

**THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

SPEAKER:

AMBASSADOR SAMIR SUMAIDAIE

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ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to thank you for coming this morning on behalf of John Hamre and the CSIS.

And I know you came to hear Ambassador Sumaidaie and I will not take up more than a few moments, but I think it is particularly important at this point in time to hear an Iraqi voice. Sometimes I feel that we in the United States tend to debate issues purely on our own terms. And I know many of you have not had the opportunity to visit Iraq, but it is a country I first visited in the early '70s. And I can never forget the fact that it is today a country of 27 million people. That the events there go far beyond the issue of U.S. surges and U.S. troops levels.

It is also a country which has an extraordinarily young population. When we talk about the future of Iraq it's easy to forget that the median age of Iraqis is about 19 years – about half the median age of Americans. And the future we are shaping affects, literally, an immense number of people. I think, too, that as we have our own debate in the United States, we as Americans may find it a little too easy to forget that we have moral and ethical obligations to the Iraqis and to the Iraqi people, not simply strategic interests.

And I can't think of someone better qualified to express the Iraqi view than the ambassador. He has served as a minister. He was an active member of the resistance to Saddam Hussein. He's been Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations before becoming the ambassador to the United States. I find out he is also a poet and a calligrapher, someone who knows the culture of his country and his heritage as well as the politics.

So Ambassador, if I might turn things over to you. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR SAMIR SUMAIDAIE: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank you, Dr. Cordesman, for this introduction and thank you for arranging this meeting. I'll go straight into my comments.

There is a heartfelt debate going on in this country about what to do about Iraq. People feel that this intervention in Iraq is not producing any successes to speak of. It's bogged down. It's a big drain on American resources and it's going nowhere and are wondering when this is all coming to an end. It's a legitimate question. It's a legitimate worry. And we understand, of course, why Americans generally feel so disappointed and so exasperated with the situation in Iraq.

But in my many speaking engagements around the country, I find the American public – especially those with an interest in international affairs – to be quite willing to listen. They ask the right questions and when they are informed, they generally are very supportive. What I'd like to do in my brief remarks today is to put the Iraqi situation in its context – in a context that helps the American public, the American decision makers to look at it not as a problem, or not just as a problem, but also as an opportunity and see the longer-term ramifications of various decisions and policy approaches.

Iraq has not always been a problem. Everybody knows Iraq, Mesopotamia, is the birthplace of civilization. It is where most people agree the wheel was invented, the week was invented as a unit of time, beer was first brewed, the first ever law was written, the first ever library was – public library was established and the first ever cooking recipe was written. Iraq has a very long tradition and a long civilization.

And in its modern incarnation it came up as a modern state in the '20s of last century and I myself was born into a middle-class family and my parents took care that I had a good education. People in Baghdad were very neighborly, very peaceful. Violence was far from people's minds. People tended their gardens and looked after their own and corruption was almost unheard of. People who – when rumor was going around that someone was involved in corruption he was shunned and this is how we grew up. There was no discrimination and no prejudice as to Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd, Christian, Muslim, Jew. Many people forget that Baghdad in the '30s of the last century was largely a Jewish city. It was – about 25 percent to 30 percent of its population was Jewish. The first Parliament in Iraq had more Jewish members than Christian members.

So Iraq, and Baghdad in particular, was a cosmopolitan country which was coming up – coming up very well. Up until the '50s when the first coups d'état – military coups took place, Iraq was a very promising country. When the Ba'athists came in 1968, Iraq had foreign reserves of \$35 billion. Its GDP was on a par with Spain. Its education was working, health system was working. And it was a very promising country with people looking forward to the future. The Iraqi dinar was equivalent to 3.3 American dollars.

When finally, in 2003 – after two wars and a long period of sanctions – Saddam was removed, the economy had collapsed completely. One dollar became equal to about 3,000 Iraqi dinar. And instead of having a surplus and a reserve, Iraq was in the red to the tune of \$300 (billion) or \$350 billion. That is the transformation. That's the transformation that Saddam and his misrule and his henchmen with systematic looting, systematic destruction, wreaked on the country.

