AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ SULAIMANI FORUM دیداری سلیمانی ملتقی الس The Fourth Annual March 16-17, 2016 Upheaval and Transformation in the Middle East: Confronting ISIS and Beyond



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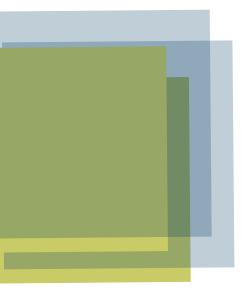














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## **The Fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum**

## Upheaval and Transformation in the Middle East: Confronting ISIS and Beyond

## American University of Iraq, Sulaimani March 16 & 17, 2016

**Conference Proceedings** 

**Edited by Sara Bajalan** 

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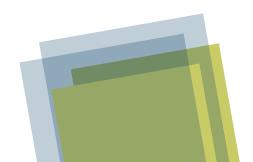


















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# **Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)**

The Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) is an independent research center based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Through multidisciplinary research, strategic partnerships, a fellowship program, and open dialogue events among experts and influential public leaders, IRIS examines the most complex issues facing the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East.

IRIS is housed at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), Iraq's only independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. IRIS's location offers academics, journalists and institutions access to areas of interest and a safe space in an otherwise unstable region, making it an attractive, unique meeting place.

The Institute's main focus areas include but are not limited to: post-ISIS Iraq and Syria, energy and the economy, IDP and refugee issues, regional geopolitics, gender and archeology.



## **Sulaimani Forum**

The Annual Sulaimani Forum is IRIS's flagship conference and is becoming one of the premier events of the Middle East, where academics, experts, and policymakers constructively address the most difficult questions facing the region over the course of two days. This year's Forum, "Upheaval and Transformation in the Middle East: Confronting ISIS and Beyond" convened on the 28th anniversary of the Halabja massacre in 1988 and on the centennial of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. The past century has been one of transformation and tumult, as citizens of the region have struggled to establish economic, political and judicial systems in their respective countries. In recent years, these struggles have come to a head both peacefully and violently with the Arab Spring and the onslaught of DAESH, forcing states to consider, more seriously than ever, how to chart a path forward. Prominent scholars, government officials, political leaders, and journalists from around the world came together at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani to discuss the war against DAESH, regional dynamics, the economic crisis and challenges for reform, extremism in the region, and the possibilities of breakups and alliances emerging from the turmoil and disorder.

Participants included high-level officials from the central government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Prime Minister of the KRG HE Nechirvan Barzani gave the inaugural address, while the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iraq Ibrahim al-Jaafari delivered the keynote speech. The National Security Advisor to the Iraqi Government Faleh Fayadh, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk, Peshmerga Commander Jaafar Mustafa, and the Governor of Ninewa Noefel Humadi Sultan spoke on the first panel, focusing on different forces involved in the military operations against DAESH. The Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly Yousif Mohammed Sadiq, the Iraqi Minister of Higher Education Hussein al-Shahrestani, leader of the Mutahidoun Alliance Osama al-Nujaifi, and Special Representative

to the Secretary General for Iraq at UNAMI Jan Kubis participated on the second panel and examined the political, economic, and security challenges facing Iraq. Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Hemin Hawrami, Head of Kurdistan Democratic Party foreign relations office, Salman Ali al-Jumaili, the Iraqi Minister of Planning along with Hasan Turan, an Iraqi MP, and Ambassador Crocker, former US Ambassador to Iraq looked at the "Clear, Hold, Build" as principle components of defeating DAESH in Iraq and Syria on the third panel. The Former Secretary General of the Arab League Amre Moussa, the KRG President's Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein spoke about regional dynamics on the fourth panel. Qubad Talabani, the KRG Deputy Prime Minister, Adil Abdul Mahdi, the Iraqi Minister of Oil, Ali Alaq, the Governor of Iraq's Central Bank, and US Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones participated in the fifth panel on the economic crisis and the challenges of reform. Ranj Talabani, the head of Zanyari (Intelligence Services), presented on a panel discussing the extremist narrative in militarized societies.

Leading journalists, analysts and thinkers were also major contributors to the discussion both on the panels and in the audience. Thomas Friedman, well-known *New York Times* columnist and author, was in the audience on his second trip back to Sulaimani since delivering the commencement speech at the third AUIS graduation ceremony in May 2014. Jane Arraf of *Al Jazeera*, Liz Sly of the *Washington Post*, and Cengiz Çandar were amongst the leading journalists covering current affairs in the Middle East who participated in, and attended the forum. Taher Barake, the presenter of Political Memoirs at Al Arabiya took part in the Forum by moderating a panel on Iraq's future prospects.

Analysts from various think tanks and study centers were also present, most notably, Mina al-Oraibi, a Yale World Fellow; Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow at Brookings Institution; Sir John Jenkins, Executive Director of IISS Middle East and former British diplomat who served as Ambassador to several countries, including Syria and Saudi Arabia; Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin, President of the Middle East Institute in Washington; Laith Kubba, Senior Director for Middle East & North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy; Joseph Bahout, visiting Fellow at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Amberin Zaman, Fellow at the Wilson Center. They took part in discussions on efforts to rebuild and ways to combat sectarian divisions in the midst of proxy wars. World Bank's Iraq Director Sibel Kulaksiz, the Google think tank Jigsaw Director Yasmin Green, Hudson Fellow Institute Nibras Kazimi, and Senior Fellow at Woodrow Wilson Center Robin Wright contributed to the panel discussions on extremism and turmoil in the region.

The Forum was organized by IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn, Coordinator Zeina Najjar, and Media and Public Relations Manager Bzhar Boskani. The support of Henri Barkey and Mina al-Oraibi, both members of the AUIS Board of Trustees, was essential in the planning, oversight, and implementation of the event. The Forum would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors and the efforts of the Communications, IT, Security, and Facilities Management departments, as well as the AUIS student and staff volunteers. IRIS and AUIS sincerely appreciate the support of the security forces of the Sulaimani Governorate, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Sulaimani Asayesh, and the Sulaimani International airport. AUIS would especially like to thank the Protocol team of the KRG Prime Minister whose efforts greatly facilitated the organization of the Forum. A special thanks is due to Ranj Abdullah for his excellent photography of the Forum.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Christine van den Toorn, IRIS Director**

The fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum convened at a pivotal time in the history of Iraq and the greater Middle East. Regional competition for influence and power is exacerbating domestic instability in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, creating a febrile mix. Political and socioeconomic tumult has already been manifest in revolution and violence, and has bred extremism that is most manifest in rise of DAESH and other terrorist groups. These conditions are reshaping thinking about the state and governance in Iraq and the Middle East. Pressure on the existing nation-state model that has prevailed for the past century is forcing a reimagining of governance systems and the underlying social compact that has underpinned them; international borders are being reshaped; and governments are being forced to consider much-needed economic reform as well as how to engage a new generation of technologically savvy citizens determined to improve their future.

Over two days, a diverse group of highly respected, local and international speakers considered these key issues, and discussed both the impact of the prevailing dynamics on Iraq and the Middle East. Participants debated which forces were most important in shaping the region, and provided potential road maps towards a more stable, less violent future.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement is one hundred years old this year, and this anniversary, as well as current regional dynamics and emerging powerful non-state actors, create momentum to reflect upon the possibilities for the future. They might represent a rare opportunity to constructively and productively effect change. What will the 21st century Middle East look like? It is time to reassess our conception of borders and of the legitimacy that they hold. The cost of protecting an outdated regional order now seems to high to bare; boundaries may shift, and give rise to new, rightful entities or perhaps borders of present nation states becoming much less relevant. Those ideas permeated all discussions at this year's Forum, and must be central considerations for policy-making in the future.

#### Among the key conclusions of the Forum were:

- Regional borders are not immutable. As the regional order is unravelling, and states of the region evolve, the political map that has existed for the past century is likely to change. The borders informed by the Sykes-Picot agreement will need to be rethought to reflect present circumstances. This process can contribute to stability if it is achieved through negotiation and dialogue rather than through violent competition.
- Extremism, particularly in the form of DAESH, is the greatest immediate challenge to Iraq and the Middle East, and this risk is expanding beyond the region to threaten Europe as well. It was acknowledged by a number of participants that degrading DAESH would be very difficult, even though some progress had already been made. But the task is further complicated by the impact of domestic rivalries and regional proxy war, all of which are fueling instability and violence.

- A military solution will not be sufficient to defeat DAESH. Winning the war of ideas will be a critical element to combating extremist ideologies that are promoting violence. Islamist extremists have used modern technology and social media to spread their message and to weaponize history, promoting an imperial project that appeals to a swathe of younger Muslims worldwide. Winning the hearts and minds of this constituency by challenging the ideas of extremists and using technology cleverly will be critical to deradicalization.
- A new political and security order will also be needed if DAESH is to be dislodged. The erosion of state sovereignty in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, combined with the interference of regional powers engaged in a battle for influence, has helped to create a vacuum that DAESH and other non-state actors have filled. Good governance, enhancing the rule of law, and ensuring justice will be a critical part of future reconciliation and stability.
- Economic reform will also be a key requirement, especially in Iraq. The country is rich in resources, including in oil and water. However, the absence of structural adjustment to reduce the bloated public sector and encourage private-sector investment is critical to economic growth.
- In Iraq, these changes will necessitate a new socio-political compact underpinned by constitutional change. The post-2003 order is no longer sustainable, even if DAESH is defeated. A commonly agreed state model will need to be introduced that limits the right to bear arms to state actors and accommodates the demands of all of Iraq's various constituencies. This framework will, by necessity, need to incorporate a greater decentralization of power, and address key deficiencies of the present political order, including the emphasis on power acquisition rather than power sharing.
- Addressing the issue of displaced people will be an important long-term challenge to stability. The record of encouraging the return of displaced communities has thus far been a mixed one, but important lessons are being learned. Governments will need to ensure greater local empowerment in order to muster greater trust among displaced populations. But they will also need to acknowledge that different situations will require different solutions to reflect the uniqueness of each individual situation. As a result, adaptable reconstruction solutions will be key.

Key and unique to the Sulaimani Forum is not just the topics explored but the diversity of the speakers and audience, as the problems and solutions of the Middle East require both local, reginal and international engagement. The location of the event – a safe space in the heart of the tumultuous Middle East – allows a gathering of individuals and organizations from all over the world: Kurdish, Iraqi, Turkish, Syrian, Saudi, Jordanian, European, and American students and professors, analysts and researchers, officials, practitioners, and journalists.

### Dr. Barham Salih, Founder and Chairman of AUIS Board of Trustees

## **Welcoming Speech**

Dr. Barham Salih, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani welcomed the distinguished guests in the audience at the Fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum and began his speech in the opening ceremony by remembering the Halabja massacre. The first day of the Forum coincided with the 28th anniversary of Halabja Memorial Day, a day when Saddam's chemical attack took the lives of 5,000 innocent civilians. "We said never again." And yet recently, he continued, DAESH forces used chemical weapons in Taza. He stressed that this event should serve as a reminder to all that "we cannot be complacent; we cannot be ignorant of the tough realities of our part of the world". To prevent similar events in the future, Dr. Salih emphasized the need for combating sectarianism and terrorism, the need for cooperation between all groups in the region, and the need to use available resources to their fullest extent.

The Middle East is undergoing fundamental transformations and therefore it is imperative to ensure that the political and security order in the region is established in such a way that people's rights are respected and extremism does not have the opportunity to flourish in our midst as it has had in the last few decades. There are many pressures on the people of Iraqi Kurdistan, he lamented, and that there will be more challenges to face in the future; challenges such as DAESH's use of violence, torture, and murder, the destruction of our heritage, and

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The Middle East is undergoing fundamental transformations. It is imperative to ensure that the political and security order in the region is established in such a way that people's rights are respected, and that extremism does not have an opportunity to flourish.



the obstruction of any positive future. Dr. Salih acknowledged that the road ahead would not be an easy one to traverse, pointing out the serious domestic and regional challenges that also face the Kurdistan Regional Government and Iraq. The need to develop and improve our governance is essential in order to solve the struggles of our people and political issues and this, he argued, cannot be done without negotiations and agreements between Erbil and Baghdad. "We are required to work together and be serious about resolving the political and economic problems, instead of being preoccupied with internal feuding. We have no choice because we have to be united in the face of extremism and in the face of DAESH." He went on to say that the Peshmerga forces, Iraqi forces, the al-Hashd al-Shaabi (The Popular Mobilization forces) and the International Coalition led by the United States have the capability to eradicate DAESH militarily; however, the true challenge will be to ensure that a new DAESH does not emerge years from now to afflict the region with the violence and conflict seen today.

Dr. Salih asserted that the Middle East is a place for great change and development. One hundred years have passed since the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 and it is now evident that the boundaries they set in place will change, but what will take its place in the future, he asked. He concluded his speech by hoping that Sulaimani would be an example where leaders will be active in finding solutions to solve current problems and "work towards a future where we have a say in our own future." He also hoped that the Forum would provide a venue for open dialogue between the various officials and friends from the international community; moreover that the forum would be an opportunity to discuss the fundamental issues facing the region to mark a path forward. "Let us truly work together and ensure that this part of the world will never be afflicted by another Halabja again."

## Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government

## **Inaugural Address**



The KRG is trying, in every way, to end this crisis.

His Excellency, Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, opened the inaugural address by paying homage to the memory of the victims of the chemical attacks on Halabja and commemorating them as martyrs. He stressed the importance of working together to solve the country's issues through dialogue and understanding, and the importance of being victorious in ending the fight against terror and DAESH, instead of working against one another within the community. "We have yet a long war ahead of us." However, the political environment in Kurdistan has become difficult because political alignments are breaking down. The people of Kurdistan are suffering from this situation but we are doing all to ensure it does not get any worse, he said. At this juncture, he continued, we need to be united and hold this unity above all else so that terror does not win. He added, "our foreign supporters have also communicated this to us".

Discussing the presidential elections, he imparted that "while the KRG President Masoud Barzani believes that elections should be held, the electoral commission could not organize such an election". It is for this reason, he pointed out, that the representatives of Kurdistan extended the presidency to ensure political unity and security within the region, especially given the current political climate. However, instead of solving impending issues within the parliament, there was an attempt to abuse the parliament and overturn the presidency. He deduced that such attempts have led to many difficulties for the people and have obstructed government operations, which not only could have been productive but also able to implement changes to ameliorate the situation. He argued that internal political disputes and issues occur in every country but "it is now time for all political sides to create unity and make right all the wrongs, in a sustainable way, that ensures safety and stability for all the people of Kurdistan". He asserted that the disputes between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are very central.

The Prime Minister expressed his hope that all parties will continue to collaborate and communicate effectively and seriously with the focused aim of finding resolutions that will restore the health of the government within the Kurdistan region. "We in the government have initiated an important effort in this long process, which will be continuous in nature." At this point, he took the opportunity to thank the public employees, who he called the gatekeepers of Kurdistan, for upholding the values of citizenship. He acknowledged the difficulties that the current crisis has created for every household and its impact on the daily lives of every individual and thus reiterated the need to respect and thank the citizenry. "The KRG is trying, in every way, to end this crisis," he told the audience. Moreover, he continued, the government is hopeful not only that the crisis will come to an end and people's living conditions will improve, but also that the development of Kurdistan will begin again, and this time with better perspective. "God has bestowed on the Kurdish people a land with breathtaking nature and rich in natural resources and because of these we can survive any crisis."

The Prime Minister then turned to the fight against DAESH and the terror, fear, violence, and hardship that has spread across the region and reached the world in a very short time. The conflict has had a devastating impact

on Kurdistan. In particular, the Yazidi community has suffered immensely and among the horrific acts of DAESH, from the destruction of Kobani and Shingal to the destruction of ancient sites, "the kidnapping of our Yazidi Kurdish sisters and mothers has been the most devastating". He pointed out that "until now, we have been able to liberate 2,445 sisters, mothers, and their children, but unfortunately there are still many of them who are living under DAESH".

He thanked the United States for supporting the Kurdish people and in particular for their coordinated efforts and airstrike support in the effort to defeat DAESH. Moreover, he thanked the Peshmerga forces for their fearlessness, for every drop of blood they have spilled, and for the sacrifices they make every day to protect Kurdistan and indeed the rest of the world. He emphasized how the Peshmerga have proven to be a force without political affiliations and with a great respect for human rights. They are the single most important force within our region, he proclaimed, who have protected all peoples within our lands. Because of them, he argued, the Arab, Turkmen, Christian, and Bahai people in Iraq have sought refuge in areas under the control of the Peshmerga forces and the KRG. On one hand, "this is a source of pride for Kurdistan and illustrates how ethnic and religious diversity is respected in the region". On the other hand, he continued, this also serves as a call to action "for all other affected countries to help with the development and professionalization of the Peshmerga forces". With the Mosul operation underway, in particular, he emphasized how "we want our forces to be as successful as they have been in the past". While the world debates how to stop DAESH, neighboring countries have adopted policies towards the Kurdish region that forebodes a worsening of extremism.

Moreover, Prime Minister Barzani noted the importance of the police and antiterror forces in the Kurdish region. He presented as a crippling challenge the staggering number of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, some 1,800,000, who have escaped to the Kurdish region since the beginning of the war in Syria and the spread of DAESH. In addition to this he stated that the Iraqi government discontinued paying the salaries of public sector employees in the Kurdistan region and the Peshmerga forces, which belong to the

umbrella of Iraqi government forces. He went on to say that the international community, particularly supporting countries, did not pressure the Iraqi government to reimburse the KRG, especially where the Peshmerga forces were concerned. He explained that these factors have contributed to and compounded the economic difficulties facing the region and it has been unfortunate that during this time of war and economic crisis, and with the influx of refugees into the region, no country has offered to provide economic relief to the KRG. He used this opportunity to call on foreign governments to support the people of the Kurdistan region and the Peshmerga forces fighting DAESH.

Regarding Baghdad-Erbil relations, the Prime Minister called attention to the fact that the KRG has tried on numerous occasions to negotiate with Baghdad in an attempt to solve the region's problems, but all to no avail. "We would be pleased to solve our problems with the Baghdad government." However, he highlighted that the government in Baghdad has worsened its cooperation with the KRG year after year. Despite the willingness of the KRG and its political parties to reach an agreement with the central state, there have been no results, and hope for any agreement in the future is lost. He reached out to the Iraqi representatives and officials in the audience and reiterated the KRG's desire to reach an agreement. "We have to be realistic in seeing the future of Iraq with respect to the geography of the country before thinking about changing the political landscape in Iraq. The former agreements of unity have not been successful."

However, the Prime Minister was hopeful that another political system within Iraq was possible, one that could offer all the people of Iraq happiness, stability, and security. The terror that is facing the Kurdistan region is an external force, he said and it is with the blood of the Kurdish people that this terror has not expanded further into the wider world. Kurdistan, he proclaimed, can continue to play a significant role in the area as well as worldwide to ensure peace and stability in the region. Therefore, he concluded that any reformation of the system would not be successful without the voice of the Kurdish people, as they play a vital role in Iraq. He closed with the hope that the Sulaimani Forum would be a place for open dialogue, where students of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani would debate with their politicians as well as experts from all branches of government.

### **Ibrahim Al-Jaafari - Foreign Minister of Iraq**

## **Keynote Speech**



The war against terrorism is not regional. It is international.

His Excellency Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, delivered the keynote speech at the Fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum. Jaafari opened by acknowledging AUIS as an institution that will enrich education in Iraq. In commemorating Halabja, which he called a genocide, Jaafari remembered not the scourge that occurred 28 years ago but rather the city, which he called a hub for culture and literature. Halabja is the city of great Kurdish thinkers such as Nali, Mawlawi, Ahmad Mukhtar, Ahmad Mahmood and many others. These thinkers enriched the culture of the region through their literary works. He also noted that Halabja had fought against the tyrannical regime of Saddam and thus increased the zeal for uprising in Kurdish lands.

Now, the entire world is experiencing a wave of terrorist attacks, he said. "The 20th century marks the beginning of a new kind of terrorism, modern terrorism." Since September 2011 and the first attacks in New York, the terrorists have expanded their operations into Europe, North Africa and the Middle East and Afghanistan. He put forth that the world was not prepared to fight this new kind of terrorism and that it is much more important to fight the ideology of these terrorists than to fight them through military means. Terrorists have come to Iraq from Afghanistan and Syria and do not settle in one country alone; their tendency is to affect neighboring countries. "The war against terrorism is not regional. It is international." Every continent is involved in this war; every country is affected; every social, ethnic, and religious group is afflicted, and finally every age group suffers from the violence of terror, with the youngest victim being a day old infant.

HE Jaafari continued by focusing his talk on DAESH and their operations. The world was shocked in 2014 when DAESH claimed victories in Iraq. He explained that DAESH exploited the political vacuum and the divisions within the society. "Terrorist groups always play on ethnic, sectarian, and racial differences and exploit them to their benefit." He referred to the Thirty Years War, fought between the Holy Roman Empire and its allies and the Scandinavians, which lasted for a long period of time because its leaders were able to manipulate the differences among their peoples to their benefit. It is a wonder, he amused, why the Middle East is devastated by such violence and conflict when it is one of the richest regions in the world in terms of resources and it enjoys a strategic location in the heart of the old world. In fact, he added, the earliest civilization emerged in the Middle East, in Mesopotamia.

Moreover, he emphasized how "We do not want an Iraq with one sect; no, we value all sects but we should not value sectarianism". He continued that an Iraq with no ethnic diversity is not desirable and it is ethnic and religious diversity that adds to the richness of society. The Iraqi government had only newly formed when DAESH swept into Iraq, seizing one third of the country's territory. It had inherited the pre-2003 and post-2003 problems, such as corruption, but as he

pointed out, they had developed a 20-point plan to confront these issues. He acknowledged the problems that exist between the central government and the Kurdish region, and that perhaps there will always be problems, but the main goal is to respect one another. The Foreign Minister said he is proud to say "Iraq has a parliament that appreciates diversity ... that the transition of power has been done through peaceful means ... that we have a successful federal experience in Iraq ... [and] that women are politically represented in Iraq." He stated that women hold 82 seats in parliament and this while women are not allowed to drive in some countries. Iraq still has time to develop; "we are facing many challenges, but we are trying to overcome them". He briefly discussed the financial circumstance in the Kurdish region, how prosperous it had become in the last decade, and how he hoped it would solve its economic predicament.

"Wars and divisions are created easily, but strength is always achieved through unity," he said, arguing that success for Kurdistan is success for Iraq and vice versa. He recollected the unity of the opposition against Saddam's regime next, harkening back to the time when Kurdistan was a hub for opposition figures, regardless of their religion, tribe, or ethnicity. "We focused on what unites us, not on what divides us," he reasoned. Saddam's regime killed Arabs and Kurds alike, as well as Sunnis and Shias. When fighting Saddam's regime, all groups were united, he reminded the audience; and they all agreed on two main objectives, ending the Baathist regime and creating a democratic government in its place. He maintained that it is the entire globe that is affected by terrorist activities and financial hardships and not just Iraq. One year ago, DAESH came dangerously close to Baghdad, Erbil, Hilla and Diyala, but the diversified army, militia forces and Peshmerga were able to fight them and confine them in the Mosul area. That, he said, is an example of unity. "Let us not give up and unite." He concluded by highlighting how complicated terrorism is and that it is based on a very distinctive philosophy, and should be countered with an opposing philosophy. These philosophies and thoughts, he said, will emerge from universities such as AUIS. Jaafari ended his talk by praising Iraq for being a diverse nation and hoping that conflicts in the region will be overcome.

## Halabja Day Remembrance Zmnako Ali and Peshwa Ahmed



The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani commemorated Halabja memorial day on March 16, 2016, by observing a moment of silence at 11:20 AM at the same time the chemical attack occurred 28 years ago. This was followed by a few words from AUIS graduates Peshawa Ahmed and Zmnako Ali who are both survivors of the Halabja attacks. Peshawa, an AUIS graduate in Business Administration, received his M.A in Public Administration and Finance from Syracuse University through an Open Society Foundation Scholarship, and is currently starting up his own business in Sulaimani. Zmnako is an AUIS graduate in Information Technology, who works at Ericsson in Sulaimani. After the Halabja attacks, he was adopted as an infant by an Iranian family and lived in Mashhad until he was reunited with his biological family several years after the tragedy through DNA testing.

Their harrowing personal stories of survival were moving for the audience. Zmnako and Peshawa asked the audience to think of peace while they observed a moment of silence.

