

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Statesmen's Forum: The Future of U.S.-Iraqi Relations

Moderator:

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Speaker:

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Location:

**B1 Conference Center
CSIS 1800 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006**

Time: 10:00 a.m. EST

Date: Thursday, February 28, 2013

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming. And I know you didn't come here to listen to me, so I'm going to turn you over to Dr. Fayyah as soon as possible.

He will be listening to your questions. He will be using a translator to provide comments as he speaks, so I will ask you to just recognize the fact we need to give the translator a little time.

Beyond that, I think that you – we are hearing from someone who is in a unique position to tell us about the security and stability of Iraq, the Iraqi view of issues and problems in the area, the status of the SOFA and relations with the United States, and who is accompanied by several Iraqi parliamentarians. And as we get into the question period, we may have the benefit of their expertise on key issues as well.

So with that brief introduction, let me –

(Mr. Al-Fayyah's remarks are delivered through interpreter.)

FALEH AL-FAYYAH: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen; thank you for being here today. And I would like to thank CSIS for this opportunity. We came to Washington, myself, along with the members of my delegation, members of the Council of Representatives Committee on External Relations, Mr. Yassin Majid and Mr. Sami al-Askari. Along with us as well, Mr. Abbas, and he is a member of the National Security Council of Iraq. And it is a great opportunity for us to meet prominent personalities and officials in this very – in this important place and to talk about the access of the issues – about the issues that Mr. Sadi (ph) has indicated. These are very broad issues, and we will try to give you an exhaustive, comprehensive and yet brief perspective on the issues.

In reality, there are – there is a set of changes that happened in Iraq after the fall of the regime. And we've started, after the fall of the regime, the process of building our democratic system with the presence of the U.S. forces back then, and later, with the pullout of these forces. And today, we – there are also changes in light of the many developments in the Arab region, specifically, under – in light of the Arab Spring.

There are with us today prominent U.S. personalities, such as His Excellency U.S. Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, who might have, I'm sure, very detailed information, and might possess a realistic, true vision and reading of what is going on. Along with us, also, is the adviser, Mr. Sadi (ph); he is with us, and he is, for sure, knowledgeable about the issues and has useful information.

However, what I'm going to go about today is to talk about the security in Iraq and the security issues and security developments in Iraq as well as in the region in light of the popular movement that has taken place – that has taken place. And I must here indicate that this popular movement and this popular mobilization, if you will, is a sort of ripple effect – a reaction – a delayed, reactive ripple effect to what happened in Iraq with the fall of the regime and the

establishment of a democratic system. So this movement is coming after – for a long time having still water in that place.

Today, what we do in Iraq – and we were able to address an array of problems that resulted from the fall of the regime. Also, other issues and developments on the Iraqi scene were the emergence of secondary affiliations or secondary identities – secondary identities of the Iraqi people. And the third – the third issue being, this happened after the oppression and for a long time – also the issue of terrorism and its repercussions. And other developments in Iraq are a result of the actions that some forces are taking in the region in order to take down the experience of Iraq. And finally, also, the development with the action of al-Qaida in the region and in Iraq.

What we witnessed in Iraq over the years – the past years were a sort of a pre-emptive war that was undertaken by dictatorship regimes. And that pre-emptive war was an accurate expression – a reflection of a reaction to – a regional reaction to the Iraqi experience. The Iraqi people suffered tremendously from this pre-emptive war launched by these dictatorship regimes, and we feel – we Iraqis feel that we paid a hefty price for this war in partnership with the United States. Iraq and the United States sacrificed blood, suffered together and suffered tremendous losses during that war.

The problem today in Iraq is the popular movements that we are all witnessing. And I would say this is a result of many ripple effects – many reactions, mainly that also yielded an issue of sectarianism. This is a new – it has a new form today – the issue of sectarianism has become – has a new form today, and it has affected the movement of the populace, the movements of the population. Instead of holding impartial, neutral slogans, today, we are witnessing slogans that are trying to influence the internal front – the internal scene inside Iraq.