But the figures belie a deeper reality of destruction – destruction in social values, destruction in social fabric. And the corruption that took root, the government institutions that became totally dysfunctional, I think it is true to say that the state, as a state, had collapsed from the inside during the period of the sanctions. And the sanctions were almost as responsible for the destruction of the state and the social fabric as the misrule and the crimes of Saddam Hussein.

So enter the United States in 2003 – maybe without sufficient thinking about how to manage the situation. Saddam – Saddam's regime collapsed, as it was expected to, but there was a period of lawlessness and a period of lack of control, which we're still paying for until now. The police and the army were disbanded and there was absolutely no impediment to mob rule. Saddam had very thoughtfully released thousands upon thousands of hardened criminals into the streets before the Americans intervened.

So in that environment, the average person – average civilian – was really in trouble. Nevertheless, Iraqis rallied. Most Iraqis were delighted to get rid of Saddam. They were grateful for the Americans to rid them of Saddam. But they were looking forward to a better future. We're hoping that the Americans will help them put their country together and build their institutions.

But in this vacuum, two things happened. Regional powers found an opportunity to step in establish spheres of influence. And of course, insurgents and criminals – organized crime – all kinds of bad people found an opportunity to organize themselves. And with help and support – tangible, significant help from outside, they succeeded in doing that. We must remember that Saddam experienced a failure early in his political career. And the Ba’ath party, it was – came to power in 1963 as was removed in the same year. It came to power in February, it was removed in November of the same year, only to come back in 1968. So they vowed that if ever they are removed, they would have enough resources to come back. And they set aside for many years five percent of the oil revenue as a fund to help them to come back.

Like any good, disciplined mafia, they disbursed these funds through many legitimate businesses internationally. And the equity, which is controlled by Saddam’s family and his supporters, is in the tens of billions of dollars. So they’re not exactly short of cash. Saddam, before being removed, sent his son to the central bank to load up nearly \$2 billion in cash. Three truckloads were loaded up and moved out. We managed to retrieve something like \$500 million – just pocket change compared to what they have.

So what the point I am making here is that we have the Saddamists with determination to come back to power and the necessary resources. They are supported, aided and abetted by regional powers who were less than pleased by the intervention of the United States and the presence of the United States’ troops next to them. And we had a vacuum which allowed all these things to get established. So we have this formidable challenge. But the Iraqi people rose up the challenge despite the onslaught, and it has been a horrendous onslaught. To date, there have been about 1,000 suicide bombers who have attacked Iraq. You tell me any country on the face of Earth which can withstand 1,000 suicide bombers going into markets, going next to schools, going wherever there is a crowd and blowing themselves up. It is remarkable how resilient the Iraqis are. And until now – yesterday there was an attack on Parliament. Today there was a meeting of defiance in the – in Parliament. People questioned whether in going to vote in the elections or going to their jobs every day – they are in every action saying to the terrorists, “We are not going to be cowed.”

I have lost many dear friends in this battle, and I don’t know any other Iraqi who has worked with me who has not. Last month, our vice-president was here and we were sitting in the Oval Office with President Bush, and I know that he had shrapnel in his – by his toe from the attack a month before to assassinate him. This is what we are going through. But I detected no weakening. I detected no change in resolve in Dr. al-Abdul Mehdi's (sp) attitude or anybody else. Iraqis are still determined to go on. However, the extent of the damage in Iraq that has accumulated because of all these factors that I have enumerated and the viciousness and sheer scale of the onslaught upon them means that this is going to be a long-drawn battle. But this is not only a battle in Iraq by Iraqis. It’s an international battle. This is a confrontation between forces going well beyond Iraq, well beyond Iraqi borders. Most of the suicide bombers I mentioned a while ago are not Iraqi. They’re coming to us from North Africa, they’re coming to us from Yemen, from Sudan, even from Europe.

