

Iraq's national and international compacts

Dr. Barham Salih,
Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq

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Martin,

Thank you for your kind words and thank you for honoring me with a Statesman's Forum.

Martin, you are known in Washington DC for your efforts to advance the Israeli-Arab peace process. You also deserve credit for your support for the people of Iraq and your opposition to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. America's engagement with Iraq did not begin in 2003. It started many decades earlier and it was sometimes a sorry and bleak story. It was in the 1990s, however, that America began to engage with Iraqi oppositionists and you were part of that effort. During your time in government under President Clinton, the U.S. Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act. Martin, thank you.

I also want to thank all those at the Saban Center and Brookings who have worked so hard, and at such short notice, to make this event possible. It is a pleasure to see so many friends here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to lay out for you today our strategy for a country in transition, for a country at the crossroads of the Middle East, a country that is every day in the cross hairs of terrorism.

It is a strategy of two compacts, national and international, a strategy motivated by a profound realism, not by defeatism. It is a strategy with a sense of urgency, but with a refusal to give in to panic. It is a strategy without any regret for the just and moral act that was the liberation of Iraq from a genocidal and racist tyranny, but a strategy tempered by the difficult experience of recent years. Above all, it is an Iraqi strategy that is being implemented with broad international support that goes beyond the Coalition of countries that have supported our liberation.

It has become traditional in Washington DC to start any speech on Iraq with an acknowledgment of mistakes made and regrets for errors past. Apparently we live in a world of perfection in which it is only the mistakes that democracies make that are visible, and in which it is only the mistakes that democracies make in such difficult ventures as the liberation of Iraq that are worthy of comment. Well, it is true that missteps, many missteps—by the Coalition and indeed by Iraqis—have been made.

What we must aim for is far less imperfection than has been the case in these tough years of transition. Unlike dictatorships, however, we must learn from our mistakes because we have open debate. We can also put them into context. No error in Iraq should detract from our progress. Quibble the rationale for our liberation as much as some people may, nobody who has seen the mass graves, and we discover more of them almost every month, nobody who has met the victims, nobody who knows of our decades of suffering can look Iraqis in the eye and tell us that we would have been better off with Saddam Hussein still in power.

As an Iraqi and Kurdish democrat, as somebody who has devoted his life to the overthrow of the fascist tyranny of the Ba'ath Party, I understand Iraq in its true context: a society traumatized by 35 years of state terrorism, a state that was designed to fail, a state that was a prison of its people, a state of imposition and repression.

No perspective is more false, no analysis more shallow than that of viewing Iraq within the context of the last three and a half years alone. Iraqi history did not begin in 2003, but if Saddam Hussein had had his way, it would have ended with him and his sons.

The turmoil that we are going through emanates, in part, from the turbulence that dictatorships leave in their wake. There has been more of that dislocation than we expected. In the areas of Iraq that were under Saddam Hussein's control until April 2003 society was more damaged than we knew.

From that legitimate, longer view, our progress has been important. In record time, in less than 12 months during 2005 we held provincial elections, a national constitutional referendum and two national parliamentary elections. Turnout went up in each election, from just under 60% in January 2005 to close to 70% in December 2005.

The constitution was a critical step forward and the criticisms of it are all too often unfair. It was not, as some pretend, rushed out of a smoke-filled room at the last minute. It was a result of a process that began many years earlier in opposition, a process that then moved into Iraq in 2003, a process that led to an interim constitution in 2004 and then over a year of discussion and debate leading to the first popularly ratified constitution that recognizes the fundamental diversity of our part of the world.

What is more, in the two parliamentary elections there were important changes in the results, something that does not happen much in our part of the world. There increased

participation by the Sunni Arab community, and that community gained more representation.

While it is important to point to the progress made particularly in the context of the current debate in Washington which has assumed an extremely pessimistic tone, I am not hesitant to address the many grave challenges we continue to face. The unrelenting security problem, sectarian polarization, corruption and inability of government to deliver services are grave threats to the transition that should not be underestimated. They may even prove fatal if not dealt with urgently.

While in the Middle East—and perhaps elsewhere—it is convenient to blame outsiders for one’s own failings, I must recognize that ultimately it is up to the Iraqis to resolve their country’s problems. Outsiders cannot deliver for us. The Iraqi leadership must assume responsibility and deal with these challenges and turn the tide. This must be done by the Iraqis, but undoubtedly will need sustained support from the international community, and particularly the United States.

To achieve this, we must build two compacts, national and international.

The key planks of the national compact are national reconciliation, democratic federalism, political inclusion, and a fair and rational oil policy.

