

# 7<sup>TH</sup> SULAIMANI FORUM

March 15 and 16, 2023

[www.uis.edu.krd/iris](http://www.uis.edu.krd/iris)

  IRISmidEast





# THE 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SULAIMANI FORUM

20 YEARS LATER: IRAQ AND THE REGION AMID  
NEW GLOBAL CHALLENGES.



American University of Iraq, Sulaimani  
Kirkuk Main Road, Raparin Sulaimani, Iraq

[www.auis.edu.krd](http://www.auis.edu.krd)  
[info@auis.edu.krd](mailto:info@auis.edu.krd)  
f t y @ in auis official



Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)  
American University of Iraq, Sulaimani  
Kirkuk Main Road, Raparin Sulaimani, Iraq

[www.auis.edu.krd/iris](http://www.auis.edu.krd/iris)  
[iris@auis.edu.krd](mailto:iris@auis.edu.krd)  
f @IRISmideast  
t /IRISmideast

## Proceedings

Edited by  
Karam F. Robeil & Shvan Najm

Designed by  
Awder Omer

## SPONSORS

### PLATINUM



### GOLD



### SILVER



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Seventh Annual Sulaimani Forum was organized by the staff of the Institute of Regional and International Studies' (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), particularly Mac Skelton, Shvan Najm, Zainab Hamid Mera, and the rest of the IRIS team members. The Forum would not have been possible without the efforts and contributions of the following AUIS departments: Communications, IT, Security, Facilities Management, Finance & Purchasing, and Student Services as well as the help of AUIS staff and student volunteers. IRIS would also like to thank AUIS President, Bruce Walker Ferguson for his support, as well as that of all AUIS faculty members. The support and guidance of the following persons (in no particular order) was particularly essential: Awder Omer, Ranj Sarraj, Rebaz Nawzad, Mohammed Hussein, and Sami Qadir.

## Table of Contents

08	About IRIS
09	About the Sulaimani Forum
10	University Welcome & Introductions
14	Keynote Address
16	Interview with the Keynote speaker
20	Plenary Address
22	Remarks
24	Geopolitics: Iraq, MENA, & the Changing Role of the International Community
30	Remarks & One-on-One
34	Energy: Oil & Gas, Renewables, and Regional Dynamics
40	20 Years Later: Reflections on Iraq's Past, Present & Future
46	Economic Policy: The Dinar & the Challenge of Growth
52	Interview
56	Halabja Commemoration Speech
58	Governance: Corruption & Barriers to Reform
64	Environment: Climate Change, Water, and Conflict
70	Security: Conflict & Stabilization in Iraq and the Region

## **About IRIS & AUIS**

The Sulaimani Forum is organized by the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), an Iraq-based research center housed at American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), Iraq's only fully independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. Through multidisciplinary research, strategic partnerships, and regular events featuring experts and leaders, IRIS examines the most complex issues facing the Kurdish Region, Iraq, and the Middle East.

## **SULAIMANI FORUM**

The Sulaimani Forum convenes high-level officials, corporate leaders, and experts to discuss the most pressing issues facing Iraq and the Middle East region. The Forum provides an annual opportunity to bring together the main stakeholders in regional affairs for strategic policy conversations, with the aim of generating blueprints for transformative and lasting change in the Middle East and North Africa.



### Professor Bruce Ferguson

President of American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS)

Professor Ferguson commenced the event by extending a warm welcome to the participants of the Sulaimani Forum on behalf of the university. He expressed his gratitude to Dr. Mac Skelton, the Executive Director of the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), along with the dedicated IRIS staff and the entire university team for their efforts in orchestrating the forum. Acknowledgments were also extended to H.E. Dr. Barham Salih, the university's Founder and Board of Trustees member, as well as Dr. Jill Derby, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and the other esteemed trustees who traveled from across the world to attend. Professor Ferguson emphasized the rich diversity embodied by the AUIS staff, faculty, and student body, underscoring the institution's distinction as one of the most exceptional universities in the region. Furthermore, he elucidated how AUIS, as a nonprofit educational institution, not only champions academic excellence but also promotes experiential learning through extracurricular activities, thereby nurturing responsible citizens, community leaders, and accomplished professionals. Concluding his opening remarks, Professor Ferguson celebrated the wealth of diverse experiences and perspectives brought by the forum's distinguished guests.

“

*We have students from all 19 governorates in Iraq as well as neighboring countries such as Syria, Turkey, Iran, and a bit further afield, Afghanistan. More than %27 of our students come from outside the Kurdistan Region which I believe is the highest number of that kind for any university in the region. So, AUIS belongs in the category of special universities that support diversity as a mean of education. It's one reason why we view ourselves as an American style university.*

### H.E. Barham Salih

AUIS Founder



At Professor Ferguson's invitation, H.E. Dr. Barham Salih took the podium and extended his welcoming remarks to H.E. Prime Minister Sudani, President of the Supreme Judicial Council H.E. Faiq Zaidan, KRG President H.E. Nechirvan Barzani, and other esteemed guests. Dr. Salih took a moment to reflect on the 20th anniversary of the overthrow of the former regime. He acknowledged that beyond what might be disagreed on about the interpretations of this event, everyone must agree that ending the tyranny and brutality of the former regime was a pivotal effort. This accomplishment, he emphasized, was the result of a tough and prolonged struggle involving all components of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, Dr. Salih paid tribute to the countless victims and martyrs who bravely fought against the former regime and in the battle against terrorism, both from within Iraq and alongside the Global Coalition. He expressed gratitude to the nations that stood alongside Iraq during these challenging times. Dr. Salih then underscored the enduring principle of peaceful power transition, noting that the presence of three current and former Iraqi Prime Ministers in the venue exemplified its establishment. Despite the myriad challenges that Iraq has encountered since 2003, he highlighted the nation's progress and resilience. In conclusion, Dr. Salih highlighted Iraq's transition from being a source of regional problems at the expense of its citizens to becoming a fertile ground for political, economic, and security integration in the region.