Iraq has also suffered from this specific set of problems that was a result of sectarianism, and a lot of it had to do also with the influence that al-Qaida has tried to effect inside Iraq. They almost caused an internal civil strife – an internal civil war. However, we were able to abort such a problem and such a plan. Our government of national partnership – the national coalition government was able to abort the plan of al-Qaida in causing civil strife. And the prime minister, with his council of ministers, with his government, was able to take down such a strife and launch the process of building a state built on citizenry and holding accountable those who act outside the scope of the law.

The problems in Iraq today, I can explain them as follows. First, we had to deal and address the legal structure and the constitutional framework and structure. We also had to address problems that resulted from the fall of the dictatorship. We also had to deal with the situation that – with the relationship between the central government – between – the relationship between the central government and the KRG – the Kurdistan region, knowing and in light of – that the Kurdistan region was established before the – you know, the – before the new order in Iraq, if you will.

And they had already gained some rights. Some of it was not – some of which – some of which was not approved or sanctioned by the constitution yet. And also, we had to address the

issue of the partnership with the Sunni community, specifically in the Western areas. After – finally, we also had to address the issue of al-Qaida and – al-Qaida that continued to cause problems and affecting the Iraqi people – the Iraqi people, in light of al-Qaida actions in Iraq, were either in the forefront and were confronting the threats of al-Qaida, or were under the influence of some of its armed groups.

I will explain and describe the situation in Iraq today as follow – or the situation of Iraq as follows: Iraq today has entered the club of the democracies. Iraq has entered the club of democracies; Iraq has held its pluralistic elections. Iraq has witnessed a peaceful transfer for the – a peaceful transfer of powers and authority. Iraq today has launched a process of reconstruction and (staunch ?) development.

Today, Iraq has increased its energy sector oil production and has increased and attracted global investments in that sector. Iraq also has put forth an ambitious vision for that sector. Also, we worked hard to address the standard of living – the standards of living for Iraqis. I am pleased to say that today that specific issue has improved, and we have witnessed an increase of around 500 percent in that realm of the standard of living and the income power, if you will, of the Iraqi people compared to what it was before.

Again, there were some problems that were inherited, and they were also the reaction to the developments, some of which is related to the Iraqi experience and the response and the reaction to the new Iraqi experience. Some of it also is a ripple effect of the Arab Spring – an extension of the ripple effect of the Arab Spring.

About the U.S.-Iraqi relationship, I will say that this U.S.-Iraqi relationship today has taken a human dimension – has witnessed a great achievement in terms of – it has a great value, great substance. The United States was able to show that – its experience in Iraq. It helped the building of a state. It helped remove a dictatorship; it helped take down a great – a dictatorship. It also helped foster a partnership between itself and Iraq based on the respect of sovereignty. Today, also, our armed forces are in constant training and constant improvement of their capabilities.

Also, we are in constant improvement of our – (inaudible) – in human rights. And not to say that there aren't – there isn't some of what we inherited in terms of the culture in that human rights sphere that we inherited. However, we have been in constant movement to achieve strides in that regard and also through the Council of Representatives of Iraq before, and through the government of Iraq, we were able to foster a better environment for human rights in the country.

About the cooperation between us and the United States, it is built on a – on the cornerstone – on the robust cornerstone of the Strategic Framework Agreement and the status of forces agreement, the SFA and the SOFA.

I will also describe our U.S.-Iraqi relationship as exemplary. I will also describe it as an exemplary relationship between two allies. After the pullout, the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, we have witnessed a new order in Iraq. This new order was managed after a heavy U.S. military

presence in Iraq. This new order was managed through the relationship – our relationship with the U.S. embassy.

In that regard, I would like to point out that ambassador – U.S. Ambassador Jim Jeffrey has done a tremendous, exceptional job and he and his team demonstrated utter competence and a tremendous professionalism. And the pullout, the withdrawal of the U.S. forces happened in a cordial atmosphere and it also indicated that the blood that was paid in the lives of the U.S. soldiers who died there was for the freedom of Iraq and for giving – building the state – the state and the institutions of Iraq. And that by itself gave our relationship, our bilateral relationship today, a human dimension.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, let me open things up for questions. But a couple of points: As you can see, the room is very crowded. We also have to allow for translation, so I would ask you to do the following: When I call on you, whether I know you or not, I'm not going to name you. I will ask you to name yourself and your organization.

