

TM: Greetings ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tarek Masoud. I'm a professor of public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and the director of our Middle East Initiative, and it's my distinct pleasure to welcome you to today's discussion. Before we introduce our guest Ayad Allawi, the former vice president and former interim prime minister of Iraq, let me explain for our viewers and our listeners what it is we are up to in these conversations. The conversation we're about to have today is actually the fourth installment in a series of conversations that we've been having with Arab thought leaders, politicians, and intellectuals on the state of not just the Arab world but actually of the United States of America. It's our belief that everybody and especially Americans can learn a lot about this moment in American politics by hearing from people who have a different perspective on the events. And we believe that the perspective on American events that is represented in the Arab world is one that most Americans really need to have. As everybody knows, the fate of the Arab world and the politics of the Arab world have really become central political issues in the United States, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the fate of Iraq, the Arab spring. All of these things are regularly debated by presidential candidates and politicians, and so much of what happens in the Arab world may not quite be made in America, but it is certainly assembled out of some American components. And that means that Arabs actually have a lot to say about America's politics and the directions in which it should go.

This series began with the former Egyptian foreign minister Nabil Fahmy, and we've had discussions with the distinguished Emirati intellectual, Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, the Kuwaiti journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin. Last week, we were supposed to meet with the Palestinian legislator and spokeswoman, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, but unfortunately, that session has had to be postponed on account of her contracting an illness, from which I'm pleased to say she's recovering. And so I'm hopeful we'll be able to reschedule that session soon. But to introduce today's distinguished guest, let me turn things over to my trusted co-pilot in these conversations and my colleague Ambassador Karim Haggag, professor of the practice of the at the American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Ambassador—

KH: Thank you Tarek, and it's my distinct pleasure to introduce our guest for today's conversation, Dr. Ayad Allawi. Dr. Ayad Allawi was born to a prominent merchant family in Iraq where he studied at Baghdad medical school and graduated from Baghdad University with a degree in medicine. He later went on to complete his master's in science at London Medical University and obtained his Ph.D. in medicine from Guy's Hospital London University. He was politically active since 1968 in Iraqi politics, founding the Iraqi national accord as an opposition movement to Saddam Hussein's regime. Dr. Allawi survived several assassination attempts, one of which left him unable to practice rheumatology, and this prompted him to move into private trade and also to conduct extensive work with the UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization.

Now of course, Dr. Allawi played a central role in post-war Iraqi politics. In 2004, Dr. Allawi served on Iraq's interim governing council and was unanimously elected by the council to become Iraq's first post-war prime minister. In that capacity, Dr. Allawi held both executive and legislative powers. And in that capacity, he oversaw the first elections in Iraq after the war,

which resulted in the peaceful transfer of power in 2005. In 2010, the Iraqi bloc headed by Dr. Allawi was declared the winner of national elections conducted during that year. Dr. Allawi still leads the Iraqi National Court, a national political party that promotes a civil state serving democracy and stability in the wider Arab and Islamic world. He remains actively engaged in Middle East politics and, of course, Iraqi politics. And currently, he heads the Wataniya coalition, a national cross-sectarian political bloc that will contest the next national election in Iraq. Dr. Allawi thank you for taking the time to join us in this conversation.

AA: Thank you ambassador. You did it best, better than me, the background.

KH: Thank you so much so Dr. Allawi. We, of course, want to focus our discussion with you today on your view of American politics and American foreign policy and especially the relationship between the United States and Iraq from your perspective. But if I could start by a very direct question about the upcoming presidential elections, which is now five days away. In your view, what are the stakes for Iraq in this election.

AA: The most important is security, is the domination of Iran and partly Turkey on the Iraqi affairs. And without the support of the international community, it will be very difficult for Iraq to resist the Iranian domination, as well as the Turkish interference in Iraq's affairs, especially vis-à-vis the north of Iraq, Kurdistan and Mosul and the province of Ninevah, where we have a big contingent of Turkish army present there in an area called Bashiqa. This is number one. Number two: Iraq, unfortunately, because of the huge corruption is almost regarded now as a very depressed country financially, although Kadhimi has the capabilities. But it is relying on foreign support, the World Bank as well as the International Monetary Fund. The elections in America will be very useful to us because without the help of the international community, it's going to be very difficult for Iraq to bypass this this current stage where it is passing through, where we have foreign domination, an economic weakness.

And, we have the other problems in the Middle East, and indeed, the problems occurring between America and Iran, between the international community and Iran, between Russia and Iran, America and so on. And Iraq is becoming the area of theater for conflict, and all this. That's why we are very much in need of the help of the international community. And don't forget my friend, Mr. Ambassador, that the United States have a moral, political, as well as indeed a legal commitment to Iraq, to support Iraq, to pass through this difficult phase. But we are looking forward to the elections in America and who is going to achieve supremacy, ultimately by the will of the of the people of the United States. And we will take it from there. We definitely are preparing for visits to the United States after the elections to expand and discuss the issues that are bewildering Iraq and hindering the progress of Iraq and the progress of stability in Iraq.

KH: Dr. Allawi, I think it's very interesting what you said about the United States having a political and moral commitment and legal commitment. But would you agree that the relationship between the United States and Iraq lately has been somewhat less than consistent? I mean just recently the Trump administration threatened to close the American embassy in Baghdad if the Iraqi government does not take serious steps to contain the threat of

pro-Iranian militias. And of course, this came after what was perceived to be a very successful visit by prime minister Kadhimi to Washington, where several agreements were reached, including an agreement to draw down the number of American forces in Iraq. Did you see this as a signal from the United States that it is becoming less committed to Iraq's stability?