“

*20 Years on, it's time for us to reflect in a serious way about what we have done and how we can improve. Hopefully this forum will be an opportunity to do this.*

**H.E. Antonio Guterres**  
Secretary-General of the United Nations



In a pre-recorded video message delivered to the forum, H.E. António Guterres extended his warm greetings to the participants and expressed his deep gratitude for their efforts in fostering dialogue surrounding the complex challenges facing Iraq and the broader Middle East region. He recognized that these challenges are products of decades of oppression, war, terrorism, sectarianism, and foreign interference. H.E. António Guterres expressed his understanding that these challenges cannot be resolved overnight in times of escalating geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and proliferating conflicts. He drew attention to the opportunities he had identified during his previous visit to Iraq, which included enhancing public services, diversifying the economy, and generating meaningful employment prospects for the youth, and more. The Secretary-General underscored Iraq's commendable progress in addressing environmental concerns, particularly with regards to mitigating water scarcity and tackling climate-related issues. He placed significant emphasis on the importance of national unity, regional collaboration, and multilateral action. H.E. Guterres highlighted the United Nations' commitment to supporting Iraq and collaborating towards sustainable and inclusive solutions that benefit the entire populace across Iraq and the broader Middle East.

**“** *Mesopotamia is the ancient land between the rivers, it cannot become the modern land without rivers.*

**Dr. Mac Skelton**  
Executive Director of IRIS



Dr. Skelton welcomed the guests of the forum on behalf of IRIS to the 7th Sulaimani Forum. He briefly described the vision and work of IRIS as the university's flagship research center. He explained that IRIS firmly believes that policy analysis requires political and historical context. He added that IRIS' research looks at how some of the most complex challenges facing Iraq, from environmental degradation to protracted displacement to corruption are shaped by political dynamics and the enduring legacies of war.

**“** *IRIS is committed to policy relevant research that is deeply rooted in the Iraqi context while also drawing connections across borders.*



## H.E. Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani

### Prime Minister of Iraq

H.E. Prime Minister Sudani extended his gratitude to H.E. Dr. Salih for the invitation to the forum, along with expressing appreciation to the organizers for their efforts. He highlighted the notable significance of the Sulaimani Forum as a valuable platform, bringing together officials, leaders, researchers, and professors within this educational monument. Prime Minister Sudani underlined the government's pledge to provide services and build a strong and cohesive economy through its governmental program. He announced that the government was able to guarantee financial stability and maintain the fluidity of service implementation for the future through making a 3-years budget plan for the first time.

“ *Iraq's history, geographical location, economic potentials, and human resources qualities, all qualify him to play a central role in the Middle East and the world to become a regional pivot.*

“ *We are approaching the memorial of a tragic incident for our people, the painful anniversary of a heinous crime committed by the dictatorial regime against our oppressed Kurdish people in Halabja, and we have voted two days ago in the Council of Ministers on converting this selfless city to a governorate, and this is the least we can offer for their great sacrifices.*

He explained that the agreement on the Budget Law Bill will enable the current government to avoid previous failures and express confidence in its plan, which prioritizes the issues of unemployment and poverty, corruption, economic reform, and proper service delivery for Iraqis. He added that the approved budget will enable successful legislation of the Oil & Gas Law and reach an agreement with the KRG about this issue.

In regard to the commemoration of the tragic Halabja genocide, H.E. Prime Minister Sudani declared that the Council of Ministers had voted in favor of converting Halabja into a governorate. He expressed his support for the unity among Kurdistan's political authorities, recognizing the vulnerability that division can pose for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). He further stated that the strength of Iraq is connected to the strength of KRG and vice-versa and that Iraq is undividable. He cautioned against replicating past mistakes that involved empowering one component at the expense of others or empowering a part of Iraq at the expense of the federal government, which had facilitated the emergence of terrorism. The keynote address also underlined the importance the current government gives to reinforcing the Border Guards and ensure that Iraq is not a ground for threat to the security of neighboring countries and its sovereignty is preserved. Additionally, Prime Minister Sudani highlighted Iraq's potential to assume a constructive and impactful role in both the Middle East and the global stage.

H.E. Prime Minister Sudani recognized the urgency of the climate challenges facing Iraq and the region and mentioned the efforts undertaken by his government in facing these challenges which include building renewable energy power plants, rehabilitating the sanitary landfill sites, anti-desertification projects, closed irrigation technologies, heavy water treatment, and limiting gas flaring. Among these efforts, he announced that the government is planting 5 million trees across the country. He concluded by stressing the importance of diversity in the country and how unity was the driver of success on the campaign against ISIS.

“ *The Budget Law Bill represents a valiant step that surpasses previous failures and expresses confidence and clarity for our vision of our declared goals, with the service for every citizen in its forefront.*



# Interview with the Keynote speaker

**H.E. Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani**

Prime Minister

*With*

**Jane Arraf**



The interview kicked off with a question about how H.E. Prime Minister Sudani's presence in the country before and during Saddam Hussein's removal has shaped his perspective on governance. In his response, H.E. Prime Minister Sudani recounted the challenging times and crises of that era, emphasizing their influence on the government's view to work towards a peaceful Iraq that doesn't engage in conflicts with other nations but rather become a ground for economic partnerships.

The second question asked what he wants the west to understand about Iraq and what he thinks changed about Iraq and Iraqis after 2003. H.E. Prime Minister Sudani acknowledged the United States' pivotal role in the regime change of 2003, characterizing their post-invasion engagement as that of a strategic partner. He emphasized the mutual benefits of fostering a comprehensive relationship with the United States, activating all the articles of the Strategic Framework Agreement. He further urged the West to appreciate Iraq's diversity, regional relationships, and its aspiration to not take a side against the other.



Responding to the question about the assurances he can offer to the disheartened new generation of young Iraqis, H.E. Prime Minister Sudani asserted that Iraq's youth can be a source of strength if their immense potentials were harnessed properly. In addition, he mentioned that the Riyada Program is a promising initiative that his government has released to provide career opportunities beyond the stagnated public sector. Subsequently, responding to the question of how to address the factors that hamper the growth of the private sector, H.E. Prime Minister Sudani stressed that corruption will pose an obstacle on the way of the government's program as well as the private sector. He also admitted that without the private sector, the government cannot meet all the demands and services of Iraqis.

Arraf asked H.E. Prime Minister Sudani about his approach in reining in Iran-influenced armed groups in which he answered that this is a "sensitive issue" that faces the state-building and law enforcement efforts of the government. Furthermore, he stressed that the government is the party responsible for addressing the issue of sovereignty and the nature of foreign forces' existence in Iraq. He clarified that the relationship between Iran and Iraq is not one of regency or intervention, but rather stems from historical, political, social, and cultural mutuality as neighboring nations.

Regarding the Iranian-Saudi Agreement, H.E. Prime Minister Sudani expressed his view that it aligns with Iraq's aspirations for regional stability. He also tackled the subject of religious conservatism and its impact on minority groups within Iraq. He affirmed the nation's commitment to upholding justice and safeguarding the rights of all components within the framework of legality, national identity, ethics, and democracy.

