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Transcript

PUBLIC OPINION ON IRAQ AND THE ARAB SPRING

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Transcript by Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

OPERATOR: (In progress) – The discussion includes the results of a poll of Americans and Iraqis on the results of the war. From the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, this is a little more than two hours.

[00:00:37]

MARWAN MUASHER: OK, good afternoon, and welcome to another Carnegie event that we're doing jointly with the Arab American Institute. We're going to talk today about public opinion on Iraq and the Arab Spring. And we're dividing the – this afternoon session into two sessions – one – or two panels, one where we will focus on Iraq and look at the views on U.S. intervention and departure. As we all know, yesterday marked the end of the U.S. military presence in Iraq.

And the Zogby group conducted a poll in September and October that looked at Iraqis, but also at people in the region views on the departure and what it means for Iraq.

And in that – in this first panel we will have, first, Jim Zogby, the founder and the president of the Arab American Institute, present the findings of the poll. And then we will have two colleagues and dear friends comment on the findings: Edward "Skip" Gnehm, who is the Kuwait Professor of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Affairs at George Washington University, but who I know more closely and intimately as the American ambassador to Jordan, where – when I was still in government, and we forged a very close relationship; and our own Marina Ottaway, the senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Program.

We will have a short coffee break after that, and then we will start the second panel, where we'll look – we will look at political change and governments in the Arab world in general, in six Arab countries that were also polled by the Zogby group. Again, Jim will present the findings. I will comment on these. Mustafa Hamarneh unfortunately is in Canada right now. He came from Jordan yesterday on a plane that was diverted there instead of to Washington because of a sick person on the plane, so he unfortunately – (chuckles) – could not be with us today, but perhaps we can ask Skip to also comment on the findings that Jim will present.

So with that, I turn the floor over to Jim.

[00:03:16]

JAMES ZOGBY: Thank you, Marwan, and thank all of you for coming. I want to acknowledge up front that these polls were done in September of this year after the Eid, and they were done for the Sir Bani Yas Forum, which is held annually in the United Arab Emirates. At that forum, we released the polls there that dealt with the role of social media in Arab Spring. These two sets have not been released yet, and so I'm releasing them now.

As Marwan noted, we polled in Iraq, six other Arab countries, the United States and Iran, in an effort to measure attitudes at this point toward the war itself, its impact, toward the feeling that Iraqis and people in the region have about the future of Iraq in the wake of an American withdrawal, and how Iraqis see their country in the world.

There are three essential observations I want to make up front that pretty much follow through all of the findings. The first and foremost, I think, is the divergent attitudes we find among three major Iraqi groups. I mean, we've come to talk about them a lot, but here we have some hard numbers to put to the differences in attitudes between Kurds on the one side and Shia and Sunni Arabs on the other.

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Then there are the – there's the partisan divide that exists here in the United States. It is so deep that sometimes you get the feeling that Democrats and Republicans are looking at two different wars that took place in two different countries.

And then finally there – the attitudes of the respondents in the Arab countries and in Iran that both neighbor and are in some proximity to Iraq. Those attitudes were more negative toward the war and more positive about the future of Iraq's post-withdrawal prospects than the Iraqis themselves.

I'm going to start if I – if I – as I begin with the Iraqi people and their attitude toward the war, a general assessment. What you find is that overall Iraqis feel that they're worse off than they were after the war itself. When we asked the question specifically: After eight years of war, are you better off or worse off than you were before the war began? 42 percent worse off, 30 percent only say better off, and 23 percent say the same.

You'll notice here the divide, as I – as I pointed out. Sunni and Shia, more inclined to say worse off. Only among the Kurds is there a sense that Iraq is better off, or that their situation is better off than it was before the war began.

When you ask in the broader region, you get a much more decisive response in terms of worse off. In Jordan and in Saudi Arabia – I'm not going to give all of the countries we polled; those are in the booklet you have in front of you, and the results are available if you want to log on to our website or write to the Arab American Institute; we can send you the whole poll. But in just Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the two countries most in the neighborhood or closest to Iraq, almost two-thirds say worse off. In Iran, more than a half, but slightly less concerned about Iraq being worse off than Saudis and Jordanians. Overall in the Arab world, about six in 10 say worse off.

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Look at Americans. When you split it up, Democrats – only 24 percent think Iraq was better off than it was after the war – before the war, whereas 58 percent of Republicans say Iraq was better off – Iraqis are better off. This translates to – when you ask the question, was the war worth it – overall, 56 percent of Americans say it wasn't worth it. 75 percent of Democrats say it wasn't worth it, but a plurality of Republicans, 43 percent, say that it was in fact worth it.

When we asked questions of Iraqis as to how the war impacted various aspects of their lives – did it improve their personal safety and security? Did it improve education? Did it make them freer? Did it make them respect the rights of women more? In almost every instance, the results pretty much track the numbers we have here for effect on personal safety and security.

And what you see is that overall, Kurds largely give the war a positive rating in terms of how it impacted their lives, whereas Sunni give it overwhelmingly negative, and Shia only slightly more positive, but still a substantial majority negative. And again, among Democrats and Republicans, by two to one, Republicans seem to always want to find the war having had a positive impact; Democrats much less so.

Where you see the numbers don't go up to a hundred, it's because there were people who weren't sure, which was itself interesting, I think. In some of the instances you'll see the no-impact or not-sure numbers equal almost 30 (percent), sometimes 35 percent, which is somewhat surprising – after eight-and-a-half years of a highly debated and highly contested war here at home, which took a tremendous toll in lives and treasure, that you have, you know, about a third of Americans with either no opinion or sort of ambivalent about what the outcome or the consequences of this were.

Is the withdrawal positive or negative? Decisively, Americans – Republicans and Democrats – say it was positive. It is positive. It is something they look forward to. Among Iraqis it's the same – Iraqis overall, 60 percent, with Shia more highly supportive of withdrawal; Sunni and Kurds though, in the majority, still saying that it was – it was positive.