On March 16, 1988, as the people of Halabja were preparing to celebrate Nowruz, a traditional festival to celebrate the start of Spring. On that day, under the command of Saddam Hussein, airplanes dropped chemical weapons on the town of Halabja, east of Sulaimani. Approximately 5,000 civilians, including women and children, were killed. No one was there to celebrate Nowruz less than a week later. No one was there to light the fire for Nowruz or read from the mythical Kurdish stories to mark the beginning of Spring. Today, many survivors still suffer from diseases such as cancer, birth defects, nerve palsy and respiratory ailments as well as psychological consequences resulting from the exposure to the poisonous gas. In March 2010, the Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as genocide. The horrific tragedy of Halabja occurred in the final stages of the Iran-Iraq war.



## **Confronting ISIS**

### **Moderated by Jane Arraf**

**Journalist** 

#### **Brett McGurk**

Special US Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL

#### Faleh Fayadh

National Security Advisor, Government of Iraq

#### Jaafar Mustafa

Peshmerga Commander

#### Nofel Humadi Sultan

Governor of Nineveh

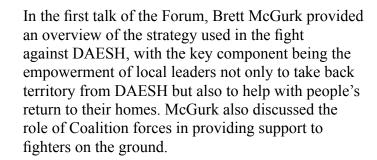
As military operations against DAESH continue, all eyes are on the battle for Mosul. Ridding Iraq's second city of DAESH will require both Iraqi and international efforts. This panel discussed the myriad of forces involved in the war against DAESH - ISF, Hashd al-Shaabi, Peshmerga, and the USled Coalition – confronting DAESH on the battlefield, and preparing the ground politically to ensure their defeat

## **Brett McGurk**

Special US Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL



We are making progress and I think we have the right strategy. The challenges now are economic as much as they are military.



Brett McGurk began by sending condolences on behalf of the United States to the 5,000 innocent families who lost their lives in Halabja. He recalled his past participations in the Sulaimani Forum, where he discussed the same topic about the situation at the time; Tikrit was still occupied by DAESH he noted while Ramadi was teetering and falling to DAESH. "If we looked at where we came since then it is quite a long way, but we have a very long way to go." McGurk noted that 40 percent of territory in Iraq and in Syria has been liberated, amongst the tremendous strides in the fight against DAESH since the Shadadi operation.

McGurk addressed the key features of the strategy put in place, starting with the north and the Peshmerga forces, who, he said, have lost over one thousand martyrs in the fight and who everyone owes a debt of gratitude. He ascertained that the region is far more secure than it was a year ago and assured that the United States will continue to work to ensure it remains safe. He emphasized the important role the Peshmerga forces will have in the liberation of Mosul. Looking at the south, he pointed out that while Tikrit has been liberated, it had been entirely depopulated by DAESH. The city was the scene of horrific atrocities where thousands had been slaughtered and videos of it put on YouTube to terrorize the population.



Upon liberation, he added, the Coalition forces worked with Iraqi Security forces to ensure that the Baghdad government delegated authority to local leaders and paved the way for the return of the population. He recognized the efforts of the United Nations, whose work led 90 to 95 percent of the population to return to their homes in Tikrit, a remarkable feat given the historical complexities. current circumstances, and that less than a year ago the city was still occupied by DAESH. With regards to Anbar province and Ramadi, he noted that Coalition forces in collaboration with security forces are pushing up through the Euphrates valley. McGurk argued that the success of the strategy is due to the formula of empowering local leaders and tribes to take back their territory in partnership with the Iraqi military forces. The formula is working, he maintained, despite progressing slowly and with extreme difficulty. When discussing the liberation of Mosul, therefore, he stressed the importance of empowering the people of Nineveh to be an integral part of the operations.

McGurk enumerated the ways in which Coalition forces have supported the war effort against DAESH. The gathered intelligence about DAESH's network is now more complete than ever; "we have more intelligence than before and we act upon that intelligence". A main DAESH leader is being killed every two or three days. However, Coalition forces know more about how DAESH is operating in Syria and their movements there, he noted. Talking about the liberation of Shadadi, he explained that Coalition forces knew the town was a citadel for DAESH and that Abu-Bakr Baghdadi was living there for a time. Abu Sayaf, DAESH's number one financier, was captured there and it was the city where they brought

the Yazidis from Sinjar as slaves for their fighters. Shadadi had to be liberated. Overall, he argued, Coalition forces are working across multiple lines to defeat DAESH, not only through military operations, but also by working to return people safely to their homes. He stressed the long-term nature of these efforts.

The Coalition forces, he asserted, are supportive and able to work through difficult and tense situations. He reiterated his point about empowering local leaders. In Anbar province, the tribes are working with security forces and authority has been delegated from Baghdad to these local leaders. This has been witnessed in Tikrit as well. The liberation of Mosul. however, will be one of the biggest operations and will involve the Peshmerga, the Security forces and the people of Nineveh. The road ahead is long, but he assured that progress is visible, especially with routes from Mosul to Raqqa being totally cut off. When DAESH uses back roads, they are seen, found, and killed. The bottom line, he said, is that progress is being made because they are using the right strategy. The challenges now, he surmised, are economic as much as military. But he emphasized the importance of empowering local entities to take back their territories from DAESH with the support of the Coalition forces.

McGurk questioned the resiliency of DAESH in Iraq and Syria and argued that it is a degraded organization, which ultimately cannot withstand a global campaign. "They have not launched a successful offensive operations. Since May of last year they are no longer able to amass their forces and maneuver." DAESH is on the defensive and Coalition forces, working with the Iraqi and Kurdish

regional governments and local leaders, will ensure that DAESH remains on the defensive. Back in 2014, he recounted, DAESH was able to mobilize thousands of fighters with armored vehicles and became a fully-fledged army. Then, they were able to take town after town with good command and control structures, something they cannot do anymore, he explained. Thus, he argued, the death of top commanders and the continual deterioration of their ranks has a visible impact in that they are no longer able to amass and move forces or take any

territory. The ideological underpinning of DAESH is to conquer territory and expand; it is part of their propaganda. DAESH is a terrorist organization with the aim of terrorizing the population. He recognized DAESH not only as a threat in Iraq, but as a threat to US partners in Europe and a threat to the United States itself, a truly global threat. "Everything is trending the right way but this is going to be a very long haul. They will continue to surprise us but we're going to continue to surprise them as well."

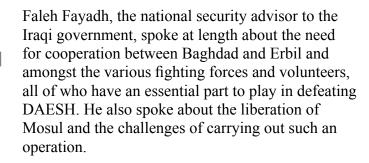


## **Faleh Fayadh**

National Security Advisor, Government of Iraq



The KRG's resistance is Baghdad's resistance. And Baghdad's resistance is the KRG's. We cannot proceed in parts!



He began by remembering the Halabja massacre as a painful chapter in the history of the nation's struggle. "We work together so that what happened in the past is not repeated." The nation's struggle continues with the rise of DAESH in June 2014, when the government and the nation encountered a historical setback. He touched on the political climate of the country and the political feuding and fallouts happening in Baghdad and the KRG. Looking at the fighting forces on the ground, he praised the Hashd al-Shaabi who, he said, in the eyes of the nation have acted as saviors. The Peshmerga as well represent a liberating force to this nation

In the first four months, Fayadh recounted, international support was not forthcoming and the Islamic Republic of Iran stepped in to support Iraq militarily, especially with weapons. They also supported the fighting forces in Erbil in the first days. However, he pointed out, the international coalition only arrived after the Iraqi army had withstood the brunt of the shock. The first page of DAESH's defeat was turned with the liberation of Samarra and Baghdad's neighboring areas. The role of the international coalition, he agreed with McGurk, is to support. In fact, he pointed out, "it is our battle, us Iraqis". At this point, he voiced his

disagreement with Nechirvan Barzani's statement about the Peshmerga being the only force, saying that while he is proud of their efforts, it is every Iraqi soldier, every Hashd, and every tribal fighter. "One supports the other and if one falls, the other will be weak. KRG's resistance is Baghdad's resistance. And Baghdad's resistance is the KRG's. We cannot proceed in parts!"

After this broad analysis, he argued that DAESH's defeat in Syria is also its defeat in Iraq. Moreover, the war against DAESH is progressing at a good pace and is not related to the political disputes between Baghdad and Erbil. He evaluated the performance of all fighting forces, the Peshmerga, the Iraqi army, the Hashd al-Shaabi, and the international coalition, commenting that areas are being liberated daily. While the problems that will arise after liberation are many, he noted that the focus should be on moving forward. He pointed out that DAESH has fortified Ramadi and Salahaddin, arguing that "what happened to Mosul was a military defeat, but what happened in Salahaddin was a moral defeat." Unfortunately, the province of Salahaddin was taken through terror, the use of media, and rumors of defeat while not one shot was fired. He believed the civil strife in Syria created the perfect environment for terrorism and led to the emergence of DAESH or what is called the Islamic state, while being very far from holding Islamic value.

DAESH, he said, was established from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq. These types of movements, he explained, began in Afghanistan where fighters were recruited to engage the Soviet Union. He provided an overview of the reasons that have so far

been given for the rise of DAESH and their ability to recruit fighters, naming marginalization and exclusion, sectarianism and sectarian discord, and the lack of social justice. While acknowledging their potential pull and influence, he nominally dismissed these as real reasons. "But in fact, none of these are true reasons," he said. "Marginalization and lack of justice is not a genuine reason, because foreign fighters are joining DAESH from advanced countries that have social justice and equal opportunities for their citizens." He questions sectarianism as a reason as well, looking to Egypt and Libya, both countries with unified ideologies, as examples that negate the sectarianism argument. Moreover, the ability to recruit is tied to and depends on ideology, which he acknowledged as having a presence in the Islamic world with manifestations in the history of Muslims.

He then turned to the liberation of Mosul and asserted that the battle must be fought with solidarity and unity. The Iraqi army, Peshmerga, the Hashd al-Shaabi, as well as other volunteers in the provinces should fight together. While certain sensitivities from all sides should be taken into consideration, he reasoned, the country of Iraq, with the support of the international coalition, should lead the process. "We strive for cooperation, even in recruiting the volunteers of Mosul and those from the tribes in order to take a stance and prevent a new DAESH from emerging in Mosul." He admitted that Baghdad has disagreements with the KRG in terms of defining the role and aim of these volunteer militias, but he hoped that dialogue between the two sides would continue and translate into supporting the volunteers in Mosul and arming them to fight DAESH. He was optimistic that this could be an



example for the next volunteer force that would be responsible for security in the province. Lastly, he spoke about the challenges facing Mosul, with the first challenge being to understand and agree on a mutual plan for serving the city. The second challenge he noted was the presence of Turkish forces, which is a source of serious concern, not only because Iraq does not want to go against its neighboring Muslim country, but also because it signals a provocation. The presence of Turkish forces does not have the approval of the Iraqi government, and it cannot be ignored due to historical factors in regards to Mosul. He also mentioned Bashiga training camp and the involvement of Atheel al-Nujaifi, who was governor of Mosul, in administering the camp. The Hashd

al-Watani forces in the camp are Iraqi fighters but are not affiliated with the Peshmerga or the Hashd al-Shaabi. They should be considered as non-national forces, he declared, since they do not obey the general command or the command of the army. He beckoned these forces to join a side, "without exception" and "not under the Turkish umbrella, but under the Iraqi umbrella by coordinating with the government in Baghdad and the Kurdish region's government and staying in the system of volunteers in Mosul." This is our stance, he proclaimed. He concluded with the hope that these issues and concerns would be addressed despite the illegal presence of Turkish forces. "Everyone is looking towards the end and what the result will be."

## **Jaafar Mustafa**

**Peshmerga Commander** 



Without us, the liberation of Mosul will not be successful.



The Peshmerga Commander Jaafar Mustafa discussed the readiness of the Peshmerga forces to liberate Mosul and provided a brief overview of the strategies DAESH has so far used to fight the Peshmerga forces.

He opened by speaking about the tragedy of Halabia, an event that shocked the world. Regarding the liberation of Mosul, he claimed it to be the country's top mission and announced the decision to play a key role in this military operation. The Kurdistan region, he said, has become a safe haven for tens of thousands of refugee families who are now living under the protection of the KRG and the Peshmerga forces. Mustafa argued that the Peshmerga bear the responsibility of taking part in the liberation of Mosul. "Indeed, without us, the liberation of Mosul will not be successful," he said. The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs is undertaking negotiations and is engaged in preparations for the Mosul operation and therefore, he noted, the Peshmerga have an active surveillance role in this context. The Peshmerga forces have reached Mosul from three different fronts, drawing close to DAESH from western, northern, and southern areas of the Kurdistan region. The Peshmerga forces have set a precedent for the fight against DAESH, for the liberation of Mosul, and Iraq. He pointed to the active role the Peshmerga forces have played since the beginning of hostilities and asserted the readiness of the Peshmerga to be a part of the military operation that liberates Mosul.

According to Mustafa, since their rise, DAESH has been adopting different strategies and plans for attacking the Peshmerga forces. However, despite



their efforts, the Peshmerga have been successful in halting these attacks and effectively countering them. "DAESH has failed at attacking our strongholds and killing our civilians." Moreover, he explained that DAESH has failed at using TNT, bombings, and suicide attacks in the Kurdistan region and as a result is now turning to the use of chemical weapons on the frontlines in Makhmour and more recently in Tuz Khurmatu. These attacks have resulted in a total of three deaths and 27 injured. The use of chemical weapons by DAESH was indeed shocking to the

Peshmerga and to the international community. The commander asserted that their inability to be successful in other military tactics has led them to increase the use of chemical weapons in their attack operations. DAESH is targeting civilians and using chemical weapons against them. He concluded by stressing that there is fear of DAESH using these weapons in bigger cities.

## **Nofel Humadi Sultan**

**Governor of Nineveh** 



If the Mosul Dam comes to collapse, the consequences will be far more dire than those of an atomic bomb.

The Governor of Nineveh Nofel Humadi Sultan provided a local lens through which to view and understand the situation in the Nineveh province. He touched on living conditions and the need for humanitarian support. Most notably, he highlighted how the Mosul Dam could collapse and cause large-scale devastation.

He began by emphasizing the ways in which Nineveh is different from other Iraqi provinces, as its social fabric is made up of so many different ethnicities, sects, and religions, including Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Kakais, Kurds, and Arabs. Prior to the advent of DAESH, the inhabitants of this province lived together in peace and there is generally no problem with this intermixed society. He explained the emergency plan in place along with initiatives to preserve and maintain the peace. The majority of Arab communities and tribes as well as Christian communities have shown signs of working towards reconciliation.

These communities see the liberation of the Nineveh province from DAESH as the most important goal, he explained. He pointed out that the largest communities in the Nineveh province are Christians and Yazidis, with the Yazidi community enduring the most harm. The horrendous crimes committed against this community include the murder and rape of Yazidi mothers, sisters, and daughters, he lamented. However, approximately 1,500 Yazidi women have been liberated and there has been an outpouring of financial and psychological support for these communities. The federal government has also been requesting support for the Yazidi community. And while most of Nineveh's inhabitants have faced the cruelty of DAESH equally, the Yazidi

community's fate has been affected by this experience the most.

According to Sultan, the people living in the province of Nineveh, including the Christians and Kakais, are suffering from looting and killing on a daily basis and are trapped within the province, with the city center under siege. He explained how their plight is worsened by the lack of any electricity, clean water, or basic services. Salaries for the employees are in arrears. He stressed that the people living in Nineveh province cannot be viewed as a homogenous block and while some sympathize with DAESH, there are many who do not support them. He further explained that there are many cases being reported of killings and executions of police officers, government employees and even university professors and teachers. Some are random, while others are public executions that include torture. On one hand, the tragedy of losing the provider of a family in such a way is unspeakable and on the other, the desperation of not having a salary is also ruinous. He pointed out that many people are escaping to Turkey and this carries the risk of being killed or captured.

The Nineveh province is suffering through a tragic episode in its history, with many people simply trapped in the city, said Sultan. The province, according to him, has not received any support in the four months since he has been appointed as governor. He highlighted the humanitarian crisis resulting from these horrible conditions and how many refugees are surviving with no services, no medication, and no treatment. He took the opportunity however to thank the local governments and the southern provinces for taking in the refugees and IDPs and acknowledged the difficulties associated with such an effort. But he said, "I call for humanitarian support for the recovery of the human resources of the government of Nineveh from this disaster."

His last point of discussion was the Mosul Dam and the dangers associated with its collapse. "If the Mosul Dam collapses", he warned, "the consequences will be far more dire than those of an atomic bomb". It will have a devastating impact on the entire region, destroying in its path not only the fields but also the buildings and the people of the Nineveh province. He concluded that the Nineveh province looks to Baghdad for leadership and close collaboration with the central government. In response to their requests, he noted, the Prime Minister visited the dam and held a comprehensive meeting with the Minister of Water Resources to urge the Italian Trivi Company to implement a solution to the erosion problems in the Mosul Dam, specifically gate number two, which is the critical gate that could, at any time, cause the collapse of the Mosul Dam

## **Day After: Prospects for Iraq**

### **Moderated by Taher Barake**

**Presenter of Political Memoirs. Al Arabiya** 

#### Yousif Muhammed Sadiq

Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly

#### Hussein al-Shahrestani

Minister of Higher Education, Government of Iraq

#### Osama al-Nujaifi

Head of the Mutahidoun Alliance

#### Mina al-Oraibi

Yale World Fellow and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees

#### Jan Kubis

Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq, UNAMI

While DAESH poses the most immediate threat to Iraq, it is by no means the only one. Thirteen years after the war to remove Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, prospects for the future of Iraq are undermined by political, economic, and security challenges. The panel addressed these challenges and ways in which Iraq can emerge from crisis management towards a stable trajectory.

# **Yousif Muhammed Sadiq**

Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly



We have to solve the issues that have caused the rise of DAESH, which will continue to become the cause of hardship otherwise.



HE Yousif Muhammed Sadiq, Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly, looked at the reasons for the spread of terrorism in the region, specifically the lack of a democratic system. Delving into the democratic situation in the Kurdistan region, he called for the government to uphold the principles of democracy.

Sadiq began his talk by commemorating not only the martyrs of Halabja but also the Kurdish martyrs and indeed all martyrs of DAESH's terrorist acts. DAESH will not be easily defeated and the struggle to defeat them will be long. "DAESH is only one scene amongst many horrific events that belong to the history of Iraq since its inception," he bemoaned. In the past 50 years, especially, Iraq has witnessed various internal conflicts and indeed has created conflict elsewhere in the region as well. He argued that Iraq must become a different country once DAESH is defeated. "We have to solve the issues that have caused the rise of DAESH, which will continue to become the cause of hardship otherwise" The chain of violence since the Baath regime has continued with al-Qaeda and DAESH. The ideology of DAESH, he continued, has a historical and violent background.

He contextualized the reasons that have led to the spread of terrorism in the Middle East and especially in Iraq. He enumerated these issues, discussing each briefly. Firstly, he looked at the relationship of different political entities to one another and the lack of "honest and productive" dialogue among them. "Nothing can be done without communication and dialogue," he argued, "so that political factions in Iraq are not further polarized." Secondly, he touched on the issue of diversity and the need for co-existence in the future. He argued for a red line to be drawn regarding the killing of civilians and



the need for peace in the different parts of Iraq. DAESH has polarized political groups and has magnified and compounded these issues in Iraq. "The most important issue is that we aim towards the further development of our democracy, transparency in our politics, ethnic and religious diversity, communication, respect for each other, laying the foundation for our constitution and laws, and a peaceful transformation of power."

Sadiq discussed the need for democracy further, arguing that the two-party system in the Kurdistan region is a serious problem. The accumulation of power in the center of the government has brought about this crisis. There needs to be more democracy in Iraq and the Kurdistan region. He named the lack of a democratic system and social justice as the reasons for the existence of terror in the society. He argued for another democratic system in the KRG, but warned that democracy should not become paralyzed in Kurdistan. The presence of DAESH on the borders of the region, should compel the government to work on the democratic process, not to postpone it. Previous dictatorial systems have used the same pretext in the past. He presented Israel as an interesting case where despite imminent threats of attacks on its territory, the country continued to uphold its democratic system. Instead of postponing elections, they have sometimes held elections earlier

than planned, he explained. After the 2014 elections, Maliki possessed the right to reappoint himself as prime minister and held the majority in the Council of Ministers. However, the rise of DAESH led to a change in the Iraqi leadership.

"The struggles of the Kurdistan region lie in the continuation of office for one single person." Speaking further about democracy in the KRG, he highlighted that the term of the KRG president had come to an end in 2013, before the fight with DAESH began. The term was extended for an unknown period of time before the war. The reason put forth by the government for not changing the leadership, he noted, has been to ensure that the Peshmerga forces continue fighting DAESH. He held this to be an underestimation of the Peshmerga who he said are the real fighting force against DAESH. Sadiq called for lessons to be learned from past dictatorial regimes in Iraq. Moreover, he noted that the Kurdish people have asked for justification from the Kurdish parliament. The issues concerning the parliament must be resolved and by experts with good governance. "These issues need to be resolved at the soonest possible time because the problems will worsen and their persistence will make improvement in the future even more difficult."

### **Hussein al-Shahrestani**

Minister of Higher Education, Government of Iraq



It is essential for all Kurds,
Sunni and Shia Arabs,
Yazidis, Mandaeans,
Christians, and Turkmen
to come together to discuss
what unites them so that
they can envision the future
of Iraq, and their own
future within Iraq.

The Iraqi Minister of Higher Education Hussein al-Shahrestani presented his analysis of issues that need to be considered in order to build a united Iraq after the defeat of DAESH, listing these points as the need to review the constitution, to implement sociopolitical and economic reforms, to address corruption, to reduce dependence on oil, and to ensure the government is the only entity with the right to bear arms. When addressing Kurdish independence, he expressed his optimism that Iraq would remain a unified country.

HE Shahrestani opened by stating that DAESH will be defeated soon, not only in Iraq but in the world. Once DAESH is defeated, Iraq will have the chance to build a civilized, unified and prosperous society. A similar opportunity was lost after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 and Shahrestani warned against repeating past mistakes. He provided an overview for the points that need to be considered and mistakes that need to be avoided. Firstly, the constitution was written in haste and ratified without the inclusion of large segments of the Iraqi community. He made the point that Iraqis did not agree on many articles and as a consequence the legislative authorities abused these articles. "The constitution needs to be reviewed by all members and groups within the Iraqi states, and it should include more articles that set the basis for the relations between the central government and KRG, and between the center and all other provinces."

Secondly, he emphasized the need not only for political but social reforms. He expressed his happiness at seeing so many Iraqi people asking for reforms, but noted that there needs to be a clear understanding of these broad terms. The third point



he raised was corruption. "The most important type of reform is the one that ends corruption in all its forms and layers of the government and society." He pointed to corruption as the true cause for the defeat of the Iraqi army in Mosul and not DAESH. According to Shahrestani's estimation, it was corruption within the governmental institutions that eased the way for the DAESH takeover. How else could a militia of a few hundred men assume control over such an old and established city, he asked, noting the large army at the time. Corruption, he expounded, is entrenched within all institutions and layers of the government and is not only about a specific ministry, personnel, or institution.

Shahrestani shared his preference for a unified Iraq, but admitted that to have a unified country, the citizens should agree on certain steps. Moreover, economic development would be an essential part of this process. Iraq has been blessed with an abundance of resources, and not only oil, he added. The people are also capable of contributing to economic development. And he lamented that Iraq has become a country that produces oil and imports everything else. Fourthly, this backward phenomenon should be overcome, he asserted, proclaiming that the country should become industrialized and a producer of not only commodities but knowledge as well. Fifthly, he

argued that the government should be the only entity with the right to bear arms. While militias such as the Hashd are fighting DAESH, they should be dissolved after the defeat of DAESH and the liberation of Mosul, with members having the option of joining the official army. Lastly, he expressed his confidence that Iraqis are more than capable of building a new Iraq. "Iraqis should unite!" The Iraqi people are very aware. He recounted how people were suspicious of the Hashd when it was established, but today they are asking them to be involved in [the liberation campaign of] Anbar and Mosul. This is reassuring, he said, showing that Iraq will overcome all these problems. However, he continued, the country still needs reforms to build a better Iraq.

