

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES
BAGHDAD, IRAQ

EXCERPTS FROM SPEECH BY
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AT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

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It's a great pleasure to be here at USIP. I think it's an important time for U.S.-Iraqi relations. I think when we look back, it will be a time of probably one of the most critical periods, because we are now on the eve of national elections in Iraq, which are coming up in some two-and-a-half weeks. I was talking to the prime minister a couple of weeks ago, and I said, you know, "We have elections. You have elections in 30 days," and he said, "It's actually 28 days and 7 hours from now." So I think everyone is very aware of the moment.

It's also a year in which our military is preparing to draw down after seven truly, truly heroic years of service. It's a year in which the U.S. military will be out of combat operations, and will leave in its place -- in the beginning of the fall -- advise-and-assist brigades, but we will not be directly involved in combat operations.

It is also a year in which our embassy is growing. It truly is extraordinary. We are there, the U.S. embassy is there, for the long haul. People who equate our interest in Iraq with our troop presence have, may I say, kind of missed the point. Because we are interested in a long-term relationship. And the embassy that we have there is very much symbolic of that relationship.

It's also a year in which I think new economic potential very much beckons Iraq into a new decade. We have a number of oil contracts that have been reached with international companies. Iraq is really on the move, economically.

It's also now a year just after President Obama stated his vision for Iraq in his Camp Lejeune speech, and I think it's a very appropriate time to share some of the observations from the ground in Baghdad, and, if I can, lay out what we believe will be the road ahead.

This will be a landmark year, as we pivot from a military-led engagement to a civilian-led presence. The dynamic of our relationship with the Iraq Government will mature. And as we make this shift, the American civilian- military team -- and it is one team and one mission -- will put into practice the hard lessons of the past seven years.

General Odierno and I share the President's strong resolve to help Iraq finally become a place where its citizens can live free of fear, his resolve to help Iraq build an inclusive political system, where people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, his resolve to help Iraqi communities settle their differences peacefully, just as USIP is engaged in that process, his resolve to help Iraq modernize its economy, and very much a resolve to help Iraq integrate with the region and with the world.

It is, no doubt, a daunting agenda. Our embassy works very closely with U.S. forces Iraq to chart the course forward. We are committed to this course, not just for the satisfaction of helping Iraq, or to right past errors, but rather, because it is undeniably in the interest of the United States to do so, and to stay engaged.

Opinions about Iraq among pundits, professors, politicians are widely varied. I must say when people sort of talk about the various ideas they have, you hear a lot of terms, "must" and "should." "The U.S. must do this, the Iraqis must do that, the Defense Department should do this. The State Department must do that," and so on. And there are a number of musts. In fact, I saw one in a U.S. newspaper. They had an editorial around Christmas, and there were 11 musts in the editorial.

So, I -- you know, in looking at all these musts, I think I've tried to reduce them down to maybe three.

The first must is, we must help Iraq build healthy political and democratic institutions in an environment of peace and security.

The second must is we must help Iraq modernize its economy. If it doesn't have a modernized economy, it's not going to work.

And, thirdly, we must help Iraq establish a productive relationship with its neighbors and a strategic relationship with the United States.

Now, of course, you can have 1,000 musts, and it won't mean anything without a stable and secure situation in Iraq. Years of sacrifice and strategy have moved us ever closer to this critical stage.

First of all, we won't ever forget the sacrifice of our U.S. military, our coalition partners, our Iraqi counterparts who have taken on what is often a deadly, and surely a daunting challenge. Due to their collective efforts, violence against civilians, violence against elements of the Iraqi state have dropped dramatically. In addition, violence against our forces has also dropped precipitously in recent months.

