



# America's Second-Longest War: Taking Stock Iraq: A Decade Later

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**Welcome:**

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**Moderator:**

**Rajiv Chandrasekaran,**  
National Editor, The Washington Post

**Speakers:**

**Ryan Crocker,**  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

**Emma Sky,**  
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**Samir Sumaida'ie,**  
Former Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S.

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JESSICA T. MATHEWS: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It's a real pleasure to welcome you today to help us take stock 10 years after the launch of what turned out to be America's second-longest war.

It's too soon for history, of course. Many of the war's direct outcomes, and certainly most of its indirect consequences both at home and in the region, are still unfolding. One can certainly see the effects of the Iraq War, for example, in our current agonized efforts to try to decide on what to do about Syria, both in terms of public opinion and policy-makers' thinking.

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But if good journalism is the first draft of history, then 10 years is certainly time enough to step back and re-evaluate and perhaps time for a good third draft. We can't trace all the events, all the issues and the impacts of the war today. We won't do justice, for example, to a critical set of questions about how we got into the war. And there's a good deal of revisionist history that's been going around, particularly this week, on that topic, which is, I think, critical for understanding what happened and why it happened, and essential to understanding – to avoiding a repetition.

We also won't try to treat in detail the impact of the war, for example, on the lives of individual Iraqis. But we are going to cover a lot of territory and for what us seems to be the critical three sets of questions. In choosing those we had one eye on the past and one that's very firmly set on the future. We're asking first, what is the state of Iraq today? How far towards the U.S.' original goal of a stable, functioning democracy has it come? What is the outlook both for this country and for the region, for its neighbors? And that will be the subject of our first panel.

We're then going to look at the economic cost of the war. You may remember that President Bush's economic advisor Larry Lindsey was summarily fired for predicting that the war might cost 100 (billion dollars) to \$200 billion. He was off by a factor – at least a factor of 10, and as we're going to hear in our second panel, maybe much more than that.

And finally, we're going to ask, from the U.S. point of view, what are the geopolitical, the military and the strategic lessons insofar as we can see them from this near and far vantage point? What are the take-homes from this conflict?

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We have assembled a really superb roster of experts to address these issues, beginning with this wonderful first panel. I have no question that however much each of us knows about this conflict firsthand and more – and looking around this room, there is a huge amount of wisdom here – but I know that all of us are going to go home from this a good deal wiser.

So I thank you for joining us. And I'm really thrilled to turn this – turn over to the moderator of our first panel, Rajiv Chandrasekaran. I think everybody in this room, and watching on television, probably is deeply familiar with his work. Ten years ago he was covering the

beginning of the war from Kuwait City and then Baghdad. He later wrote “Imperial Life in the Emerald City,” one of the best of many books about the war. And we’re very lucky to have him.

And so, Rajiv, the mic is yours.

RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN: Thank you, Jessica. And thank you all for coming this morning to hear what I think is going to be a fantastic lineup of speakers all day.

Ten years ago today the lead story on the front page of the Washington Post appeared under my byline. And here is how it began: U.S. and British ground forces punched into Iraq across a broad front tonight after a booming artillery barrage, seizing territory along the Kuwaiti border with only modest resistance, and pushing on toward the key southern city of Basra. While the sweeping land invasion began under a hazy desert moon, a second torrent of U.S. cruise missiles destroyed several buildings in Baghdad.”

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Two says ago this is what my colleague Ernesto Londono wrote, also in the Post: “Ten years after the United States barreled into Iraq with extraordinary force and a perilous lack of foresight, the country is neither the failed state that seemed all but inevitable during the darkest days of the war nor the model democracy that the America’s set out to build. Haunted by the ghosts of its brutal past, Iraq is teetering between progress and chaos, a country threatened by local and regional conflicts that could drag it back into the sustained bloodshed its citizens know so well.”

That’s what we’re here to examine this morning. Ten years after the war began and 15 months after the last U.S. combat forces departed the country, what is Iraq today? Is it on the precipice of political dysfunction, another civil war, a resurgent insurgency? Or is it poised to muddle through, fueled by plentiful oil revenue, reasonably competent security forces, and a prime minister who has managed to establish control over a fractious government? Or is it all of those things?

This is not a discussion that will be rooted in the past. We’re not going to relitigate the WMD questions and prewar intelligence. We’re not going to dwell on the mistakes of the Coalition Provisional Authority, as much as I enjoy talking about that subject, and we’re not going to debate the surge. We’re going to look at Iraq today and where it’s headed. There has been precious little of that in the 10-years-on media coverage, even though it’s a far more relevant question for policy makers and the public today.

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So with that, because you didn’t come here to hear me prattle on today, let me introduce the panel. I’ll keep it very brief since you all know who they are. And more importantly, you know their contributions to their efforts to stabilize Iraq over the past several years.

To my immediate right is Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who is now the Kissinger Senior Fellow at Yale University’s Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. He served us most recently as our ambassador to Afghanistan, 2011 and 2012. His long and distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign

Service has included posts as ambassador to, importantly for this discussion, Iraq, from 2007 to 2009, as well as our ambassador to Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait and Lebanon.

From May to August of 2003 he served as the governance director for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, so an earlier stint there. And his long and distinguished career in the Foreign Service also included a tour in Lebanon at the same time, in the early '80s – at the same moment of the Israeli invasion, as well as the bombing of the Marine barracks. He is a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our country's highest civilian award.

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To his right is Ambassador Samir Sumaida'ie, who was appointed Iraq's permanent representative to the U.N. in July 2004. In 2006 he moved here to Washington to serve as Iraq's ambassador to the United States. He served in that post until 2011. Prior to his appointed to the United Nations, Ambassador Sumaida'ie served as the minister of interior in Baghdad. Before that he was a member of Iraq's Governing Council during the initial months of the U.S. occupation of that country. He is currently working as a consultant and a writer.

And to the far right is Emma Sky, also at Yale's Jackson Institute, where she is a senior fellow and she teaches courses on international politics of the Middle East and the new Iraq. She's worked at senior levels on behalf of the United States and United Kingdom governments in Iraq, in Afghanistan and in Israel. From 2003 to 2004 she was the governance director in Kirkuk for the CPA. She is best known, however, for serving as the political advisor to General Odierno when he was the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.

So instead of asking our three distinguished panelists to deliver long opening statements, I've asked all of them to be ready to kind of tackle three broad questions at the outset before we can launch into what I hope will be a robust discussion. And the three questions, which I'll address to the panel sequentially, are to talk about the state of Iraq's domestic politics, Iraq's role in the region and Iraq's relationship with the United States. And so let's start off with domestic politics.