He addressed the question of Kurdish independence as not being beneficial to the Kurds, other Iraqis, or the region as a whole. Looking at the historical context, he pointed out that the attempt to create a Kurdish state failed after the First World War, when there was a trend towards creating nation states based on self-determination. Following the Second World War, new forms of unity emerged, such as the European Union, which is based on economic, political, social, and civil unity. South Sudan and divided Libya are examples of newly formed states and what is happening there, he pointed out, has

led to increasing conflict. While there are many problems between the KRG and the center, it is still possible to find solutions that are satisfying to both sides. "The region is already independent when it comes to political and economical practices." Moreover, he argued that there should not be talking about independence and separation, but rather a focus on good governance and good practices and policies.

Currently national and international efforts are focused on liberating areas under the control of DAESH. Disputed territories will be considered after DAESH is defeated, he added. According to his vision, "Iraq after DAESH should be built on the basis of understanding and harmony among all groups within the Iraqi state." It is essential for all Kurds, Sunni and Shia Arabs, Yazidis, Mandaeans, Christians, and Turkmen to come together to discuss what unites them, and according to Shahrestani, that's the "future of Iraq, and their own future within Iraq". Policies that aim to divide a people, he asserted, only serve the interest of certain politicians and not the people. He concluded with the fact that it is common for nation states to be composed of various ethnicities and religions but he argued, these groups must draw strength and unity through compromise and agreements.

# **Osama al-Nujaifi**Leader of the Mutahidoun Alliance



We are for retaining and preserving Iraqi unity.
But if we cannot solve our political issues, all options should be open for consideration.

Osama al-Nujaifi, former vice president of Iraq and the leader of the Mutahidoun Alliance, contextualized the current state of affairs and addressed the government's stance on autonomous regions, non-governmental militias, and liberated areas. He argued for all sides to join negotiations with the aim of collaborating and reaching meaningful agreements.

HE Nujaifi began by speaking about the growth of DAESH and the mistakes made in the region after the war. Comparing DAESH to a disease, he named the post-war policies and failed political experiences as the main reason for their proliferation. These policies, he noted, were based on the marginalization of different groups within Iraq's society. Many people refused to accept the constitution after it was written, but the push of some politicians who had the support of Iran and the United States led to its eventual ratification. Nujaifi focused on these politicians' ties to Iran, saying that they controlled their own militias - trained and organized in Iran - which still exist and enjoy easy access to arms and weapons. He pointed out that Iraqi politicians have not been capable of solving the various problems in Iraq, problems that have existed before the 2003 war and were remnants of the errors of the Baath regime, as well as problems created by Iraqi politicians in the post-2003 period. He criticized the post-2003 policies as centered on ethnic domination and intervention in the internal affairs of provinces.

He pointed out that the constitution claims to support federalism under one unified state, while many provinces were not permitted to have a federal system. The Shias, he explained, had promoted federalism at the beginning while the Sunni factions stood against it and even opposed the legislation by leaving the hall of parliament, arguing that it would promote divisions in



Iraq. Later, however, the Shias disapproved and disputed the semi-independent regions in Sunni provinces. He explained that the constitution guarantees the right of provinces to vote for and install a federal system in their region and it is the responsibility of the prime minister to prepare the path forward for referendum on this decision. The concentration of the legislative and executive branches of government in the hands of one ethnic group, seriously harmed Iraq and its people, he argued. "The group that made up this type of government usually violated the constitution, oppressed some ethnic groups who did not share their ideologies. and imprisoned many political opposition figures ... Democracy ceased to exist in Iraq." Many prisoners are only guilty of disagreeing with the government, he lamented. Moreover, "The parliament was not able to function because the prime minister and his subjects did not allow it to practice its legislative power. They did not allow it to address issues, suggest solutions, or pass laws." These impediments led to frustration within the parliament, which the Supreme Court, under pressure from the executive power, later declared unqualified to function without the explicit support of the Prime Minister.

Moreover, according to Nujaifi's talk, the government liberation practices are not sound or reasonable and on some occasions even violate certain laws and policies. People are not allowed to return to their homes in many areas that have been liberated from DAESH and the reason given for this from the executive has been the presence of armed militia groups that are not under the control of the government. He warned that tensions will rise if these practices and policies are not corrected. About Mosul, he said that the diverse population and the potential for tension among them after liberation especially should be taken into consideration. He emphasized how the final decision regarding any matter

about Mosul should be in the hands of its Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Yazidi, and Christian inhabitants. Nujaifi pointed out how different Mosul is and that solutions and decisions should not be enforced on it, "decisions which are mostly always wrong". He also inveighed against non-governmental militias, saying that they should not control Mosul as this will lead to greater violence and intolerance amongst the different ethnic and religious groups living within the city.

He warned that if the reform process fails in Iraq after the defeat of DAESH, another terrorist group will rise to power in its place and a bigger sectarian conflict will ensue, one that may last for decades. Militias not taking order from the government should be disbanded and not allowed to take part in any future military campaigns. In addition, he added that the government should respect the right of regions to create semi-autonomous administrations and respect the diversity which exists in various provinces. While destroying DAESH is the main priority, he stressed the need for foresight regarding issues that might arise after the fall of DAESH. "We should solve our problems internally and respect should be our main tool." Nujaifi focused on the need to work together and negotiate, denouncing the other side's lack of willingness to adopt the same viewpoint. "They should not adopt the same strategies of 2010 and 2014 when they broke all agreements." He censured the new government for breaking its agreements and talking about changing the cabinet, an act that government supporters themselves disapprove of. "Even the Shia community is dissatisfied with the government ... we need to promote the right course [of action] and national dialogue to achieve satisfying ends." He concluded that "We are for retaining and preserving Iraqi unity. But if we cannot solve our political issues, all options should be open for consideration".

## Mina al-Oraibi

Yale World Fellow and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees



Dividing Iraq will never solve the issue.

Mina al-Oraibi, a Yale World Fellow and an AUIS Board of Trustees Member, addressed the issue of the future of Iraq, emphasizing the impact of regional factors. She argued for a unified Iraq which can be achieved through open and sincere dialogue, a review of the constitution, and reforms. According to her, the constitution, parliament, judicial system, and the media, all have a role to play in checking the powers of politicians. Warning against dividing Iraq, she made the case that Iraqi people should be proud of their nationality and celebrate the differences in their ethnic identities.

"The future of Iraq is crucial to the entire region," she opened. Regional factors, as well as the connections and interests of some political figures to Iraq's neighboring countries, can have an adverse affect on its future. These regional factors are important to take into consideration when discussing the future of Iraq. She emphasized the need for serious and sincere dialogue amongst different political groups and leaders in Iraq, as opposed to diplomatic ones. She congratulated AUIS for gathering the politicians of the country in one room to hold dialogue, but once they return to their daily work routines, they should not forget about these gatherings or return to the same practices that cause tension and lead to turmoil. She noted the importance of the constitution as the supreme authority in the state that should not be violated by anyone. She argued for the review of the constitution to ensure that it is immune to violations.

Oraibi focused next on the importance of reconstruction after the defeat of DAESH, with reconstruction of the entire social, political, economical, civil, and national aspects of life in



these cities. "These reforms" she continued "will increase the sense of Iraqi identity and belonging among the citizens of these cities." Moreover, the IDPs should be aided, both socially and financially, in the process of returning to their homes. Here, the role of regional powers can be to support this process, which will in turn prove their sincerity and goodwill. She also stressed the need for financial help, not only after the defeat of DAESH, but now, since Iraq is facing an economic recession. Looking at the humanitarian crisis, she mentioned the need to help refugees and IDPs living in horrible conditions and to aid the people of Mosul who will face a crisis once the city is liberated.

She ascertained that while dialogue should be promoted internally, regional factors cannot be ignored as they have a great impact on Iraq. Syria is an example, she said, where the power play amongst regional actors directly affects the country. However, she posited that Iraq should not depend on any other state in the region "to help us solve our problems". Oraibi then focused her talk on the United Nations, which, established 70 years ago to promote peace and dialogue, can serve as a mediator. The United Nations, she argued, would be a much better choice than any other regional country such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, or even the United States. Next, she addressed the issue of unity and a unified Iraq. "At the end I think we all agree that we want a unified Iraq," she said; however, politicians use the rhetoric of independence and separation whenever they are discontent or dissatisfied. "They use these concepts as a weapon against unity, and they seek foreign support to empower themselves."

Oraibi's next point concerned the people and their relationship with politicians. The Iraqi people are more forward thinking than their political leadership. The daily protests, suicide bombs, and other desperate acts illustrate vividly that there is a need for real change. "Real change happens when laws dominate every aspect of the government and life." The constitution, parliament and even the media provide a check on the powers of politicians, who regardless of their nationality are prone to making mistakes. About the media, she said while there is more freedom in Iraq than any other country in the region, the risks and threats are also higher and journalists, especially those who are radically honest, operate under the threat of losing their life. The judicial system is very weak in Iraq, she pointed out, and corrupt politicians never or rarely ever stand trial for their crimes.

"Dividing Iraq will never solve the issue," she concluded. The presence of so many factions and political parties currently in conflict will perpetuate turmoil in the region. What happens to Iraq after DAESH depends solely on Iraqis themselves, she asserted. If however, the right of Iraqis as citizens is secured, then perhaps they can feel proud of their Iraqi identity and celebrate the ethnic and religious diversity amongst them. The goal should be to achieve a condition where the people living in Iraq all feel Iraqi, and are convinced that they are all one, with one connected future. "The conflict among us now is not for independence, but it is for personal interests, money, and power."

### **Jan Kubis**

Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq, UNAMI



Discussion is not a progress, but it is a sign that something is happening.

Jan Kubis addressed numerous issues concerning the future of Iraq and the role of the United Nations as mediator in the region. He spoke about creating the correct conditions in the country, from reform to reconciliation, to progress, emphasizing the need for a sense of patriotism and open dialogue between the people and their political leadership.

Kubis argued that the United Nations has the mandate to play a mediator role, but only if the conditions are right. Discussing the future of Iraq post-DAESH, Kubis asserted that the country will not remain the same post-DAESH as it was before DAESH. Remaining the same would only lead to the burgeoning of DAESH in another form. More importantly, it is for the people of the region and inside Iraq to determine the future, he argued, by evaluating the circumstances and finding solutions. While there may exist the need for facilitation, "it must be the people of the country that must understand that something was wrong when DAESH was able to sweep through the country in almost no time and capture Mosul; that something was wrong that the minorities started to leave Iraq, before DAESH attacked." He delved further into the fate of these refugee and IDP minorities, pointing out that they are requesting international protection, even after DAESH is pushed back. "Something is wrong when eighteen months after the liberation of a number of places in the country", he went on, "IDPs are still unable and unwilling to come back because they know that the conditions are not right for their return."

Moreover, according to Kubis, it is essential for specific issues to be addressed. He used the liberation of Mosul as an example, explaining that it is not only a military campaign and that the humanitarian situation must also be taken into consideration when deciding who will lead the effort, what groups will participate in it, and in what way. The liberation might lead to approximately one million people fleeing the city. He also mentioned the case of Ramadi, when it fell and again when there was a campaign to liberate it. When planning to liberate a city, it is critical to think carefully about the humanitarian aspect and plan for how the civilians who are running away will be treated. In order not to alienate the refugees, measures to process and vet them must be in accordance with humanitarian law. The next immediate issue is the future government, in particular for Mosul and Nineveh. "It is also about a future for the people." If the people, most notably the young people and minorities, do not have or cannot imagine a future in their own country, then they will leave. Statistically, 60 percent of Iraq is younger than 25 years of age, with 40 percent younger than fifteen. When discussing the youth, Kubis focused on future prospects such as employment opportunities. "State Employment" he said is "totally unproductive", adding that it nurtures and perpetuates a system of patronage and corruption. "This is not the future that will enable this country to function as an efficient economy."

When discussing minorities, especially in the post-DAESH period, which has already begun in the many areas that have been liberated from DAESH, he argued that immense amounts of money is needed to ensure the success of stabilization, reconstruction, and rehabilitation. Some places, he pointed out, have attempted to focus on community, tribal reconciliation and transitional justice, usually

not with great success. To support these efforts financially, resources should come not only from abroad but also through reforming the economies of both Baghdad and Erbil. "Without that [economic reforms], forget about a normal future - a dignified future!" Next, he looked at the grievances and injustices of the past, specifically the draft bills, like the Amnesty Law, that have been discussed in the parliament for eighteen months, with no progress or result. "Discussion is not a progress, although it is a sign that something is happening." Mentioning the constitution, he recommended that the government accelerate the process of devolution and decentralization. The program which was put on the table in Baghdad and announced by the Prime Minister last August, he pointed out, has stalled and where it is happening, has been skewed and thus unable to deliver the results. "Without addressing these kinds of issues, of course it would be very difficult to speculate about big dialogue that could be or should be facilitated by the United Nations. This is the homework."

According to Kubis, "All politics is local", but it is important to understand that regional powers act in their own interests and Iraq exists, not in a vacuum, but in an immensely complicated and difficult region, undergoing unprecedented turmoil, which is only increasing, unfortunately. These countries, while in many instances offer assistance to Iraq, are acting in their own interests and very often interfere based on their interests, and not necessarily because of the interests of Iraq. "What is needed is patriotism, from the political forces as well; Patriotism of being an Iraqi." Iraq will be able to withstand interferences from countries in the region and outside the region, if it is able to have patriotism,



he argued. Patriotism is missing, he posited, and needs to be part of the curricula in schools.

Moreover, Kubis noted that the entire world is uniting against the increasingly global threat of DAESH to international peace and security. The fight against DAESH is a serious matter. This means, in concrete terms, that countries are called upon to act and "are obliged to cooperate and use all legitimate means in fighting DAESH - in suppressing DAESH in many areas." The fight against DAESH must be fought on multiple fronts, and countries must cooperate in "curbing the financing of DAESH, preventing the flow of foreign fighters, ... [and] cooperating in finding political solutions". He also discussed the peace process in Geneva to find a political solution in Syria, maintaining that it must be a solution that would be acceptable to the people of Syria. This, he said, "might have positive implications also for the situation here in Iraq." In addition, since it will presuppose high levels of cooperation amongst international and regional

players, it might also help bridge the divides and create opportunities to address other crises in the region, like in Yemen.

Kubis concluded that most political leaders in Iraq, in Baghdad and in Erbil and even in Sulaimani to a certain extent, are well aware of the problems and the sort of solutions that will lead to results. These however, he pointed out, do not always translate into concrete action, either because of a lack of trust, vested interests, or even the fear that, following more conciliatory or more bold steps, they might lose the support of their constituencies. "I believe they should consult the people," he said. Looking at the example of the past year, where the people all over Iraq and Kurdistan sent clear messages about how they envision their future, he pointed out how disappointed the people were with the responses they received from their politicians. Therefore, he advised that a real dialogue should begin between the people and their political leaders.

# **ISIS and Beyond: Clear, Hold, Build**

### **Moderated by Kenneth Pollack**

**Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution** 

#### Sulman Ali al-Jumaili

Minister of Planning, Government of Iraq

#### Hemin Hawrami

Head of Kurdistan Democratic Party Foreign Relations Office

#### Saleh Muslim

Co-Chair, Democratic Union Party (PYD)

#### **Ambassador Ryan Crocker**

Former US Ambassador to Iraq

#### **Hasan Turan**

Member of Parliament, Government of Iraq

Clear Hold Build are the three principal components to defeat DAESH in Iraq and Syria. While military strategies are being finalized, holding the ground and rebuilding areas liberated from DAESH are the secrets to long-term success. The third panel discussed the vying interests and conflicts that could undermine these efforts, while rebuilding trust within Iraq and Syria's various constituencies.

### Ryan Crocker Former US Ambassador to Iraq



The 'Holding' and 'Building' ultimately have to be achieved by the people who will be living here.

Ambassador Crocker provided a broad context for the 'Clear, Hold, Build' strategy and underlined the importance of conclusions about such strategies to be made in concert with the local population. In his talk, he stressed the need for the US to engage with the Middle East and demonstrate that what matters in Iraq is important to its national interests.

Crocker predicted that the Islamic State will inevitably fail regardless of whether through concentrated military action or under their own weight. "When their version of Islamism fails, it will be the next in a long stream of failed 'isms' in this region." In the hundred years since Sykes-Picot, the world has seen the failure of Colonialism, Imperialism, and Monarchism – particularly in Egypt, Iraq and Libya - Republicanism, Arab Nationalism, Communism, Arab Socialism and now this version of Islamism. While they all had divergent philosophies, their point of commonality was their failure. He made the point that every 'ism' has failed to provide good governance, that is stability, security, and prosperity to their peoples. He argued that once the field is clear, any 'Hold and Build' strategy that would follow, would need to be determined by the region's leaders and acceptable to the people inhabiting the area.

Furthermore, Ambassador Crocker argued that any future strategy for holding or even clearing areas in Syria specifically would need to be developed with trepidation and humility. For all their similarities, countries are distinctly different, he pointed out. He remembered when the American administration decided in 2011 that the Assad regime must go; at that time, he recalled being very apprehensive. As an ambassador to Syria for three years, Crocker knew

that Syria would be different. Firstly he pointed to the brutal elimination of the 'Hama Rising' in the winter of 1982 as evidence that the Assad regime, both father and son, had spent thirty years perfecting the police state, knowing that someday there would be a day of reckoning, and unlike the regimes in Egypt, Libya, or Tunisia, the Assad regime was ready for a very ugly fight. Secondly, he noted that as the fight developed, the opposition elements would increasingly move towards radical Islam. Those two dynamics in Syria had been present for years, but unknown or forgotten in the West. These dynamics make the 'Clear, Hold, Build' challenge immensely difficult in Syria. The clearing part, he stressed, is virtually an impossibility at the present moment. However, given the historical and current rancor, bitterness, and divisions amongst the various groups, the holding and building must be agreed on and accomplished by the people living there. At the minimum, the people must trust those who will help them Hold and Build. Moreover, he argued that the presence of external forces in the Hold and Build phase must be at the behest of a legitimate local authority, as defined by the people of the area, and can only be effective in terms of providing support for long-term results.

His advice for the next president of the United States was to "engage, engage, engage!" Not by sending marines, but by treating Iraq as an ally; by sending the Secretary of State to visit the different cities and regions of the country, proving that the United States cares what happens to the Iraqi people. Moreover, the United States, he advised, should collaborate closely with regional states and the international community. Crocker highlighted that Iraq is at the center of the Middle East and is important. The

United States, he argued, has a "real obligation to demonstrate to the Iraqi people, to Iraq's neighbors, and to Americans that what happens in this country affects our national interest and our national security".

Ambassador Crocker recounted his work in early September of 2007 with the then Prime Minister Barham Salih, who was very instrumental in the efforts, and Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi to convince Prime Minister Maliki that a gesture towards the Sunni community, in particular in the province of Anbar, where the US was working hard with the sons of Iraq against al-Qaeda, would make a big difference. The Prime Minister approved a 250 million dollars budget supplemental for the province of Anbar, the first province to be given a supplemental budget. He recalled when he, Barham Salih, and Adel Abdul Mahdi had travelled to Ramadi to meet with several hundred Anbari notables to make the announcement about the supplemental budget. The encounter demonstrated that compromises can be reached and that such gestures, across sectarian divides, can have a powerful impact. This had a medium-term impact of some significance. However, he mentioned, realizing how deep mistrust and bitterness ran between communities and even within communities had a very sobering effect. He observed that the experiences of war in Iraq and Syria are too complex to be easily forgotten and while those coming from a different background can advise to move forward with a new life, the reality is quite different. And that realization, he pointed out, only came about "after a lot of time and a lot of conversations with a lot of different communities"

### **Sulman Ali al-Jumaili** Minister of Planning, Government of Iraq



We must take a 'sustainable peace' approach, and not a quick approach to peace.

The Minister of Planning al-Jumaili discussed the need for reconciliation in liberated territories and gaining the people's support to ensure that peace will be sustainable and society moves forward without fear of the future.

He emphasized the importance of reconciling those who have been harmed with those who sympathized with DAESH, and indeed with the security forces. Unfortunately, he pointed out there has been evidence of acts of revenge in some areas. He noted that the government must understand the priorities set for societies under the control of DAESH. Discontent with the government has created an environment within which DAESH has been able to spread its ideology. "These problems must go away and they won't go away unless there are new procedures." Reconciliation, he maintained, must be based on justice that provide the means to achieve peace. However, justice cannot be implemented in its entirety before reaching reconciliation. Moreover, he argued that many issues could be resolved through political means.

He then spoke of two specific experiences; the liberation of Tikrit and Baiji and the liberation of Ramadi, which was the more successful example compared to Baiji. In Baiji, satellite images from the moment it was liberated compared to images today show a vast difference in the level of destruction of construction sites; according to local officials, while only 20 percent of sites had been destroyed prior to liberation, over 80 percent has been torn down since, in a systematic destruction of the refineries there. In Ramadi, on the other hand, destruction was directly related to the military operations which liberated the city. Why this difference? He explained that in



Ramadi internal security forces collaborated with people from the city in the process of opening the streets, clearing the mines, and settling people, and this proved to be a successful experience, related in many ways to reconciliatory measures adopted after liberation. He argued that a message must be sent in advance of the army to the residents. Many in territories taken by DAESH no longer sympathize with them and do not support them.

The government needs to regain the support of the people. He brought up an example of a young man taking down a DAESH flag and replacing it with an Iraqi flag, after which he was executed on the spot. This is a reaction, he said, and the government must communicate with them and reassure them in order to have their support in the future. He maintained that security cannot be viewed from a military perspective alone. "You can liberate, preserve, and build, but you cannot sustain the liberation like that." It is necessary to liberate a person from fear, whether fear of authority or the future, through participation, equality, and opportunities for growth, "otherwise,

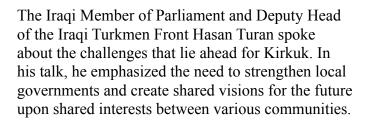
the cycle will keep turning," he said. He referred to the experience of Ramadi in 2007 and 2008 when the people of Ramadi cooperated in eliminating al-Qaeda at the time. In a matter of weeks, the areas were liberated and central authority reestablished with the help of the young men of Ramadi. However, the government was unable to fulfill its promise of incorporating these young men into productive members of society, through employment and opportunities. Instead it abandoned them. In fact, he continued, several of these young men were arrested, killed, or expelled for being considered sympathizers or members of al-Qaeda, despite their sacrifice and contribution to the Awakening Forces. This experience, he warned, if repeated "will not produce a new wave of DAESH, but an army of extremists". He pointed to the refugee camps, which are the perfect environments to produce extremists. "Therefore, we must take a 'sustainable peace' approach, and not a quick approach to peace. There must be a human form of peace that liberates the society from fear and gives it hope that the next life is better than the past."

### **Hasan Turan**

Member of Parliament, Government of Iraq



Our strength is in our unity, and our unity is in our diversity.



He began by pointing to the recent events in Taza, which afflicted around 1,000 citizens, saying that it places a historic responsibility, not only on the citizens of Kirkuk, but also on the world and shows how vicious and aggressive the enemy is and how all Iragis are targeted. He noted that while the political literature differentiates between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, the Iraqi constitution does not separate the nation into these three communities, rather it emphasizes its multiethnic and multi-religious nature. What has happened to the Turkmen, the Yazidis, the Christians and Shabaks by DAESH was a systematic approach to remove the efforts of these communities to belong to Iraq. The Iraqis have a duty to protect the diversity of the nation. His central message was that "our strength is in our unity, and our unity is in our diversity".

The experiences in Kirkuk have been both successful and painful. He attributed the successful experiences to two factors. There was fear amongst certain political blocs in Kirkuk who did not want citizens in Arab areas to be armed in order to fight al-Qaeda. But the presence of American forces guaranteed that armed citizens would only fight against DAESH, or al-Qaeda at the time. He espoused that liberating and stabilizing the Arab areas in Kirkuk would have an impact on the security of the province as a whole, most particularly the city center as it has no less than a million people without taking the IDPs into account. With the support of the local and



central government and Coalition forces, these areas were secured. According to Turan, it was a very successful experience that needs to be implemented in other areas, considering the fact that there are still Turkmen areas in Qasabat Bashir under the control of DAESH gangs who used chemical weapons against Taza. These areas need to be liberated as well as other Arab areas.

