

**HILTERMANN MEETING**  
**17.04.2007**

Guven Sak: Let me welcome you all. Again Joost Hiltermann is here. This is your fifth time. Today, we are going to have a discussion on the Iraq issue, the developments in Iraq basically. Joost will mostly talk about two issues. One is about the new security plan of the Americans. I don't know whether there is still a new security plan. You will tell us about it. Then he is going to talk about the developments around the Kirkuk issue. Let's have an open discussion. As far as I see, these Iraq discussions everywhere, both in Turkey and in Washington are very much peculiar. Nobody is exactly discussing about Iraq. All the discussions are about internal politics. Nobody is interested in how the Iraqis are feeling and what is happening in Iraq. Maybe today we will also get a feel of how the Iraqis are feeling. We have also participants from Iraq. We can learn about the real developments on the ground.

Joost: Thank you very much Guven. It is always pleasure that I come to speak at TEPAV/TOBB University. This is at least my fifth time. I don't keep track anymore. I always feel welcomed here so I am very appreciative of the opportunity. I always seem to be talking about the same subject, which is Iraq broadly speaking and then the issue of Kirkuk in particular. There is one thing that I focus on but it seems to be so important in the overall Iraqi crisis as well. It has been ignored and it is very dangerous. Two topics. One is the security plan which was announced more than a month ago, maybe about two months ago. It has not gathered full steam yet with the arrival of American forces in Baghdad, about which we can already draw certain conclusions because it was announced and immediately upon the announcement, it had an impact. Before the arrival of significant amount of forces, either Iraqi forces or American ones, the violent actors that were planned to be targeted by these forces, both on the insurgent side and on the militia side, decided to preemptively disappear essentially. They went about their daily business such as the Sadirists. And so, before there was any attempt to suppress these armed forces, there was relative calm that went to the streets of Baghdad for a while. That was somewhat reassuring to the Baghdad population, which of course suffered from horrendous violence in the preceding months. Before there was an uncertain situation that drew many people out of the capital to Jordan or Syria or into other areas of Iraq that felt safe. But, then there was this calm and an opportunity, a psychological moment in which an attempt could have been made to try to