So we have been thrust into this situation by the intervention of the United States, for which we are grateful – let me make that absolutely clear. But to get after – out of it, we cannot do it on our own. Yet the debate in this country is – seems to be always framed in “When can we have the troops back? Is it next month or is it the month after?” I say that it should not be framed in these terms. I say that it should be framed in terms of this confrontation, with this international alliance of dark forces. Are we – by we, I mean here both Americans and Iraqis – and all those who believe in democracy, all those who value the values of open society – are we going to come out as defeated, or are we going to come out on top? That’s the fundamental principle that we have to keep in our minds. And we have to do – we all have to do whatever it takes to ensure that Iraq does not fall into the hands of al Qaeda or the Saddamists or an alliance of both, or an alliance between them and other extremists Islamist movement – or become dismembered between all these and between a regional power. That would be a catastrophe not only for Iraq, it would be a catastrophe for the region, it would be, I insist, a catastrophe for the United States and its long-term interests.

I believe everything that needs to be done has to be done. We Iraqis have not been sitting idle. We’ve made considerable achievements under fire. We continue to do so and we will continue to do so. Many people talk about sectarian violence and that there is a civil war. There is a war, indeed, but it’s not a civil war. It’s a war conducted – carried out by extremists on innocent civilians. Extremist Sunnis are killing innocent Shi’a. Extremist Shi’as are killing innocent Sunnis. But there is no animosity between ordinary Sunnis and Shi’as. They live quite happily together. They work quite happily together. And I – as an Iraqi, I know that in my own experience and the experience of all the Iraqis I know, there is no hatred. We are not the Balkans.

People try to Balkanize Iraq, but Iraq cannot be Balkanized. We cannot – the Iraqis don’t warm up to solutions in (inaudible) about dividing the country in order to keep it together. This would not work. We have big pockets of Shi’a communities within Sunni areas, and we have big pockets of Sunni areas within Shi’a areas. We have – in urban society, we have about 30 percent of mixed marriages. What do we do? Run the borders through bedrooms? It wouldn’t work. In Iraq, it would not work. So to those who are seeking simple solutions, I say forget it. We Iraqis will find our own solutions. We Iraqis will reach the accommodations that will work for us. Help us to beat off the terrorists, and help us to rebuild our institutions which were destroyed over years of misrule, sanctions and then later mismanagement. Then we will shoulder our responsibilities. We believe we can do it, but we believe we can do it only with your help. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, I’m going to open things up to questions in just a moment. I do have several favors to ask, however. We do have microphones. I would be grateful if you would wait for them. I’m staring into some TV lights. I’m going to have to recognize you largely by geography, not by name. Forgive me for doing that but that means it would be very helpful if you’d identify yourself before you ask your question. And since we have quite a number of people here if we could make it one single question per person and one that ends in a question mark, that would probably make it better for everyone.

Let me begin with the lady in the far back there.

Q: Michelle Kellerman with National Public Radio. Was wondering – you talked a lot about the influence of neighbors. If you can shed some light on the upcoming neighbors meeting – why it's taking so long to get it off the ground. What are your expectations for it?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Thank you. I don't think it's taking so long to get it off the ground. We – it needed some nimble diplomacy to get the first one going and that was – that took place, as you know, in Baghdad on the 10th of March at the senior official level. That meeting requested the Iraqi foreign minister to conduct discussions with all participants to set up a date and a place for the next meeting, which is at the ministerial level, and give him a month to do so. And he in fact did it within the month, just. But he did it and it has been now agreed to hold the ministerial level meeting on the 4th of May, which is soon going to be upon us. That would be preceded by a meeting on the Iraq Compact.

But this is a very significant meeting. We have always pleaded with our neighbors to leave us alone and allow Iraq to heal without intervention and without interference, and we have warned them that if things go wrong in Iraq, they will not be immune from the violence and they will not be immune from the terrorism that would overflow from Iraq. We received a lot of assurances and promises but we generally try to hold people to their word and judge them by what they actually do, not by what they say.

This forthcoming meeting will be one in the context of a chain of such meetings, but this will be more important and different in the – in that the P5 – the permanent five members of the Security Council – will participate at the ministerial level. It will be an opportunity for the big powers to be talking to the regional powers, and hopefully this will help address confrontations that exist at the moment between various parties. And if we can defuse these confrontations or reduce them, that will be reflected in the streets of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. Thank you.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CORDESMAN: Michelle –

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Well, Iraq and Iran are implicitly there because Iran is a regional power and the U.S., of course, is going to be attending.

