

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

STATESMEN'S FORUM

"IRAQ: A STATUS REPORT"

**WITH
THE HONORABLE ZALMAY KHALILZAD,
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ**

**INTRODUCTION BY
ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI,
CSIS COUNSELOR AND TRUSTEE**

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MR. BRZEZINSKI: Ladies and gentlemen, we have been told that we should start a little earlier because the room is filled and the audience is giving signs of increasing impatience. And so we decided to proceed.

And some of you may wonder why I am presiding on this occasion, since perhaps my views on Iraq are known to some of you. So let me explain. For someone like me, who has had to make his way in public life through the thickets of American society, to have had some progress in spite of the kind of a name I have, as being Brzezinski -- (laughter), evokes almost automatic affinity for someone called Zalmay Khalilzad -- (laughter), who is clearly a rising star on the American public scene.

So, Zal, we immigrants, we have to stick together. (Laughter.) But don't forget that the Congress now is in a bad mood about immigrants. (Laughter.) You know, my origins involve a country that was Communist at one point, yours that was Taliban. How do we know that we'll not be labeled at some point as enemy sympathizers, for example? (Laughter.) So we have to be careful. So that's one reason I'm happy to preside, because there is this bond here.

But second, I'm delighted to preside because I've known Zalmay for many, many years and I admire his contributions to American national security. As many as 15 years ago he was in the forefront of rethinking America's strategy in the changed global context, and he did so with insight and imagination; produced controversy, but controversy can be heuristic, and that was a very important contribution to a reassessment of how one plays this complex game of being a global leader.

More recently there is further reason to admire him, and that's, of course, for his role in Afghanistan, where he went to a country in the midst of an enormous internal challenge, confusion, personal risk, and he did superbly in helping the Afghans to commit themselves on a stable political development.

Today he faces the same kind of challenge in Iraq, and that challenge obviously is of enormous importance not only to the future of Iraq but to America's position in the world. So to have someone there who has a strategic vision, who understands the region more than most of our other policymakers, is a great asset to us. And I'm delighted that I can welcome him here to CSIS and to ask him to share with us his views on what is of importance to all of us.

Zal, the floor is yours. (Applause.)

AMB. KHALILZAD: Thank you, Zbig, for this very, very kind introduction. Many of you know that the Twelver Shi'a speak of certain individuals whom believers should seek to imitate, calling them the marjaiyah. To many of us who are playing policy roles, but do have academic backgrounds, and being immigrants as well, Zbig, you are a source for imitation.

I also want to thank CSIS for giving me this opportunity to share my assessment of the situation in Iraq and my views on the way ahead, as well as to engage in some questions and answers.

I'll give my bottom line up-front: I believe Americans, while remaining tactically patient about Iraq, should be strategically optimistic. Most important, a major change, a tectonic shift has taken place in the political orientation of the Sunni Arab community. A year ago, Sunni Arabs were outside of the political process and hostile to the United States. They boycotted the January 2005 elections, and were underrepresented in the Transitional National Assembly. Today, Sunni Arabs are full participants in the political process with their representation in the National Assembly now proportional to their share of the population. Also, they have largely come to see the United States as an honest broker in helping Iraq's communities come together around a process and a plan to stabilize the country.

Moreover, al Qaeda in Iraq have been significantly weakened during the past year. This resulted not only from the recent killing of Zarqawi, but also from the capture or killing of a number of other senior leaders, and the creation of an environment in which it is more difficult and dangerous for al Qaeda in Iraq.

These are fundamental and positive changes. Together they have made possible the inauguration of Iraq's first-ever government of national unity with non-sectarian security ministers, agreements on the rules for decision-making on critical issues, and on the structure of institutions of the executive branch and a broadly agreed-upon program.

They have also enabled political progress that resulted in the recent announcement of Prime Minister Maliki of his government's national reconciliation and dialogue project.

However, at the same time, the terrorists have adapted to this success by exploiting Iraq's sectarian fault line. A year ago, terrorism and the insurgency against the coalition and the Iraqi security forces were the principal source of instability. Particularly since the bombing of the Golden Mosque in February, violent sectarianism is now the main challenge. This sectarianism is the source of frequent tragedies on the streets of Baghdad. It's imperative for the new Iraqi government to make major progress in dealing with this challenge in the next six months. The prime minister understands this fact.

Today I'll discuss the status of these efforts, noting the achievements we have obtained and the further steps we intend to take in partnership with the new government.

Containing sectarian violence will require political and security steps.

On the political track, several steps are needed to enhance unity among Iraqis.

First of all, Iraqi leaders must build a consensus to address several issues that arise out of the new constitution. Because Sunni Arabs were underrepresented in the assembly that drafted the constitution, the document provided a fast-track amendment process under the new fully representative National Assembly.

One of the central and difficult issues will be the constitutional provisions governing future federalization of Iraq; that is, the process, timing and rules for creating federal regions beyond the Kurdish area.

The constitution also requires that the assembly enact legislation to govern the development of Iraq's oil and gas resources, including the role of the national government in allocating revenues.

Another constitutionally mandated action involves the creation of a commission to review de-Ba'athification.

There is agreement among most Iraqis that there have been excesses in this process. The right approach is to subject those who committed crimes under the previous regime to the judicial process and to achieve reconciliation with those who were Ba'athists but who did not commit crimes.