Finally, the interview then shifted to the pressing issue of climate change in Iraq. H.E. Prime Minister Sudani highlighted the existential threat posed by climate change and revealed the government's intentions to convene a regional conference aimed at collectively combating this critical concern.

**“** *I have called corruption a pandemic, and it's required of me to find the vaccine for this pandemic.*



## H.E. Nechirvan Barzani

President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

H.E. President Barzani commenced his address by extending a warm welcome to the attendees of the forum. He expressed gratitude to H.E. Dr. Barham Salih and the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) for orchestrating the forum. H.E. President Barzani paid tribute to the victims of the tragic Halabja massacre and commended the initiatives led by H.E. Prime Minister Sudani to convert Halabja into a governorate, emphasizing the importance of allocating a dedicated budget to facilitate its reconstruction. In addition, he conveyed his support for the measures taken by H.E. Prime Minister Sudani since assuming office and praised the joint efforts of the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in formulating the recent budget and expressed his hopes in achieving the Oil & Gas Agreement.

H.E. President Barzani stressed the pivotal role of the Sulaimani Forum in fostering constructive dialogues aimed at assessing the past and charting a more informed future. He highlighted the role of freedom in making the post-2003 Iraq a key regional player despite challenges. Furthermore, H.E. President Barzani noted that the absence of meaningful dialogue and the failure to fully implement the constitution were major factors that led to the subsequent crises after 2003. He also explained that the declining rights of the civil society and women in particular posed a big obstacle for the social advancement, the building of a modern life, and innovation in Iraq. H.E. President Barzani also spoke about how the multitude of centers of decision making and the use of state coercive power in resolving disputes has harmed the political process and the Iraqi institutions. Additionally, he said that not applying the constitution appropriately produced doubts in the federal system among the people of Kurdistan.

“As we approach the 20th anniversary of Iraq's liberation process, this forum presents a valuable opportunity to conduct important assessments that can inform the future. However, it is crucial that these assessments steer clear of assigning blame for past failures, as this approach is not constructive.

In conclusion, H.E. President Barzani underlined the importance of addressing the pressing issue of climate change. He explained that engaging in negotiations with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey and Iran, in order to find solutions to Iraq's water scarcity challenges is essential. He expressed his admiration towards the Basra Climate Conference and expressed gratitude for the UN's and other friendly countries' support to Iraq's efforts in combating climate change. Moreover, H.E. President Barzani expressed his concern over Iraq's overreliance on oil as the primary source of revenue. He cautioned that as the population continues to grow, additional funding will be required to provide employment opportunities. He advocated for a shift in focus towards funding strategic projects instead of paying public salaries, many of which end up outside the country. Prime Minister Barzani closed his remarks with a call for unity among all Iraqis, as well as within the Kurdistan Region.

“To mitigate the impact of climate change and water scarcity in Iraq, it is crucial to engage in negotiations with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey and Iran. By collaborating with regional partners, we can work towards reducing the harm caused by these environmental challenges.



## H.E. Jeanine Plasschaert

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

H.E. Jeanine Plasschaert started her remarks by recalling her participation in the 6th Sulaimani Forum and the October Uprising that followed her warnings during that event. While she recognized that the current government can't be expected to resolve all the inherited challenges of the past and those emerging in the present, she warned that the demands that existed in 2019 remain prevalent and that band-aid solutions and political inaction must be left behind. In addition, she stated that events after 2003 did not only compound inherited problems from the previous decades, but also exposed new weaknesses. Among the aforementioned challenges she pointed to systemic corruption, weak governance, poor service delivery, unemployment, and over-reliance on oil. However, she also explained that opportunities can emerge from any crisis and that the current government has the opportunity to restore stability but it needs the commitment of a wide range of actors in addition to prioritizing the national interest.

“It's quite simple. The kind of in-depth change that is needed now requires relentless commitment from a wide range of actors, and absolutely, it also requires placing the national interests above all else.”

H.E. Jeanine Plasschaert warned the government from the danger of passing regulations that impose bans or limitations to rights and freedoms and that it could take away from the support the government needs. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of reforming the economic system to not only depend on public sector employment and to limit corruption in the system established after 2003. Finally, she reaffirmed the importance of unity between the KRI authorities to maintain the achievements after 2003.

“Now, in turn, the Iraqi people need to see that slowly but surely, progress is being achieved for all Iraqis and that includes women, minorities, and young people. They need to see that inclusivity and equality are not mere words and speeches but are dealt with as absolute essentials. They need to see that civic space is not being restricted but given room to flourish, thereby guaranteeing the freedom of expression. They need to see that justice and accountability are ensured for all regardless of affiliation or background and they need to see that creating a conducive and all-in environments is at a core of any policy or piece of legislation.”

# Geopolitics: Iraq, MENA, & the Changing Role of the International Community

**H.E. Ann Linde**

Former Foreign Minister of Sweden

**Peter Bergen**

CNN national security analyst

**Dr. Elena Suponina**

Advisor to the director, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies

**H.E. Nickolay Mladenov**

Former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

**Dr. Raad Alkadiri**

Managing Director, Energy, Climate, and Resources at Eurasia Group

*Moderator*

**Dr. Joost Hiltermann**

Program Director, Middle East & North Africa, International Crisis Group



Dr. Hiltermann initiated the panel discussion by asking H.E. Linde about the evolving role of Western nations in the Middle East. H.E. Linde offered insights into the prevailing security challenges within the region. She underscored the significance of Kurdish forces in combating terrorism and recounted her personal involvement in efforts against ISIS, including negotiations regarding ISIS prisoners. Notably, she highlighted her enduring belief in the potential for democracy to take root successfully in the MENA region, despite the setbacks witnessed during the Arab Spring.

H.E. Linde warned that the situation in the Middle East will look very grim in the future as the west is moving away from buying oil. Furthermore, she stated that Europe will have to fill out U.S' role in the region as the latter fades out to shift focus towards Taiwan. She summarized the next chapter of international engagement in counter-terrorism, economic development, multilateral cooperation, and a potential shift between the U.S and EU involvement.