MR. CORDESMAN: In the back. Yes – (off mike) –

Q: (Off mike) – service. I was curious if you could talk about the oil situation in Iraq and whether you have any – if you can give a realistic expectation of when the oil law will be passed and implemented, and if you have any forecast for oil production.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: As you know, Iraq has considerable oil reserves, but its oil industry, like all other infrastructures, are running on shoestrings. They're dilapidated – we haven't built a refinery in the last 30, 40 years in Iraq, and it is subject to sabotage all the time. But despite the sabotage, we are producing around 1.7 and exporting around – producing about 2 million barrels a day and exporting about 1.7 million barrels a day. But that's way below what we want to produce and export. So there is the opportunity for considerable oil investment – considerable investment in

the oil sector – and we have also made sure in the drafting of our constitution that oil is the property, for lack of – benefited from oil belongs to all Iraqis. That is a very useful and unifying principle for Iraq, and recently the Cabinet has passed a draft law to put some pressure on that principle, and that draft will be going to Parliament. Parliament will debate it, possibly amend it or whatever, but we expect that it will be changed – it will be passed. How long exactly I don't know. We are in – as you know – in difficult times. Things take a little longer there. Things – as you know, things take long enough here in Washington, D.C. so don't expect more of us than people do here in peaceful environment. But we will – we realize how urgent this is and this is being dealt with on that basis.

Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman over there.

Q: Ambassador –

MR. CORDESMAN: Could you identify yourself?

Q: James Kitfield from National Journal Magazine. General Petraeus has talked about there's Iraqi time and there's U.S. time, and the two clocks don't match up. Your comments seem to imply the same thing. You're sort of begging for a little more – not begging, but you're asking for more patience. What do you tell Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill when they say they want to put a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces that really goes through next year but no further? How do you respond to them?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Well, I think I can claim the first use of this phraseology of clocks, and General Petraeus has used it quite correctly. There is a difference in the clock if you like – in the speed of the clock in Washington and in Baghdad. In Baghdad, we are governed by reality on how soon we can deliver any specific thing in the circumstances that we experience out there. Here, the imperatives are of the, you know, presidential elections, other elections and what different parties want to do to each other. I think we should go, frankly, by what happens on the ground. The judgment – the best judgment of that can be made by Iraqi government which is, of course, deeply involved and by the U.S. forces and people like General Petraeus who are – experience things firsthand.

To those who say that by a certain date we should have a cutoff and bring the troops home, I think they – they would be saying to the terrorists, “You don’t have to do anything now; just wait until that date.” That is not the right signal to send out.

However, I’m not against discussing dates. I’m not against setting deadlines or target dates for ourselves, because we want to challenge ourselves. We want to achieve what we need to achieve. But this can be discussed not in the glare of publicity, not in public statements, and certainly should not be legislated. That – that should be a target that we both work towards on understandings or – tacit understandings between the two governments and everybody who is involved. That’s the way this should be tackled.

We agree on one thing: We don't want tens or – tens of thousands of American troops to continue to exist on Iraqi soil forever. So we can find a way of achieving that in a way that will not give victory to the terrorists, and at the same time will – will satisfy Americans who are worried about their loved ones.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman in the third row there. Please wait for the microphone.

Q: Thank you very much. Ambassador, good morning to you. And good morning, Dr. Cordesman. My name's Edward Joseph. I'm with the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and co-author, with Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, of just such a proposal, sir, that I think you were criticizing before, and that is federalism, or self-partition of Iraq along the Bosnia model, as a solution and as envisioned in the – in the Iraq constitution. As a Plan B, I should mention – as a Plan B, if the present course does not work. And sir, you said – and I take your point very well, that there's no – and (it's ?) a major counterargument to this kind of view, that Sunnis and Shi'a, there's no – it's not the Balkans; there's no animosity and hate there. You say that.

What we see, unfortunately, indicators are –

MR. CORDESMAN: (Inaudible.) Get to it.

