

**NATIONAL COUNCIL ON U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS**  
**19<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ARAB-U.S. POLICYMAKERS CONFERENCE**

*“Arab-U.S. Relations: Going Where?”*

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2010**

**RONALD REAGAN BUILDING & INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**"GEO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS (I): The Endgame in Iraq"**

***CHAIR:***

**Mr. Charles Dunne** - Resident Scholar with the Middle East Institute; former Foreign Policy Adviser to the J-5, Director of Strategic Plans and Policy of the Joint Staff at the Pentagon; former Director for Iraq at the National Security Council.

***SPEAKERS:***

**Dr. Michel Gabaudan** – President, Refugees International.

**Mr. Michael Corbin** – Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

**Ms. Manal Omar** – Director of Iraq Programs, Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations, United States Institute of Peace.

**Mr. Brian Katulis** – Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress.

## GEO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS: ENDGAME IN IRAQ

[Mr. Charles Dunne] Thank you very much Dr. Anthony and I really appreciate the opportunity to be here and I want to thank the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations for hosting this panel on what I think is a very important issue, perhaps underappreciated in some senses.

For most of the last seven years Iraq has probably been the main foreign policy preoccupation of the United States but with the drawdown of U.S. forces to 50,000 last August, and the final withdrawal scheduled for the end of 2011, this issue has sort of fallen off the screen of the American public, Congress to a certain extent, and I would argue the administration's screen as a major policy priority. So we have the title of our panel today "The End Game in Iraq," but is it really. I would argue that the game is very much alive for both Iraqis and the United States and certainly it's alive for Iraq's neighbors. Many questions remain to be answered before we have achieved an Iraq is sovereign stable and reliant as President Obama has put it. Seven months after national elections we have no government and Iran appears increasingly poised to achieve its goal of a religious Shiite government with Prime Minister Maliki returning as the prime minister.

The future participation of Iraq's Sunnis in the political process, if they perceive that they have been dealt out of power is also in question. As a political game plays out preparations for the final U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011, as I mentioned, continue and there is no clarity from the Iraqi side at this point as to whether they will request the U.S. to stay on in some strength. There has been a lot of discussion about this and differing views expressed by the Iraqi politicians but no clarity yet. Much of this, of course, depends on the formation of the next government. Who is going to be in charge and specifically what role the Muqtada al Sadr and his party is going to play in that government.

Meanwhile the U.S. is trying to manage a very challenging transition from a military led presence in Iraq to a civilian led presence, led by the State Department. Can State and DoD manage this transition, and will the civilian mission have the freedom of mobility and the freedom of resources to implement our future policy in Iraq.

Longer-range challenges also loom. According to UNHCR, the UN High Commission for Refugees approximately two million Iraqis have fled to neighboring countries posing significant problems for their hosts. It is an open question as to how many are actually going to be able to return in the next few years, and certainly over the longer term. As many as 2.7 million Iraqis may have been internally displaced, which has significantly changed the demographic makeup of Iraq and it has also had an effect on its internal politics.

Finally how the region reacts to the developments in Iraq will be critical in determining whether Baghdad draws closer to Tehran or closer to its Arab neighbors, with implications for U.S. policy as America tries to forge a strong strategic relationship with Iraq after 2011 and fully integrate Iraq into its regional security and political strategy.

Now we are very fortunate today to have a distinguished panel to help examine these and other questions.

Our first speaker Michael Corbin is Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, for Iraq issues. He served as Minister Counselor for Military Political Affairs in Baghdad and was Charge d'affairs in Damascus.

Dr. Michele Gabaudan is President of Refugees International. Prior to his role with that organization Dr. Gabaudan served as United Nations High Commission on Refugees Regional Representative for the United States and the Caribbean. His career with UNHCR spanned more than 25 years including international service in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

Manal Omar is Director of Iraq Programs at the United States Institute of Peace. She was Regional Program Manager for the Middle East for Oxfam Great Britain, where she responded to humanitarian crises in Palestine and Lebanon. Manal lived in Baghdad from 2003 to 2005 where she set up operations for the organization Women for Women International. She is author of this years Barefoot in Baghdad, a story of identity, my own and what it means to be a woman in chaos, which captures the tale of women in Iraq.

And finally Brian Katulis is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress where his work focuses on U.S. national security policy in the Middle East and South Asia. He has served as a consultant to many U.S. government agencies, private corporations and nongovernmental organizations on projects in more than two-dozen countries.

So before I ask you to welcome our speakers I'd just like to note that questions will be submitted on cards, they can be delivered to the folks who will pick them up and bring them up to us. We will take a look at the questions and you'll have an opportunity following the panel after a 10-minute discussion to ask these. So thank you very much and please join me in welcoming our speakers.

[Mr. Michael Corbin] It's a great honor to be here and I certainly do agree that this is an institute of higher learning on the Middle East. What I have learned in my career so far, and it has been an honor and a privilege to serve in many Middle Eastern posts, what I have discovered so far and I'm still learning, is that patience and optimism are what a diplomat needs every morning. And today you are going to hear some optimism which comes from Iraq, which may be strange given what you read in the media but I have a few minutes to try to lay out at where the Administration is on Iraq, and where we are going and then we will have a discussion with questions and answers where I can get into more detail.

But first what I'll focus on that are the two transitions that we see in Iraq right now. We see in Iraqi transition and we see a U.S. transition. The Iraqi transition is one from violence to politics; the American transition at is one from a military security dominated relationship to a more traditional development and assistance and diplomatic relationship as we have with many partners around the world.

Let me start with the Iraqi situation. Iraq is the first country that I've been in where change is happening. If you are in Iraq one day go back three months later things are changing. And what I would just underline as we look at this Iraqi transition is that the Iraqis have moved from a

situation in 2006, when they were last trying to form a government, when violence and militias and killings in the street were the rule, to a situation where all, and I repeat all, of the major parties who participated in the election, and that is most of them, are engaged in daily negotiations on the future of Iraq. And this is extremely encouraging because what it means is they compromise on strongly held positions among all the different sects, confessions and groups in Iraq is a mainstay of what we see daily in Iraq. Whether it's the Kurds on their long held concerns, whether it's Shia concerns, whether it's Sunni concerns, the groups are meeting together and negotiating together on how they are going to form a government. And it isn't paralysis. You'll read in the media that it is paralysis but if you follow the Iraqi media the discussion of the different coalitions that are possible, different personalities, the different formations that are occurring, occurs every day and the changes are dramatic. So we don't have a paralyzed situation in Iraq. We have a situation where government formation is very active and the different players are working together to form a government, and this is very important, to form a government that is inclusive, that represents the different communities.