“The next chapter in international engagement [in the Middle East] is likely to focus on counter-terrorism, economic development, multilateral cooperation, and there might be a shift between U.S and EU involvement

**H.E. Ann Linde**

Former Foreign Minister of Sweden



The third question asked Dr. Alkadiri about the deeper challenges that Iraq faces internally and externally. Dr. Alkadiri narrated how Iraq became the ground for proxy wars after 2003 and how that hindered its capabilities. He also elaborated by stating that Iraq has lacked vision in terms of strategic thinking and that Iraqi leaders have allowed themselves to be manipulated by others to advance their own agenda before Iraq's sovereignty and interest. Last but not least, he mentioned that Iraqi leaders should stop looking at the past and there has to be accountability for the present and the future.



The second question was directed to H.E. Mladenov, focusing on the role of the international community in bringing more stability to the Middle East. In his response, H.E. Mladenov highlighted the distinctiveness of the discussion in the forum, where both the Prime Minister of Iraq and the President of the Kurdistan Region were addressing the critical issue of climate change unlike in the past, when H.E. Dr. Barham Salih was the lone voice speaking about the issue.

H.E. Mladenov also pointed out that although Iraq has historically relied on external sources to resolve its challenges, it now possesses a unique opportunity to drive solutions from within. He drew attention to the fact that while the United States is determined to remain in the region, other global powers like China and others will have an increasing interest in this region.



The fourth question turned to Dr. Suponina, exploring Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East and its implications following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In response, Dr. Suponina expressed appreciation for Iraq's active role in advancing dialogue within the region. She drew upon the insights of former Russian Prime Minister H.E. Yevgeny Primakov, emphasizing his concept of multipolarity.

Dr. Suponina expounded on the role the Middle East plays in shaping the «new world,» particularly in terms of mediation and conflict resolution. She highlighted that while it might be simpler to align with one side over another, Russia adopts a more complex approach aimed at maintaining equilibrium in its relationships. Dr. Suponina explained that this balanced stance is a deliberate strategy intended to uphold stability within the region.



“ *In 2014, Russia provided, maybe not so big, but very quick and needed help to Baghdad when it was needed against Daesh, and this kind of cooperation is still developing now and Russia supports strongly Baghdad Initiative and all efforts of Iraq as mediator in this region as Russia strongly supports now the efforts of China towards Saudi Arabia and Iran.*

**Dr. Elena Suponina**

Advisor to the director, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies

The fifth question featured Bergen, focusing on the role of the United States in the region. Bergen began by discussing the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq, drawing attention to what happened in Afghanistan after the U.S. forces withdrew from there. He underscored the importance of the 2,500 American troops in Iraq for ensuring a sustained long-term engagement by the U.S. in the country.

Furthermore, Bergen highlighted a notable absence of self-examination by the U.S. regarding its invasion of Iraq. He drew a comparison to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pointing out similarities in initiating conflicts based on false assumptions and without the endorsement of the UN Security Council.

Bergen concluded by shedding light on China's emerging mediation role in the region, which has contributed to de-escalating conflicts. He suggested that the United States should engage in deeper self-reflection in light of China's mediation efforts.

“ *Earlier this month, Russian foreign minister Lavrov in India at a conference there ... called out an American double-standard on this. And while, obviously, I am an American citizen, you know, there are many many differences, but I would say there is not a lot of self-examination on this issue of wars that are conducted without U.N security backing, very few allies, and under false assumptions.*

**Peter Bergen**

Vice President of New America, CNN national security analyst



# Remarks & One-on-One

## LTG (Ret) Terry A. Wolff

Special Advisor to the President and Senior Director for  
the Middle East and North Africa

*Moderator*

## Mina Al-Oraibi

Editor in Chief, the National



## LTG (Ret) Terry A. Wolff

Special Advisor to the President and Senior Director  
for the Middle East and North Africa

Wolff opened his address with gratitude to all participants, particularly academics, experts, think tankers, students, and Iraq's followers. He addressed the audience in the hall as the future of the country who will set its trajectory and role both in the region and globally.

Wolff clearly stated that the U.S remains committed to Iraq and the region. He described the U.S' relationship with Iraq as strong, strategic, and focused on the future. He also talked about his engagement in Iraq's state building after 2003 and his contribution to supporting Iraqi security forces. He admitted that although security is stable, Iraq is facing other pressing challenges. He explained that therefore, the new ways the U.S is helping Iraq through a comprehensive relationship that encompasses economy, private sector, employment, climate crisis, water scarcity, and energy.

Wolff summarized the U.S' approach towards Iraq in two documents. The first document, he explained, is the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) that details the U.S-Iraq relationship and it's based on what he described as the "shared interest" in Iraq's sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and security and stability, but mainly concerned with economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties. He referred to the High Coordinating Council's most recent meeting as a sign of the maturing relationship and partnership between the two nations under the SFA. He briefly mentioned the outcomes of this meeting and these include building the financial sector, protecting the system from financial crime, and supporting Iraq's energy transition efforts. According to Wolff, the resolution of these meetings was to accelerate efforts especially about Iraq's energy and electricity sectors. He concluded his remarks by summarizing the second document which resulted from these meetings in partnership, deterrence, diplomacy, integration, and values.





Al-Oraibi kicked off the Q&A session by directing the first question to Wolff, inquiring about his current assessment of Iraq two decades after the events of 2003. Wolff conveyed his aspirations for a stable and secure Iraq, with a focus on generating employment opportunities, addressing economic challenges, and tackling climate issues, echoing the sentiments expressed by H.E. Prime Minister Sudani regarding the 3-years budget.

The subsequent question revolved around whether the mission of the Iraq invasion, as implied by President Bush at the time, had been accomplished. While Wolff acknowledged the incentive behind President Bush's statement, he admitted that there is still work to be done after the invasion. Addressing Bergen's remark from the previous panel about U.S. self-reflection, Wolff respectfully disagreed, asserting that self-reflection does indeed exist, actually even across different U.S. administrations.

Moving to the present security situation, Al-Oraibi asked Wolff about how he assesses security in today's Iraq. He pointed to the fact that ISIS still exists in Iraq but admired the Iraqi security forces' continuous pressure on the extremist group to keep the security situation stable. The conversation then dived into the complex issue of repatriating foreign citizens who once joined ISIS, with Al-Oraibi seeking Wolff's perspective on Iraq's concerns and the role of other nations. Wolff acknowledged the

complexity of the matter, drawing parallels to challenges faced with the Al-Hawl Camp and its potential impact on Iraq. Al-Oraibi further delved into the topic of security, questioning the potential threat posed by militia groups in Iraq. Wolff referred to H.E. Prime Minister Sudani's statements and warned that the U.S. and the Global Coalition do not anticipate attacks from these groups, emphasizing it as a condition for their support.