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What emotions do you feel about withdrawal? And here, the convergence of attitudes you have between Iraqis and Americans, that a withdrawal is positive, breaks down when you say, how do you feel about the withdrawal? Americans very happy; overall Democrats overwhelmingly happy, Republicans still almost 60 percent happy. But Iraqis, the plurality worried – worried about the outcome of what will happen now that American forces are leaving, with Sunni Arabs in the majority being worried about the outcome.

Why are they worried? Asked what their concerns are, almost 60 percent say they're worried about a civil war, worried the country being split into part, worried about terrorism, worried about economic – in almost every instance, the questions we ask about, what are you worried about coming up in the future, almost 60 percent say that they're worried. And that goes across the board, between Sunni, Shia and Arabs on the one side, and Kurds on the other.

Optimism and pessimism about the next four years. While Iraqis are worried, Arabs are not. Almost a – almost an insensitivity or a disconnect between Arab attitudes about this war and about how Iraqis themselves are feeling about it. Two-thirds Jordan, 75 percent in Saudi Arabia are optimistic about the next four years in Iraq – and 60 percent in Iran.

When we ask Iraqis to assess other countries, how do they feel about other countries and the role that they might play in the future? Only 24 percent favorable attitude toward America; 7 percent among Sunni, 25 percent among Shia and 63 percent among Kurds. The Iranian numbers: only 2 percent of Sunni and 5 percent of Kurds have a favorable rating toward Iran, whereas 41 percent of Shia do. And in Turkey, Shia 53 percent favorable rating, 40 percent among Sunnis and only 5 percent of Kurds with a favorable rating toward Turkey.

UAE is one of the few countries that actually was rated positively across the board. Saudi Arabia had favorable numbers in several – among several of the – of the groups, but not across the board, bringing its overall number down to 39 (percent).

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Democracy: Can it work, or won't it work? This was almost the definition of being conflicted. I'd like my country to be a democracy, and it'll work here – 21 percent. I want my country to be a democracy, but it won't work here – 41 percent. I don't want my country to be a democracy because it will not work here – 20 percent. Meaning that – I'm sorry, 62 percent of Iraqis would like their country to be a democracy, but 61 percent of Iraqis don't think a democracy will work in their country.

Attitude toward Iraqi leaders. Nouri al-Maliki, the prime minister, has a favorable rating actually only among Shia. Ayad Allawi has a favorable rating among Sunni and Kurds, a less favorable rating among Shia; he actually is the more popular leader overall, in terms of rating, of all of the people that we polled in the country. And Muqtada al-Sadr is more favored among Shia than any other Iraqi that we – that we surveyed, and look at very low favorable ratings among Sunni and Kurds.

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The issue here of Iraqis being conflicted I think comes through, the – their being divided also comes through. The fact that Americans have sort of a weird but deep partisan split also comes through. One can't blame the Iraqi people for being conflicted and divided. I mean, after years of ruthless rule and an invasion and occupation, and then accompanying it, terrorism and ethnic cleansing – while the trappings of democracy have been set up, the country is somewhat dysfunctional at this point. And so Iraqis are – (chuckles) – deeply worried about the future; happy America's going, worried about what happens now that America goes, and don't quite see their way through to the future.

I think I'll leave it there, Marwan, and we'll hear what the folks here have to say.

MR. MUASHER: All right, thank you very much. A couple of surprises here, things that we've expected but things that I guess many of us did not expect. Let me turn it over to Skip. Skip of course was American – the American U.S. ambassador to Kuwait during the first Gulf War, and as such has I think a uniquely – unique perspective on these issues.

EDWARD "SKIP" GNEHM JR.: Thank you, Marwan. It's nice to be here today, and thank you very much, Jim, for your presentation. I was intrigued, of course, by the polls and the results. And I felt – my first reaction was that it does confirm many of the things that we had sensed would be the case; and I particularly think of the three demographic groups in Iraq, the fact that they were going to have different attitudes about certain of the questions that you asked – particularly like U.S. presence, the Kurds always seeing the American presence as very supportive – along the questions of whether or not we are worse off or better off, and particularly their concerns about the future.

As I looked at the – whether we're better off or worse off, the first thought that came to mind was that it's really understandable, given what the Iraqi people have been through since 2003. And I really did like the phrase that you selected, "gestational state." I think that really does capture, in a – in a – in a correct way, that it's sort of at that point in life where there's still a lot that can happen and a lot of formation that needs to take place.

It's easy to forget, or to rationalize if you're an Iraqi today, the bitter – the better past. To think back on the days of Saddam Hussein – let's be straightforward about it – when they could say that violence hardly existed, at least violence on the street – there were certainly other kinds of violence – that generally safe conditions, the schools worked, different things happened, job security – most people worked for the government. And all of these things have been really turned upside down, and so today they see a situation in which there's a great deal of uncertainty.

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So it's easy to understand how those percents that you found are likely to be the way they are. But I'll make this prediction for the future, because it's human nature. If things do improve in Iraq, if things do get a bit better, you're going to see that comparison shift. And we'll see more people in Iraq saying, we're better off than we were before.

I was impressed, frankly, with the similarity of views between Shia and Sunni toward what had and hadn't improved. This is on a – I think you showed it – but when you look at those two communities, political freedom has not improved, economic development has not improved, education has not improved, health care has not

improved, personal safety-security, relations with the neighbors also very negative; government hasn't improved, women's rights a little bit better but haven't improved.

So it's really only in – as I think – in religious freedom where the Shia clearly see that they have a better situation than they did before. But I think, you know, that commonality between two communities that are often at odds with each other is worth – is worth taking note.