It seems to me that Iraq today is a tinderbox with red hot embers inside. There are fundamental disputes over the allocation of political power and oil revenue that still have not been resolved, and now it seems that the government is crumbling. Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, a Sunni, won't leave Anbar province and come to Baghdad because he fears he'll be arrested. Foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd, has also been boycotting government meetings in the capital and remaining in the Kurdish-controlled north. And ministers who represent the Sadrist Movement have announced their intention to also boycott the government in recent days.

I'd like to begin by having the panel give us their top-level assessment of the domestic situation. And let me start with you, Ambassador Crocker. Is Prime Minister Maliki turning himself into an autocrat, taking a page from Saddam's playbook?

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RYAN CROCKER: It's a great question, and I thought you had a great quote from Ernesto's article two days ago. Iraq is haunted by its past. Nouri al-Maliki is haunted by its past, both recent and not so recent, in my view. He came out of a clandestine movement that was

severely persecuted under the Saddam years. He thinks with that mindset – they're all out to get me – and that conditions his behavior. It is said in Iraq, including by the prime minister, that only two men successfully governed Iraq: Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the dawn of Islam, and Saddam Hussein. It is a very, very tough country to govern.

I don't think, by any means, Nouri al-Maliki is trying to be the next Saddam Hussein. The politics and conditions of Iraq won't permit it. I think he's afraid he may be the next Abd al-Karim Qasim, who overthrew the monarchy in 1958 and who was a pretty able political figure – making deals, breaking deals, bestowing favor, withdrawing favor, bringing down the hammer – but eventually it all got away from him.

So I think to read Prime Minister al-Maliki correctly, the best perspective is someone who is playing defense, who is trying to stay in power, who is trying not to go the same route as Abd al-Karim Qasim.

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MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Thank you.

Ambassador Sumaida'ie, let's talk a little bit about Sunni politics. There have been some pretty large demonstrations there over the past several months. What are the chances that the current state of Sunni frustration, anger, overall sense of disenfranchisement will spill into something more violent and destabilizing, in your view?

SAMIR SUMAIDA'IE: Well, it's already spilling out into violence. We hear a few days of explosions, of acts of terrorism that are taking place. I think they are not totally disconnected from the general dissatisfaction of the populace, not only the Sunni. I think there is a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst the Iraqis.

But I just wanted, in order to elaborate on that, get back to the mindset of the government. It's not shaped only – I agree totally with Ambassador Crocker's assessment of the way Maliki thinks, but I would like to add to it the fact that Iraq is a (one-tier ?) state. Whoever controls the resources controls the system of patronage that builds the power structure.

In a state like the United States, you know, the population pays taxes and therefore the government is accountable, and that faction is not there in Iraq. Whoever seizes oil seizes power. So I think that is a major factor conditioning the mentality of the group that rules. They get their hands on that and they will not let that go.

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Now, coming back to the Sunni, the Sunnis – I remember growing up in a country where these sectarian divisions were not really at all almost relevant. I mean, we didn't know who was Sunni and who was Shia at that time, in many cases. But with the sectarian policies of Saddam's regime and the oppression he imposed on the Shia and the Kurds, this sense of being persecuted was strong amongst the Shia. And when the opportunity came, there was a segment amongst their leaders, particularly the Islamists, who were thinking, now we've got it we will never let it go. It's going to be a Shia government.

Now, that put the Sunnis, even those who are not sectarian, in a rather difficult position. And you remember, in the early days they boycotted the political process. That didn't work so they then joined it, and that is not working. So now they are caught in a very difficult position. They don't want to go to the extreme where al-Qaida is, because they themselves were victims of al-Qaida. And at the same time they are being marginalized and being treated as second-class citizens. So the opposition is extremely difficult.

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But I must say that their general dissatisfaction is part of a much wider dissatisfaction among the Iraqi population. You've got to talk to any Iraqi at the moment, almost any Iraqi, and they will feel that, you know, there are no services, there is no security, there is no progress, there are no jobs. What on earth – you know, where on earth are we going? The country seems to be in this situation where it's not moving at all.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Fantastic. Much to delve into when we circle back, particularly on the allocation of oil revenue and broader dissatisfaction.

Emma, tell us a little bit about the state of Kurdish politics at the moment – obviously concerns that moves by the Kurds in selling their oil from the north – or I should use that word carefully, “their” oil, but oil extracted in northern parts of the country and their efforts to sell it further stoking tensions with the central government. Help us understand – as well as, obviously, key unresolved lands rights issues up in the north. Help us understand where things stand today.

EMMA SKY: At one level Kurdistan is almost the success story of Iraq, because it's in Kurdistan that you have got electricity 24 hours a day; there's much more employment. People there do feel happy, and they do feel it's much, much better than they've ever had in the past. So at one level, this is the Kurds' moment. At another level, relations between Kurdish leaders and Baghdad have probably never been so poor. And a lot of it goes back to personalities. There's a real absence of trust among the elites in Iraq.

A lot of this boils down, at the moment, to a personal dispute between President Barzani and Nouri al-Maliki. Barzani and other Kurdish leaders genuinely fear that Maliki is becoming an autocrat. Their sense of history; they're affected by it in the same way as Prime Minister Maliki is affected by it. So the Kurdish sense of history makes them always fear a central government, and they see in the future that the tanks, the F-16s supplied by the U.S. could be used against them. So there is this huge distrust.

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Before it was President Talabani who served as the mediator, the broker between President Barzani and Prime Minister Maliki, and now that he is incapacitated there is nobody who is brokering that disagreement. And as you mention, there really are substantial issues to be dealt with. The issue of land was supposed to be resolved through the constitution, Article 140, and it hasn't been resolved. So should those disputed areas become part of Kurdistan? Should they stay with the central government? All the measures put in place have not taken place. So whether it was the



census, the referendum, none of that has happened, and so Kurds are frustrated and think it's never going to happen.

You also mentioned the oil issues, and the Kurds have been exporting "their" oil, as you call it, through trucks to Turkey, through trucks to Iran, and there is talk now about a direct pipeline between Turkey and Kurdistan. And they have been giving out oil contracts to international companies and some of those contracts have been for fields in the disputed territories. So for central government this is a great concern because they fear that if the Kurds can have a direct pipeline with Turkey, that will lead to the breaking up of Iraq.

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We saw in months last year and the year before the movement of Peshmerga and Iraqi security forces facing off against each other in the disputed territories. And when the U.S. military was there, the U.S. military served as a mediator between the different forces. Now there is no mediator and there is concern. It only takes one shot for things to spiral out of action.