The experience, initiated by former President Jalal Talabani, was a true division of power in Kirkuk under a law passed in 2009 but not enacted until 2011, when the chairman of the Kirkuk province took office with the support of Mr. Talabani and the Turkmen. 2011, he noted, was also the year he took office. He shared with the audience the maxim they applied and achieved in the area, which he hoped would be achieved elsewhere as well. The maxim was "We are in Kirkuk, where there are Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, and Christians, and we have different visions for the future of the province. But if we want to build shared visions, we need to work on building shared interests between the communities in Kirkuk province". Shared interests, he continued, would become a bridge upon which shared visions can be built. What was necessary in this system, he argued, was the need to translate it into reality. The major problem facing the country today, according to Turan, is that problems are diagnosed but no practical solutions are offered. The petrodollar budget set aside for the province was a contributing factor and proves that the strengthening of local governments will help in finding long-term solutions.

Tal Afar is an area that has unfortunately been the scene of sectarian struggles; it is mainly inhabited by Turkmen and has encountered many difficult situations after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 until now with the rise of DAESH. He asserted that machinations in the region involved dividing the Turkmen living there into Sunni and Shia communities. He pointed out that such sectarian divisions did not exist in the region prior to 2003, where there have been many instances of marriage and affinity that exist until today in various parts. How can Turkmen coexist in Tal Afar again? The IDP map of Tal Afar, he pointed out, starts from Zakho from the north and ends in the Dhi Qar province in the south. The people have been divided into around 16 provinces and most are regretful for fighting each other. He argued "if we want to return the Turkmen to their original land in Tal Afar or other areas, Turkmen have to be engaged together in the battle against DAESH". However, this strategy must be implemented now. The Turkmen must fight under one banner against DAESH and cooperate with the international coalition. Both sides are willing and ready, he added, saying that he had spoken to both groups and will be meeting with them in the coming weeks. They will organize and stand ready to fight. He concluded that the tragedies of war and displacement has led both Sunnis and Shias of the Turkmen of Tal Afar to band together and fight and "the coming days will prove it".

### Saleh Muslim Co-Chair Democratic Union Party



Turkey is trying to thwart us and looks at us as enemies, because in Kobane and in Rojava we were able to destroy the legend of DAESH.

Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), provided an overview of the Kurdish party's role in defeating DAESH. He spoke about liberating Raqqa and briefly enumerated the technicalities involved with the military operation. His talk also focused on Turkey and the recent accusations that Kurds were involved in the terrorist attacks in Ankara.

He began by commemorating Halabja and said that Kurdistan has had to deal with many hardships and the chemical weapons, used in Halabja, are again used in the Sheikh Makhsud area in Aleppo. Those who are fighting DAESH today, are doing so for all humanity. "Life without struggle is not possible ... we wish to continue our struggle." Saleh Muslim addressed the question of Raqqa and whether it is a project for the People's Protection Units (YPG). To discuss this point, however, he argued several other points need to be made. It is important to know, in terms of DAESH, how to prevent future events from happening as they have in the past, how to fight DAESH and how to prevent suffering from happening again.

Raqqa, he claimed, is of strategic importance and its liberation is a priority and has not been achieved only due to technical reasons. "Raqqa is a priority. Syria is a priority, and hopefully we will rid it of DAESH." The strategic importance of Raqqa as the capital of DAESH is undeniable and while its liberation is a priority, the preparations involved with such an operation have delayed this goal. Muslim pointed out that until now areas in Rojava that have been liberated from DAESH and in the hands of the PYD and even the YPG have been administered by the people themselves to determine their own

future. They establish a city council and manage the area's affairs, reaching decisions together. Once an area is liberated, the people must know who will be in control otherwise there is a prevalent fear that the area would return to DAESH's control. Liberating Raqqa is a priority, he reiterated, saying that the reasons are technical and most notably related to finding who will manage Raqqa's affairs after liberation. In Rojava, "we are stable and we are calm. The system we have established in the area, we believe, is stable and has the possibility of moving forward and being settled".

The technical aspects involved with the liberation of Raqqa operations, include most notably the supply route to Raqqa. It will be hard for Mosul and Raqqa to have contact if the supply route was cut off. The liberation of Shadadi, which as McGurk pointed out in the first panel he said, would be the next step and important to Raqqa and Mosul. The liberation of Raqqa will be achieved easier if the supply routes have been cut off, especially west of the Euphrates. The other way to liberate Raqqa, he argued, is eradicating DAESH and implementing measures to prevent their return. He noted that DAESH has not appeared because the Sunni community was muted; "they do not represent the Sunnis and they do not represent Islam".

Looking at the situation with Ankara, he conjectured that there is no doubt of its relationship with DAESH or at least sympathy towards their mentality. Moreover, Turkey has not denied that they are working with al-Nusra Front. The Nusra Front and DAESH share many similarities in mentality and Turkey continues to support it in many ways, he

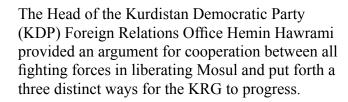
asserted. "Turkey is trying to thwart us and looks at us as enemies, because in Kobane and in Rojava we were able to destroy the legend of DAESH, the one that is indestructible." The Kurdish nation, he noted, is at the frontlines against DAESH and the Kurds have been at the forefront, leading operations against them and defeating them on the battlefield. The Kurds in Rojava have been instrumental in defeating DAESH in Kobane as well as other areas and this is the reason Turkey views us as enemies, he argued. Turkey blames the bombings in Ankara on Kurdish parties, but he stood firm that they do not interfere in Turkey's affairs. It is in the interest of the Kurdish people that Ankara is stable and capable of solving its Kurdish question in the country. Muslim adamantly rejected any support for terrorist organizations and those who target civilians. "This terrorism whether it is from organizations or from a country and its organizations, we deny any one that targets civilians." Some in Turkey have hurled accusations at the parties in Rojava for the terrorist actions. But Muslim was clear about the stance he and his party has taken regarding acts of terrorism aimed at civilians. His party, he declared, cares about stability in Rojava, in Turkey and in the south of Kurdistan. Thus, he denied any such accusations and hoped that all parties would work towards understanding the truth, whether in Syria or outside Syria. "We Syrians", he said "can agree and take care of ourselves." He concluded with the point that reactions should not be based on false accusations and pretenses.

### **Hemin Hawrami**

Head of Kurdistan Democratic Party Foreign Relations Office

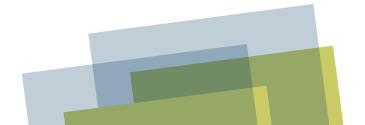


The liberation of Mosul will be the beginning of the end of DAESH.



Hawrami opened by saying that "Our project is doing good for our country, building institutions, creating democracy, dialogue and mutual understanding." He argued that DAESH is the outcome of deeper issues in the area, issues ranging from challenges in the government, the rule of law, implementation, and governance, in particular in Iraq. He asserted that the KRG is a success story as it has been able to liberate 27,000 km from territory under DAESH; moreover, he commended president Masoud Barzani who fights on the frontline with other Peshmerga fighters. In the fight against DAESH, Hawrami noted the three-pronged strategy of halting, removing, and destroying DAESH forces in any given territory. "Now, with the blood of 1,604 martyrs and with the injury of 8,000 Peshmerga fighters, we have been able to stop DAESH 100 percent and retake 97 percent of the areas occupied by DAESH."

He argued that a political agreement between all forces is needed to destroy DAESH. He claimed that for some, DAESH presents an opportunity to ruin the stable political alignments in Iraqi Kurdistan. For those who hold this belief, DAESH is part of the war strategy, to be used in the wider geopolitical game. He believed that Kurds should fight for their rights and set a referendum to decide the matter of independence. In order to create regional order, he argued, the Kurds need to work together with Iraqi and regional partners and delineate borders which



will ensure both global and Middle Eastern security. Hawrami observed that the entire world is looking at Kurdistan as Peshmerga forces and fighters in Rojava break the momentum of DAESH. The Kurdish nation, he said, stretches from Khanaqin to Kobani and is peaceful with its own distinct culture.

To move forward, the KRG must tackle three crises in the region. The first is the political crisis that has developed since June 2015. Hawrami noted that president Barzani has answered the question of the presidency on multiple occasions when he said "we have to go towards an election, or have candidates chosen by the parties, or seek advice with the council until the next election". Since there is no agreement on the political compromise, Hawrami posited that the political parties, who hold a great responsibility on their shoulders, should return to an alignment. The KDP and the PUK and other political forces, he maintained, have decided to move forward with these matters. To the Baghdad government, Hawrami posed the question, "do you still believe in partnership? ... power-sharing and representation, does it still exist in Iraq?" In the past, the Kurdish region was punished through campaigns like Anfal and the chemical attacks. Today, he argued, cutting the budget is a communal punishment.

Moreover, he added that the formulas of the past have failed; "we need new formulas because the current context in Iraq is different and has a new reality". Secondly, Kirkuk is without a doubt to be included in Kurdistan. He lamented that after 10 years, despite their belief in article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, the referendum has still not been implemented. About Mosul, he emphasized its importance; "the liberation of Mosul", he said,

"will be the beginning of the end of DAESH, not the end of DAESH". Thirdly, because Mosul is a city with Shia and Sunni Kurds, Shia and Sunni Arabs, Turkmen and Assyrians, it is imperative that a political plan be set for post-DAESH Mosul before any military operations are undertaken to liberate the city. It is essential to create guarantees for who will ensure the safety of the people and who will oversee stabilization processes in Mosul so that an environment conducive to the rise of another kind of DAESH is not created there.

If an operation to reclaim Mosul is to be successful, the four fighting forces need to work in coordination with one another, he argued. The Iraqi army, the Hashd al-Shaabi, the Peshmerga forces, the Sunnis, as well as the Coalition forces need to work together. Participatory members in the Mosul operation need to be clearly identified and their responsibilities clearly defined. All sides must give each other assurances that they will participate only to the extent of their responsibilities. His next concern was whether or not the Iraqi army was ready to confront DAESH. He explained DAESH's new strategy of attacking on many fronts to spread the Iraqi army thin and therefore, argued for involvement from the Iraqi army in the Mosul operation. "Mosul is important for Kurdistan as much as it is for the other parts of Iraq. Because as long as DAESH stays in Mosul, the security of Duhok, Erbil and of Kirkuk will be in danger." Hawrami stressed that despite desires to liberate Mosul from DAESH, 50 to 60 percent of the Mosul operation is a political operation that needs to include specific agreements prior to its launch.

# Regional Dynamics: Proxy Wars and Policy Options

### **Moderated by Sir John Jenkins**

**Executive Director. IISS- Middle East** 

#### **Amre Moussa**

Former Secretary General of the Arab League

#### **Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin**

President, Middle East Institute

#### **Fuad Hussein**

Chief of Staff, KRG Presidency

#### Laith Kubba

Senior Director, Middle East & North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy

#### Joseph Bahout

Visiting Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

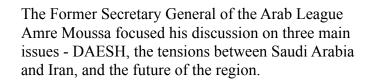
Heightened tensions in the Middle East, the breaking of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the winds of a cold war between Washington and Moscow have already complicated 2016. As proxy wars heat up, policy makers are faced with increasingly difficult options. This panel discussed where the region is headed and ways to curb the downward spiral towards violence and sectarian divisions.

### **Amre Moussa**

Former Secretary General of the Arab League



The Arabs are highly civilized people and it is time for these people to come up with solutions to their problems.



Moussa began by agreeing with Saleh Muslims's point to study the causes that led to the spread of DAESH and the reasons behind its power. Using military might cannot be the sole means of defeating DAESH and while airstrikes, and targeting, and killing specific leaders weakens the organization, it will not destroy it, he argued. Moussa highlighted the internal factors behind the successes of DAESH in the last two years, stating the importance of understanding how it emerged in the first place. Many people are perplexed about how well funded DAESH is, or where it draws its experience and expertise. In a matter of two years, DAESH established a presence in Libya and transfer troops there despite the Mediterranean countries claiming that the entire Mediterranean sea was under tight control. Questions are asked about how DAESH was able to transfer human capital and weapons to North Africa without anyone noticing. DAESH is easily able to move, like the swing of a pendulum, between the Middle East and North Africa

According to Moussa, without curing the causes for the emergence of DAESH, we will witness the appearance of another terrorist group. The people of this region live in fear, with the threat of sectarian violence and death looming over them. People are angry and tense and we must find solutions that will combat the negative impact of these problems, he said. Moreover, he continued, it is necessary to improve the image of the Middle East internationally. The Arabs were not aware of the Sykes-Picot agreement when it was signed in 1916,



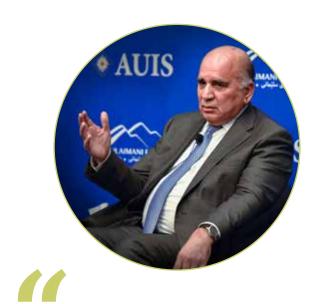


but, he asserted, this could not happen today. "The West cannot draw new maps based on their own interests, as they did in the dark age of the early 20th century. The Arab world has a youth population that is aware of its surroundings and will never accept a new Sykes-Picot. DAESH will be defeated through good policies and by opposing external intervention."

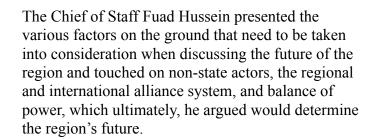
Moving on to his second point regarding Saudi-Iranian relations, he pointed out the importance of Iran as a major and vital player in the region. However, he argued, neither Iran nor Turkey is capable of controlling the Arab world. Moussa went on to say that we should all face the new challenges of the 21st century and realize that the breakdown of relations is not between Iran and Saudi Arabia only, but rather between Iran and the whole Arab

mentality. He alluded to the many declarations by Iranian officials that highly offended the Arabs, claiming that despite whether they were meant or not, the way these statements were perceived was more powerful than the truth. "It is not only Saudi and Iran" he said, "it is much more than this. These conflicts are affecting Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and that is reason enough to maintain healthy relations with Iran." Moussa ended his talk with his last point about the future of the region, which he asserted could not be looked at from a business perspective alone. He recommended that all regional powers come together to discuss possible solutions to improve the safety, culture, education, economy, and industry of their countries. The Arabs, he concluded, "are a highly civilized people and it is time that they find solutions to their own problems."

### Fuad Hussein Chief of Staff, KRG Presidency



I am not so optimistic about the future of the area.



He opened his talk by discussing the future of the region and possible conclusions about solutions. To address this, he noted, it is important to consider the facts on the ground. Firstly, non-state actors are playing a major role in the political life of this area and these non-state actors can fall into very different categories, with some looking to destroy everything and others aiming to build up or change the structure of the area. Secondly, proxy wars are being fought in various countries across the region. Thirdly, there are many failed states in the area, which include both geographically failed states and non-functional governments. He also pointed out that borders are no longer sacred and the dramatic change in the concept of sovereignty and the legal aspects of the state. From a legal standpoint, many states no longer enjoy respect for their borders and talk about humanitarian intervention has been replaced with the 'right [responsibility] to protect'.

Another factor on the ground is the formation of various regional alliances with international dimensions, which can also be based on religious ideologies. As a result, he argued, there is a return of a cold war between Russia and the United States, both superpowers in the region, and both targeting the same enemy in Syria without any coordination. Russia and the United States are targeting DAESH and al-Nusra with wholly diverse priorities. Hussein



asserted that any basis for regional order must be in collective security without which there will be no trust amongst the different actors. He acknowledged that while security in the region must be achieved through the collective efforts of the countries in the area, security would also need to be protected by the superpowers. However, he pointed out that regional security and order lies far from reality and the situation in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya prove that decisions will be made on the battlefield.

Regarding the Kurdish region, he asserted that "the first priority is to protect the region from the terrorist group or Islamic state; the priority of the region is to build good relationship with neighboring countries like Iran and Turkey; the priority of the region is to be part of the political process and it was part of the political process in Iraq to build a democratic state

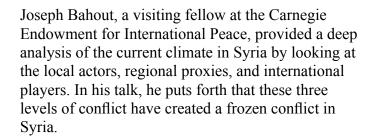
based on federal structure." He lamented however that the Kurds and Arabs had failed due to a lack of a real federal structure in Iraq. The most important factor to note about the future of Iraq is that it is connected to the future of the region and "we cannot solve the political situation in Iraq without solving the problems somewhere else." It is beyond Iraq's scope to solve problems elsewhere as the situation within its own boundaries have proved to be beyond its ability to solve. Hussein concluded that too many regional players and indeed international governments are involved in the region, playing key roles, whether positive or negative, in determining its future; for this reason, he maintained, he is not optimistic about the future. The conflict will only be decided through the balance of power internally, regionally, and internationally.

# **Joseph Bahout**

Visiting Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace



What we are going to see [in Syria] is something like a frozen conflict.



He mentioned the relevance of Syria as it is the exemplification of the overlaps between proxy wars on the regional and international levels and local realities. Part of Syria's drama is that the narrative has obliterated the local aspect of the conflict, that it was a local revolution of society against a brutal dictator, no less brutal than the author of the awful Halabja chemical attacks. He then highlighted Russian involvement in the region and the sudden withdrawal of its forces, asking "what is behind this sudden Russian decision of withdrawing?" The first point, he asserted, is to understand the context of the Russian withdrawal as well as its scope and width. It is very important that this has occurred at a moment when Syria is at a turning point, both underground and on the table of negotiations, and they are intrinsically tied. What is interesting about this mechanism is that it has produced something new, an American-Russian monopolistic condominium over Syria. This means that the various groups involved in Syria, friend of Syria, P5, contact groups and others have been substituted or replaced by a duopolistic monopoly over Syria, which peripherally is leading many European countries and other actors to be dissatisfied

His second point was that within this condominium there is an American acceptance of a subcontracting to Russia's lexicon over the Syrian affair. This



can be seen on many levels, in the crafting of the resolution and the way things are led at the table of negotiations. "The software of the Syrian crisis has completely shifted." The example he provided was the latest resolution 2268 which he mentioned is in fact the embodiment of the agreement between Lavrov and Kerry; while the Americans have accepted that there is no more reference to the Riyadh group in the negotiations, the language has changed from the formation of a transitional government body under the umbrella of Geneva platform that would oversee transition implicitly and sometimes explicitly without Bashar al-Assad and his regime in a period that was to be determined to today's framework, the Vienna framework, the operational framework stating that a National Unity Government under the auspice of the Assad regime would itself re-write a constitution and present and

go for elections in eighteen months with no mention of whether Assad would be presenting himself or not. This in essence, he argued, is a budging to the Russian way.

"What lies ahead?" he asked. According to Bahout's analysis, there will be a frozen conflict, a classical situation in international affairs and created by the likes of Vladimir Putin in the Crimea and now Syria. This frozen conflict will produce a set of issues; firstly, it will consolidate demarcation lines for sometime. Currently, we have three Syrias, he argued. One is called "Assadistan or Alawistan" which is the main aim of the Syrian part of the Russian intervention with the other part, having nothing to do with Syria, being centered around the duopoly with the Americans, to establish a power-dialogue between the United States and Russia.

The other is Kurdistan, which is today a reality; he referred to the meeting in Rojava taking place to determine the complete consolidation of this Kurdistan. The third and the most complicated and problematic Syria is Sunnistan, which will become a black hole where DAESH will fight Nusra, and DAESH and Nusra will fight others. Within the context of the frozen conflict, the rationale for Russian withdrawal is that Vladimir Putin has understood that he has reached a quagmire, where anything else would mean more costly operations and in essence taking on the burden of Syria and owning the problem. In this frozen conflict scenario, they will wait for the US to re-negotiate the terms of an alliance that could destroy DAESH in Sunnistan, a place that is unmanageable.

Bahout's third point focused on how regional proxies could derail this process and here he highlighted how discussing Syria in the framework of proxies creates an interesting case. Looking at the truce that went into effect in the beginning of March, he ascertained its potential to derail this kind of frozen conflict. When the truce entered into effect, he said, very few days afterwards, Syrians took to the streets again to shout the same slogans they had been shouting five years ago on March 15, 2016, and this is after incessant bombardment and the prediction by many that the fatigue itself would end the Syrian crisis. This proves that the issue will be much more difficult to resolve than by simply "bombing a bunch of radicals". This is the new narrative of the Syrian affair which has no basis in the reality of the Syrian affair. The main point, he continued, is that regional proxies have an interest in derailing this process and here, he named Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran as the three actors. All three

actors have at least one common objective and that is to keep Syria from becoming fragmented; Turkey does not want to see the creation of a Kurdistan; Iran, while not concerned with the unity of Syria, would like to maintain an amenable state to the open corridor through which it transfers weapons, money, and influence to the western shores of Beirut; and Saudi Arabia, a Sunni power, could not accept that 8 to 10 percent of the Alawi minority would dominate the useful part of Syria, i.e. the western coast, mountains, and most of Damascus. While all three actors can do very little, the little they can do, can torpedo the process. Here is where the Russian withdrawal becomes important, he argued, because "as long as the Sukhois are doing their jobs in Syria, Turkey was probably at bay, not intervening in the northern part of Syria; Saudi Arabia didn't want to clash with Moscow as they still think in Riyadh that Moscow is better than Tehran in Syria". If, however, Russia is no longer there, and this is subject to verification, Iran has the burden of propping up the Assad regime on its shoulders and there would be an increase in the number of Pasdaran, Hezbollah, and Afghan fighters sent to the area.

To conclude, Bahout highlighted again the three levels of new climate, the local Syrian level, the regional proxy level and the international cold war level - a duopolistic relation between Washington and Moscow. The fate of Syria, he surmised, is that these three levels are not overlapping and are indeed very distant from one another. If these three layers of conflict do not coincide to solve the core issue of the regime, then he predicted, Syria will remain a frozen conflict and an open wound for years to come.

## **Laith Kubba**

Senior Director, Middle East & North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy



Our problems won't be solved by external powers. No, we should solve them on our own!



Laith Kubba, senior director of the National Endowment for Democracy, discussed the spread of radicalism and beseeched the political leadership to focus on building a state based on services and investing in the future generation to ensure a better future for Iraq.

Kubba opened by stating that he will be bringing a distinctly Iraqi perspective to the panel discussion, a perspective of a person who wants to achieve solutions in what remains an uncertain future. He pointed out, however, that these uncertainties exist, not only in Iraq, but also in the United States where people are confused about how to react to the radical Donald Trump and his peculiar politics. He claimed that political decisions and environments will always change, radically at times, and so we should learn to cope with this. The Iraqi youth desire freedom after being liberated from dictatorship, but the traditional political leadership are backward and lack successful strategies. The sectarian and ethnic ties have broken and communities are clearly divided. Kubba argued that these ties no longer offer a solution.

Events in the region and the entire world has an impact on Iraq and the withdrawal of US and Russian forces created a vacuum within which Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are vying for power. The collision of these regional interests and powers in the area has led many to flee and make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean into Europe. DAESH was small but it has been able to take advantage of the situation and shape the conflict to serve its interests. He predicted that the situation in the region would never improve if the religious issue was not solved, especially radicalism. Based



on statistic, 30 percent of the population in Lebanon sympathizes with DAESH, while a shocking 80 percent in Turkey are inclined towards them. These statistics, he mentioned, reveal a serious problem that needs to be solved immediately.

During Saddam's regime, oppositions groups were comprised of Arabs and Kurds and various other groups, all united against him. Today, every group wants to claim a share in power. "Iraqis do not benefit from these strategies. Iraqis want better education and services." He lamented that the people's wishes have been ignored and warned that until politicians change their mentality, the future

will be worse than the present. He stressed that there is no substitute for a unified Iraqi state. "Let's give up on power and start a state based on services." Moreover, he pointed out that fighting DAESH will not end the conflict, but fighting the mentality that led to DAESH and investing in the youth would. "Our problems won't be solved by external powers. No, we should solve them on our own!" He concluded that strategic investment in the youth and civil services would be the best way to build a state and predicted that Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia will all incur unrest in the future because they are not investing in their youth.

# **Wendy Chamberlin**

**President, Middle East Institute** 



If Hillary Clinton is elected, we [US] will have a more aggressive foreign policy in this part of the world.

Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin, the president of the Middle East Institute, and former US Ambassador presented her view on what Washington's stance is in the Middle East, focusing on the recently published Atlantic article by Jeffrey Goldberg to highlight President Obama's policies in the region and how Clinton would adopt a more aggressive, engaged position.