All of the major political figures have come up out and said the government should be inclusive and represent all the parties who participated in the elections. Those elections, and this is another explanation why it is taking time, led to two blocks getting 91 seats out of the 325 seat parliament for Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya coalition and 89 seats for the Maliki's State of Law, the current Prime Minister's State of Law coalition. This is made very complex but it has also got positive elements. Iraqis on March 7 voted for the most secular, if you can say that, but the most combined blocks that were focused on services and on combating corruption and on changing the situation for Iraqis everyday lives. And when you look at the fact that the religious parties, the extremists in one sector or not did not receive votes, that the Sunnis voted for a Shia candidate in Ayad Allawi this is encouraging.

Now the Iraqi people are frustrated and they want to see this government formed, but there is a lot of activity going on and we think that to say that it is paralyzed is incorrect.

Quickly, on the interim government that has been in place it is functioning. Whether it is on the security side or on the economic side, decisions are being made, services are being provided. Security for example; at the end of August when we had an uptick in violence which was linked to both Ramadan and to President Obama's date of August 31st for the end of combat missions, we saw an uptick in violence. In September and October of this month we have seen the Iraqi security forces take significant actions against violence in Iraq and terrorism.

There is not support for the insurgency despite some articles talking about Sunnis returning to the insurgency. A) there isn't an insurgency, there's a lot of frustration, there is a lot terrorist groups, but B) we do not have any evidence of Sunnis returning to take up arms against the government or against the political process.

I would just say on the economic side, two days ago we just had the third economic bid round or the oil bid round in the hydrocarbons field. The Iraqis are proceeding with this type of economic decision, and I can get into more of that in the discussion period. There is not paralysis in the government. Things are going forward.

Since I don't have much time I'm going to turn to the U.S. transition and what we are building on is the fact that we have Iraqi partners. We have a partnership that we can build on that the Iraqis are calling for that takes our relationship from a security dominated relationship to one that's based on the traditional areas such as trade, diplomatic, and we heard in the previous panel about the importance of reintegration of Iraq into the region.

This is extremely important and we're working on our partnership with the Iraqis as they go forward to change our relationship. We've got to provide employment. People are not turning to the insurgency, but they will if they don't have jobs. That's why we are partnered with the Iraqi government in the areas of health, education and agriculture. The oil services or the oil business will not provide the employment. Agriculture is a traditional area. Iraqis know about agriculture and they can return to agriculture. We're working with them. We are going to switch to a civilian led program and I will note this transition is not starting now.

I was there in January 2009 when Ambassador Ryan Crocker opened our new embassy, the largest in the world. It is serving already as a diplomatic platform for us to do civilian led activities. We are working hand in glove with the military on the transition and that includes the important task of transitioning the activities the military has done for seven years to civilian ownership preferably the Iraqis own them. But in cases where they don't, civilian agencies will take over. This process that has ongoing up and we see enormous progress.

Just to finish up because I want to get to the discussion and allow the other panelists to talk, as Charles said in his introduction, this is not an endgame in Iraq. This is a time when we are building. We have a commitment to partnership. Vice President Biden has made five trips to Iraq in the last year and a half. The State Department has got to get this military to civilian transition right, not just because of Iraq but because this shows we can turn take over from a conflict situation, from our military colleagues and this will apply to other places. It does not mean that Afghanistan will be a success, but it certainly if we have success it means that we won't have Iraq as an example of an area where we have failed.

The Iraqis are taking the lead in this partnership and I'm sure I will get questions on this so I will just briefly touch on this fact, that Iraqis are seeking Iraqi solutions for Iraqi problems. The neighbors are trying to influence things but they are not influencing the outcome of government formation. There has been a lot of speculation about who is influencing what and whether one country is winning quote end quote in Iraq. We don't see that. We see the Iraqis walking a fine balance of building a constructive relations with all of their neighbors, whether it is Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Jordan or Kuwait. And this is very important as we go forward that we support the Iraqis and their efforts to have constructive relations with their neighbors.

We are very actively engaged with the neighbors and with Iraq on this task, but we see enormous progress and I'm sure in the discussion/answer period I can address some of the issues focused on administration policy. Thank you very much.

[Dr. Michael Corbin] Good morning and thank you very much for the privilege to address this very distinguished audience. I represent Refugees International an independent agency that

monitors the situation of refugees and displaced people in the world and makes recommendations to the U.S. government and to the United Nations.

Well certainly from my point of view in Iraq there is no end to the dire situation in which people who have fled the sectarian violence still find themselves. It is still very much an active issue and whatever positive developments happen, as we have been told, and I'm certainly not decrying these but must not make us forget that a lot needs to be done to attend to a very large number of people who still find themselves in a very precarious state. And just to go back quickly over how these displacements took place. Just after 2003 the Iraqis who left were, in general, wealthy Iraqis who went to Syria or Jordan with their own means. Some left because perhaps they feared retribution, others left because they were not quite sure what would happen to Iraq.

The big movement however occurred between 2005 and 2008. Much more modest people were fleeing the results of the sectarian violence which was then at its peak. People were fleeing either because they had been associated with the multinational forces, with American companies or with the UN or because they represented minorities, religious minorities living among majorities. Shias living in Sunni areas the reverse of course, Christians, Yazidis, Mandaeans, living among larger Muslim communities.

Those who could make it left for Jordan and Syria and those who couldn't were just displaced within Iraq.

There's a very interesting interactive map on the BBC website where you can look at how Baghdad was divided between mixed communities, Sunni and Shia communities before 2003, and how it looks now.

The majority of the areas were mixed before 2003. You have very little of these areas left now in Baghdad, it is so completely different. People moved according of their affiliations.

At the height of the movement it was estimated that some two million people have been displaced within Iraq, and perhaps two million people have become refugees in Syria and Jordan. I think I would like to emphasize here the fact that after some hesitation Syria and Jordan have behaved very well in tolerating this very large influx of people within their borders.

Today we have perhaps slightly more moderate assessment of the numbers, but it is still staggering. We believe there are one and a half million people still displaced within Iraq and there are about 500,000 refugees in Syria and Jordan, 230,000 of whom have registered with UNHCR which means they have accepted the refugee stamp mostly to have access to the benefits. The others have not registered because they do not want to be categorized as refugees and they still are trying to survive as welcome brothers. Manal will cover most of the situation of refugees but it's not a fixed situation where people are either in or out of the country. There is a certain element of movement where people who are in the refugee situation and people are displaced within Iraq. So it is a fluid situation.