Please wait for the microphone and please ask one short question which ends in a question mark so the translator has the ability to give Dr. Fayyah a clear question and something to respond to. I think also he has a State Department luncheon along with other members of the Iraqi delegation after this meeting. I have been told by the State Department they're going to give me their traditional sign that I should stop moderating. But what I'd also ask is that you please allow the Iraqi delegation to leave so they can meet the time commitments they have.

So with that, let me start, if I may, but please do wait for the microphone.

Q: Nazar Janabi, independent consultant. (In Arabic.)

MR. AL-FAYYAH: The question from Mr. Janabi – Mr. Janabi is a consultant, and the question was: Mr. Fayyah, your excellency, how do you see the repercussions of the situation – how do you see the repercussions of the situation in Syria affecting the situation in Iraq? The second component of the question – what do you – how do you see the possibility of change happening inside Syria, and what is the Iraqi government doing in preparation or in pre-emptive mode to confront such development in Syria?

The answer from his excellency, Mr. Fayyah: The issue of Syria affects the situation in Iraq and mainly and knowingly that we know Syria has been in the past challenging and opposed to the political experience of Iraq. Syria has also been over the past few years a conduit – a conduit – a conduit, as well as an intermediary for the opposing forces; those opposing forces that were opposing the new – the new change – the new transformation of Iraq. They were coming into Iraq through the Syrian territory. In that regard, today, given the developments, we are prepared – we are prepared to these waves – to these waves of terrorists or to the forces that would seek to wreak havoc in our country. Iraq has taken in that regard a set of measures.

Iraq has amassed a good amount of military forces all along its border with Syria. We are also cooperating with our friends and specifically with our friend, the United States, to counter

the possibility of chemical weapons being – chemical weapons flowing out of Syria into Iraq, and knowingly that you are trying to take these pre-emptive measures to make sure that the – such weapons do not fall in the hands of terrorists.

I do feel that we are about to see changes and therefore Iraq – the Iraqi government is concerned. Iraqi government has concerns vis-à-vis the situation in Syria, and it has taken steps to prepare for such eventualities.

MR. CORDESMAN: I'm always struck by the level of innovation involved, so first may I ask that the question be in English, and second, a short question is a one-part question. (Laughter.) But thank you for that clever approach.

The gentleman in the third row in the middle there. Could we wait for the mic?

Q: Thank you, (Mr. Cordesman ?) and Dr. Fayyah. My name's Saeb Erekat. I'm a journalist in town, but I was also the United Nations spokesman in Iraq for 5 years, so I know the country very well.

Sir, you spoke about a partnership government – (in Arabic). In reality, reconciliation – (in Arabic) – has not improved since 2005 since our first attempt. So, in fact, there is quite a great deal of dissidence today. It's no closer today than it was then. Could you explain.

MR. CORDESMAN: I'm sorry, could you just – one short question.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: We have a – the government of national partnership is an upper structure. What I was referring to is the cohesion, the popular cohesion among the Iraqi people. And I feel in that regard Iraq was successful in overcoming the possibility of a sectarianism conflict, and people killing each other on sectarianism – on a sectarian basis.

I feel that today at the social level, the social fabric level, we were able to overcome a sectarian conflict. What you see today in Iraq is at the political level and this has to do with some allegations, and this has to do with some of the truth. Whatever I'm going to say that in Iraq today we have peace, we have civil peace, that you don't see any more displacement based on the sectarianism, you don't see people being killed based on their identity or sectarian identity. You don't see any more people being expelled from the region or people being rejected on the basis of their religious sectarianism and sectarian affiliation, and their ethnicity.