Second, beyond these constitutionally driven issues, the new government's effort to enhance the unity of the Iraqi people will be channeled through Prime Minister Maliki's National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project. This is a bold initiative which puts all of the toughest issues on the table for resolution.

The central goal of the National Reconciliation Project is to bring insurgent elements who are currently in the armed opposition into the political process. Many insurgents have fought the coalition and the Iraqi government as a result of misplaced fears that the United States was seeking to occupy Iraq indefinitely or was motivated by a sectarian agenda. Now many are considering the pursuit of their goals by means other than violence.

Also, a greater sense of realism has set in among most Iraqi political leaders. Sunni Arab leaders are realizing that nostalgia for their past dominance is not the basis for a realistic political strategy. Shi'a Arab leaders are coming to see that seeking vengeance against the other groups for Saddam's crimes or attempting to exclude Sunni Arabs from playing a role in government is not a realistic option.

Consequently, a growing understanding exists that reconciliation with most elements of the current armed opposition is both possible and essential for stabilizing Iraq, as evident from the fact that some insurgents have asked to be armed by the Iraqi government in order to fight the foreign terrorists.

As the Iraqi government and reconcilable insurgents come together, the question will arise of granting amnesty to those who have committed violent acts in the current conflict. Iraqi leaders understand that every war must end and that ending wars inevitably require amnesties of some kind. A broad amnesty was issued at the end of the American Civil War. Many other recent internal conflicts have ended with broad pardons or amnesties. Recent examples include El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, South Africa, Angola and Indonesia. Afghanistan has implemented a process to allow all but a few former Taliban to renounce their past, reintegrate into Afghan society. I understand that some in the United States reacted negatively to the concept of

granting amnesty. We will work with Iraqi leaders to find the right balance between reconciliation and accountability, and to ensure that the sacrifices of those who died or were injured in the liberation of Iraq are honored.

There will not be a double standard that grants amnesty to those who killed soldiers in the coalition, but not those who killed Iraqis. The American people can rest assured on that point. The biggest honor for soldiers and civilians who sacrificed to end the threat from Saddam's regime and to liberate the Iraqi people is for the cause of a democratic Iraq to succeed and for those Iraqis who initially fought this change to accept this new order.

In parallel with political efforts, the Iraqi government with the support of the coalition must increase the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces and adjust our security operations to meet the challenge of controlling sectarian violence. This will require adjustments and new efforts in six areas.

First, the Iraqi government and the coalition will continue to improve Iraqi security forces. In the last 12 months, the Iraqi security forces have grown from 168,000 to more than 265,000. By the end of the summer, about 75 percent of Iraqi army battalions and brigades will be leading counterinsurgency operations with the coalition playing only mentoring and supporting roles. By the end of the year, all Iraqi army units are expected to be in the lead in their operations.

Nonetheless, there is still much work to be done. Iraqi units must be fully manned, and the Iraqi army and particularly the police need to achieve higher levels of readiness. We are also implementing plans to accelerate the evolution of the Iraqi army from a light force that's dependent on the coalition for logistics and combat support into a heavier force that not only can take on well-armed enemy units more effectively, but also can operate with less reliance on the coalition.

We will also have to maintain a long-term commitment to developing effective military leadership as well as to working with the Iraqi government on the progressive modernization of their forces.

Second, there is a need for measures to ensure that Iraq's security institutions are capable of winning the confidence of all Iraqi communities, a confidence that the Iraqi forces must secure if they are to be the instrument for curbing sectarianism. Unfortunately, there have been instances in which Iraqi forces gave way or even cooperated with sectarian militias. To counter this problem, Prime Minister Maliki, as well as Minister of Interior Bolani, have made the reform of the Ministry of Interior, including the purging of sectarian forces from the police, a top priority. It is vital that these changes take place as quickly as possible.

The coalition will assist through interim measures such as increasing the vetting of recruits and embedding advisers with police units to have an immediate impact in the conduct of the police.

Also, General Casey and I have worked with the Iraqi leaders to create a joint group to assess the capabilities and requirements of Iraq's security forces and to monitor such critical issues as the reform of the Ministry of Interior.

Third, as this institutional foundation is strengthened, the Iraqi government will be in a position to re-establish the state's monopoly on force, which is a central task of state building. Prime Minister Maliki understands and is committed to undertaking the next steps that are essential to the completion of this task. The need to demobilize unauthorized armed groups, including militia, is a critical part of this. Although this will be politically difficult, the new Iraqi government understands that it is necessary both to stabilize Iraq and to reduce sectarian violence.

Iraqi leaders with coalition support are developing a program for the demobilization and reintegration of unauthorized armed groups, which would be implemented as insurgent activities diminish as part of the reconciliation process. As the prime minister undertakes this challenge, he can count on American support.

Fourth, the Iraqi government and the coalition will undertake -- will take advantage of reconciliation efforts to weaken and destroy the terrorists and other irreconcilable elements. Prime Minister Maliki understands the importance of reaching out to the maximum extent to groups who are willing to lay down their arms, provided they accept the new Iraqi order and fully cooperate in helping target those who persist in engaging in terrorism. We support this view because it will help to reduce the violence in Iraq and support other measures to defeat the terrorists.