Our main concern now regarding these refugees, we have moved in Iraq among some of the poorest communities of the displaced people and we think there are about 500,000 people, squatters in absolutely miserable conditions under bridges along railroads and in garbage dumps. This is not the normal face of urban misery that one witnesses in different parts of the world in poor countries. These are people who have been pushed into misery as a result of the sectarian violence and who cannot get out of that.

The other million displaced have found succor either with relatives or within communities of the same affiliation but half a million people are still in a very precarious situation with no land titles who fear to go back in their areas of origin, who are so poor that they cannot afford to move and who lack every basic service. It is a situation that needs to be addressed as part of the stabilization plan of Iraq.

The second big concern we have in Iraq is that of access. It is true that the U.S. and the UN are mounting the improvement of the security situation in Iraq but their security protocols have not changed at all. There is still tremendous limitation on the possibility for officials from the U.S. government or from the UN to move out into the communities and assess needs for themselves. This is of course to the detriment of Iraqis who need this assistance and we believe very strongly that these protocols should be reviewed.

My colleagues have traveled in Iraq discretely without any problems, and we have found squatters just a few blocks away from the international zone that nobody heard about. This is not quite acceptable at the time when we are talking about moving forward. Unfortunately the attack on the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, just a few days ago, even if it was not fatal or dangerous, will pose some difficulties in convincing the UN for example, to review its security guidelines and to allow its officials to have a more proactive approach to Iraqi communities and not just interaction with the government.

When we have talked to people in Sadr City in areas that were considered to be the difficult ones people tell us, we want assistance, we want people to come and help us. We're not against anyone. Some have even told us "I can't read you know. I can't see what's on the bag I just want people to take care of us."

So I think the whole question of access will have to be broken as soon as possible. To date U.S. officials, UN officials go to the field after negotiation and with the support of the U.S. Army. With the withdrawal of the U.S. Army, how they will operate in the future remains a big question mark. And I don't think there will be much progress in the situation of the people I have been mentioning if this question of access is not addressed in a more generous way. I'm not asking people to take high-risk but I am asking people to perhaps be a little bit bold in considering who are those who are most in need of international attention.

International attention of course has been weak. After what I would say was perhaps the slow response at the beginning the U.S. has been practically the main supporter of the whole humanitarian relief for refugees outside Iraq and for displaced people inside Iraq. The appeals that the international community has regularly made have been funded to the extent of 60% only. Barely above half of the needs were met. And 60% of that was regularly funded by the U.S. The

rest of the Arab world was not responding well. Europe certainly was not responding well, and these, in my view, are mistakes. We don't want, everybody has an interest in the stability of Iraq and leaving large numbers of people in a precarious situation is not a factor for stability and we certainly wish that although the U.S. has done its share it will continue to do its share in supporting persons displaced by violence in and outside of Iraq.

Just a quick word of another issue that has developed in Iraq is that there were refugees in Iraq before 2003. Some of these refugees have found themselves in very difficult situations as a result of the change in the power disposition in Iraq. Those who have been most victimized have been the Palestinians. There were about 35,000 Palestinians living in Baghdad before 2003. There are probably 9,000 to 10,000 left now. Many of them tried to escape, and Syria and Jordan who are very generous to Iraqis, did prevent them from going into their country. They were left in camps, in no man's land between the countries and after many years of living in very precarious situations we have managed to get some solution for resettlement of them. I'm very pleased to say the U.S. has taken a very large number of Palestinians as a result of this advocacy that we carried out. But there are still Palestinians hiding, pretending to be Iraqis both in Baghdad and Damascus and their plight will have to be addressed if we don't want to again have another possible source of trouble or instability or disquiet developing.

Manal will address the situation of refugees in particular but I just want to say that while Syria and Jordan have been generous in granting access to Iraqis and have been very careful at not deporting them except when they commit crimes basically the population of Iraqis is falling into increasing degrees of poverty month by month.

UNHCR is seeing an increase in the number of people who come to register as refugees not because they are new arrivals in Syria but because they are just so poor that they cannot survive by themselves. We see people now moving two or three families into little apartments where there was only one family before. We see the number of children going to school decreasing because the parents cannot afford to buy them books. So attention to these countries has to remain if we don't want to have refugees going back home by force. And of the more or less 70,000 refugees who have gone back from Syria to Lebanon the survey has recently indicated that 60% regretted to have come back because they did not find any place to go and I think it is important to remember that 80%, four out of five, did not go back to their areas of origin. So they go back to a situation of internal displacement in Iraq. I see that my time is getting close so I will leave it here.

I just want to repeat what is to me very important. The humanitarian situation has to be addressed and we have to find a link between giving better humanitarian aid to Iraq and linking that to the development initiative that was mentioned by Mr. Corbin before so that this population will become stabilized in the near future.

Thank you very much.

[Ms. Manal Omar] Good morning. I'm very happy to be with you here today and I actually wanted to also start on a brief note of optimism. I work at the United States Institute of Peace,



which has had a consistent office in Baghdad since 2004 and a lot of great work has been done on Iraq.

We have seen things that have happened in terms of a really growing civil society. Iraqis were very proud of the elections and going up out to vote and many people would agree that the current negotiations, although very difficult and painful, are a great example of the power sharing and negotiation.

I said brief because my task is to talk about the external refugees, the people who are neighboring countries. I think it is hard to carry that note of optimism when I'm looking at the refugee situation in Iraq.

What I wanted to do today was to give you first an overview of what the situation for refugees in neighboring countries is like.

Second talk about very specific issues that the refugees are facing, and finally end with my very own personal observations and potential recommendations for ways to move forward.

To start with it is important to talk about the numbers that were thrown around, the 1.5 million. This number was a significant debate for many years, going on in terms of initially you had numbers from two to four million and one of the biggest challenges has been how do we identify the number of people who have been uprooted in Iraq whether refugees or internally displaced people.

It is important to understand that there is a political undertone in terms of identifying that number. That number is the only real indicator for what is happening inside Iraq.

Because of the security situation inside Iraq, there have been a lot of international actors who generally work in post-conflict areas, who have not been able to access the country. And my colleague already mentioned the challenge of access. And so that number became political in terms of the success or failure of what was happening inside Iraq, and very specifically in terms of the Iraqi government's abilities as duty bearer.