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On the question of withdrawal, I think it's clear to most observers who know any of the history about Iraq that it's not surprising that virtually all communities in Iraq support the end of the U.S. military presence. If you know – (chuckles) – anything at all about the history, even under the monarchy, I think, of just after World War II, when the government then signed a renewed agreement with the British which did in fact have the immunities involved, the streets were in turmoil, there was rioting, there was call for the execution of whoever signed the agreement. The prime minister who did left the country in the middle of the night, never to return.

So there's a whole history of Iraqi nationalism that's very powerful and very potent. And to have thought that we were going to get a continuation of the status of forces agreement is really very simplistic. I say that, though, and with one point of criticism: I think the administration really didn't approach the whole issue of an ongoing military presence appropriately, or in a way that might have led to a different conclusion. But certainly, given the political fragmentation at the center, we weren't going to find any political figure that was going to stand up and say, we want U.S. forces here, and they can have the immunities that they had before. Just impossible.

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Worried about the future? Absolutely, and I think they have every reason to be. But I did notice and note the concern about domination by neighboring states – and not unhappy as an American to see that Iran managed to be up there at the front with us in terms of concerns by all three communities, incidentally, over their involvement.

Kuwait along with the – with Iran are not considered countries that's likely to be helpful to Iraq. And I was intrigued that Jordan received such high ratings in a very positive way.

So I wanted to take a moment and talk about Jordan which was mentioned in several places in the poll, but also a bit of Kuwait which is not in the poll, but I think can share with you some insights – I just got back a few days ago from there: that 61 percent see – in Jordan now – see Iraq worse off; see the U.S., 60 percent, as chiefly beneficiary, but also Israel and al-Qaida; and say that 92 percent of Jordanians believe that the U.S. made a negative contribution in Iraq. A deep concern about the future of Iraq – they mention civil war, terrorism, foreign neighbor influence.

I think all of this is very unsurprising when you realize that Jordan – the Jordanian public, at least – were as very, very heavily against any sort of military intervention by the United States, made it quite clear prior to 2003 that that – the ties that Jordan has had with Iraq over time, both economic – and this was trade, but also oil that they received at concessionary rates; the port of Aqaba, which was so critically important to the Iraqis during the Iraq-Iran war – there are these ties, in a sense of a presence, just on their east. And therefore, these concerns that you see the Jordanians speak about, I think, are again, I think, legitimate. They worry about Iraq being dominated by Iran; it's the Sunni issue, certainly. They worry about the turmoil and chaos inside Iraq with the resulting – it's like flow of refugees from the country, as they saw in 2003, '(0)4, '(0)5, and '(0)6. And they also would see a disruption in the economic trade relationship, which has been pretty much re-established. So I think those views are really quite understandable.

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Kuwait is unique, and we have to say that openly and forthrightly. The Kuwaitis, I think – I know the government for a fact – I think it's quite clear about the population as well – they would have just as soon have us stay in Iraq for as long as they could possibly figure out how to keep us there. They are suspicious, and they are certain in their minds that Iraq remains a threat, will be a threat. They don't see the historic relationship being so different, though they claim and hope so and are trying so.

Having an American military presence is a security blanket compensated for today by a decision by the U.S. government to continue to have a military presence in Kuwait itself – that suffices to go part of the way. But they really have – they, the Kuwaitis, really have little confidence in the way – particularly again, the fragmented political situation in Baghdad and the willingness of legislators in Baghdad to use the Kuwait situation for their own political ends. And I'll quickly add – there are plenty of Kuwaiti politicians who are doing the very same thing from their perspective, so let's just sort of keep this in balance. I have just a few quick thoughts, if you'll give me –

MR. MUASHER: Please.

MR. GNEHM: – couple more minutes. Polls – these are clearly based on individual attitudes, and it's good. But I learned a long time ago in my service that people, by the nature of us all being human beings, can hold very contradictory feelings inside of us, and we rarely pull ourselves apart, look at ourselves, and see it. And I think of my time in Jordan, but it's been in other countries in the region where I've had passionate attacks on – not me, personally, but on the United States for what it is and does and doesn't do – and have them turn right around and say: So you have to do something. Well, you mean you really have enough confidence in asking the one you just said was no good that – do something? But then we'll end up having a longer conversation because it's dinner, and they'll talk to me about their children who're in school in the States. They'll talk to me about medical problems that they've had – in other words, it's not – it's not unheard of that people inside themselves have very contradictory feelings and emotions, and I think that's something always to keep in mind.

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The poll, of course, doesn't cover the attitudes of governments – it's not intended to, and this is not meant to be a critical remark at all. It's simply to say that let's don't forget, when we're looking at public opinion – and I do believe that public opinion amounts more today than it did a couple of years ago – governments still are the main drivers of foreign policy. And decisions by government leaders, while they'll consider the public views certainly, are going to still make decisions of their own national interest, and that's going to impact on their relationships, just as we see the Saudis in their reaction to a Shia-controlled Iraq at this point in time.

Will the U.S. withdrawal provoke a debate in the region? It does. You know, the debate now is, is the U.S. a reliable security partner? Are we, in fact, a diminishing power, fading out, can't be counted on – we need to find alternative security arrangements? And I would just say this – this widespread sort of discussion in the region that the U.S. is a declining power is not true, and I have spoken about it in Kuwait recently, and I've done so in other countries. The U.S. commitment and the interests that we have in the region are going to keep us there, and, therefore, we are not likely to be leaving. But the United States government has an enormous task in front of it, which is to convince people that that is indeed true.