A chasm has been developing between al Qaeda and those Sunni Arabs in Iraq who have been part of the armed opposition. Previously, many Sunni Arab insurgents saw al Qaeda operations as beneficial for their own cause. Now, the Sunni Arabs increasingly understand that the terrorists are not interested in the future of Iraq, and that al Qaeda's leaders see Iraqis as cannon fodder in an effort to instigate a war of civilizations.

More and more, Iraqi Sunni Arab insurgents reject this cynical game. Osama bin Laden's specific denunciation of Sunni Arab political leaders, such as Vice President Tariq Hashimi, and recently captured documents indicate that al Qaeda's leadership know that they are losing ground as a result of Iraq's reconciliation process. They know that if reconciliation goes further and begins to hollow out the Sunni Arab armed opposition, it's a mortal threat to their terrorist movement.

Fifth, as political reconciliation proceeds, the coalition and the Iraqi government will carry out a series of focused stabilization operations to develop enduring security in major cities, particularly Baghdad. General Casey is leading the coalition's effort to adjust the military strategy to focus on containing sectarian violence. Our stabilization operations will be built up on -- will build up Iraqi forces in an area while at the same time working with local leaders to implement programs to improve local governance and jump-start economic development. A key requirement for Iraqi forces will be to go after those groups engaged in sectarian violence. Iraqi forces, with coalition support, must establish an environment that poses sufficient risk to deter militant sectarians from launching attacks.

Sixth, the coalition will be able to adjust its forces as Iraqi security forces stand up and as the security situation improves. Both the Iraqi government and the coalition agree that the goal is for Iraq to stand on its own feet in terms of providing for its own security, and that dangers exist in going too fast or too slow in drawing down coalition forces. General Casey and I are discussing with the Iraqi government the formation of a joint commission to work towards a condition-based

withdrawal of coalition forces. This will complement the joint commission on the transfer of security responsibility, which has already produced an agreement on the first transfer, in Muthanna Province, to take place on July the 13th. This action demonstrates that as Iraqi security forces are ready to succeed in securing an area, responsibility for it will be turned over to them. This process will be based on continuing assessment of the security situation and Iraqi capabilities to handle it. If current progress remains on track, the coalition will be able to continue its drawdown of forces.

Besides ending sectarian and terrorist violence, Iraqi leaders have before them other opportunities and challenges, each of which can be used to support the Iraqi efforts to stabilize their country.

One opportunity that the Iraqis are taking advantage of is the positive shift in regional and international assessment of Iraq's future. More and more countries see the political change that has taken place in Iraq as enduring and even beneficial. At the regional level, several countries, including Saudi Arabia, are encouraging Sunni Arab insurgents to move towards reconciliation. This is part of a process of regional reconciliation which is leading to an improvement in relations between Iraq and the other Arab states. An indication of this positive development is the recent series of visits by Prime Minister Maliki to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

These visits included potentially significant agreements for investments and assistance.

In addition, a number of countries and firms, including major energy companies, have approached the Iraqi government proposing to increase their involvement in Iraq, to make investment in important Iraqi economic sectors and to commit to binding contracts. These developments represent a shift reflecting our calculation that the new Iraq is increasingly likely to succeed.

The Iraqi government has secured an agreement with the United Nations to co-chair a process to develop a compact between Iraq and the international community. Under this compact, Iraq will commit to specific goals and timelines for economic and other reforms, in exchange for commitments for assistance from coalition allies, the IMF, the World Bank, and other nations, including those who may have opposed Iraq's liberation but who now have a stake in seeing a prosperous Iraq.

We will support this effort. Deputy Secretary of Treasury Robert Kimmitt will lead the U.S. government's engagement in this process, as well as the State Department's counselor, Philip Zelikow.

However, at the same time, we have to be candid in acknowledging the challenge posed by a few countries, such as Syria and Iran. Iran has played a role in providing extremist groups with arms, training and money. The Iraqi government is increasingly concerned about Iran's destabilizing action. Iran must decide whether it's irreconcilably opposed to a stable, strong and democratic Iraq. If Iran persists in its unhelpful actions, the Iraqi government, as well as the United States and other friends of Iraq, will need to consider necessary measures to deny Tehran the ability to undertake destabilizing policies.

All of the efforts to stabilize Iraq, both internally and internationally, will be bolstered by the new government's effort to realize the country's economic potential and to increase economic opportunity for the Iraqi people.

This is a huge -- there is a huge gap between Iraq's economic position and its potential. Iraq used to have one of the most prosperous and advanced economies in the Middle East; under Saddam's mismanagement and wasteful spending on military conflict, threw away those advantages. To recover, Iraq must do much for the -- Iraqis must do much for themselves to set their economic house in order, and they are.

They have made an important down payment on the reduction of counterproductive subsidies for gasoline and other fuels. They're also picking up a major share of the cost of sustaining their security forces. The Iraqi government is in the process of drafting new legislation to encourage domestic and foreign investment.

It has also tapped into international expertise to assist its own experts in drawing up new hydrocarbon laws, a necessary first step in developing its oil and gas sectors. And as a signal of its intentions to move beyond the old thinking that kept Iraq from participating in the international economy, legislation to open the fuel retail sector to market prices and international players have been put before the National Assembly for its consideration before the August recess.