About the article, she pointed out that it "touched on so many nerves," because it showcased the criticisms of Obama towards different actors. Obama mentioned US closest allies, the French and British by name, particularly Cameron and Sarkozy for luring him into a decision he didn't want to make in Libva; he criticized Arab allies who he intimated held the coats of the Americans in war; he criticized professional diplomats for the tactics they used to compel him into making certain decisions as well as the think tank establishments in Washington. The reaction to this article has been swift, she added, most notably from the Saudi Prince Turki bin Faisal who has written a stinging letter criticizing Obama for his criticism of Saudi Arabia as a free rider when in fact Saudi Arabia is spending its own treasure and sending its troops and pilots to Yemen where it feels its existential interests are at stake

However, Ambassador Chamberlin noted that this article, while getting so much attention, is journalism and not an official press statement. She emphasized that it was an article that collected comments by President Obama, explaining his presidency and his thinking, over the course of months. Thus, it is difficult to know the chronological order of the statements. Chamberlin mentioned how some have compared Obama to Trump for "throwing rhetorical hand grenades that have exploded in various



different directions." Obama is nothing like Trump; he is deliberate, thoughtful, and intellectual and this is illustrated in the article.

Focusing on proxy wars, she believed that Obama's comments were deliberate and he knew the press would spread that he had asked Saudi Arabia "to learn to share the Middle East with Iran". While not good diplomacy, she asserted that it must have been deliberate. With the Middle East in a cataclysmic period of transition, with borders changing, people renegotiating the compact with their rulers, with the spread of violence and instability, and the presence of proxy wars that will continue to further destabilize the region, Chamberlin argued that what Obama said was essentially calling for an end to this proxy war, saying "Let's step back from the brink for all of our good". To answer why Obama had exposed so many of his thoughts, she presented two explanations; the first, a cynical one, that he is in the last months of his presidency and wanted to reset the narrative regarding his most criticized foreign policy move - not following through with his red line for Syria when Assad used sarin gas, killing 1,400 of his own citizens in a suburb outside Damascus. Another explanation, a more positive one, Chamberlin said, is that it is fortunate to have the deep penetrating view

into the thoughts of a leader and to understand why and how he makes decisions. Chamberlin argued that perhaps some of both explanations provide the best understanding of the reasons for Obama's recent comments.

In answering what is next for the region, she said that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would most probably get the nominations from their respective parties and this would have a profound impact. She argued that Hillary Clinton's presidency would mean more aggressive intervention in the region. This is supported through Clinton's actions while she was secretary of state. In that capacity, Clinton had argued for more assistance to the opposition fighters, for American action "as inaction would lead to a vacuum which DAESH would fill", and for humanitarian intervention and taking 65000 Syrian refugees to the United States. Moreover Chamberlin asserted, Clinton would stand up to Putin. In conclusion, if Clinton were elected president, there would be a more aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East and in the White House. "And what will happen if Trump is elected?" Chamberlin asked. To this, she said he would not be elected because he is an authoritarian misogynists racist bully who does not represent the values of the American people.

# The Economic Crisis and Challenge of Reform

### **Moderated by Ben van Huevelen**

**Managing Editor, Iraq Oil Report** 

#### **Adil Abdul Mahdi**

Minister of Oil, Government of Iraq

#### **Qubad Talabani**

Deputy Prime Minister, KRG

#### Sibel Kulaksiz

Iraq Director, World Bank

#### Ali Alaq

Governor, Central Bank of Iraq

#### **Ambassador Stuart Jones**

US Ambassador to Iraq

Iraq's government has stated it will be unable to pay salaries, oil prices remain at a record low and bankruptcy is a term repeated more frequently in Baghdad and Erbil. Economic woes have been directly linked to mismanagement and corruption, leading to demonstrations calling for serious change. This panel addressed the severity of the economic crisis facing the country, while looking at the feasibility of structural reforms.

### Adil Abdul Mahdi Minister of Oil. Government of Iraq

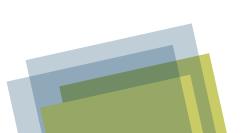


Iraq has money ... we should use this money to improve the economy by improving industry and agriculture instead of totally depending on oil.

The Iraqi Oil Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi mainly focused his talk on Iraq's dependence on oil and the necessity to reform the energy sector in tandem with changes to state relations with oil companies operating within Iraq.

Speaking on the second day of the forum, Abdul Mahdi remembered Halabja and highlighted the oppression the Kurds have experienced. He began by saying that Iraq is the third oil exporting country, the fourth in production, and the second in exporting and production within OPEC. He then outlined the production of oil in Iraq and Kurdistan. Last December, he noted, Iraq produced 4,575,000 barrel of oil. The southern fields produce 3,800,000 daily and export 3,200,000 barrels. Kurdistan produces 800,000 barrels and exports 600,000. Thus, Iraq is one of the main oil producing and exporting countries.

He ascertained that oil would always remain a vital source of energy regardless of the other sources explored in the future. Oil funds 35 percent of energy sources around the world, and Iraq will continue to be a vital contributor to that field even if the prices of oil drop to eight or ten dollars. However, he argued, Iraq's heavy dependence on oil is no longer improving the economy, rather it is destroying it. He diagnosed the problem as the Dutch disease, when oil prices increase and other economical industries diminish. To better explain this, he drew an analogy with the human body, likening oil to the fat that accumulate on the body after the heavy consumption of food; this in turn he stated, causes diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and strokes, among others. This is what is happening in Iraq, he argued; Iraq will lose this way.







Abdul Mahdi stressed the need for immediate economic reforms. Today, Iraq has 7,000,000 state employees and retired persons, an enormous number. In 2004, there were only 800,000 state employees. "The legislation and the executive sectors are crumbling and investors are not attracted to Iraq anymore." Inflation is also an important issue, in particular because oil prices are low and will probably not increase in the near future. He warned that prices will never rise above 40 or 50 dollars again, and estimated that they will probably stabilize at 25 dollars. When OPEC decreased production, oil prices increased, but OPEC cannot do this anymore because there are many new producers in the industry. He pointed out that one of the main concerns of the Oil Ministry is the issue of contract with the producing firms. While Iraq enjoys good relations with the global companies operating within the country, the increase of oil prices does not translate into larger profits for the Iraqi state. However, he explained further, when prices drop, the state is responsible for all expenses instead of the firms. "It is true that we own the physical capital and the firms only work them but the costs are getting higher."

He then discussed the Ministry's proposal for new incentives in state relations with firms, mainly to have expenses reflect the market and be based on profit. "If the prices increase, the firm's profit

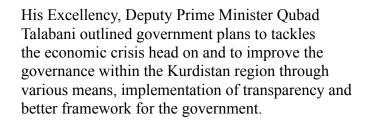
increases and the inverse is true as well." Currently, firms claim more expenses when prices decrease. It is imperative for the state and firms to agree on a specific bottom line. He argued that this will demand more responsibility for both the state and the firms and improve management choices. This he said is an international model, which Iraq is now adopting. "Iraq has money, yes. Not as much as in 2013 and 2014, but we do have money. However, we should use this money to improve the economy by improving industry and agriculture instead of totally depending on oil."

According to Abdul Mahdi, in 2015 Iraq owed 9 billion dollars to oil companies. Unfortunately, in 2012 and 2013, Iraq procrastinated in its payment to these oil firms. He explained how every 3 months, these firms develop a list of expenses that the state reviews and pays either in oil or in cash, with the fourth quarter of each year paid the following year. In 2015, the Ministry's budget was 12 billion dollars. This sum was not enough to cover the debt. "We could pay three billion dollars and owe the companies six billion dollars. We can only pay these expenses if the price of oil remains the same." However, the government is capable of paying, even if it has to resort to issuing government bonds. "We want to make sure that the [oil] companies feel safe and secure and I am happy that we maintain good economic relations with these companies."

### Qubad Talabani Deputy Prime Minister, KRG



Iraq's biggest fear should not be DAESH, nor its political problems. It should be the economic crisis and the war.



He also began by paying homage to the martyrs of the Halabja chemical attacks. Speaking about the economic climate, he said that the fall in oil prices means that every country with an oil economy is struggling. Iraq and the Kurdistan region however are struggling with various other problems as well. Enumerating the challenges facing the region, he noted the cut in the budget for Kurdistan in 2014, the rise of DAESH, and the influx of thousands of refugees and IDPs into the Kurdistan region as the most difficult hardships. To make matters worse, the price of oil has been dropping in the global market. Compounding these external pressures is also the number of internal political issues that have influenced the economic environment of the country. He claimed, "I can say that the biggest fear for Iraq, is not DAESH, nor the political problems, it is the economic situation and the war." When your economy falters, he continued, connections between societies begin to falter too and when the economy crumbles, political problems cannot be solved. The KRG's war with DAESH, fought with foreign support and the help of Iraqi forces, is a tough war, but he affirmed that the KRG is becoming stronger in fighting DAESH.

Talabani shared the KRG's plan to solve the economic crisis, outlining the ways in which these measures will help mitigate economic pressures. The plan is comprised of both short-term and long-





term strategies and addresses a number of external and internal problems that have developed over the past few years, including the drastic population increase and large public sector. He tackled the issue of the public sector first; the problem, he asserted, arose from the fact that the KRG aimed to distribute oil revenues, at the time that they were very high, in a broad fashion. He illustrated the problem by sharing the statistics related to the public sector and its heavy burden on the KRG budget. "Today in Iraqi Kurdistan, 1,400,000 people receive some form of salary from the KRG. Of this 1,400,000 about 720,000 are civil servants. We have about 220-230,000 people who receive a pension. We have 420,000 other people who receive their salary under the name of supervision, and also 30,000 under separate contracts. These accumulate to about 870 -880 billion dollars without lighting one lamp." The price of oil, he asserted, has a direct correlation with KRG's ability to pay such salaries. At 100 dollars a barrel, it was doable; at 80 dollars it was difficult; at 60 dollars very difficult; at 40 dollars impossible and at 20 dollars entirely out of the question, he explained. Year after year, since 2013 onwards, the budget has been steadily shrinking. He referred to the Prime Minister of Iraq's plan at the time, which had cut the Kurdish budget by 200 billion Iraqi dinars, and their efforts to fill the budgetary gap. The KRG was compelled to stop 5,000 running projects that formed the core of the economy. He explained however that the true difficulties arose in 2016, with the doubling of budget cuts due to the further drop in oil prices and this meant that at the beginning of 2016, the Kurdish deficit was 460 billion Iraqi dinars. "This is not something we could manage, discuss, or make plans for."

It was at that time that the KRG made the difficult decision to cut public salaries, he explained. The first decision to overcome the crisis was to create a balance and solve the deficit. According to Talabani's talk at the forum, the lowering of expenditures, the increase in oil prices, and the improvement of governance, both in terms of transparency and the framework of the KRG, can solve the economic crisis in the Kurdistan region. Talabani further explained that the cut in salaries was an essential step because unfortunately there was no where else to cut from; since 2013, the KRG had cut the ministries' budgets by 46 percent and some of the ministries today, he noted, are operating on 35 percent of their 2013 budgets.

Here he turned to government subsidies, especially for the electric power industry, which he called one of the biggest issues in Kurdistan. In 2014, the KRG put 3.5 billion dollars into the electricity network for the people of Kurdistan but this did not meet the need and in addition was not distributed well. Much of the energy was generated through Gazoil and he noted that they were very expensive. "Therefore, we tried to use more natural gas in order to lower the generation expenses. We hope that until the end of this year we will not be dependent on Gazoil anymore for the generation of electricity, but that it will come from natural gas." He recognized the need for increase in production for the future but said that it would be an extremely difficult task as production is not in the hands of the government. The process of electricity distribution includes four main points, first production, second transport, third distribution, and fourth accumulation for the future. Of these four, the KRG is only responsible for the generation of electricity, and this is with 100 percent of damages



incurred by the government. Talabani stated, "We are working with the World Bank right now to set up a plan for an electricity network, one which will also revive the government." He predicted that by the end of 2017, the government will be able to completely step aside and allow the electricity sector to be run by the private sector, saying "that the private sector is a much better actor to implement this plan". This he surmised would increase government revenue, albeit at a slow rate.

Next, he focused on government income through taxation. He commented that the KRG is very weak in collecting taxes from its citizens and companies. Moreover, the government provides for all the

electricity, water, and other facilities for its people. This is hardly optimal. He expounded that the main reason for this shortcoming was in all honesty that the KRG did not want to burden its populace with taxes that would then end up in the coffers of the Baghdad government. However, today is different. There are many countries with no oil, no natural resources, who are able to rule without difficulties, and this while developing their economies. Their taxation system, electricity system, and a developing business sector allow them to do this. The government, he admitted, cannot do everything, perhaps the KRG can manage some areas better, but it is not able to effectively accumulate wealth for the future. In this, he said, the KRG is working with

the World Bank to revive the various sectors in the economy, including the energy sector.

On improving governance, he emphasized that governance will influence the trust between the government and its population, which has been weakening both in Baghdad and in the Kurdistan region. Talabani explained that the KRG improvement plans are focused on two main points. The most important is transparency, in the oil sector and in a future taxation system. The other is improving the framework of the government. He complained about the confusion prevalent amongst government institutions, with each holding different statistics and each having different understandings of the situation. Therefore, he said, the KRG has asked its international allies to help with the technical process of improving government operations. The KRG is seeking to find a company that can improve the oil sector in the future, for both export and interior use. Trust can be built slowly through these measures. Transparency, however, will not be enough, he said. "We still need to burn off the fat." Regarding the second point, he argued for the need to invest in improving the framework of the government. The framework of the government dates back to 1992 and there is a need to improve and update state operations, administration and implementation procedures. In addition, the government needs to be brought into the current decade, in terms of governance but also in terms of laws and reviewing the system of rule, for which a parliament is needed.

According to Talabani's talk, the approach to this has two fronts; addressing the imbalance of government employees and government productivity. There needs to be a slow decrease of government employees. Each ministry in the KRG is responsible for addressing this issue in its own area. Talabani promised that "if we can create an environment where the private sector can improve, then we can easily reach agreements. If in the electricity sector, the private sector would take over, we could also slowly move employees from the public sector into the private sector in order to lessen the burden of the government." Addressing the issue of a billowing public sector is a major step towards improving governance.

Another issue that he highlighted as an example was the process by which salaries are distributed; the government had problems with this system even prior to the economic crisis, with the government taking 23 days to transfer salaries. The work is all done by hand, he noted. However, the KRG is improving the process by installing an electronic system. This in effect will eliminate payment to ghost employees. "We are optimistic because our plans are clear and we know ourselves what problems we have, we know what our ailment is and how to cure it." His conclusion was that the government needs to be determined and willing to make difficult decisions and follow through by implementing them. "I believe that some people will not like it; some political parties may not like it even, including my own." He assured that these problems can be solved as long as the government is honest with the people and has their support. "Our people have seen much worse times, we have survived many wrongs in our history and we will survive this one as well because we have determination "

#### Sibel Kulaksiz Iraq Director, World Bank



The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has a potential to become a platform for transient and logistics systems in the region given its proximity to major markets.

Sibel Kulaksiz, the Iraq director of the World Bank, presented an overview of the World Bank's support for the governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. She emphasized the need for implementing reforms in all sectors and diversifying the economy through foreign investment, private sector initiatives, and public- private partnerships.

According to Kulaksiz, the speeches of the Oil Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister made clear that both the Iraqi government and the KRG are in need of structural reforms in the medium-term and immediate budgetary support in the short-term to stabilize the economy and deliver public services. Kulaksiz discussed how the World Bank will be addressing and responding to these issues. She said that the World Bank is fully engaged in assisting in both short-term priority needs and mediumterm structural economic reforms and will provide "budgetary support, investment lending, technical systems and capacity building programs in various sectors, including energy and financial sector, ICT, macroeconomics and fiscal management, social protection and poverty alleviation. She pointed out that the Bank provided an emergency package to respond to the crisis last year, for the amount of 350 million dollars, approved in July. Furthermore, she said, the bank dispersed 1.2 billion dollar as development policy financing as budget support in December to help address the fiscal crisis.

Beyond this financing package, she added that the policy reforms in the development policy financing (DPF) of the World Bank are underpinned by multi year technical assistance in support programs in every sector. Donors and other financial institutions are also supporting these reforms. For example, the government of Japan is providing parallel financing

in the context of the World Bank DPF reforms actions. IMF approved rapid financing for 1.2 billion dollars in July, and this may lead to an upper trench program. Indeed the challenges are high, she asserted, but the economic potentials are there, as Minister Shahrestani discussed yesterday. She noted that both the government in Baghdad and the KRG are showing strong commitments to deliver reforms and diversify the economy through private sector development.

The Iraqi government, she continued, is also changing both revenue and expenditure challenges. She cited security spending, which accounts for 11 percent of the GDP as very high and "fiscal deficit and balance of payment deficit have widened despite sizable fiscal adjustments". This year's 2016 budget is based on an estimated 45 dollars per barrel of oil. "With the latest downward trend in oil prices, if the oil prices reach less than that in 2016, for example around 30 dollars per barrel instead of 45, than this means additional fiscal adjustment and external support will be needed this year," she warned. So far fiscal consolidation efforts have only reduced oil revenue and non-oil revenue investments and of course when investments decline, there is an impact on GDP growth. Iraq's non- oil GDP declined by 9 percent, the current account deficit widened to 6.4 percent of GDP, the fiscal deficit increased by 14.5 percent of GDP from 5.6 percent. She highlighted how significant this is, even when compared to high deficit countries around the world, such as Argentina and Turkey. She argued that the fiscal deficit has had a major impact in Iraq and "when it comes to the KRG, the economic and fiscal situation is even more difficult, given all the challenges that we all know and which require urgent attention".

Kulaksiz reviewed the KRG's growth, showing that it had declined by 10 percent in 2015, with revenues declining by 43 percent in the past two years. She acknowledged how difficult it will be to bring about reforms, especially the social mitigation measures to protect the poor and lower level income segments from these economic shocks. The goal, she asserted, is to provide technical support to help with the reform actions and implementation. "Our sectors' teams are fully engaged with the government and other stakeholders in the KRG to help the Kurdish people in priority areas under the leadership of the KRG ministry of planning." She mentioned that more than two years ago, the World Bank signed four reimbursable advisory services with the KRG, which include procurement reforms and economic growth prospects with diagnostic works, among others. Moreover, she highlighted that the World Bank in collaboration with the KRG Minister of Planning Dr. Ali Sindi and jointly with government counterparts in the KRG carried out in depth technical and analytical assessments in all sectors of the economy. The time has come, she asserted, to build on these analytics to inform policy decisions for upcoming economic reforms. The options come from the region and were developed in consultation with government agencies, the private sector, international partners, and academia. The teams developed a structural reform map for the coming three years. "The road map is inclusive within the government and brings best practices from around the world and prioritizes the structural reform agenda and medium term implementation plan for specific robust actions." She added that this will soon be presented officially.

Kulaksiz believed that it is crucial for the KRG to have help in implementing these reforms. She again



brought attention to the poor and vulnerable segment of society, saying it is a priority for the government to protect the poor by implementing social protection measures. Recession is a pressing problem in the Kurdish region. The number of Syrian refugees and IDPs, approximately 1.8 million, of which 75 percent are women and girls, has led to a 28 percent increase in the population of the Kurdish region. The enormous impact of such an influx cannot be underestimated. Poverty has quadrupled in the Kurdish region as a result of this influx. This is a humanitarian crisis on a very large scale and "the KRG needs support to face it". As Kulaksiz discussed at the forum, stabilization costs for the

refugees alone was estimated at 1.4 billion dollars last year.

Returning to the issue of economic reforms and their implementation, she noted "fiscal adjustment and consolidation, reducing subsidies, implementing social reforms, and reforming state-owned enterprises both financial and non-financial will be a priority". She said more needs to be done to reform the oversized public sector and argued that reducing inefficient public spending from the current budget size will bring significant fiscal savings. The example she offered was changing the parameters of the public pension system, which by

World Bank calculations would bring about savings of about 103 million Iraqi dinars through 2018 and one trillion Iraqi dinars through 2028. In addition, she highlighted the importance of focusing on revenue generation and the measures concerning tax and customs administration to improve revenue collection

Reforming the electricity sector is another critical area, she pointed out. Subsides in Iraq currently account for 12 percent of GDP and mostly concentrated in fuel and electricity. The direct costs of energy subsidies of fuel products are roughly five trillion Iraqi dinars per year. And government electricity subsidies account for ten trillion Iraqi dinar per year. Undertaking reforms in this sector, she explained, could bring about significant savings, of about 6 percent of GDP for Iraq. Another area for potential savings is reducing gas flaring and its use for electricity consumption. This could bring about 1.4 trillion Iraqi dinars for budget savings per year. Reforming the universal subsidy system can bring annual savings of about 1.8 trillion Iraqi Dinars. So, she deduced, there are many options for fiscal consolidation and adjustments that will increase savings which can then be channeled towards investments that will create jobs in the private sector.

While implementing both short-term and mediumterm reforms, such as diversifying the economy away from the hydrocarbon sector, it is imperative to mitigate the impact of this economic crisis through social measures. Other priority actions include the implementation of good governance and public investment management. Overall, she emphasized, "economic diversification is key". The three bases of diversification, which Iraq is very strong in, are human capital, specific sectors of reform, and greater regional integration. She pointed out that the financial sector can provide additional facets for investment and strengthening the economy, in particular the non-oil economy. She also noted that services can play an important role in diversification in the Kurdish region. "The KRI has a potential to become a platform for transient and logistics systems in the region given its proximity to major markets."

Given the budgetary situation in the KRG, however, the government will not be able to tackle these situations alone. She highlighted the need for foreign investment, private sector initiatives, and publicprivate partnerships in order to create competitive sectors. She argued that the oil and gas sectors can be used as a stepping-stone towards diversification for the whole of Iraq. She also pointed out that diversification can be done within the hydrocarbon sector as well. The spillovers from the oil sector can play a critical role in encouraging non-oil economic activities. She touched on the health sector as well, noting that a holistic approach could be adopted that links upgrading of services from clinics to laboratories, as well as to the pharmaceutical industry. From professional services to retailers, the opportunities exist but require the state to have an incubator role. She concluded with the fact that regional integration can also play an important role and countries in the region can benefit from the potential that exists so that the region can grow as a whole and benefit from value chains and start competing as a result.

### **Ali Alaq** Governor, Central Bank of Iraq



We can survive this depression through internal policies and external aid.



Ali Alaq, the Governor of the Central Bank of Iraq focused his talk on the national budget, highlighting the gap between financial and political objectives in the country. He outlined the work of the Central Bank and called for support from political institutions through the implementation of transparency and rule of law.

By analyzing the country's budget, he affirmed, one can better comprehend the economic crisis. Unfortunately, the method by which the national annual budget is prepared is unclear and ambiguous. Ali Alaq recounted that during his tenure as deputy prime minister, he formed a committee to study the way the budget was developed so that is would be better understood by the populace. In addition, he suggested that the Finance Ministry conduct a study regarding the failures in the budget and develop conclusions to address them. Such a study will certainly go towards improving the work of various government segments. He stressed the importance of understanding the relation between financial and political policies. He asked the audience to imagine that Iraq has two budgets; one in foreign currency and the other in national currency. Iraq would then use the foreign currency, mainly dollars, to pay for imported products and other international commitments, such as paying the national debts. Iraq always has a surplus in this budget, he noted. Therefore, Iraq cannot claim bankruptcy because A) it can continue to honor its international commitments through the national bank and B) the surplus of the foreign currency budget is always used in dinars to cover the government's internal commitments. The national currency, the dinar budget, however, does not have a surplus and all government payments are made in dinars. This budget is always supported by the surplus of the

foreign currency budget. The government always asks for dinars in exchange of foreign currency.

Alaq's conclusion regarding the use of surplus to cover internal expenses was that it is decisively wrong. The government is using its foreign currency reserve to meet internal needs instead of generating the income internally. "The government does not keep this surplus as a reserve, instead it destroys it." The Central Bank is forced to push the foreign currency into the market in order to acquire the dinars for the government. The ideal case is one in which a government meets its internal obligations through internal sources of income. When the government cannot balance between internal income and expenses. The current economy is experiencing severe problems. In Iraq's case 90 percent of internal expenses are covered by the foreign currency budget. In addition, Iraq has a large number of employees as well as internal commitments. "The government cannot reduce these expenses easily, and flexibility is close to zero." Iraq is in need of sources of income. The cost-benefit analysis shows that Iraq pays 4 trillion dinars in salaries every month, while only generating 2 trillion dinars from these jobs. "The government is losing this way!" Industry and agriculture are the only way to generate

internal income and Iraq is not trying to improve these sectors rather, he asserted, it depends on international loans in case of failure. These loans put pressure on the central bank, he explained, as the bank has to maintain a specific amount of foreign currency in order to pay these loans back, and these loans mostly result in inflation.