Today, what you see in Iraq is a democracy, and in a democracy you will see political problems. This is part of the nature of a democratic system, such as, for instance, issues of vote of no confidence for the government, attempts to dismantle the parliament – the dissolution of the parliament, attempts to also call for the dissolution of the government. All these are natural features of a democratic process.

MR. CORDESMAN: The lady in the second row? Can you please wait for the microphone?

Q: Yes, my name is Amal Mudallal; I'm with the Wilson Center. (Off mic.) Hello? Yes. My question is concerning the statement yesterday by Mr. –

(Off-side conversation.)

Q: OK. There was a statement yesterday by Mr. Maliki warning of a civil war in Lebanon and in Iraq. And at the same time, Mr. Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, yesterday said the same thing. The press in Lebanon today is interpreting this as a threat by the pro-Iranian forces in the region against those who are against Saddam – Bashar al-Assad. Could you please tell us if this is a threat? And second, you are accused – Iraq is accused of sending weapons and money and oil to Syria. Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: Again, I'm sorry, this is not a place for speeches.

Q: Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: Just for questions.

Q: Thank you.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: I believe that the statement by his excellency, Prime Minister al-Maliki, yesterday was an analysis for the potential and possible repercussions that would happen given the developments in Syria. And if it's a bad, negative end to the – to the issue in Syria, then you will see the partition of the country, you would see a civil – a civil war, you would see a potentially a – (inaudible) – and also you would see – and also if the extremist factions come into power in a new regime, in a new order in Syria, then this will export an array of problems to Iraq.

We have also started to see that some of these problems started being shipped to Lebanon, exported to Lebanon, and the ripple effect is now being seen in Lebanon. The prime minister's analysis is an accurate and correct one. And if the situation keeps going in that direction that it is taking today, we feel there might be a civil war, there might be a sectarian partition of the – of the country and also we feel that terrorist groups may try to get the upper hand in that environment. Therefore, we feel if the situation goes into that direction, the future of the Middle East will witness tension, will witness further problems, and in that effect, the analysis of his excellency the prime minister, Prime Minister Maliki, was accurate and correct.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman on the aisle in the second row.

Q: My name is Mark Kimmitt.

Minister, you talked very early about your relationship with the regional neighbors. Now, we know about Syria, we know what's happening in some of the other countries but there appears to be a warming of relationships and some room for optimism with your Gulf neighbors – Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. We've read about it; I'd be very interested in your view on it.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: We feel that we have witnessed inside Syria, what's happening inside Syria, is an internal conflict. And today, we feel that Syria has – doesn't have any more presence in the international corridors of the – in the – on the international scene. We have tried – as Iraq, we have tried to keep the humanitarian relations. Iraq has not imposed an economic siege towards Syria, and the goods and other type of commercial activity is still ongoing.

With regards to Jordan, we feel that Iraq and Jordan – we feel that Iraq needs to be part of the scenario of possibilities of resolutions to the Syrian issue. I can distinguish between two types of solutions today, to the Syrian issue; that is, two scenarios. One scenario is attempting to find resolution. Another scenario is attempting to stir the waters and stir strife. Until now, Iraq has not been able to participate in that scenario, the scenario that seeks to find solutions to the Syrian issue.

With Jordan, I can qualify our relationship as a good relationship, and we always strive to take it to the next level. We both, Jordan and Iraq, feel and sense the amount of threats that is happening in light of the developments in Syria. We both share the same diagnosis to the Syrian problem and we both share the – I believe – the same perspectives vis-à-vis the repercussions of the Syrian problem on the region. I feel that the visit of His Excellency Prime Minister Maliki to Jordan recently has sought to take the bilateral relationship with Jordan to the next level, and to give it a quantum leap.

With regards to Iraq's relation with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we have started to see signals that indicate that we're going towards a track to de-ice the relationship and we feel that our prospects for the launching of a good dialogue and for a new – for a start, for relaunching of a new relationship and a new horizon.

With regards to Kuwait, we feel that we have turned the page vis-à-vis the issues such as the airlines issues and the issue of the borders. And of course, we will work together on overcoming any of the knots that we witnessed in our bilateral relations in the past.