AA: It's absolutely a clear signal that it's becoming less committed to Iraq, and that's why I'll say the United States and America have a lot of significant responsibilities, legal and moral and so on. Unfortunately, the balance tilting towards Iran, rather than remaining with Iraq. And the sovereignty of Iraq was held by the Americans. And the Americans, when they committed a lot of mistakes during occupation, including abolishing the institutions of Iraq like the army and the intelligence and the judiciary and so on, really helped a lot the Iranians to infiltrate gradually, steadily, and progressively, the Iraqi system and get control—ultimately the way that it is now, controlling the country. Even the funding for Iran, a lot of it— I would say at least 30 to 40 percent—comes from siphoning money from Iraq through the various processes. That's why, the Americans, it's very important for them. This is a significant step, when they wanted to withdraw from Iraq.

But we know, as well as I think everybody knows, that certain areas in Iraq they wouldn't want to shed and relinquish, especially Al Asad and then Kurdistan Iraq and so on because there are lots of conflicts ongoing in the region. And these conflicts only really will grow bigger and more severe in the near future. That's why I think it's a mistake committed by the United States, if they agree. Kadhimi was under pressure from various, especially from the militias, when he came to Washington. And because they want the Americans to withdraw, he had to make this judgment of necessity to draw down on the presence of the American soldiers in Iraq. But I think both are mistaken. The government of Iraq is mistaken, and also, the United States government is mistaken. Without a real commitment, Iran is going to destroy the whole region, not only in Iraq.

TM: Mr. vice president, let me ask you a follow-up question on this that's intended a little bit to try to corner you. So Ambassador Haggag mentioned the Trump administration's wavering on its support for Iraq. President Trump's rival is the former vice president Joe Biden, who you might remember was one of the people who floated the idea that perhaps Iraq was ungovernable as a single, unitary state, and maybe partition was a solution to its problem. So I guess I'd like you to tell me between these two candidates, one who suggested partitioning the country, the other who basically won the presidency because he said the United States should never have ousted Saddam Hussein in the first place, which of these two do you support?

AA: Me? Of course, without saying, not Biden, definitely.

TM: Could you explain that a little bit?

AA: Biden, you know, let me tell you. So can I elaborate on why Biden was very much against Iraq, when [he] won the elections, and then it turned out what the reasons were later on. However, in 2010 when the government was formed not us by us but by the way by our rivals,

Maliki and his crew. And Biden called me, and he said he used to come twice a month, at least, to Iraq to convince us to let down the premiership. And I said, the Iraqi people have decided. So you can't, and we can't do it. Unless there is a force of legitimacy, we won't be able to do it. Anyway, 2011, as we were discussing the issue of drawing down the American forces in Iraq, Biden called me, and he said what is your position on drawdown? I said you are going to surrender Iraq gradually to Iran. We don't have a proper army. We don't have proper defenses. We don't have— even the economy is ruined. And the people are really annoyed with the issue of democracy. That's why it's important for us to maintain the presence of the United States and the international community, and it is important to us. But I can't give you a definite answer because we have asked the prime minister to give us the answer to the presence of the American forces or not because he was a prime minister. He was the head of Iraq's minister of defense. He was in the sovereignty at the same time, and his Iraq security council. I said why you are questioning me? I said because Maliki is frightened. He said if I agree on keeping the American forces, Allah will turn hell on me in Iraq. I said I assume that you are recording this conversation, and we are not going to turn on against them. But you have to call him back and tell him that I will tell him in the meeting, which we are having two days from now, that we will support his decisions, whether yes or no for the extension of American forces. I said but we are adamant that we should have a kind of agreement on the rules of engagement for the forces. I said that's just fine.

The meeting took place, and Maliki was going in circles. We were about 18 months, attending the meeting, the president and the prime minister and so on. And Maliki, I think he promised them that he was going to extend, and because of me, he didn't want to extend unless Biden convinced me otherwise. As he was going around here, he didn't want to commit himself. I said look Mr. Maliki, Biden called me, and I said whatever decision you will take, we'll support. So it is your call now. That's not ours. So let us know exactly what do you say. He said no I don't want any— I want the drawdown of the American forces in Iraq, and we are not going to have a news of agreement. This was in front of about 18 or 20—I can't remember the number of people around the discussions.

The American Ambassador then called me. I didn't see him for a week. Then, I saw him. I just said look, either you are playing a chicken and egg game with us or you have a determined policy on how to support Iraq and how to make Iraq a much serene place and stable place with the wealth you are doing, the diversification, the disrupting of the army with political intelligence. We can't go ahead and fend for ourselves. So anyway, Mr. Biden played negative roles in Iraq, whether in the succession of the elections, when we won the elections and then by advocating partitioning the country and then by believing that Maliki need to adjust himself and make a decision on another drawdown. I think —if you allow me to say— that unfortunately during the last administration and even the one before, the Americans did not have a post-conflict policy, what to do and what not to do—and not only in Iraq but in the Middle East. And when I went myself to Mr. Mubarak, Mubarak and King Abdullah [of] Jordan and said that we should carry on a conference for the neighborhood of Iraq, as well as the P5 on the on the level of ministers of foreign affairs, Mubarak said immediately we will host the unity conference. And I said Kofi Annon can run it under the auspices of the UN. We need to

play again stabilizing the region by connecting the internal politics to the regional policies, especially vis-a-vis what Iran and then Syria was trying to do to undermine the Iraqi situation. But again, you know all this went, and then ultimately, we had the conference. It was a very successful conference, very productive. Iran attended, and Syria attended, and all the rest of the Gulf Cooperation, as well as the Arab League. It was hosted by Egypt.

