

**THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**“MOVING FORWARD IN IRAQ –
PROSPECTS AND OBSTACLES”**

**INTRODUCTION:
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PRESIDENT AND CEO, CSIS**

**FEATURE GUEST SPEAKER:
HIS EXCELLENCY MOWAFFAK AL RUBAIE,
NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER, REPUBLIC OF IRAQ**

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JOHN HAMRE: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming this afternoon. I'm delighted that you can be here. I'm delighted that we have a chance to welcome Dr. al Rubaie to be with us today. We look forward to an interesting afternoon of thoughtful exchange.

Let me just say a word. You know, there's so much controversy associated with the war in Iraq now that it has caused people to feel that they need to react in other ways than through dialogue and listening. Can I ask that everybody today share this as a time where we talk with each other rather than we shout at each other. I think this is important to figure out how we're going to proceed.

Ambassador, thank you for joining us. I know that you were desperately trying to get here through the traffic and not all the time does Washington cooperate. We're delighted that you can join us.

It's – we as a nation are trying to sort of – we are having a great debate right now. And we're trying to sort out how we proceed, how are we going to manage this very complicated, difficult situation. And to know how to do that, we need to listen to people who are involved in it. We may not agree with them, but we do need to listen to them and we do need to talk. I've had the pleasure of meeting Dr. al Rubaie when I was in Baghdad this summer, very briefly, and asked would he consider to come to Washington to talk with us, talk with us. And I'm looking forward to that very much.

He is a man who is in the arena every day. And being in the arena, he has a point of view and a perspective we need to understand. We're fortunate that he's going to give us a chance to talk with him about that. We will have a period of question and answer. Christine Wormuth is going to be leading that. I would ask that you indicate that you would like to ask a question, but please, for everyone here, let's make this a constructive dialogue and conversation, so that all of us are going to benefit and learn.

So let me turn – do you want to say anything further Christine? Dr. al Rubaie, would we like to turn to you? Would you like to speak from here? I think probably it would be best if you speak from here because all of the microphones are here. I introduce and welcome – would you please join me in welcoming Dr. al Rubaie. (Applause.)

MOWAFFAK AL RUBAIE: (In foreign language.) Mr. Chairman, Ms. Chairwoman, ladies, and gentlemen, thank you very much. I have spent the last four or five days in D.C. and three or four days before that in New York. And I met several top officials in the administration. And I carried a few messages from Iraq. And admittedly, I have to say that there are so many good listening ears that give me so many listening

hours with sympathy, not with the sort of I hear you, but I can listen and I understand you.

We are going through difficult times. But let me, at the beginning, at the outset, let me say a big, big thank you to the American people, to the American government for everything they have done in Iraq starting from day one of liberating this country to trying to maintain and sustain stability and security in Iraq. And my message to the mothers and those who have lost their loved ones in Iraq, my message is very clear: It's well worth investing in Iraq. You invested everything. You invested the treasure, blood, tears, sweat, so the Iraqi people as well invested a lot in that. But I believe it is well worth investing that. And I believe you're going to have, the United States of America will have, strong, permanent, strategic ally in the region for years and years and years and years to come.

Now, let me start with throwing some stimulator or stimulus, stimuli to stimulate the interest of some people and throw some ideas. Number one, we believe in the government of Iraq that it is pivotal to have a continued support from the United States government. And it is important for the political process; it's important for democracy in Iraq; and it's important for the security in Iraq. How long is this? We'll come back to this.

You have heard Crocker and Petraeus report a few weeks ago. We can confirm that. There is definite tangible, palpable progress in the security, but the problem is that you cannot see there is also progress in the political arena. But that progress in the political is not visible to you. If you look at the five or six legislation and see what are the contents of this legislation, most of the contents of this legislation we are implementing in practice. We're applying it in practice using executive decree, executive orders from the prime minister pending ratifying and approving these in the council of representatives.

We have a huge, great step in the political progress. The agreement, the declaration of the 26th of August between the five, the Big Five you call them, the Big Five leaders. That statement I think it was huge progress in the political side. But what we would like to ask you is to understand us better. Iraq is a difficult place and the problems are difficult. They were not problems of last few years. These are – some of these problems are centuries old. So you need to understand these problems better and we have a lot of obstacles facing us. And we need to overcome them.

