

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ  
- SULAIMANI -

TRIS

*Institute of  
Regional and  
International Studies*

**The Inaugural**

# **Sulaimani Forum**

**“The Changing Geopolitics  
of the Middle East”**



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SULAIMANI

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# **The Inaugural Sulaimani Forum**

## **The Changing Geopolitics of the Middle East**

**The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani**  
**March 12-13, 2013**

**Conference Proceedings**  
**edited by Christine van den Toorn**





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# Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)

Through the promotion of rigorous scholarship and open dialogue among academics and influential public leaders, the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) examines today's most complex regional and global development issues. Drawing from the diversity of fields of expertise at AUIS, the Institute includes in its scope of activities historical, cultural, socio-economic, anthropological, and religious dimensions pertinent to present day realities and problems. As a space for regional and international encounters, IRIS fosters mutual understanding and awareness that reaches across national borders, sectarian divisions, and differing perspectives.

AUIS is Iraq's only independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. It has excellent conference facilities and is well placed to assist scholars with logistics, introductions, transport and other aspects of field work in the region. The University's location in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq offers a safe space and a climate of tolerance that is uncommon in the Middle East, making it an attractive meeting place for people who cannot easily convene elsewhere.

# Sulaimani Forum

The *Sulaimani Forum* is the signature annual event of the Institute of Regional and International Studies. Over the course of two days, scholars, experts, practitioners and policymakers from around the region and world convene to discuss the most pressing regional issues, current trends, and points of conflict. Public lectures, open forums, smaller group discussions, and closed door sessions assuring confidentiality conducive to candid exchanges, allows the academic and policy worlds to meet, discuss, and work together towards real solutions.

The first annual *Sulaimani Forum*, held in March 2013 and summarized in these proceedings, proved to be a tremendous success. Focusing on "The Changing Geopolitics of the Middle East," the *Forum* featured distinguished international scholars, journalists, and government officials such as: Hoshyar Zebari, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Iraq; Zalmay Khalilzad, former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the United Nations; and Max Rodenbeck, Chief Middle East Correspondent for *The Economist*. Participants considered broad issues such as the social and economic repercussions of energy policies; the emerging role of women leaders; and the global effects of the wave of unrest and change that has swept the region. They also explored particular cases: Iraq, its neighbors, and the Kurdish issue, with diverse geopolitical implications for the Middle East and beyond.

These proceedings offer a comprehensive summary of each panel, detailing the main ideas and highlights of each panelist, while putting into context the importance and relevance of each issue and theme for Kurdistan, Iraq, the Middle East, and the world at large.

# The Sulaimani Forum, in their own words...

## Barham Salih, Chairman of the Board, AUIS

“I welcome you to the *Sulaimani Forum* which moves the university beyond its undergraduate studies program and branches out into research and inquiry about issues of current affairs and geopolitics and economy and other matters of importance to this region and the world. We are convening at the *Sulaimani Forum* this year, which is the inaugural session, at a moment of profound change in the Middle East. Perhaps some can say that the Middle East has always been at moments of change but at least in my memory and contemporary history never like this before. Everything is on the move. Everything seems to be in a state of flux with dire consequences to the region and to the peoples of this land but also to the international community at large. That is why in the spirit of concern for our future and the future of our generations, we need to have a very serious debate: these issues of interest and concern for our people and for our region and for the world at large. I cannot say there will be easy answers to these issues; these are intractable issues rooted in history, culture, politics, and also regional and international interests. But I hope this university and this *Sulaimani Forum* can bring experts and people of goodwill together, policy makers, opinion makers, to make sure that this debate is guided in the right direction.”

## Athanasios Moulakis, President, AUIS

“The mission of AUIS, as you know, is to serve the country and the region and to do so by fostering innovation and creativity. Our purpose is to promote the ideal of free inquiry and to provide a privileged space for open, informed, and responsible thought. We are fortunate to be located in this island of stability and security in a troubled region. So, we are delighted to move beyond our undergraduate mission and start the Institute of Regional and International Studies, to move to a higher level of inquiry and to provide people from the four corners of the world to discuss matters of importance. This is the first of an annual meeting which is the highest expression of this new institute in which we seek to put together—and we have already assembled here as you will soon see—a distinguished group of academics, journalists, analysts, men and women of public life who all seek to understand and to promote understanding, by which I mean both the intellectual understanding of matters and problems but also the mutual understanding of people.”

## Hoshyar Zebari, Foreign Minister of Iraq

“I’m really very impressed, honored, and delighted to be here at this *Sulaimani Forum*. I didn’t expect the amount of organizations and the number of guests and friends that you have gathered together. I believe this is the first such forum not only in Kurdistan but maybe in Iraq because the very idea of debate and exchange of ideas is really an alien thing in Saddam’s Iraq at least. In the new Iraq also we haven’t done a good job to bring people together. In fact, we [Iraqis] are almost always the guests of other forums where we listen to others question us about the future of our country and where we are going. So, to take the initiative and to take the lead is really an achievement. And it is also so timely for the Institute of Regional and International Studies that you are proposing. There is no better place to hold this than Kurdistan because it is at the thick of all of these regional conflicts and international changes and that’s why really the timing and location of this forum and of this institute I personally whole-heartedly support.”

# Executive Summary

The inaugural *Sulaimani Forum* brought together government officials, policy analysts, journalists, and academics at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) for two days of discussion about some of the region's most pressing geopolitical issues.

The geopolitical changes in the Middle East resulting from the Arab Spring are profound: decades-old regimes have been dismantled, realigning longstanding coalitions on a regional and global scale. The United States was caught off guard and must now deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Egyptians are divided in their support for the Islamist group, and many desire a secular, liberal-minded government. Iran's traditional ally, Syria, is embroiled in a seemingly endless civil war. Libyans and Tunisians are still struggling to determine what form their new governments and societies will take. Iraq has been left further divided, various groups within the state supporting and opposed to various regimes, and rebels in Syria inflaming old tensions between Sunna and Shi'i groups. The *Sulaimani Forum*, in the words of Dr. Barham Salih, former Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), comes at a time of change never seen before that demands "a very serious debate on these issues of interest and concern for our people and for our region and for the world at large."

The tumult and turmoil of the changing geopolitics is not all bad and really cannot be judged in this beginning, experimental stage, suggested many of the *Forum's* panelists. The Arab Spring was the start of a long period of transformation, a "cycle" in the words of *Economist* correspondent Max Rodenbeck. The experimentation phase is messy, risky, and unstable, but hopefully will also include important steps like 'institution building,' and the creation of 'democrats' and a 'political culture.' The hope is that this will end in what Ihsan Dağı, professor at the Middle East Technical University, calls a "democratic stability" that nations in the Middle East and North Africa region have not seen before.

While exploring the current state and future implications of the Arab Spring on the region and world, the *Sulaimani Forum* focused on its host region and country discussing the likelihood of federalism, problems of disputed territories and borders, and challenges and opportunities in the energy sector, democracy-building, education and justice. Barham Salih pointed out in his opening address that while only two years since the Arab Spring, it has been twenty-five years since the devastating Anfal campaign and ten since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, an ouster that had different implications for different ethnic and religious groups and regions within Iraq. Therefore, he continued, "it is... a moment to consider our future and consider the likely



options and scenarios for Iraq, for Kurdistan, and for the Middle East at large."

The *Forum* was a unique and groundbreaking gathering considering not only its timing but its location, pointed out Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari in his opening speech. While most experts gather in Washington and London to analyze happenings of the Middle East, this distinguished conference appropriately took place in the region where the actual events were taking place, not to mention in the midst of ongoing protests in various parts of Iraq, and in a city called the cultural capital of Kurdistan where

some say a brief 'Kurdish Spring' took place in the winter of 2011. In his address, Barham Salih mentioned that he hoped the stability that allows for the conference to take place in the Kurdistan Region will spread throughout the Middle East: "I hope Kurdistan, beyond being just a success story for Kurds, can also offer a model, a catalyst for change and reform in our region." The purpose of the *Sulaimani Forum* is to encourage this change and reform through better relationships, exchange, and dialogue. "Kurdish interest," Salih eloquently concluded, "lies in being connected with our neighbors, connected with the rest of the world."



# The Effects of the Arab Spring on the World

**Moderated by Athanasios Moulakis**  
**President, AUIS**

**Max Rodenbeck**  
Chief Middle East Correspondent  
*The Economist*

**Sir Basil Markesinis**  
Jamil Regents Chair  
University of Texas at Austin

**Ihsan Dağı**  
Professor  
Middle East Technical University

**Claire Spencer**  
Head of the Middle East and North Africa Program  
Chatham House

The Arab Spring is the most momentous set of events to transpire in the Middle East in recent decades, and potentially in the modern era. While movements and revolutions have had the most immediate impact on the states in which they occurred, countries all over the world continue to feel and deal with the repercussions. The United States, and nations in Europe and Asia must now adjust their understanding of, and foreign policies toward, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and the greater Middle East. These policies, generally speaking, have historically entailed tacit to direct support of leaders with dictatorial yet secular tendencies to ensure stability – a stability that has now come into question – at the expense of democratic institutions and civil rights. The West has grown accustomed to dealing with, or not dealing with, certain leaders such as Muammar al Qaddafi and Hosni Mubarak and will now have to engage with former enemies like the Muslim Brotherhood. World leaders and populations will also have to rethink their attitudes toward and understanding of the region and its people, as previously disenfranchised groups and individuals become actors in state and society.