The Iraqi government's new economic team, led by Prime Minister Maliki and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, have the right priorities. They have emphasized increasing oil production, improving basic services, developing a safety net for the poor, and promoting investment. They understand the need to diversify the economy, particularly by jump-starting the housing and agricultural sectors. They are prepared to move forward in privatizing valuable state-owned enterprises, establishing a modern financial and banking sector, and investing in needed infrastructure in transportation, communication and health.

Prime Minister Maliki understands the importance of curbing corruption, both by undertaking reforms to increase transparency and reduce opportunities for abuses and by strengthening institutions to fight corrupt practices. The United States and other friends of Iraq will help the new government to deliver results in these areas to the Iraqi people.

In my remarks I have explained the path to success in Iraq, the actions that the government, the United States and other members of the coalition see as the key to achieving the strategic goal of a stable and representative Iraq. The Iraqis are going through a difficult transition, simultaneously facing the challenge of state and nation building while also fighting vicious terrorists. Iraq's leaders have committed themselves to a course of action that can succeed. None of the steps in this strategy are easy, but all of them are doable.

I want to end by saying a word on the importance of succeeding in Iraq. I'm aware of the dangers of staying too long in Iraq as well as the risks of leaving too soon, before success is ensured. A precipitous coalition departure could unleash a sectarian civil war, which inevitable would draw neighboring states into a regional conflagration that would disrupt oil supplies and cause instability to spill over borders. It could also result in al Qaeda taking over part of Iraq,

recreating the sanctuary it enjoyed, but lost, in Afghanistan. If al Qaeda gained this foothold, which is the strategy of the terrorists, it would be able to exploit Iraq's strategic location and enormous resources. This would make the past challenge of al Qaeda in Afghanistan look like a child's play.

Finally, a precipitous withdrawal could lead to an ethnic civil war with the Kurds concluding that the Iraqi democratic experiment has failed, and taking matters into their own hands, and with regional powers becoming involved to secure their own interests.

Whatever anyone may have thought about the decision to topple Saddam, whether one supported it or not, succeeding in Iraq now is essential to the future of the region and the world. Most of the world's security problems emanate from the region stretching from Morocco to Pakistan. Shaping its future is the defining challenge of our time. What happens in Iraq will be decisive in determining how the region evolves. Therefore, the struggle for the future of Iraq is vital to the future of the world.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Ladies and gentlemen, we have been privileged to hear a comprehensive report on the state of Iraq. We'll now throw the floor open to discussion. Just two requests: one, that you identify yourself; and two, that you be brief -- not speeches, but brief comments or questions.

All right.

Yes, sir?

Q I have one question to the general situation's development.

I acknowledge all what you have said about a political improvement in Iraq when it comes to the integration of the Sunnis, but on the same side, at the same time, it -- part of the Shi'ite society becomes more and more hostile.

So isn't it only an exchange of enemies or problems Sunnis -- lesser problems, now Shi'ites become a bigger problem?

And one second remark from my work as a journalist, and my colleague and me we have been to Iraq, and we can only say that when it comes to the work of journalists in Iraq, the situation today is much worse, it is much more dangerous than it was two years ago. So I don't deny progress in the political side, but I can't see that there is a lot of impact on the general situation in that security becomes better.

AMB. KHALILZAD: I think that --

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Can you turn the mike on? Press the button.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Sorry. Thank you. With regard to the Shi'ite- Sunni equation, I believe that overall there were concerns with regard to the Sunni participation at an earlier phase, that that participation will be at the expense of Shi'ite interests. I think there has been a diminution in that concern, and the reason is that the Shi'ites, I think, have come to believe that they cannot govern by themselves Iraq, and two, that the participation has taken place on the basis that recognizes their relative weight, that the participation has taken place with regard to -- within the current constitutional framework, which is -- although, the constitution, as I said, legally allows for a process for it to be amended.

Second, that it is based on the election results that -- in terms of proportions, that it's satisfactory to them, and that the unity government, which their concern was -- would put aside the results of the elections and be based on equality of the different sects and ethnic group, has now taken place, but in fact the government is based on the result of the elections with the Shi'a alliance having the lion's share.

There is always a tendency for zero-summing things in Iraq. I understand that. But I believe that the danger that -- at times in the past when there was an instance that the unity government be formed, that there be no sectarian ministers, was that this was going to be a total shift away from one sect to another, has proven not to be correct. I see this as not as much of a problem as in the past.

Now, with regard to security for journalists in Baghdad, the security in Baghdad is very difficult. I understand that. That's where the struggle right now is really focused, and it is a sectarian- based struggle. And therefore, those who live there, especially the journalists, I understand that the situation is difficult for them.

I'm going to be going around the room, so you next and then, after that, you.

Please. Go ahead.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Elise Labott with CNN. I'd like to follow up on your pretty dire warning at the end of your remarks that a precipitous withdrawal by the coalition forces would take Iraq from the brink of civil war into a civil war that could draw the region. Are you saying that it's the coalition forces that are stopping Iraq from the brink of civil war?

Some of the things that you describe that the new unity government has to do to inspire the confidence of Iraqis would take a long time, and this administration has said that it was the national unity government that would, in fact, stop this sectarian violence. As we've seen, over the last couple of weeks it's really increasing. So we're talking about U.S. troops being there for a long time, and that's an area that you just envision. Thank you.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, first, that the process of state- and nation-building in Iraq -- although Iraq being an ancient land, but it's really a new nation in terms of the communities of Iraq voluntarily talking with each other, coming to an understanding, and the institutions of this new country, because the existing institutions are destroyed, to be built, it will take time.