MR. CORDESMAN: If I may, I'm going to use the chairman's prerogative and ask you a question.

Iraq, to some extent, is caught in the middle between the rising tensions between Iran and the United States. And I wonder if you could give us an Iraqi perspective on what this series of tensions in the nuclear and the other military dimension means for Iraq.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: I think that in the context of U.S.-Iran issue and the relationship of Iraq with Iran, and within that context, I feel that there is a paradox, and the paradox is based on the nature of the alliances of Iraq. From one side, we have our alliance with the United States, and also we have – on the other side, the United States has its allies in the region. And with those allies, we have a negative relationship, if you will.

However, with – thanks to the efforts and the pressure exerted by the United States, the tremendous pressure exerted by the United States, we were able to improve some of the – some of these relations, some of these relations with some of these countries – some of these countries.

And with some other countries, we still have a sort of a boycott state, or we don't have relations yet.

I feel that Iraq was put under siege and was deterred and prevented from extending itself and having its normal place within the Arab environment and within the Arab region. And this has affected Iraq's relationship with several of the countries of that region.

Today, also the issue of the nuclear proliferation, with regards to the Iranian issue and also with regards to the interference of – the interference – the interference in the affairs of other states, we feel that our position is similar to the position of the United States in that regard. We are against the nuclear proliferation and we are against the interference of other states in the affairs of other – in the affairs of others.

Iraq has attempted to keep – to remote itself. Iraq has attempted to remote itself from these problems. We have an understanding between us and the Americans that the United States would not and should not put the burden of this problem of Iran, between the U.S. and Iran, should not put its responsibility on the shoulders of Iraq. I feel that that is the differences, between the United States and Iran, should not be put as a burden on Iraq.

With regards to our relationship with Iran, I have to here point out to the geographic proximity to the – also sectarian or religious – to the religious proximity as well, to the religious closeness. And also, whether it's this regime or any other regime in Iran, we feel that those two components affect the relationship; that is, the geography and the religious affiliation that exists between Iran, Iraq; if you will.

Now, we have tried to foster for Iraq and are attempting to promote Iraq's role in a position that would be in balance within its environment. We would love to see for Iraq to have a position of balance. And I feel that this balance is a good balance. And if it's a balance that also helps Iraq always protect its sovereignty, I feel that this will be very helpful to have an effect on the U.S.-Iran issue and the U.S.-Iran – issue.

And I also – sorry, one more thing – I also feel that we have an alliance with the United States. We have – we are allies with the United States. With Iran, we have a natural good relation.

Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: I see. The gentleman there in the second row, front. Please wait for the microphone.

Q: Mr. al-Fayyah –

MR. CORDESMAN: (Off mic) – asking for your name and organizations, pardon me.

Q: Barry Jacobs, I'm a retired American foreign service officer and I work with several companies, both Turkish and American, that do business in Iraq.

Would you please talk a little bit more about the relationship with the Kurdish regional government, particularly as it affects Iraq and Turkey?

MR. AL-FAYYAH: I would like to ask Mr. Cordesman to allow me to refer the question to Mr. Yassin Majid.

YASSIN MAJID: Mr. Cordesman, thank you very much, and I hope that you would allow me ample time, enough time to discuss this complicated and very broad issue, the issue of the Iraq-Turkish relation, as well as the relation between the central government of Iraq with the KRG region.

Our relationship has gone through two phases. Our relationship with Turkey has gone through two phases, the first phase being the phase before the U.S. withdrawal back in 2011. And back then, we had a very sound relationship with Turkey, politically, commercially, economically and pretty much at all levels.

Politically, we exchanged back then a set of mutual visits at various levels, at the level of the prime minister, at the ministerial level, at the level of heads of various institutions of the government of Iraq, as well as exchanges between the governors of the various regions of Iraq who visited Turkey officially as well. Governors from the south, from the center, from the north – northern part of Iraq visited Turkey.

We also had back then a volume – a very important trade volume and commercial exchanges that reached around \$17 billion. At the level of the military relationship, we had – we cooperated together with the Turks, with regards to the PKK. We cooperated militarily with the Turks.