As distinguished panelists – journalists, scholars, and policy analysts – argue below, the ‘effects of the Arab Spring on the world’ are yet to be determined as the actual ‘Spring’ is not yet over, and remains a period of experimentation. At present, the West and the global community must be flexible, and play the role of an engaged spectator as the regional trial and error unfolds.

# Max Rodenbeck

Chief Middle East Correspondent  
The Economist

“

*The current stage is one of experimentation in which people and groups are testing out new and previously forbidden ideas, theories and systems... this experimentation can be messy.*

”

The Arab Spring, Max Rodenbeck argued, has jump-started the Middle East and North Africa region, resuming “the process of history” which was “frozen.” Defrosting, however, is a long process, and the current stage is one of “experimentation” in which people and groups are testing out new and previously forbidden ideas, theories and systems such as political Islam and freedom of speech. This experimentation can be messy, creating “conflict and troubles,” and has no guaranteed outcome. In other words, hypotheses – if there were any – of the Arab Spring have yet to be proven. While the revolutions “may ultimately fail,” Rodenbeck reminded the audience that other people and places, like Eastern Europe and Latin America, have experienced – or ‘experimented in’ – similar transitory instability and turmoil and have come out relatively better than before. Hence the world must be patient and allow the thawing and experimentation to unfold without too much meddling.

# Sir Basil Markesinis

Jamail Regents Chair  
University of Texas at Austin

“

*Each country in the region will have a different revolutionary experience... There must be unique policies for each state rather than a blanket policy for post-revolution nations of the Middle East.*

”

Not only is the process long, but also one that is highly differentiated from place to place, added Sir Basil Markesinis. Each country in the region will have a different revolutionary experience; each ‘experiment’ has a different set of chemicals or ingredients or ‘players’ and ‘actors.’ This means that in terms of the international community’s response, there must be unique policies for each state rather than a blanket policy for ‘post-revolution’ nations of the Middle East. The world will have to address the new “diplomatic dangers” the Arab Spring has brought to the Middle East and North Africa region. Sir Basil used the example of Syria to detail these dangers. The West must deal with threats to the Christian population, the new breeding ground for terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, and the inability of the many opposition groups to form any sort of united front. In sum, Sir Basil presented the region as one that poses ongoing and diverse challenges to the international community.



# Ihsan Dağı

Professor  
Middle East Technical University

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*While this experimentation and these local actors are necessary for democracy building, they will complicate the policies of the international community.*

”

The Arab Spring has “unsettled established powers’ relationships,” argued Ihsan Dağı, by unseating familiar authoritarian regimes that ensured stability. Focusing on the newly empowered Islamist groups, Dağı discussed the implications of these new actors for domestic politics and the global community.

In terms of domestic politics, new citizens and

newly empowered political parties will have to create a “political culture” and “democratic institutions” that will hopefully lead to a new “democratic stability.” Historic opposition groups such as al Nahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt will now have to learn to rule; to write laws rather than simply oppose them. There are remaining questions about whether Islamists will rule in a fair and democratic way, and they must “prove their commitment to democracy and to populism and respect for human rights.” Dağı argued that by coming to power through democratic elections in which all Egyptians participated, they accepted “competitive politics and democracy as part of their identity.” There are other positive signs. Leaders are “not talking about government of God” but about “the right to rule.” The new Islamists “don’t refer... to the Quran as a source of justification” but rather to the “people’s will and concern as a base for justification.” However, this is still, as Dağı reminded the audience, in an experimental phase.

While this experimentation and these local actors are necessary for democracy building, they will complicate the policies of the international community. Rule by Islamists will certainly have effects on the world but those are yet to be seen because they still have not shown “what they will do with democracy.” How, Dağı asked, would the international community object if Islamists did try to “legislate their morality, their value system, their way of life”?

# Claire Spencer

Head of the Middle East and North Africa Program  
Chatham House

“

*The Arab Spring should be an eye-opener for the West. Europeans must change their long held stereotypic views of Arabs as passive players that like strong leaders.*

”

Claire Spencer moved the discussion to Europe, comparing movements there now and throughout history to those in the Middle East and North Africa region. The Arab Spring is not unique to the Arab World, she pointed out. Rather it is a

“global phenomenon.” Take Greece and other struggling countries in Europe where the lower classes are protesting against their governments, “challenging the status quo of the rich getting richer.” Greece is also similar to the MENA region in that the government employs most people. Moreover, these uprisings are essentially classic economic revolutions, argued Spencer: the proletariat rises up against the bourgeoisie. They are not new; these types of “class struggles between the political and economic haves and have nots” have been going on for centuries. Economic grievances demand economic solutions, Spencer argued, which means that the Islamist groups Dağı mentioned earlier will have to focus more on developing such policies. Private sector development as well as education reform will be key ways to address the demands of youth who participated in the Arab Spring.

Lastly, Spencer said that the Arab Spring should be an ‘eye-opener’ for the West. Europeans must change their “long held stereotypic views of Arabs” as “passive” players that “like strong leaders.” These perspectives let the West be “less open” and “less understanding” and hence unable to predict these revolutions.

Spencer suggested that one effect of the Arab Spring is that the world might develop a deeper understanding of the MENA region and its grievances, accepting that people there might not be so different from everyone else after all.

# Iraq and Its Neighbors

**Moderated by Athanasios Moulakis**

**President, AUIS**

**Fahrettin Sumer**

Assistant Professor of International Relations  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

**Edith Szanto**

Assistant Professor of Religion and History  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

**Karim Sadjadpour**

Senior Associate  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**Emile Hokayem**

Senior Fellow for Regional Security  
International Institute for Strategic Studies

A state's politics are often defined by the politics of the states surrounding them. This is particularly true for Iraq. While a partnership existed between Baghdad and Turkey in the years after the American-led invasion, it has soured in recent years due to differing viewpoints on the Syrian conflict and Ankara's new strategic relationship with Erbil. The Syrian revolution turned civil war has inflamed and reignited various tensions in Iraq, and created humanitarian and political challenges for the KRG. Iran is sometimes too close for comfort, and has a major hand in Baghdad and in Kurdish politics. Iraq's neighbors leave it little room to breath.

The second panel of the *Forum* focused on the changing relationships of Iraq and its immediate neighbors, particularly in light of the developments resulting from the Arab Spring. As regimes have fallen and new opposition groups have formed, some even rising to power, regional players have solidified past alliances and been forced to find new friends. Egypt and Iran, for example are closer now for the first time in decades due to the fall of the latter's longtime enemy, Hosni Mubarak. There are a multitude of new forces, like the plethora of groups in Syria which has complicated Turkish foreign policy, sometimes seen as supporting the groups against Assad, and at others times fighting the same players under the guise of combating radical Islamists. The Syria, Hezbollah, Iran alliance has certainly intensified, causing many in the international community to see a more prevalent Shi'i/Sunna dichotomy in the region, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Syrian opposition, and Turkey aligned on the other side. Panelists focused on these new dynamics, detailing Turkey's new more 'involved' foreign policy, the geopolitics of the Syrian conflict, Iran's role and potential for revolution, and the perspective of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

# Fahrettin Sumer

Assistant Professor of International Relations  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

“

***This economic expansion was only possible through a stable and peaceful neighborhood which meant increasing Turkish involvement in the Middle East.***

”

Fahrettin Sumer started the panel appropriately with Turkey, which has recently become a major player in the Middle East region after years of a somewhat isolationist foreign policy,

officially called the ‘Zero Problems’ policy and a more western, European focused outlook. Sumer presented the new foreign policy of the Turkish government, known as “strategic depth,” developed by current Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as seeking to expand the country’s export markets and hence expand Turkey’s geopolitical position in the region. This economic expansion was only possible through “a stable and peaceful neighborhood” which meant increasing Turkish involvement in the Middle East.

The Arab Spring – particularly Syria – presented challenges for this policy as events forced Turkey to abandon stable old allies and economic partners – for example Muammar Qaddafi in Libya with whom Turkey had tens of billions of dollars in trade and investment – and become involved in a way it had not before in the region.

A somewhat new yet stable alliance with Syria came to an end when Turkey sided with those in opposition to President Bashar al Assad. Sumer pointed out that this decision had serious impacts for Turkey’s economy because it pitted them against two of their biggest energy suppliers, Russia, from which sixty-six percent of Turkey’s natural gas comes, and Iran, which provides another twenty-one percent. Support of the Syrian opposition has also placed Turkey on the religious, ideological side of Saudi Arabia and Qatar – as fellow ‘Sunna’ states. Sumer concluded that Turkey finds itself in a bit of a bind today in its new role as an entrenched regional player in the Middle East.

# Edith Szanto

Assistant Professor of Religion and History  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Edith Szanto focused on the role of sectarianism in the Syrian conflict, drawing on her expertise on Twelver Shi’ism and the Saida Zeineb neighborhood of Damascus, where she conducted extensive fieldwork for her doctoral dissertation. Szanto argued that while sectarian identity – which she noted has existed in the Levant for centuries and in increasingly antagonistic ways in the late Ottoman Empire and throughout the mandate – has come to play a major role in the uprising, it is certainly not the only factor that divides and unites Syrians. The rural-urban divide is of extreme importance, as are class differences in explaining the shifting alliances and direction of the revolution. She argued that these shifting, fluid and diverse alliances make it difficult to predict an end or a solution to the current situation.