The 2016 budget required seven billion dollars to be exchanged to dinars so that the government could cover its expenses, expenses, which only consume resources rather than producing anything. "We need to solve this issue," he said. The political climate and the overall insecure atmosphere in Iraq greatly influence the operations of the Central Bank. There is a lot of money wasted in Iraq, he announced, highlighting that there is no transparency and barely any rule of law. "No matter what we do at the central bank, the political institutions are not helping. There is a huge gap between financial and political objectives." Finally he concluded, the main problem of Iraq in 2016 is not the financial crisis, nor the fact that Iraq is bankrupt. "We can survive this depression through internal policies and external aids. We should learn from these times. Unfortunately, we did not learn in 2009, but it is time to learn now, and to be less dependent on oil".



# Stuart Jones US Ambassador to Iraq





Clearly Iraq is in a difficult economic crisis and the US is in a position to be supportive.



US Ambassador to Iraq, Stuart Jones provided an overview of the ways in which the US plans to support Iraq. He called for the closer integration of the governments in Baghdad and Erbil and the diversification of the economy and outlined the potential for further US support in the non-security sectors

He began by acknowledging the expertise on the panel and their work, Abdul Mahdi for improving the operations of the Oil Ministry, Ali Alaq for improving the processes at the central bank, Sibel Kulaksiz for leading the international community's efforts in Iraq, and the Prime Minister for leading the reform efforts. The Ambassador outlined the ways in which the United States can support Iraq and the region. "Clearly Iraq is in a difficult economic crisis and the US is in a position to be supportive," he said. He referred to the 2.7 billion dollars loan facility passed by Congress in December 2015, which aimed at foreign financing of the Iraqi security forces. This he claimed enabled the Iraqi forces to defer payments on weapons, equipment and ammunition needed in the fight against DAESH. The loan facility also included a component for the Kurdish Peshmerga forces to benefit from. In the 2017 fiscal year, the Obama administration has requested the authority for a one billion dollars loan guarantee for Iraq. Such a US program has met with success in Ukraine, Jordan, and Tunisia, and has helped the governments there address the fiscal challenges and the fiscal gaps resulting from the current economic crisis. In addition to that, the United States is the leading humanitarian donor to Iraq. The Ambassador noted that since 2015, the US has contributed over 600 million dollars to support IDPs in Iraq. He acknowledged however that more needs to be done



and it is important to look ahead at this stage to ascertain what the US can do additionally.

The key issue for Iraq, he noted, is how to leverage the support of the international financial institutions. Ambassador Jones noted that the members of the Iraqi government's upcoming visit to Amman, to discuss the staff moderate program, agreed on last November, with the option to transition to standby agreement, will unlock 10 to 15 billion dollars in IMF and other foreign assistance. This, he emphasized, is a great opportunity for Iraq. "Iraq already identified significant reforms it can undertake and can go to Amman with its own bases for IMF agreement." This essentially means that the IMF would not be dictating terms to Iraq and Iraq would be in a position to draft a program that they will be comfortable with. This he said leads to May when G7 leaders will be meeting in Japan where

Iraq and support to Iraq is on the agenda. Therefore, he pointed out, there are many opportunities going forward to assist Iraq.

Ambassador Jones touched on three key points in his talk. Firstly, there is a great need for the economies of Iraq and the KRG to be more integrated, more collaborative and more cooperative. Leaving disagreements over oil issues aside, he argued that there is more in common between these economies than there is separate. "You still share tremendous cooperation in the agricultural sector. You still gather together in the food distribution program. There should be, as Qubad mentioned, a greater cooperation in the tariff system." Ambassador Jones highlighted the need for cooperation and understanding between Baghdad and the KRG in order to boost non-oil revenues as the opportunities are present. He suggested that both governments



appoint teams to engage each other on areas of economic synergies, both within and outside the oil sector. He pointed to the surplus of dinars in Baghdad and surplus of dollars in Erbil as an example to highlight areas for cooperation. Solving the issue is too easy, he said, but both parties need to cooperate, and overcome the political rhetoric.

Secondly, he underlined the need to diversify the economy both in Iraq and the Kurdistan region. To achieve this, international firms and businesses need to be able to penetrate the Iraqi market and unfortunately, he pointed out, the transparency international index number for Iraq is very low. This does not have to be the case however. It can be done, but it will require difficult political choices. The Ambassador assured that the US is extremely interested in doing business with Iraq. To corroborate this, he referred to the re-inauguration of the American Chamber of Commerce in Baghdad, where turnout was three times the projected amount. This he said proves that "there is a pent up interest in doing business in Iraq. But we have to make it easier; we have to make Iraq more

friendlier." On the one hand, that means addressing the political doubts and insecurities; on the other it translates to fixing some of the basic structural changes.

Thirdly, he addressed the importance of the strategic framework agreement. He recalled Brett McGurk's talk about the US-led Coalition's support in successfully fighting DAESH and making it possible to look beyond DAESH and towards the future of Iraq and economic prosperity. The US, the Ambassador made clear, has much more to offer in non-security sectors than in security. "The United States, can bring technology; the United States can bring capital; the United States can bring access to the international financial institutions; and the United States can bring educational assets. This is where we really want to be in our strategic framework agreement. This is where the United States can really thrive as a partner to Iraq and this is where we want to get to."

### Society Beyond Extremism: The War of Ideas

#### **Moderated by Dov Zakheim**

Former US Undersecretary of Defense and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees

#### Nibras Kazimi

Visiting Fellow, Hudson Institute

#### Ranj Talabani

Head of Zanyari

#### Alex Meleagrou-Hitchens

Director, International Center for the Study of Radicalization

#### **Yasmin Green**

Director, Research and Development, Jigsaw

#### Choman Hardi

AUIS English Department Chair and Founding Director, the Center for Gender and Development Studies As military battles ensue, the war against extremism can only be won by conviction. Years of public diplomacy outreach have largely failed in curbing extremist recruitment. This panel looked at social trends and realities feeding into the extremist narrative in militarized societies, while presenting new approaches to winning the war of ideas.

### Nibras Kazimi Visiting Fellow, Hudson Institute



What is different about the Islamic State and other types of extremism is that it not only provides the means to angry men, nihilists and anarchists, to tear down the old order. It also attracts ambitious talented young people, who want to be part of a grand state venture.

Nibras Kazimi drew on his extensive research on the growing threat of jihadism in the Middle East and the prospect for democracy in the region to discuss the topic of extremism. His main argument in countering violent extremism was for the use of history to confound potential recruits, to target the focus specifically on the segment with the most potential to be recruited, and to adopt a more intellectual approach when attempting to reach them.

While remembering the tragedy of Halabia 28 years ago, he reminded the audience about another incident that happened 13 years ago in the vicinity of Halabja, an incident that he believed would help in understanding an important aspect of the debate, mainly that ideas cannot be extinguished through military means. On March 22, 2003, Coalition forces launched 50 cruise missiles against jihadist bases near Halabja, Biyara and Qabela on the Iranian border. The operation was a great success and the organization was destroyed - and it was the same organization that tried to assassinate Dr. Barham Salih in 2002, he pointed out. What remained and emerged afterwards was the networks and the ideas. He highlighted that these Salafist networks had a lot to do with launching the Iraqi insurgency later and "this demonstrates that dangerous ideas and dangerous networks survives cruise missiles and F16s and what counts as a military victory".

Kazimi enumerated three main points regarding countering violent extremism (CVE). He argued, contrary to what is expressed, that much of what has been done has been effective, but unfortunately difficult to measure. While many of these measures should continue to be tried, he believed that some deserved more focus and needed to be taken to the

next level. The first point, he said, was the jihadists' use of history. "Jihadists have weaponized history," he argued, pointing out that the jihadists have found a way to manipulate the standard understanding of history in the Middle East, especially understanding about early Islam. He gave Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his declaration of a ten-year-old caliphate in 2016 as an example. It would surprise most people to hear of a ten-year-old caliphate when they have only started to hear about the Islamic State in early September 2014. The origin of the state, however, as far as al-Baghdadi is concerned, goes back to October 2006 when they proclaimed the founding of the Islamic State in Iraq, what they believe to be the proto-caliphate. Kazimi illustrated how the Islamic State had used history to show their audience, their sympathizers and followers, that what they were doing was right.

He referred to the book published by the Islamic state in tandem with their declaration and in defense of their action. This book, Kazimi noted, did not present a theological explanation, but rather drew on historical precedent to justify their cause, going back to the embryonic state established by their Prophet Mohammed in Medina. The book argued that what the Islamic state was doing was similar to the prophet's nascent state in scope, size of territory, tactics, and the way in which they treated others. He propounded that the concentric circles of audiences with varying degrees of sympathy towards the Islamic State have found this use of history very compelling. "This use of history as precedent is effective." According to Kazimi, the reason for not using history to counter these justifications and narratives is that there is very little agreement on the details of history. The "jihadists benefit

from the clarity of their message" by saying, 'it's in the history books!' What is missing however, as he explained, is the content that elucidates the numerous disagreements about what is in the history books. In the Islamic context, historians and chroniclers only began recording events 150 to 200 years after they occurred. The debates and quarrels, based on history and indeed what counts as accurate history, have shaped the rich Islamic tradition, he said. "We should use that."

The second point of his focus was the target audience. Market segmentation plays a role here, said Kazimi, and it is a particular segment within that market that is of special interest to CVE. "What is different about the Islamic State, and other types of extremism, both Sunni and Shia ... is that it not only provides the means to angry young men to tear down the old order ... it doesn't only attract anarchists and nihilists. It also attracts ambitious talented men, for the most part men, in particular young men in their late-twenties to mid-thirties, who want to be part of a grand state venture, almost an imperial venture." It is DAESH's ability to attract and recruit such talent, who will become the midmanagement for jihadists, which is dangerous. He expounded further, saying that this in effect means that the pool of recruitment for people who will be their financiers, who will run their media organizations, who will run their Intel organizations, and work on governance dramatically increases. The type of talent that they can attract, because they are proposing a state venture, increases. Furthermore, he added, the middle management can easily replace members of the top leadership who are killed by Coalition forces. And this is another dangerous aspect because it shows that the pipeline from



management to leadership is a sustainable system for them.

When talking about Countering Violent Extremism, Kazimi emphasized the need to discuss cerebral approaches that target the type of person who would become that mid-level manager for the jihadists. "What might influence this person?" To this question, he answered that the more intellectual aspects of these countermeasures are certainly worth pursuing. Debating history, for example, "might confuse that person, before he makes a snap decision of joining the jihad". Kazimi's last point of discussion, when talking about extremism, was the existence of a variant of extremism on the Shia side, which he has coined the phrase Shia Chauvinism to describe it.

This extremism feeds into the Sunni extremism, which in turn feeds it back, creating a loop. The way the fight in Syria has been projected to get recruits from around the world is centered on the notion that it is no longer possible for Shia and Sunni to live together. So the fight becomes "about power, about holding territory and about warfare". And that is the form of extremism that CVE needs to focus on. He concluded by arguing "we can also use history and geography to confuse this kind of narrative." For Shia extremism, it is a clear narrative for their audience, for example, to protect the Shia shrines in Syria. To confuse this message, we can demonstrate, and history demonstrates that many shrines have had Sunni benefactors, and rulers and Sultans who built those shrines. He ended by saying, "my position on a lot of CVE is that, if you can't beat them, confuse them".

#### Ranj Talabani Head of Zanvari



The government needs to do more to create avenues for these young people to find meaning in their lives.



Ranj Talabani, the head of Zanyari, spoke about the the pull DAESH exudes on Kurds, living in both the region and in Europe, highlighting the reasons behind it, and calling on the government to step in and do more.

He began by commending the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani for being a place for people from across Iraq, regardless of religion or ethnicity, to gather and exchange ideas; moreover for being a place where students learn how to tolerate each other, debate and argue, learn from one another, and compromise. Talabani highlighted how DAESH has changed the way terrorism is viewed worldwide. Prior to DAESH, al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Islam, Jund al-Islam and various other groups across the Middle East portrayed the Sunni community as victims, beaten by the West, beaten by the Zionists, and beaten by the imperialist powers. DAESH changed this with the establishment of the caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's message to that beaten community, Talabani stated, was that "you are no longer victims, you can now become holy warriors, you can come and defend this holy empire, we will expand and we will establish a state that will be here for a very long time". When looking at the data, the sheer number of people travelling from China and from Europe and the United States proves how much of a pull the establishment of the caliphate really was. This was a calculated and strategic move on the part of DAESH and the groundwork had been laid for several years. In addition, he asserted that there are many similarities between the establishment of the Islamic state and the state of Israel. These similarities include collecting people who believe, bringing them together, giving each a role to play, and importantly

he noted, one does not need to be a strong warrior to be an important asset to the state.

As far as the Kurds were concerned. Talabani said that they had witnessed a worrying trend at the time of the establishment of DAESH, when their romantic pull was very strong. He cited intelligence sources that show there are approximately 570 to 600 Kurds within DAESH, with 35 to 45 percent of them having been killed. These Kurds are predominantly from the provinces of Halabia, Sulaimani and Erbil; the provinces of Duhok and Kirkuk, on the other hand, have only had 25 people join DAESH. He added that there are also another 25 Iraqi Kurds from the European Union countries as well as over 50 Iranian Kurds who have travelled to Syria to join DAESH. Another trend in DAESH tactics is that they seek fertile soil from which to recruit; "they look for regions where there is corruption and lack of credibility, especially from the youth, towards the government". Talabani warned that "we are at a crossroads at the moment; there is an economic crisis happening and if it is not dealt with correctly, we will have many many more potential recruits for DAESH, and not just DAESH, but what will come after ISIS".

Talabani told the story of a young individual from Sulaimani to provide an example of such recruits. The young man was a very talented student, with high grades and a keen interest in martial arts. He had been invited to participate in several competitions around the region, Iran, Turkey and other parts of the Middle East and the world. Unfortunately, however, this

young man could not even afford the ride home from his martial arts center. But he knocked on many doors and went to different political party members. He became disillusioned and discouraged. He joined DAESH and was killed three or four months ago. His two brothers joined the Peshmerga forces - sadly one of them died in the operations against DAESH in Kirkuk. This is one example of a broken family.

Talabani held the government responsible, saying that it needs to do a lot more and "do more to create avenues for these young people to find meaning in their lives." This is very important because there are many people, who are smart, who are educated and who want to be a productive member of society. These people see no real avenue and have no hope for themselves. Talabani ascertained that in these conditions, they can join DAESH to secure a basic salary for themselves. On the other hand, he said, many people currently living under DAESH control, are not driven by financial incentives. Talabani said that there are many who call from Mosul, Hawija, from Riyaz and Abbasi, on a daily basis, who offer intelligence without any desire for compensation; they reject any payment, saying that they only do this to hasten the eradication of DAESH and have things return to normal. He argued that those who join DAESH do so as a result of financial problems, when their family and society burden them, and when they have no one to turn to. He concluded by saying, "it is a reaction; it is frustration and anger towards the government and the lack of institutions"

### **Alex Meleagrou-Hitchens**

Head of Research and Information, International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR)



The first real effort of the state [UK] to form a relationship with its Muslim population was on the basis of them being potential terrorists.



The Head of Research and Information at ICSR Alex Meleagrou-Hitchens spoke about finding more intelligent solutions when confronting radicalization and political violence.

He began by stating that the key feature of any attempt at deradicalization must be carried out on a region and country-specific basis. His talk, he said, would focus on the experience in the United Kingdom, where in the early 2000s they developed CONTEST, a counter terrorism strategy. This strategy he explained had a number of different strands that were fairly standard, hard power measures such as preparing for attack, pursuing, and intelligence gathering. The strategy also included a soft power element, called Prevent, meant to prevent the radicalization of people from the outset. This was a unique concept at the time and was an ambitious program, he said, which ultimately failed for several reasons.

The program included a number of problematic elements. The program used taxpayer funding to support Muslim organizations considered moderate - something the United States does not do, and for good reason. This created a business around the program and provided perverse incentives for claiming the funding. This, Hitchens continued, "contributed to ongoing communal tensions that already existed" and exacerbated existing problems between different communities and the Muslim community. The program was also often funding the wrong people, including Salafist and Islamist organizations that were not jihadists or violent, with the understanding that they were the right partners because they were speaking the same language. The standard to make the case for support were rather



low he explained, with the main criteria for Muslim citizens being that these groups did not support jihadist activities.

The other element of the program called for developing a counter narrative. The understanding has been that the state needs to create a counter narrative, to counter the messaging and the narrative propounded by global jihadists and of the global jihadist movement. One of the biggest establishments of this movement in Europe, he pointed out, is located in the United Kingdom. When creating a counter narrative, the program quickly faced many problems that still need to be dealt with. Firstly, "there is no single narrative to counter. There is not one counter narrative. There is not one narrative." Secondly, he went on, and here he drew from the work of Cristina Archetti, an expert on Communication propaganda, "narratives are not just rhetorical devices that you can roll out ad hoc and expect for them to work. They are socially

constructed and need networks to disseminate in order to offer the narrative historical and cultural context." She refers to them as a constellation of relationships, which gives the narrative context and meaning, he said. To simply throw out a counter narrative online and hope that it will resonate, does not work and it has not worked.

The other problem with this approach, he argued, is that non-state actors are generally more successful at propaganda, adding that this has always been the case. These counter narratives, being negative and reactive, have not worked, and Hitchens reiterated, would not work. The question then is "who is the messenger and where is the message coming from?" The type of people that the state wants to reach, called vulnerable individuals, are not the type of people who would trust what the state has to say. "How can the state empower the right people without staining them with the state problem," he asked. Hitchens pointed out that the UK government

had recently announced a new strategy that looked to keep the "fingerprint of the state off messaging" coming from the voices they believed young Muslims would want to hear from. However, as Hitchens asserted, this highlights the other problem with government programs that try to reach out to Muslims, especially in the UK.

In the UK "the first real effort of the state to form a relationship with its Muslim population was on the basis of them being potentially terrorists". The relationship, therefore, was poisoned from the very start and this has been a main criticism of the program, which never really recovered from what can be considered a public relations disaster, from the start. He explained how it is seen as sinister, persecutory, and conspiratorial. They already have a tainted relationship with the state to begin with and the state does not have the credibility required to reach them. "This is something it has really struggled with and I don't know if it will ever recover," he said. What has worked, he went on, are intervention-based programs where credible mentor figures deal with individual cases, providing support and mentorship to young Muslims who had not had access to them before, intervening in their lives either before or after they decide to join, and perhaps explaining to them how they have misunderstood various religious and geopolitical questions, depending on why they joined in the first place. Hitchens pointed out that this is the way DAESH has been recruiting people. "They are not just throwing messages out there and hoping they stick. They spend days and weeks with one individual." While not easy, he said, this method does work and it has models, in Denmark for example, where it has been very successful.

The other problem, Hitchens argued, was on the religious question and the idea that the state needs to offer a religious response, "that this is not Islam and the people who are providing that are offering very theoretical ideas, often requiring a lot of your time and intellectual energy"; something, he added, that does not appeal to the people interested in jihadism and DAESH. On the other hand, he said "ISIS are acting, the power of action for these kind of groups far outdoes a sheikh sitting and talking theory for a long time". While Islam is not the problem, DAESH are basing their action in Islamic practice and in Islamic history, particularly the early phase. He put forth that their key message, especially for westerners, is the Hijra, a pivotal point in Islamic history when Muhammed founded Islam and was persecuted by the tribes there.

They use pivotal moments in Islamic history like the Hijra and juxtapose them with the modern world to encourage action and thereby enrich and invest their message with a very deep historical context, which has been very effective. Furthermore, he added that many are keen to call them crazy but DAESH, uses Naji's Management of Savagery as a key strategic doctrine, which sets out a very clear strategy for the use of brutality, filling the vacuum in chaotic areas, and using brutality, violence and ultra violence to scare their enemies and perhaps pull the United States back into the region. He concluded that DAESH are not acting like madmen, they have not taken over so much territory by acting irrationally, they use clear strategies. "They are not crazy and we should not dismiss them as such."

### **Yasmin Green**

Director, Research and Development, Jigsaw/ Google Ideas



Identifying potential recruits presents an opportunity to engage, to distract, to disrupt, and maybe even sell a different product. That is the power of advertising.

Yasmin Green's experience in working at a technology incubator that focuses on geopolitical challenges added a very compelling dimension to the panel discussion. Focusing on the role technology has to play, she argued for the adoption of target advertising as the main strategy in countering the narrative of DAESH

She started by contextualizing the landscape within which technology has progressed in the last few years. Five years ago terrorists' ability to create and share propaganda was limited to a video recorded in a cave, smuggled out over a month, uploaded to the dark web, to a password protected chat forum that required you to be a member to visit; that video could be accessed after being downloaded and every person wanting to view it would need to download it, she explained. It was a cumbersome process to create and a painful process to distribute and access the content. The last five years has seen a dramatic shift in the use of technology, with the rise of mobile phone users, the creation of online social networks, and possibly the most critical, the popularity of streaming services. She continued that many young Internet users in Iraq or in the Kurdish regions use their mobile phones to access the Internet. They're fortunate enough to have access to Wi-Fi in a place like the university, but otherwise, they may have patchy Internet access or use shared computers. Bad internet access, using a mobile phone, or using a shared computer was a very strong deterrent to downloading content, especially a piece of radicalizing terrorist content.

The world is different today, Green expounded, as content can easily be uploaded to streaming services and social media, and accessed easily, even with bad



Internet connection. This has meant an explosion in the creation and consumption of content, which as a representative of the tech sector, she argued is overall very positive, with great consequences for e-commerce, education and entertainment. However, she continued, it has also meant that terrorist groups have found it much easier to reach, radicalize, and recruit their audience. The progression of technology can therefore be a double-edged sword, she posited. DAESH, for example, is not only capable of recruiting local fighters to fight their conflict, they can also recruit from anywhere in the world, from Kosovo, from Indonesia, from Austria. They can convince other foreign fighters to join them and fight in their conflict.

When looking at the totality of the content created by DAESH, Green pointed out that the vast majority, approximately 80 percent, is in Arabic, with Russian and English following closely, and then Kurdish, Turkish, and French, and further still there is content in Chinese and even Hebrew. She expressed her amazement at the fact that DAESH has also created several pieces of content in sign language. Therefore, she affirmed, DAESH is truly an "equal opportunity recruiter, super global" and at the same time very local, with members who connect to potential recruits via social media, who speak the same language, and talk about local grievances, corruption, lack of jobs, and discrimination. "It is a formula that works" she said, "and at the same time, the modules we have right now ... they're failing, they're broken." On this she agreed with Alex Hitchens' main points. The strategy to create and proliferate a counter narrative is a failed experiment. "We're just beginning to scratch the surface of what we can do with technology", she said.

Her proposal pivoted on reframing the challenge, to use what is commonly understood in place of the old world, failed experiments of the counter narrative. She stressed that events happening in the physical world, on the physical battlefield are easy to grasp. "We heard Brett McGurk yesterday say that we actually reclaimed 40 percent of their [DAESH] territory over the last year and we understand why that's good, that's really easy for us to grasp." She proposed using the same framing to think about the digital space, asking, "How do we think about reclaiming digital territory, a digital counter insurgency if you would? How do we think about DAESH's footprint online? Their supply chain and their command and control?" She put forth two distinct and disparate strategies. The first is a negative strategy, she explained, which includes striking accounts and removing content. While many categories of content warrant this strategy, such as immolation of a prisoner, or a bomb making tutorial for example, not every mention of DAESH, however, can be removed from the Internet and this is not even desirable, she clarified. There is a risk in overstepping this strategy since the backlash can create digital martyrs. Interestingly, she added, there is even a cache for those who have had their accounts suspended and where it is perceived as a badge of honor.

The second strategy is a positive measure: "Technology enables us to reach an audience with precision and what I am going to suggest is so successful and so obvious that we don't consider it, and that is 'Targeted Advertising'." She pointed out that the e-commerce sector is a trillion dollar sector online and it is based on user habits, finding customers for products and content. She argued



that the same technique could be used to find potential DAESH recruits, like any other online consumer, based on their browsing sessions, content consumption, and online searches. Identifying these potential recruits presents "an opportunity to engage, to distract, to disrupt, and maybe even sell a different product. That is the power of advertising", she argued. Green referred to the frequency with which content is uploaded to the Internet every minute, assuring that there is content that is already debunking DAESH's recruiting narratives. While this content may not be the content that says "Say No to ISIS," courtesy of the State Department or Home Office, it probably is religious debate, citizen journalism, documentary footage that exposes the military successes of DAESH conquering the world's greatest powers as not true.