UNHCR and other agencies have settled on the 1.5 million and the 500,000, which are refugees, but a lot of people argue that the number is much higher particularly because of the resistance of refugees to settle, to register. A few refugees have been mainly going to Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. A few have been settling in Jordan and in terms of the number again there is the constant. Those who are returning are replaced by new people who are coming in. So there are a lot of people who have waited and a lot of my colleagues waiting till the last minute, saying we don't want to leave Iraq we have a lot of faith in terms of the long-term development of Iraq but then, because of personal circumstances were forced out more recently in 2009 and 2010.

Everyone is in agreement, I think, both the international community, the Iraqi government and the refugees themselves that the best case scenario is repatriation. A lot of people want to see the Iraqis go back home and resettle.

A lot of Iraqis who have left have left as already pointed out as a last resort. In my book I describe it as being divided between humiliation as a refugee or death in Iraq. When they are faced with that ultimatum a lot of them are then pushed into going into neighboring countries with the hope of being able to go overseas.

I think although that is the best case scenario is important for us to be realistic and it is not possible now, and I would argue probably not in the foreseeable future for these refugees to go home.

Most of these refugees in neighboring countries were literally on the edge waiting for the elections to see what would happen. There is a very strong sense that they would like to see all minorities, particularly people who feel they are marginalized within the Sunni political parties, are part of that new government before they can make that decision. So they are watching and we see, from morning to night people are stuck to the satellite channels waiting to see what the outcome of the election will be. And that has a direct impact on their decision to return or not.

Today's news was a little bit disturbing. I don't know if many people heard about the Netherlands decision to return 100 Iraqi refugees who are in the Netherlands back to Iraq. It is a growing fear of those who have managed to leave Iraq about this forcible return. I wanted to share a personal story of a friend of mine and her decision when she left Iraq. She's originally from Mosul and she has three kids and she settled in Baghdad early on and all her kids were born and raised in Baghdad.

She didn't want to leave because, very simple reason, her daughter was in the senior year of high school. She was getting ready to graduate and was very much, it was very much a decision to stay we don't want to leave. There was an incident near their neighborhood where they left. They spent a year in Syria and started hearing all these rumors in 2008 as to how great it was to go back. Of course the daughter said once more, I want to go and I want to graduate. She was not allowed to go to school in Syria and she wanted to finish high school. I really want to do this and put a lot of pressure on her family to return. They called their neighbors, heard again it's really good, it's great comeback. They came back and the first day of school the daughter who was 16 at the time was shot and she was paralyzed and she's now a paraplegic.

So when we're talking about return, when we're talking about repatriation it is very important that we do it very cautiously. It is not to say that resettlement or repatriation is not the solution but to say that there is a moral responsibility to make sure that we are painting an accurate picture for people who are returning.

To go into specific issues I wanted to talk about what most Iraqi refugees are facing. There is a huge amount of deepening poverty. Cash is running out for most Iraqi refugees. Even those who came early on and were wealthier, sold their land brought all their savings and a lot of those funds are being spent down in Iraq's, in the neighboring countries and very little access to pensions or other funds that were coming from Iraq.

In most countries they are not allowed to work so they have no access to income generation and no access to any form of livelihood, which makes it very easy for exploitation of refugees and I

would highlight very particularly for women. We have been able to document several cases through other agencies that have shown there has been an increased exploitation of women in these neighboring countries. A lot of these women are widows and are particularly vulnerable and add on the layer of not being able to have an income, even more so.

The second point I would make is the lack of access to education, which ties to poverty but also ties to the laws of some of the host countries. What is happening is a new potential for a lost generation in Iraq. Statistics from the IRC, from the International Refugee Council, points out that 40% of Iraqi refugees are adolescents and 60% are under 25. So you have a large number of young people with no access to education, no access to jobs and are sitting at home literally boiling as they feel that they and their families are being humiliated in the host countries.

I say this is round two of the lost generation because we shouldn't forget about the 12 years of sanctions, which also had a great impact on Iraqi education, which as we know that in the 1980s it was one of the best education systems in the region.

The third impact is that they're living with a strong fear. I would argue that the refugees that I interacted with are actually living with in a stronger fear than the Iraqis that I've seen inside Iraq. Part of it is because of this constant 24-hour news channel, this constant rumor mill, and perception is very much reality. So there is a lot of feeling of sectarianism. There is a lot of feeling about the militias, which inside Iraq, Iraqis become more confident about and more able to deal with. Particularly in 2006 and 2007 were considered by Iraqis to be a lot of the dark ages and people have moved on. They have done reconciliation, they have worked on sectarianism, where the refugees are a little bit frozen in time. They are frozen at the time that they left and a lot of them have been traumatized. So there is also concern about when they return, they will coming back with the 2006 mentality, whereas inside Iraq we have seen a large amount of progress within the communities on these issues.

Finally, one of the main issues is that a lot of Iraqis are living in limbo. The idea of actually settling inside Jordan, Syria, although the Iraqis would like that to happen the reality is that they will never be able to be full citizens and have access to all the rights that other citizens would have. So that leaves them in a state of limbo if they are staying in the region. We have seen an increased number of people actually turn down a third country, going to Europe or going to the US, because of this fear of not enough support, as well as a sense that there might be a point where they'll might be sent back. Again looking at what is happening in the Netherlands today.

Finally I'll end with just a few recommendations based on my own personal observations. The amount of aid that has gone to the refugee crisis, and this is one of the largest movements in the region since 1947. So it is an important issue in terms of the proportion of response to the Iraqi refugees from the international community has been a little bit shameful in many ways.

In most instances there has been a large reaction to the refugee crisis. So increasing aid and I would say specifically focusing on cash assistance. Second would be looking at reconciliation programs targeting specifically Iraqis in neighboring countries.

And finally something that is in the hands of a lot of people in this side of the world is addressing the issues of limbo and really pushing Europe and the U.S. to reexamine their resettlement process. The U.S. it has been particularly good about accepting refugees and has been very open toward refugees coming into the country, but re-examining assistance that comes when they arrive and at the very least a lot of international outcry about those who are being forcibly returned.

Thank you.

[Mr. Brian Katulis] Good morning I am Brian Katulis with the Center for American Progress and it is a special honor for me being here today because I'm an alumnus of the National Council on U.S. Arab Relations. I was thinking about this when Dr. Anthony called me the other day to ask if I could at the last minute bat cleanup on this panel. I thought back to 20 years ago when I first, my professional and academic career was shaped by a lot of the programs of the National Council and U.S.-Arab Relations and I'll never forget a visit I took to the region that was led by Ann Kerr, a good friend of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations.