Some of our partners in the political process, they have decided in the last minute to pull out from carrying on in the cabinet as well as in the political process. They are – (inaudible) – on both sides of the equation, on both sides of the equation. And they have decided to, some of them, put the secret (?) – clog and jam and freeze the political process, trying to bring down the government, hoping to bring down the whole political process. And we have a solution for this. The way we tackle this is by what we call aggressive national reconciliation program.

Anyone can be included in the national reconciliation program we have started in May last year – anyone, any Iraqis, but non-Iraqis are certainly excluded. The foreign terrorists are not to be included in any – but all of the reconcilable, the mainstream Sh'ia, mainstream Sunni, mainstream Kurd – they are all included in our national reconciliation.

We have another problem, which is not new for you. Our neighbors are muddling in our internal affairs. And we have every neighbor has his own problem and he wanted to settle score on Iraq territory. We have – the only way is to strengthen our Iraqi security force capabilities as well as with the help of our strategic allies, the United States government. We made our choice, the final choice, of having a strategic ally in the United States government. The other problems and the other obstacles we're facing is that we inherited a completely ruined infrastructure, completely ruined Iraq, let alone infrastructure. So when we start, we start from below zero.

And I was saying this in the other meeting, that the worst, the most horrible crime Saddam has committed is he has ruined this and this of the Iraqi people. And he has implanted an incurable virus in the software upstairs. And this is that virus called Ba'athism or Neo-Ba'athism. This Ba'athism can move from the extremist leftist in the '50s to the extremist Arab Pan-Arabist nationalist in the '60s, '70s and '80s and to a Neo-Islamist and Salafist Ba'athists in 2003 onwards. So that's the sort of enemy, and we're aware of that. And we are open to all, probably 90 – we're not, we're de-Ba'athifying the ideology, not the Ba'athist as a member of the Arab Ba'ath Social Party.

And we have a constitution which is a formula to get over this problem. The other obstacles we have is the lack of patience in the international community as well as in this part of the world. And for those who have heard this from me, I'm going to repeat it: The old regime, the old order – we inherited a 1,000 year old order – the old order of tyranny, autocracy, theocracy, religious supremacy, dictatorship to a new, completely new set of rules, a new order called democracy, human rights, federalism and transparency, accountability, rule of law.

This is alien for the whole region. So to move from the old order to the new order, I think this is a huge paradigm shift and we need time for it. It's the nature of this business. You cannot fit this in the election cycle of D.C. You can't; it's too short. This is a strategic shift; you need time and you need patience for it. We understand the impatience of the world, but believe me, the government of Iraq is not sitting on their hands and doing nothing. No one – no one in the world is so eager to make progress in politics, in security, and in economy.

A few weeks ago, we have issued a first-ever in the history of Iraq and in the history of the region – the new National Security Strategy. It's a roadmap for our country for the next – from now until 2010. It's a strategy for every single ministry, so that they will build their policies according to the strategy and they will implement that policy so we have a direction, a sense of direction, a new vision. What is the vision of the government of Iraq for the next three or four years? This has never happened in the

history of Iraq before – never. We in the government of Iraq also continuously assessing the requirement of the foreign troops in our country.

No one, no one on earth wanted the foreign troops for one day more in this country if we can do without. But we need it because of the security situation. That's still changing. Our enemy is amorphous, changing. It's like an amoeba, changing the nature. So according to the flat assessment, we continuously assess that coming from internally and regionally. We continuously review this requirement. And I can tell you, without hesitation, that our Iraqi National Security Forces are gaining the capabilities very fast. And by the end of this year, the combat forces are in place. By the end of next year, the logistics are in place and we'll be ready for any eventuality. We're prepared for any eventuality anyways.

And if you press me on the number of troops, I believe we will go back to the pre-surge level – that's 15 brigades – by probably April, by Easter next year and probably before the next election two-digits figure or the worst by the end of next year. But that all depends on the condition on the ground; that's to the best of our knowledge and belief and assessment now, so that we will relax gradually, but progressively, we will relax the requirement for the presence of the foreign troops in our country.