That's why we feel that Biden is not really too much concerned about Iraq and what Iraq should do and should not do. We think that Obama also is— I mean Trump is going the wrong way by saying that we want to draw down the forces in Iraq. We have now in Iraq a very foreign formidable force of militias, much stronger than the army, very well equipped. I just can't see the Houthi in Yemen, what they are doing. They have long-range missiles and so on. We have the same in Iraq, similar. That's why I think America needs to re-visit this policy, whoever comes to power, and re-examine their policies and attempt to really stabilize this whole region of the Middle East, including the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. Otherwise, the whole region will be engulfed in struggles and problems, and it will definitely spill over into the entire world, not only to the to the neighboring countries.

TM: Dr. Allawi, you know, you've spoken eloquently about how the United States has a moral responsibility to stabilize, not just Iraq but the region. But of course, it's not just the region or Iraq that is engulfed as you say in struggles. It's also the United States. And we know that for, you know, the past 15 years, it's almost become bipartisan consensus, at least on the part of American voters, that the decision to invade Iraq and unseat Saddam Hussein was a bad decision from the standpoint of the American national interest, such that you have rare agreement really on the part of both parties in terms of not really wanting to deepen their involvement in Iraq. And you're calling for the United States to deepen its involvement in Iraq. So what is the political argument that you make to America, sir? Go ahead. Am I misunderstanding you?

AA: Yeah I'm not deep in the involvement but really to help and providing the stability of the region.

TM: What does that entail specifically in your view?

AA: Not fighting and not sending troops by deterrent and by putting pressure on those who are trying to muddy the waters in the region, as they are putting pressure on Iran now. And they should be putting pressure on Turkey. This is the answer really. That's not the answer, and wallahi, we have done what we need and what we can do and goodbye to you. And you will have to face your fate. Because if you look at the events that have happened after the occupation—we were against the occupation. We were supporting an inside change of power by supporting the forces of change inside the country, and we told the Americans this. We told the British this. We told the even the Russians this. But we don't think that the Americans should be involved in fighting. They should use their presence in the international policy of the United Nations to put pressure on those who are causing problems and forming problems in the Middle East. And it's very obvious now. I mean Iran is wreaking havoc on Lebanon, Syria,

Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Palestine, and we don't want a war, by the way, with Iran. We want Iran to resort to kind of peaceful solutions and to supplement and to trade benefits with the region and with Iraq. Indeed but not really to use its forces either in Yemen nor in Syria nor in Lebanon or in Iraq. We don't want this. That's why when I say the moral responsibility of the United States lies— and the decisions that can be taken in the United Nations and by the decisions that can be implementing kind of sanctions on Iran, selected sanctions, not to make the people miserable but to make the government of Iran suffering until they repent and decide to withdraw from the involvements and problems they are causing.

KH: But Dr. Allawi, perhaps if we can ask you to clarify a little bit more on the issue of Iran, which you very clearly highlighted as being one of the key challenges facing Iraq moving forward. Now of course, it seems that the issue of Iran's role in Iraq is partly a function of U.S. policy towards Iran. Now you've criticized the Obama administration for leaving a vacuum in Iraq, which Iran has moved to fill. However, it seems that the maximum pressure policy adopted by the Trump administration against Iran has turned Iraq into a sort of battlefield between Iran and the United States. In your view, what exactly should the United States do to contain Iranian influence in Iraq?

AA: Wallahi, there are two routes that I can think of. The one is getting to try and to squeeze Iran politically speaking, not only the United States but with the help of Russians, the Chinese, all the countries. This is number one— squeezing Iran, politically speaking. And secondly, I think there should be some sanctions on certain individuals in Iran and maintaining the sanctions because what they are doing creating sanctions. But at the same time, Iran is trying to siphon money from Iraq through various means, including siphoning of oil from Iraq and selling under the banner of Iraq oil or smuggled in the Gulf region. I think those two areas, not fighting Iran. I have to be genuine, to be realistic. I try to work towards another conference five years ago, six years ago, regional conference for peace and stability and religion in the presence of Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia to finalize the problems and to decide on a course of action that will stabilize things. And then, we will touch on the Palestinian peace process with Israel but not during this conference. But it laid the groundwork to do this, and the British government agreed on this concept, as well as the French government. And the British government sent me to Iraq after I came to London, and I went to France. [They] sent me a minister in foreign affairs, and he came too. And I said squeeze. The problem is that societies would do not want to sit with the Iranians, and the Iranians don't want to do this. But try to put pressure on both of them to come together.

So they came with an idea that on the fringes of the of the general assembly meeting, Obama will call for a conference on an anti-terrorism conference under the auspices of the United Nations. But two things happened then which destroyed the concept of this kind. I think we should bring Iran, as well as Turkey, as well as Ethiopia to a regional conference and to try and talk sense to them. But this is not happening because there is no real political pressure on Iran or on Turkey or anything. Now the pressure is building up again.

But I hope that the substitute for engaging Iran in the war is really engaging them in a fruitful [way] because Iran also is tired now from the antagonism of the stability in the region. And it's tired because of the sanctions that are taking place in Iran. Sanctions are biting. We know firsthand. Sanctions are fighting, and that's why they are turning more and more towards Iraq for help because they have about 1200-kilometer borders with Iraq. But these are the ideas that the new administration of the United States should entertain and think about seriously and try to work a kind of modules, ABC. The conference works. If not, then the sanctions would have to increase and the pressure political pressure on Iran, but this would involve also getting the understanding of the Russians.