So when he called me up, and I'm a new father, we have a two month old at home, and I'm getting on a flight tonight to go overseas, and I said I've got to do this honey. Can you help me out, I know we were scrambling. And it's a pleasure to be here and it's really a pleasure to be here on this distinguished panel with Michael, and Michael, and Manal and Charles. The depth of expertise we have here this morning really I think can get us, to delve into these issues in a clear way.

Briefly, I am at the Center for American Progress, which is a think tank founded in 2003. I think our claim to fame these days is along the lines of the personnel we lost to this current administration. We lost more than 60 people who joined the White House and the State Department and other senior positions, but we also like to say our ideas have helped shaped this current administration's agenda. And my boss John Podesta never misses a moment to remind me what a good deal I have been able to actually criticize many of my former friends and colleagues and how they're doing.

I'm not going to do much of that this morning because I actually think they're doing a great job. What I do want to do is tee up what I think are three tests of where we are right now on Iraq. These are three tests that most, if not all of you, have the ability to influence. Whether it's in your position in government, in the U.S., or in other countries, or as a leader of an NGO or as a thought leader, or as an academic or as a journalist. You all have the ability to shape what is happening here and I hope this forum will help us think about these three tests.

The first test is the test to the Iraqi leadership. The second test is the test to the Middle East as a region, a region in transformation. And the third test is a test of U.S. national security policy.

First the test of Iraqi leadership. I talked about these elections earlier this year and also the 2009 elections like a stress test. Like a cardiologist hooking up a heart patient to see how things are going and whether it will hang together. I think a lot of people, like most elections, get fixated on election day and but the most important process is happening right now, and I agree with what

Michael said. There is real politics happening right now. Not to reveal any state secrets but Charles and I witnessed up close and personal the complex coalition math that Iraqi leaders engage in to get to that magic number of 163.

I know here in DC, inside the Beltway we would be shocked to hear about the notion of self interested political elites disconnected from their people trying to get positions in power. But it is happening in Baghdad and that is actually a good thing when you compare it to what was happening in Baghdad 10 years ago.

The two questions I think right now are most relevant and this is mostly for the Iraqi people, but for those who can shape and influence their calculations at this point is, number one, how are they going to resolve many of the unresolved questions of how to share power? We all know this if you follow Iraq closely. You look at the 2005 Constitution, and although the process has continued, the political process, many of the substantive power-sharing issues, the relationship of the central government to the provincial governments, the balance of power, the checks and balances on the executive, still remain unresolved today and fortunately there are still attempts ongoing to resolve that peacefully, rather than it is in the streets and in battles between armed militias.

So all of these issues and the number one question is how will Iraq choose to decide what the new Iraq will look like and how it shares power?

Second, will Iraqi politics continue to evolve? I don't know and I don't think anyone can predict whether we will have a grand inclusive coalition or when that might happen. I asked my friends in the administration all the time, people who are working these issues, and I think it is really unclear. But if there is a coalition that does not include some of the leading parties, a key question is will there be a peaceful democratic opposition that exists and operates outside the patronage networks of the ministries and leads Iraq into a new style of politics?

All of these things will take time. Obviously the government formation I believe is in the Guinness Book of World Records, as taking so long. But it takes time because Iraq for 20 years was isolated from the rest of the region. It was controlled mostly, most of Iraq by a dictator. And these sorts of issues are not easy to sort out. Which leads me to a second test. Which is a test for the region. And for those of you from the region you understand this. This is a very key test. And the region has played a much stronger role. Few people in this room today would deny that the way that the United States under George W. Bush went to war in Iraq and then handled the first few years of the war in Iraq actually had a very devastating effect on the region. To this day we are still trying to clean up from that mess. We may have different views on this, but I personally believe that we are still trying to take a sad song and make it better from a U.S. national security standpoint. That is still a net negative from the U.S. national security standpoint. But it can be redeemed.

It will only be redeemed not only by the actions of the U.S. and the follow-through which I will get to shortly, but importantly the actions of countries in the region, neighbors of Iraq.

I know here in Washington we like to get her debates fixated on that which we have done. And we have played an important role. The surge I think helped decrease the violence but less noticed are the actions by key countries like Turkey, since 2007 adopting a different tone and posture toward the Iraqi government in a way that I think has been deeply constructive. It hasn't solved all the issues but has been helpful. There is a lot of talk in this process of government formation, about Iran's role. I think we need to watch that carefully particularly based on what we saw in the pre-election period with the de-Baathification committee. But we need to temper our analysis about the role Iran plays with the strong understanding that Iraqi nationalism is very much alive and well. I witnessed this when I first went into Iraq in 2003 and it is very assertive. So yes Iran is seeking to play a role and I do believe that many of the countries of the Arab world are playing an important role also. It is an open system if you will and I think we need to temper our analysis with these visions, the visions that are out there of one party from the outside imposing its agenda on Iraqis versus the other. It's a complicated game and many actors are playing an important role.

The fact that Prime Minister Maliki was in Egypt yesterday, I think was an important sign that there is ferment and this is a years long project. But I think the fundamental objective of most Iraqi leaders when I talk to them is to move beyond this 20-year period of isolation, this understanding that becoming more interconnected with all of its neighbors, interconnected with the rest of the region, and interconnected with the rest of the world is in the interest of Iraq. This is a regional project and for those of you who work in the region this is a great responsibility. I'll close on the test for U.S. policy because I think it is very significant, and Michael alluded to it in some of his remarks. And although today I think the President spends the balance of his time on Afghanistan and Pakistan – we have had a recalibration compared to three or four years ago in terms of where the resources, time and attention are – Iraq remains fundamentally important. And I think this President despite what he said on the campaign, and how people perceived the withdrawal timeline of military forces remains fundamentally committed to see an Iraq evolve and help in the right sort of way, not trying to control but to shape the most important efforts.

I think on the U.S. side for U.S. national security there are two main challenges. One, and Michael's remarks alluded to this. But Iraq remains one of the biggest challenges to this notion of smart power. Smart power, the label that Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton and the President use to talk about the shift of resources from the military, to a greater emphasis on diplomacy and development.

I have many friends who are trying to deal with this and the various mechanisms – QDDR – this rebalance of how we conduct national security policy. Iraq is one of these tests and as Michael has indicated the State Department is going to be playing a much stronger role on things that quite frankly the State Department has lacked the capacity, the funding, the budget and the personnel to do.

I think this will be a significant test. I am confident knowing, who I know is leading over there will do their best to meet this challenge. But it is I think the ultimate challenge of smart power and changing the way the U.S. does national security.