These changes, which are evident all across Iraq's 18 provinces, are not only a sign of a stronger Iraq, they are also a sign of a smarter American presence, a presence where we have learned the lessons of the last few years. And, frankly, some of those lessons were very hard, indeed. Just as we have brought change to Iraq, so Iraq has changed us. We

have new military doctrine, a new counter-insurgency doctrine developed from our experience in Iraq. We have new civilian-military engagement. You know, I worked on military-civilian engagement in the Balkans. I can tell you what we have going on in Iraq is unprecedented in the scope and depth of the degree to which we work together with the military. The United States has developed many more effective uses of smart power. All of this can be traced directly to this war.

And while every war is different, the lessons learned through the sacrifice of lives and resources in Iraq will inevitably change the way America interacts with the world. Our efforts in Iraq will be indelibly etched in the history books for future generations to judge.

In 2006 and 2007, Iraq's interests and power were played out on the streets against a backdrop of death, of uncertainty, and fear. Today, notwithstanding the article in today's Washington Post, power and interest are battling it out with election posters that, frankly, obscure the bridges and blanket the markets in every province. If you drive through Iraq today, you will see these posters just everywhere, of -- and they will look very familiar to anyone who has ever seen an election anywhere in the world. It is inspiring stuff. Everybody has these posters out there. The campaign for this election has, indeed, begun, as Iraqi politicians consolidate their blocs and hash out very tough political deals.

Truly, the Iraqi people have embraced the reality of democracy. And I think it's very important to understand that it is a place where people speak their minds. Iraqis are quite comfortable letting you know where they stand. And the issue is to try to create some rules of the game that try to explain that politics can be tough, and we need some type of scope and measure for how Iraqi politics are going to be played out.

One of the major issues in the recent weeks that has been very difficult in Iraq has been the deBa'athification issue. Given the history, given the Ba'athist legacy in Iraq, it is very understandable why it incites strong emotions in Iraq. Given the history of the U.S. in Iraq, if you look at the 1960s, and how the U.S. -- the United States -- was very concerned about the potential spread of Communism to Iraq, and how Ba'athism was seen as an alternative to Communism, where the U.S., in fact, preferred Ba'athism in the 1968 process that led to the return of Ba'athists, how the U.S. preferred that outcome to a Communist Iraq, it is understandable, it is really understandable, why some Iraqis look at a pattern in the 1960s and think they're seeing a pattern today, where the U.S. has been so concerned about other influences in Iraq.

And somehow, when people look at that pattern, they think we must be, in some way, supporting a Ba'athist resurgence in Iraq. For Americans, it's hard to understand. After all we have lost over 4,000 of our countrymen in this struggle against Ba'athism. We took on Saddam Hussein, we defeated him. We rooted out Ba'athists throughout the country. It is simply extraordinary for Americans to try to understand that some Iraqis actually think we somehow support Ba'athism. But when you look at this pattern in the 1960s, you can see how this cracked mirror can somehow affect people's view of the current situation. So, we need to be respectful of the history, and respectful of people's emotions.

I think when the initial lists of excluded candidates was read in the Council of Representatives -- and this was a process that I must be very clear with that, that we did not feel passed any measure of transparency, a process of naming people, essentially denying them their rights to participate in the election without, in our view, any kind of due process -- we had a lot of concerns about this. But I think people need to understand that when this initial list of candidates was read in the Council of Representatives, it received standing and sustained applause from all of the members there.

Ba'athism is a very vibrant, important subject there. People feel very strongly about it, and we need to respect that, and we need to understand that, in dealing with it, we need to try to deal with it, and not as a fundamental issue that is reflected in the constitution, but deal with the question of whether it was done with sufficient transparency, and done outside the political scope.

Obviously, we had some concerns about it. We registered those concerns with the Iraqi Government. We were very active in making sure Iraqis understood our views on this. And so we felt, for example, that there was -- scoring political points was definitely a part of the controversy. Yet, I think it was very important for us to make clear to the Iraqis that, as they got ready for elections, they need to make sure that this Ba'athist issue was handled in the context of the rule of law.