I recall very well before the Geneva II conference, we went to— I belong to our body, the Arab International Council of Relations—see the Russians with Putin. And I suggested instead of having the four countries involved in the Syrian problem to have the P5 plus the four countries plus adding another two, one European and one Arab country. And I suggested Jordan was mostly affected by it, and Putin agreed to this concept. And he said yes this is a very good concept. So we stopped on the way back in Ankara, and then we spoke. The prime minister and he were very convinced that this is the way forward. For really, we need to tackle the situation either politically through our conference, as we did in Sharm el-Sheikh—the Iranians before Sharm el-Sheikh, which was hosted by President Mubarak—The Iranians thought that they will be next on the agenda after Saddam was overthrown. And I told them —they came to see me— Khatami came to see me. He was the president of Iran. I said no the Americans do not have any animosity towards you or towards anybody else, but they had a problem with Saddam, and they were asked by the Iraq people to help us, show their help. But they did wrong thing in the operation and dismantling Iraq and the power of Iraq. They agreed to come to the conference. It was on the level of minister of foreign affairs, and they were very productive and diplomatic and likewise Syria by the way, the Arab and p5, Australia and Egypt. Well, I think there are ways of structuring the policy towards preventing the borough(?) from expanding and then blowing up. Otherwise if you leave this situation as is now, it will definitely blow up.

TM: Dr. Allawi just, you know, before we open it up to questions from the audience, we wanted to just also make sure to talk a little bit about the internal situation in Iraq in some depth. But before we move to that, I think if a listener who was asked to summarize your answer to the question what should the United States do to fulfill what you believe to be a moral responsibility to help Iraq? They would say that well Dr. Allawi really emphasizes the United States needs to do a lot of things to contain Iran, to get Iran to stop meddling in Iraqi politics, and that that could be part of the answer. But then, they might also think well what about these other problems that Iraq faces, the fact that it has a very weak state apparatus, the fact that Iraq is rocked by sectarianism, the fact that Iraq's political leaders are floridly corrupt? Is there a role for the United States to help Iraqis address those problems? And what is the U.S. role in helping Iraqis address those problems, if there is?

AA: One, these problems were resulted from the American policies in Iraq.

TM: So but that happened. So what is Dr. Ayad Allawi's argument?

AA: Sorry?

TM: So Dr. Ayad, what do you say to Americans that they need to do in order to correct?

AA: They shouldn't interfere in these issues. The Americans, they should only interfere on the level of Iran and level of Turkey and the peace process between Palestine-Israel. These are the most important issues, and once this is resolved, the Iraqis can take over. You know, if there is no Iranian support to militias, khalas, there is no sectarianism anymore in Iraq.

TM: Got it. Your diagnosis of the problem is clear; just one question before we move to the next. You've invoked the Palestinian-Israeli conflict a couple of times. What's the connection between—?

AA: I mentioned the peace process, not the conflict.

TM: It's fair enough. Sorry, I'm the one who said conflict. The peace process, Dr. Allawi can you just spell out for us the direct connection between that peace process and stability in Iraq?

AA: You know, the countries of the region are connected to each other very strongly. What happens in Syria is bound to spill over into Iraq. What happens in Lebanon is bound to spill over into Syria. What happens in Iraq is bound to spill over into Syria and to Jordan and so on. So really, the region is very well connected. The Palestinian issue remains a very important issue, a prime issue really in Iraq. And we have to find a settlement for this peaceful process, a durable peace and a just peace between the Palestinians and Israelis who have no objection on this at all. That's why we want the help of America on strategic issues, not to get involved wallahi with sectarianism, who won the elections, and who did not win. America went very far and in depth when Biden used to come twice a month to convince me to shut power and to refuse the premiership.

TM: So Dr. Allawi, just before we move on, are we to infer from your comments about the Palestinian issue that you are personally not a supporter of the recent Abraham accords?

AA: No I am a supporter, but we need to get for the Palestinians something else. But what are going to give the Palestinians? Because ultimately what will happen—the terrorists recruit Palestinians and other Muslims saying that wallahi the Palestinian issue and Jerusalem is sold to the Jewish people. That's not right. We need the peace process. Do you know the conflict, all in the region, is between moderation and extremism, including— this is the basis of the conflict. We need the United States and the international community in the United States to help with the with the global [issues] not the small issues, who won the elections and to interfere in the elections and to help this guy or that guy. No, we want them to really look at the board as a whole and try to reach to a conclusion how to formulate a policy whereby the Palestinians would not be the problem, and they will be part of the of the solution. And they will get what they want, especially after the agreements and the United Nations and the Arab League and the Arab summits. And also Iran should refrain from intervening. The issue of sectarianism will



finish automatically, will end up, and corruption will go. The corrupt people will go to the courts and tell us we are finished. But this is not the function of the Americans.

TM: Right, so as I understand it, the way that you bring in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is this an issue that gives Iran some mobilizing leverage or some credibility?

AA: Zarif, the foreign minister was in Iraq a few months ago, and he wanted to see me on my own. I said no, see you with the other people. And I saw him. I said why are you giving rockets or missiles to Hezbollah and to Hamas to Israel complicate the issues? I had six, seven people with me, and he had five, four, six people. Again, I said what are you doing? He said I want the non-belligerence agreement with the Arabs. I said what have you done all this? He said I spoke to Albusaidi, the foreign minister of Oman, and I wrote an article. I said you wrote a letter to the great Sultan, to the United States asking them to discuss the nuclear issue. And now you don't write a letter to the Arab ministers for foreign affairs? Why don't you do it and have three components here that are first to zero any problems. You have problems with us? You have problems with Emirates and so on? And then based on this, the non-belligerence should include the countries and their extensions. You don't use Hamas and Hezbollah to fight. And thirdly, to threat benefits. That's all he said. Yes, it's a good idea. I'll initiate a letter. I don't know whether he did it or not, but you know, you have to reason with people. You have to put them under pressure. You have to listen and address the major concerns and then go into the details, which is not entitled by the United States to go into details or Britain or France or Russia or anybody else. But we don't want Iran to use the power that it has gained because of the Americans keeping a blind eye on the Iranian movements in Iraq, and then Iran having the upper hand and deciding what to do and what not to do.