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This whole idea, then, of Arab governments reaching and looking for alternatives – and Turkey is always a good example today of being an alternative partner in the security arrangements in the Gulf, or the expansion of the GCC military capacity in the Gulf, or a more assertive Arab League. And often, these are described as actions governments are having to take because of their concerned (sic) about U.S. commitment. I think that's wrong too because, in fact, the United States has been pushing these governments to do some of these very things. We are happy to have Turkey more engaged in the region. We have wanted for 20 years to see the Gulf Cooperation Council have a better security arrangement and a capability. The same would be true of the Arab League, and certainly we were – and closely cooperative. So I don't see this as a zero-sum game at all – I don't think people in the U.S. government do – but see it as a way of enhancing, frankly, the American partnership in the region. And I'll stop there.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you, Skip, for this regional perspective, as well as a U.S. perspective on the issue. Let me ask Marina to give her comments before we open it up to the floor.

MARINA OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. I'll start with something that I did not mean to talk about, but I just want to add something to your last comment about the U.S. – the sort of this perception that U.S. is losing power.

I just came back a short time ago from a trip to the Gulf and I heard a lot about – people are talking a lot about this. And my impression is that, it's not that they want the U.S. not to help the present, so you are absolutely right, but they're afraid that the United States is no longer capable of keeping things under control. That seems to me – is really the crux of the discussion. It's not so much: You guys go away. It's: Oh my God, you cannot keep order in this part of the world any longer. It seems to me that that is really – at least, that is what I've been hearing.

I want to make a few comments about what I found most interesting or most surprising in the polls, and then raise the question, in light of what has been happening in the last weeks or last few months essentially, you know, how this – whether this poll still reflects the common, you know, present concerns, or we would find a different situation.

Of course, we can only speculate, but let me start with what I think that was – I found most interesting: the fact that one-third of Americans really have no clear opinion on whether the – you know, of what has been the outcome of this war. First of all, it is – obviously, it's in contradiction with other – with some of the answers to the earlier question that seemed to be very clear opinion about whether the war was worth it and so on.

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But more – the most important point here is, it's a good reminder of how much of the war has – the war in Iraq – really dropped off the radar screen for most Americans recently. That's a war that was forgotten very quickly. Past the surge, past the initial – (inaudible) – past the surge, essentially, everybody rushed to put it out of their mind. And that is why – and that is reflected in the fact that people are not really sure what they think about the situation now because, if you think about it, there has been very little discussion of it in the press, in the media.

And we read The Washington Post and The New York Times – I assume most of us – and the major newspapers. I think if you go to small town – I go away from Washington very often on weekends, and, believe me, the local newspaper where I go does not talk about foreign news. And that is what most people read, right, this kind of local newspaper, and there has not been a word about Iraq for a long time. So for a country that was, after all, in a very important conflict, I think this is very, very interesting.

I found very interesting this relative optimism of neighboring countries – of people in neighboring countries about the future of Iraq. And this may be very well a very important reminder about how we should not confuse the opinion that I've expressed by leaders with the opinions of the majority of the population, because if you – again, if you go to that area and you try – and you talk to government official, you talk to all, quote, unquote, "opinion leaders," you talk to the intellectuals, the journalists, and so on and so forth, the attitudes – the pessimism about the future of Iraq is very, very strong, particularly in the Gulf.

What you hear is doomsday scenarios about how Iraq is now completely dominated by Iran, essentially – that that country is, you know, going to become an appendix to the Iranian Republic – to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is a cliché, but you still hear it all the time – United States served Iraq to Iran on a silver platter; the country was better off before, and so on. It's clearly not reflected in public opinion, which is – again, the United States is not the only country where the public is really not very much in the loop, if you want, about what the attitudes are.

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Very interesting also, I think, is this last – the attitudes towards Iraqi leaders. And while I cannot really read the figures very well because I'm seeing the graph at this length, but the fact that Muqtada Sadr has – there is not that much difference between Muqtada Sadr and Nouri al-Maliki, both in terms of positive and negative attitudes. It's not a huge – it's not a huge difference among the Shia population, and I think that it is very good reminder, essentially, of things that we are seeing developing now.

First of all, how dependent Maliki is on Muqtada Sadr – that is, Muqtada Sadr is as popular as he is, essentially. Probably Maliki – it would be very difficult for Maliki to maintain the support that he has among the Shia population if it was not for Muqtada Sadr, which also explains the point that you raised about why Maliki really could not say yes to the American presence, because Muqtada Sadr – I mean, extending immunity to American troops so that they could stay – because Muqtada Sadr had made it quite clear that he'd pull out of the coalition if the – if Maliki was to extend such immunity. So I think that is really a good reminder, that graph, of – in essentially, we have bifurcated the leadership of Iraq is, that we think of Nouri al-Maliki, but it's really Nouri al-Maliki plus Muqtada Sadr – that is really the core of the control on the country.

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The opinions about Allawi are not surprising. He was, after all, the representative of the Sunnis and to some – and the Kurds are certainly – discussed long and hard of the possibility of forming an alliance with him rather than with Maliki in the formation of the government. So that's not surprising, but it's really the very similar attitude towards Nouri al-Maliki and Muqtada Sadr.

The last point that I want to bring up in terms of the result is a very – what I really found surprising is the fact that such a small percentage of Kurds have a positive attitude about Turkey because that is – that just seems to contradict, essentially, what we have seen lately. I would not have been surprised if those opinions had been – had been expressed in 2003 or even in 2004 and '05. Actually, I would have been surprised that it was as high as 5 percent.

But at this point, I mean, when you talk to the Kurds now, when you talk to Turkish officials, they talk a lot about the very positive role that Turkey has – is playing in the area in terms of investment, in terms of developing – they are building infrastructure. Turkey seems to have more or less accepted the situation. They never liked the idea of an autonomous Kurdistan for the obvious reasons that they fear the same demands in their own country. But yet, all the indications have been that there has been a rapprochement, essentially, that everything is – that Turkey and

Kurdistan have found the models within – (inaudible) – a rather positive one. And this seems to belie that – again, that show that that level of public opinion, if not at the level of leaders, that are suspicious of Turkey still is very much there. And that I really did not expect to see.