Back then also, I could say that Turkey was a sort of relief and haven for Iraq, especially when we had some Arab countries – and here, I will emphasize and say some, not all Arab countries – but some Arab countries at that time were involved in the sectarian strife that was happening inside Iraq. Therefore, Turkey back then played a role that was more of a relief and haven to Iraq.

Then a problem happened; a problem occurred. And I will describe it as a sort of a sudden change, a sudden coup that hit the foreign policy of Turkey vis-à-vis Iraq. Also, at that time was the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and that also came along the Arab Spring and the developments, ripple effect, of the Arab Spring.

Then with that – with that sudden coup, that sudden swift change of the Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq, came a new dimension, a new dimension that had a lot of components. Turkey started to interfere in a great deal and in various ways into the affairs of Iraq. Also, here I point out that the prime minister of Turkey and the foreign minister of Turkey launched personal attacks against the Iraqi prime minister. And Turkey turned to become as if it were a political party within the internal crisis in Iraq. Turkey turned as if it were also part of the political factions present on the political arena in Iraq.

This new change in the Turkish policy towards Iraq has taken also a much more dangerous turn, in 2012 specifically, when the rhetoric, the Turkish rhetoric has taken a sectarian dimension. And many of the actions and calculations had reminded the Iraqi people as if they were living again the history and the influence of the Ottoman Empire on Iraq.

When we witnessed the duo – the duo, Erdogan/Oglu, the two persons, the duo of Erdogan/Oglu launching that attack, that over time became a personal constant attack against the person of the prime minister, against the person of the Iraqi prime minister. He started – they started hitting on the sectarian tone. And furthermore, when we saw the visit of the foreign minister of Turkey to Kirkuk, without asking for authorization or without any preauthorization, the foreign minister of Turkey went to Kirkuk, the Turks – we thought that the Turks were sending out a message in Iraq. Furthermore, when they said that the Turkmen community in Iraq is Turk, we felt that the message of Turkey was also to the Turks in Syria, in Armenia, in Iran, in Lebanon, that they are Turks. To these communities in these countries, the message of Turkey was to them as if they were Turk and addressing them as if they were Turk. We felt that the Turks in Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Oglu gave themselves the eligibility or the opportunity to interfere in the affairs of the other states.

We felt that the problem then is Turkey took a greater dimension, and it wasn't anymore – it wasn't – it came across as if Turkey was trying to find an alternative for the relationship between Baghdad and Ankara, that we thought that the Turks were trying to replace it with a sort of relationship between Ankara and Erbil. We felt that such development was a dangerous development, and it was more dangerous than interfering in the internal affairs of our country from a sectarian perspective, but rather it was more to – of put a fabric for a relationship – politically, economically, commercially, and at the security level with the KRG region as an alternative to the relationship between the two countries, Baghdad and Ankara.

Also, we felt that the other dimension of that great threat that we saw in this development with the position of Turkey vis-à-vis Iraq was the interference of Turkey in the affairs of Iraq was more than the sectarian issue, but rather more trying to establish relationship with the region and with the governor – (inaudible) – and the various provinces of – specifically of the country.

I will also here point out two statements made by Mr. Dawood Oglu and that we in Iraq viewed as a very dangerous development back then: the first one pertaining to the Iraqiya list. Back then – and you know – you know that the Iraqiya list is an important political faction in Iraq. It has its presence at the Council of Representatives as well as the government. He said that the Iraqiya list was established and formed in my house, in my residence. That was his first statement.

His second statement – and it reached him to the point of getting to that – he said that I am the one – (off-mic) – the second point became when he said that, and I quote, I asked Mr. – (inaudible) – after the first session of the parliament and after the first section – the election of the president of the republic and the government – I asked Mr. Najefi (ph) to return to the (corps ?). And finally, he said the following: The central government of Iraq doesn't have the right to prevent the KRG region from exporting oil towards Turkey. These are what we viewed as dangerous positions.

Q: Thank you very much.

MR. : Excuse me. Who is this person? You didn't tell us who this gentleman is.