To implement these policies, we agreed in a meeting of the Iraqi Policy Council on National Security, which is composed of key elected officials, an intensive legislative timetable. This legislative agenda is vital because it is the political arm of our approach to ending violence. Coming from Baghdad, I can tell you that I am deeply frustrated by the carnage. Sometimes, the pace of what we can achieve relative to what we aspire to is just not what the people of Iraq and you, the generous people of the United States deserve. I can understand how disappointed and saddened Americans must be when they see the scenes of violence from Iraq.

That is why we have imposed this tough, very tough, timetable upon ourselves. We owe it to our own people and to our friends here to press harder and to advance no matter how intense the assault upon us by the terrorists.

For example, this month we should be passing the investment law and the Parliamentary Commission for the Review of the Constitution should be established. In October, parliament should vote on legislation to reform the de-Ba’athification Commission. In December the law on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants should be passed. Also in December, we plan to present to parliament the hydrocarbons bill. The latter is most crucial piece of legislation, and we intend to turn oil from a divisive issue into one that is unifying—not easy, but we will work hard at it!

Implementing these laws will advance us towards the goal of the national compact: to create a viable political equilibrium inside Iraq, a balance that will be to the benefit of the region. For most of its existence as a modern state, Iraq was politically profoundly

unbalanced. Power was concentrated in the hands of the few, the benefits of the state denied to the many. The liberation of Iraq in 2003 changed all that, but it temporarily created a new, if fundamentally democratic, imbalance. Almost overnight, the Kurds and Shi'a Arabs were enfranchised and too many Sunni Arabs did not participate in the new political process.

Iraq is a fundamentally diverse country and we need to find a balance that protects that diversity and encourages a voluntary, democratic, federal national unity. It is a diversity that those responsible for the violence hate and reject. Our enemies are not freedom fighters, but fascists. I do not use that word lightly, because I refuse to trivialize or deny the crimes that scarred the twentieth century. We are under assault from Ba'athists, and nobody familiar with the theory and practice of Ba'athism can claim that it is not a fascist ideology. The Ba'athists and some of their allies advocate a supremacist ideology similar to the chauvinism that the apartheid regime in South Africa was built upon. Like racists elsewhere, they yearn for the restoration of the *status quo ante* in which they were dominant.

We are also being attacked by Islamist extremists, people who justify their intolerance and bloodlust in explicitly religious terms. The Islam that the jihadists and takfiris claim to represent is not the religion of the majority of Iraqis, but a distortion born of political bigotry and ignorance.

By killing Zarqawi we have wounded Al-Qaeda in Iraq, but we have not eliminated it. The alliance between the Ba'athists and jihadists which sustains Al-Qaeda in Iraq is not new, contrary to what you may have been told. I know this at first hand. Some of my friends were murdered by jihadists, by Al-Qaeda affiliated operatives who had been sheltered and assisted by Saddam's regime. Under UN resolution 687 of 1991, Saddam was not only supposed to verifiably disarm, which he did not do, his regime was supposed to stop supporting international terrorism and to "renounce all acts, methods and practices of terrorism."

This Ba'athist-jihadist terrorist axis rejects the notion of a balanced process because it wants supremacy and theocracy. Another force that creates instability is majoritarianism. Those who have suffered discrimination and exclusion, when their numbers are finally acknowledged can easily, and understandably, seek to secure their position with majoritarianism. This is an issue not just for Iraq as a whole, but also for its regions, because those who are a majority in one part of Iraq are a minority in other areas. To prevent any such tyranny of the majority, Iraq now has a Bill of Rights which needs not just legal but practical political enforcement.

Balance is critical, for without balance, Iraq's diversity can become a catalyst for disintegration. Within the program of national reconciliation outlined by prime minister Maliki, we seek balance on de-Ba'athification between the need for justice for the victims and the requirement that we politically rehabilitate those whose crimes were not beyond the pale.

Similarly, in our counterterrorism and anti-militia strategy, we must balance political and security measures. There is no pure security solution to the terrorism and militia challenges, just as there is no neat, politics only way of settling these issues. We need both approaches. The door to the political process must always remain open; our security forces must be ever vigilant.

Our security forces are increasingly capable. Arguably we should have stressed quality over quantity far earlier, but had we done so we would have heard complaints that we were not doing enough. Allow me to cite, in evidence of the pure increase in numbers the very useful figures in the Brookings Iraq index, which state that in August 2006 the Iraqi security forces were 294,100 strong, an increase of 61% on August 2005. More of these security force members are fully trained and more units are capable of autonomous operations than was the case in the past.

By the end of this year, nearly half of Iraq's provinces will be under the control of Iraqi security forces. The command of Iraqi forces has now formally moved from the Multi-National Force-Iraq, the Coalition forces that are present with United Nations' backing, to the Iraqi government.

The issue of security marks the ideal transition point to the international compact that we are building. The international compact emerges from the knowledge that Iraq is not an island, for it is entirely of the Middle East. The rest of the Middle East cannot be indifferent to our fate, and we cannot ignore our neighborhood.