effect some kind of political move in order to bring the various groups in Iraq back together. I think if the security plan is to succeed at all, it has to be not just strictly a military campaign to subdue or pacify Baghdad and then the rest of Iraq. It has also got to be accompanied by a political plan and so far, we saw no signs of this. The psychological moment that I have mentioned may well have passed or is passing. Even though the insurgents that are out there killing people have gone to ground, the suicide bombings have been gone up. Certainly, to the extent that they are identified by the Al-Qaeda in Iraq group, those attacks have increased rather than decreased. February had the highest number of such attacks ever. This is one of the factors why the security plan is not even working from a military perspective. It is also changing the mood of the people and especially, and this was probably the intended effect on the part of the insurgents, it is raising anger among the Shiites who have been targeted mostly in these attacks. I think one of the intentions of the insurgents is not only to show the Americans that their security plan is not working but to provoke the Mahdi army of Mukteda al-Sadr to come out into the open and start retaliating. Then, this is what the insurgents hope of course, the Americans may start cracking down on the Mahdi army as they had promised to do all along. President Bush had mentioned this in his speech in January. And in a way, both sides, two sides: the militias on the Shiite side and insurgents mostly on the Sunni side, both of them were hoping that the US would do their dirty work for them. The Shiite militias disappeared because they thought that if they did not act up, the Americans would ignore them, and in fact they might work together in rebuilding Sadr city. Some of that is actually happening. But, the Americans would then attack the insurgents. This is of course what the Shiite militias want. Instead of doing it yourself, why not have the Americans do it? And vice versa. The insurgents, noticing that the Shiites had gone to ground, wanted to bring them out into the open so that the Americans could crack down on the militias as they had said they would. Now, we may be seeing a return to the original cycle. Already this last weekend more bodies were found tortured, killed. It looks like it is the work of some of the death squads that worked in the past, who seem to be inside the militias, subgroups affiliated with the militias. We have seen the suicide bombings going up. We also have seen maybe again a return of the revenge killings and return to that overall cycle. Then, we have to see whether, when the bulk of the American forces arrive, it can go back to this other period of calm and real engagement militarily of these violent actors. We have to see whether they can be suppressed, whether we also gain this initial momentum that seemed to exist that would have allowed for a political initiative.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has already made clear that if there is going to be a political initiative, it is going to come from the Iraqi government. In our view, this is a non-starter. I would have liked very much to have thought differently, say differently but I don't think the Iraqi government is capable, has the ability as a government to even effectively govern, let alone effect reconciliation with its adversaries, nor I am convinced that it is willing. This is a government, the majority of which is in many ways a party to the sectarian conflict that is playing itself out in Iraq. And so, they are not the ones that are going to take the real initiative to come to a genuine agreement with the other political and violent actors, including the insurgents, maybe excluding the al-Qaeda in Iraq types, over the issues that are dividing Iraq today. Those issues have been and will be: the nature of the federal system in Iraq, the issue of Kirkuk, the issue of revenue sharing from oil and gas sales, the issue of de-Baathification. There are also some other issues like the identity of Iraq for example. If no real attempt is made to come to an agreement, then, it simply will not happen. Because in our view since this government is not capable and willing to effect such an overall compromise, we feel strongly as we said in the report in December, after the Baker-Hamilton report came out, there will have to be a multilateral effort driven by the US, which remains the most powerful actor on the ground despite all their mistakes, with the other members of the Security Council and the 6 neighboring states. In our view, anything less will not work and you cannot bring peace in Iraq without the active cooperation of the 6 neighboring states of Iraq. That includes of course Syria and Iran. We now have seen an initial regional meeting, including all these countries. This is a very positive development. A second meeting is scheduled for early May in Egypt rather than in Istanbul. The fact that it will happen is a very positive thing. Some substantive issues will be discussed. Bilateral talks between the US and Syria and Iran will start. That could start to dampen some of the very situation that exist in the region. It won't be easy and it is completely premature to have any sort of optimism about this. But what will need to happen is for these 5 Security Council members and the 6 neighboring countries to sit together to create an Iraq Support Group, as the Baker-Hamilton Report suggested. This support group should call together the main Iraqi actors across the political spectrum to the exclusion of Iraqi al-Qaeda and bring together these actors around the table and push them towards compromises on these key questions that I mentioned. This is the only way out of the mess that we are currently in. Any attempt to restabilize Iraq by military means only is going to fail. There is no full proof system of security. You cannot prevent the individual bomber from getting through.

The attack at the parliament last week showed that very clearly. These kinds of attacks, such as an attack in a Shiite market place, are going to get the militias to respond. This is almost inevitable so the cycle would resume. The only way to break the cycle is not to try to catch these individual bombers. I am not against that attempt either, it should happen too, but we need to come to this overall compromise. Militias and insurgents can try to be integrated into the national security forces that can crack down on these other violent actors including the criminal elements that are not going to be brought to the table in any way. This is the only way forward that could succeed. Whether it would succeed is a big question that I don't want to start to answer. We first need to see a move in that direction. Anything short of that will not succeed. A more likely scenario at this stage is the escalation of the civil war in Iraq and anything that may follow from that. The real challenge now is that if we fail to restore a semblance of stability in Iraq, the challenge will be to prevent the civil war in Iraq not from escalating but from escalating beyond the borders of Iraq. The challenge will be to contain the civil war within the borders of Iraq and that is going to be very difficult. Regional meetings may contribute to that. The one thing that all the neighboring states have in common and that is the important basis to work on is the fact that none of these countries would like to see total chaos in Iraq and would not like to see Iraq break up into various parts. But they all may contribute to such a scenario simply because they are now trying to secure their immediate interests by supporting certain proxy parties in Iraq that are fighting each other. Should these proxy parties collapse and falter, these patron states may not have any choice but to go into Iraq to protect their fundamental interests, thereby precipitating the very scenarios that they are against, which is the break up of the country. We don't want to come to that stage. Therefore, it is very important to have a regional security framework that would allow these countries to exchange information and to coordinate certain policies that will help them in containing the civil war in Iraq. I don't like to be talking about such a scenario. I would rather talk about the possibility of ending the civil war. It is just that we need to have a plan B. Senator McCain said there is no plan B. This is it. We can't afford to think that way.