MR. CORDESMAN: Would you introduce?

MR. : And his position.

(Off-side conversation.)

Q: Of course, we need the right to respond – (cross talk).

MR. CORDESMAN: No, you do not have the right to respond. We have – this is an Iraqi platform. I'm sure you that have –

(Off-side conversation.)

MR. CORDESMAN: I am very sorry, but we do not have time –

(Off-side conversation.)

MR. CORDESMAN: All right. Let me put a close to this. I'm sorry, this is an Iraqi session. We have limited time.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: The person who just spoke is Mr. Yassin Majid, and he is a member of the External Relations Committee at the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

MR. CORDESMAN: I have to check with the State Department in terms of timing. How are we at this point? Because we've gone over the original time limit.

Colm, how much time?

STAFF: We have 15 minutes left.

MR. CORDESMAN: 15 minutes? All right. I have the gentleman over there close to the wall in the second row.

Q: Thank you. I'm Lu Xiang, a visiting fellow at CSIS from China. I have a very, very brief question to Mr. Fayyah. How do you think the role of China can play in the reconstruction efforts in Iraq? That's my simple question. Thank you.

MR. AL-FAYYAH: We have an economic Chinese presence in Iraq through the companies that hold a lot of investments. We also try to promote these investments – mainly also in the oil sector. The Chinese work on some oil fields in the region of Al-Kut, and as you

all know – as you know, the Chinese manufacturing sector is all over the world. So I feel that we have good prospects economically with China.

MR. CORDESMAN: I want to say that we did not come here to get into a debate over Iraqi and Turkish relations. I do feel that I should give the Turkish representative a very brief time to respond. Brief is three minutes.

Q: (Off mic) – I don't want to take too much of – (inaudible) – time, because this issue has been discussed and – over the press in the public domain and bilaterally.

MS. : Would you please state your name?

Q: Sure. My name is Janos (ph), and I am a political (counselor ?) in the Turkish embassy who also had the pleasure of serving in Iraq at some point and on Iraq issues. Thank you very much.

The thing is that it's very clear we don't have a personal policy against any country in the region. Turkey has consistently and repeatedly, over the years since 2003, worked for the preservation of the unity, territorial integrity of Iraq and stabilization. This has been proved time and again – and I don't want to go over the list of things that we have done for the good of Iraq and take some other questions of the audience.

Today, we have 12 billion of investment in Iraq, some of them – a major portion of them is with the Kurdish Regional Government; the rest is with the rest of Iraq. We have a consulate-general (ambassador ?) in Mosul. As you know, we are planning on and thinking about opening others, and we have excellent relations with all the components of the Iraqi society. When there were clashes in the southern part of Iraq, and there were attacks and damages to the religious shrines of Iraq, Turkey has been the first country in the region, when no one was coming to the aid of Iraq, to go and help redevelop and repair those sites.

While ending, I think it has been that my prime minister, my foreign minister doesn't have personal grudges against any figure in the region. We don't have time for that; they don't have time for that. I do not accept what Mr. Majid has shared with the audience here. I think Turkish-Iraqi relations is more important than personal issues. Again, this has been a personal attack against my government. So we should – rather than exchanging, you know, these kind of criticism, focus on what's going on in the region, as you are the national security adviser – and we know you, sir, personally. And this region deserves better.

MR. CORDESMAN: Thank you. Did you want to respond?

MR. AL-FAYYAH: The person who spoke at the podium moments ago is a member of the External Relations Committee within the Council of Representatives of Iraq, Mr. Yassin Majid, and I am unable to – I am not in a position and I am unable to oppose what he said. He was giving his opinion that reflects the opinion of a large segment of parliamentarians within the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

However, if you are asking me to answer – to answer your question, I will answer it from another perspective – from a different angle, if you will, within my power as a member of the executive branch in Iraq. I will say that we see a big problem – a problem that can be interpreted in various ways – in positive ways or in negative ways. However, it is a problem with different facets or a variety of facets. Let me – let me share this with you.