The second challenge and this is one concern I have, and it is more conceptual, for those of you are academics and write a lot, is one of a broader regional strategy. When I look at things like the Obama Administration's national security strategy, which was released in May, and I look at the sections on the Middle East, I think it is a fair and constructive criticism to say that there is a lot that is unanswered about where Iraq fits within this broader conception. Perhaps no grand strategy is viable at this point given the complexity of intraregional dynamics. But to put it simplistically in the 1980s if we were supporting an Iraq as a buffer against Iran, to contain Iranian influence and in the '90s we had a policy of dual containment, I am not certain what the overriding imperative for U.S. strategic policy in the broader region is. When I talk to some of my friends at senior levels of the administration I think we've got great tactical management, much better than we were in 2005 or 2006, of individual pieces of the Middle East, but it doesn't, I think, sum up yet to the overarching theme of where we are going to be five or ten years from now.

If anything, I think the overriding imperative is to deal with the Iranian influence, the increasing Iranian influence. You see this in today's newspapers, the \$60 billion weapons package with F-15s to Saudi Arabia. These are all fine and well but what I am saying is, is there a good greater sum? What is our broader objective and where do we want to be by say 2020.

All of these questions are complicated. The three tests of Iraqi leadership, of the region, of U.S. national security policy. Again, you have a role. We all have a role in shaping this. And I think that is the most important thing as we discuss these issues in the questions and answers and as you take these thoughts with you.

Iraq is not a dead issue. It's still very much alive. A new Iraq can actually serve as a bridge, I do believe, between some of the most complicated parts of the Middle East and bring us to a better position.

So thank you, and I look forward to your comments and questions.

[Dunne] Due to time constraints and considerations we're going to go straight to the questions, and Dr. Anthony will throw the first one.

[Dr. John Duke Anthony] We try to link these two separated by a semi-colon. We heard from the first lecturer Ambassador Freeman that the United States intervention has succeeded only in getting rid of Saddam Hussein and nothing else. Is Iraq truly better off today than it was prior to the invasion?

We get the positive upbeat, the optimistic picture from bureaucrats, media, those embedded with the troops and those who take short visits to the region. But can we get a net assessment on whether the situation is better for we did or truly net assessment worse for what we did.

Related, as a US citizen and a native of Iraq what can I do as an individual to increase U.S. aid to the Iraqi refugees. Time is not on the Iraqis side as you mentioned. The number of Iraqi refugees who have been admitted to United States is tinier than miniscule compared to Jordan and Iraq.

The living standard and deterioration and the decline of the literacy level of children, these are major issues. How can we get to the bottom line?

[Corbin] Being in a room full of historians, I think it is apt to say that how we determine what the endgame is in Iraq, when we really do start talking about an endgame, I would just draw out a couple of thoughts.

When I look at Iraq and I put it in the historical context, when I look at decentralization, which is absolutely unheard of in any other Arab state. When I look at the civil society law, which the Parliament adopted, and which is being implemented by the government. When I look at the remaining media freedom, which is the only way we're going to deal with corruption. When I look at the institutions in Iraq that are struggling to come back, of course there are enormous challenges. Some of our speakers addressed, of course, the refugee situation, the unemployment situation, but of course the issues of power-sharing are also enormous challenges.

But when I look at where we were in 2006 and where we are in 2010, I have to say that the history books will be written but we are in a process where the Iraqis abandoned civil war, where they are seeking to balance their relations with their neighbors, where they have chosen politics, where decentralization, free media, civil society are elements that the Iraqis have seized on and desperately want to make work.

[Katulis] I look at things, I think the first question we all need to answer ourselves, based on your own position I look at things from a U.S. national security standpoint. And I mentioned this briefly. I do believe this to you this day the Iraq war is a net negative. It was perhaps one of the biggest strategic blunders from a U.S. national security standpoint when you look at the opportunity cost. And I say this with all respect and deference to those who served and committed their lives to making Iraq better. But at the most strategic level, the leadership level, I think when the historians look back on this certain period, I think they will understand that we went awry. And this is not an argument that Saddam Hussein was a good guy and that we could have just kept him in power and everything would have been all right.

Things need to change and evolve and I am glad that things are evolving and certainly have improved since 2006. We've been pulled, I think, back from back from the brink but if we had to do it all over again, we would not have done it in a way that we did and I don't think that war would even have been the best option.

I think, if an outcome though that brings Iraq back into the fold, in the broader region, much more interconnected with all of its neighbors within the region and the world. And if we have a much more functional region, where all of the rivalries, I think this is a question of do we want to look to the past or the future? And I think there is an impulse among especially the younger generation of Iraqis when they travel through the UAE and other places, they want to leave behind all of those divides.

So I think from a U.S. national security standpoint though, still a net negative, the impact it had on our troops, the costs, the opportunity costs, and the messes I think that were left behind in



other places, I think historians will still have a grim look, outlook on this, even if things turn to the better which I expect they will in Iraq.

[Omar] I would add a little bit of what I hear from Iraqis when I'm in Iraq. I think it's a difficult question and most people would say the jury is still out, from the Iraqi perspective. And you have the exact same individuals who will sit and say and refuse to compare it to 2006. Let's remember that in 2006 the death toll was 100 people a day, school buses were being blown up on a regular basis. 2006 and 2007 was a black hole, was the dark ages. We refuse to compare it to then. We like to compare it to 2003 which is when the U.S. entered and again this is the Iraqi perspective, and they are saying in terms of education, in terms of what security, in terms of health care, in terms of electricity, which is still one of the biggest issues, in terms of access to clean water, all things have gotten worse and Iraqis would say that over and over and over again. And then the next thing they will say to me always surprises me, no matter how much I hear it, which is we still think it was worth it. And even after a list of complaints, even a list of how the U.S. made crucial mistakes, and a list of a sense of feeling betrayed by the international community, a lot of times they will say it was still worth it. And I think it is very hard for me personally to grapple with that but that's a majority of comments that I often hear.

I think again the jury is still out on how it will materialize. This government formation is a crucial turning point in terms of where it can go and it's very exciting. It could go in a great direction and it could also go in a very grim direction which is why everyone is on the edge of their seats to literally find out what the outcome will be.

[Dunne] Let me just add to that. I was in Baghdad just a few months ago with a delegation from the Stimson Center and we had the opportunity to have wonderful meetings with civil society representatives, students and so forth, and we had about 20 of them in the room. We asked the question: are you happier today that Saddam Hussein is gone or would you rather not have had this?

Every single hand went up when we asked them this. They were all happy that Saddam Hussein was no longer there, that there had been a change in government. So I realize there is obviously a lot of dissension and differences of opinions in Iraq but that kind struck me especially coming from young people.