While sectarian identity existed before the mandate, the French “institutionalized the identities” in an unequal way, paving the way intentionally for division and discord. The rise of the Assad family, in fact, was due to this system, as marginalized minority groups made their way up through the ranks of the military academy which only the poor, uneducated population attended. Similarly, the Ba’ath party, which the Assad family used to come to power, was founded by such marginalized minorities on ideas of secularism and socialism. Hafez al Assad continued to employ sectarianism in his rule, promoting not only Alawites and Christians but also strategically

engaging members of the majority Sunni elite. Syria, Szanto argued is not black and white, or even black and white and four shades of gray – it is complicated and allegiances, alliances, and animosities do not merely follow the lines of a religious group or class. Moving to the present, Szanto touched on the very real geographic and class divisions, which are complicating the revolution. Rural peasants suffered a 2010 drought and moved en masse to cities, usually of political liberal secular elites. Assad’s economic reforms weakened the labor market when they needed more jobs to accommodate these new migrants and the youth bulge of the 1980s that plagues many Middle Eastern states.

Szanto mentioned that “sectarian divisions have made Syria receptive to foreign influence,” mainly from Iran and Saudi Arabia. The relative absence of Western powers has left a vacuum that more radical groups have filled, the opposition desperate for supplies and funding to fight the Assad regime. In Saida Zeineb, where Szanto lived, she noted that “people have turned against each other... even Iraqi Sunnis and Iraqi Shias have joined opposing sides in Syria.” Szanto concluded with a gloomy outlook for Syria in the future: if, referring to a common expression among Syrian analysts, “the regime will only fall once the capital rises,” Szanto predicts a long, drawn out conflict “given that the Damascene and upper middle classes have much to lose should they rise up, it is very difficult to say when and how and if that will happen.” Syria looks to be heading down the same road as Lebanon in the late 1970s and Iraq in 2005, a prolonged sectarian based civil war.



# Karim Sadjadpour

Senior Associate

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Karim Sadjadpour moved the discussion to another key Iraqi neighbor, focusing on three key aspects of Iranian policies: Iran's role in the Arab Spring, relations with the United States, and the potential for a revolution in Iran.

In today's Middle East, Sadjadpour finds three paradigms in power: the sectarian Islamic paradigm, such as in Saudi Arabia; the modern Islamic paradigm, like in Turkey, whose government emphasizes 'economic expediency' over religion or ideology; and third, the 'resistant' Islamic model of Iran, whose policy is solely based on "whatever is bad for the U.S or Israel is good for Iran." This also determines how Iran picks friends. Because they cannot simply "wave the Shi'i flag" (only ten percent of Muslims in the region are Shi'i, ninety percent of whom live in Iran), Iran allies with other such oppositional groups like Hamas.

Framing his point with Henry Kissinger's famous quote that "Iran has to decide whether it's a nation or a cause," Sadjadpour argued that Iran must move away from this revolutionary 'cause' based foreign policy to one based on national interests. As it is now, a relationship with the United States is impossible, as Obama found. While Obama made diplomacy with Iran a priority because he found that Iran was tied into almost every one of the US foreign policy challenges, he found it was hard to make

friends with an enemy who "needed the US as an adversary." Hence the U.S. had to shift from trying to "resolve the conflict" with Iran to "managing the conflict," "preventing the cold war from becoming a hot war." Sadjadpour predicted that Iranian-American relations will not improve until Iran can move from a 'cause' to a 'nation.'

Sadjadpour finished with an interesting historical explanation on the unlikelihood of revolution in Iran. Because of what happened after the revolution in 1979, Iranians "don't romanticize about the prospects of a revolution. The word revolution doesn't have positive connotations, it has negative connotations. It doesn't represent the future, it represents the past. It doesn't represent tolerance, it represents intolerance." Hence today Iranians "still haven't figured out what their common goal is" and "don't have the stomach" for what they see in Syria. So, while Sadjadpour was hopeful about the prospect of a revolution, he thought it unlikely and unrealistic due to past and present domestic and geopolitical dynamics, in a situation similar to Shimon Perez's description of the two state solution: "The good news is that there is light at the end of the tunnel and the bad news is that there is no tunnel."

# Emile Hokayem

Senior Fellow for Regional Security

International Institute for Strategic Studies

Emile Hokayem brought yet another angle into the panel: the internal politics and perspective of the Gulf states, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia. Hokayem argued that compared to the "Arab world" – from which the Gulf states see themselves as separate – the Gulf has been an "island of stability" but that this stability might not continue as it has in the past. Saudi Arabia faces particular geopolitical challenges after the fall of Saddam Hussein and the rise of Iranian power in the region.

Despite denying that it is part of the tumultuous Arab World, the Arab Spring showed that the Gulf is not all that far away geographically and politically, as uprising and conflict came south to the region, for example in Bahrain. These events showed not only that the Gulf was not immune from the events of the greater region, but also "highlighted contradictions in the coherence of those states" as they supported the right to protest and democracy in Syria but not their own Bahrain. Their inability or refusal to solve problems without the sword – crushing the uprising rather than engaging with protestors – means that grievances were not addressed and there is most likely remaining discontent.

Hokayem showed that other worries of the 'Arab world' are coming to the Gulf as well. After watching Iraq engage in three wars – Iran, Kuwait and then the U.S. invasion – Saudi Arabia now

fears its own war with Iran as well as legitimacy challenges to its regime. Saudi wealth does not translate into geopolitical power: "they have the instruments for power... they don't have the strategic relations that a country like Iran has in developing allies in the region." Hokayem argued that this Iranian-Saudi rivalry for regional superiority will continue to define Middle East geopolitics.

Iraq has great importance in this rivalry, which many Gulf leaders feel "has been lost to Iran," claimed Hokayem. In his final point, Hokayem described the Gulf States as having a "very hard time adapting" to post-Saddam Iraq since he was a known quantity, a containable threat, a sometimes ally and definitely not an enemy. He was, rather, the devil they knew. Moreover, on paper, Saddam was a Sunna Muslim, and most of the "the Gulf States have a sectarian outlook." Most importantly Saddam "checked Iran" and his downfall and the rise of Iran in Iraqi policy is a new threat to Saudi power. This is in turn why it is so important to the Saudi regime and other Gulf states that Assad falls, argued Hokayem. With the rise of a more friendly 'Sunna' government in Syria, it is possible that "some of the regional balance could be restored." Hokayem lastly suggested that Gulf states reach out to the Kurdistan Regional Government – as they are currently doing – as another counter to their perceived loss in Baghdad.

# Iraq: Internal Developments and External Relations

**Moderated by Qubad Talabani**  
Minister for Coordination and Follow Up  
Kurdistan Regional Government

Faleh Abdul Jabar  
Director  
Iraq Institute of Strategic Studies

Jane Kinninmont  
Senior Research Fellow  
Chatham House

Sadiq al Rikabi  
Member of Council of Representatives of Iraq

Christine van den Toorn  
Lecturer in History  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Alaa Makki  
Member of Council of Representatives of Iraq

JP Schnapper-Casteras  
Attorney  
Sidley Austin LLP

Since 2003, the international community has hotly debated Iraq's internal developments, evaluating how and whether institutions can evolve after decades of dictatorship and war. Iraq does not exist in a vacuum, and more recently, analysts and officials hoped that the Arab Spring might encourage further moves toward democracy in Iraq. Growing chaos in Syria, though, has dashed such hopes, reigniting old sectarian tensions. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari mentioned in his opening remarks that he had even hoped the reverse would be true, that Iraq could be a model for Arab Spring countries, but "unfortunately the internal difficulties, the political, the fall of the national political consensus, has not been helpful to give that example." Panelists addressed such 'difficulties' in their analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of Iraq's systems and institutions – democracy, foreign policy, federalism, local politics, education and law – and elaborated on broader themes of the *Forum* in terms of how the changing geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa region has impacted Iraq's internal and external affairs.

# Faleh Abdul Jabar

Director  
Iraq Institute of Strategic Studies

Faleh Abdul Jabar began the discussion with a pessimistic, albeit realistic, evaluation of the democratization process in Iraq. According to Democratization theory's three-pronged test, he argued, Iraq's prospects for democracy are not good. Iraq lacks a middle class, has a strong centralized state, and has not experienced the process of "industrialization, organization, secularization, liberalization." Another way academics evaluate democracy, Jabar explained, is through looking at the conditions under which it fails, when a state is "defeated" or engaged in an independence struggle. The latter will always take precedence over democracy. According to Jabar, Iraq is plagued with "almost all" of the factors that defeat democracy, and "none of the factors" that promote its growth and is therefore "not optimistic."

Moreover, historically speaking, there is little precedent for democracy in the Middle East. Only three types of governance existed in Iraq and the broader region before the Arab Spring. Authoritarianism, rule by one leader, one party and the military, was most common, followed by the 'sultanate' model of the Emirates and Kuwait. Last there was the "reformed" state of the 1970s, forced to reinvent themselves after the 1967 defeat.

Hence both history and academic theory deem Iraq and the Middle East disadvantaged in any pursuit of democracy.

Jabar argued that there were three more recent factors that paved the way for the Arab Spring and that affect the current situation in Iraq. First was the relative retreat of nationalism, which created space for democracy seized by the "new generation," whom Jabar finds essential to the movements. They are "not ideological" or hampered by "memories of colonial occupation" and are rather "modernist minded, highly educated" and use the internet. In Iraq, nationalist sentiment is still too strong after the American invasion, and the 'new generation' has yet to arise "but it will in the future." Lastly Jabar related the Arab Spring to the lack of market economy, particularly in Egypt where he saw "the names of the family of Sadat in so many companies as members of the board." While Iraq lacks a market economy, it is still in the midst of developing a young generation, like that which was out in Tahrir Square, to react to its absence.