Q: I had a question, sir. Please permit me. I'm making, I think, a valid point –

MR. CORDESMAN: (Inaudible due to cross talk) – longer than I'm –

Q: – and I do have a question, Dr. Cordesman, and believe me –

MR. CORDESMAN: Please get to it.

Q: I had it. If you'll permit me, I will get to it.

We see the corrosive effect of the fighting that is forcing people to flee into homogenous areas, increasingly homogenizing their country. We also see a –

MR. CORDESMAN: I'm really sorry. If you have a question, please get to it now, or we'll go on to someone else.

Q: I will, sir. I am. It's honestly a rather cogent point that I'm making, if you'll just permit me.

MR. CORDESMAN: Yes, but this is not a speech forum –

Q: I understand. Thank you very much.

The second thing is we see a long-standing sense of – a Shi'ite sense of grievance that's reflected in the election. And my question for you and for Dr. Cordesman, if he'd care to reply as well, is how do you see any valid Shi'ite alternative, particularly among the Shi'ites, to the course that we are suggesting? The argument is made that only SCIRI And only Hakim want this course of action, but where do we see the others? And I ask either one of you, including the highly respected and – has my respect – Dr. Cordesman. Either one of you, where do you see the evidence of a Shi'ite vision that is different from this, that has the crucial components that must – that Iraq must have for stability, which is a meaningful place for Sunnis? If people do not like the vision of Hakim and SCIRI? What if – what if the – (off mike). Thank you very much.

MR. CORDESMAN: We'll allow the ambassador to respond, please.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Thank you. Well, I said moments ago that Iraq is not the Balkans. I said that what's going on is not a fight between Sunnis and Shi'a. And I said that physically and geographically and socially there are – Iraqi Sunnis and Iraqi Shi'a are very intermingled. Yes, there has been intimidation by extremists. There have been murders committed by extremists. A large number, in the case of Sunni extremists, in the form of al Qaeda and Saddamists and so on. Started in 2003, when they murdered Mohammed Baqir Hakim and about 100 of his people as they were coming out of prayer in (inaudible) And continued relentlessly.

But throughout that period, the Shi'a and their visionary religious leader saw through this. They saw clearly the strategy of the terrorists. The terrorists – Zarqawi, in fact, put it down in black and white in his famous letter, which (wasn't conservative ?). He said that we need to start a civil war between Sunni and Shi'a in order to achieve our purpose. The Shi'a saw that. However, when, as you know, on the 22nd of February last year, the – Samarra shrine, one of the most holy shrines for Shi'a – which happens to be in a Sunni city, by the way – was blown up, there was a reaction which went beyond anything that the Shi'a religious leaders could control. And that gave license, if you like, to Shi'a extremist factions to wreak havoc and start to murder in large numbers Sunni individuals just because they are Sunnis.

Now, the great majority of Iraqi public do not endorse this or this, but however they are victims to both. If any family receives a slip of paper under the door saying that, "You've got to leave this neighborhood," generally people don't like to take chances with their kids, with their lives. They take the safe option. So we have – for terrorists, it's an easy – it's an easy point to score. But what do these people – if it's a Shi'a family fleeing a Sunni neighborhood, they leave the key to their door with their Sunni neighbors. This – this is Iraq.

We do not believe in hard partition and we do not believe in soft partition. Most Iraqis want Iraq to stay whole; they want to keep it undivided. And opinion polls back this statement; I am not making it up. The constitution allows decentralization because we believe decentralization enhances democracy, enhances democratic practice, and it's a guarantee against despotism in the center. However, this division must not be on a sectarian basis. That has to be understood. Any province or group of provinces can form a region for the purpose of decentralized administration, as it is done in this country. When the United States decides to make one state for Catholics and another state for Protestants, then we'll consider (that an error ?). Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman there.