So, we have gotten through this issue now. It hasn't been easy. It is very upsetting to people who were excluded, who don't feel that they should have been excluded. But we have moved on from that period now. And now, with two-and-a-half weeks to go, we see, I think, a very vibrant campaign. And I think we will see that Iraqis will, whether they're Sunni or Shia or Kurds, they will be voting in mass numbers.

Voters on March 7th will decide who fills 325 seats in the parliament, with the winning bloc taking the lead in nominating the prime minister and the main cabinet posts. Now, I know many -- this being Washington, people want to know, "Well, who do you think is going to win? What are the polls suggesting?" Well, it is a very complex process. Because after the actual votes are tabulated -- and we have worked very hard with our colleagues in the UN, worked very hard with the High Election Commission to manage the technology of the elections, which we believe will be run well -- we know that, as they get through the votes, they will have to -- there are five major coalitions, and we will have to see which one actually wins. And it will go to the major winner to see who will then try to form the government.

And then, that day, that March 8th, or whenever this is finally decided -- it will be later than March 8th -- they will begin the process of putting together a new government. And this process will not be an easy process. It will be a process in which they need to reach out to different coalitions, and put together some kind of coalition government.

So, I think this first of the musts -- that is, helping Iraq build healthy political and democratic institutions in a secure environment -- is something we really need to focus

on. To this end, we have been -- our diplomats in the embassy in Baghdad, and the civilian experts -- are very heavily involved.

The true test of victory will not be in the behavior of the winners when they are finally announced. But rather, it will be how the losers accept the results. So I would argue in Iraq, as elsewhere, losers have an even bigger responsibility to be part of the political process. And I have always felt that the quality of democracy is determined by the losers. And Iraq will be no exception to that. Those who do lose need to understand that they have this responsibility, they have, in some ways, as great -- they have to win the public's trust, as well.

This has implication for what could be a lengthy government formation process, and it also affects the security. Security concerns keep us very watchful of the frictions that have been in plain view during the current full contact political season. The issue runs much deeper than the election math of Iraq. We all know about some of the showcase political splits in Iraq: the Arab-Kurd issue, the Sunni-Shia issue. But you know, when you're there, of course you're concerned about Arab-Kurd issues, of course you're concerned about Sunni-Shia issues. But you are also concerned about Sunnis -- about Kurd-Kurd issues in Sulaymaniya. You are concerned about Sunni-Sunni issues in Saladin, you're concerned about Shia-Shia issues in places like Najaf.

In Kirkuk, there are also Kurd/Arab/Turkoman issues. And, frankly, the Turkoman and other Turkoman have grievances with each other. Those differences are deadly, deadly serious for those of us who are there. And none is more essential than the disputed internal boundaries, the so-called DIBs. The DIBs forms the centerpiece of the Arab-Kurd dispute. These are all areas in which there is a dispute, in which there are Peshmerga forces who do not share the view of the Iraqi Army forces. And we need to deal with these things.

Kirkuk has rich oil fields, but also a very difficult history. And it's become the focal point of this Arab-Kurd dispute. The United States is determined to help resolve these differences, and to play an important role alongside the UNAMI in trying to address them. We have sent one of the State Department's premier regional experts to be in Kirkuk, a senior foreign service officer who speaks flawless Arabic, and he is meeting every day with the various parties in Kirkuk, to try to deal with these problems.

The Shia-Sunni relationship has implications well beyond Iraq's borders, even beyond our times. If you witness the various reactions to the deBa'athification issue last month, or the continued divisions among secular, or more strictly religious Sunnis that we see playing out in some of the provinces.

Some observers think of the Kurds as a united front. But the picture is far more complex, when you look at what is going on, especially in Sulaymaniya, with the development of the change list, which is a new political identity that has come out of the PUK, out of President Talibani's PUK. This change list is going to be fielding candidates in some eight different provinces, well beyond just the three provinces of the Kurdish regional

government. The Shia-Shia divisions are also front and center during the campaign. Prime Minister Maliki is fending off serious challenges from opposing Shia parties, such as ISCI.

