United States.

But friends also should provide advice and support, and should play a role in order to bring the parties closer together. They should support their friends when they are in trouble -- I mean, we need weapons, we need a political stand, we need an economic support. And the United States needs from Iraq to be a stable country, to be secure, to be able to produce energy, to be democratic. All these are American and Iraqi interests, alike.

Following the withdrawal of the American forces, we felt that Iraq was left on its own while it was not stable yet, or balanced enough, and was not yet able to completely move towards a transition to a strong state. This is why, at this point, the center of power was dis-balanced, and we reached the situation that we're facing today.

The United States politically withdrew in the last few years, and they started moving or shifting their attention away from Iraq. But now, with the return of Al Qaeda, and the increasing and escalating violence in Iraq, the United States are looking

back at Iraq. And, therefore, I believe the Americans can play a very important role in bringing the parties closer together in Iraq, and in supporting Iraq in its fight against Al Qaeda, in providing the necessary expertise to encourage national reconciliation, and try to restore the cohesion in Iraq. And we do know that Iraq has very important relations with other countries. Iran has an influence, Turkey has an influence, Arab countries have an influence.

By the superpower, the United States has an influence over all the countries in the Middle East, and Iraq needs a long-term friendship with the United States -- a friendship, though, based on the values of democracy and the respect of human rights, and a stable, successful state -- not a state that is working outside legitimacy, and with discrimination and oppression.

I think that in Washington, Americans understand the problems of Iraq, and I'm convinced that they should concentrate on Iraq once again in order to protect it from the lack of stability, in view, of course, of the situation in Syria, are the problems over all the Middle East. The Americans also do not want Iraq to be another region that exports problems and terrorism, but rather they want it to be an oasis of democracy and stability.

And this is what we hope for.

MR. POLLACK: One last question for you in the minute we have remaining, Mr. Speaker.

Iraq is scheduled to have national elections at the end of April. What would you like to see the United States do around those elections to ensure that they are positive. We've seen elections in Iraq that were extremely helpful for Iraqi democracy, and we've seen elections in Iraq that were extremely destructive of Iraqi democracy.

What can the United States do to ensure that these are constructive elections, not destructive?

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MR. AL-NUJAYFI: Well, there should be a message that should come from all countries to Iraq that the elections should be respected, and organized in a just and transparent way. And circumstances should be prepared. I mean, we should have a minimum stability by April, and there should not be decisions that are controversial, like the one that was taken two days ago, the reaction to demands about creating provinces, and so on. We should avoid political provocation. We should avoid confessional mobilization in order to be able to organize fair and just elections that can provide a solution to the Iraqi problem.

If we do not have such circumstances, if we do not have international observers -- and the United States should be present through observers, as should the United Nations and all countries. If we do not have all this, the elections can be very destructive.

So, this is a historic chance, and it is a crossroad between either stability or, God forbid, between other and more intricate problems.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you so much.

Please join me in thanking the Speaker for an extremely lively and enlightening presentation. (Applause.)

Thank you.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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