Recently the budget was pushed through parliament without the agreement of the Kurds, and with many of the Iraqiya members boycotting it. But that is what's led to the Kurdish boycott of government, because they fear that Maliki doesn't want to share power. They now feel that they're not real, equal partners in Iraq. We're back at the beginning. 2003-2004 you hear Kurdish leaders saying: Now for the first time I feel Iraqi. More and more and more the Kurds are becoming autonomous. They're seeking economic independence from Baghdad. So they're drifting further and further apart.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: So much there we could spend the next hour just following up on this stuff. I promise we'll get back to all of it. I want to just also talk about Iraq in the region and Iraq in the United States and then we'll circle back.

And obviously much concern about the relationship that has been forged over the past several years between Baghdad and Tehran. So, Ambassador Crocker, give us your sense of the true nature of the Iran-Iraq relationship today.

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MR. CROCKER: Well, if I could give you an accurate assessment of the true nature of the relationship between Iran and Iraq today, I would be elevated to a celestial status – which may yet happen, but it won't happen this morning. (Laughter.)

It is a highly complex relationship. I think there can be no question that following the withdrawal of all U.S. troops in 2011 and, to speak frankly, a waning of U.S. engagement at other levels, it has shifted a balance so that Iranian influence now in Iraq is greater and ours is less. I don't think there is really any question about that.

But at the same time, I do not buy in to the tendency in the West and in the United States that Iran calls the shots and gives the orders, because it is one Shia government in Tehran under the Islamic Republic dealing with another Shia government in Iraq.

I think the differences that we often lose sight of between Arab and Persian, the – again, history, history, history. The bloody history between Iraq and Iran, the brutal war of the 1980s which we tend to have forgotten but no Iraqi or Iranian ever will, remain fresh in the memories of both countries. Iraq is, whether Sunni or Shia, in its Arab population, profoundly an Arab state and for many years was at the vanguard of Arab nationalism.

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So I think we're going through an interval here where, because of a lack of a regional or international balance, Iran has disproportionate influence in Iraq, but I think the farther they press that influence, as I saw even during my own time there, the more Iraqis tend to push back and resent it. So I would see probably a prolonged period where this will play out. Iranian over-reach, though, is going to produce an Iraqi backlash. They will have influence; they will not have control.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Emma, let's talk about Syria for a moment. There's a tendency here in Washington to view, for instance, Maliki's acquiescence to Iranian overflights to Syria as a result of Iranian pressure, but Maliki has his own reasons for perhaps wanting to see Assad remain in power. Is it the kinship among the Shia and the Alawites? Is it a concern that if his government is toppled it puts additional pressure on sectarian tensions within Iraq? Help us understand why the Maliki government is taking the position it is vis-à-vis the conflict in Syria.

MS. SKY: I think when you look, you know, for simple explanations, it's very difficult to find simple explanations of this. It's through Syria that many international jihadis entered Iraq and committed those horrible terrorist acts. The Syrian regime did very little to try and prevent that flow. Whether they facilitated or not is another question, but they didn't stop it.

And in 2009, after a particularly horrible set of bombings that targeted the Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister Maliki wanted to take Assad before a criminal court of that. When people look at the Ba'athist regime of Syria, it looks like Saddam's regime. When people see the uprising in Syria, it looks like Iraq in 1990, '91.

So how did this come about? And I think it's too simplistic to say Maliki is a pawn of Iran I think more the issue is that Maliki and Shia Islamists in Iraq see the threat facing them in the same way that Iran sees the threat. And by the threat I mean this fear of the Sunni regimes getting together – Saudi, Qatar, UAE, Turkey coming together to overthrow the Shia regime of Assad in Syria as the first step to then overthrowing the Shia regime of Maliki in Baghdad.

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So it is this fear of the alternative. It's fear that this is all part of a regional plot. It is fear that if Assad is overthrown, that the people are going to come to power or Jabhat al-Nusra or the most Salafi jihadi branch of the opposition. And that fear is propagated through the media. It's propagated in dialogue between people.

But the relationship between Syria and Iraq is very complex because the different communities inside Iraq have got different relationships with Syria. I mean, yesterday when Robert Ford was testifying, he spoke about how the Iraq government was not preventing weapons from



Iran reaching Syria. He also described how some Shia extremists from Iraq are inside Syria fighting on behalf of the regime.

There are also plenty of Sunnis from Iraq who are fighting on the side of the opposition; Al-Qaida in Iraq members who might be Syrian and might be Iraq, but going back and forth. And also Kurds inside Syria see a new opportunity. And there's fear there that if Assad goes, the Kurds will become more empowered inside Syria, so how will that affect Kurds inside Iraq? So they're all interconnected.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: In looking at the interconnections, let's just branch out a little bit more and look at, you know, Iraq more broadly in the Arab world.

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Ambassador Sumaida'ie, you know, we're more than a year on from – two years on from the start of the Arab Spring. You know, Iraq has a large border with Iran but also borders Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and is a player in the Arab world. Help us understand how the Maliki government sees its relationship with the broader Arab world at the moment, and how its neighbors beyond Iran and Syria, which we've talked about, view Iraq today.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Back in 2003, in the days of the Governing Council, the first Syria delegation that were received from outside Iraq, was not from an Arab country. It was from Iran. There was a kind of denial among the Arabs that what the Americans did, did actually take place.

In some quarters in the Gulf region, there is a kind of phobia of Shia, and that played into the situation, particularly exasperated (sic) by the fact that Shia political parties themselves looked at this as an opportunity to seize power in Iraq as Shia and not as Iraqis. So there was this fear from both sides feeding on each other.

The Iranians proved to be very adept and they moved swiftly. They utilized their investment in the Shia Islamist parties, who were nurtured in Iran during the Saddam period, and therefore built very close relationships with the leaders of the Islamic Republic. And they never looked back from that.

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Now, coming back to the Arabs, the more they see of this, the more estranged they become from the new Iraq. Iraq has traditionally been, as you absolutely said, Ambassador, an Arab country in its identity, not looked at itself – certainly not part of the Persian history but as an Arab country with a proud history, a proud Arab history.

But there is another layer now, which is the layer of sectarianism, which is struggling with a layer of nationalism. So at the popular level there is one sentiment, but at the political level, amongst the leaders of the Islamist parties, there is a different kind of sense.

And therefore as we progressed from 2003 into the turbulent years of 2006 and '7, the other Arab countries started to point at the chaos and said, here is a failure and it's all because of the Iranians and the Americans' mismanagement, and we never seemed to – it was very hard to get Iraq

back into its Arab niche. We got Iraq back fairly quickly into the Arab League, but it remained a kind of work in progress. It never really integrated back. So that is where things

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So that is where things stand. There is a recognition that Iraq should be part of the Arab fold, but there is a tension between that sense and the sense that Iraq is close to Iran at the moment and that Iranian influence is very apparent, both at the macro level and micro level within the political echelons governing Iraq at the moment.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Fantastic. Again, so much to burrow into over there. Before we do that, I'd like to just quickly talk about the state of Iraq-U.S. relations, and then we'll really delve into conversation on all of this stuff.