TM: Fair enough. So Dr. Allawi, we've talked a lot about geopolitics so far, and in the few minutes we have remaining before we open it up to questions from the audience, we wanted to talk about a little bit about domestic politics in Iraq. And you know, as many of our listeners probably know, for about a year now, Iraq has been experiencing a protest movement against government corruption and sectarianism and foreign influence. And we'd love to get your perspective on where do you see this protest movement now? And where do you see this movement heading.

AA: Well this movement will expand, will increase. All the ingredients are there for the expansion of this movement. This movement is taking place in the Shia areas mostly dominated by Shia, the south of Iraq and the parts of Baghdad. But of course, this threatens Iran, and that's why the Iranians are trying to mobilize their forces to suppress the demonstrations. And until now, about six to seven hundred people have been killed, let alone those who are injured. I'm ready and happy to send you pictures. I support the demonstrations These are the peaceful demonstrations, and I say to the president, you have to meet them. I said to the prime minister you have to meet them. And we can't ignore the demands of the people, and we are talking about millions of people. So I think first of all, the demonstrations will expand. It will also spill over, not only in the Shiite area but in the Sunni areas sooner rather than later. Saladin, Kirkuk will revolt again or demonstrate, but peaceful demonstrations.

And secondly, the government would be not able to be orchestrating or demonstrating new elections in Iraq. So here we are coming to a head-on collision between the demonstrators. As far as I know, the demonstrators are now engaged in trying to form a front for the various groups who are involved in the demonstrations, but I can't give you real hard figures. Iraq needs 24 million documents of elections for the parliamentary elections. 24 million. What we have now is 77 percent of this ready. And out of the 77 percent, only 50 percent of the 77 percent of the documents have been given to the ballot stations. And 50 percent are not being distributed yet. So really, the elections are not going to resolve the issues.

But once Iran stops the heavy interference and what's happening in Iraq, then I think the Iraqis will be able to resolve this. The government is trying to buy time, is not working on a very clear structured policies forward, trying to buy time to do things here, to do things there on a haphazard basis. This is not what this Iraq requires. Plus the fact that they have found themselves between Iran on the one side and America on the other side. This is, again, causing a lot of madness, politically speaking in Iraq. And then as we are drifting, the increase of problems between the Kurdistan region, which is more stable than the rest of Iraq and the rest of Iraq, we are going to see more corruption. The situation remains as is. We are going to see much more people who are coming, either representing Iran or representing foreign powers or regional foreign powers. It's a big picture. That's why we need the help of the international community, as I said, and let me reiterate this, to put a stop on Iran involvement by hook or crook, by pressure, or by convincing but not with the interference. And if America leaves the Iraq and of course, the allied forces of America, then I assure you, you will have problems throughout the Middle East and also in the United States and also in Europe. Believe me, either through refugees or sleeping cells or whatever. That's why it's a fight for the future of the world really. In a way, this is how I see it.

TM: That's a fairly dramatic warning. Karim, you had the next question.

KH: Dr. Allawi, I think what you outlined in terms of the dynamics in Iraq really leads us to ask you about the future of your political vision for Iraq moving forward. Now you have been very vocal in advocating for a secular Iraq, for an inclusive political order in Iraq, for all Iraqis regardless of religious sect or ethnicity. And yet, the Iraqi national accord today only holds a small number of seats in the Iraqi legislature. Do you think that is reflective of a lack of belief in the political project that you have advocated so forcefully for? And if you could also touch on whether you think you should have received more support from the United States in supporting that vision.

AA: No, we don't need the support. We need the support of the United States vis-a-vis Iran and control Iran and to help us on Iran. But let me tell you something great. Whatever the demonstrations are chanting now is really our vision. They don't want sectarianism. They want a secular Iraq. They don't want a religion to be interfering in Iraq's affairs. They don't want Iran. They don't want America to interfere in the details of issues in Iraq, if you follow up the demonstrations and the slogans of demonstrations. So really what we have cultivated is now mushrooming, getting larger and larger. And the population of Iraq are chanting, "neither

America nor Iran, our revolution is a young revolution” (one possible rough translation). The protests are really forceful in Karbala and Najaf. So really, the ideas of secularity, which we injected into the in the whole system in Iraq, and I agree with the Americans and with the allied forces. No Shiite can run Iraq. No Sunni can run Iraq. No Christian can run Iraq. No Arab. It has to be run by Iraq and secular Iraqis. Now the tide is very much flared up. That's why I tell you frankly and with all honesty, I was disillusioned a year ago, very much disillusioned with the way that Iraq is being run, when Adil Abdul-Mahdi died. The prime minister told them this. But what brought my interest back really is the demonstrations, which were spontaneous but the same slogans that we used, and we stood for. And we lost the elections in 2018 because only 20 percent of the people went to the ballot boxes, not 20 percent, only after the electoral course in Iraq. That's why I feel very pleased, very happy that what we have said turned out to be right, and the Iraqis are rallying now along these points very much. And there are 700 people so far have been killed and many injured and many disappear, even women and young women. And if you look at the age structure of the demonstrations, you'll find that mostly are between up to 40 years old, from 18 to 40 years old. So this is the new generation of Iraq which is really believing in secularity of the country, which is very important.