My last point, and probably the trick is here to fill the time, so that there will be no questions. (Laughter.) But I promise you this is my last point, or the one before last. (Laughter, inaudible). The importance of the enduring bilateral strategic relationship with the United States government. We do need this for years to come. And we have asked the United States government to start the serious negotiation on this. And this is not going to be only security. This is going to be security, economy, diplomatic, and political. So it's going to be comprehensive package for enduring relationship for decades to come, a long-term relationship with the United States government, with the United States.

We are going to be one of the anchors of, the strategic ally, of the United States government in the region because Iraq has finally chosen, once and for all, its strategic ally. That is the United States of America. Thank you very much indeed. (Applause.)

CHRISTINE WORMUTH: Thank you, Dr. al Rubaie, for very interesting comments and I'm sure there's no shortage of questions. I thought, as the chair, I might have to get things going, but I don't think that's an issue. First, the woman in the white blouse. And before – as you ask questions, we do have people with microphones. Please wait until the microphone gets to you and then please give your name and your affiliation. Thank you.

Q: Hi, I'm Courtney Kube (sp) from NBC News. You mentioned a more aggressive withdrawal strategy than General Petraeus spoke about last month, with 15 brigade combat teams in Iraq around Easter time. Is there something that's changed in the last couple of weeks, or why is it that you are – it seems like you're planning on a withdrawal of American troops faster than the United States?

DR. AL RUBAIE: These figures are not ingrained – are not ingrained in stone. These figures is depending on the conditions on the ground. Our assessment probably slightly different from the assessment of the multinational forces. We work very, very closely with the coalition forces. We work very, very closely with David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker. You have top-class world soldier in that part of the world. And we work very closely with them.

But our assessment probably is different. We believe that Iraqi Security Forces capabilities is much higher than the assessment probably of the coalition. And also, we are negotiating acceleration of arms and training and readiness of our Iraqi Security Forces.

Q: So is it fair to say that the reason that you think that your assessment is more aggressive for the withdrawal than the United States because you believe that ISF will be more capable by then?

DR. AL RUBAIE: That's right.

MR. WORMUTH: Okay, the gentleman right over here.

Q: Hammad Said Luofi (ph), al Iraqi TV. I will ask my question in English. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said that in her meeting with President Talabani, she felt that she was very pessimistic and he told her, quote, unquote, that "all what the American forces has to do is to train the Iraqi forces and the rest can be done by the Iraqis themselves," quote, unquote. My second question will be, when we are talking about destabilizing the situation in Iraq and having neighbors interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq, who do you mention specifically and what is your opinion toward the speculation about any Iranian intervention in Iran? Thank you.

DR. AL RUBAIE: Thank you very much indeed. The Iraqi Security Forces, their combat force will be in place by the end of this year. We are already in the lead of more than 70 percent of all the security operations in the country. Our counterterrorism force, we are proud of them. I believe that one of the best refined counterterrorism force in the world now. They're doing probably doing in the region of 90-plus percent of the operations in the country.

What we are lacking is the logistical support, is the intelligence, is the whole logistical – is the transport, is the firepower, is the airpower. That's what we are lacking. And we have a detailed to move on and by the end of the year, of next year, Insha'Allah, all these logistics will be in place.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, the gentleman here in the front.

Q: And the neighbors? Sorry.

MS. WORMUTH: I'm trying to keep track of you, but right here. Let's go ahead and try and give – there are a lot of people here who would like to give questions, so I'd like to go ahead and move around and we'll try and come back to you.

Q: There was part of my question he didn't answer.

MS. WORMUTH: Oh, the issue about the Iranian involvement. He did ask that question.

DR. AL RUBAIE: It's not a secret that Iran is muddling in our internal affairs. I'm not disclosing a secret here, and so other neighbors as well. Syria is doing that as well while turning a blind eye to these foreign terrorists. But I believe – and this is not a good news for everybody – I believe if we leave things as they are now, we're going to have more escalation and this is going to endanger the security gain and the security success we've gained over the last few months.

So what do we need to do with Iran? We, the government of Iraq, told them in a very clear Arabic language that they should stop muddling in our internal affairs because that – we are going to lose everything because if this continues, the whole political process will collapse. Not this government will collapse, the whole political process. And whatever the Iraqi people got over the last three or four years, they will lose. Now, if they continue escalating that.