You know, it's been 15 months since our last combat forces drove out of the country, though there's a very robust diplomatic presence there, a very large embassy that you know very well, Ambassador Crocker. We still have some military personnel doing some arms sales and training there, and our intelligence community has individuals on the ground.

Help us understand, from your perspective, Iraq-U.S. relations today. And I guess I'd like to start out with – if you might just offer some thoughts on if the SOFA process had turned out differently; if we had, say, 10,000 U.S. troops in the country today, would things be appreciably different? Would Iraq's relationship with Iran be different? Would it deal with Syria any differently? Would we have – if we had a military presence on the ground today in the thousands, would that give us any meaningful leverage in the politics of the country?

MR. CROCKER: Well, I would defer, obviously in good part, to Ambassador Sumaida'ie for an Iraqi perspective. But it seems to me that had those security negotiations succeeded and we had, say, a presence along those numbers, you know, that's not enough to make a military difference, nor should it be, but I think it would be a powerful signal in Iraq to Iran and in the region that the United States is engaged, involved, interested and effective. And I think it would have reshaped calculations in capitals, starting with Baghdad, in Tehran and right around the region. Again, this is the military, as it were, as a political presence, as a signal of U.S. engagement and involvement.

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During my time in Iraq, in addition to the first security agreement we negotiated a long-term strategic partnership agreement that was intended to send that very signal. It was predicated on the assumption, which I think at the time both governments in the United States and in Iraq shared, that there would be a successor security agreement.

The intent on both sides was to signal, for the first time since the 1958 revolution that overthrew the monarchy, that Iraq was going to be a strategic partner of the U.S. in particular and the West in general. That agreement still exists. It's still in force. But I the full withdrawal of the U.S. military, except for the small contingent left for training and equipping, reduced our leverage.

And I would say one other thing. You can still have substantial leverage in international politics without military forces. I am not sure that we have taken full advantage of those

opportunities, and I hope very much as we enter a second Obama administration that the administration is going to have a greater and deeper focus on the importance of Iraq and engage Iraq more fully, more frequently and at higher levels, because we have seen what happens when the relationship deteriorates, as it did after '58, and particularly under Saddam. We do not want to go back to those days.

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So with our military leverage gone, I think we need to take full advantage of the strategic partnership agreement to increase our political leverage – you know, not to make Iraq do things but to demonstrate to Iraq that it has a partner; it has an ally; it has options other than looking to Iran, for all the reasons that Emma Sky just laid out.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Now, as you know so well, there's limited bandwidth in Washington in dealing with these sorts of issues, and if part of – part of the tragedy of Afghanistan, a country you also know well, was that, you know, we turned so much of our attention to Iraq in 2003, '4 and '5. Have we now flipped it? And, you know, with the administration's great focus on Afghanistan over the past, as well as a broader set of issues, has it come at a cost in terms of dealing with Iraq?

MR. CROCKER: Well, as has been said in the past, we are a great power and we can actually do more than one thing at one time. I think there may be a bandwidth issue, but that is an attention issue rather than a capacity issue because, again, we are not talking about the deployment of divisions; we are talking about simply taking Iraq seriously, as our agreement says it should be taken, and having the level of senior diplomatic engagement that sends that signal in Baghdad and in the region. And I hope very much we'll see that because it's been somewhat absent in recent years.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Ambassador Sumaida'ie, how do Iraqis view the state of the relationship with the United States today?

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: If you ask any individual Iraqi, you might get two different answers. (Laughter.) So when you ask all Iraqis, you can imagine the spectrum. Iraqis are conflicted about their attitude to the United States. Right from the beginning some saw the intervention by the United States as a threat and some saw it as salvation. Those who saw it as salvation later found that they were disappointed in many respects.

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So there were shifts even in the perceptions and individual attitudes to this, but I think broadly, especially the enlightened population, everybody is glad and grateful that Saddam Hussein was removed, that's for sure; that they were for the first time free to speak their minds. All these were huge, huge gains for Iraqis. But these were quickly smothered by lots of problems that came in the wake of this emancipation.

At the government level we went through all the negotiations and all the agreements, and the strategic framework agreement is still in place. But I think it would not be wrong to say that the Iraqi government as such, at the moment, does not see American presence or influence as an integral part of its political calculation. It was a few years ago when political decisions were taken.

They always factored in what the Americans thought, and that was certainly true. You probably remember when you were ambassador in Baghdad. I don't think that's the situation now.

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I would even venture to say that there is more weight for what the Iranian regime thinks about political decisions in Iraq, whether it's forming a cabinet or any other major political decision. But that doesn't mean that the Americans have lost all possible influence. I think that the Americans still have a considerable amount of soft power. I think they should use it not only with the government – and they are actually using it, to be fair, in support of civil society. I think supporting the segment of population who are secular in their outlook, who believe that the separation of religion from the state is the salvation of the country, that is the natural ally of the United States, not the Islamist party.

So I think there should be more support for the politics of secularism in Iraq. After all, the Iranians are supporting the Islamists, which are much more in harmony with their ideology. It would not be wrong – in fact, I would say it is necessary and highly desirable that the Americans support their natural allies, which I happen to believe represent the future of Iraq. And I myself am part of that at the personal level.

So there is this conflict, and this conflict is not resolved. All the balls are in the air. The outcome of this will depend on how much investment the United States is prepared to put in to help nurture the right factors to get Iraq moving in the right direction. And if they fail, well, it would be very unfortunate but the people who would pay the price will be Iraqis and I think also, to some extent, American interests in the region.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Emma, real quickly – the Europe perspective on the Iraq-U.S. relationship.

MS. SKY: I think many people looking at that relationship just feel that the U.S. wants to forget about Iraq, just wants to start looking at it through the rearview mirror, just to move beyond. And people find that quite difficult to understand after all that investment – I mean, huge investments in blood and treasure over the years.

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When you look at the time of the surge, the U.S. reputation was way high and Iranian influence way low, and yet now, you know, the balance has completely changed. People think the U.S. has much more influence and is not wielding the influence that it could have. And so people ask, why doesn't the U.S. do more to contain some of Maliki's worst instincts? Why doesn't the U.S. do more to create a better balance inside Iraq between the different communities?