Q: Howard LaFranchi with the Christian Science Monitor. Mr. Ambassador, as you know, some in Congress are supporting benchmarks for Iraqi political action, perhaps as a way of speeding up the clock. You yourself, in a recent op-ed, speak of vigorous action on the part of the Iraqi government. I'm wondering if you could give us examples of that vigorous action that's taking place, and also your view of benchmarks to speed up the clock.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: You probably heard about our beloved President Talabani falling ill recently and going to Jordan. I am assured that he almost collapsed because he was conducting more than six – seven meetings a day with different groups of people, really pushing himself to the limit. He and the – Prime Minister Maliki have been working very hard to meet anybody that has been estranged, has not joined the political process in the past and is prepared to give up violence and join the political process. They have been working hard to talk to them, to assure them that law will be applied indiscriminately. This recent deployment, by the way – the prime minister pledged that it will be done totally indiscriminately. There is going to be no different treatment to Sunni or Shi'a area – anybody who is against the law will be dealt with accordingly.

We have been moving not only on this, we've been moving on the economic front. Iraq has set aside \$10 billion for smallish or medium-sized projects throughout Iraq to create work. A lot of these young people are drawn to join violent gangs, whether criminal or political, for lack of employment because – you know, the money I was talking about which was flowing into Iraq was spent on engaging these young people. So we want to have an alternative for these people. And this has been pushed very vigorously by various ministers. The ministers have been themselves pushed to execute their programs. We have a much bigger budget this year than we had last year. So the Iraqi government is – it's very aware of the urgency required. We are not against benchmarks. We're not against deadlines. As I said, we should have benchmarks even for ourselves so that we can measure our progress. But we must also take into account that everything we do, we are doing under fire, we're doing in extremely difficult circumstances. That has to be allowed for.

MR. CORDESMAN: Someone in the back?

Q: (Off mike) – very simple, and I'm sure you'll give a diplomatic reply.

I wonder if you could assess and contrast – compare and contrast the performance of CPA head Bremer with Ambassador Khalilzad. Now obviously they had two different periods to deal with, but I wonder if you could give us an assessment comparing those two.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: You're absolutely right. I'll have to give a diplomatic answer.
(Laughter.)

You yourself give part of the answer in that the two periods are different, very different. I have the highest regards, personal – even personal affection to Paul Bremer for his commitment and dedication. I believe that certain things he did wrong. I told him so at the time. But he applied himself totally for the benefit of Iraq. I think we are grateful for all the good things he did. Then

Khalilzad is a different kind of person. He understand the culture, he built bridges with Iraqi leaders and gained their trust and conducted his diplomacy in a different style. But underlying all this, really, is the fact that now we are partners. Iraqis and Americans have to work together and have to succeed together.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman in the last row.

Q: Good morning, Mr. Ambassador. I'm Tim Phelps from Newsday.

Could you talk a little bit about what's going on in the north where not as much attention has been paid there recently? But as you know, there's been a war of words between Mustafa Barzani and the Turkish government. There seems to be some doubt now as to whether there will in fact be a referendum over Kirkuk this year. Do you expect that to happen or not?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Well, we as a country would like to establish the best relationship possible with our neighbors, relationships based on mutual interest and noninterference in internal affairs. And on that principle, we believe that any interference from Turkey or from Iran or from anybody is not acceptable. We solve our problems ourselves. So that is a fundamental issue and anything that gets in the way of it, whether it is from us or from anybody else, that's against our interests.

As to the question of the referendum, there was a negotiated article in the constitution, and there are – there is a legal structure and the political structure behind it. Whether the referendum keeps peace or not, that will be decided, as you say in America, above my pay grade.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman over there.

Q: (Off mike) – disagreement, obviously, among many, many parties – (off mike) – Iraq and everywhere else regarding the future. But one thing that everyone has agreed on – without electric power, there can be very little economic growth, investment trade and all the rest. In fact, you mentioned that in your op-ed in the Wall Street Journal. Yet it is also true that drawing from reports that Tony Cordesman has done, GAO, the special Inspector General – the sabotage against the electric power infrastructure continues. The attacks are very prevalent. We are now years into this process and successive ministers of electricity can't seem to get control over this. I understand that there's some renewed interest in trying to get on top of this problem so that there can be some stability, especially as we are in this critical period. I wonder if you could speak on that.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Thank you. Yes, we – we're facing sabotage, certainly. And we're facing corruption, also, and the two things are conspiring to hamper our progress. And when I talk about sabotage, I don't mean just randomized destruction of pylons or substations or generating – power-generating stations, no. The people who are doing this are absolutely well informed. They have the plans, they know where to hit cause the maximum delay. Same with our oil pipeline. They don't hit the pipeline anywhere along the pipeline. They target (inaudible) groups which are very difficult to replace. Which means that they have drawings, they have details, they have intelligence. And we suspect the Mukhabarat of the previous regime, who were fully well informed.