The question of the U.S. military presence is not necessarily one which has to stay until the process is completed, but until Iraqis can handle this on their own. And I believe that with progress with regard to the political track that I described, as well as building up of the security institution, if conditions move in the direction that I have discussed, there could be adjustments downward because I do believe that if one stays too long, we also add to the difficulties. And therefore it is something that needs to be assessed and reassessed constantly, and what my signal and my message was, that we are aware of those dangers and are trying to calibrate this.

Iraq has an elected government. This government by any measure is a legitimate government. All communities have participated. Believe it or not, 85 percent of the assembly is represented in this government. This government has the backing of 92 percent of the assembly who are negotiating with it. They are aware of the political impact of the U.S. force presence. And therefore, together we're going to -- we're going to reach an understanding, an agreement that will allow for adjustment and recalibration constantly.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yes, sir? Then all the way over there.

Q: Jamshid Charlangi, Persian Service, Voice of America. My question is, I mean, Sunni leaders, like Olamar Muslimin (ph), they accuse Interior Ministry is under control of Revolutionary Guard of Iran. How do you consider this? And when you say, Mr. Ambassador, America has a plan, I mean to stop Iran to interfere Iraqi interior problems, I understand it. But how about Iraqi government? Because we know most of them, they are -- they have a good relationship with Iranian regime.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right. Well, there is no question, as I've discussed, that there is a need for reform of the Ministry of Interior and vetting of people. As I said, there are indications that some elements of the police force cooperate with sectarian militias. We also understand that building institutions take time and it's not easy. But the key thing is that the prime minister, who is a strong leader himself, and a Shi'a, he says that; it's not only some Sunni politicians that have stated that. So we're going to work with them to -- on the reform agenda.

With regard to Iran, there are relations between Iran and some of the political forces in Iraq. But Prime Minister Maliki understands that Iran is playing a double role. On the one hand it's got good state-to-state relations, but on the other hand, it's also helping extremist groups and that is not acceptable to this government. And as I said in my remarks, both the Iraqi government and ourselves are looking at ways to bring about the cooperation of Iran, or to take measures to deal with the actions that they are taking in Iraq that is unhelpful to the building of a stable Iraq.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yes? In the back there, yes. The microphone.

Q: Adel Awad (sp), Radio Sawa. There is a lot of emphasis lately about the necessity of disarming the militia, specifically the Shi'a militia, referring to the Mahdi Army particularly. And one question that come to the mind that how could you disarm the Shi'a militia without playing into the hands of the terrorists who are, I mean, daily announcing that they are targeting the Shi'a civilians.

Today there is a report from International Crisis Group that just came today, talking about the importance of postponing the attempts of coercive disarmament of Mahdi Army. So what's your view on this?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, there is no question that the terrorists would like to provoke sectarian war. What they do is to attack innocent Shi'a, the terrorists. Zarqawi was the mastermind of this concept, and now bin Laden has taken it over. He's stated the same objective. And when an innocent Shi'a area or group is attacked, then some of the militias take revenge for that by going after some innocent Sunnis.

I believe that unless the sectarian conflict is brought under control and the militia and the insurgent capabilities are brought under control, as state institution capabilities grow and everyone cooperates against the terrorists, that there is a risk that the sectarian conflict will expand, state institutions will be overwhelmed. And that's what needs to be avoided.

So there will be difficult decisions that will be faced by some of the leaders, such as Muqtada al-Sadr and others who have militias. But this will be done in a way that's balanced, that reduces also the insurgents' military capabilities. Because some are beginning to see the insurgents as Sunni militias and the militias as Shi'a militias, and these two communities have their own militias, rather than relying on the state to look after their securities, and that is a recipe not for success.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: The lady over there.

Q: Maya Beydoun from Al Jazeera. I have two questions, actually.

The first one is about the civil war. Senators Biden and Reed today have described what's going in Iraq as a civil war, whereas you are downplaying it now. So, I mean, for the American administration, when will -- how do you define civil war? When will it be a civil war?

And the second question is about amnesty. You've said that people who have killed soldiers, Americans and the Iraqis, are not going to be amnestied. So then who is -- this amnesty covers whom? I mean, usually amnesty covers people who killed during the war.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, I've said that there will not be a double standard and I can -- that if you've killed a coalition soldier, you get amnesty, but if you've killed an Iraqi, you don't. There will not be a double standard.

With regard to the civil war, I believe that this is a matter of definition, of course. And there is a sectarian conflict focused particularly in Baghdad right now. But the state institutions are holding.

The leaders of the different communities are in the government. They say they want to stay in the government. And therefore because of that, because of the desire of the leaders to work together, and they are, and the state institutions to hold together, I do not believe that what's

happening could be described in terms of just what I described as a civil war. But there is significant sectarian violence, there's no question about that.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: The gentleman in the third row there. Yes? Behind you. Yes.