Historic, theoretical, and current circumstances therefore seem to suggest that an Arab Spring-like event and democracy are far off for Iraq.

# Jane Kinninmont

Senior Research Fellow  
Chatham House

Jane Kinninmont shifted the discussion beyond Iraq's borders, arguing that the state must move toward a consensus-based foreign policy, which is difficult because there is little consensus in Iraqi politics today.

Historically speaking, Iraq's foreign policy could be seen as "aggressive," having engaged in an eight-year war with Iran and invading Kuwait only three years later. Sanctions in the 1990s, though, were "designed specifically to neutralize" this aggression.

Whether Iraq does or does not have a deliberate foreign policy, though, is somewhat irrelevant due to the "demonstration effect." "Iraq's impact on the region goes way beyond matters of deliberate foreign policy," Kinninmont argued, meaning what happens in the domestic sphere has an impact beyond its borders. For example, Dawa and the Iraq Communist Party, which started as local movements, have branched out regionally and had significant impacts in the Middle East and North Africa region. "Ideas from Iraq resonate just as ideas from Egypt have traditionally resonated throughout the Arab world," analogized Kinninmont.

Today, Iraq is affecting the Middle East and North Africa region in different and many times "destabilizing" ways and hence must build and

institutionalize a new foreign policy based on consensus.

Consensus in Iraq, though, can be difficult to achieve. Analyzing Iraq's foreign policy is impossible without "coming back to some of the basic issues of domestic national unity." Kinninmont first suggested that the ethno-sectarian demographics of the Foreign Ministry should reflect that of the country so they might create an unbiased, balanced policy. These actors must come together to form one, collective national policy rather than multiple stances toward other states and international issues, each supported by a different ethnic or religious group, province or region within the state. Iraq has had some foreign policy successes – meaning those with consensus: United Nations policies, the United States troop withdrawal, business ties with Kuwait, and relations with China and Asia.

More often than not though – as toward Syria, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar – Iraqi foreign policy is plagued with division, reflecting the internal divisions of state and society. While admitting that many states have differing opinions on foreign policy – for example British sentiments toward the war in Iraq – an absence of consensus "weakens the country's national bargaining power" and "encourages foreign countries to form alliances with specific political groups on the bases of their interest and the factional interest rather than the country's national interest."



# Sadiq al Rikabi

Member of Council of Representatives of Iraq

Sadiq al Rikabi moved the discussion to the panel's most controversial subject, but also one that many believe could be the best viable solution for Iraq's myriad problems, federalism. Al Rikabi criticized Iraq's three main groups – Sunna, Shi'i, and Kurds – in their interpretation and use of federalism over the past decade, and advocated for a more balanced 'across the board' implementation of the system. The "federal system," Rikabi noted, "theoretically could be a solution" for the decades-old problem of a lack of an "Iraqi nation," reminding the audience that the problems that plague Iraq today are those of the "nation-state dilemma" that have been with the country since its foundation in 1921.

To move forward, Iraqis must reevaluate their respective interpretations of federalism. Currently, the three main ethno-sectarian groups have wildly different and irreconcilable viewpoints on the system, as al Rikabi explained: Shii "retreated from federalism," Sunna "rejected it" and Kurds "exceeded" in its implementation. These contrasting interpretations must somehow be streamlined, negotiated, and aligned. Sunna must realize that there is no going back to the way things were, and that federalism does not mean the end of Iraq. Similarly the Kurds must come back from the 'independence edge' and realize that "their interest is in unified and federal Iraq." Federalism, al Rikabi argued, is "is a final destination for all the Iraqi component[s]."

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*The federal system theoretically could be a solution for the decades-old problem of a lack of an Iraqi nation.*

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# Christine van den Toorn

Lecturer in History

The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Christine van den Toorn picked up on themes of federalism and ethno-sectarian identity in her discussion of how Iraqi state politics are destabilizing societies at the local level, using the example of Bashiqa, a disputed territory in Ninewa with diverse identities, political loyalties, and oil.

In today's political context, explained van den Toorn, Bashiqa's dynamics – geography, economy, history, language, and religion – make the town the perfect disputed territory, "eligible for inclusion in both the KRG and Iraq."

Historically, Bashiqa has been part of the Iraqi state by way of Mosul; it has always been a sub-district to the provincial capital, located only thirty kilometers from the city center. All of its products were traded through Mosul, students attended university there, and the population is Arabic speaking. Many identify in varying degrees as 'Iraqi.' Bashiqa is also – possibly more than anything else – a Yezidi town, a religion traditionally, and to this day to an extent, related to Kurdish ethnicity. van den Toorn mentioned that many will say, "At one point all Kurds were Yezidis and all Yezidis were Kurds." Since 2003, Bashiqa has become more part of the Kurdistan Region than Mosul and Iraq due to security and economic factors. Peshmerga moved into Bashiqa during the American

invasion, providing security for minority groups all over the province of Ninewa. Since then and increasingly so in recent years, the KRG – mainly the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani – has established a large patronage network in the town, providing jobs for many local residents. Sinking Bashiqa further into the Iraqi politics was its inclusion in the KRG production-sharing contract with ExxonMobil, a deal that Baghdad has declared illegal and unconstitutional.

Despite the fact that it is a diverse Yezidi town in disputed territory neighboring Mosul, Bashiqa had experienced no violence until November 2012 when bombs went off just outside the city center. This was unfortunately repeated months later in February 2013. Many cite the deep local community ties, that locals put their fellow Bashiqis over state politics or a religious or ethnic group, for the historic lack of violence. van den Toorn quoted a local man in Bashiqa, "There are two things people in Bashiqa don't care about; religion and politics." But as Bashiqa becomes further drawn into the Iraqi state politics – identity, land disputes, energy – they will be tough to avoid.

van den Toorn concluded that while KDP and KRG security and economic networks will keep people safe and happy for now, the area must be closely monitored as ExxonMobil moves in and draws the attention of groups that oppose its presence.

# Alaa Makki

Member of Council of Representatives of Iraq

If nothing else, education is the key to Iraq's success in the future, argued Alaa Makki. In his practical talk, Makki focused on several initiatives he, as a member of the Education Committee in Parliament, has undertaken over the past several years as well as some of the challenges in rebuilding Iraq's education system. Picking up on themes of previous talks, Makki discussed the benefits of federalism in the education sector, arguing that "better achievements" could be made at the provincial council level.

There is a long history of focus on education in Iraq. Makki reminded the audience that the country was "first in the Middle East in the 1950s and 60s." Hence Iraqis "agree education is a must and it's important." That said, wars and sanctions in the 1980s and 1990s destroyed much of what was accomplished. Makki offered interesting statistics about the percentage of the Iraqi national budget allocated to the education sector reflecting this history:

1962 – 60%	1990 – 10%
1970 – 45%	2004 – 4.9%
1980 – 30%	

While the budget is currently at insufficient levels, Makki projected major growth – twenty percent by 2020 – that will allow them to initiate more reforms.

Over the past several years, Makki's office has focused on "students, teachers, educational environment, curriculum... and addressing illiteracy." Possibly the most significant work has been done on the curriculum. The Education Committee and the Ministry of Education have partnered with multiple international actors – the World Bank, UNICEF, USIP, UNESCO, UNIVECT, British Council, NDI, USAID, and the EU – to set higher standards and guidelines for curriculum with particular attention to reforming areas like national studies and minority rights. The partnership with USIP, for example, produced a "civic education" curriculum currently being implemented by training 17,000 Iraqi teachers in instruction of "democracy, freedom, human rights, justice, respect to the laws and constitution."

The education committee in Parliament has passed legislation to implement the 'National Education Strategy' and a literacy eradication program, to increase teacher and university professor salaries, and budget for scholarships and to nullify education laws from the previous regime. There are also challenges for the education sector. Makki admitted that there "will be corruption" in the distribution of the budget. Much of this corruption takes the form of stealing money from government contracts that should go to constructing new school buildings. Iraq is in dire need of new schools for all its new students. Makki suggested that the government build 600 schools per year to start to chip away at the needed 21,000 new buildings that are still needed to accommodate the current youth population.

# JP Schnapper-Casteras

Attorney  
Sidley Austin LLP

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*The lack of rule of law is a major impediment to foreign investment.*

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Moving from education to justice, AUIS board member and attorney JP Schnapper-Casteras advocated for a 'bottom-up' approach to improving the law in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, focusing on the role of lawyers and law students. He also mentioned the importance of reforming the private sector investment and contract laws to increase foreign investment and economic development.

If, as analysts, scholars, and officials agree, that a private sector is key to the economic, political and societal success of Iraq, then the state must reform its currently dissuasive, intimidating and inadequate contract and private investment laws, argued Schnapper-Casteras. The lack of rule of law is a major "impediment to foreign investment." Another issue is corruption, the lack of due diligence and compliance and transparency, which leaves US companies operating in the country subject to United States anti-corruption laws. "Individual companies in the U.S have paid fines up to 500-800 million dollars so it's a major concern," Schnapper-Casteras reported. Iraq also needs to become a full member of the World Trade Organization and abide by international trade laws. Lastly, Iraq must develop a civil society, another "prerequisite" for investment. Schnapper-Casteras gave the example of Burma, where investors are waiting to see how civil society grows, and Russia, where despite opportunity, lack of rights and civil society has led some to divest.