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Let me move now to discuss a bit what is happening right now because the – if you have been following closely, the – not only have the last couple of months or before the withdrawal of U.S. troops been very difficult, essentially – there has been an increase in violence in the country; there has been an increase in terrorist attacks – but the developments that took place just this last week and over the weekend have been positively dramatic.

In other words, just after the – you know, we all heard last week all the speeches that were given – you know, Obama and al-Maliki and so on – about all the positive things about – and what we are seeing now – I mean, impression that one gets is that things are falling apart in Iraq much faster than anybody expected. In other words, that there has been – it's almost as if, you know, everybody was waiting for the last convoy to get out to really do some of the things that they wanted – that they wanted to do all along.

Essentially, Iraqiya is no longer part of – not only it's no longer part of the coalition, it's open to discussion how much Iraqiya was ever part of the governing coalition. Yes, in theory, they were part of the government, but it's always – they were very marginally part of the government. But they are not even participating in the parliamentary sessions any longer. They have pulled out of the parliament. There are arrest warrants out for some of the main – not against Allawi himself , at least, not that I'm aware of, but certainly against all sorts of prominent personalities within Iraqiya. In other words, that there seems to be a very clear decision taken by Maliki that, you know, they're not going to be very patient with the – with the Sunnis, essentially – that the Sunnis are not going to be an integral part of the government and that, of course, justifies, essentially, and explains why all Iraqis – no matter which group they belong to – has expressed, already several months ago, such strong concern about the future. Happy to see the Americans going, but what's going to happen – what's going to happen next?

[00:39:40]

MR. : You also have the moves against the vice president.

MS. OTTAWAY: The moves against the vice president –

(Cross talk.)

MR. : During the last 48 hours.

MS. OTTAWAY: – and yeah, there is a whole list. And also what you – what we have seen not only in the last few weeks even more pronounced trends by – towards the regionalization of the country – that is, trend by various provinces to try to set themselves up as autonomous region or semi-autonomous regions. Although we always refer to Kurdistan as a semiautonomous region, I don't think it could be much more autonomous than it – than it is now, and still be – I think it's semi-independent. It's an autonomous region that's semi-independent. In reality, it's not semi-autonomous. But what we see, an increase in the trend that has been developing over the last two years, essentially, on the part of more regions to set themselves up as – excuse me, of provinces trying to set themselves up as regions.

There are a lot of things that I certainly don't know; I'm sure somebody in the intelligence community does, but I don't know about who is financing this trend towards the creation of more regions rather than provinces, because, of course, not everybody has – not everybody has an oil revenue like Kurdistan, and that at this point, they do not get share in the – solving the – the oil revenue to the same extent.

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So in a sense, what we are seeing now is the realization of everybody's fears, of those fears that you documented in the opinion survey a few months, and all seems to have come to pass. It will be very interesting to see – to know what the opinions would be if the polls were taken again right now. And let me stop there.

MR. MUASHER: Marina, thank you very much for some very perceptive remarks.

Before I open it up, I'd like to maybe take the first shot and ask Jim about implications for democracy in the region. I mean, the polls seem to suggest that the Iraqi government is no more responsive to the needs of every – you know, the daily needs of Iraqis than other Arab governments that have not gone or are going through transitions are responsive to their own publics. If this is true, what does it say about sort of democracy in Iraq eight years after the war, and democracy in the region that is undergoing transitions but where people still don't see that eight years after the war, their own government is being more responsive to their needs than before?

MR. ZOGBY: Well, it was an infantile fantasy of the neocons in the first place – (laughter) – that Iraq was going to be the regional model. And everything was done, actually, to subvert Iraq being a democracy in the way government was structured. It was structured as a sectarian model, which is inherently not democratic. And we're seeing that play out at this point. So I didn't see Iraq a model.

I don't think that the region will, as a whole – I didn't – I also didn't believe that if Iraq succeeded, it would be the beacon that would light the way to the whole region. It was not done by the people; it was done by a foreign government. Tunisia is more of an example of how people can, from the bottom up, create change. That is sort of the trial run that inspires; Iraq doesn't. It certainly is a tragedy, though, to see this situation unraveling.

I just want to make the comment that to me, the problem isn't that we withdrew or that we set the date for withdrawal; it's that we didn't take advantage of the time between when we set the date and when we withdrew to create – help create structures that were more sustainable than what we left. It seemed that we did everything right to get everything out, and in Kuwait, waiting to be positioned elsewhere. But what we didn't do was help create sustainable institutional structures in the government, in the country or in the neighborhood to create a regional security arrangement with the neighbors who were going to be involved. We knew they were going to be involved; they already were involved. But they were involved under the table, not sitting around a table finding a mechanism of how to – how to move forward.

[00:44:42]

I just want to make one comment on Marina's observations about the ambivalences – the U.S. ambivalence – and Skip, the Arab ambivalence toward the United States. On the fourth anniversary of the war, I did a TV show, my Abu Dhabi Viewpoint show, with students in Baghdad and students in the U.S. I'll never forget the Iraqi woman who very passionately, in one sentence, said, without pause, you know, you have to leave, you have to leave, you have to leave – not now. (Laughter.)

And this is what comes through in this. I didn't read these numbers, but when we ask the questions about withdrawal – how long should U.S. forces stay? – almost a half of Iraqis said, as long as needed, and 10 percent saying, one year. Only 29 percent said, leave as soon as possible. And that was across the board, among Shia, Sunni and Kurds – about a half or a little more than a half or a little less than a half among all three.

On the U.S. end, when should we leave? As soon as possible, 47 percent; stay as long as needed, only 22 percent. So it seems the U.S. was fed up and wanted out because frankly, they never saw the point of it, this ambivalence issue. We were detached from the war from the beginning; we never – it was never a shared sacrifice; it was never a country investment in lives, in treasure and in emotion. We didn't understand the country when we went in; I don't think Americans – still, in the last poll we did, only about a third of Americans can still find Iraq on a map. After 4,500 people died from our country, only a third of us can find it on a map.