A consequence of being of the Middle East is that we are buffeted by the cross currents of the region, and in particular, by its main storm—international terrorism. Just as you have to understand our transition in terms of our history, so you must see what is happening in Iraq in terms of the dramatic changes in the Middle East and the Muslim world. There is a sea change happening. The challenge ahead of us is not to cling to the past, but to advance into the battle for the future to shape the new order. It is hard labor, slow and sometimes seemingly without reward, but we are paying off an accumulated debt from the mistakes of Western and Middle Eastern policy in the pre-9/11 era—the folly of engaging the region through its dictatorial superstructure, the contempt of the governing elites and ruling castes for their subjects.

The terrorism that we are facing is therefore not an aberration caused by the liberation of Iraq; it is not an expression of a legitimate grievance. It is the failure of the political culture that is the warped offspring of the old order, the result of decades of inequality, intolerance, injustice and officially-sponsored fanaticism.

Every day Iraq is battered by this tornado of terrorism. Every day the terrorists attempt to provoke a full-scale sectarian civil war in Iraq, the implementation of the evil plan that Zarqawi outlined in his poisonous letter of 2004. Every day, we fight back.

We are your allies in the global war against Al-Qaeda, which for the United States and Iraq is a success. Thousands of Iraqis have voluntarily joined the new Iraqi security

forces, formations that depend upon volunteers, not enslavement and coercion, knowing that they fight our shared enemies.

How many other societies could come through the test that we face every day? In some ways, what is remarkable in Iraq is how much restraint so many still show in the face of appalling provocation.

Whether or not what we are going through now can be classified as a civil war is for Iraqis and our neighbors an academic point. What is happening is grave and must be acknowledged as such. Too many innocents are dying, whether or not they are dying at some academically defined civil war level is a redundant debate.

What matters is that we have to end this violence not just for our own sakes but also for the region. If Iraq plunges into a full blown civil war, then so will the rest of the Middle East. The borders will not matter, because each of Iraq's communities is part of a larger whole that stretches across the region. Iraq's security is not Iraq's alone. Our security is a matter of regional, and so given the importance of our region, of global security. This is not a theory, it is a fact that our wiser neighbors comprehend. They see that borders will dissolve if Iraqi democracy is overwhelmed by the terrorists. For Iraq to revert to being a failed state would be to export horror to the region again, as Iraq did so frequently under the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

Resolved to deal with these challenges, we announced the plan for an "International Compact with Iraq" in collaboration with the United Nations. I have just arrived from a productive meeting to prepare for this International Compact in the United Arab Emirates. With the assistance of the United Nations we sat down with other interested parties to develop the International Compact. Three years after the bitter international divisions over the liberation of Iraq, the international community should begin coalescing behind the new Iraq.

Above all, we and the United Nations are determined to make the project that is the new Iraq as international as possible. We Iraqis know that the generosity of the American people is by necessity not endless, even if their compassion and solidarity seems to know no bounds. We have come forward with this initiative to show that we are responsible for ourselves and the response thus far has been encouraging.

The international compact involves a road map for Iraq to attain financial self-sufficiency in a 4 to 5 year time-frame. We understand that there cannot be genuine economic regeneration unless there is political stability and security. But in a nation weaned on war, where political violence has been the rule not the exception, we need to give the bored young men of Iraq a form of employment and pride that comes from hard work, not the easy swagger of the gunman.

In this regard, our budget for 2007 will be ambitious. We will allocate our oil revenues to investment in infrastructure; we aim to create jobs and widely distribute the benefits of the current oil price boom.

Again, as with the national compact, so with the International Compact we are creating a balance. We want a partnership, not unconditional aid. We are adopting a roadmap for economic development, not handing out a laundry list of financial demands.

Moreover, we are promising clear targets for economic restructuring accompanied by mechanisms for intelligence cooperation and security coordination. For the Middle East, such an approach, with broad international support, is an innovation and, we hope, a harbinger of a Middle East based on cooperation and not conflict.

Ladies and Gentleman, I am committed to politics because I am an idealist, but I must practice politics as a realist. For nearly thirty years I have fought to make my country a democracy. Finally, this is not a vision, but a realizable project, not a tantalizing prospect tormenting us and beyond our grasp. It is a difficult problem that lies in our own hands and from which, with cooperation and commitment, we can mould success. With our national and international compacts, based as they are on what we have learned from the last three and a half sometimes very difficult years, we can shape our own future.

Our success or failure in Iraq has profound implications for rest of the Middle East, implications that sensible leaders in the region and Iraq's leaders understand. Together, we must make failure impossible, even if in politics success can never be guaranteed.

I must affirm that success—as defined in terms of stable federal democracy—is not only possible, but a necessity for Iraq, the region and the wider world. We should also understand that failure is not an option.

Thank you.

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