Economic matters took the forefront as Al-Oraibi asked how the U.S. could assist Iraq in combating corruption and returning illicitly smuggled funds. Wolff underscored the detrimental effect of such practices on the slowly growing investor confidence and therefore, the private sector. Turning to the stability of the Iraqi currency, Wolff noted that the government has initiated efforts, albeit acknowledging the need for further measures.

**“** *If (The Iraqi people's money) is being moved out of the country illegally, the problem is it's not going for the betterment of the Iraqi people.*

**LTG (Ret) Terry A. Wolff**

**Special Advisor to the President and Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa**

Moving into the climate topic, Al-Oraibi raised the question of how to bring regional order for climate change to help with the water scarcity issue in Iraq. In response, Wolff referred to the COP meetings and how nations should commit to their promises.

Finally, in response to Al-Oraibi's query about Iraq's greatest opportunity moving forward, Wolff emphasized the foundational role of security, while underscoring economic opportunity as the driving force for the nation's future. He urged Iraqi leaders to create the opportunities young people seek in their country



# Energy: Oil & Gas, Renewables, and Regional Dynamics

**Layth al-Shahir**

Deputy Minister of Oil for Distribution Affairs, Government of Iraq

**Ahmed Mufti**

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, KRG

**Dr. Meghan O'Sullivan**

Jeane Kirkpatrick Professor of the Practice of International Affairs, Harvard University's Kennedy School; former US Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan

**Mr. Abdulla Al-Qadi**

CEO, Crescent Petroleum Iraq

**H.E. Mark Bryson-Richardson**

Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Iraq

*Moderator*

**Dr. Andrew Parasiliti**

President, Al-Monitor



Dr. Parasiliti commenced the panel by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the forum on the significant occasion of the anniversary of Saddam Hussein's overthrow and the Halabja massacre memorial. The initial question engaged the topic of global trends in energy policy and transition, and their reverberations on Iraq and the region. Dr. O'Sullivan responded by expressing encouragement at the climate change focus highlighted by H.E. Prime Minister Sudani and the United States' policy orientation in the region.

Moreover, Dr. O'Sullivan acknowledged the existing discrepancy between climate change ambitions and real-world implementation. However, she emphasized the transformative impact that climate change would wield over diplomacy, predicting a fundamental reshaping of geopolitics, including within the Middle East.

Dr. O'Sullivan underlined the importance of adopting a low-carbon emitter profile as a producer and the need for Iraq to pivot its investments toward becoming a preferred oil supplier aligned with emerging oil standards.



**“** *We hope we can cover most of Iraqi demand within this year.*

**Layth al-Shahir**

Deputy Minister of Oil for Distribution Affairs, Government of Iraq



**“** *If you cut the flare of Iraq 1 BCF, it's equivalent to 20 million trees you plant per year.*

**Ahmed Mufti**

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, KRG

Dr. Parasiliti redirected the question to Mufti who explained that energy transition is different from country to another. He described gas as a clean tool for energy transition if it is understood and dealt with properly. However, he explained that Iraq, including Kurdistan, only produces 2 BCF of gas while it needs 10 BCF to cover 24 hours of electricity, adding that international oil companies need to be regulated to make that happen. Lastly, Mufti stressed the importance of developing the refining sector and capturing flaring gas.



The fourth question asked Al-Qadi about his view on the risks and opportunities for investors in Iraq and what he thinks about energy transition and renewables. Al-Qadi explained that in order to fully invest in its oil and gas resources, Iraq needs to work on its legislations and laws to support investors and to consider the private sector as a partner rather than merely a contractor. According to him, these two solutions will enable Iraq to cover most of its gas demand and help solve the problem of unemployment.

**“** *All what Iraq really needs is the will, the plan, to actually you know, exploit that gas ... The opportunity exists and it only needs the people who will make it happen and when it happens really, it will be a true ... change for Iraq in terms of energy independence and in terms also of improving the economy by creating jobs and by helping those poorer areas.*

**Mr. Abdulla Al-Qadi**

CEO, Crescent Petroleum Iraq



The fifth question featured H.E. Bryson-Richardson and asked about how energy is involved in his engagement with the Central Government of Iraq and the KRG. He explained that engaging other governments when it comes to energy and climate change requires trade-offs and coordinated policy making in terms of balancing the short-term and long-term goals. He also highlighted the dependency of Iraq on oil and how energy transition will require transitioning the whole economy of Iraq. Finally, he endorsed supporting the private sector, capturing flaring gas instead of importing gas from Iran, and developing renewables.

**“** *We see a country that is heavily dependent on oil and gas, its entire economy is based on it, it's impossible to escape that and two of the biggest challenges it faces are around energy and economic transition moving forward and certainly all of us in the international community really want to support Iraq with that transition.*

**H.E. Mark Bryson-Richardson**  
Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Iraq



# 20 Years Later: Reflections on Iraq's Past, Present & Future

**Sajad Jiyad**

Fellow, Century Foundation

**Zahra Kadhim Al-Sadr**

Vice President of the General Committee of the National Hikma Movement

**Samiya Shingali**

Sinjari Poet & Activist

**Shivan Fazil**

Researcher, SIPRI

*Moderator*

**Hayder al-Shakeri**

Research Associate, Chatham House



Al-Shakeri opened the panel by providing a brief overview of the events that Iraq has undergone over the past two decades. He highlighted the subsequent challenges of corruption, discontent, and protests, setting the stage for the panel's theme: "What have Iraqis learned, and what lies ahead?"

He then turned the floor over to Shingali, seeking her insights on the situation of the Yezidi people and the potential lessons Iraqis could learn from their experiences. Shingali highlighted the ongoing struggles faced by the Yezidi community and other inhabitants of disputed territories. She underscored that while conventional warfare might have ended, a persistent psychological war continues to haunt residents of disputed territories, leaving scars that often prove more detrimental. Shingali proceeded to detail the challenges facing the Yezidis, including the tragic mass killings in Sinjar, the substantial number of Yezidis still residing in IDP camps, the continued captivity of 2,700 Yezidi females, the incomplete implementation of reconstruction funds for Sinjar, and the insufficient representation of Yezidi youth in governmental decision-making processes.

“ We see significant marginalization from the government towards not only minority but also the youth in general. I have been working for 9 years in volunteering because our grievances and challenges are many, and when we see that the government's role is weak towards us, we have to undertake the responsibility towards our communities.