In light of the Arab Spring, and bringing up themes mentioned in Alaa Makki's talk, Schnapper-Casteras focused on the importance of cultivating top law students. They are the future of the legal system, as "five or ten years from now" they will be "the ones standing up in court and counseling many of you and writing the laws." Hence Iraq should be concerned with curriculum development, especially with regard to investment, trade, and contract law.



## Question and Answer

The panel was followed by a colorful and highly practical debate on the controversial topic of federalism raised by Sadiq al Rikabi. The exchange among al Rikabi, Barham Salih and Fuad Hussein, Chief of Diwan of the Presidency of the KRG, focused on whether it was Dawa party (to which al Rikabi belongs) policy to promote federalism. By acknowledging this, al Rikabi could also imply that it could be the policy of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki. The debate was considered important and provocative because currently most Iraq scholars and analysts would argue that Dawa as well as al Maliki's Dowla al Qanun or 'State of Law' party have actively combated federalism, and built up a strong central government, marginalizing both Kurdish and Arab Sunna groups whereas most cite it as the only potential solution for Iraq. Al Rikabi responded that there is a "discussion in the Party," referring to Dawa, about whether "they should move forward with federalism" and that questions remained of how exactly it would look. He did clearly argue that it could be a solution for Iraq.





# The Kurdish Question

**Moderated by Henri Barkey**  
Chair, Department of International Relations  
Lehigh University

**Kamaran Karadaghi**

Op-ed contributor, *Al Hayat*

Former advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani

**Maria Fantappie**

Iraq Analyst

International Crisis Group

**Ruşen Çakır**

Journalist and author on Turkish and Kurdish affairs

**Fuad Hussein**

Chief of Diwan of the Presidency

Kurdistan Regional Government

The Kurdish Question is one that almost every state in the Middle East must entertain. Significant populations of Kurds inhabit Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Coming to answer this question though has proved difficult, as Kurds frequently have conflicting interests among themselves and with the states in which they live. While frequent participants in government and society, Kurds have consistently struggled politically, militarily, and economically for more rights, more autonomy, and even independence. Among Kurds, there remains much cultural unity but also many political divisions. The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring created new opportunities and challenges for answering the Kurdish Question. Iraqi Kurds enjoy a great deal of political and social autonomy but are also economically dependent on Baghdad, while Syrian Kurds are struggling for something similar in the situation to their east. This 'rise of the Kurds' has forced Turkey to address its own Kurdish question, and today Kurds there enjoy more cultural rights and the government is engaged in talks with the PKK. There is really not one Kurdish Question, but a variety of them, each associated with a different state or even party and movement. Panelists offered both perspectives on individual Kurdish struggles but also the situation of the Kurds overall.

# Kamran Karadaghi

Op-ed contributor, Al Hayat

Former advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani

Kamran Karadaghi – a true insider of Iraqi and Kurdish affairs – drew from his vast knowledge as a longtime journalist and friend and advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to issue both words of praise and warning to Iraqi Kurds: “We have achieved a lot and we can lose a lot if we don’t manage our affairs.”

By ‘manage our affairs,’ Karadaghi first discussed what the Kurds should not do, advocating for a somewhat isolationist foreign policy for the Iraqi Kurdish leadership toward other countries with Kurdish populations. While it is “important to work together” he suggested that Iraqi Kurdistan should not seek to extend its powers or follow expansionist or interventionist goals, questioning the viability of whether “they can manage a kind of strategic national strategy among all the Kurdish groups.” Alluding to the volatility of the situation in Turkey and Syria, the Kurdish leadership should instead act “very carefully in order not to antagonize any Kurdish group” and not “meddle with each others’ affairs.” Iraqi Kurdistan would be most useful as a “model” for “the other parts of Kurdistan.”

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*We have achieved a lot and we can lose a lot if we don’t manage our affairs.*”

Moving to what the KRG should do, Karadaghi argued that instead of looking north, east and west, Iraqi Kurds should look south to Baghdad, “[re]define their interests, stay within Iraq, develop relations with Baghdad, and have some influence in Baghdad.”

# Maria Fantappie

Iraq Analyst

International Crisis Group

Whereas Karadaghi spoke about the importance of preservation of the Iraqi Kurds through non-intervention, Maria Fantappie focused on how the Syrian Kurds can achieve “recognition of the Kurdish rights within a state.” By Kurdish rights, she was referring to “political rights” such as “governance and cultural rights.”

To begin, Fantappie picked up on Karadaghi’s main argument. While Syrian Kurds should learn from their Iraqi counterparts “by seeing the way Iraqi Kurds arrived to build capacity, to manage and govern themselves,” their path will be unique and different in terms of how they “ask for autonomy” from the Syrian government. Throughout her talk, Fantappie emphasized the need to “preserve the particularity and characteristics of each Kurdish path within each respected state.” The role for Iraq and Turkey’s Kurds is to encourage Syrian Kurds to “decide their future by themselves” rather than become engaged in “an intra-Kurdish competition over the Syrian Kurdish land.”

Second, as other panelists advised the Kurds of Iraq to do in Baghdad, Syrian Kurds should “invest in the future of Damascus... because investing into the future of Damascus will be investing in the future of Qamishli.” They should actively take interest in the Syrian state, as their struggle is that of all Syrians, the “struggle

for citizenship.” Here they can learn from the contentious relationship between Baghdad and the Kurds and avoid it. Geographically speaking, the Kurds of Syria can also learn from the deadlock of the disputed territories of Iraq when they consider how to handle their non-contiguous territory. Furthermore, Kurds should not consider their Kurdish identity as opposed to their Syrian identity, or “fall in the mistake of defining and consolidating their Kurdish identity” against another Arab identity. Fantappie gave the

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*[There is a] need to preserve the particularity and characteristics of each Kurdish path within each respected state.*”

example of Syrian Kurdish youth who “want to be recognized in their ethnic identity of Kurds but they want the future to be in Syria.” Lastly, she argued, these youth must be incorporated into the political system.

# Ruşen Çakır

Journalist and author on Turkish and Kurdish affairs

Ruşen Çakır shifted to a controversial topic—the PKK—arguing that questions of how to deal with the Kurds and how to deal with the PKK are intertwined, “We can’t separate one from the other.” For Turkey, these are the “mother of all

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*The questions of how to deal with the Kurds and how to deal with the PKK are intertwined... For Turkey, these are the mother of all questions...*

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questions” because without solving both the state “can’t be a regional power” or a “stable republic.” Çakır focused on how current and past peace talks have been consistently derailed by their own exclusivity, as well as domestic and foreign forces.

Talks always occur between Abdullah Ocalan, head of the PKK, and various Turkish intelligence chiefs, leaving out “main opposition parties, civil society organizations and intellectuals” who could strengthen the talks, and make them “more transparent.” Turkish public opinion is usually negative to such secret negotiations. The current initiative, which arose due to the Kurdish revival in Iraq and Syria, particularly the emergence of the PYD (the Syrian branch of the PKK), Çakır argued, is being derailed by “foreign forces” who want Turkey to be weakened and distracted by the Kurdish and PKK problem. Çakır, though, despite these attempts, is “very optimistic” and thinks a resolution is “realistic.”

Çakır noted the irony behind the lack of development of the position of Kurds in Turkey: there has been “no relative growth or progress among Kurds in Turkey,” considering their government’s new relationship with the Kurds of Iraq, that they have the highest population of Kurds, and are closest to Europe.

# Fuad Hussein

Chief of Diwan of the Presidency  
Kurdistan Regional Government

Fuad Hussein challenged some of what earlier panelists argued, making a case for greater unity among Kurds of various countries; “the Kurdish movement” and the “Kurdistan Region” cannot be separated, he claimed. For example, while the KRG should have a good relationship with Turkey, Iran and Syria it “will never be at the expense of the Kurds in Iran, Turkey, and Syria.”

This is possible because the Kurds have finally overcome their geography, Hussein argued, touching on the issue of geography and borders, a theme raised throughout several panels. While borders still exist, they do not matter as much as in the past, and today there is more “geographic interaction, political interaction, ideological interaction, but also cultural interaction.” Overcoming geography though does not mean interference in others’ affairs. As Kamaran Karadaghi and Maria Fantappie suggested, Hussein claimed the KRG was only giving advice to the Syrian Kurds from afar: “don’t fight each other” as Iraqi Kurds did in the 1990s; “protect yourself and defend your village and city;” and do not “create any problems with the Arabs... or with the Christians.” Diplomacy is a powerful weapon, which Hussein noted brought the KRG from a near military confrontation with Turkey years ago to a strong friendship based on economics, oil, and gas.

In terms of the Kurds of Iraq, challenging to an extent the blanket statement others made that federalism is the solution for Iraq Hussein said that it “will not solve all of the problems” and will lead to democracy only if there is a democratic elite “which in Iraq is weak” and disorganized. Similarly, the Kurds will be committed to the constitution only “if the others are committed. But if the others will violate the principles of the constitutions then it is not our choice, it is their choice.”