TM: Dr. Allawi, it seems as if your answer to part of Karim's question, which was, you know, why does your party, you know, not have more seats in the legislature, part of your answer would be that very few hierarchies went to vote in the last election. Your argument is that in fact, most people believe our ideas, but very few people went to vote. And the natural follow-up question is well if most Iraqis want the things that your party is calling for, why didn't they go to vote? What is preventing the Iraqis from seeing you and your party as the vehicle for the achievement of their aspirations?

AA: Many of the regions in Iraq were flooded with water. They were prevented from going to the ballot boxes, and there was very gross, very clear manipulation of the ballot boxes. And also militias control, in some certain areas, the ballot boxes. But what they can they do? And many people were either harassed or threatened or arrested. Even now, we still have the same position. We are secular. We are not sectarian. We want Iraq for the Iraqis. We don't want any differences between two Iraqis. We want a civic state and the citizenship state for all Iraqis. But what we are —until now, we are threatened by assassination, by arrests. We are oppressed, and unfortunately, the international community knows about this very well, but they are not doing anything. And those who are doing this from the militias—if you dissect the anatomy of the elections of 2018, you will see back that almost half of elections were controlled by the militias. The IHEC is very sectarian, represents powers that are completely sectarian. We don't have a single one in the IHEC, and this is the secretariat of the elections. But we see that the Iraq people now have changed their attitude. They are more aggressive. They are more cultural[ly] broken, and they are much more vocal and advocating secularism.

KH: Yeah before we open it up to questions from our audience, if I could take you back to where we started, which is with the issue of the relationship between Iraq and the United States. Because it seems to me, if I can sum up your remarks, that there seems to be a dilemma here. Because on the one hand, you look to the United States to play a strategic role in Iraq,

and you've been very clear on what the parameters of that role should be. But this comes at precisely the time when the United States seems either unwilling or unable to play that role. I mean president Trump popularized the slogan of ending endless wars, and there seems to be a widespread sentiment in the United States against active involvement in the Middle East in general, and I think that would include Iraq in particular. If you had to make the case to an American audience about why the United States should assume that role, what would you say?

AA: Well, I always say very clearly that the world would not be in peace, not only this part of the world, the Middle East. The whole world will not be in peace. The Middle East is in turmoil, and America is required to help strategically, either by convincing or by pressure, not by war. And going towards—I told the Americans this, and I said it in the media that we don't want a new war in Iraq. And that's why we support the issue of the peaceful resolution for the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israeli. And that's why we are turning really now to Europe to see whether Europe is ready because Europe's feeling depends more than the Americans. Every day, there are assassinations in Europe every now and then by extreme forces, like what happened in France in the last two or three days. And we are also trying to turn to the Russians to see what they can do and how they can convince Iran, to convince Iran not to fight but to convince Iran that their way of engagement is wrong.

If we lose faith in America, America decides not to withdraw. They don't commit themselves, which I think is a shame really because what happens in Iraq now, as a result of the American involvement, continuous environment the occupation, followed by interference and small details. And you can ask Biden himself, why did you go to Iraq to prevent the Iraqi from forming the government? It was very clear now, especially from the emails of Hillary Clinton when she was foreign minister. Putin told me in 2010. He was prime minister then, but he was running his Russian translation. He said I met Clinton, and she said I won't be able to form a government. I said why? She told him that we wouldn't get sufficient votes in the parliament. I said okay, let them try. And secondly, she said because Iran would create problems. This was 2010. Mr. Putin told me and Sabah al-Sabah of Kuwait and Mubarak, also. Then, it turned out to be true what happened. The American administration was trying to prevent Iraqis from formation of the government. And I think if the government had been formed by Iraqis, sectarianism would have disappeared, and Daesh should not have occurred. Because after this in 2011 Daesh, thousands escaped from prisons in Iraq. That's why we don't want an interference by the Americans or anybody else on the minority policies. But we want them on a grand scale to convince people that leave it, khalas, we don't need anything else.

TM: This is a good time for us, I think, to allow the audience to engage with your excellency. And so, what I'm going to encourage everybody to do is if you have a question of Dr. Allawi, please use the raise hand function in Zoom, and then I will call on you in the order in which you ask questions and will invite you to unmute yourself. If you're not comfortable asking a question directly, you can always message me directly, and I'll ask the question on your behalf. Okay, so I have one hand up. Let me figure out how to do this. Okay go ahead, sir. You need to unmute yourself.

XX: Hello, can you hear me? Dr. Allawi, thank you very much. It is a great pleasure to be able to learn from you and hear your perspective. And I did want to ask a question about the Abraham Accords because from my understanding, part of Arab nationalism has always kind of been the support of the Palestinian cause. And I understand that peaceful processes and these ways of normalizing relations are better than nothing. But do you see that as kind of an abandonment of the historical position to support Palestinians that is often expressed through opposition to Israel?