Before I come to the topic of Kirkuk, I just want to raise one issue and this is also raised in the US since now it is moving closer towards a presidential election. The issue of withdrawal of American soldiers and what to leave behind... One of the scenarios that has gained a lot of traction is the soft partition scenario. It is now particularly popular among some certain

Democrats. They see it as a reality on the ground that is evolving and therefore should be encouraged rather than stopped. It cannot be stopped. This may lead to an arrangement that would produce stability for some time and would allow the American forces to be withdrawn.

I don't have to give a lecture here in Ottoman history but one of the arguments being used is that not only is a partition/division of the Sunnis/Shiites/Kurds a reality on the ground but it is also something that has a precedent in the Ottoman times. It should be obvious to anyone who has read Ottoman history that there is no precedent whatsoever. There was never anything in Iraq that resembled a Sunni region/Shiite region or even a Kurdish region. The northern vilayet of Mosul was a totally mixed area. It incorporated what is now known as Iraqi Kurdistan but it incorporated also Mosul, which was never a Kurdish city. Kurds would not claim that. There were other areas that were either Arab, Turcoman, Christian or Jewish. Southern region of the Basra vilayet was not a Shiite region. Basra had a significant Sunni population like the other cities in the south. They also had Christian and Jewish populations. The central region which included the holy cities to the Shiites of Najaf and Karbala was actually majority Shiites. This whole notion that there was at one point this precedent of Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni regions was a fiction. But it gained at some point certain popularity. Nor, today can you speak of Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish regions. Well, you can talk of the Kurdish region but it is not equivalent to what used to be the Mosul vilayet. Of course it is the Kurdistan region but the boundaries of this region are very much in dispute. Even if you can set aside the Kurds, that issue of their boundaries is not settled and it would most probably lead to violence unless there is a real effort to settle that. The further notion that you could separate the Sunnis and the Shiites of Iraq is absurd. You would need to draw a boundary through the living rooms and the bedrooms. That is going to be a very bloody affair and that should not be considered as a solution. It may end up being a default situation. It might happen but it should not be encouraged. Also, I think that it will not happen. The two options in Iraq are these. One: There is going to be some kind of new stability thanks to a new political effort aimed at bringing together various groups together. Or, Iraq is going to be a failed state. I think this is the more likely scenario. A very dangerous one, but it is getting very likely. I don't see any developments pointing at a partitioning of Iraq. This notion, that is now popular in the US, this notion of soft partition, is a way really where some of the Democrats and maybe some Republicans as well, and some intellectuals believe that there is an easy way out of Iraq. There is not.

I think what this shows for the US is that there is no choice but to remain in Iraq at some level until they have either accomplished such a political national compact, or if it is impossible to reach that, we have to move to plan B which is to contain a civil war. We can show how intermingled all the population groups remaining in the capital are and therefore, how difficult it would be to separate them.