Q: Hello. I'm Tim Phelps from Newsday. Could you talk a little bit more about this joint commission for the withdrawal of U.S. troops; and also the role that Muqtada Sadr is playing, both politically and militarily, in Iraq right now?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, when I get back, we will -- General Casey and I are planning to sit together with the prime minister, establish this joint group to look at kind of conditions that would allow for adjustment downward in U.S. forces, the coalition forces. And we have agreed to do that. And this will be composed of Iraqis and coalition people. We already have experience in this in terms of the Committee for Transfer of Responsibility that have been working on transferring the security responsibility, the lead in it to the Iraqis, and that has worked. This will be a parallel kind of entity. We've had workable experience with the Iraqis on this issue.

With regard to Muqtada al-Sadr, he is, of course, a significant religious, political and security leader, but there are others, as well. He doesn't represent all of the Shi'as of Iraq. There are differences of view among the Shi'a community. And of course, the overall religious leader is Mr. Sistani, that has influence over the Shi'a community as a whole.

Our effort is that the militias -- that's what the government of Iraq is saying, as well -- the militias need to come under control, that the state needs to have a monopoly of force, and that I think this is clearly the way to go forward. There has to be a program for decommissioning and reintegration. And I believe that that will involve costs, and we believe that part of the cost could be borne by this international compact that is being discussed to bring countries together with Iraq; Iraq makes commitment, the world makes commitment vis-a-vis Iraq. And that will be good for Iraq both politically and of course in terms of the financial help that right now Iraq needs in terms of the transition.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, thank you for your overview. I was -- you were -- on the regional dimension, you were mentioning there were certain countries that are playing a constructive role. At the same time, you said that you thought Iran and Syria were not.

I was wondering if you could elaborate on the motives of those two. And when you said about necessary measures to adjust, was this a warning to Iran? And on the Syria issue, can you just say if there's been any improvements on the border with Iraq? Do you see them making progress?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, with regard to Syria, there have -- there has been some improvements on the border, according to our people, but no fundamental change in policy.

With regard to Iran, as I said, it is at least a two-track approach. The change in Iraq obviously was welcomed by Iran. Iran sought to overthrow Saddam itself, as it tried to deal with the Taliban problem on the other front and did not. I used to meet with the Iranian ambassador. I

had the authority to -- authorization to meet with him when I was in Afghanistan, and I used to joke with him that "you guys ought to be much more helpful to us, because look, you couldn't deal with the Taliban problem, you couldn't deal with Saddam problem, and we've dealt with both. Oh, that's a big deal. We'll send you a bill one day for that." (Scattered laughter.)

So -- but it's an issue that they are trying to keep their coalition under pressure, inflict pain. They are trying to supply arms to groups. That keeps Iraq in a relatively unstable environment.

Strategically, it's possible that since Iraq was a balancer vis- a-vis Iran, and Iran sees itself as the natural hegemon, entitled to regional domination, that doesn't want Iraq to reemerge to play that role.

Iraqis are beginning to understand that. They were dependent, some of them, on Iran during the opposition time, but now that Iraq has become liberated, as they become more self-assured, and as the region engages them, that they see they have other options, I think they're going to be less tolerant of that sort of attitude on the part of the -- Iran. We don't seek a hostile relationship between Iraq and Iran. They're neighbors, but at the same time, the half of the policy that seeks to undermine, make things difficult for Iraq is unacceptable to the unity government, to Prime Minister Maliki. And we certainly support him on that.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Second row from the back. Yes. The gentleman there. Yes.

Q: Omar Abdel-Razek, BBC Arabic Service.

Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you can tell us how far your presence in Iraq -- the American presence in Iraq -- has served the reconciliation between the United States and the Arab world? Also, to follow up on what my colleague just mentioned, when you say that there is more regional understanding for the importance of success in Iraq, do you mean that Arab neighboring countries are willing now to accept the Iraqi model or to apply it, especially when it's included in democratization of the Middle East? Thank you.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, on the second question, I don't know whether they accept the model, but I think they are -- they see that the Iraqi population, different groups have come together in a unity government, and this reconciliation initiative by Prime Minister Maliki is appreciated. They also like Prime Minister Maliki. He's kind of a businesslike, straightforward kind of dealings. And the fact that he regards himself as an Arab and emphasizes his Arabness, and has talked clearly about Iran, all of this is encouraging the Arabs. There are concerns in the Arab world about increasing stability in Iraq, and they are concerned about a precipitous U.S. withdrawal also, I have to tell you, when I go and visit some of them. And they also, of course, ultimately would like the U.S. to leave, but they think a precipitous withdrawal would not be good.

Now, as to whether our involvement in Iraq has helped in terms of our relations with the Arab world, well I -- I know I would leave others to judge that. In Iraq -- I describe to you what the situation is in Iraq. That's my focus at the present time.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I'll keep my mouth shut.

Yes, sir?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yeah. Please. (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you. My name is Ali Al-Ahmed. I'm the director of the Gulf Institute.

My question is on the regional situation. The administration and yourself mentioned a lot about the Iranian and Syrian role in Iraq, but noticeably you have ignored the Saudi and Jordanian role, both public and official. The largest number of terrorists in Iraq are from Saudi Arabia, between two to three thousand. This is Saudi sources and our sources. That -- the Saudi government actually gave green light -- green light to these many terrorists to go into Iraq, but you have never emphasized or spoken to the sectarian government of Saudi Arabia -- mentioning sectarianism -- their role in destabilizing Iraq because it's Shi'a majority and because they don't want the democracy to filter in their border.