And you can ask a follow up question.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: How should the United States be doing that? And once you venture a thought on that, I'd love to hear from the others. But how do you all believe that the United States should be recalibrating this relationship? And, you know, to build upon Ambassador

Sumaida'ie's point, you know, if the natural allies to the United States are those who believe in more secular government, how do you do so in the zero sum nature of Iraqi politics without further breaking the relationship with the Maliki government? Or do you accept that as a cost of doing so? But if you could build on that and then we can –

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MS. SKY: I think people believe that the U.S. betted on Maliki. They betted on Maliki in 2010 and thought, this is the guy who is going to get us a follow-on security agreement. This is our man. So rather than investing in the processes, the institutions, it was just seen as a troop withdrawal – Maliki is the guy.

But the long-term interests of the U.S. do rely on Iraq being more democratic. It's never going to be a liberal democracy in Western style but it's been inclusive of all its communities. As Ambassador Crocker said, it's the strategic framework agreement which provides that framework to do that, to invest in the institutions, to build up better relations with Iraq's people.

So there is that. There's also the huge influence that the U.S. exerts with the Sunnis, with the Kurds, with neighboring countries. Baghdad needs the U.S. to use that influence to help Iraq, the help Baghdad, to help Maliki himself have better relationships.

And of course there's the arms sales. Will the U.S. just continue to sell arms, sell arms without any conditions placed on it if those weapons if those security forces are used to oppress – used to, sorry, oppress Prime Minister Maliki's domestic rivals?

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: How else should the U.S. recalibrate that relationship?

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Well, I think it is possible to have a two-pronged relationship, even with the government; say, we will support you but we will not support oppressive actions. We will support you but we will not accept human rights violations. We will support the political process and the political system as long as it actually serves the principles on which it was built.

Now, let me make a very important point at this juncture. At the beginning, when we were writing the TAL, the Transitional Administrative Law, and later on when the constitution was negotiated, there was this assumption that the players are going to abide by the rules which are written. This assumption was wrong. The Islamists had no intention of abiding it. They went along, but as soon as they got into power they started flouting the rules, blatantly.

[0:49:05]

I mean, it was explicitly stated in the constitution that there are certain institutions which were independent of the executive: the Electoral Commission, the central bank. I was on the Governing Council when the law of the central bank was issued, and it was made clear that it was independent of the government. You know, there were several – the media. I was the head of the media committee and we tried to structure a media commission which was intended and designed to be independent.

Now all these have been reined in under the auspices and the control of the Prime Minister's Office on the basis that, well, these have some executive functions – all these institutions have some executive functions and therefore they can be – they should be part of the executive, using the semantic definition. Now, that really means a kind of hijacking of the power of all these institutions, which are the guardians of the democratic system. And once these have gone, then what safeguards do we have for this democracy?

[0:50:27]

So the Americans should make it clear where they stand on these issues. The fact that – the general perception in Iraq is that, well, Maliki is in power because both the Iranians and the Americans want him to be there. That should be dispelled. It should be clear that the Americans are committed to the Iraqi political system, not to an individual, not one particular government. Governments come and go but the political system has to be built on proper foundations in order to be sustainable and in order to create the stability and therefore the prosperity that will flow out of that.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: What's the clearest way to do that? I mean, we talked a little bit about carrots. It is time to re-evaluate the arms sales to the Maliki government at this point?

MR. CROCKER: I think it's time, Rajiv, to engage in a serious, sustained and high-level manner, and through that engagement exert greater influence frankly with all the parties – I think they can all use it – and to use as your structure for that the strategic framework agreement, because it is about institutions, their strengthening and their endurance, as well as it is about cooperation in a variety of fields that are of benefit to Iraq as well as the United States.

[0:52:03]

We have a very able ambassador in Baghdad right now, but the nature of the relationship, the recollection of the Iraqis over how it used to be with the routine high-level engagement, I think suggests strongly that to get at just the points that Samir and Emma have raised, you know, we've got to up our game here.

I would like very much to see the secretary of state make an early visit to Iraq. In the previous administration, for a variety of reasons, not all of them foreign policy related, the secretary of state didn't visit. I would love it for the secretary of defense to visit Iraq. Secretaries of defense routinely visit countries where we don't have troops deployed, but it would certainly get everybody guessing, wouldn't it? I would like, in a similar vein, to see the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff visit.

And these kinds of visits then provide a framework to get at questions like, you know, balances, institutions versus individuals, arms sales and their conditions, and some useful words of advice, both to those in the ascendancy and those in the opposition because, as I said, I think all parties need it.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Let's move back toward Iraqi domestic politics for a few moments before we start taking some questions.



One individual who hasn't yet come up here is Muqtada al-Sadr. I'm keen for your thoughts on what you see his role being in the future of Iraqi politics, and what are the chances of him potentially playing somewhat of a constructive role as more of a Shia nationalist figure and potentially seeking to break further out from the broader Shia coalition and ally his movement with Sunnis as Kurds as a potential counterweight to Maliki and playing the role of something of a spoiler? What are the chances of that, and would that be sort of a positive development in any of your views or a prescription for even more trouble ahead?

[0:54:37]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: The question is to me?

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Oh, why don't you tackle it, Ambassador Sumaida'ie?

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Well, Muqtada al-Sadr has been a rather unpredictable player on the Iraqi stage. That is because of his background, history. He came on a wave of love and adoration because of his father, who was murdered by Saddam Hussein. His father was a remarkable thinker and writer and leader – a clergyman, a religious leader, but he was a remarkable person. He was viewed with great respect, by the way, by both Sunnis and Shias in Iraq.

But those are a segment within especially the Shia poor who venerated him, and this was his son. So he was simply swept into this position of power, for which he frankly had no qualifications whatsoever, and therefore he was a candidate for manipulation by people who had much more experience, including our Iranian neighbors. So his recent actions – although I think his instincts were, as you pointed out, much more nationalist Iraqi, helping the poor, but his actual political actions were all over the map.

Now, what he will do the next day or the next month, if you ask him I think you will probably get, again, an answer today and a different answer tomorrow. So it is difficult for me to sit here in Washington and say how he is going to act, but he is a factor, definitely, and he will continue to be a factor. The next elections, next year, are going to show, hopefully, a more mature response from the electorate. Having said that, I quickly add the qualification that this will be, again, colored and tempered by the fears that are being whipped up right now.

[0:57:02]

You know, among the Islamists, especially extremist Islamist Shia, there is this – (inaudible) – which they use: The Sunnis are coming to get you. And “The Sunnis are coming to get you” is now amplified by: The Sunni Arabs are coming to get you, not only the Sunni Iraqis are coming to get you. With this conflict in Syria unresolved – and it's possible at least that it might be resolved in favor of a Sunni-dominated outcome – that makes the fear even more important.

The best things that the Sunni Arabs in Iraq should do is to try to alleviate these fears, and I think most of the wiser elements within the Sunni Arabs in Iraq are aware of the dangers of these fears going out of control. So coming back to Muqtada, the next elections, if they are not totally swamped by the sectarian fervor, might produce a more mature outcome and might bring a new crop of leaders, younger leaders who have been less contaminated by the events of recent years. You know, so they have hope there.