The issue of Kirkuk... I guess it is a pity and very difficult coincidence that on the issue of Kirkuk, we are both in an election year in Turkey and in a referendum year on Kirkuk. It could not have been a worse combination. In Turkey, I don't have to tell you anything. You know much better than I do but we are facing two elections that are already very polarizing, at least the first one. This gives an opportunity to the military establishment in this country to raise its voice in the issues that matter to Turkey in northern Iraq. This is the issue of Kirkuk and the issue of the PKK. These are genuine issues with genuine concern to Turkey but the debate's escalating at this stage is not helpful and in fact it is very dangerous because signals are mixed. We may face a military situation in Iraq that may really undermine any attempt at coming to a peaceful solution to Kirkuk and the PKK situation. In our view, the situation in Kirkuk has now the appearance of a trainwreck in the making. Unfortunately, whether the referendum takes place or not, the situation could lead to serious violence and this would have an impact beyond Kirkuk as well as in Baghdad. If the Kurds succeed in persuading the Iraqi government to go ahead with the referendum before the end of the year, the referendum would be boycotted by the other communities that are in the region, mainly the Turcomans, the Arabs and maybe some of the Christians. It may lead to violence and civil war in Kirkuk. However, if the referendum does not take place because the Iraqi government does not organize it or because it is undermined by violence in Kirkuk, then the Kurds may withdraw from the government in Baghdad as they have threatened to do. That would lead to the collapse of that government if it hasn't collapsed before then. And, that in turn would lead to the renegotiation of the government in Baghdad which could only be done with the participation of the Kurds, because politically they are king makers in Iraqi politics. The Kurds would then raise the Kirkuk issue once again and say "look this time we won't talk about a process of gaining Kirkuk, but now, we want Kirkuk as part of the new governing accord to build the new government" That would lead to a total deadlock in Baghdad just at a time when the security plan is supposed to yield political dividends. It would be the opposite of what the US wants to happen in Iraq now. Unfortunately, the

US does not seem to have a strategy on Kirkuk. It has supported the constitutional process which in this case means the implementation of article 140 of the constitution which prescribes the holding of the referendum before the end of the year.

I don't see any way how this referendum can be held in a practical way before the end of the year. First of all, political opposition is enormous. Secondly, nobody has started in Iraq to work out the very complex, difficult, procedural issues involved in organizing such a referendum in Kirkuk and in other areas claimed by the Kurds. The constitution is entirely unclear about what the referendum is going to be about. Everybody assumes that it will be about the status of Kirkuk but it does not actually say that. Because it does not say that, there are going to be people saying, this is not what is meant by the constitution. There are going to be disputes and they need to be resolved. Given the high level of polarization, especially about the issue of Kirkuk, they are not going to be resolved. Therefore, the referendum probably won't take place. If we want to prevent the Kurds from carrying out their threats from withdrawing from the government, there has to be a pro-active policy to bring the Kurds on board of a different approach on Kirkuk. What we are proposing is to postpone the referendum and to replace the current process with a new process. I have to say that, as I found during my recent visits to Kirkuk and to the Kurdish region, the Kurdish leadership seems to have realized that its own strategy on Kirkuk has failed to persuade the other communities in Kirkuk that they would be better off living inside the Kurdistan region than under the federal government and that a new approach is needed. This is a bit late. We have now lost 4 years in which the Kurds not only have done whatever they wanted in Kirkuk but they have also destroyed any kind of trust that could have existed between the other communities and the Kurds, the Kurdish parties in particular. So now, all we need to do is not only to find an equitable solution to Kirkuk but we also need to overcome four years of very serious distrust that has been created by these policies. These policies include the Kurds' total control over the political and administrative institutions in Kirkuk governorate.

Now, much will depend on what the US will do. I was in Washington a couple of weeks ago and I was still not getting any sign that the strategy is changing. What I was told is that the US is completely preoccupied with the security plan in Baghdad. Now, I understand why this is so important. This is the last ditch effort to succeed in Iraq or at least to stabilize Iraq. But, as I said earlier, if the issue of Kirkuk is mishandled, the impact will be felt in

Baghdad. The issue of Kirkuk is linked to the security plan in Baghdad whether we like it or not. Therefore, it cannot be ignored at this stage. We now need a proactive effort by the US to bring the Kurds around to an alternative approach on Kirkuk, where negotiations are held between the Kurdish parties and the community leaders in Kirkuk and more broadly, the political leadership of the various parties in Iraq as well as the Kurdistan regional government and Iraqi federal government. Based on my talks in Kirkuk, the Kurdish leadership having realized they have done it wrong, they also now seriously started talking with their enemies and not just with the Turcomans and Arabs they liked and who truly did not represent their communities. These talks started in the last couple of months and this is a very positive development and it should be encouraged. However, this is not going to be enough. In fact, the Kirkuk question cannot be solved in isolation. It cannot be solved at the local level, even though at the local level much can be done to create good will.