So I'd like you to comment on that.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, we're very much committed -- it's no secret that we're committed to a representative, democratic government in Iraq. And that is beneficial to the population, that's the largest benefits will now be for everybody. So the Saudis know our stand on Iraq, that we want a representative, democratic system. And we want a longer-term transformation of the whole region to become a normal part of the world. As other regions that were at one time dysfunctional became functional over time, this region's turn has come as well.

But with regard to their assistance, I don't believe that it's the Saudi official policy to send terrorists to Iraq. I mean, that's my own judgment as well as the judgment of our people who follow these things.

And they have been helpful. Jordan and Saudi Arabia and UAE, Turkey, have been helpful in terms of encouraging Sunnis to participate in the elections, number one. I go a lot to these neighboring countries to get them to engage positively, because they are very concerned about Iran gaining influence in Iraq. And I tell them that if they isolate Iraq, and Iraqi Shi'as in particular, then they will have no choice but to rely on Iran; but if they really want Iraqis to rely on themselves, they need to give them -- provide them with other options as well and to accept the realities of Iraq.

And I believe that the extension of the visit by -- the invitation for the visit by Prime Minister Maliki, the way he was received by the Saudi government, the crown prince going to the airport to welcome him, giving him a royal treatment, a one-on-one meeting with His Majesty the king of Saudi Arabia, all was a message that they are reconciling themselves with this new Iraq. And I think similarly what happened in UAE was very positive. Kuwait is not surprising, to some extent, because there has been a longer-term relationship.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: The gentleman over there. Second row, yes.

Q: Sir, my name is Khaled Dawoud. I'm from Egypt, Al-Ahram Newspaper. I have two questions, please. When you speak about national unity government, it's difficult sometimes to understand how it could be described so if every Iraqi goes and votes for their sect in the first place. And you personally mentioned proportions of Sunnis, proportions of Shi'ites, so how much united is it in this way? And my second question. You also mentioned something about the Iraqi army and the need to make it a better army instead of being a light force. So I was wondering what kind of weapons you might think the Iraqis might get. Will they get airplanes, they get tanks, for example?

Thank you very much, sir.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, on the first one, unfortunately, given the sectarian and ethnic fault line that has been accentuated, that people in Iraq largely voted for their identities in the last election, so therefore the cross-sectarian parties, cross-ethnic parties did not do as well as the ones that were sectarian.

Now, there are lots of reasons for it, some say because of the current situation, some say because of the factors present on the scene that brought this about. But that is what happened. And therefore, in order to bridge that divide in terms of how the votes took place, rather than having a Shi'a-Kurd government excluding the Sunni, the Iraqis, and with our encouragement, decided to make sure that it's a government that all three main ethnic groups and sects are represented in that government.

And I think that puts the situation, in terms of the government, in a stronger position to deal with the problem that Iraq faces, which is sectarian fault lines, sectarian tension.

But my hope is that as Iraq will get more -- gets more secure, as it becomes more normal, that people would then decide to vote on issues, and that will be more cross-sectarian/cross-ethnic coalitions that will come about.

On arming the Iraqis, that will be something that will be looked at by this joint group. There is an existing plan for "heavying up" the Iraqi forces, including tanks and so on. But they -- we'll review it together with Prime Minister Maliki. He would like to accelerate the buildup of the army, and we would like to sit down with him and see what it is that can be done and what the Iraqis are willing to do in order to be able not only acquire the force but be able to sustain it over the longer term.

Q: A follow-up on the --

Q: Can I follow up on the arms question?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: No, gentleman there. Gentleman next to you.

Q: Hisham Melhem, Al-Arabiya TV and Mahab (sp) newspaper in Beirut.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Hisham.

Q: Zal, thank you.

A quick question. We hear that Prime Minister Maliki will be visiting Washington soon, in the next few weeks.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

Q: Give us a little story here, if you can. But broadly, we heard that there were reports that the sectarian killings that occurred on Sunday in Baghdad was perpetrated by the Mahdi Army, Muqtada Sadr's army.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

Q: This may be difficult for you to discuss, but in hindsight, I mean, was it a mistake for the American authorities and the Iraqi authorities two years ago not to prosecute Muqtada Sadr? Because there was a case against him, a legal case, being probably involved in the killing of al-Khoei early on, after the fall of Baghdad, because it seems to me that sectarian forces like him now have veto power.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, I have -- one thing I've decided not to do is to look back as to what my predecessors should or should not have done. And always I'm asked about the de-Ba'athification, about the dissolution of the army, about Muqtada al-Sadr, about, you know, some of the decisions that were made by my predecessors. I'm looking -- I always say I look forward, not back. That's a safe place for me to be at this time. (Laughter.) Thank you. (Chuckles.)

Q: (Off mike.)

AMB. KHALILZAD: I think -- I don't have anything to announce on that right now. But if there is something about that, it'll be announced by the right institutions.