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*(Federalism) will not solve all the problems and will lead to democracy only if there is a democratic elite which in Iraq is weak and disorganized.*

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## Question and Answer

During the question and answer session, an exchange between Sadiq al Rikabi, member of Iraqi Parliament, and Fuad Hussein highlighted some of the most pressing and contentious political issues of the day in Iraq, and the shifting alliances among various groups in Iraq and the KRG behind them. Al Rikabi questioned the Kurdish support for the current Sunna based protest movement that he claimed sought to overthrow the Iraqi government. Hussein responded with both historic and legal justification for the support. The Kurdish leadership supports the constitutional right of protestors to gather and protest, started Hussein, “If it is in the framework of the constitution then ok, but if it is outside then of course we don’t agree.” He then related the current Sunna struggle to the Kurdish movement, important because it is traditionally the Kurds and Shi’i that are aligned by comparable marginalization. The protests “are about their [Sunna] identity,

partnership in Baghdad, it’s about the whole structure of Iraq... When they have been ignored and marginalized, of course they demonstrate.” Hussein admitted that there are “some radicals among them” but that “in general the system marginalized the Sunni group” just as “the system tries to marginalize the Kurds.” He blamed this situation on the lack of federalism by the Shi’i led government, “the whole, dominant ideology in Baghdad is centralism,” and made direct political appeal to al Rikabi: “We [Kurds] will be glad if federalism becomes an important part of the Dawa Party because that will help you, us, and the Sunnis.”

Another interesting focus of the question and answer session was on geography and borders, a topic addressed in different panels. In his questioning of Fuad Hussein’s perspective that Kurds have overcome geography, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari seemed to suggest the opposite, that Kurds are still defined by borders and the map. Maria Fantappie seconded Zebari’s point, arguing that “the interest of the Kurdish strategy in the Middle East keeping borders... otherwise it will disrupt the international borders and it will create so many enemies.” New borders, however, should not be drawn in Iraq, rather she argued, as earlier panelists have proposed, the “solution... lies in Baghdad with truly power sharing in Baghdad.”



# The Oil Dimension

**Moderated by Shwan Zulal**  
Political Analyst and Energy Consultant

**Rachel Bronson**  
Vice President, Studies  
Chicago Council on Global Affairs

**Giacomo Luciani**  
Scientific Director  
Masters in International Energy at Sciences-Po

**Ernst Schennen**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Forstbetrieb Buckow

**Pars Kutay**  
Head of Government Relations  
Genel Energy

**Bilal Wahab**  
Lecturer of International Relations  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Oil might be the most important factor in the history of how modern states, and the Middle East as a region, have developed and changed over time. It continues to be deterministic to this day in terms of a state's domestic affairs as well as regional and international geopolitics. This panel explored the major changes in global and regional energy markets as well as the domestic issues facing 'petro-states.' Whether it is an energy poor nation deciding where to import its oil and gas, or a petro-state trying to manage resources and maintain stability, energy issues define a country's foreign and domestic policy. New developments color the global market; for example, the rise of the United States as an energy exporter, and the rise of China as a net importer. Energy issues are particularly relevant and controversial in Iraq, not only due to its 'petro-state' status but also due to the debate surrounding distribution of oil revenue and the quasi-independent nature of the Kurdistan Regional Government's oil policy. The energy sector could make or break the state of Iraq and the KRG, either keeping everyone happy with equal distribution of wealth, or creating divisions when accusations of inequity challenge the state's viability. Panelists approached the 'Oil Dimension' from a variety of angles, taking us around the world from North America to Europe to Latin America and then to the heart of the geopolitics of oil, the Middle East.



# Rachel Bronson

Vice President, Studies  
Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Rachel Bronson kicked off the panel with a fascinating look at what is behind the growing energy independence of North America and what it will mean to regional players, the global market, and United States foreign policy.

The ‘two big stories’ of North American energy independence are about gas and Canada. New technologies like horizontal drilling and fracking have allowed the U.S. to locate and extract shale gas to the point that by 2035 it will be the world’s leading producer, overtaking Russia and cutting its own imports nearly in half from sixty percent to just over thirty. Canada is a major actor because it is the largest supplier of U.S. energy, providing a third of all imports. Slightly over half of the U.S. energy comes from the western hemisphere; another third comes from Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Mexico combined. The U.S. receives as much oil from Africa as it does from the MENA region. So in terms of the Middle East, while the “Persian Gulf is clearly important for us,” Bronson argued that due to the diversified market, “it is one of the pieces, not even the biggest piece, of where are we getting our energy.”

Bronson then moved to the global implications of this energy shift. First, growing U.S. independence will turn the Middle East’s export focus east. Currently, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait send

sixty percent of oil exports to Asia, and the UAE over fifty percent. Iraq’s forty percent will double by 2035.

American foreign policy could also take new directions. The U.S. could become more isolationist, no longer needing to depend on the MENA region’s oil resources, or become more engaged, “more supportive of certain activities here [in the Middle East]... because we are not as worried that if we do something, all of a sudden two million barrels will come off the market.” Bronson predicted the latter, because the US has “remaining strategic interest” in the geopolitics of the region, for example in oil going to Asia.

Bronson concluded that the United States must remain engaged in the world, because its success “depends on an open market economy which means we will care a lot about the stability of energy and energy roots regardless of where we are getting it from.”



***The United states could become more isolationist, no longer needing to depend on the MENA region’s oil resources.***



# Giacomo Luciani

Scientific Director  
Masters in International Energy at Sciences-Po



***While some argue that politics is definitive and shapes the energy market, so does oil shape international geopolitical alliances and competition.***



The panel’s next speaker, Giacomo Luciani, began by encouraging development students to engage in the energy sector: “a knowledge based industry... not just a resource based industry.” Therefore, leaders should turn “oil revenue to human capital through education.”

Luciani moved the discussion from North America to Europe, arguing that the energy sector

is moving toward a regionalization, “greater polarization of international trade and economic relations,” and “away from a paradigm of simple globalization.” For example, because the product is difficult to transport, three “macro-regional gas markets” have developed: Europe and North Africa, North America, and Asia. Other markets, Luciani argued, are following this trend. While oil to this point has been truly a “global commodity” because of the ease of its transport, it too will break down into these three quasi-separate markets. First, as Rachel Bronson mentioned, the U.S. is on its way to greater energy independence. Second, and “key” to Luciani in this new regionalization, is “a multifaceted, a multilayered interdependency of Asia and the Gulf” which is becoming “more and more intense” because Asia is “more open” to importing petroleum products from the Gulf region. Lastly, Europe’s large scale energy reduction campaign will be at the expense of international markets. “The Gulf, Russian, Central Asian, and North African crude... will face increasing difficulties with the European market.”

The regionalization of energy markets could lead to a similar dynamic in political and economic affairs as differentiation in “prices, trading conditions, [and] access to oil resources” lead to “polarization of economic and political ties.” So while some argue that politics is definitive and shapes the energy market, so does oil shape international geopolitical alliances and competition.



# Ernst Schennen

Chief Executive Officer  
Forstbetrieb Buckow

Ernest Schennen shifted the focus of the discussion from the global to the domestic with a bleak glimpse at the fate of Latin American ‘petro-states’ plagued by the ‘Dutch Disease’ or the ‘Oil Curse.’ Venezuela, Mexico, and Columbia are the most important oil producing states in that region, but their oil wealth – especially of the first two – has been wasted by “incompetent politicians, unprofessional managers responsible for mismanagement on all levels bureaucracy, and corruption” leaving half of their populations living in poverty.

In Venezuela, ninety percent of the government revenue comes from oil and there is no industry or agricultural sector. The population thinks the government should provide everything: “We are rich now, so give us subsidies wherever, whenever,” as Schennen put it. He continued, “for an official to be re-elected he or she must promise to maintain subsidies.” Unlike Venezuela, Mexico did not suffer from Dutch Disease because duty free trade with the United States supported local industry. However due to a corrupt, ineffective state oil company and government funds spent on social welfare programs at the expense of developing production sites and exploration, forty percent of Mexico’s oil revenue is in jeopardy. “There are new fields that are as big as Saudi Arabia’s oil fields” but the Mexican government “had no money to invest in those fields because

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***Venezuela, Mexico, and Columbia are the most important oil producing states in the region, but their oil wealth... has been wasted... leaving half of their populations living poverty.***

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oil revenues are spent in providing social need expenditures.” When funds are directed to the oil sector, Pemex, the state oil company, becomes another impediment toward development, as it is “not professional, all from politics” and corrupt at every level. It manages every aspect of the industry, “from exploration to production to transportation to export” in a “vague” manner. Offering a telling statistic, Schennen noted that Pemex has the lowest performance among sixty international oil companies.

The one light in the dark is Columbia, which, despite its negative reputation is actually “booming” and has avoided the fate of most petro-states. In contrast to Pemex, Columbia’s state oil company, Ecopetrol, “is in professional hands,” for example its “revenues are taxed in a normal way and not sucked by politics.”

# Pars Kutay

Head of Government Relations  
Genel Energy

Pars Kutay brought the focus to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. His company, Genel Energy, was one of the first oil companies operating in the Kurdistan Region in 2002 and today it is one of the largest. Kutay focused on the promise of the Kurdistan Region energy sector and three trends that define the industry: geopolitics, oil and gas prices, and technology.

Kutay detailed the allure of the oil and gas sector in the KRG, where the minimal risk and great deal of reward has made it “the exploration capital of the world oil industry.” Based on the success of the last five years, the Kurdistan Region could become “a significant oil contributor to the global oil supplies on its own right,” predicted Kutay.

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***While oil and gas is key to realizing the expectations that many have for the region, that energy sector is by no means stable, and will depend on overall political stability in Iraq.***

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Kutay cited a variety of favorable dynamics such as security and stability, rule of law including sanctity of contract, minimum government interference, large oil reserves, and projects to increase oil production exponentially over the next ten years.

That said, while Kurdistan has come a long way, it has a long way to go to reach “economic stability.” And while “oil and gas is key to realizing the expectations that many have for the Region,” that energy sector is by no means stable, and will depend on overall political stability in Iraq, particularly between Erbil and Baghdad.