Let me ask another question here which we haven't really touched on in any depth so far. Basically it is what is the future of the Kurdish situation. The Kurds have issued a manifesto of sorts with about 19 different demands many of which seem to be unconstitutional for their participation in a future government, in lending their support to the next prime minister. The question is basically can the Kurds be accommodated within a federal system either as it exists with major constitutional changes or are these two sides drifting irrevocably with apart.

Second what is the future of U.S. mediation between Baghdad and the Kurdistan regional government? If we do completely withdraw our forces by the end of 2011 what leverage do we have to mediate that conflict? What is our plan as we look out?

[Corbin] This is very important. One of the greatest challenges that we face and will face is Kurd-Arab relations. But again what I would point out is politics as a solution and I think that as the Kurds negotiate with the other parties about their future there is a sense that what Ambassador Crocker used to say is that the Kurds need to see their future in Baghdad rather than in Irbil is actually coming true. When you see the involvement of the Kurds in the formation of the new government, in politics, in Baghdad you see that the Kurds see their future as linked. Now, of course, there are enormous issues but one other, a couple of other elements.

First Kurdish politics is changing also. We can't forget that the division between the two main, the KDP and the PUK, which has long determined politics in Kurdistan is changing. The press freedom, the killing of a journalist earlier this year led to enormous outcry in Kurdistan. Change is coming in Kurdistan as it is coming everywhere else and that will have an impact on the rest of the country.

Finally hydrocarbons are extremely important, and this will be part of the negotiations but now that the southern oilfields have been open to international exploitation, the Kurdish hydrocarbons are not the most easily available or quickest to get to quickly, and that means that the Kurdish negotiation position has changed.

We see negotiation on dibs [phonetic], we see the role of Unami [phonetic]. We see that there is a future. The administration will be absolutely seized with this issue but we do see politics rather than violence as the way forward.

[Katulis] Yes. I would say can the Kurds can be accommodated within the federal system? I think the answer is yes, and if not we have to come up with a plan B. But that plan B has to be accommodated not only within the Iraqi system but within the broader region, which is probably far more difficult than starting from where we are right now which is a difficult point.

One thing I would say to complement what Michael said, yes politics, we all agree that politics are happening and it is a good thing that Maliki is talking what the Sadrists rather than going to war with them generally. On balance, maybe Mike and I might disagree on that. But I think politics on these big-ticket items of how to share power were frozen. There is a curious thing that I think happened, and I did a report two years ago with Marc Lynch and a few other analysts, that looked at Iraq's political transition after the surge and I think that coalition that led Iraq from 2004 until about 2008 started to break down, started to fundamentally disagree with things. And that doesn't mean that politics was breaking down, and in fact it may mean the reverse. But the big issues of what is Iraq, still remain unresolved and I think we all need to think creatively about what are the best ways to help Iraqis facilitate these divides or bridge these divides, in a more creative fashion and then we have.

[Omar] In terms of the Arab-Kurd relations and where that will go, just to kind of highlight in terms of the important changes happening in the north and the regional Kurdish elections a third party that was introduced that did actually very well, incidentally called "Change," and the buzz of civil society and got a lot of votes, particularly in Sulamaniya, which is a great movement toward the Kurdish regional government and their political system.

But you know when we are talking about the U.S. responsibility I would add to the word leverage, responsibility, in terms that the U.S. needs to be engaged in the Arab-Kurdish debate because it is an important issue and that cannot be done without the difficult conversation about Kirkuk.

We cannot answer that question until we really look carefully about the status of Kirkuk, which the Constitution provides special conditions for. It is exciting. Census is now being discussed. The UN is saying that in the next 60 days the census in Kirkuk will take place. It is an essential element towards where that relationship will go.

There is a fear within Iraq with that the status of Kirkuk will be similar to the status of Jerusalem, which is that it will be consistently postponed and will never be resolved. I think that as long as, again perceptions in Iraq are reality, as long as that is a strong perception then I think the tensions between the Arabs and the Kurds will only increase.

[Anthony] Two related questions here. How many Foreign Service officers currently serve in Iraq? Where do they serve in Iraq? What is the situation with fewer than 40 Arabic speakers in the 1000 person envisioned American Embassy in Baghdad? Do Americans living and working in Iraq, live in the place where they work? If not why? Does that mean they have to travel with security vehicles to their workplaces? Why are there so many private security and civilian contractors over and beyond those uniformed armed services personnel? And I might add that one individual, a friend of mine, who has signature authority for \$1.2 billion in Iraq for a civilian development contract said, John, of the \$1.2 billion that I have to spend, \$750 million is for security.

[Dunne] If I could just further complicate Michael's task here. The State Department has a very big request before Congress to fund perhaps 6000 to 7000 security contractors including an air wing to support movement and security around the country.

At the same time we are going to be closing our PRT's by the end of the year. So I am just interested in your take, Michael, on whether the State Department feels pretty confident they can accomplish its mission and will still have the kind of access to the Iraqi people as this civilian transition goes ahead with. That we had had to a certain extent in the past.

[Corbin] I will answer in shorthand because that is about six questions but basically there are about 1000 different types of Foreign Service civil service programs. We have programs where we bring in technical experts who are working at the embassy in the embassy in Baghdad.

We have more spread around the Provincial Reconstruction Teams around the country. What we are setting up to do and what we've been planning for the last year is to have two consulates and two what are called embassy branch offices and they have been chosen to be in critical areas where we can do outreach after the military is gone. We believe that we are going to be able to do that.

The two consulates are in Basra in the south, an important economic city, and in Irbil in the north where we have, of course to work with the Kurdish regional government. We also have is

Kirkuk which was just mentioned, we'll have an embassy branch office there. Also Mosul, which is very important for protection of minorities. It is something we are very focused on and Arab-Kurd tensions that spill over in the Ninowah (phonetic) Plain.

In terms of getting out and getting about. Private security contractors. I think this is misunderstood. Those private security contractors who understood that in January of 2009 the U.S. running the show was over made arrangements with the Iraqi government, applied for licenses, starting working with the Ministry of Interior.

Those private security companies that work all over the world that understood that this was really an Iraqi show from January 2009 are doing fine. Iraqi officials and private companies are using those international private security companies. We dealt with the Blackwater Nisour Square incident. We have not had incidents since then. This is no longer the wild, wild West. It is frustrating. It is difficult. The oil company, the international oil companies that are going in the south are using private security contractors. We don't see this as a problem.