[00:46:42]

Given that, it's, like, it's done, finished, get out. So the president did what people want to do, but Iraqis are saying, what now? And I think that there is – if anything, what this war may do or the outcome of this war may do is further impact America's image in the region as this thing unravels, if, in fact, it does.

MR. GNEHM: I couldn't agree with you more, Jim. And the fact that you brought up these statistics about us staying, it really goes back to my observation that I went through quickly, which is that we didn't use the time that we had a position there. If they had had more leadership on the part of the United States to get some of these decisions made structurally, we would have had support among Iraqis for that.

MR. ZOGBY: Yeah.

MR. GNEHM: Yeah, we had opposition for sure, because we're an outsider, but we had an opportunity that we simply didn't use.

But your question, Marwan, about Iraq as a model, I think – for democracy – I think even from the very beginning, the way things unfolded in Iraq, it probably hurt the whole idea of democracy in the region, because more of my friends throughout the region said, if this is what democracy is all about, not for us. And they, of course, looked at the chaos. They looked at the uncertainty. They looked at the government; it seemed constipated, unable to do anything – and, of course, not bringing about anything beneficial to the population. And that's simply not what they wanted.

MS. OTTAWAY: On the issue of – I mean, I agree with both comments concerning democracy; it's certainly not a model. I think it's very easy to forget that while certainly, it's not a democratic country, it's an enormously pluralistic country – in other words, that this is a country that clearly has a very large number of centers of power at this point. It has large of number of centers of powers.

[00:48:36]

What you have – first of all, you have all these, you know, large political alliances; not the parties as such, but these large political alliances fighting with each other. I mean, and these are real – these are real – these are groups to which people really owe an allegiance, whether it's Maliki's State of Law, whether it is Iraqiya and so on. People are – you know, it means something to the people involved. And, of course, you have Kurdistan, which is a totally different story.

But there is beginning to be a real give-and-take between the prime minister and the parliament. How long it's going to go on, I don't know. But, you know, don't sort of dismiss the – don't discount the speaker of the parliament, who is really a very important figure and center of power in his own right.

And you're beginning to have more and more of these provinces that are claiming a degree of autonomy. And there are centers of power in the provinces, not just in Kurdistan, but in many – in many different provinces.

[00:49:44]

The problem is – and here is where the real danger is, now – that is pluralism without rules. And pluralism without rules – I mean, you cannot have democracy without pluralism, but pluralism without rules is not going to – is not going to lead to democracy; it risks leading to chaos or leading to civil war.

And I think here is where we come to the issue of the U.S. role, because I think one – it's not so much that we did not build the institutions. I don't think you can build the institution. It takes time. You cannot just go out – we always talk about building institutions. In fact, it does not work that way, in many ways. But we really did not – we rushed the process of writing the constitution and setting up a political system so much that there was never a chance for the Iraqis to try to reach some consensus about what they wanted.

Iraq – we have forgotten now, but what happened in 2005 in Iraq was an incredible feat of political engineering on the part of the United States that had nothing to do with the country, because this is a country that – you know, still in a state of war, for all practical purposes, under occupation, it had – it elected a constituent assembly. It wrote a constitution, and the constitution was supposed to be written between January and August; I understand from people who were directly involved that it got – it took so long to set – to set up the mechanism for writing this constitution that in the end, it took – the constitution was discussed for less than six weeks. It was done – you know, essentially, it was a totally artificial process, essentially, so that there was never a building of consensus about what the country wanted around this constitution – and what we are seeing now, because the elections have created new centers of power. The system has created new centers of power, but there are – there is no agreement on the rules.

MR. MUASHER: All right. Let's open it up for questions. We have about 20 minutes. I would ask people who ask questions to identify themselves and where they're from, and maybe we can take three or four questions at a time to allow as many as possible to ask questions. Please.

[00:52:10]

Q: Hi. My name is Hugh Greinstaff (ph). One of the scenes I was watching over the weekend was of a man who showed his three sons. And his three sons had been killed by his neighbor. It's sort of like looking at the Tutsi and the Hutu in Rwanda. Did your study take into consideration the – still, the bonding of former neighbors who were on both sides of the internal war? And how are we going to reconciliate that?

MR. MUASHER: OK. Please.

Q: Hussein Etmi Yousef (ph), International Petroleum Enterprises. I apologize for your – for being late, but I saw the slide there, the attitude toward Iraqi leaders. And since the number and percentages of the Kurds and the Sunnis are much lower than the rest of the country, don't you think that that particular slide had to be normalized to show that huge difference there? Because the Kurds and the Sunnis collectively have about 40 percent and the Shias about 60 percent, roughly. So it gives a different perception when you – when you show Allawi, for example,

what kind of support he had from the Sunni group or from the Kurds. But don't you think that that had to be kind of normalized? Thank you.

[00:54:09]

MR. MUASHER: OK. Please.

Q: Hi. I just have a question for Dr. Zogby. I know you have a lot of questions in the survey to ask about Iraq's people with regard to the troop withdrawal. I was wondering if any of the questions were given context about, yes, the U.S. invaded Iraq, but it was also the same entity that imposed economic sanctions. And I'm wondering if they – if the two different situations were reconciled in that questions, because it's interesting to see people in a civil society sort of way not reflect on what it did to them before all of that.

MR. MUASHER: One more question, and then we'll give the panel a chance to answer.

Q: Why, thank you. Alan Keiswetter, with C&O Resources. My question is to Mr. Zogby. You mentioned that sectarianism, the emphasis on sectarianism with the U.S. government is – was inherently undemocratic. And I think that's probably putting the problem the wrong way around. I think the emphasis was on democracy, which, in Iraq, is inherently sectarian because of the – of the 60 percent that are Shia and the fact that they have not been in power for (a ?) millennia – I guess centuries. So it looks like to me that that's sort of a wrong reading.