Now we are in a battle, they blow things up and we try to build them up again as soon as we can. And as I said, complicating our life is the fact that our institutions – our government department – do suffer from corruption. We've got to get on top of that in order to achieve greater progress. We understand how important electricity is. Without it, as you say, there can be no good. But now – and now we established a whole number of smaller electric stations, but we cannot get them to work because of the fuel. So it's – the whole thing has to work together. And I believe we can do it, but we need more time.

MR. CORDESMAN: (Off mike.) Can we get the microphone here please?

Q: (Off mike.) Ambassador, you've had several government delegations in recent years that have made trips to Tehran, and they appear to have established very good relations. And since we give you an awful lot of advice, what advice would you give us on how to cope with Iran in the coming phase of the nuclear dispute?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Well, I really hesitate to give the United States advice on how to handle Iran, or any other country for that matter. But I believe in every case, the players have to look for mutual interest. I'm sure that – I – by the way, I myself took part in high-level delegations into Iran and met – talked with Iranian leaders. Like the leaders of any country, they have strategic interests. They have their worries and they have their problems, and I think it is not beyond the capacity of American diplomacy to identify all these and approach Iran with a package that would give it some – give Iran some assurances and some benefits – not at the expense of fundamental issues but, nevertheless, I think there is a lot that Iran can get out of a dialogue with the United States, and there's a lot that the United States can get out of dialogue with Iran. I don't want to delve into specifics here, but the principle is very clear. Iran, I believe – despite the bravado and despite the public statements, I believe Iran needs the United States.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ambassador, I'm going to take advantage of the position of moderator to ask you two questions. One, we've heard a great deal about re-Ba'athification and bringing more people from the Ba'ath back. I wonder if you could tell us about that. The second is the prime minister, when he came to office, talked about the need to find a solution to the militias – to either absorb them or abolish them – and obviously this remains a key issue and I wonder if you could discuss that.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Absolutely. As it is the strategy of the terrorists to drive a wedge between Sunnis and Shi'a, it is the strategy of the government to isolate the most extreme parts of the insurgents, and to do so we've got to get those who are amenable – those who have grievances which can be dealt with. Al Qaeda, we cannot negotiate with. They just want the destruction of the country and they want to establish their brand of extreme Islamic rule. This can – we have nothing to say to them.

But there are a lot of people who are disgruntled. They were army officers who – when the army was disbanded and found themselves without jobs and so on who persuaded themselves, or were persuaded with ideology or money, to take up arms against the government. Many of those groups we can talk to, and try to persuade that it's much better – they would be better off to be

inside the tent than outside. We're doing that. Now, de-Ba'athification was a rule that was applied in the early days. We realize that most of the Ba'athists were Ba'athists not out of conviction but in order to survive. So de-Ba'athification identified the top four layers of leadership in the Ba'ath party and said those people will not hold public office. Now, this – even that – (inaudible) – affected something like 30,000 – 35,000 people across the country. That is being eased off, and what we are saying now is that those who committed crimes can go through the judiciary system, and those who did not or we cannot prove that they did can just resume their lives in the normal manner. That hopefully will defuse that problem and would bring more people into the process.

Now, the latest development is that the government has, first of all, decided to give six months as a period before they bring the whole of this regime to an end, and during the six months they allow the provinces to decide what level of leadership they keep excluding. Some governors might decide to go one level down and some others one level up. Give – in other words, give some flexibility to the situation and thereby take out the sting from this problem. The next point is about – excuse me –

MR. CORDESMAN: The militias.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: – the militias – yes. The militias do represent a challenge and a threat, and we address that in the constitution. There is an explicit reference to militias in the constitution, which says that militias are not allowed. There is a clear ban on the carrying of arms by any organization outside the state or is licensed by the state. However, we face the situation as a reality. This deployment – this recent deployment and the plan for Baghdad has made it clear that any militia will be targeted – doesn't matter what kind of militia – and that's resulted, in fact, in the melting away of militias. Well, that's good – that's what we want. This hopefully will give the security forces enough space and time to strengthen themselves and gain control and hopefully prevent the return of these militias. Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we have time for a few last questions. Let me get the lady in the far back row.