In terms of Arabic speakers, absolutely we are working to bring more Arabic speakers in. It is one of the top priorities. It was for the last Secretary of State and for this Secretary of State. We are bringing those people to Iraq. We think we can get around. One last point I would make is that Iraqis are welcoming a civilian partnership. We are building on the enormous sacrifices that our men and women in uniform have made over the last seven years. When you look at the cities with Iraqis want not just US civilians, they want Iraqi civilians. They don't want the Iraqi Army doing security in the cities, they want the Iraqi police doing security in the cities. They don't want men and women in American uniforms they want diplomats in suits. And I travel to Iraq regularly and when I ask them, are you ready for U.S. presence with all of the private security contractors that they will have to have, they say, absolutely as they transition from the security relationship to a civilian relationship.

I have probably answered only part of the questions but we are focused on this.

[Dunne] Thank you. I am going to ask any sort of raft of refugee related questions. The overarching one of which is, is it fair to say that the refugee IDP situation may be the most important index of gross national stability or gross national progress in Iraq and a few related questions talking about the situation at specific refugee communities.

The first one has to do with the Palestinian refugees who are living between Jordan and Iraq. What is their destiny? Do you think they will end up becoming U.S. citizens? Are they going back to Iraq? What is their future?

And this is specifically for Manal. How many Iraqis as the US accepted as refugees since 2003? And finally a question on the plight of the Caldean Christians. What is their future? How many are emigrating? But perhaps we might address the question of Iraqi Christians more broadly in that context.

[Gadaudan] The U.S. has resettled over 50,000 refugees from Iraq. It was been a slow beginning but once it decided how to manage it, it has been a pretty efficient mechanism and a faster one,

despite what was said at one point, than the process applied to people coming from other parts of the world. So I think it has been a fairly successful exercise and we think it should keep on because there are still people for whom return even if in the distant future might never be considered.

Refugees are an indicator of stability. We would like this to be an indicator. I don't think that this is. I think there is a danger to say as we move to a more politically progressive situation one can leave the humanitarian situation a little bit on the back burner. And I think this is what is wrong. I think there will not be stability unless these populations are stabilized themselves. Right now we have a large number of refugees who say they never want to go back and so they are a burden to Syria and Jordan. If Syria and Jordan are not being consistently sustained in the tolerance they have for these people, and they see that Europe is returning people at gunpoint they returned to the same sort of measures. If you return people forcefully in an area they cannot absorb them you add to social disruption and therefore to political complexity and risk destabilization.

As far for people who are internal, as I have said we have 500,000 people who are squatters.. If you don't address their plight you are going to have frustration building among the young generation who have no future.

I think of anything history tells us you don't want to have large numbers of young men who are frustrated in the Middle East and I think it is not just a question of humanitarian concerns and morals I think it is a question of security.

[Anthony] We have time for one last question.

[Manal] Yes, real quick think, on the refugee situation being taken care of. The 50,000 according to Michael in terms of how many have been accepted in the U.S. But I really wanted to address the issue of the minorities, because it is a central issue at USIP. One of the programs we are really focusing on is how to support the minorities in the Ninowah (phonetic) Plain and elsewhere. We have already seen a large migration. There was a strong Catholic presence in Basra. Some of them migrated to Baghdad and some of them have now migrated to neighboring countries.

Those that are involved in the north you can actually track it by satellite, the movement towards Irbil and towards Turkey. Which is an extreme concern. The Christians in Iraq have always been an essential part of the social fabric of Iraqi society. So in addition to the right to protect, there is also the issue of what the mosaic of Iraq will be in the future and it is a concern for all Iraqis and it is something that is very strongly stressed.

We have been working towards building an alliance of minorities that include all of the minorities – the Yazidis, the Fabaeon (phonetic) and the different Christian groups, in terms of making sure that they have a voice within parliament as well as civil society.

It is a strong challenge because these are among the groups who have really dug in their heels not to leave. When we interview a lot of the high level representatives of the minorities they say that we are trying to think of our long-term presence in Iraq and they have really resisted leaving. A

lot of European have said we will only accept Chaldeans are Christians and there is a huge presence in San Diego so there is a very strong pull factor. They have been resisting it but they have been specifically targeted and we have seen a lot of violence that has happened in the north specifically targeting the communities for unknown reasons.

It goes back a little bit to the Arab-Kurd tension. A lot of the minorities feel they are caught in the middle because of the electoral system and because of their actual geographic presence and having to choose between the Kurds or the Arabs, and a lot of pressure in terms of which side you're on and they are already feeling marginalized and to have that added pressure is obviously not helping the situation.

[Corbin] Just two quick comments. One, that this is the minorities and it is not just Christians, its all of the minorities. is an incredibly important priority for us in the administration. And one of the things I do is visit those communities in the States who are having the burden of those new refugees who happen to be coming to the U.S. at the worst economic period for new refugees.

We are working with the communities here in the United States and we are working in the Ninowah (phonetic) Plain and throughout Iraq to work with the government on protecting these communities, to work with the government on bringing these communities into the police forces. The USIP has a program on caucusing. This is where we are encouraged by the representatives working together to get their interest recognized.

The minorities are a part of diverse components of Iraq and they have to be protected and we are pleased that the Iraqi leadership understands this. This is going to be a great challenge but it is something that we are very focused on.

And then my last point is just that, somebody asked what American citizens can do, I would just say to the people in this room on Iraq. Iraq is much more complex than the media portrays. What we need to get across is that this isn't a situation where it's unremitting violence, where it is hopeless, where the situations are not solved. The Iraqis are working on their solutions. They are working on Iraqi solutions for their problems. We need to look at ways of explaining that we need to invest in Iraq. This is for Congress, this is for business people, this has the opportunity as somebody said of being a bridge in the region and we can help the efforts of the Iraqis to the terrific challenges of refugees, of poverty, of unemployment, the threat of terrorism.

Our relations, not just the government but all of the private citizens with Iraq are extremely important as we go forward and I thank you again for this opportunity.

[Dunne] I would like to thank all of our panelists for a wonderful set of presentations, which have really illuminated the complexities of Iraq. Not only within the region but also in terms of U.S. policy. And as Michael, Brian and others have said, Iraq is going to be a major foreign policy concern of the United States for some great period of time. Not only a negative concern, but a positive concern. One that can become a real asset not only to the United States but also for general stability in the region. But clearly they're a lot of problems to be resolved before we get to that state of affairs. And certainly how the refugees are dealt with is going to be a real indicator of Iraq's progress going forward.

So thank you very much to all of our panelists. It was a real pleasure being with you here. Please join me in thanking them.

<end>

Ryan & Associates