But at the same time, what we need from the – and in the same token, what we need from the United States government is to engage seriously with Iran in a serious negotiation, constructive serious negotiation. Engagement with Iran is the solution. Escalating? I have no problem making them feel the pain in Iraq, but attacking Iran I said big, fat no to that. It's a fatal mistake. It should never been an option at all. But stopping them muddling in our internal affairs and with the help of our friends and allies in the United States government and in the coalition? Yes. But at the same time, we need to get a positive, constructive, serious engagement with Iran.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay. We'll have the gentleman here in the front and then the gentleman in the very back. Right here in the blue blazer.

Q: Hi, Ben Lando with United Press International and the Iraq Oil Report. I'm wondering if you can talk about how you view the oil sector in Iraq through the national security lens, your thoughts about when you're dedicating resources, money, and personnel – for what? And why is it so important and what it goes to?

DR. AL RUBAIE: If you don't have a follow-up question, I will answer your question. (Laughter.) Take the microphone because I know what his follow-up question is. I'm pleased to say that I just came from a very constructive, very informative meeting with the secretary of Energy. And that sector is pivotal and is like the jugular vein for us. It's – we discussed in detail. We're going to have more capital investment for next year, 2008, in the oil sector, and try to, to find – that's what we agreed in the Department of

Energy – we tried to make a priority list of small projects, quick fix – quick hits, you call it – to try to increase the number of barrels every day we can get out, okay? So that's our immediate concern for next year.

Second concern is the protection of the pipelines and the infrastructure, with gas as well as pipelines, oil pipeline, as well as the power line. And these are issues we prioritize for our next year. Next year – and this is for you – next year probably the last two years, one and a half year, we were talking about security, security, security. If we can sustain this level of security until the end of the year, I can tell you, next year is going to be services, services, services; economy, economy, economy. And then security. That is our emphasis is going to be service, services and economy.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, the gentleman in the back and then I think you had a follow-up question?

Q: Hi there. One question, but two parts, please, sir.

MS. WORMUTH: Could you please identify yourself, sir?

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Mike Kellerman, Press TV. One question, two parts, sir. Today, Condoleezza Rice announced that the U.S. State Department is going to in effect crack down on the security firms such as Blackwater in Iraq. This in, of course, in response to all of the publicity, as you know, about the alleged killing of innocent civilians in Iraq.

My question is, first of all, what is your reaction to the U.S. government announcing these new rules for the operations of companies like Blackwater in your country. And the second part of that question is, is your government going to prosecute any of these people in case there's enough evidence to do that?

DR. AL RUBAIE: The Blackwater and other security private security companies are covered, actually, by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546 and the CPA Order 17. And there is a huge legal gap there as well, which is not addressed as well. But I don't want to politicize this issue, and I don't want to make this issue as a point of friction between the government of Iraq and the United States government.

Of course what they have done is appalling. Of course what they have done is something against our Iraqi people and killing innocent people. But I have to wait for the outcome of the investigation. And I am pleased to say that the department, the secretary of State, has responded very, very quickly to our appeal and to our request to include the revision of the CPA Order 17, which gives the blank immunity to the private security companies working in the country. So we're going to have a radical review, a revision of that CPA Order 17. This is number one.

Number two, we don't want to, this is not – this is a legal jargon, this is rather than – this is also not only a legal and law jargon and law against, but it also has a direct

encroachment on our sovereignty. And this is a huge sovereignty issue in the country. And if you follow the newspaper, the national newspaper in Iraq, you will see how big this issue is -- and the television, the radios, everybody discussing and analyzing this issue.

So it is a huge sovereignty issue we need to sort out and sort out quickly. But we don't want to jump into conclusion. We don't want to preempt or influence the investigation. We need to wait for the investigation -- the outcome -- we need to look into the compensation; we need to review the CPA Order 17; probably, we need to rescind the CPA Order 17. And we have the power. The government of Iraq has the power because it is an elected, constitutionally elected government, to rescind it. But we don't want to rescind any CPA orders without consulting with our allies who are the partners in the country. We need to coordinate this with the coalition forces and with the embassy because they are doing service to the embassy.

I'm sure we will come to an amicable solution at end and we will certainly make the compensation. Whether they can be sued or they can be tried under Iraqi law, this is for the lawyer to answer because the way I look at it, and reading the CPA order and reading the UNSCR, I think they are not under Iraqi jurisdiction. But I am not a lawyer by the way. I'm a medical doctor.