Q: Hello. Heather E. Moore, Kuwait News Agency. Now, I wanted to ask you – you mentioned the term "grateful" in referring to the Iraqi government's aid by the United States in helping with the battle. But would the majority of Iraqis consider themselves grateful for the U.S. intervention?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: From Kuwait News Agency? Yes. Well, you – I'm sure the Kuwaitis were grateful for the intervention of the United States in 1991, so you would understand that. Iraqis – I think most Iraqis – the overwhelming majority of Iraqis were desperate to get rid of Saddam Hussein, and they had lost hope after the failure to intervene in 1991 to remove Saddam Hussein, and started to suspect that the United States didn't really – were not serious about helping Iraq out of that situation. But when the United States did intervene and remove Saddam Hussein, most Iraqis were grateful for that act, and still are.

However, as you know, people's hopes and expectations were dashed. People were disillusioned. They found that what happened after, you know, created a mess – much bigger mess

than they could envisage in their worst nightmares. But the difference – the fundamental difference between Saddam period and now is that under Saddam there was no hope. There was no horizon. Now, despite all the trouble, if you ask most Iraqis, they have some hope to get out of this. And, of course, we must not forget that there are whole areas of Iraq which are prospering, are doing well and moving forward. Kurdistan region, for example, is doing quite well. Some areas in the south are doing quite well. We have some hot spots – very important – including Baghdad, which are suffering. But there is hope. Saddam is gone. We know we can build our own future ourselves, but we need to get rid of this challenge by, as I said, terrorists and insurgents.

MR. CORDESMAN: Let me take two last questions. The lady in the second row there.

Q: I'm going to stand up, sir. My name is Jennifer Hyman with CHF International. I was very interested to hear how you talked about the importance of setting aside economic resources for job creation and how that serves as a disincentive to violence. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit more whether or not you think that the best U.S. assistance is military assistance or perhaps additional economic development, political and social solutions might be a better way forward.

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Thank you very much.

The answer is that they've got to be both in play. One is not enough. You've got to do it both on the military track and – in fact, three tracks: the military track, economic track and the political track. All of them have to work together. And that's our strategy and that, I believe, is the strategy of the United States as well.

Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman.

Q: (Off mike). It seems to me the purpose of this forum is to bring the voice of Iraq into the debate. As you very well know, the debate up on Capitol Hill is shaped by the American opinion. Is there an effort by the Iraqi government to interject its voice directly to the American people?

AMB. SUMAIDAIE: Yes. There is an effort by their embassy and I am ambassador of Iraq and I speak as often as I can. I think many media producers find our insistence a nuisance and we keep plugging. But we do try to get our voice out there.

We have frequent delegations by senior officials from Iraq. We had the prime minister here. We had the president here. We had the vice president and deputy prime minister and we have ministers coming occasionally. There's hardly a week that passes by without somebody from Iraq speaking to someone here. So we are engaged.

There are, of course, a lot of American journalists and media people in Iraq. And they're by and large doing a good job. They are really – some of them are brilliant and they take risks. Of course, they tend to cover more explosions than construction projects, but that's the nature of the

beast. I mean, that's the media. But they do a good job and they bring our views and aspirations to the American public, so they also help a great deal.

And we continue to bring the Iraqi perspective to the American debate. I go to meet congressmen and senators almost daily to introduce the Iraqi perspective into this debate. And this debate is important. We respect it. We admire it. This is a democracy. After all, that's what we aspire to do ourselves. So we have no problem with it, but we just want to make sure that people, when they make decisions, are fully informed and have the broader picture in mind, not only the next election in mind.

Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you very much for coming. But above all, I'd like to thank the ambassador, who I think has done a superb job of being the voice of the Iraqis. And I hope you'll join me in a round of applause.

(Applause.)

(END)