Q: Phil Dine, St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Given the lack of WMDs or of ties to 9/11 or al Qaeda --

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

Q: -- it seems the main justification now is -- for us being there is trying to provide a better life for Iraqis. But as Americans see the daily carnage, as they see expenditures of hundreds of billions of dollars, and as they see a U.S. death casualty -- death rate approaching that of 9/11, how can Americans be sure this is all worth it?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, I believe that, as I said in my statement, that now that we're there, you -- and I respect your arguments about the past -- now that we're there, I believe -- and for strategic reasons that I described, also for good moral reasons, which is that part of the circumstances is, of course, due to the fact that we're there, we were there. Although the fundamentals are Iraqi, but I think our presence did play a role.

We have to do everything that we can, as good people thinking about our own future and the future of the world and the future of the Iraqis, that we have played a role in this, that we do what we can to have a good end in terms of this -- what we have started.

And so I think that, given the risks of -- kind of an abandonment strategy for Iraqis, for the region and for the world, we need to do everything prudently we can to help them stand on their own feet, contain the violence. And I think it will serve our interests and it will be the right thing to do.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yes, last row. Here.

Q: Hi. I'm Dan Sagalyn from The NewsHour.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Hi, Dan.

Q: Hello, Mr. Ambassador. So the security crackdown in Baghdad has been going on a couple of weeks -- what's your assessment of how well is it going? Is it succeeding?

AMB. KHALILZAD: It has not produced the results I expected so far. The plan is being reviewed, and adjustments will be made.

No, it has not performed to the level that was expected.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Go ahead.

Q: Quil Lawrence, BBC.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Hi.

Q: I wanted to ask you about next year's referendum in Kirkuk, and if you could talk about that city -- I was there recently -- it doesn't look like it's changed much in three years, and some of the people there say that they're getting resistance from Baghdad in investment there because it's unclear which way the city will go, and at the same time some resistance from the coalition for Kurdish investment coming from the north. Is there some sensitivity about things going too well up there and some imbalance?

AMB. KHALILZAD: No. We are committed to working within the -- helping Iraqis work within the framework we agreed to in the constitution, unless they change their mind but -- in a constitutional manner.

But that's where the commitment is. And we don't want anyone to presume a particular outcome already, and -- but to stick to the provisions of the constitution.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Someone in the back there -- yes?

Q: Guy Dinmore from the Financial Times. Thank you very much.

Following the alleged atrocities by American soldiers in Iraq, there have been reports that the Iraqi prime minister has requested that immunity of U.S. soldiers be lifted.

Is this something you can imagine happening?

And a somewhat unrelated question, the Pentagon today is saying that the Geneva Convention will henceforth be applied to all combatants in the custody of the U.S. military. Does that make your life particularly easier in Iraq now?

Thank you.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, on the first issue, the prime minister, according to the press, has made allegedly statements of the kind you've talked about. We have talked with him. I -- not done it myself; General Casey and my deputy talked with him about this. We have explained to him that in unity, which is embedded in the laws of Iraq as well as in the U.N. resolution and that -- under which the U.S. forces are present there, does not mean immunity from prosecution, that we in fact ourselves prosecute people who break the Law of War, break U.S. laws and rules and regulations with regard to operations in Iraq, and that there may be opportunities or ways in which we can bring Iraqis more into the picture as to what it is that we do so that they have transparency. They should not believe that they're immune from prosecution if they break the law, and I will discuss this with them further when I get back.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: This will be the last question. The lady there. Yes?

Q: Elaine Grossman, Inside the Pentagon. Mr. Ambassador, you've talked for months about the criticality of securing Baghdad, and so I wanted to follow up on that. What kinds of new measures are you looking at to facilitate this, given that what is -- what you've done thus far has not worked out so well in the past few weeks?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yes. Sure. Well, I believe that securing Baghdad is critical. That is number one. Number two, that what is needed to secure it is first that is some political measures that I talked about that brings the communities together, and there's been progress on that at one level. But at the same time, at another level, things have gotten worse. That what's needed is a more effective police force, that -- I've talked about that. We need to deal with militia issue, which is the source of some of the problems in Baghdad. And we need to make it risky for people in terms of operations that the government allows or supports that changes the calculus of people involved. If you are a militia leader and you know that if you -- or your group -- or these particular configuration of forces think that you can get cooperation from the police, go kill someone, and not face any penalties or any risks, that, of course, is not going to act as deterrent.

And what is needed, and I think the government's moving in this direction with the revised Baghdad security plan, and with our own adjustment in terms of our operations, this is -- in my judgment, this going to -- the calculus will change.

But it is a difficult situation. I don't want to give the impression that what we have undertaken in Iraq is easy. It is a very, very difficult project that we have taken on. There is progress, but there are huge challenges still with us. But it's very important, in my judgment, that we do what we can, as I said before, to succeed, to adjust our posture, and with the ultimate goal of getting Iraq to stand on its own feet as soon as possible.

Before I stop, since Dr. Brzezinski said this was the last question, I want to thank everyone for coming here.

Thank you, Dr. Brzezinski, for your presiding over this meeting, and for your friendship and guidance over the many years.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will also agree with the two points I'm going to make. The first is that Ambassador Khalilzad has been remarkably generous with his time. You can well imagine what his schedule is. And he has been comprehensive in his answers. He has tried to respond to your concerns.

And secondly, that we as a country, whatever our differences regarding our policy in Iraq, we're lucky to have someone in Baghdad who is candid, who is realistic, and who thinks strategically, and last but not least, who knows the region.

So we're doubly grateful to you, Zal. Thank you very much.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)