MS. WORMUTH: Which is probably not a good thing, to be a lawyer. Did you still want to ask your follow-up question? And then we'll have the gentleman right there across the aisle.

Q: (Off mike, inaudible.) You mentioned that the Iraqi government gave a very clear message to Tehran, to stop their interference in the Iraqi affairs. What's the government's position toward the Iraqi globe (?) that is paving the way to Iran, to Jordan, to Turkey, to Saudi Arabia, to other countries, the Iraqi neighboring countries, to interference in Iraq?

DR. AL RUBAIE: The answer to your question is one of the -- until, unless we have real national unity, real national, well, reconciliation, cohesion between all political parties so that the allegiance and the loyalty is to Iraq and Iraq only, these countries will countries will continue trying to intervene in our internal affairs because they find political parties and groups who are amiable to their strategic interest, to the neighbor's strategic interest, not to Iraq strategic interest. So we need to be much positive in our inclusion, in our national reconciliation, and I mean it when I said, when I said earlier -- I meant it when I said we need to pursue an aggressive national reconciliation and be really, really inclusive in all senses of the word.

MR. WORMUTH: You right here in the front row, please. And then we'll get the gentleman sort of in the middle.

Q: Ron Bagens (ph) with Kuwait News Agency. How are the relations between Iraq and Kuwait today and what are your hopes in that regard in the next six months toward the end of '08? Thank you.

DR. AL RUBAIE: The relationship between Iraq and Kuwait is good. I think Kuwait is one of the good friend in the Arab world and they have good relationship with the different level of most of the politicians leading the country now. The new Iraqi elite, political elite, they are friends of the royal family in Kuwait. And we worked with the Kuwaitis before the, after the invasion of Kuwait and the liberation of Kuwait. And also they helped us during the liberation of Iraq.

But there is a very important issue that needs to be tackled and that is the issue of debts and issue of compensation, war reparation, I mean. This is an issue need to be tackled with – they need, the Kuwaiti brothers need to be brave and courageous and have a good position and then they said, we are not, we are going to stop punishing the Iraqi people by getting them to pay the war reparations for a war Saddam Hussein launched and invaded the country and all the Iraqi people – in contradiction to the Iraqi people's will and against the Iraqi people's will. And I think this is, for the Kuwaiti government, for the Kuwaiti Parliament to stand and be a very good example for the rest of the Arab and for the rest of the members of the Gulf Corporation Council, to take the lead and be a pioneer again.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, I think there was a gentleman with a yellow tie in the middle there or yellow shirt?

Q: Thank you. Howard La Franchi with the Christian Science Monitor. You mentioned federalism under the points of a new order in Iraq. And I was wondering if you could tell us your view of efforts in U.S. Congress to press for a devolution of powers in Iraq to regions and specifically the proposal from Senator Brownback to press for a Sunni region to be created in Iraq?

DR. AL RUBAIE: Federalism is part and parcel of our constitution and you cannot have democracy in Iraq without federalism and vice versa. Democracy means that the majority rules and then it will be the majoritarian dictatorship. And that's not acceptable in Iraq. Iraq is a very diversified country. We need federalism and it's an integral part of our constitution. And devolution of power to the periphery is extremely important and we need that. But we need to agree on what sort of power needs to stay in the center and what sort of power needs to go to the provinces and the regions.

But partition, I honestly believe, even hearing the partition, is a capital crime. It's really irritating. It irritates not only my ear, my brain, my mind, my heart – no partition on earth was written by a pencil. Every partition was done and written by blood. And we don't need to shed any more blood. We don't need to shed any more blood.

This country is more than 5,000 years old, this, this Mesopotamia, this Iraq, this – (unintelligible). And it is a crime to think of partitioning this country, honestly. We've

lived thousands of years. And I don't think those words, using the word soft partition or partition or devolution of central – I don't think they mean partitioning the country as such, into three different countries, no. I believe they meant, and when I talk to them, they meant federalism. And we are all for federal units. Strong federal units means strong Iraq. If we don't have strong federal units, we have a very weak Iraq. And I cannot see any contradiction between strong, central government and strong, federal units. I can't see a contradiction in that if there is a clear cut line of demarcation between the authorities and responsibilities.

MS. WORMUTH: There was a gentleman in the back over there?