Kutay framed the remainder of his talk with the three factors he claimed shape the industry: geopolitics, oil and gas prices, and technology. Oil prices are driven by politics, which leads to new technological development. For example, “the rise of OPEC more than tripled the price of oil and made the North Sea and Alaska commercial. Industry then created technology that allow them to be exploited.”

Kutay ended with a series of predictions: geopolitically speaking, OPEC will remain in charge of the oil market, Russia will continue to dominate gas, North America will become a net exporting region, and China’s ties and relations will grow with the Middle East. Oil and gas prices will remain low, even though demands will rise as “more enjoy a middle class lifestyle” because “there is plenty of oil in the world in many places” and technology continues to improve.

# Bilal Wahab

Lecturer of International Relations

The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

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*Federalism could be a cure for the Dutch Disease currently plaguing the KRG and Iraq...The two governments in Erbil and Baghdad can act as competitive checks on each other to provide accountability.*

”

Bilal Wahab brought together themes from the previous two speakers and previous panels, in arguing that federalism could be a cure for the Dutch Disease currently plaguing the KRG and Iraq.

Wahab suggested that the two governments in Erbil and Baghdad can act as competitive checks on each other to provide accountability. These

checks and balances, are “not like the federalist papers,” with three branches, explained Wahab, as the executive branch in both Baghdad and Erbil controls everything. Rather, this system of checks and balances is a “competition between elements,” ‘elements’ being the two executives in Erbil and Baghdad, a ‘competitive federalism.’ While the individual players (here, governments) might not support accountability because each benefits from the lack thereof – “a completely KRG oil policy will not be accountable... the same is true for Baghdad” they will hold each other accountable.

This mutual accountability will occur through “more linkages.” For example, Wahab suggested that “the KRG signs the contract, but Baghdad cashes the checks.” That scenario “would be a leverage from Baghdad on the KRG. On the other hand, “if the KRG is making decisions on some of the federal policies and contracts that are signed by Baghdad, that is a leverage that the KRG has over Baghdad.” Here, concluded Wahab, we see “federalism as a cure to the resource curse.”

Hopefully, Wahab said colorfully, this will prevent a return to camels after the KRG has moved to Cadillacs, referring to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia’s fear of his Kingdom’s own future: “In one generation, we have gone from riding camels to riding Cadillacs. The way we are wasting money, I fear the next generation will be riding camels again.”

## Question and Answer

The question and answer session focused on the Kurdistan Region’s oil sector. Bilal Wahab expanded on his argument on how federalism might be a solution to the oil curse, encouraging Baghdad and Erbil to embrace rather than push each other away. This is a point that was made throughout the panel and the Forum: that the KRG’s long term economic viability depends on an improved relationship with Baghdad, as well as a stable Iraqi state. Federalism is the cure for the oil curse but also for Iraq. “The heart of federalism in Iraq is this issue of revenue

sharing,” argued Wahab, but instead, Baghdad has pushed KRG toward “revenue independence.” For example, the Iraqi government made a mistake in denying Kurds the right to sign contracts. Instead, Baghdad should allow this, thereby creating more checks and linkages: “You sign the contract; I sign the contract. I cash the money; I give it to you...You hold me accountable; I hold you accountable,” suggested Wahab.

Baghdad has pushed the KRG into the corner, which, as Wahab explained through an American saying, only makes things worse: “When pushed into the corner, a cat becomes a tiger” and hence Iraqi policy made the “Kurdish cat become a KRG tiger.” Whereas cats sign contracts, tigers build pipelines, said Wahab, referring to the current pipeline the KRG is building to Turkey.

The KRG’s next big challenge, according to Pars Kutay, is the export issue. That said Kutay also mentioned that continued development of the oil sector will depend on a positive and stable relationship with Baghdad. The pipeline will only exacerbate tensions between the two. Maybe this is an area where Wahab’s federalism of competitive executive checks and balances could play a role.

# Women Leaders Participate in Rebuilding Nations

**Moderated by Jill Derby**  
Member of the National Advisory Committee  
on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI)

**Marion Abboud**

Coordinator, Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

**Gameela Ismail**

Member of Steering Committee  
Al Dostour Party, Egypt

**Narmin Othman Hassan**

Former Iraqi Minister of Human Rights

Notable shifts in gender roles and relations are taking place as a result of the region's drastic geopolitical changes. An important question that arises is to what extent the social, political, and economic shifts endanger and/or strengthen the region's women's rights and gender equality movements? On the one hand, a number of trends in the region highlight valid concerns for women's status and rights, including the rise of political Islam, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, instability and violence, and the increased exclusion of women from decision-making processes. Yet the widespread grass-roots social movements in the region have also created new spaces and opportunities for women to play active, public roles in their communities. As a result, recent regional developments have empowered a new generation of women leaders. This roundtable convenes three such women leaders who share their insight on women's roles, status and rights in the region. Coming from the sectors of international development, civil society and government, each panelist offers a unique perspective on gender in the Middle East.



## Marion Abboud

Coordinator, Institute of Regional  
and International Studies (IRIS)  
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

*“The field of gender development in the Middle East is evolving to better address current needs and realities on the ground...”*

Drawing from her own experience implementing women's leadership programs in the Middle East, Marion Abboud described the positive impact of the Arab Spring on gender development work. Regional developments have prompted NGOs, governments, and foreign aid organizations to rethink their gender programming strategies and priorities so that they better reflect the existing needs and realities on the ground. As a result, Abboud posited that gender development projects are an increasingly valuable source of support for women leaders who are, despite significant challenges, actively participating in development and rebuilding their communities and nations.

Abboud presented the ALWANE program (Active Leaders for Women's Advancement in the Near East) as one case study of a successful 'post-Arab Spring' gender program. ALWANE is a women's leadership program designed and coordinated by the international NGO Women's Campaign International (WCI), and implemented by local civil society organizations in 17 countries across the MENA region. The program's key activities embody the best practices that are increasingly applied to gender development programs following the Arab Spring. These include:

1. Building capacities of emerging and established women leaders
2. Engaging youth
3. Engaging men
4. Innovative usage of information and communication technology (ICT)

Abboud concluded that the field of gender development in the Middle East is evolving to better address current needs and realities on the ground. Programs no longer have to prove that gender inequalities exist, nor that these inequalities are a detriment to society as a whole. There is now a widespread awareness among policy leaders, civil society, and communities at large, of the importance of women's empowerment. As a result, programs can now shift their focus to building the capacity of those in the region who are already working hard to empower women in order to develop and transform their societies as a whole.

## Gameela Ismail

Member of Steering Committee  
Al Dostour Party, Egypt

*“It is important to explore a landscape of promising new leaders in the new generations of women in Egypt, and across the Arab world at large.”*

Civil society leader and activist Gameela Ismail agreed with Abboud's point that that one must move beyond speaking about gender inequalities; it is an established fact that they exist. Instead, she argued that it is important to explore a landscape of “promising new leaders in the new generations of women in Egypt,” and across the Arab world at large.

To truly grasp the current gender situation in the region, Ismail emphasized the importance of distinguishing between traditional and non-traditional measurements of women's empowerment and women's rights. Traditional measurements are statistics which measure women's representations as numbers and percentages. For example, to account for political participation one would measure how many seats they have in parliament, how many ministerial

positions they have, or how many women judges are in criminal court. Non-traditional measurements are those which look at women's social participation and engagement, not simply in terms of percentages but in terms of what kind of work they are doing, and how they are doing it. Though more difficult to measure, an increase in women's social engagement and participation has been apparent since the start of the Egyptian revolution.

Ismail noted that this distinction is important as it affects how we understand the revolution's impact on women. If one looks solely at traditional statistics, one may conclude that the Arab Spring was a defeat for women. If one also considers women's participation in the non-traditional sense (“in the field, on the streets”), women will seem “extremely victorious.” Women now play critical roles as activists, politicians, media professionals, field doctors, etc., and are the leaders and founders of social and political movements, parties, and organizations that are founded and led by women.

In light of this, Ismail believes the revolutions in the region have empowered women: “They don't want to negotiate; they don't want to lose their rights.” Although women have not yet fully accessed the traditional roles of leadership, she believes that this grass roots empowerment is the first step, and that “in a few years, you will find (women) in traditional and classical institutions like the parliament and the judiciary... they are going to force themselves into (these positions)... with their own strength” rather than through



## Narmin Othman Hassan

Former Iraqi Minister of Human Rights

***“New laws and quotas are only the first step, and...progress cannot be sustained without proper enforcement, implementation, and an overall shift in cultural attitudes.”***

Narmin Othman focused on the case of women in Iraqi Kurdistan to explore the current opportunities and threats to women's rights and empowerment in the region. Othman considers the KRG to be an example for the region in terms of the policy efforts towards promoting gender equality. During the Anfal Campaign, women suffered a disproportionate burden, making up the majority of the casualties. After 1991, the government made an effort to improve women's social rights and protections. For example, they now have a quota of 30% women in government, and a personal status law is in place to protect women from a variety of harmful cultural practices such as circumcision and polygamy. Nonetheless, Othman cautioned that new laws and quotas are only the first step, and that

progress cannot be sustained without proper enforcement, implementation, and an overall shift in cultural attitudes. “Traditionally speaking,” she explained, “(women) are advanced – they are in decision making positions, they enjoy their basic freedoms, they show confidence.” Nonetheless, she noted that there continue to be serious violations against women's rights. For example, though the personal status law prevents circumcision, the lack of awareness and weak enforcement of the law results in a continuation of this practice. She also cites the case of honor killings which, though banned by law, continue to be committed by perpetrators who circumvent the law simply by pressuring the women to commit suicide.