A couple of other issues have to be discussed. One of these issues is the PKK because Turkey has invested so much in the Kirkuk question and could spoil any kind of emerging settlement in Kirkuk because of the PKK. So, the PKK issue also has to be addressed. And thirdly, the issue of oil revenue sharing in Iraq has to be addressed as well because of Kirkuk of course. It sits on 12% of Iraq's proven oil reserves. So, the oil revenue sharing issue is relevant in Kirkuk in particular. We have already seen some work done on the new Iraqi oil law but we are still far away from a true compromise on the issue of revenue sharing. That has to happen and soon. If that happens and if some kind of a solution is found to the PKK problem that is short of military intervention by Turkey into northern Iraq, then the Kirkuk question, as part of that package, can be addressed in a positive way as well. These are very big questions and it is going to be difficult to solve these issues but I don't think that taking them in isolation is going to work as well. Therefore, we have to think of them as part of a package deal.

Let me stop there and give a chance for debate.

Guven Sak: We can start the questions.

Question: You said the Kirkuk question might be complicated or spoiled if the PKK issue is not solved. For many outside observers, it is not very clear if it is the PKK issue or the Kirkuk issue which is more important for Turkey. Assuming that there is some kind of a settlement on Kirkuk that is



satisfying to Ankara, do you still believe that the PKK issue could spoil that given that the bigger interest could overcome the smaller interest?

Answer: I think the primary interest for Turkey is the territorial integrity of Iraq. In a way, Turkey might learn to live with some kind of a Kurdish entity in northern Iraq if it is a buffer against total chaos in the rest of Iraq. If the future of Iraq is going to be total chaos, then you might as well have some kind of stable entity in the Kurdish region that Turkey can work together with. The PKK issue is of course important to Turkey in terms of all the activities of the PKK in Turkey. The Kirkuk issue is important because the perception is that if the Kurds gain Kirkuk, therefore the oil fields, then whatever the constitution says about the oil revenue being shared throughout Iraq, then if there is not going to be an Iraq, there won't be an implementable constitution. The Kurds would then de-facto have the oil. They would still have to transport it via Turkey or Syria but they will be dependent. But, they will have significantly more leverage with Kirkuk than would be the case without the oil. It would put them onto a path towards greater autonomy and independence down the line. That would encourage the PKK to ask similar things from Turkey and that of course becomes an existential question for Turkey. The issues are intimately linked in that sense. But you can also look at them in isolation. Can we solve the PKK issue in isolation? Possibly you could. What about the Kirkuk question? Maybe you can also solve it in isolation. The debate being what it is in Turkey today, especially in an election year and the internal divisions inside Turkey, and of course everything is driven by domestic politics in most countries, I am not so sure that you can solve these issues in isolation. You may have to link them. Maybe I am wrong. But this is the way we are thinking about it now. I would like to have comments or people contradicting me on this. It would be helpful actually.

Question: You have mentioned that the occupation of the Americans with the security plan is not that good. You mentioned that there is the need for a political component also in addition to that. What do you mean by that political component? Is that the Kirkuk issue or insertion of the militias into the security forces?

Answer: It is what I also referred to as the effort by the 5 Security Council members and the 6 neighboring countries to put the Iraqi groups including the insurgents (they call themselves the patriotic resistance) around the table (non-al-Qaeda type groups) Dayton style, push them towards a compromise