Q: Hi, I'm Bob Dreyfus with Rolling Stone magazine. I wanted to ask you about reconciliation vis-à-vis the Sunnis. Recently, the United Iraqi Alliance issued a very strong statement denouncing the efforts to engage with groups like the tribal forces and militias and so forth and said really, this is intolerable. And also, Prime Minister Malaki said that he would investigate former Prime Minister Allawi because of his opening a dialogue with forces around Izzat al Douri and some of the ex-Ba'athist and so forth in Damascus. Even though Allawi said he did this with the Americans present, what does this say about the efforts to reconcile Sunni and Shi'ia if these kinds of efforts are so quickly opposed by the Iraqi central government?

DR. AL RUBAIE: I'll take the second question; it's easier – Allawi meeting the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party. It's illegal to recognize the Saddam Ba'ath party. This is a constitutional requirement. You can't do it. You cannot recognize when you sit with someone you sit with a Ba'athist, but not with the Ba'ath party because the Ba'ath party is an illegal entity in our constitution; it's enshrined in our constitution. And we are a constitutionally elected government so we have to abide by our constitution. This is easy one. So I think Prime Minister Malaki was right in being upset and irritated by people meeting Arab Ba'ath Social Party.

The other question is the, the what you call, the Iraqi security volunteers in the tribal awakening. We, the government of Iraq, we have started this national reconciliation in May last year. And we have helped the tribes end al Anbar with arms, with money, with organization, with media, and we really brought that to fruition. And we have absolutely no problem recruiting after vetting. We have in place a vetting system, vetting people from their past criminal record, security clearance, and if they are clear, then they're most welcome, come in. And even we will turn even a blind eye to the minor offenses they might have committed in the past. And this is in the homogeneously ethnic areas like al Anbar, for example, like in Nineveh, in Mosul, like Salah al Din probably. But in the mixed areas, we need to be careful here. We need to be helpful with the armed groups.

Number one, they should not come back as a group, as a block. They can come back as a block but we have to recruit them individually, not as a block. This is very important. Number two, they have to renounce violence or at least pay allegiance to the constitution or at least pay allegiance to the constitutionally elected government.

Now, if we forget about that for the time being, we need to vet them properly and have a mixture of them. When they come and recruit part of this – for example, Neighborhood X is a Sunni Area. We should – in Baghdad, it's all mixed. The friction is in Baghdad. It's all mixed areas. In Baghdad, we have to have a mixed police from Sunni and Shi'ia. We cannot afford to consolidate what Zarkawi and al Qaeda wanted to. They wanted to drive away, they wanted to consolidate the line of demarcation or the fault line in Baghdad.

We cannot accept this, that this is a Sunni area, so give it a police, a Sunni police. This is a Shi'ia area, give it a Shi'ia police. No. That would not be acceptable to the prime minister and to the government of Iraq. We will aim to recruit from mixed communities to serve mixed communities. That's what the prime minister and I believe also. I read carefully that UIA statement as well. They are worried about this and quite rightly, we have to – there are some risks, but sometimes you have to take this risk.

There is some risk in the national reconciliation. And we're fully aware of it. And that's why we put this implementation and follow-up committee for the national reconciliation, to vet these new recruits and to bring them into the police, bring them into the army or give them a temporary contract for three months, six months, renewal. And then, after that, we give them either stipend or renew your contracts or bring them into permanent contract within the army or within the police or bring them to a vocation-training scheme to train them something better for life. But we will cross that bridge when we get to it. We need to cross the river now by taking some risks.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, I think there were a couple of questions over here, the gentleman here and then, sir, you in the middle.

Q: James Kitfield from the National Journal magazine. I have a chicken-and-the-egg question here. You said that as long as Iran and some its neighbors are meddling and supporting militia groups, et cetera, you cannot reach a national reconciliation because they're aggravating those tensions. Yet, absent a national reconciliation, you can't get them to stop. My question is, how do you get over that hump? Is a national reconciliation international conference required, where we get everyone at the table? How do you get over that hump? And if you don't, can reconciliation happen from the bottom up, as some have suggested?

DR. AL RUBAIE: Thank you very much. Two track – well, there can be no serious national reconciliation without a regional reconciliation. If we carry on doing this Shi'ism versus Sunnism and this extremism in the region, it will be extremely difficult to have a real national reconciliation in Iraq. If you have – if you carry on escalating in the region, then we have a problem. That's number one.