**Samiya Shingali**  
Sinjari Poet & Activist



In response to the second question posed by Al-Shakeri, Fazil shared his insights on the role of the young generation and their participation in the decision-making process. Fazil highlighted the challenges facing the youth in Kurdistan such as inadequate teaching methods, deficiencies in education quality, and cultural norms that impose limitations on the range of career opportunities available to them.



“ Independents have more freedom in their speech ... Any word that I speak could be taken in a certain way. The idea of independent youth is a very powerful weapon and I wish the Iraqi government becomes aware of supporting them to enable a youth revolution to occur in the future.

**Zahra Kadhim Al-Sadr**

Vice President of the General Committee of the National Hikma Movement



In the third question, Al-Shakeri asked Al-Sadr about her perspective on potential reforms to the political system in Iraq in the years ahead. Al-Sadr emphasized the significance of youth within the political framework. However, she stressed the importance of equipping young individuals with the essential skills and resources required for success in their endeavors. Al-Sadr also acknowledged the significant role that seasoned political figures play in the political process.



“ *When the time comes where enough people, the critical mass, are mature to say 'I don't care, I just want who is a good bureaucrat, minister, politician who is going to make my life better,' that's when we can see the disconnect between us and 2003, that would be the moment of change.* ”

**Sajad Jiyad**  
Fellow, Century Foundation

The fourth question asked about protecting emerging movements from being absorbed into the system. Jiyad answered that this is not possible in the present for two reasons. The first reason being the lack of maturity for the youth due to the system being designed to not help them prepare themselves for the political field. The second reason is the electoral strategies that the established parties are undertaking to maintain the status quo of the political system.



# Economic Policy: The Dinar & the Challenge of Growth

**H.E. Mohammed Tamim**

Minister of Planning, Government of Iraq

**H.E. Qubad Talabani**

Deputy Prime Minister, KRG

**H.E. Ali Al-Allaq**

Governor of the Central Bank

**Basima Abdulrahman**

CEO of KESK Company

**David Burger**

Charge d' Affaires, US Embassy Baghdad

*Moderator*

**Raya Jalabi**

Middle East correspondent, Financial Times



Jalabi initiated the discussion by directing a question to H.E. Al-Allaq regarding the effectiveness of the Iraqi government's efforts in addressing the issue of dinar fluctuation and addressing public concerns. H.E. Al-Allaq, in response, explained the role of the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) and delved into the dynamics of inflation, which has experienced a notable increase over the past two years. He further elucidated how this rise in inflation has exacerbated pressure on the purchasing power and poverty levels. H.E. Al-Allaq expanded upon the factors contributing to these challenges, notably the significant increase in dinar export coupled with a lack of diversification in production, resulting in heightened import dependency and subsequently straining the CBI's reserves.

H.E. Al-Allaq also highlighted a key contributing factor to the current currency crisis which is the shift towards more stringent transaction criteria and regulations. He emphasized that the prevalence of transactions conducted outside proper regulatory channels, primarily through traders who did not adhere to established procedures, has contributed to the prevailing currency crisis. Concluding his remarks, H.E. Al-Allaq cautioned against the government's dependency on the Central Bank in fulfilling the federal budget's deficit and its potential impact on the financial stability of the country.



“ I remember in 2017 the Iraqi Government promised to have 0 fiscal deficit by 2021 in a document for the International Monetary Fund, at that time the deficit was %14 of the GDP. The budget now has %25 deficit of the GDP rather than 0.

**H.E. Ali Al-Allaq**  
Governor of the Central Bank



The second question spotlighted Burger, inquiring about the timing behind the implementation of the new banking regulations. In response, Burger clarified that the timing of these regulations was not influenced by Iraq's political events; rather, it emerged from a series of negotiations and close coordination with the CBI. However, he stated that the U.S is watchful for the importation transactions occurring between Iraq and Iran.



The third question was directed to H.E. Talabani, addressing the banking arrangements of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and how they manage their funds independently. H.E. Talabani's response centered around the budget law and raised questions about its proper implementation. He stressed the significance of establishing a constitutional agreement regarding the oil policy between the GOI and the KRG, which would pave the way for a financial agreement. H.E. Talabani underscored his focus on key elements such as revenue distribution, debt repayment, and the role of the federal government.

“ I think we will never address the financial problems between Kurdistan and the rest of the country until we have an oil law, an oil law that is very explicit in terms of the roles and responsibilities of everybody involved.



**H.E. Qubad Talabani**  
Deputy Prime Minister, KRG

H.E. Tamim began his answer to the question around growth by providing insight into the recent budget planning process. He highlighted several significant issues impeding Iraq's growth trajectory, including excessive operation expenses, both internal and external debt burdens, and inflation stemming from previous administrations' policies. Lastly, he explained that they planned the new budget with maintaining ongoing investments, investing in gas capturing, covering the population's medical and food needs, and involving the private sector to help with providing employment in mind.



“ *I say it with all honesty, this government has not taken a single decision to employ a single person even in the ministers' offices or the current government's offices. Adding the employment money to the budget was to fix the decisions of previous governments and parliaments.*

**H.E. Mohammed Tamim**

Minister of Planning, Government of Iraq

“ *We get investments and financing from international investors, VCs, angel investors, who invest money in US dollar, they want to feel more confident around the stability of dinar When they are putting their money into startups in general in the region, in Iraq, in Kurdistan. So, the fluctuation and the stability of the dinar affects the value of the US dollar they are putting into investing into our companies and it's definitely going to affect future investmentson the long term.*



**Basima Abdulrahman**  
CEO of KESK Company



# Interview

**H.E. Haider Abadi**

Former Prime Minister of Iraq

*With*

**Dr. Toby Dodge**

Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics  
and Political Science



Dr. Dodge initiated the panel by welcoming H.E. Abadi and asking about the advice he would offer to H.E. Al-Sudani, as well as the major lessons he learned during his premiership. In response, H.E. Haider Abadi shared his insights and advice. His first piece of advice was to strike a balance between not becoming overly entangled in details while still maintaining awareness of them. Then, H.E. Abadi delved into the issue of corruption, noting that it often hides behind bureaucratic complexities and stressing that simplifying procedures is key to combat it. He emphasized that corruption is a systemic phenomenon, and merely targeting specific individuals, as in the case of the "Theft of the Century," will not serve as a comprehensive solution to the problem.



## H.E. Haider Abadi

### Former Prime Minister of Iraq

The second question asked H.E. Abadi about the lessons he learned from handling the demonstrations in 2015 and the advice he would offer to H.E. Al-Sudani regarding meeting the aspirations of young people. In summary, H.E. Abadi highlighted the significance of allowing individuals to voice their grievances and demands openly, in order to prevent the accumulation of discontent that led to more substantial protests in 2019. Furthermore, H.E. Abadi advised H.E. Al-Sudani to maintain honesty and transparency when making promises and to be responsible to all citizens including those who cannot reach him.