[0:58:36]

MR. CROCKER: If I could just add to that, I agree entirely with Ambassador Sumaida'ie's assessment of Muqtada al-Sadr, that he himself doesn't know what he's doing the day after tomorrow. Sadly, assassination can be very effective, and the 1999 assassination of Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr and his two elder sons, who were both being groomed for leadership has had a lasting and negative impact on Iraqi politics, as has the assassination of Abdul-Majid al-Khoei in 2003, presumably at the hands or on the orders of Muqtada al-Sadr.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Muqtada al-Sadr, yes.

MR. CROCKER: So in the Sadr family that once stood not only for a moderate form of Shiism but for Iraqi and Arab nationalism, we are now down to the very shallow end of the Sadr gene pool. (Laughter.)

There was a period that Emma and I will remember in 2008 when the hope was just what you articulated, that Sadr, drawing on his family heritage, would make that outreach as an Arab nationalist over the sectarian divide to the Sunnis. It never really happened, to the immense relief of the Kurds. And therein lies the complexity of all of this. You can manage to make perhaps two out of three reasonably content, but getting three out of three has eluded us and the Iraqis for the last decade, and Iraq for about the last century.

Ambassador Sumaida'ie makes another good point on the region that I would just like to come back to with respect to the U.S. You know, not only do I believe we need to be more effectively and decisively engaged within Iraq, I think we need to be more effectively and decisively engaged in the region on behalf of Iraq.

I made the rounds as ambassador to Iraq's Arab neighbors with the, I thought, pretty persuasive talking point that if you're concerned about Iranian influence in Iraq, well, then why don't you reopen your embassies, have your foreign ministers visit, invite Iraqi officials to your capitals and, you know, push back against Persian influence with Arab influence? Well, it persuaded me but it persuaded no one else. (Laughter.) But as the region changes through the Arab Spring, I think this, again, is a time for more active U.S. diplomacy in the region, again in support of Iraq.

[1:01:49]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: May I have just a follow-up comment here? I agree entirely with Ryan on this.

Coming back to Muqtada, Muqtada should not always be viewed as a free agent. In a recent episode when there was an attempt to unseat Maliki in parliament by a vote of no confidence, initially Muqtada signed on, on this action, on this plan, in Erbil but later withdrew. And the information I have is that he withdrew because a few of his lieutenants came to him and told him that they could not protect him if he went ahead with this plan. What that says I don't know, but it at least explains some of the capricious nature of his decisions. He make a decision today and he is told to change it another day.

MS. SKY: Can I just add one final comment on Muqtada, because I think he is very hard to read, but in the last few months you could say there has been a maturing in his behavior. When you look at the intra-Shia competition going on, it's Muqtada who has chosen not to be mil (ph) sectarian. He has actually chosen to reach out to the Kurds and reach out to the Sunnis. And you have seen him going up to Erbil, you have seen him going to Lebanon. So you've seen a change in his behavior, and he could have acted differently. So I think he deserves some credit for that.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: I agree with that. I did say right at the beginning that his instincts are right because he was brought up in that family, and this family is rooted into Iraqi culture and history and is seen, unlike some of the Mijaiya (ph) and the – (inaudible) – as being very Iraqi and very Arab, and for that reason loved by Sunnis and Shias alike.

[1:04:08]

I just want to also add here, because my comments have referred to Iran in a negative sense throughout, but it is important for Iraq to have a working relationship with Iran. Iran is a neighbor. We have historical, cultural, family ties with Iranian society, and we have religious ties. And we have every year hundreds of thousands if not millions of pilgrims who come from Iran to visit the holy shrines in Iraq.

So a healthy and positive relationship between the two countries is absolutely essential for Iraq. It's got to be done in such a way that it is free of domination, it's based upon mutual respect and independence, and that's of course in the current situation a little difficult. But that's what we should be aiming toward.

MR. CROCKER: That is where the U.S. comes in again, indeed.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: One last question and then I'll turn it over to all of you.

I think it would be a safe assumption that the three of you would be in favor of a more secular Iraqi government in the future, and certainly the results of the Iraqiya Party in the last election are, you know, sort of not lost on all of us. But as one looks toward that as sort of an aspiration, is the better approach one that actually seeks to build institutions and promote the notion of a more secular form of government and essentially seeks to empower and assist leaders with more secular tendencies.

[1:06:10]

Or is the reality that we are going to be facing for the foreseeable future sectarian and an ethnically divided politics, and that the path to some form of greater political stability has to simply involve working with and facilitating a degree of negotiated political compromise within the factions and saying, look, you know, the idea that you're going to get enough individuals from the principal constituencies into some sort of big tent is unrealistic, and really it's got to be more progress on the sharing and distribution of oil revenue, a more equitable distribution of political power, and recognizing that we are in this religiously and ethnically fractured society and it's a challenge of seeking to build the appropriate compromise?

MR. CROCKER: If I could start, you know, I think it's a bit of both. First, recognizing reality for what is in Iraq today. We've had our utopian visions for Iraq. It hasn't worked out well, not for Iraqis and not for ourselves. So again, first we need to recognize reality and then see how we can work with that reality to build a better future for Iraqis.

I do not think the United States should be in the position in Iraq or elsewhere as taking a position in principle that we oppose religiously based parties by definition and will only favor secular parties. I think that's highly dangerous. There is nothing inherent in a religious party, whether it be Dawa on the Shia side or the Iraqi Islamic Party on the Sunni side, that is contrary to a nationalist vision for Iraq.

[1:08:24]

It's the way events and personalities – and the emphasis on personalities that I think Emma brought out is extremely important – have evolved that has created some of these problems. And we've got to be very careful how we approach that. Again, not only because I negotiated it, I think the strategic framework agreement gives us both that vehicle to move forward.

Set aside the identity of parties and focus on the development of institutions, the development of a pluralistic approach, the knowledge that Iraq ultimately succeeds as a whole or will fail in its parts, and move on from there. But that requires, again, a level of senior U.S. engagement that we haven't seen and badly need.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Do you agree with that, Ambassador Sumaida'ie?

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: For the first time I have to disagree with the ambassador.

MR. CROCKER: Thank god. (Laughter.)

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: So we have to inject some excitement into this discussion.

Ideologically, religious parties are by nature sectarian, and sectarian politics is divisive, and they are incompatible with the national vision, in my view. This has been proven in practice. People who see themselves as champions of this sect or that sect cannot themselves see themselves champions, or be seen to be the champions of the whole nation.