MR. ZOGBY: OK. Let me start with the reconciliation. The answer is, we did not ask questions about that, but we did find, in the poll numbers, the deep divide comes through; but we didn't specifically ask questions of that sort.

The numbers are, you say, normalized; I say, averaged out in the totality. And if you look in the poll toward the end of the booklet that you have, the section on Iraq that is on page 21, attitude toward Iraqi leaders, the total – the total is there. And you will see that, despite the fact that the – al-Maliki's – I'm sorry, that Ayad Allawi's numbers are not as high among Shia, much higher among Kurd, much higher among Sunni, overall, his favorable rating – in the 20-20-60 breakout that you note – his overall favorable rating is higher than Nouri al-Maliki's overall. If you do a one-man, one- vote situation, you get pretty much the result you got in the election, and that is that his list wins by a slight edge over al-Maliki in favorability.

[00:56:53]

We did not ask about sanctions. We did – I did one my TV shows, though, right at the beginning of the war, and we did ask that question. And it still is a wound deeply felt. It was then and I assume it is still today, although with the passage of time, there are many other wounds I think that have eclipsed it.

On the sectarian issue and democracy: You know, the first poll we did in Iraq was October of 2003. We found a much less – a much lower inclination toward sectarian – a sectarian self-identification than we do – than we do today. I think that, to some degree, we structured governance in Iraq around sect identification, and it certainly did appeal to leaders. I don't think that those leaders had a mass base support for sectarian divide. In fact, one of the TV shows that I did early on, I remember asking the kids in the audience on the Iraq side how many of them came from mixed-sect marriages; most of them did. This was like – this was like Sarajevo before the war. People were – Sunni married Shia. People from one community married another community and with no sense of divide in that way.

[00:58:22]

And one of the things that worries me about Syria is when people say, oh, it can't happen here, we're so different. No one ever expected it to happen in Baghdad either. No one ever expected it to happen in Beirut; no one ever expected it to happen in Sarajevo; it can happen anywhere. This were – this was sect leadership in Iraq who found a system of governance that said, this many Shia, this many Sunni, this many Kurd, worked to their advantage; I don't think that there was a broad mass support for the Lebanonization of the Iraqi political system, which is why I say that our use of sectarianism undercut the push to democracy and rather played into these – sort of created warlords out of sectarian leaders.

MR. MUASHER: OK. Please.

Q: (Off mic.)

MR. MUASHER: Microphone.

Q: (Off mic.)

MR. ZOGBY: In the – that poll that I'm talking about, October 2003, less than one in five Iraqis saw religion as having any basis or any role to play in governance, as I recall – back then. And today, you'd get some very different numbers.

Q: Thank you. My name is Sana Halfons (ph), from the Arab League. I'm not sure you mentioned or not the number of – the percentage of the Iraqis you did the poll on. Like, what's the number?

MR. ZOGBY: Oh. The demographics for the poll are in the back. It was 1,000 Iraqis nationwide – 1,000 Iraqis nationwide, yes. That's what it was.

Q: One thousand, OK. Can I have reflection on the poll on the Arab Spring thing, because we didn't talk about it much – (inaudible, cross talk).

MR. ZOGBY: That's going to be the second half of the discussion.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you. OK. Thank you. We're going to have a whole session about it, so. (Laughter.) OK. Questions, please.

[01:00:22]

Q: Stanley Kover (sp). In his first inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln said that public opinion has to be the master in a free society, that majorities, minorities can change with elections as public opinion changes, and that's how they change freely. What is being suggested here is that the result of the invasion, the sort of sectarian identity politics strengthened, and it raises a question to me: If that was the case, and if Lincoln was correct, then all this talk about institution-building may be kidding ourselves – that it was this creation of the sectarian difference that was fundamental.

MR. MUASHER: OK, I think you had a question here?

MR. : Yes.

[01:01:08]

Q: My name is Maura O'Brien-Ali; I'm with the Center for International Private Enterprise. We work with the Iraqi private sector, and one of the things that we're finding in our recent surveys is that there's quite a negative perception of the political parties themselves, that instead of working for the will of the people, many politicians now are working for the will of their political party. And I'm wondering, Mr. Zogby, if you had any questions that related to that issue, and if you could comment on it.

MR. MUASHER: One more before we open it up? OK, shall we – you want to – ?

MR. ZOGBY: No. (Laughter.) Were you asking about here in the United States or in Iraq? (Laughter.) Sorry.

Q: In Iraq.

MR. ZOGBY: No, I – (chuckles, laughter) – the – no, we did not poll on favorability toward parties or toward groupings, just toward leadership. And as you see in the numbers, every Iraqi leader has a net – a net unfavorable attitude. The highest favorable rating is al-Maliki, and that's – I'm sorry, is Allawi, and that's at a 40 percent level. Respectable by American standards, I guess where – (laughter) – where we – where we are today. But we didn't poll institutions. I would suppose if we polled institutions, the numbers would be – would be low. But no, we didn't – we didn't poll them.

And I'm not quite sure I understood – or maybe I'll defer on the question of the sectarian issue and public opinion – the question that was asked by the gentleman here.

MS. OTTAWAY: If I understood – in terms of the specific question, if I understood it correctly, I think it is true that if people – what makes a democracy possible is the fact that people change their opinion from one – from one – from one election to the other. Otherwise you'd have fixed majorities and minorities, and then you have the – you have the – no.

MR. MUASHER: You have an Arab system—(chuckles).

MS. OTTAWAY: It maybe does not work essentially – (laughter) – that's right-- in fact, the most important voters, you know, it's the swing voters, those people who change their mind all the time. If you are a dyed-in-the-wool Republican or Democrat you are not doing very much for democracy in the long run – (chuckles, laughter) – because you always voted the same way.