and focus on issues that are now proven to be so divisive (like the nature of the federal system, oil revenue sharing issue, the Kirkuk question and de-Baathification). Once, if and when you reach a compromise on this, then amend the constitution accordingly. It is being reviewed now anyway. You could review it more drastically than you could now in isolation. Now, one of President Bush's benchmarks are the constitutional amendments. But the constitution is not going to be changed in any significant way because the only issues that matter are the issues of the federal system and the issue of Kirkuk. On the issue of the oil revenue sharing, I think that a compromise can be reached outside of the constitution. It is already on its way and in fact the Kurds have made some major compromises but we are still not there yet. On the issue of Kirkuk and the nature of the federal system, they are not compromising. The thing is that the constitutional amendment package can only be passed in a popular referendum. It can be vetoed by anyone who can muster 2/3 of majority in three governorates. The Kurds can do that very easily. The Kurds have absolute veto power to any change of the constitution. They do not want the constitution changed, except on some of the details. Therefore, the constitution will not be changed and therefore you need to go over these and take these issues up as part of a political compromise sponsored by the international community, US, P5 and Iraq Support Group. You need to bring all these states in because they have too great a spoiling power and they might come along because they have the shared interest in not wanting too much chaos in Iraq. Iraq falling apart would bring into question all the post-Ottoman borders. Nobody wants that. Every country has its own minorities that could be used or that could start fighting for their own independence.

Question: There is also the petrol law that everybody is discussing. Is this part of the process?

Answer: This is part of the process. But that is one issue where I think success may be possible. The Iraqis made an announcement a couple of months ago that the cabinet had approved the oil law. That's true but the oil law is a very limited oil law and it is not the real one that we need as everyone acknowledges. The oil law basically regulates the industry. But it is still lacking three annexes that have to be drafted or at least renegotiated and agreed upon. It lacks a companion piece of legislation which is the oil revenue sharing law and that is the one that really matters. There, we have only seen the Kurdish draft and obviously, that is not going to be enough. There will be negotiations on that. We are just not there yet. If and when that

happens, then we can say that real progress has happened. If we have a true compromise in oil, then we can say this is a good step forward. It will not be sufficient but it will be a necessary part of the process.

Question: Thank you. I fully agree with your analysis on the internationalization of the problem in a Madrid Conference sort of an event where all the parties should be there. Although we would probably prefer a special status for Kirkuk under the constitution but as you said, the veto power of the Kurds on the constitution makes it unlikely. In a broader grand bargain deal, what would it require for the Kurds to give up Kirkuk with a give and take, what would convince them to compromise. I don't see what the internationalization of the conflict or bringing all the neighbors could bring to the Kurds something that they don't currently have.

Answer: It is a very good question. The Kurds are in Kirkuk and they dominate the political scene but actually they do not control Kirkuk and they militarily have not been able to do that. Now, there are bombs going off in the Kurdish neighborhoods, only in the last two months. So, they are not even providing security to their own people. Kirkuki Kurds living in Erbil and Suleimaniya, are refusing to go back to Kirkuk as long as there is no safety, security for their children, nor infrastructure, social services, schooling or jobs. I know that in the media and also in Turkey, we often hear Kurds are bringing together other Kurds into Kirkuk. Reality is not that. Reality is that the Kirkuki Kurds do not want to go back to Kirkuk. Kurds really have a problem. Of course they can bus them in for an election or a referendum but actually people want to leave Kirkuk because it is actually not very safe. This is the prospect for the Kurds. If they want to take Kirkuk, it is not going to be very different. It will be more violent. They will not have a stable boundary to their region; they will not have Kirkuk in the way they wanted. The next best solution for them is to share Kirkuk, at least on an interim basis. We proposed this in our last report in July as well that Kirkuk be a stand-alone federal region for say 10 years. There will be a power sharing arrangement during this period. Maybe a UN third party or a facilitator would be appointed to work out a mechanism to eventually determine the status of Kirkuk and to oversee this power sharing arrangement. That is still an option on the table and it should be considered. Maybe if things turn out to be better, there is a true dialogue and Kurds postpone the referendum, maybe there is even a possibility of Kirkuk being incorporated into the Kurdistan region but having a special status within that region with a power-sharing arrangement. The Kurds are certainly willing to

consider that. At this point, I did not find any takers among the Turkmen and Arab so I don't think it is going to happen. This is also because the situation is so polarized that this is something that is maybe down the line possible.