The third question focused on security, where H.E. Abadi advised H.E. Prime Minister Sudani to not push the armed forces commanders to seek the support of the political parties and provide them with the proper training and support.

When asked about the Coordination Framework and the factors that hold it together, H.E. Abadi clarified that its primary objective is to facilitate dialogue among various political entities. He further explained that this framework was established as a result of concerns that “minority” factions might push the rest to the outside.

While H.E. Abadi underscored the importance of inclusivity in governance, he noted that the existing institutional framework is still not ready yet for fundamental change. Moreover, he made a distinction between Iraq’s political landscape and that of the Western nations, noting that the West possesses well-established national parties, whereas Iraq is still in the process of nurturing such entities.

“ *We haven't built an institutional democracy yet. Our institutions are not very powerful, they are still very weak, and when you do that, you can change a lot of things in the country.* ”

“ *I still say we should be inclusive. Within that, some are talking about majority government, minority government. I say we should be inclusive. In Iraq you cannot go along as just one side.* ”

“ *In the West you have national parties. Here, unfortunately we still don't. I tried, I did try and I did have some success, but it needs time for it to have a foundation and I hope and I wish we will move to more nationalist policies and politics, in that case we can move to a majority government.* ”



“ Halabja became the symbol of the struggle of the Kurdish people and the tragedies they had to endure ... this was a window, a statement about the cruelty of Saddam's regime across Iraq.

“ Mass graves in the south and many other areas are reminders of the horrors Iraqis had to endure under the rule of Saddam Hussain.

“ The lesson of Halabja is that no amount of force, no amount of coercion, and criminality can ever stop people determined to reach freedom.

**H.E. Barham Salih**  
AUIS Founder



# Governance: Corruption & Barriers to Reform

## Judge Hayder Hanoun Zair

President of the Commission of Integrity, Government of Iraq

## Simona Foltyn

Journalist and Filmmaker

## Yama Torabi

Anti-Corruption Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP

## Dr. Zaid Al-Ali

Senior Programme Manager on Constitution Building, International IDEA

## Dr. Bilal Wahab

Nathan and Esther K. Wagner Fellow, Washington Institute

*Moderator*

## Dr. Renad Mansour

Director of the Iraq Initiative, Chatham House



Dr. Mansour welcomed the guests and opened the panel with a question to Judge Zair about his priorities in fighting corruption. Judge Zair started by describing the work on the Committee of Integrity and how it was not given space to perform its duties as a result of previous governments creating sub-committees, which he called “unconstitutional” and that caused the anti-corruption efforts to fail. He also described corruption as an existential threat to the state, democracy, and the rule of law. He highlighted the fact that corruption has gained immunity and cover under the state’s institutions. He explained that when pursuing a corruption case that leads to certain institutions’ officials, the Commission of Integrity gets accused of treason. Judge Zair also showed interest in enabling the Iraqi public to engage in anti-corruption efforts.



“ *There are many obstacles facing the Commission of Integrity but not challenges. Those who challenge the Commission of Integrity at this time will lose and I am giving you this promise and I am responsible for it. We will do everything to beat corruption and place it under the feet of the selfless people who were killed by corruption first before terrorism.* ”

**Judge Hayder Hanoun Zair**

President of the Commission of Integrity,  
Government of Iraq

When asked about the way to combat corruption in Iraq, Dr. Al-Ali stated that he does not think anything has changed in the political environment to make a difference in fighting corruption. He recognized the importance of events like the Sulaimani Forum in making a call for action, but what is missing, according to him, is the political will.



Foltyn narrated the details of the “Theft of the Century” and how it exemplifies the model of corruption in Iraq. She mentioned that the quota-system or “Muhasasa” plays out as the main theme in corruption as it does for the political system. In addition, she explained how different institutions such as the Parliament of Iraq, the Prime Minister’s office, Ministry of Finance, Al-Rafidain Bank, CBI, the Commission of Integrity, and the Chamber of Audit, ignored the issue or didn’t perform their duty properly. Foltyn also stated that while smaller officials are encouraged to report corruption, they are often penalized and threatened, the thing that creates a climate of fear to reveal corruption. Last but not least, she highlighted the lack of accountability and how it harms the relationship between the government and the public.



“ *I think the key take away when we look at [the theft of the century] is that it really tells us that, in Iraq, graft is crafted by consensus, it is not done by one specific side, there is a fundamental agreement between political elites that they will line their pockets with state funds.* ”

**Simona Foltyn**

Journalist and Filmmaker

Dr. Mansour turned to Dr. Wahab, inquiring about his perspective on the potential for overcoming corruption within both the GOI and the KRG. Dr. Wahab responded by arguing that corruption has become common sense in Iraq and that people alongside businesses are forced to engage in it because of bureaucratic obstacles. He emphasized that addressing corruption necessitates a comprehensive approach involving both government-led initiatives and societal engagement. Furthermore, Dr. Wahab criticized businesses for not actively participating in anti-corruption efforts, noting that they often find workarounds around bureaucratic obstacles. In a comparative context, Dr. Wahab pointed out that identifying the responsible parties for corruption is more straightforward in the Kurdistan Region, which he described as two regions under one party's rule.



In the next question about what Iraq could learn from the experiences of other nations in combating corruption, Torabi drew a comparison between the corruption challenges faced by Iraq and those encountered by Afghanistan. In his response, he introduced the concept of the «displacement of corruption,» a phenomenon that can arise when attempts are made to address corruption solely by simplifying bureaucratic processes. Finally, he suggested that more system-sensitive solutions and those with social empowerment elements work better.





# Environment: Climate Change, Water, and Conflict

**H.E. Jassim Abdul Aziz Al-Falahi**

Deputy Minister of Environment, Govt. of Iraq

**H.E. Mahdi Rasheed Al-Hamdani**

Former Minister of Water Resources, Govt. of Iraq

**Khalid Sulaiman**

Environmental Journalist

**Glada Lahn**

Senior Research Fellow, Environment and Society Programme, Chatham House

**Jassim Al-Assadi**

Co-Founder and Head of Nature Iraq

*Moderator*

**Dr. Mac Skelton**

Executive Director, Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)



Dr. Skelton opened the panel by highlighting the fact that water scarcity is not simply a matter of lower precipitation levels or upstream damming practices, but is also a matter of water infrastructure and management. He then directed the first question to Sulaiman, inquiring about the agricultural communities that he encountered during his work in environmental journalism.