Recently I visited -- I had the opportunity to visit Grand Ayatollah Hussein al-Sadr, who is actually a cousin of Muqtada al-Sadr -- so sometimes the divisions are within the family, as well -- and he spoke of the benefits of a united nationalistic Iraq that incorporates all religions and ethnic communities -- a refreshing message, I think, for the Iraqi people. We had a long discussion that spanned subjects from deBa'athification to preservation of water resources. He talked about his concerns about Iraqi politicians lacking a strong base, and the fact that some resort to religion and sectarianism to define themselves. Actually, this is part of our conversation, but he mentioned our conversation on his website, so I don't mind telling you about it, as well.

In short, it was heartening to see a cleric of this stature talk about these issues. And I think there are such people in Iraq, and such people that we need to reach out to and listen to, not just the politicians of Iraq, but also people who, I think, have a great role to play in influencing Iraqi public opinion.

This does lead to a question that I think comes up a lot, which is there is no doubt that today there is a big difference between where Iraq now has its sovereignty, and where we, as diplomats, must deal with a sovereign Iraq, and the old days in the CPA in 2003, when essentially Iraq was ruled by U.S.-issued decrees, such as the one that put Mr. Chalabi as the head of the deBa'athification commission.

I think it's important to understand, though, that the way we deal with Iraqis is through diplomacy. Our leverage is that we want to have a serious, long-term relationship with Iraq. And if the Iraqis desire a serious, long-term relationship with the United States, they need to work with us on some of these issues.

So, that is how the process works. We sit down, we explain issues that we think are important, whether it's how they handle deBa'athification, or how they have -- or whether there is the use of the army in an inappropriate way in Saladin, and try to explain why these are important issues to us. And that if we're going to have a good relationship, we need these issues resolved.

We have worked a security mechanism along the Arab-Kurd fault line. This has not been easy, but this is really directly due to the great efforts of General Odierno and his staff in trying to get members of Kurdish Peshmerga to work with the Iraqi Army, to work with U.S. troops, to go through joint training programs. This is something where you really have to do it step by step. And it is working. It is beginning to work.

We are bolstering civil society. We are providing guidance and support to local organizations dedicated to uniting, rather than dividing communities. We are maintaining a strong presence in the provinces, through our provincial reconstruction

teams. We have people every day who are dealing at the provincial level, helping provinces with social, political, and economic development.

Even our strong advocacy for opening Iraq's oil sector has had, we believe, a good effect on some of the Arab-Kurd issues that we have been dealing with. I think as Iraq has begun to develop their oil sector, I think the Kurds have been interested in the fact that 17 percent of what potentially, in the 10 years, could be 10 million barrels a day -- 17 percent of 10 million barrels is more than 100 percent of 100,000 barrels. So I think what we have been able to do, in terms of encouraging transparency and openness and careful management and development of the oil sector has also contributed to trying to hold Iraq together.

Time and time again, we have seen the power of the U.S. stand on issues as a key factor in promoting essential tolerance and limiting extremism. Despite the drawdown in funds and troops, it remains true in Iraq that what we think -- and, more importantly, what we do -- matters profoundly in Iraq.

And so, while all of us need to acknowledge and respond to the changing nature of our presence, this is not a time for slipping into complacency. The U.S. must remain mindful of its continuing influence, and be prepared to use that influence to realize positive outcomes in Iraq that benefit both the Iraqi people, as well as the American people.

So, as I mentioned with these oil contracts, the economic life of Iraq does need to begin to mature. With targeted, smart help from us, the potential is really almost unlimited. This is our second must. We must help Iraq modernize its economy. And there is no mystery here. Iraq's economic future hinges on its careful management of its oil sector. Iraq is off to a good start -- albeit a slow start, but a very good start.