[1:10:03]

It's as if in this country you have two major parties, one protestant and one Catholic, and you can imagine what would flow out of that. This country could not survive as it is. In Iraq we have paid the price of this vision, and we've frankly paid the price of this American view of how workable this is, because it's not.

Let me just go back a couple of squares. Most of the people who are now leaders in Iraq were born and grew up during Saddam's regime, which lasted for, what – the Ba'athist regime lasted for about 55 years.

So people were conditioned by the way the government was run, and by this highly entrenched and effective system of splitting the goodies among the people who were faithful. The carrot and the sticks were very, very severely applied, and the stick was very hard and the carrots were delicious. The system of patronage produced this generation.

[1:11:39]

Now, you take this generation, which has been conditioned like this, and you sit them down and say: OK, now we're going to play with different rules. We're going to have parliament. We're going to have – the judiciary will be independent. You've got to play like this. Look at the answer: Fine; that sounds good. But when they start actually playing they are automatically drawn to the way they have always done it.

And this is exactly what happened, particularly because some of them came with a sense of grievance that they were excluded, they were oppressed, they were – and now it's their chance, and their chance – what did Saddam do in order to consolidate his power? He seized the security apparatus and he seized oil. That worked for him. And the newcomers? Exactly the same.

Now, Maliki is minister of interior and the effective minister of defense, and the effective minister of intelligence and security. Hardly anything goes by on the security front which doesn't go past his circle. And oil and the revenue from oil effectively is run by – and I remember the discussions in the Governing Council stage. There was a huge pressure from the parties, from the Islamist parties in particular, to appoint as many of their followers as possible, not only to positions of responsibility and leadership but also just fill the ranks of the security and other government.

The electricity – sorry if I take just one more minute on this – electricity in Iraq during that time was produced by 35,000 workers. All of them got their income from the revenue from sale of electricity. Now it's nearly 100,000. Most of these appointees are from political parties: You want a job? OK, go to electricity. You want a job? Go to the police. It is now a system of patronage, which was exactly the same structure.

[1:14:02]

So when you look at this superimposed, rather superficially superimposed, structure of political relationships which we now call democracy, look underneath, look beyond, and you will see the reality that really, to a larger extent than you expect, resembles the ugly face of the Saddam regime.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: We're running short on time. Do you have a quick thing to add?

MS. SKY: 2010 you saw how the electorate voted. People were voting for parties that were not running on sectarian platforms. And you could see the electorate, the Iraq people, not wanting to define themselves in that way and not wanting to vote for political parties that stressed sectarianism.

Unfortunately, the opportunity that the U.S. had to negotiate a new political dispensation then, to break the sectarian construct of the state, to get a new elite agreement, was missed and the same dysfunctional system is in place.

What's our fear coming into the national elections, which are scheduled for 2014, is that you probably will end up with Prime Minister Maliki as the largest party, largest coalition, but is unlikely to be able to get enough votes to get the support of the parliament, but there is likely to be no consensus candidates in opposition, so you'll end up having an acting prime minister with everybody else acting, because the system itself is now creaking with the same elites not willing to do a deal with each other.

[1:15:42]

MR. CROCKER: Which also could present some opportunities as well as challenges.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: OK, time for a few questions. Right here on the front row. Do we have a microphone or – hold on one second. Right here in the white shirt.

Q: Judd Herriot (sp), a documentary filmmaker. If Iran does get the bomb – which I believe they will in spite of the sanctions regime – if they do, what will be the impact on sectarian politics in Iraq and regionally in general?

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Thank you.

MR. CROCKER: Well, that was a question that came up during the time I was ambassador, and Samir will obviously have views of his own. I did not find that Iraqis worried too much about the bomb in Iran. I remember the prime minister once kind of shrugging and say, they're not going to drop it on us; it's going to blow back on them. You know, farther afield it's somebody else's problem.

You know, if you share the analysis that one of the consequences of Iran getting the bomb would be a new round of proliferation, that the Saudis would consider that an unacceptable threat to their security and that they would get the bomb – they can't develop it but they sure as heck can buy it – you know, then you've got, I think, a new element of instability in the region, but one in which certain elements of the population in Iraq might not be averse to.

[1:17:34]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Well, I don't know. Iraqis don't lose much sleep over this issue, actually. I agree with Ryan here. This is not an issue that worries Iraqis. We obviously don't like the idea that Iran has a nuclear bomb, or any neighbor having a nuclear bomb.

The general feeling in Iraq: We would rather have a nuclear-free Middle East. We have managed to rid ourselves of any weapons of mass destruction – mass destruction. (Laughter.) And Iraq is committed by its constitution to be free of such weapons, and we would rather be living in a neighborhood that is free of these weapons.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Right over here in the yellow.



Q: If provincial elections are postponed in Ninawa and Anbar I'm wondering, what message is that going to send? Ambassador, what does postponing the elections do for the morale of the Iraqi voters, and is this foreshadowing of how the national elections will go?

And also, Ambassador Crocker, do you think increased diplomatic engagement could change the outcome of that decision?

[1:19:00]

And also, Ms. Sky, I was wondering, how does the rest of the world see this? Is it somehow that the U.S. is failing to aid in the process, or does anyone know or care?

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: We'll try to tackle that quickly.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: I think that sends a negative message if elections are postponed in two provinces, because the question is then, when will they be held? Will they be held soon or never?

And I don't want to make – I've taken more than my fair share of time, but I'll just add that as the current government tries to prepare for the next election, this – again coming back to the system of patronage is well rooted now in Baghdad and the southern areas but not yet established in the Sunni areas, for sectarian reasons – so it would not be a good thing, definitely.

MR. CROCKER: I would first agree. And then, going to the second part of your question, I would like to think that high-level, intensive U.S. diplomatic engagement could prevent that kind of outcome, because there are two ways it could happen. Either the central government could say, too much unrest, too much instability; can't have acceptable elections under these circumstances, or you could have a – you could have a boycott. We're not going to play.

Either would be a highly undesirable outcome. And sometimes it takes an interested and engaged third party to cause everybody to take a deep breath, go sit under a tree and let the emotions of the moment pass. So I'd like to think we could be helpful in that regard.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: I think so.

[1:21:01]

MS. SKY: And it's important for the legitimacy of the elections that they do happen at the same time throughout the country, that international observers are able to go and monitor, because if there are any – if some areas are excluded, if international monitors aren't there, people won't trust the results. We had difficulty in 2010 getting the election results to stick, even when we had monitors everywhere and great levels of supervision.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: In the red here.

Q: Thank you. Judith Kipper.

I think it's very unlikely that this administration is going to re-engage in a serious way in Iraq, but it seems to me, based on what the two ambassadors – a single comment each has made, that we need to look – step back a little bit and look at a larger strategic question.