Sulaiman spoke about what he called the miserable water reality in Iraq in terms of water scarcity and pollution. He urged to involve the local communities in the decision-making process to be able to implement their “innate culture.” He also mentioned that there is an imbalance between the dwindling fundamental resources and the rapidly growing population. Lastly, he raised the argument that it’s essential to report people’s stories alongside policy and statistical research.



H.E. Al-Falahi began by drawing attention to the alarming decline in water resources in Iraq’s marshes area and the complete drainage of the historical Sawa Lake. He emphasized that Iraq faces a unique set of challenges related to climate change, including drought, soil degradation, desertification, sandstorms, reduced water supply, and lower precipitation levels. He identified water scarcity as one of the most critical national security threats due to its contribution to the displacement of agricultural communities.

H.E. Al-Falahi outlined the role of the Ministry of Environment as a supervisory and monitoring body that is tasked with overseeing water quality in water sources, monitoring groundwater levels, and assessing the environmental impact of agricultural activities. The Ministry of Environment collaborates with other executive ministries and governmental institutions to ensure compliance with environmental standards. When violations occur, the Ministry of Environment employs a range of measures, including issuing warnings, imposing fines, and pursuing legal action.



“ You can see that with the IPCC's scenarios. We do have influence over what happens after that and how intense the impacts are. So, it's absolutely essential that we reduce emissions with immediate effects, and that's not just Carbon but Methane ... Iraq and all the other countries in the world have a role to play there.

**Glada Lahn**

Senior Research Fellow, Environment and Society Programme, Chatham House

Next, Dr. Skelton introduced Al-Assadi and asked him about the activism and work he has been doing in the marshes and the south. Al-Assadi started by highlighting the tremendous value of the Iraqi marshes. He then spoke about his work in restoring the Iraqi marshes after 2003. He also explained that after water started becoming limited, water mismanagement and negligence of the marshes’ importance caused them to dry out. He also called for the authorities to financially support the residents of these areas to adapt to their crisis.



“ [Marshes] are an important part of the world as it includes the most important habitats for birds, animals, and Mammals. At the same time, they have environmental and economic value in addition to the local residents of these marshes who are the only thing left of our Sumerians and Akkadians predecessors.

“ What I want to commend is that women in the marshes of southern Iraq perform %70 of the economic activity and a significant social activity, however they are deprived of a dedicated budget.

**Jassim Al-Assadi**

Co-Founder and Head of Nature Iraq



Building on the points raised by Al-Assadi, H.E. Al-Hamdani began by highlighting a historical shift in water management practices. Prior to 2005 he explained, the predominant approach was focused on managing floods, but this was replaced by a growing emphasis on drought management. H.E. Al-Hamdani concluded his remarks by mentioning the fact that approximately 5 million cubic meters of pollutants is being discharged daily into the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.



# Security: Conflict & Stabilization in Iraq and the Region

## Staff Major General Omar Salih Hassan

Chief of Staff of the 70 Forces

## Sarhang Hamasaheed

Director, Middle East Programs, United States Institute of Peace

## Dr. Amy Austin Holmes

Visiting Scholar the Elliott School of International Affairs at GW University

## Dr. Joseph Bahout

Director, Issam Fares Institute, American University of Beirut

## Hamid al-Shatri

Head of the National Security Agency

*Moderator*

## Dr. Dov S. Zakheim

Senior Advisor, Center for Strategic and International Studies former U.S Under Secretary of Defense



Dr. Zakheim started the panel by granting Dr. Holmes the opportunity to express her gratitude for the opportunity of academic freedom AUIS is allowing. Then, she reflected on the situation in Sinjar and the Sinjar Agreement, demanding new measures to better represent the aspirations of the local community.



“ *The previous government signed what they called the Sinjar Agreement ... but they should have perhaps called it the Erbil-Baghdad Agreement because a major short-coming of that agreement is that the local community in Sinjar as well as the Yezidi diaspora were not properly consulted ... You can't make a Sinjar Agreement without consulting the people of Sinjar.*

**Dr. Amy Austin Holmes**

Visiting Scholar the Elliott School of International Affairs at GW University

“ *... I strongly believe, based on specific examples and case studies, that the mindset of peace, the capital of peace, the action for peace is increasing in this country, in the Middle East Region.*

**Sarhang Hamasaheed**

Director, Middle East Programs, United States Institute of Peace



Following that, Dr. Zakheim asked Al-Shatri about his efforts in repatriating ISIS families. Al-Shatri started by briefing about the security situation regarding ISIS. He stated that ISIS has been defeated militarily and is on the way to being defeated security-wise and intelligence-wise. He continued that ISIS' effective members do not exceed 500 and are restricted to caves in geographically difficult areas and therefore are incapable of occupying and holding cities. Moreover, Al-Shatri warned about Al-Hawl camp and described it as a “mini-state” for ISIS as a result of lack of security hold over it. He explained that the Iraqi government has returned about 7000 people from this camp to Iraq and is working on repatriating them. Furthermore, he promoted the idea of social reconciliation and emphasized the importance of the steps undertaken to form a national center for fighting extremism.



“ *[ISIS] presence is restricted to rural areas. Regretably, they are still taking advantage of some contradictions, especially the relationship between the federal forces and the Peshmerga in the KRG, the thing that we are trying to close up completely through coordination with our brothers in the KRG.*

**Hamid al-Shatri**

Head of the National Security Agency

The subsequent question was directed to Staff Major General Hassan, inquiring about whether his force receives adequate financial support and what challenges they encounter. Staff Major General Hassan spoke about the shortages in arms and emphasized the need for more advanced weapons and equipment. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of increased budget allocation and the establishment of legislations to restructure the Peshmerga forces, facilitating better integration into the federal armed forces.



Dr. Zakheim asked Dr. Bahout about what the KRG can learn from the Lebanese experience. Dr. Bahout began by mentioning the financial crisis Lebanon is facing. Then, he spoke about the Lebanese-Israeli Agreement and how the U.S played part in tailoring this deal between Hezbollah and Israel. Finally, he underlined the importance of the role played by non-state actors like TotalEnergies in making this deal happen.



Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) | American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS)  
+964 770 139 5009 | [sulaimani.forum@uis.edu.krd](mailto:sulaimani.forum@uis.edu.krd) | [www.uis.edu.krd/iris](http://www.uis.edu.krd/iris)