Recently, there was a conference held in Istanbul under the slogan of liberating – freeing Iraq. That conference was held by a number of opposition factions and armed factions in the opposition in Iraq. So how can you – I mean, it is normal. How can you look at these things and not explain them or see them in a different way?

Therefore, because you are looking here as – at an unusual dimension – at some unusual events, if you will – therefore, we look up to our American friends, and we have been very active asking our American friends to help us in improving the relationship with Turkey – the relationship between us and Turkey. And this is something I discussed with Mr. Oglu myself when I met him in Ankara recently.

And, you know, we talked about how the Syrian problem today has affected the relationship of Turkey with Iraq, and also the Syrian problem, we feel, has changed the mood and the nature of Turkey's position or foreign policy towards the various issues of the region and towards the countries of the region. In that regard, I will also say that we have invited the Turkish minister of energy to – for a visit – to visit Iraq. And I feel – I also say that Mr. Gül met with Prime Minister Maliki in Cairo at the – at the margin of the Islamic conference meetings. And we are trying – we are trying, we hope, to improve the relationship. And we hope to bring about the relationship where it comes to a level that takes into account our mutual interests for both countries.

MR. CORDESMAN: Once again, we discover there are no controversial issues in the Middle East. (Laughter.)

But I wonder if we might close, because we only have a few minutes, by asking you, Mr. Fayyah, where do we go in terms of the U.S.-Iraqi strategic relationship? What is it that we can do to best strengthen that relationship?

MR. AL-FAYYAH: Allow me, Mr. Cordesman, to refer this – the answer to this question to Mr. Sami al-Askari, who is a specialist in this issue and expert and can talk further.

SAMI AL-ASKARI: Thank you very much.

I feel that the Strategic Framework Agreement was the context and was the framework that framed the relationship between the United States and us, between the U.S. and Iraq. I feel that – I feel that Iraq and the United States has set forth a unique example, a unique model in the relationship – in the relationship of a country that helped another country, that helped the people of another country, and also in this relationship that led ultimately to the withdrawal of the – for U.S. forces.

Many people back then were very skeptical about the pullout of the U.S. forces. Many people back then were skeptical of a sound, healthy pullout of the withdrawal and pullout of the U.S. forces in a way that would preserve and maintain the value of the U.S. forces – U.S. Armed Forces, and would maintain and protect and preserve the value of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The Strategic Framework Agreement set the context for the broad possibility to develop further and faster the relationship between the two countries. And we are still working on activating and promoting further the various aspects of cooperation within that Strategic Framework Agreement.

I feel that we are one of the most important allies of the United States in the region. I feel that we are the only – we are the only democratic system in the Arab world. I feel that we have a unique, distinguished relationship with the United States through the Strategic Framework Agreement. I feel that Iraq, through its oil and energy wealth, through its geographical position can play a great role in the stabilization and the stability, the stability of the oil markets around the world. And Iraq, through its oil sector, can even reassure the international markets of the world that their stability will be secure. And we are working – I feel also that we can help the United States play a very positive role in the region.

Today, in light of the repercussions of the Arab Spring, we witness a rise in extremism in the region. I feel that Iraq can play a leading role and a sound role in – among the countries that are moderate countries; the countries that constitute a moderate – front of moderate states who – that will challenge the axis of extremism in the region.

I feel that through our cooperation with the United States, the Iraqi government can play such a positive role. Iraq can further play a fundamental, pivotal role in gathering the friendly countries of the United States in the regions; in gathering those countries friendly to the United States that are rejecting extremism and that are moderate. And such a group of moderate countries rejecting extremism can help in fostering the security and the stability of this region, which is very important at the end of the day to the economic stability of the world.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, before I ask you to thank Dr. Fayyah and his colleagues in the usual manner, let me just say they do have a luncheon with the State Department; we are under time pressure. Could I just ask you to allow them to move to the elevator and get to their luncheon before you sort of either pigeon-hole them or leave?

But in any case, I think we have had a very good presentation of Iraqi views. I'd like to thank Dr. Fayyah and his colleagues, and thank you very much for coming. (Applause.)

(END)