The other thing is that the US can also offer the Kurds something. They can offer the Kurds recognition as a region and protection. One thing I heard at the Pentagon (not an official policy) is that they have all these big bases in Iraq in the desert but not in Kurdistan. Americans could put one in Kurdistan in exchange for Kurdish compromise on Kirkuk. That way, they feel that they will not be invaded by Turkey and they can secure their borders with the rest of Iraq which may well turn out to be a chaotic situation. They need some kind of security. Maybe that could help them to develop the Kirkuk oil fields, to sharing the revenue but at least to be able to export the oil safely to Turkey or Syria. There are things that the Kurds could gain.

Question: You just talked about the possibility of the deployment of a US base in northern Iraq as a way to win the hearts of the Kurds or to get a compromise on Kirkuk. But on the contrary, we have another problem there that would bring in the insurgency and the anti-Americanism. Kurds are already hated by the rest of the country since the rest are anti-Americans. All that hatred would be brought into northern Iraq as well and then we would have more trouble on our border.

Answer: I am not sure if that is true. If you travel now from anywhere inside Iraq into the Kurdish region, the security is phenomenal. They have by and large been able to prevent some of these insurgents from coming into the region. Of course, there have been some attacks. Some of them have been very lethal but by and large, the Kurdish region has been free of that kind of violence. Because they have such disciplined security forces, they can effectively protect the region. I don't see that happening so easily.... (end of the tape)...

Question: I have a question about the pre-referendum process because there is an ongoing normalization process in Kirkuk right now. How do you evaluate this process? Would it make more sense if the referendum is postponed?

ANSWER: In the constitution it says that there has to be a process of normalization, then a census and then a referendum. It is clearly a sequential process in the constitution and in the TAL (article 58) which is incorporated

into article 140 of the constitution. It has to be a sequential process and this has led a number of political actors to say that since normalization is far from completed, it is premature to move to the next stage which is a census, let alone to move to a referendum. There are two issues now. Should we continue with the normalization and to complete it and to have a referendum at the end of that or should we have the referendum by the deadline and have the normalization which may take many years to take its course. This is one issue. The other one is if there should be a census? I never understood why there should be a census because it is written in the constitution but, I have never been able to get an answer from anyone why a census is required in Kirkuk. The only reason I can see is to create a voter registration. There are many different and better ways to do that, and less controversial ones than organizing a census. Now, coincidentally, this year is also the year of the decennial census in Iraq. It happens in every 10 years, 87, 97 and 2007. I have actually not heard anything that the census is happening this year. Maybe it is but it usually happens in October. It is a major effort and the situation is very unstable and violent. I don't think it can be carried out, obviously not in all areas. Anyway, it is going to be very difficult to carry it out in Kirkuk. But, there is no need. If you want to create voter rolls, there are better ways to do it. Even the ration card system can still be used. It was used in 2005 and it wasn't the worst system. So if you want to use the voter rolls, use that.

The other issue is normalization. Normalization has different aspects. It is a strange term. What is normal? People say it is going back to pre-1967 situation. Can we go back to a situation that has existed in the past? Of course not. The world evolves. But what is meant of course, is some kind of reversal of the worst aspects of Arabization. That is expected by the Turcoman community as well as even by some of the Arab leaders. Some Turcomans have also been victimized by the former regime. Some yes, others no. All of these things are very complex. The return of those people who are displaced from Kirkuk by force... It is very difficult. The countryside was destroyed by the former regime and it has to be rebuilt. It will take a long time. One Kurdish leader had told me, it would probably take around 50 years to reverse what Saddam Huseyin had done. It is probably true.

The second issue is the departure of those people who were brought there by the former regime. I choose my terms very carefully. It is not settlers. What is meant is that these people came either because there were incentives