Number two, if we – we need to work and we have a detailed plan, to strengthen our new Iraqism, national identity, and by bringing all of the three communities together and break down this self-defense mechanism of the three communities and strengthen and

build our Iraqi security forces on a national basis and make a national army, a national police, then we'll be doomed. And I think this is the way forward, to build a strong national Iraqi national security forces as well as national reconciliation, national unity, include everybody and make them less susceptible and less amiable to the influence from the region. But I can tell you that our neighbors are – with very few exceptions – are playing a very negative role in Iraq.

MS. WORMUTH: I think there was a gentleman in the middle there. And then, over there.

Q: Hi, I'm Dave Michaels from the Dallas Morning News. This is sort of a question about oil, but I guess also about federalism. Was the decision of the Kurdistan regional government to issue its own oil concessions most recently to haunt oil, was this helpful or hurtful for the cause of national reconciliation and also for the passage of a national petroleum law. And then also, how do you regard the agreement as an illegal agreement or a legal agreement?

DR. AL RUBAIE: This is a very complicated constitutional problem, not a political problem. Politically, what the central government, the federal government, has done, they said, this contract with Hunt Oil and others, it's null and void. It doesn't bind the central government, so that's the central government – issued that very clear statement.

How much – this is going to be really constitutional issue and the high court is going to – because the way the constitution is written allows the clergy to do this. And the way they interpret the constitution, that's why they – and also, they are local, the regional constitution. So this is – what we are – I think, I wouldn't like to say that the hydrocarbons law needs only crossing the T's and dotting the I's. We've been saying this for long, but I'll tell you what. There is a huge pressure from everywhere, inside and outside the country. And we need to apply more pressure even, on everyone, to agree on a compromise hydrocarbons law whereby all parties go home partly unhappy. That's the best compromise I think, where everybody goes home partly unhappy. And that compromise, I think we are very close to that. We need some tweaking on that.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, there are a lot of questions here, but I think we'll take the gentleman in the back with the glasses.

Q: Hi, John Iskandar from Foreign Service Institute. When you spoke about the long-term strategic alliance or agreement with the U.S. that you are pursuing, that the government is pursuing, to what extent does that involve basing and what is the future of American permanent bases or long-term bases in Iraq?

DR. AL RUBAIE: I think it's too early to talk about basing, but I do believe that neither United States government ask for bases nor the government of Iraq probably or the council of representatives would, will ask for bases. I don't think they will. But, it's too early to and we haven't started negotiation. We are talking about a SOFA (?) here.

We are talking about the status of forces agreement and not in security. As I said, we need to have an economic package as well and diplomatic and political support from the United States government.

But it is – I believe we will need help in the way of counterterrorism forces, in the way of training, arms, monitoring the borders, probably even as a guarantor to the new, nascent democracy or to deter the friendly neighbors from muddling in any, in our internal affairs. So these are the grand plan, if you like.

But we have, we are going to work very soon, we're going to start very soon working on joint declaration, joint declaration of intents: what are we intending to do. And then we renew the 1546 or the United Nations Security Council resolution, probably for another year, with some modification, with some concession for respect of the sovereignty of Iraq and respect of the government of Iraq, and lay down some new rules on the ground – what is your responsibility and authorities, what are your responsibilities and authorities? Because sometimes, it's difficult to have two armies at the same basal space and coordinating with them.

So that there are a lot – and then we move on to serious negotiation and this is going to be experts. The experts are going to be working the details of this enduring, bilateral cooperation agreement between the two countries. Even the issue of the other countries, the not the United States government, what is the other country's troop (?), we haven't tackled that.

This is a serious issue; we need to have a view and have a look at that and see what we can do with the other countries. Are they willing to go and come with us on the same terms or not. There are all sort of things that need to be done, but this is all down the line and next year, or from now until the end of next year, I think we're going to be very, very busy.

MS. WORMUTH: I know that there are a lot of additional questions, but unfortunately, we've run out of time. Dr. al Rubaie, thank you first so much for coming. Please join me in thanking him. (Applause.)

DR. AL RUBAIE: Thank you very much indeed.

MS. WORMUTH: And Ambassador, thank you very much for coming. It's always nice to see you. Thank you all very much and we hope to see you at the next event.

(END)