AA: No, I don't see this— on the contrary, I think the Palestinians have moved great and very long steps towards agreeing on the peace process and engaging with Israel on the peace process. And you can ask Hanan Ashrawi when she comes— Inshallah, she feels better after the incident. The peace process now have divided the Palestinians between Hamas and the extremists, and between those who wants a peace process like Abu Mazen, Mahmoud Abbas, the PLO and the administration, and I think that this should be encouraged. And the only encouragement is to find solution for the population of Palestine, what to do with them, where to go, what to do, where to go, how to live. And I know that the international community have agreed once upon a time on the issue of the two states, a Palestinian and Israeli. They must find through the peace process, not through fighting, through this process and accommodation, which one is better, which one is doable, which one is not doable. And I think the mistake here is to engage with Egypt and with Sudan and with UAE and with Iraq, and I don't know and leave the Palestinians because this will be used tremendously by Iran to manipulate some of the Palestinians, as they have done with the Hamas and to try and muddy waters more than they are mudding the waters now. I told the Zarif myself. I said you have no right to supply Hamas and Hezbollah and Lebanon with missiles to Israel. We have a peace process. We should allow the peace process to grow, to strengthen, and to address and to be a justice process. But this is what we say— it's not a matter of Arab nationalism. We are more realistic. We see Israel as— When I tell you when we were 14, 15 years old, we were thinking of different things, but now it's different. We are seeing politics from a different angle, realpolitik. Israeli politics is there to stay, but also, the Palestinians are there to stay. I can't throw them on the sea and say your life is your encounter. Khalas, goodbye to you. So we have to find a solution through a peace process. That's why I define the peace process, not the conflict.

TM: I mean you've expressed your view of Mr. Biden. But on this particular issue, it sounds like Mr. Biden might be closer to your preferences than Mr. Trump.

AA: I hope so. I hope he's enlightened to see what my issues are.

TM: Okay let me get some more questions here. The next question I have is from Dr. David Patel of Brandeis University, one of our most gifted scholars of Iraq. Go ahead Dr. Patel.

DP: Thank you for this wonderful talk. I'm wondering how do you see the new districting, the new subdivision of the governance in Iraq affecting the coalitions leading up to the next election and the results of those? And secondly, it's kind of related. Is your party taking any

position on this intra-Sunni Arab split that's trying to unseat Halbousi as a speaker of parliament?

AA: No we're not taking part in this. We don't take part in—you know, our part really is to deplore sectarianism and to blur corruption and to lay the groundwork for just elections and fair elections. And even, I said fair elections is enough to be 65 percent fair. We don't win 70 or 80 or 90 percent, 65. So we don't go into these details. Wallahi who is angry with who and who wants to drink because I think all the parliament is illegitimate. That's why I resigned from parliament. I'm not a member of parliament anymore because maximum 20 percent of the electorate went to elect parliament. 20 only; what kind of legitimacy this gives you? Plus the 20 percent are divided Shia and Shia militias and the Sunnis and (undiscernible). And I don't know. So really, it's a matter of getting our priority right. Our priority really is to have fair elections and to get all what's happening now behind us.

By the way, I told Adil Abdul-Mehdi and Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and I said, why don't you engage the demonstrators and engage the unions and the associations, as well as the parliament, as well as the political forces? So I have three components: the demonstrators who are millions, representatives of them and the political groups of Iraq and also the unions, which is very well-established institutions in Iraq and associations, trades, union, lawyers union, and so on. And create a government, which encompasses the whole, these three groups. And this would work very gradually, but definitely, it will work towards better elections in the future. But they didn't do it. They were under pressure from the militias, and they told me this. And that's why Adil Abdul-Mehdi resigned because he couldn't fix this, the militias and their demands. And Mustafa al-Kadhimi is squeezed now. And he is not able. He doesn't have a platform, is unable to run the country, and the Iraq is going through the abyss.

TM: Our next question, Dr. Allawi, is from Matt Buehler, a former fellow of the Harvard Middle East initiative and a professor at the University of Tennessee.

AA: Matt Buehler?

TM: Go ahead. Matt are you unmuted? Okay I've lost him. I think he's lost his connection, so while we're trying to figure that out, I'll go to senior fellow of the Middle East initiative, Rami Khouri

XX: Thank you. My father served as his last job as head of the U.N. information center in Baghdad in the 1970s, and I spent a couple of summers there. I wanted to ask you, given your experience and your many contacts around the region and your living through these last 20, 30 years of erratic politics all over the Arab world, do you feel possibly that one of the mistakes that has been made in Iraq, as well as in many other Arab countries has been to go move too quickly to national elections before allowing the societies to form the institutions and to negotiate informally to allow the kind of consensus government that you're talking about?

AA: I think, you know, frankly speaking, the whole story started with Iraq and to throw Iraq into immediately to— I did not want —the political forces in Iraq suggested to me they need to two years at least before the elections takes place until they organize themselves, and I was in favor of this. But I have given my word that it's an interim government, and once we do the election I'm not— I refused. I said I will agree on this provided that you find another prime minister, and the governing council should elect a new prime minister. They rejected this for we did the elections. And I feel very sorry because I went with the elections, and the way I would attribute (?) it. The first election was really transparent, no problem. I allowed the U.N. to choose the IHEC, no interference from Iraq at all. So there wasn't a Sunni, a Shia, a Christian— I don't know what. It was a pure Iraqi, very capable Iraqi group, and I supported them myself.

And really what happened is after I left, downpour of— Iraq went sloping down. And once Iraq was lost as a country. the whole Middle East went into—then came the so-called Arab spring, which is not a spring. They are a bloody autumn, rather than spring. And also, it was encouraged by our friends in the United States, really pushing the Arabs into, and I told Bush once, George Bush. I said look, you can't have a photocopy of what you have in America in Iraq. We are just still beginning. We have been living for 40 years under concrete dictatorship. How can we go into full-blown democracy immediately? I think there were lots of mistakes. I don't want to go into the mistakes that was committed by the United States and the occupation and then and so on. But really, we respect. We share a lot of common grounds with the United States, rule of law, freedom of speech.