[01:03:34]

So it is true that if people voted their identities and identity does not change, obviously, then you risk having permanent majorities and permanent minorities. You are absolutely right on that one.

What I'd like to bring up, though, concerning – I'm not totally convinced about this idea that sectarianism is somehow the result of the way the United States handled government formation at the beginning and so on. Sectarianism was built into the Iraqi National Congress. I mean, it was built into the nature of the parties that came together to form the Iraqi National Congress.

[01:04:15]

Just look at the names of the parties. I was a little – almost surprised why after the first elections people say, oh my god, that there has been – you know, people are voting for religious parties. When you had parties in the Iraqi National Congress with names like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and say – you know, what did you think that was essentially? (Laughter) But all the political parties that existed before the U.S. invasion were based on – were based on sectarian divide. I mean, and this is one of the problems that I think we are seeing in country after country.

MR. ZOGBY: That may have been one of the reasons why it was a problem for us to have seen Iraq through the lens of the Iraq National Congress at all, and had them as the people who directed traffic for us early on. I mean, we learned – how many of them have we learned have been discredited since we – since this war has gone sour. But I think early on we did that. Which is why I worry about the same situation in other countries as – (chuckles) – they're developing, that when you rely on these exile groups, you begin to develop a very different perspective of how the country operates or what the future of the country should look like.

MS. OTTAWAY: True, but there has never been – and this is the last point I make – I think, let's keep in mind that there has never been a transitional situation where elections were won by parties that were formed after the transition started – that it's invariably the parties that were there before. It's the old liberation movements, quote, unquote, that end up by prevailing. And that is – you know, and that is very – that's very problematic, because very often these parties or these movements are not what one would like to see in a democracy. But unfortunately that seems to be the case.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not a fan of the U.S. invasion, I'm not a fan of the way the U.S. handled the situation, you know, in the early period, but I think that's one – this problem of sectarianism was built into, and not something that U.S. did.

MR. MUASHER: Skip?

MR. GNEHM: I wanted to actually bring up something new if I might, just another look at the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, because I think, again, I thought your comments were wise for us all to remember, Jim – the American public and its disengagement from the issue. I would mark it from the day that the president announced his withdrawal, and that seemed to solve everybody's problem. Not, of course, everybody, but…

[01:06:44]

But the one thing that also the American public – and I'm afraid the U.S. government doesn't think very deeply about it either – is what I want to call the balance of power in the regions, and this – and how the withdrawal of the United States – how the entry of the United States into Iraq and the destruction of Iraq as a power center – if not real terms, at least in the – (chuckles) – imagined terms of the region.

You know, this region is still struggling with who's in charge and how people are going to be dealt with and balanced; the Iranian factor we all know about; the Saudi-Iranian competition, the small Gulf states. Iraq isn't there as the bulwark to Iran in the same way it was. And you could take it on into the Levant and – on the role of Egypt. I mean, I think one has to understand that America's withdrawal and repositioning of itself is seen by the people in the region as an unsettling new sort of ongoing development in this decision about who's going to be in charge and what's going to happen to them all. And I don't think we should forget that, and I don't think many people in Washington calculated that when we went into Iraq and how we've dealt with things since then.

[01:07:52]

MR. ZOGBY: And if you look at the poll question about who benefited from the war, the differences in opinion are fascinating.

MR. GNEHM: Yes.

MR. ZOGBY: Although, almost across the board, everyone thinks that America benefited except for Americans.

MR. : Yes. (Laughter.)

MR. ZOGBY: 40 percent of Americans, on the other hand, think no one benefited – Again, this total ambivalence, the sense that we don't know what happened, and we almost want to wash our hands. It's over, forget it, be done with it. The second beneficiary of the war, almost across the board, is Israel. And then Iran. Only the American people say, number two, that the Iraqi people benefited. The Iraqi people don't think the Iraqi people benefited, but the American people do. And our two top – we said that "no one benefited" and the "Iraqi people benefited." After that, we're completely out of sync with the rest of the world.

MR. MUASHER: Any more questions on the issue? Please.

Q: Thank you. I have two brief questions. Was there any work done to disaggregate the American military effort from the American civilian effort in terms of feelings in Iraq? And the other one was, was there any data to show the – let's say, the perceived importance of military – or let's say American influence in Iraqi politics over time?

I'm sorry if that's a little bit complicated. I'm asking the question, though, because having worked there as an American – (chuckles) – who felt more and more powerless over time to, you know, materially affect political outcomes in Iraq – and that happened fast. That seemed to drop off a cliff after not very much time. And as to the first question, there was, you know, a concerted effort in '09 and 2010 to put a civilian face on activities over there, and I'm wondering if that showed up in any sort of perception.

[01:09:59]

MR. ZOGBY: If you look at the poll, we didn't disaggregate as you – as you asked looking backward, but we did looking forward, asking what future role people saw for the United States. And about a third see the U.S. as simply being a source of interference, foreign interference. But 15 percent want a special alliance, 14 percent see the U.S. playing a security role, 12 percent as an investor in development, et cetera.

There is this same kind of – the sort of conflicted nature. On the one hand, get out; on the other hand, we're afraid about what happens when you leave. And on the other hand, you still have a role to play in these – in these different ways. So I think, looking forward, the Iraqis aren't ready for us to wash our hands of the country completely, at all.

[01:10:53]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you very much. This concludes the first half of our workshop. I want to thank Jim, Marina and Skip for very interesting and perceptive remarks about the Iraqi issue. In the second panel we will talk about the region, the polls that were conducted not just in Iraq but in six Arab countries, and cover the issue of

political change and governance more broadly. So maybe we can take a 10-minute break for coffee and then reconvene for the second session. Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)