[1:21:56]

Samir, you said that Iraq used to think about what the U.S. would say. Now it thinks about what Iran would say. That's true throughout the region. Maybe Jordan it's not that case, maybe Libya, but everybody else doesn't give a damn what the U.S. thinks and is doing their own thing.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Not to that extent. (Laughter.)

Q: Well, to a large extent we have very, very limited influence, but part of that is as a result of the chaotic mismanagement of the Iraq question.

So aren't we looking now at an Iraq where we've become attached to the man again who used brutal, brutal means as a savvy politician to consolidate power and is a dictator? Aren't we looking now at a period where we're going to have to really wait for the post-Ahmadinejad, post-Maliki period, and for a hopeful moment when the U.S. and Iran can genuinely engage, for the U.S. to be able to influence events inside Iraq?

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: That's obviously for you.

MR. CROCKER: Well, since we've been waiting 34 years since the Islamic Revolution in Iraq for such a moment, I'm not sure that's a feasible strategy. If our influence is at a low ebb in the region, I would suggest that that is because we have not chosen to use it.

We are a great power. We are seen throughout the world, including in the Middle East, as a great power –

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Absolutely.

[1:23:41]

MR. CROCKER: – but we are largely seen as absent on key issues in key countries at key times.

I think for the dynamic to change that you described, it isn't a question of waiting for Nouri al-Maliki or Ahmadinejad to go; it's a question of whether we are going to start punching at least up to our weight again.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Yes? A little further back. Over there? Yes, you.

Q: I'll try to keep this simple. Could you give me an idea of the view of Turkey from Baghdad, and specifically Maliki as the relations between – I would say Maliki and Erdogan, you know, have turned into a war of words and Turkey has gotten closer to the Kurds over the past three, four, five years.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Emma?

MS. SKY: I was going to hand that to Ambassador Sumaida'ie. (Laughter.)

MR. CROCKER: So was I. (Laughter.)

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: This is interconnected with this perception at least of Turks supporting the Sunnis, Iran supporting the Shia, although reality is never as simple as that, as we all know.

The Kurds have worked out a working relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan which is anchored in political and economic interests, and that also irritates Baghdad to some extent, especially with a potential pipeline to export oil from Iraqi Kurdistan.

[1:25:31]

So a complex set of issues. Also Turkey's support of al-Arafiya (ph) in the last election, rather overt support, was extremely irritating for the opponents of al-Arafiya (ph), in particular the bloc of the current prime minister.

So there is an accumulation – a sense of mistrust, exasperated (sic) by what Ryan explained at the beginning of this panel here, that our people are conditioned with from the Saddam's years that they see everything as a conspiracy. So they see now Turkey – (inaudible) – and everybody else as co-conspirators to basically go after them. And that's the problem.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: We have time for two more here. You right here in the front. Wait just one second for the microphone, please.

[1:26:30]

Q: Thank you. My name is Ragarda Saudyi (ph) and I am affiliated with the U.S. Congress.

And my question is that, do you see the development in Iraq similar to the Balkans tragedy, and especially with the ethnic cleansing and so on? If so, what are the preventive measures should be taken in advance in order to prevent a serious tragedy with the civil war? Thank you.

MR. CROCKER: Let me begin, if that's –

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Please, please.

MR. CROCKER: One can certainly make the point that the most vicious conceivable ethnic cleansing has already occurred in the '06-'07 period. As Samir has pointed out, Iraq does not have a history of sectarian conflict or strife. I think you go all the way back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Wahhabis sacked Karbala to –

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: And the Sunnis actually helped to drive them off.

MR. CROCKER: Yeah. So even then –

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Yes.

MR. CROCKER: So that was the exception, not the norm.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: But the Iraqi Sunnis at that point helped the Shia to drive off the –

MR. CROCKER: Exactly.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Yes.

MR. CROCKER: Well – yeah. So they were – some did. (Laughter.)

[1:28:01]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Some did, yes. Not all. Yes.

MR. CROCKER: It's the exception. It's not the norm. I think Iraqis by and large were horrified by the excesses of that period. And, you know, that I think helps to be a break on recurrence of such violence, but we clearly have seen, in the last year or two, an increase in both sectarian and in ethnic tensions –

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Yes.

MR. CROCKER: – sectarian between Shia and Sunni Arabs, and of course ethnic between Arabs – in some cases Sunni and Shia vis-à-vis the Kurds. Again, this has not led to wide-scale violence. I keep beating this particular drum that Judith told me is not going to work, but I will beat it again anyway. This is a good moment, perhaps a crucial moment, for senior-level U.S. engagement to help the Iraqis avoid what they want to avoid, which would be any kind of return to that kind of horrible violence.

[1:29:17]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: I agree entirely. I think sectarianism in Iraq goes against the grain. It is an aberration and, I think, a transient aberration. Having said that, it is actually hurting, and recently, the last couple of weeks, I've heard of reports of the return of some aspects of threats and ethnic cleansing coming back, which is a dangerous sign.

But this is not the community at large. It's extremists in this community and extremists in that community using that. But the general population is not in favor of that.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: We have time for one last quick question. All the way down there on the aisle, the gentleman in the white shirt. Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much. I'm Ferva Loq (ph), second-year student at the SIS, American University here in Washington, D.C., and writing about negotiating DDR – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration – but not – (inaudible) – about disbanding the army.

But my question is – and it maybe seems an optimistic question, but I’m always an optimist about my country, the future of my country – is how do you view these country divisions for Iraq for the future? Mainly some people view it as a very good balancer, I mean, prior to the invasion, I mean, in terms of region, especially Iraq would not bandwagon with Iran maybe, or the United States to rebalance, but what would be the alternative for the future? What’s your strategic vision for that, to empower Iraq in that sense? Thank you very much.

[1:30:57]

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: I didn't quite get it. I didn't catch the question. I'm sorry. Can you try to paraphrase it?

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Iraq's strategic vision going forward.

MR. SUMAIDA'IE: Well, again it depends which Iraq, who you ask. I think at the moment there is a political crisis. The government is trying to struggle through. The general consensus is that somehow we will reach the next election without an implosion, but it's painful. And the next elections, a lot of people are hoping that they will produce something which is different, but all the factors indicate that this something different is not going to be radically different. Whether then it will take a turn down or turn up, that remains to be seen, but I am the eternal optimist.

[1:31:54]

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Fantastic.

I know we've run a little long because we started a little late. Please join me in thanking our panel, not just for what they've done here this morning but for each of them, their years of service in the effort to try to stabilize Iraq and try to create a better future for the Iraqi people. All three of them have served at great personal peril in a variety of positions and really have made an enormous contribution to the future of Iraq. And it's for that principally, in addition to their comments here this morning, that I think we should give them a round of applause. Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)