There is an abundance of content online that shows military failures, the refugee crisis, fighter casualties, and the fact that the happy governance of the Muslim Utopia is not true. It is much more credible counter propaganda to see a 90 year old religious woman in Raqqa telling DAESH fighters that they are all the same, that they are all evil, and that they are all the same as Assad fighters. "You can see the pain and suffering on her face. That is very, very credible counter propaganda". The most credible spokespeople, she went on, are the defectors and the returnees who can talk firsthand about brutality, hypocrisy, and corruption. Green concluded with two major points, saying firstly that "it is our job to sell these young people something different and if we don't, our silence lends ISIS strength" and secondly that "we should use our voices and use technology and reclaim the digital space". She emphatically acknowledged that "there is no solution to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria without a political solution" but in the meantime, she propounded "let's not overlook the role of technology."

### **Choman Hardi**

AUIS English Department Chair, Founding Director, the Center for Gender and Development Studies



Women and men have unfortunately very different social experiences and history shows us that when we leave the decisions to men ... usually women's experiences are marginalized.

Dr. Choman Hardi, the founding director of the Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) spoke about the consequences of extremism for women and women's roles in society as well as opportunities for women in post conflict situations to counter the extremist narratives and to work towards change.

She began by saying that the main consequence of radicalism and extremism, seen most recently with the Taliban and DAESH, is the rise in violence against women. She pointed to the most recent example witnessed with the Yazidi women survivors. The way gender stereotypes are reinforced plays into a patriarchal system of seeing men as fighters and protectors and women as nurturers and defenseless victims, with women having no other role than satisfying men and reproducing. Gender stereotypes, she went on, are also reinforced by depicting women as symbols of the group. Ideological fights in modern times take place on women's bodies with the woman becoming a symbol, an iconic figure for the nation, for the group, for the identity and thus "her sexuality is controlled by that group because she is culturally and biologically reproducing the group's ideology" Hardi expounded.

When talking about "managing post-conflict transformations from war to peace, from extremism to tolerance, from despotism to pluralism" she continued, "it is a cliché now, fortunately, to say that it's very important that women are involved in combating extremism, and are involved in conflict-resolution management and prevention, in peace building and also in governance". In 2003 post-war Iraq, there was a 25 percent women participation rate in Iraq and 30 percent in Kurdistan as a result

of the UN Resolution 1325 passed in the year 2000. However, she pointed out that the 1325 UN Resolution is not without its problems, the most notable of which is the way the resolution essentializes women. By this she meant that the resolution "reinforces the notion that men and women are by nature, and essentially, different from one another and that their characteristic differences are determined by their biology". She gave the example that women should be involved in peacebuilding because, according to the UN Resolution, women are more peace loving. She countered this commonly-held notion by saying that "we don't have to go far back in history to see evidence contrary to that, that men are more aggressive and women more peace loving." She named Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi as examples of two of the most peaceful leaders in history while also naming Margaret Thatcher who was an aggressive woman.

The other way in which the UN Resolution essentializes women, she argued, is by portraying them as in need of protection. Moreover, she said that the resolution "urges states and governments to protect women, to pay attention to the needs of women, and to protect them especially from sexual abuse and rape." Hardi continued that AUIS was fortunate enough to have had Nasreen Abdullah, the commander of YPG, at the University in February for a conference about Yazidis. In her talk, Commander Nasreen had said that Kurdish women have taken up arms to protect themselves and this, Nasreen had proclaimed, is the greatest honor they can have. According to Hardi, what is important to take away from this is the disassociation of honor from sexuality and its association with bravery and

patriotism - the fact that they can defend themselves and are no longer dependent on men.

She emphasized the need to learn from the coleadership that issued from the three cantons of the Kurds in Syria and the leadership of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and also the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey, specifically from the ways men and women have been leading efforts on the ground as mayors, as party leaders, and as army commanders. Hardi recommended that mechanisms be put in place in Iraqi Kurdistan to ensure that co-leaderships are not superficial and in this, she suggested, drawing examples from the experiences of the Kurds in Turkey and Syria when they implemented co-leaderships.

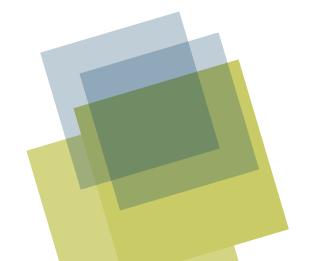
She put forth two reasons for supporting women's involvement in combating extremism. "I believe that it is a loss to the community not to utilize the creativity and ideas and skills of half of the population in combating extremism", she said firstly and secondly "because women and men have unfortunately very different social experiences and history shows us that when we leave the decisions to men, to decide about law, constitution, norms, values and so on, usually women's experiences are marginalized." It is for these social reasons, she argued, and not any biologically determinist reasons, that women should be involved in combating extremism.

The question, she asked however, is how to achieve this. Hardi asserted that the focus cannot be on one issue alone. Education, pluralism and diversity, and marginalization are all key issues that cannot be addressed individually. She noted how Jihadi John had studied at a good British university and yet he became a terrorist and beheaded people. Regarding pluralism and diversity, she maintained that "it is very important for young people to be exposed to other communities, people who hold completely different views than their own and to form friendships with them, to interact with them, and to stop seeing things as black and white, us v. them, to integrate ... and not to outcast anyone". Hardi stressed the need to address marginalization along with economic deprivation effectively. She looked at the situation of those recruited by DAESH, even in the West; among them, she said, there are those who feel marginalized by the state, who are stigmatized, subjected to racism, and impoverished. It is important therefore to provide positive role models to men who turn from their terrorist activities, who only turned to it in the first place when they were disenchanted, depressed, and deprived because an Islamic party gradually recruited them into doing horrible things.

Hardi agreed with the main points of Hitchens and Green, that it is imperative to provide positive support and role models to these young men and of course to utilize technology to counter extremist narratives. She said, however, that as an educator, she believes in the importance of education in particular because "education makes us question and think critically so that we don't accept what is being given to us straight away, so that we question, so that we are not easily brainwashed". Moreover, she pointed out that the right education allows individuals to see through hegemonic states of oppression. "Hegemony works by making injustice and inequality invisible to people and they normalize it and we become so desensitized that we don't

see it anymore." She posited that education gives individuals the capacity to see through that and to recognize that the system attempts to brainwash and to persuade oppressed individuals to accept their low social status, to accept that they deserve it. When these attempts fail, hegemony uses violence.

Hardi concluded on a positive note, expressing her happiness about the fact that in the past two years in Iraq, five gender centers have opened in Baghdad, Basra, Soran, and Sulaimani, and recently at AUIS under her direction. These centers, she said, can provide a counter narrative to the social constructs of masculinity as an aggressive, dominant, selfish being, and femininity, on the other hand, as passive, domesticated, and centered on reproducing and providing comfort. It is very important to support these centers, she said, and help them grow so they can research and reach their community, from primary and elementary education and secondary school, seeing as that it is quite late in the developmental stage when somebody comes to university. "We need to provide guidelines to the government itself ... maybe research centers like these, could provide guidance to the government to implement change."



# Turmoil and Disorder: A New Sykes-Picot?

#### **Moderated by Henri Barkey**

Director of Middle East Program Woodrow Wilson Center and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees

#### **Abdul Aziz Sager**

Chairman, Gulf Research Center

#### **Robin Wright**

Senior Fellow, United States Institute of Peace, Woodrow Wilson Center

#### Saban Kardas

Director, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies

#### Hayder al-Khoei

Chatham House Fellow and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees

#### Kawa Hassan

Fellow, East West Institute

May 2016 marks the centenary of the Sykes-Picot agreement, leading to the borders that define where we are today. As Syria enters its sixth year of war, sectarians divisions become entrenched, and Kurdish aspirations for independence are heightened. Is the redrawing of boundaries inevitable? The panel discussed the possibility of breakups and alliances emerging from the current turmoil.

# **Abdul Aziz Sager**Chairman, Gulf Research Center



A unified Iraq is what we support, we do not support divisions anywhere.



The Chairman of the Gulf Research Center Abdul Aziz Sager presented an overview of the role of international and regional actors in Iraq. He looked at the question of Kurdish independence and argued against it.

He began his talk with the Sykes-Picot agreement, saying that it was the result of a conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. He referred to a documentary produced by the Gulf Research Center, where he serves as Chairman, entitled "Promises and Betravals," which looks at British promises made during the First World War, and whether they were committed to them or not. The documentary, based on primary sources, shows how Britain did not intend to deliver on its promises in many cases. Regarding the arrangements of the time and the political processes today, he said that there are some issues that need to be considered. Firstly, the old strategies for solving political, military, or economic problems are no longer effective. The United Nations, he asserted, has lost the ability to implement solutions and its decisions are "meaningless". This in turn, he argued, created an environment of civil war and conflict, especially in countries like Syria and Libya, among others, where non-governmental militias have flourished by participating in political life and supporting sectarian conflicts. "Sectarianism was not a main issue in the past, but it is a prominent one now." In addition, neighboring countries, especially in the Middle East are directly affected, as security and safety deteriorates as a result of the proximity of conflict.

Looking at the role of international and regional actors, he discussed the failed policies of the United States in Syria and Russia's intervention there.



Neighboring and regional countries too are heavily involved in the internal affairs of state and are exploiting the situation. Oil-dependent countries are suffering and the further decrease of oil prices has led to the cessation of reconstruction. The instability is compounded by the expansion of terrorist groups and activities across the Middle East and through Europe. He defined Obama's strategy in the Middle East as ambiguous and very weak, one that is ultimately failing.

Sager also discussed the concepts of federalism, independence, and separatist movements. These issues, he said, are understood differently in the Middle East and Middle Easterners believe separation to be legitimate based on ethnic and sectarian factors. "Any kind of independence movements in Iraq will either be based on ethnicity or religion." It remains to be seen if the Kurds will insist on independence once the situation in the country improves. He ventured to argue that a Kurdistan within Iraq will be much stronger because of its geographical location and being surrounded by many rival states. In the case of independence, he proposed that the two future states discuss ways to settle disputes about the delineation of borders and natural resources. The Arab Gulf

countries took years to settle territorial claims even though they are not as different as Kurds and Arabs. "Division also leads to more intervention by foreign powers," he surmised, which in turn leads to more conflict and unrest as these powers support one group over the other and create an environment of fear and instability.

Sager concluded by saying that "A one unified Iraq is what we support, we do not support divisions anywhere ... We also want a strong Iraq that preserves regional balance, an Iraq that plays a major role in the area, ... a stable and a safe Iraq ... an Iraq that does not allow for foreign intervention". This he maintained can be achieved by solving the internal political issues. Iraq also needs to improve its relations with its neighboring states. He believed Iraq should be more directly involved in matters concerning the Arab world as it was one of the founding members of the Arab League. He ended on a note of tolerance "That does not mean the Kurds will be excluded, no, we respect, love, and highly value the Kurds and we thank them for hosting that large number of refugees. The Kurds can be a vital part of the Arab world as well."

### **Robin Wright**

Senior Fellow, United States Institute of Peace, Woodrow Wilson Center



The story of the 21st century is going to be one of regrouping. The Middle East, with the demise of Sykes-Picot and the order it protected, is not an exception.

Robin Wright, senior fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, contextualized the panel discussion by naming the ways in which the Arab Spring have influenced the trajectory of events in the Middle East. The main point of her talk centered around the need for belonging to groups or 'regional blocks' in moving forward.

Wright noted that the last panel of forum ends on the most controversial subject. In many ways, she asserted, the "21st century is going to be the story of the regrouping. We've seen it already in other parts of the world. The Middle East in not an exception." Mentioning the examples of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, she argued that the Middle East in many ways is part of the perfect storm. In 1973 with the 'fourth Middle East war' there was discussions of the breakup of the region. which she had rejected. While living in Beirut during the civil war, she recalled, there was talk of whether Lebanon would implode, whether it would breakup as a country or be reabsorbed by Syria. While never agreeing with this line of thinking, Wright said that she began changing her mind after spending time in the Middle East to write a book, entitled 'Rock the Casbah', where she looked at the extraordinary phenomena of 2011. Beginning to understand the evolution and the impact of the Arab Spring in defining what people wanted, she told the audience that she began asking questions not about what people wanted in the immediate future, but rather what they wanted the region to look like.

Wright enumerated six factors that have contributed to where the region is today. The most obvious, she pointed out, is the Arab Spring. These uprising demonstrated that a generation had embraced



the idea of diversity and was willing to fight for their deserved rights. This was reflected in what transpired between the rise of Al Jazeera as the first television station to circumvent state control, she said, and the proliferation of around 500 independent satellite television stations in the Middle East. "Suddenly there was no one truth, there was no one nationalism whether it was in politics or in religion." The diversity of ideas, in all facets of life including politics, exposed the faux nationalism that had bound people, the ideologies that had used repression to keep people together. At this point, she argued, the people had crossed a threshold and there was no going back! People began believing that they have a stake in their future. She pointed towards the rise of communitarianism in lieu of nationalism as a way for people to protect their futures by looking at the local, the clan, the tribe, the sect, the ethnicity to protect and project political power. The lack of a sense of common good, she added, led people to turn towards their communities

"The rise of communitarianism was then militarized or securitized with the civil war in Syria where the issues of political survival and political future were replaced by exponential issues of physical survival." She argued that the future at this point was defined by the political devolution and the militarization of the community. Wright asserted that the great danger is that "the problems are so deep that whether it's the economic morass, the political impasse, or the fact that the social contract is no longer deliverable. It's

not an issue of the states breaking up because of the clashes among militias or political groups. It's the fact that the state is no longer sustainable, that the traditional political actors have been replaced by the community leaders and in most cases those are not elected, not reflecting anything more than community interest." She emphasized that the regional states will be facing a new round of challenges.

Wright believes that there is a positive side to the situation, much like the European countries who came together to form the European Union. "One of the trends of the 21st century as we move to globalization will be the creation of regional blocks." The Gulf Cooperation Council, the Maghreb Union, Eco - an environmental group - illustrates that regional alliances are important. About the future of the Kurdish region, she said, "There's no question in my mind that Kurdistan is going to, at some point in the not too distant future, be its own entity whether it's through decentralization, hard partition, or independence, that it will be a separate entity." However, she posited that Kurdistan for various reasons, its geography, economy, its lifeline through pipelines, must be part of a larger grouping. She concluded that this will be a period of unprecedented conflict. "We're beginning to see the trend of the 21st century is finding groups with which you can cooperate and finding solutions but it is not visible yet."



### **Saban Kardas**

Director, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM)



The conventional order of the Middle East has reached a dead end.



Sarban Kardas shared his views on the future of the Sykes-Picot agreement and order of the region, observing that it has become part of the daily discussions, in Turkey as well, and discussed how recent developments in the region have impacted Turkey, especially the country's foreign policy.

He framed the discussion of the future of the regional order into five different dimensions. There is an understanding that "the conventional order of the Middle East has reached a dead end" and that this order, which certainly needs revision, has been upset by the Arab Spring. However, he argued that recent developments should not be entirely limited to the Arab Spring. The first dimension is the borders, with the region's borders being challenged and the discussion of redrawing the borders moving beyond an academic debate to a debate amongst high-level policy makers. According to his understanding, Kardas argued that borders have become part of the discussion in two ways. On the one hand, "borders have lost their national meaning as markers of sovereignty" with competing authorities present on the borders. On the other hand, "there is a discussion about redrawing and dismembering existing states".

The second dimension, he put forth, is "the erosion of national sovereign authority" in tandem with the discussion about borders which affects different countries at different degrees. Turkey is part of this discussion and part of the same regional context; therefore, the erosion of sovereignty and the national state model in this context also affects Turkey. The empowerment of sub state actors and their identities at the expense of the national identity and authority is the third dimension in the discussion. Again, this is happening at different degrees in different



countries and "Turkey is also directly and indirectly affected by the very same process, especially the discussion about the future of the national state model." He called Turkey the textbook example of national state experiment in the Middle East, which is currently coming under pressure at this new junction. The fourth dimension, he continued, is the "vicious cycle between socioeconomic underdevelopment and political underdevelopment." The Arab Spring demanded socioeconomic and political reforms, from the bottom up. However, he argued, these demands have not been fulfilled neither economically, nor socially and "the region is not moving in a positive direction."

The socioeconomic circumstances are feeding the political underdevelopment; the need for reform, socioeconomic and political reform, has not been fulfilled and for this reason people are on the streets to make their demands heard and the potential for

uprisings remain. Moreover, reforms in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq have been suspended as security concerns and conflict have surged to the top of the agenda. But in the long-run, he asserted, the demands for reform must eventually be satisfied or else he warned that people will once again take to the streets. He likened the situation to a ticking time bomb, saying that as long as the demands for reform in the socioeconomic and political sectors are not successfully met, then the future of the region and indeed the global structures in the region will remain unstable. According to his speech, Turkey is also affected by these very same discussions. Turkey did not develop a framework to manage regional transformations on this scale. Democratization and the socioeconomic climate in Turkey has been negatively impacted by the dynamics in the region.

The fifth and last dimension he put forth regarding the Sykes-Picot order in the Middle East is the lack of region-wide, collective security mechanisms to address the crisis. This, he asserted, is a rather large failure of the region. Importantly, external forces assured the security of the region in the past. Global actors played a great role in creating the regional order, in determining the future of the modern Middle East, and therefore provided the security for the region. Now, at this junction, he pointed out these international actors are less willing to play this role and the lack of a regional framework has meant that the region is at the precipice of chaos. Because of this, he maintained, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Libya have been unable to end or even contain the conflict. This is important to Turkey. Prior to the Arab Spring, he noted, "Turkish foreign policy was an attempt in region building, an attempt in regionalization ... Turkey was seeking to achieve a degree of regional integration in the Middle East, in an economic, social, cultural, and most importantly in a political and security sense". With the onset of the Arab Spring and the undoing of the regional order, however, the main trend in the region is contrary to the key philosophical principles of Turkey's regional policy. While Turkey aspired towards regional integration, the region today is moving towards fragmentation at almost every level. Moreover, he highlighted, while Turkey relied on economic soft power instruments, the region today rests on militarization and the use of hard power.

Delving deeper into Turkish foreign policy trends, he pointed out that today Turkish foreign policy is under enormous pressure. Turkish foreign policy, before the Arab Spring, called for moving beyond polarization, beyond sectarian divides. But today, the region is entrenched in sectarian politics, and indeed this has become the defining characteristic. As a

result Turkish foreign policy is undergoing a difficult readjustment. As a final point with regards to the future of Sykes-Picot he commented that what is happening today is a recreation of the state order as opposed to a complete destruction of it. It will not be easy to redraw the borders and undo Sykes-Picot since countries like Turkey, whose prime minister recently visited Tehran, and Iran wish to maintain the current state structure.

Turkey has been affected by these events in two distinct and disparate ways. The transformation of the regional order is firstly a foreign policy challenge and secondly poses a domestic challenge as it leads to ethnic polarization within Turkey. The region is home to many failed states and power vacuums where security threats are emerging. From the foreign policy perspective, Turkey needs to develop a plan to protect itself against the security concerns that threaten to spill over into its territory. He used the two recent attacks on Ankara as examples where the PKK were implicated and it was discovered that the perpetrators had lived in northern Syria, in PYD controlled areas wherefrom they were eventually able to carry out attacks within Turkey. And he continued, the same applies to attacks carried out by DAESH. Turkey traditionally viewed the region as "an area of opportunity to expand its economic and political interests". Now, however, the Middle East is a source of security concerns. "So in this sense, in the new phase, the first priority of Turkey is to pacify the conflicts, so that it can undercut the security threats emerging from the Middle East. But while doing so, Turkey's own domestic discussions, Turkey's own democracy, Turkey's own political transition are also affected."

### **Hayder al-Khoei**

Chatham House Fellow and Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees



These borders can transform a terrorist into a freedom fighter, and vice versa, you just have to cross a border.



Hayder al-Khoei, a fellow at Chatham House and a new member of the AUIS Board of Trustees, emphasized the role of local actors and factors on the ground in determining the delineation of borders, arguing however that the Sykes-Picot will endure.

As a new addition to the AUIS Board of Trustees, he expressed how proud he was to know that an institution such as AUIS exists in the country; "in a vacuum this university is impressive but in the context of this conflict-ridden part of the world, AUIS is a beacon of hope for the next generation and an inspiration to us all", he said. Khoei began by noting the appropriateness of the last panel's focus on turmoil and disorder and the Sykes-Picot question, as the agreement itself had mentioned many more times during the forum than the word DAESH. He asked, is the Sykes-Picot over? The answer, he continued, was both ves and no. The fact is that Sykes-Picot had ended in 1932 when the League of Nations' Commission defined and established the current Iraq-Syria border and therefore, he did not believe we would witness new borders soon or in the near future. What we will see, or are in fact seeing, he said, is a reordering of politics within the nation-states, at least as far as Syria and Iraq are concerned. This includes more decentralization - local leaders taking more powers, a sort of workable federalism. Changing the borders in the 21st century, on the other hand, he remarked was much more difficult than redrawing the borders were in the 20th century. So borders will be determined, not by men in suits sitting in conference halls drawing lines on a piece of paper, but rather by armed, angry, young men on the ground who will draw the lines with blood

The Sykes-Picot agreement will endure because the stakes are too high, he deduced. At this point, Khoei highlighted that he did not hold this view as an Iraqi nationalist, who believes these colonial borders drawn by the British and French are sacred and need to be defended, but rather as one who recognizes the tough environment of Iraq, the plethora of armed groups active in Iraq and Syria who are establishing facts on the ground, and more importantly the geopolitical realities of the country - that Iraq is surrounded by larger, more powerful countries, who blatantly use Iraq and Syria as a battlefield to settle their own scores. He pointed out that Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia would never risk their own security directly by fighting one another. When talking about any new version of the Sykes-Picot, it is important to recognize that this time around, the locals, those on the ground, will matter much more than Empire men. The Middle East will continue to be an arena where the Powers will project their influence, with the difference that it will have a much more regional dimension than an international one. While the United States and Russia matter a great deal, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia matter more. "Gone are the days of Gertrude Bells and Lawrences of Arabias: today it is the Qasim Sulaimanis who are shaping the future. It is not to say that the Brett McGurks of this world aren't relevant; they are relevant in this globalized world, but much less so." Looking at the underlying "good fences make good neighbors" attitude towards the desire to draw new borders, Khoei emphasized, "Iraq was never and will never be easily dividable along ethno-sectarian lines. The disputed areas, the heavily mixed cities and provinces, the intermarriages and relations that bind us together as communities, these will all complicate the good fences argument."

For those who believe redefining the border will end bloodshed because Shia and Sunni Kurds cannot be civilized enough to live together, he said they are in for a rude awakening: "if Iraq is to be divided, we will witness bloodshed and ethnic cleansing on a biblical scale", worse than anything seen from Bashar al-Asad or DAESH. Iragis wants stability, he highlighted, regardless of their ethno-sectarian background. Regional players complicate this equation, however. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran want territorial integrity and stability for Iraq, but it is qualified stability that they want - stability on their own terms which translates to war and conflict for Iraq. The role of the United States here, while mattering less, cannot be ignored, despite being at war with itself on most occasions.

The departmental rivalries and interagency battles in the United States lead to confusion within Washington DC and within the Pentagon, and this in turn translates to confusion and chaos in the region, in Iraq and Syria. In Syria for example, the CIA is on its own adventure, arming rebel groups who are supposed to be moderate rebels and who are for reasons unknown fighting alongside al-Qaeda or DAESH. On the other hand, the Pentagon was also spending half a billion US dollars funding, training and equipping rebels who ended up crossing into Syria, either disappearing or joining al-Qaeda. Khoei cited The Atlantic article about Obama and his doctrine in the region, pointing out that the US president wants to wash his hands of the region entirely. "If America is confused about what it wants, then we can excuse the Iragis for not being sure either!"