Most importantly, we see ourselves as moderates, not extremists, and we see the United States as a moderate country. And the American people are moderates. So that's why we feel that we need the support of the United States, not in the integrity of politics but in the general strategy to highlight to Iran and to introduce this and the security council. So why not to say that Iran have to refrain from interfering in the matters of Iraq and Yemen and Lebanon and Syria? And they can't refer to the speeches of the Iranians themselves when they say we rule four or five capitals. We rule Beirut. We rule Damascus. We rule Baghdad. We rule Sana'a. But that's why there were a series of mistakes committed by our American friends. That's why I say there is a moral obligation, as well as legal obligation by the United States to help this region because this region really, in a way, is in the center of the world.

You know, the cardinal who died, passed away, Delly. He believed that the Americans were trying to vacate the Christians from Iraq and from the Middle East. He told me this personally, but we can't have this. We can't have a Christian and the Shi'a and the Sunni. We have to have an Iraqi citizen. You may be Christian. You may be Mizrahi. But first of all, you are an Iraqi citizen. That's what we need to do, and this is our function, not the Americans. They can't dictate it. There is a body in Europe for religious dialogue. They wanted to see me. I refused. I said to see why? What? We don't want you to interfere. We don't have problems. I don't have problem. I studied in an American Jesuit school called Baghdad College (?), if you know it. You know, there were Christians. There were Jewish people, Shias, Sunnis. We never felt that there is any difference between each. Now you have to—and that's why the Iraqis now, the

demonstrations are calling for a secular Iraq, no Iran or influence, not even America not to intervene.

TM: Thank you for that Dr. Allawi. We're coming on the end of our time. So this is going to be the last question from Professor Buehler at the University of Tennessee. Go ahead.

MB: So Mr. Prime Minister, thank you very much for your talk. Given that Iraqi Kurdistan has achieved greater stability and economic growth compared to other areas of Iraq, do you see the region over the next 10 to 15 years either seeking full independence as a sovereign nation, seeking even greater autonomy within the Iraqi state, maintaining its current status, or perhaps seeking greater integration with the broader Iraqi state? Thank you.

AA: I think more autonomy. I think so. Masoud Barzani is a very dear friend of mine, and I engage with him. And we are very close to each other since very early days. And I told him I said look, if you want consensus to separate from Iraq, you won't get it. You won't get it. Maybe the casual vote for it, for this, but you won't get it because neither of the Americans nor the Russians nor the British nor the Iraqis nor the Arabs nor Turkey nor Iran are ready to accept this. It's better for you to take the graduation and work towards more autonomy for Kurdistan. This is better. He agreed there, and he sent me a letter on my initiative. And I took a little time, and I went, and said I saw King Abdullah II. I was the head of the Arab summit. And I said you have to get a body and Masoud Barzani together and to give Masoud the way out of what he did on the consensus on Kurdistan. And let them meet together in your house either for lunch or dinner and let them fight. But at least let them resolve the issue. And let Masoud go back with honorable way out of what he—so the king agreed he agreed and Masoud agreed to come to Jordan. I recall, it was on Wednesday. He agreed to come, but Abadi refused. He said I have to apologize from me, from body, from the Kurds, and from the Iraq. I said what's this? Are we fighting, apologize one from the other or on the unity of Iraq? I think really what we need to do is through dialogue and through friendly and brotherly and encompassing, because of course, they are part and parcel of Iraq, to have more autonomy. And their slogan since I was involved in politics was the democracy for Iraq and the self-autonomy for Kurdistan. Fine. I don't have a quarrel with this, but this should be done in a mutually agreed way and in a progressive way. But I can't see them decision on forming a government yet. I don't know, in 20, 30 years or 11. And I don't see them becoming under the control of Iraq completely. That's why I think autonomy is better.

TM: Dr. Allawi, I think we could probably spend another two hours talking with you and absorbing your wisdom, not just on the situation in Iraq but also what you're seeing in the United States and America's changing role in the region and in the world. So I hope that you will, once this pandemic is over, do us the honor of coming and visiting us here at Harvard so that we can continue this discussion.

AA: My pleasure. You know, I always would like to come to Egypt. I know Sisi very well. I come and see him every now and then. See I love Egypt. I love these people. My wife in fact started as medicine in Egypt.



TM: Inshallah. Well, I'm definitely Egyptian, but I'm located in the United States, and so we'd love to have you come to Harvard, or you can join my co-pilot in this endeavor Karim Haggag at the AUC in Cairo.

AA: So we'll do both. I can go to Cairo and, I can come to Harvard too.

TM: Inshallah. Thank you, Dr. Allawi. Karim, any last words before we part?

KH: No, just to echo what Tarek mentioned. Dr. Allawi, I think we owe you a deep sense of gratitude, not only for your insight but also for your candor in your conversation with us this afternoon. And I think Tarek and I will reach a peaceful settlement on which of us host you first.

TM: First, after the conversation, we'll do AUC first because I'm also affiliated with AUC.

AA: You know, I tell you. I am very proud that I have known you now, and I have heard of you before. Haggag, especially, I have heard of you. And you know, I like what you are doing, and this is a really a good insight into to the Americans mentality and thoughts. We don't want America to feed spoon-feed us. This is very wrong, absolutely. I'm against this completely.

KH: Thank you for helping us engage in this series of conversations.

AA: Absolutely.

TM: I think the message that you delivered really came through very clearly, and Inshallah, this is the beginning of a conversation. All right ladies and gentlemen, if we were all in the same location, we would now be drowning Dr. Allawi in thunderous applause. But I know that you all share the gratitude towards him that Ambassador Haggag and I share. So thank you all for coming, and we'll see you again next week when we will be meeting with the Iraqi journalist Mina al-Oraibi in this series of conversations.

AA: Very nice.

TM: Wonderful. All right take care everybody. Bye, thank you very much. Thank you. Goodbye.