And it is also a transparent start, as oil companies put their bids in and the bids were opened up on national TV, as that would suggest, the oil sector taking off in Iraq could fundamentally change the lives of every Iraq citizen, build the confidence that Iraq needs to stand with its neighbors. They have realized some 10 contracts. Two of them are U.S. companies, and some major U.S. companies, including Exxon Mobile, are going to be there. But they also have companies from all five members of the -- all five permanent members of the UN Security Council. In short, many other countries now have an investment in Iraq's security and its future.

So, modernizing the energy and energy service sector, it could create tens of thousands of jobs, attract hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investment, which, in turn, could fund rapid reconstruction and development of Iraq. It can import modern business practice, modern technology to an Iraqi sector that has not seen foreign involvement since Nixon was President. In short, when you look at the fact -- the emergence of foreign oil companies in Iraq -- that is, high-technology companies -- this is a major new development in Iraq that they haven't seen for a long, long time.

The first oil companies were not American. We have some representation, but the first oil companies were something else. There was a British company, a Dutch company, also a Russian company before the U.S. companies were there. So careful management of Iraq's oil riches is essential because an Iraq that succeeds economically as well as politically, will be self-reliant and secure in its place in the region.

It will also be positioned to live up to still another must, which is the fact that we must help Iraq establish better relations with its neighbors. We still have considerable work to do on this front, because Iraq's place in the world depends not just on us, not just on oil, but Iraq itself and on its neighbors. Egypt and Turkey are stepping up, forging genuine multi-faceted relationships with Iraq. But it's troubling that some other neighbors -- and, in particular, some of Iraq's Arab neighbors -- have been slow to embrace Iraq.

There is no question that Iran has shown a very malevolent face in Iraq. It has probed for weaknesses. It has tried to frustrate U.S. and Iraqi common goals. It has been responsible for helping armed militia groups. It has been responsible for training. It has been responsible for some of the munitions that have found their way into Iraq. Indeed, it has been responsible for some of the munitions that we have found land almost on our heads in the Green Zone.

I can assure you that no one in the embassy or Camp Victory is naive about this Iranian presence. We know the Iranians are very much engaged in some of these malevolent acts. But we also are working with the Iraqi authorities on it, and we are convinced that the Iraqi authorities share that concern. They did not choose Iran as a neighbor, and therefore in the way they deal with Iran as a neighbor. They deal very carefully, because they know that for the next 1,000 years Iran is likely to be their neighbor. It does not mean that they are any less vigilant.

One of the great calling cards we have in Iraq, is that we can introduce Iraq to the international community. At present, Iran can introduce Iraq to North Korea, and not much more.

The last thing, obviously, I want to be is guilty of careless optimism. But it's also no time for pessimism, either. It's time for tenacity, steadiness, and resolve. We must be persistent in the face of adversity.

But as a new Iraqi government forms and lays out what kind of relationship it wants with the United States, they will need to see that the United States is committed to building a relationship that will work out to our mutual benefit in the long term.

Our diplomats, soldiers, and civilian experts will continue to apply American power as best we can, from Mosul to Baghdad, from Anbar to Basra. We will continue to support the development of a robust rule of law in Iraq, carried out by impartial judges, trained police, competent military. That is another issue we work on every single day of the year in Baghdad.

We will pour our energy into expanding private sector trade and investment, so that Iraq entrepreneurs have a shot at success. And we will stay deeply committed to helping create a politically sound and prosperous Iraq, whose leaders and diplomats, friends to the United States, engage confidently and prudently with their neighbors and with the world, a stable, secure, and self-reliant Iraq. In other words, a strong and proud Iraq can be a catalyst for stability in the region.

And given the threats that remain, the pains of the past, and all the blood that has been shed there, this would constitute a major strategic success. So, for Iraq certainly, but also for those military and civilians who have served -- and indeed, who have sacrificed so much

So, in the end, we are there. We are in Iraq not only for U.S.-Iraqi relations, we are there for U.S. interests. We believe we can succeed there. We are very mindful of the difficulties, and we are very steady in confronting them every day of the year. Thank you very much.

END EXCERPTS