Discussing US's role in Syria further, he spoke about Vice President Biden's speeches in 2012 when the death toll in Syria was between 20 to 25 thousand and again in 2014 when it had increased to over 150 thousand. Over the span of two years, Biden changed US position, from one of working 'hand in glove' with its Turkish and Arab allies to ensure the right people are being armed, to one of blaming Turkey and its Arabs allies for funding and arming al-Qaeda, DAESH, and other Salafi jihadists." This he called out as being a very naked and transparent deflection. Furthermore, US policy on the Kurds as well is very confusing he pointed out. This issue he argued is tied to the Sykes-Picot, in a broad sense, as the Turkey-Syria border was not a part

of this arrangements. However, on one side of this border, the Kurds are considered to be terrorists and the international community therefore stands with its NATO ally, defending its right to defend itself against those terrorists. On the other side of the border, they are considered friends; they are called the Syrian Democratic Forces, a group that can be supported and armed, despite the fact that Turkey is shelling them from across the border. "It is a well known cliché that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, but these borders which exist today can transform a terrorist into a freedom fighter to the same man, you just have to cross the border."

### Kawa Hassan Fellow. East West Institute



Kurdish independence should be a cause, a rallying cry to unite Kurds, not to further fragment and divide them.



The East West Institute Fellow Kawa Hassan gave a summary of the internal and external challenges facing the KRG as the state system collapses.

He spoke about the Sykes-Picot century as one of genocide, persecution, marginalization, ethnic cleansing, and chemical attacks. While the Sykes-Picot arrangement of state systems is beginning to collapse, chemical attacks continue to take place, by DAESH, in Makhmour. "Iraqi Kurdistan, the KRG, is at a crossroads." He asserted that the collapse of the current state systems presents both opportunities and risks, especially for the KRG. The KRG is increasingly recognized as a legitimate actor, both in the fight against DAESH and in the presence of more than twenty diplomatic missions in Erbil with military and economic support to the KRG. These give the KRG a great opportunity to capitalize on the collapse of the current state system. At the same time, however, the KRG also faces considerable internal and external challenges.

Addressing the external challenges first, he noted that the foremost of these is the re-delineation of the borders. In the case of Iraq, he argued, the internal borders have already shifted and the country has taken on more of a confederal character than a federal one. The second external challenge is the opposition of neighboring countries to an independent Kurdistan and the cost to secure a delineation of borders through armed conflict is too immense, both for Kurds and non-Kurds, he argued. The internal challenges are also formidable. Most notably, he argued, is the fragmentation and rivalry between the main Kurdish parties in Iraqi Kurdistan. And while there is an internal consensus across party lines about the principle of independence,



unfortunately he noted there has been no consensus on the timing and the way it has been pursued so far. This, he maintained, weakens the position of Iraqi Kurds in future negotiations with Baghdad in terms of its final status. Secondly, this fragmentation has led to political paralysis, or stalemate and to this is added economic dependence on Turkey. Thirdly, the deep economic crisis has revealed the structural weaknesses of the system in Iraqi Kurdistan. While it was known that the Iraqi system suffered from paternalism, cronyism, and an army of employees who draw resources away from the government, the crisis has exposed them all.

"What is needed" he argued "is a common understanding of one joint vision and action plan about what do they want to achieve with Baghdad in the coming months and years." For this to happen, there is a need for a pan-Kurdish public view where not only the different Iraqi Kurdish groups but also other civil societies engage in a free, and open, and public debate about what they want from the future of Iraq. If independence, then what kind and

through what means? The next step, he said, would be to "present this joined vision to Baghdad with a support of international community to reach a historic agreement". Unfortunately, however, this is not the case because Kurds are fragmented. And secondly, there is a need to address the structural weakness of the political and economic system in the region as well as the democratic deficit. Independence cannot be achieved when a parliament is paralyzed and the main parties are not engaged in debate, are not reaching agreements, or lack a joint action plan. "Once they have reached this joint vision and action plan, it is ... much easier to talk to Baghdad, but also to gain the recognition and respect of the international community to support the Kurdish desire for independence." He maintained that independence will be achieved, but it is a matter of when, positing that "to be independent, you need to be united." He concluded with the notion that "Kurdish independence should be a cause, a rally cry to unite Kurds, not to further fragment and divide them."

# The World is Fast

## A Conversation with Thomas Friedman



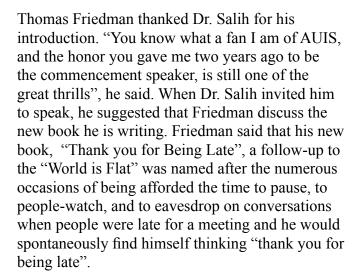
At this year's Forum, AUIS was honored and privileged to have Thomas Friedman, Pulitzer Prize winner and renowned journalist, New York Times columnist, and author in the audience and as a special speaker at a gathering for the distinguished guests - ministers, officials, analysts and scholars - of the Forum. "Thomas Friedman needs no

introduction" said Dr. Barham Salih of Friedman. He began the conversation by thanking him for travelling to Sulaimani and attending the Forum, which means a great deal to the people of Sulaimani, Kurdistan and indeed Iraq, and by pointing out that the topic of the discussion would be about everything but the Middle East.

"You want to talk about the world. Yes, all politics is local", said Dr. Salih, agreeing that while one cares about their hometown, their country and their region, there is too much happening globally to ignore. It is important not to be self-centric and see beyond where we are today.



Kurdistan has only one 'oil field' that will not run dry, and that is AUIS.



In this sense, the book is "about a desire to pause and reflect on where the world is right now." In 2004, he remembered, he wrote about global interconnectedness - they ways through which people are able to compete, connect, and collaborate to a degree not seen before - in "The World is Flat". Seven years later, he went on, in 2011 he began writing another book about America called "That Used to be Us". When starting the writing process, he explained, he pulled "The World is Flat" off his shelf to remind himself of what he wrote and was surprised to find that upon reviewing the index, there was no listing for Facebook. He recounted how back in 2005, when he was in Kurdistan, he had told people that the world is flat, that we are all connected, but at that time "Facebook did not even exist. Twitter was still a sound. The cloud was still in the sky. 4G was a parking place. LinkedIn was a prison. An application was something you send to college. Big data was a rap star, Skype was some type of graphical error" he said amazed, concluding that "something really big is happening".

As a columnist for the New York Times, who has been writing for 21 years, he asserted, "my job is to provoke ... I am either heating up an emotion in you, or illuminating something for you, or ideally both and producing a reaction." He argued moreover that producing a reaction, whether light or heat, requires three main ingredients; the first is one's set of values, beliefs and positions; the second is one's understanding of machine, his shorthand for the biggest forces shaping more things in more places, in more ways, and in more days; the third is one's knowledge about different peoples and cultures. and one's understanding of how those peoples and cultures and the world's biggest forces mutually impact each other. He explained how his book is about these three ingredients; his own value set, his understanding of the machine's workings, and finally peoples and thier cultures. He focused his talk on only one portion of his book, the portion on how he thinks this machine works. "What are the biggest sources shaping more things and more places and more ways and more days, including right here in Kurdistan and at AUIS"

He referred to "The Second Machine Age", a book by Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, as having a big impact on his thinking. The book argued that technological progress is constantly accelerating and includes the automation of cognitive tasks that will substitute humans and software-driven machines instead of complementing them. This second machine age was built on Moore's Law, coined 50 years ago, which posits that the speed and power of microchips will double every 24 months. Today, he pointed out, with the power of exponential doubling, there are self-driving cars and computers that beat humans at chess or any other game. Thomas

Friedman argued that two exponentials are missing from the book, mother nature and globalization. Climate change and environmental degradation are on a non-linear acceleration slope. The machine works through the three largest forces on the planet: the market, globalization, and Moore's Law, which are also moving in a simultaneous, non-linear acceleration slope.

All computers are made of five key parts, he explained: the microchip, the processor, the storage unit, the software, and the sensor. Since 2007, some of the technology has been melded into a cloud, or a "supernova" as Friedman calls it. This 'everaccelerating supernova' is changing four kinds of power. 1) "it is changing the power of one," he claimed; "it is changing the power of machines" that can now touch, feel, and even think; 3) with the onset of this new geophysical era called anthroposophy, "the power of many is now located in a place we've never seen before"; and 4) "a change in the power of ideas" is currently being effected. Ideas, he pointed out, circulate at an unprecedented velocity. The consequences, according to him, is the shifting of the nature of every job, every country, every leader, "posing a whole new set of challenges".

Every middle class job is being pulled in three directions at once, he explained. It is being pulled up by requiring more skill. It is being pulled out where machines and people in India and China and Kurdistan can compete for it. And it is being pulled down by being outsourced to history and made obsolete faster than ever. This is posing a huge educational challenge, he pointed out, where knowledge in a job must constantly be improved.

"The world of work is going [towards] permanent learning." This change will require a shift in the approach to work and education. The world of work, he argued, is now using big data to create intelligence assistance. "These accelerations" he expounded, "are like a hurricane" and they are "creating a new geopolitical divide in the world between the world of order and the world of disorder, that is the new divide in the world". He argued that the "left, right politics born on the new deal and the industrial revolution cannot possibly manage the choices we need to make in this age of acceleration."

Regarding his own politics, Friedman explained he is a "non-partisan extremist. I am actually to the left of Bernie Sanders, and I am to the right of Wall Street Journal editorial page, at the same time". He believes in universal single-payer healthcare, a minimum income, universal pre-K, a massive expansion in college and education grants, and an investment in infrastructure; moreover, he said he believed in radical entrepreneurship, eliminating corporate taxes and all personal income taxes to be replaced with a tax on carbon, sugar, and bullets with a small VAT. He then turned to what a country needs to thrive in this world, naming resilience and healthy interdependencies. He contended that the world is in the midst of three climate changes: the technological, the geo-economic, and literally climatic, environmental. His argument was that the cultures and countries that approximate attributes such as diversity, pluralism, entrepreneurship, and resilience are those who will do best in the age of acceleration. "Mother nature does that unconsciously, so we have

to do it consciously." Politics plays a role here, but there is another problem; 'another problem' is the name of the last chapter of the book, he said.

Friedman recounted how someone on a book tour had asked him "Is God in cyberspace?" He didn't know how to answer, he said. He called his spiritual teacher for an answer. There are two concepts of the Almighty. In the first one, destroyer of evil and rewarder of good. Within this prespective, God is not in cyberspace, a place of lies, gambling, cheating, and cybercrime. The second competing conception of the Almighty is that "God manifests himself by how we behave". In this sense, if God is to be found in cyberspace, he then needs to be brought there by how one behaves there, he explained. "These accelerations have brought us to a place as a humanity we have never been to before ... We have never been at this junction before. We have never been more godlike as a species." Furthermore, he explained that values will matter more than ever at this juncture. Everything that matters - good teaching, good parenting, good governance, good spiritual leadership - needs to be 'uploaded' the old fashion way, slowly. In order to be protected from the hurricane, he advised, one needs to stand in the eye, to draw energy from it. For balance, however, one also needs to hold onto an anchor of stability good governance, good community, and good values - that will "enable you to have both an anchor and a said. Because in a world where things move so fast, everyone needs both an anchor and a sail."





#### Center for Development and Natural Resources. **Founding Director Dr. Bilal Wahab**

The Center for Development and Natural Resources (CDNR) was launched in the Spring of 2015. The Center is well positioned to bring together representatives from, and create partnerships among, academics, policy makers, civil society and industry in Iraq and the KRI to engage in constructive discussion and analysis of questions pertaining to the

energy sector, stability, and economic development. The Center will have two tracks. Through research and analysis, CDNR will become a resource on all topics regarding Iraq's oil, governance, and federalism. Secondly, through education and capacity development, CDNR will enhance the levels of expertise of government officials, Iraqi citizens and students to better understand and make decisions regarding oil governance in the country.

CDNR held its inaugural event in November, bringing together relevant officials from the KRG and international experts together to develop and publish a sovereign wealth fund policy in the KRI. CDNR implemented a 'Future Leaders Initiative' in the Fall Semester 2015, to empower students interested in governance, politics, and the economic development of Iraq and the KRG to become leaders in their respective fields. CDNR held its first conference, entitled "Escaping the Rentier Model: Reforms in Iraq and Kurdistan Region", on January 21, 2016 which convened representatives from Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, experts and policy makers, diplomats and business leaders. The CDNR Conference covered the challenges facing the oil and gas sector, ways to diversify the economy, as well as public finance management.



#### Center for Gender and Development Studies, Founding Director Dr. Choman Hardi

AUIS is uniquely placed to become a leading institution in the region, ensuring that academic initiatives lead to improved gender relations and equal economic opportunity for young women. The Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani seeks to become a hub of knowledge and conceptual discussions, which will then be disseminated within society through different outreach strategies. CGDS will focus on academic research and instruction, programs and trainings to promote economic opportunity, and community outreach.

The ultimate aim of the Center's initiatives is to provide the basis for normative change and development by providing training, sharing information, and supporting women's economic empowerment, leadership and management. In order to achieve those goals, the CGDS aims to establish strong links and promote serious dialogue with internal and external institutions such as government bodies, gender programs in other universities, and local and international NGOs. The Center was formally launched on February 11, 2016 at the joint conference, "Ezidis Beyond ISIS: Gender, Genocide and Return", hosted by CGDS and the Institute of Regional and International Studies at AUIS.



#### Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage Founding Director Dr. Tobin Hartnell

The Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage (CACHe) aims to promote the study and preservation of cultural heritage in Iraq and the KRI. The AUIS Center for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage advances a scientific understanding of the past through remote sensing, geophysics, and traditional archaeological investigations. The Center also promotes training, discussion and dissemination of knowledge about archaeology and cultural heritage in Iraq and the Kurdistan region as a safeguard against indiscriminate destruction by groups such as DAESH.

The Center held its first Annual Cultural Heritage Symposium, entitled "Iraqi Cultural Heritage in Crisis: Strategies for the Future" in April 2015. CACHe started its first excavation in July 2015 in Peshdar 36, an ancient city located near the banks of the Dukan Dam Lake. The Center's future project, includes the Topographical Mapping and Geophysical subsurface scanning of the area of Peshdar, the creation of a Virtual Museum of Sulaimani History, an environmental history of Sulaimani Province using Remote Sensing, and the establishment of a Digital Humanities Lab and a Virtual Museum of Kurdish Technology.



### **#SuliForum 2016: The Social Media Aspect**

Using the #SuliForum, conference participants and live streaming viewers took to twitter to report, connect and comment on the topics discussed by panelists and the audience. More than 750 people - high profile politicians and policymakers, international academics and journalists, think tank and NGO leaders, AUIS students and alumni, faculty and staff members, as well as attendees and those watching online - sent more than 5830 tweets that highlighted key moments and quotes and engaged in lively debate.

#SuliForum was trending for the two days of the conference, generating 119,204,930 potential impressions and reaching 3,072,952 people. Thanks to Sarbast @Sarbast\_M who was collecting different statistics on tweets using #SuliForum, we know that tweets were being sent from major cities around the world: Sulaimani, Erbil, Baghdad, Dubai,Karachi, Riaydh, New York City, Washington DC, Boston, and London. #SuliForum created quite a buzz on social media



Qubad Talabani @qubadjt Mar 15

Great turnout at #*SuliForum*. A good opportunity for some interesting tête-à-tête's given so many Iraqi Govt & KRG officials are here



Mina Al-Oraibi @AlOraibi Mar 17

Despite many crises in Iraq, honest&critical discussions from all sides in presence of govt&media is something for @AUIS\_NEWS to be proud of



Hayder al-Khoei @Hayder alKhoei Mar 16

Turan: we didn't come here to solve all our problems, but to cross-pollinate ideas and come closer.



Joseph Bahout @jobahout Mar 17

Promising figure of #Kurdistan; highlights leadership dilemma: tradit. legitimacy v/s modernist outlook.





**Wladimir** @vvanwilgenburg Mar 15

@BarhamSalih instead of focusing on conflicts, we hope that #suliforum could be a forum to cooperate and consult how to overcome probs



Hanar Marouf @Hanar Marouf Mar 15

In this conflict-ridden part of the world, its impressive to see most of the political elites are meeting again at #SuliForum



Bayad Jamal Ali @BayadJamal Ali Mar 17

Congrats to @AUIS\_NEWS @BarhamSalih for the 4th successful #SuliForum where off-limit boundries are broken by intelletuals #auisalumni



**Shajwan** @Shajwaan Mar 17

AUIS annual #SuliForum has become the axis for healthy discussions and a meeting point to present solutions for present issues.



Shad Rashed @ShadRashed Mar 17 Iraq

Creating discussion and good debates is what this forum is all about. #SuliForum



**Zhiwar Jawhar** @zhiwarjawhar Mar 17

Kak Hamai Haji Mahmood: "#SuliForum is important for Kurdistan, Iraq, and Middle East." @AUIS\_NEWS



Aree Ahmed @AreeAhmed\_M Mar 17

**#SuliForum** be more attractive year by year... Well done AUIS members for this achievement!



Sazan M. Mandalawi @Sazan Mandalawi Mar 17

You know what I like most about #SuliForum is that you hear the official speak without the added salt & pepper of our media outlets





Sana Karwan @SanaKarwan Mar 16

Thomas Friedman: "Kurdistan has only one 'oil' field and that is AUIS." #SuliForum



SamSakar @sakar sam Mar 16

The 4th and last panel finished, great day and really hot and good discussions, speakers were excellent #SuliForum



Tracy May Fuad @tracyfuad Mar 16

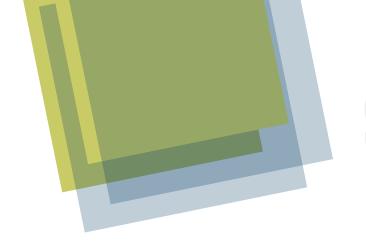
AUIS is a beautiful place to have these important conversations about the future of Iraq & the Kurds #SuliForum



Amanj Saeed @Amanjsaeed Mar 17
Successful and informative debates at Suli Forum

Successful and informative debates at Suli Forum, thanks for organisers #SuliForum





# Support AUIS

The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani is a non-profit institution for public benefit and seeks to be a resource for the entire community. It is with the contributions of its generous donors, ranging from companies and organizations to individuals and families that the University is able to offer a liberal arts, American-style education that has an impact on the future of the region.

AUIS accepts support for its institute IRIS to continue its activities to advance research and scholarship in the region and promote dialogue through events such as the *Annual Sulaimani Forum*. There are many ways to support higher education at AUIS, namely sponsoring new scholarships, establishing faculty chairs, expanding the library's collection and resources, and supporting the continued development of the campus, amongst many other opportunities.

Please contact the office of Institutional Development at support@auis.edu.krd if you are interested in discussing ways you or your organization can support AUIS.



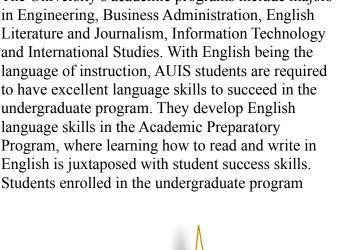
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani was established in 2007 to be a catalyst for innovation in higher education in Iraq. The University is a not-for-profit institution that strives to be a resource to the entire community and an institute for public benefit. Since its inception, the University has been dedicated to offering its students a comprehensive liberal arts education that develops strengths in critical thinking, the ability to communicate well, a strong work ethic, good citizenship and personal integrity.

As a not-for-profit institute, the University relies on contributions to carry out its mission. That is to provide its students with an education that prepares them for a pluralistic and global society, to make available the opportunities and skills needed for success and to be a resource to the entire community with a lasting impact on education and the educational culture of the region.

The Founder Dr. Barham Salih, with the support of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the US Embassy in Baghdad, and the aid of private sector companies and a group of prominent individuals created an institution not only innovative in its teaching methodology but also unique in its role as an establishment of learning unaffected by sectarian divides and affiliations.

The University's campus is now located on a hill overlooking the city and includes an academic building with lecture halls, classrooms and offices; an administrative building with a cafeteria and large conference facilities; two basketball courts and a soccer field; a 400-bed residence hall; and an additional building with high-quality lab facilities and equipment. The grounds at AUIS will be able to accommodate the continuous growth of its student body and the demand for wide-ranging educational opportunities.

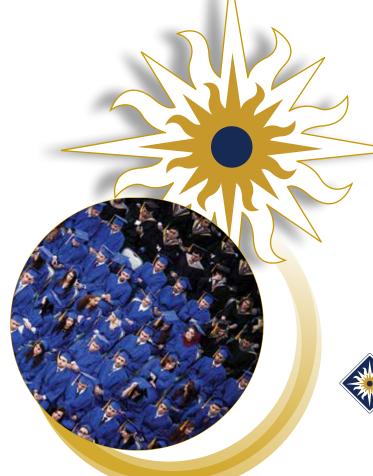
The University's academic programs include majors in Engineering, Business Administration, English Literature and Journalism, Information Technology and International Studies. With English being the language of instruction, AUIS students are required to have excellent language skills to succeed in the undergraduate program. They develop English language skills in the Academic Preparatory Program, where learning how to read and write in English is juxtaposed with student success skills. Students enrolled in the undergraduate program



receive a well-rounded education grounded in the liberal arts with core multi-disciplinary courses that foster creativity, analytical, and critical thinking and greater knowledge of the world. AUIS professors integrate hands-on learning into the curriculum and provide an alternative to the 'memorization and repetition' style of education prevalent in the Middle East.

The University is the destination of choice for top students from all over the country, even attracting Kurds and Arabs studying in the US, UK and Europe. In 2012-2013, AUIS created the KRG Academic Excellence Scholarship, with a donation from the KRG, which enabled it to support bright students with full merit scholarships. In addition, the University awards high-performing students with lower tuition rates that are directly linked to their high school scores.

At AUIS, staff and faculty members are proactive in creating partnerships and associations that will benefit the educational experience of AUIS students. The University currently has partnerships with many universities in the United States and Europe and these have resulted in the creation of different programs and opportunities for AUIS students. Additionally, AUIS students have participated in a wide-range of international competitions and conferences.



AUIS



Do not only thrive in the world around you. Dare to change it!

There is a strong emphasis on extracurricular activities at AUIS as well and the University encourages and actively promotes student engagement in volunteering initiatives, community outreach programs, internships, clubs, athletics and the creative arts. The University boasts two women's and men's basketball teams, a soccer team and more than 20 student-sponsored clubs and associations, including the Development Club, the Model United Nation, an internationally competitive debate society, and the Drama Club, which puts on plays for the University and wider community; two of its members have performed in Sharjah and under the guidance of Kevin Spacey. AUIS is also home to the first and only independent student newspaper, the Voice. The AUIS motto is "learn today, lead tomorrow" and the University is committed to providing the space and support for student activities that encourage initiative, creativity, service to community and leadership.

The University promotes research and open dialogue in the region through its Institute for Regional and International Studies. Every year, IRIS supports researchers interested in the region by providing them with fellowships that include involving AUIS students in the study of the complex geopolitics of the Middle East. The Sulaimani Forum is the institute's flagship event and takes place every year on AUIS campus. The University therefore becomes



the meeting ground for Iraqi political leaders, foreign dignitaries, journalist, and academics. The Forum brings politically and academically important figures in close contact with AUIS students who have the opportunity not only to listen to the frank discussion of panelists but also to pose their own questions regarding matters of importance to them.

Graduates of AUIS therefore have been exposed to many experiences that prepare them for a bright future and are a distinct point of pride for the University whose mission it is to facilitate the transition from the university and the world of education to the workforce and the world at large. Commencement ceremonies at AUIS are memorable events that celebrate the diligence and

dedication involved in completing an undergraduate program. Thomas Friedman, author and New York Times columnist, gave the commencement speech at the University's third ceremony and was deeply impressed by the cadre of graduates who he challenged to change the world around them.

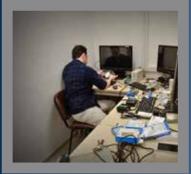
The objective of the University is to produce graduates of responsible character with the necessary knowledge and skills for professional and national leadership. Students are prepared for successful careers that ultimately have an impact on the entire region. Investment in AUIS is thus an investment in the educational culture and future of the country.

# Behind the Scenes Behind the Scenes

















































































## **Art Exhibition**

One of the highlights of the Forum was an art exhibition by numerous local artists, including professors and students from the College of Art at Sulaimani University. Displayed throughout the halls of the university and adorning the staircase leading to the conference hall were 25 ceramic pieces, 30 bronze sculptures as well as 50 oil paintings. The exhibition was an opportunity for participants to appreciate the art of Sulaimani.