offered to them or because their jobs were transferred there and they were brought there by the regime for various reasons. The constitution says these people need to be compensated properly if they choose to leave Kirkuk. The Kurds have chosen to read this even as if these people should leave. There is a big controversy going on especially on this issue. There is a committee now (article 140 committee- part of the executive office of the PM) that is looking at the normalization question. They issued four decisions recently. One of them seems to suggest that these people must leave. That would be contrary to the constitution. It is creating a big uproar especially among those people, but not only among those people because they feel that as Iraqi citizens, they have civil rights and they have the right to live anywhere in Iraq. They've got a point of course. This issue will not be solved easily. So far, some people have left and the settler community is divided into two. Those who agree to leave and they will leave if the price is right, and the package is improved. The second group adamantly refuses to leave saying that we are living here and this is our right. One person is a secular Shiite, he has two wives. A Shiite and Kurdish wife. His Shiite wife lives in the Kurdish neighborhood of Kirkuk and the Kurdish wife lives in the Arab neighborhood of Kirkuk. All his children speak Kurdish since with the Shiite wife, they are living in a Kurdish neighborhood and with the Kurdish wife, because the mother-tongue is Kurdish. Now, not only is he subject to this new regulation, but so are his children who are in many ways Kurds but they are settlers so they must leave to their original areas, which of course they don't have. It is a very complex and complicated issue. To hold a referendum while this process is still unfolding is a very dangerous thing.

Question: I would like to talk about Baghdad, which is the heart of Iraq. You mentioned a couple of times that the government is not capable and not willing. This government, we do not have any other alternative. Complete chaos in Iraq and if you have any alternative, please let me know. Al-Maliki after he became the PM of Iraq, realized what it means to be a leader in Iraq. He took serious steps from his sectarian background and there are facts on the ground on that. He is working very hard for the national reconciliation. You know my background, so I do not need to prove anything. Two things he did very clearly. First of all, his relationship with the Sadr group is not going very well and the Sadr group is very important factor in the Shiite bloc. They withdrew six of their ministers yesterday. His relationship with Iran is not going well at all. These are major things for Maliki to do because he wants and is seeking national reconciliation. More importantly, Baghdad

now is under threat not from the militias but al-Qaeda type terrorists. We receive delegations from Baghdad every couple of weeks and they tell us that the issue in Baghdad today is al-Qaeda killing Sunnis whether they are the resistance leaders or in the political process. The issue isn't as sectarian as it was six months ago. The issue is now turning to moderates and extremists. Also in the Shiite bloc, there is not too much killing among themselves as it was in the Sunni bloc. However, there is also a serious conflict in the Shiite bloc. Fazila Party for example withdrew from the Shiite bloc. Sadr withdrew from the government. I think these are serious factors that show that Maliki is trying hard to do something.

I agree with you when you said that it is a fiction to see Iraq divided into Sunni, Shiite, Kurdish areas. It is absolutely true. Your example of your family shows that very clearly. In your last report, you said that things will get worse in Baghdad. That did not happen. Although things are not well, it is not as bad as it could have been in the direction of the sectarian violence. So, I think these are important things to make people aware of it. We have a confrontation with the modernists and extremists.

Answer: Thank you very much. I always appreciate your comments. I did not mean to single out any individual when I said that the government was weak and unwilling. I think Prime Minister Maliki well may be willing but his problem now, very much that the Sadrist have withdrawn, they are still in the parliament and that is the basis for his position as the PM. Should they withdraw from there as well, then Maliki will not politically survive. By withdrawing from the government, the Sadrists can say "look this is an incompetent government and a proxy and Maliki is an American agent." They can say that now and they will probably say it if they haven't already said it. This won't help his credibility and his effectiveness. It has nothing to do with him as a person. I am easily persuaded of his good will and his vision of the way forward but that is not enough. The government has to be behind him and the government is totally dysfunctional. What is the alternative? I go back to this need of an international effort. There is no alternative to that. You are saying that the dynamic has changed and it is now more radicals against moderates and that the situation has actually improved since we published the report. Both are true but they are temporarily true. After the report, Bush came up with a plan. It wasn't the ultimate plan but it is still a plan and it had a temporary effect in quieting things in Baghdad. This changed the nature of the conflict from a sectarian conflict to radicals and moderates on the Sunni side of things. Already, we

have seen the reprisal killings and if that dynamic returns, then I think the sectarian conflict is going to be stronger again. Intra-Sunni conflict and intra-Shiite conflict is also going to continue and escalate on both sides. I am not sure if I have a solution to this. We laid out a political plan. It is not certain if it can be implemented. The alternative is worse. So what do we do?