To address this gap between the law and implementation, Othman offered several recommendations moving forward:

1. Governments need to create strategic plans for gender that is all inclusive, engaging both men and women in the process, and concerning all ministries, civil society, and the three powers of government.
2. There needs to be more academic research on gender. In the KRG, little research has been done to explore gender issues. As a result, accurate gender statistics are difficult to find.
3. Efforts to address gender concerns in government cannot be concentrated in the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Othman recommended that gender issues also be addressed through parliament, where the legal decisions are also made.



# Conclusion

**Moderated by Hoshyar Zebari**  
Foreign Minister of Iraq

**Max Rodenbeck**  
Chief Middle East Correspondent  
*The Economist*

**Zalmay Khalilzad**  
President  
Gryphon Partners

**Henri Barkey**  
Chair, Department of International Relations  
Lehigh University

**Rachel Bronson**  
Vice President, Studies  
Chicago Council on Global Affairs

**Sir Basil Markesinis**  
Jamil Regents Chair  
University of Texas at Austin

During the concluding panel of the *Sulaimani Forum*, panelists focused on key regional and global takeaways from the two days of discussion. At a foundational level, distinguished speakers emphasized the importance of acknowledging that the period of change brought on by the Arab Spring was only in the beginning stages. The movements and revolutions are the start of a process of transformation that will continue for years if not decades, most argued. This transformation will have major impacts on the world, whose leaders and foreign ministries currently twist and turn, trying to develop policies to deal with new leaders and newly empowered populations. Whether they will succeed – just as the fate of the movements – is yet to be seen.



# Max Rodenbeck

Chief Middle East Correspondent  
The Economist

Max Rodenbeck began by reiterating one of the central arguments of the *Sulaimani Forum*: that the Arab Spring has just begun. He proposed that the movements “perhaps represent a cycle of change” similar to that which started with independence struggles of the 1930s and 40s and extended to the post-1967 revolutions and coups. Change happens over decades, not years, he reminded the audience and therefore we have to wait decades for this ‘cycle’ to be completed. For example whereas the “model of state” has changed the “model of state monopoly over oil hasn’t changed” and this monopoly “prevents the public from having any influence on the economic policy.”

Rodenbeck pointed out key global and regional geopolitical dynamics mentioned during the *Forum* as key to watch in the future. First, in terms of the world’s relationship with the MENA region, the shift East – the disengagement of the West and the engagement of China and other countries

of Asia – is most consequential. Second will be Iran’s relationship with the West. Regionally, the ouster of dictators could mean that alliances will now be defined by mutual interest rather than “personalities and ego.” That said ethno-sectarian dynamics like the Sunna/Shi’i struggle will play a major role in defining relationships. Within states, minorities will continue to struggle for a legitimate place in society and government that they have not enjoyed “since Ottoman times.” Lastly, borders will continue to be an issue as nations fight over land – like Syria and Lebanon – and groups within states – such as the Kurds – fight over federal, regional, and provincial powers and boundaries.



# Zalmay Khalilzad

President  
Gryphon Partners

Zalmay Khalilzad approached geopolitics from two perspectives: how the international players will shape the Middle East and how the geopolitics of the MENA region could shape the world.

While Rodenbeck and others mentioned United States disengagement, Khalilzad, like Rachel Bronson earlier, surmised that the United States might bounce back from the back-seat role, and advocated for an expanded American role in the region. While the United States’ economic crisis recently hindered their ability to act in the world, future energy independence and Americans’ “pragmatic” natures as “problem solvers” would help them rebound. The U.S. will now have to compete with China, though, and should balance this by creating new free market opportunities with Europe.

Khalilzad argued that the geopolitics of the Middle East will be a driver of international politics, playing “an important role in the evolution of system.” The direction the states of the Arab Spring choose to take, “monopolization of power, centralization, lack of tolerance” or “more openness, checks and balances, federalism” will be definitive in terms of global geopolitics. The rise of new powers, such as Turkey and Iran, and whether Iran becomes a nuclear power, and how Saudi Arabia will respond will also affect

the global community because if the Middle East fragments, then “you could get a divided world.”

Khalilzad ended with a warning for the world: if the problems of the Middle East drag on and the region becomes polarized, it could become like “the old Europe, where its problems were the problems of the world.”

“  
***The direction the states of the Arab Spring choose to take, monopolization of power, centralization, lack of tolerance or more openness, checks and balances, federalism will be definitive in terms of global geopolitics.***  
”

# Henri Barkey

Chair, Department of International Relations  
Lehigh University

Henri Barkey agreed with other panelists about the early stages of the Arab Spring, quoting Henry Kissinger on the French Revolution, that it was “too early to tell” the nature of the impacts nearly one hundred years after it occurred.

That said, Barkey offered more definitive conclusions than other panelists were willing to make, arguing that the ‘ancient regime’ of the Middle East – the centralized state – “will not be reconstituted because it is incapable of resolving the problems that have been put forward now by the Arab spring.” Absent this centralized state, Barkey argued that the solution moving forward is localism, decentralized power: “local solutions to problems, whether it is education, whether it is sanitation, whether it is law policing.” The solution could be federalism or “some kind of a hybrid system.” This does not mean the end of the nation-state: “Iran and Iraq might be states” but it does mean somewhat of a facelift. “They are not going to look the same,” Barkey argued.

Barkey also made suggestions about specific states, seeing stability in Egypt but not in Syria. In Egypt he described the state as a pyramid that is right side up, supported by the strength of the bureaucracy. In Syria, the pyramid is upside down, teetering on Bashar al Assad’s head, with ethnic and sectarian divisions to

further unbalance it. Syria, however, argued Barkey, is not nearly as relevant as Iraq, which lies on a ethno-nationalist ‘earthquake’ fault line, the “Kurdish-Arab, Kurdish-Turkish, Kurdish-Persian” line.

Picking up on a theme raised throughout the *Forum*, Barkey argued, “borders are going to become meaningless” as smuggling and social, cultural ties ignore where they lay. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari picked up on this point, agreeing that “there have to be bridges for communication, for cultural exchange, for movements of good and people” but that in his experience as foreign minister, “in this part of the world, borders are a sensitive issue related to sovereignty, independence, defense.” So in the Middle East – unlike Europe – borders still matter, said Zebari, pointing out current cases with Kuwait, Iran, and Syria.

“*The ‘ancient regime’ of the Middle East – the centralized state – will not be reconstituted because it is incapable of resolving the problems that have been put forward now by the Arab Spring.*”

# Rachel Bronson

Vice President, Studies  
Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Rachel Bronson used the AUIS student Debate Society to frame her closing remarks, proposing several topics to be considered and debated among the students of the Region.

The first crucial topic to be debated is whether the American withdrawal was good for Iraq. On one hand, Bronson explained, the departure was a positive for Iraq to move forward as an independent nation-state. On the other hand, military withdrawal means political withdrawal, and the U.S. was an important interlocutor at times between various parties and individuals. Second, a serious debate needs to be held about whether becoming a ‘petro-Region’ is good for the Kurds of Iraq. While conceding that with the devastating history of the Kurds, it must be a “tremendous relief” to be “able to fully exploit and benefit from the oil revenue” and develop infrastructure, Bronson indicated this could be considered a negative. She used the Gulf states as an example, revealing a major downside to an oil based

economy: that it “destroys the culture and the work ethics that is needed for kind of a fulfilling future.” If the Kurds decide that the “reward is greater than the risk” they must figure out how to more equitably and transparently distribute oil revenue. Bronson’s third debate was one which many panelists, particularly Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, discussed throughout the *Forum*, whether the Arab Spring was good for Iraq. While offering Iraq the chance to lead by example and engage in new relationships with new neighbors, the chaos in Syria has also reignited old sectarian tensions bringing new radical groups onto the scene.

Bronson left her final “very American question” for the audience to contemplate: are you better off than you were 10 years ago?







## Sir Basil Markesinis

Jamail Regents Chair  
University of Texas at Austin

Sir Basil Markesinis lauded *Forum* participants for doing what academics were meant to do: “make people reflect” just as “politicians speak in order to gain votes and lawyers speak in order to win cases.” Within this spirit of academic dialogue, Sir Basil identified holes in the panel and challenged the views of past speakers.

Sir Basil first focused on the importance of politics and politicians, or the lack thereof, in the region and the Arab Spring. The “real problems” of the Middle East and North Africa – and particularly Iraq – “depend on politics,” he argued. Politics concerns, in a sense, what is missing from the movements even in their

transition phase, “a move towards liberalization and democracy.” Elections are a false sign of democracy that the West and America “have been quick to ask for... as a medium of legitimization of the new government.” Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari picked up on this later view claiming, “What is lacking in the Arab Spring, is a lack of democrats and standing up in the new order.”

Engaging in the debate on borders, Sir Basil seemed to side with Foreign Minister Zebari, and said the Middle East should learn from Yugoslavia and the Balkans, and the current rise of discrimination and economic woes in certain states of the European Union. If borders continue to disappear, these problems in Europe, “these are problems that are going to be magnified and will become unmanageable.”

## Question and Answer

The question and answer session focused on Turkish and American perspectives on the Arab Spring. Zalmay Khalilzad addressed the lack of United States involvement in the movements, a point which many panelists had mentioned throughout the *Forum*, explaining that the country was preoccupied with internal problems, uncertain about its ability to influence change, and to an extent unable to act because of how quickly developments unfolded. He advocated for a “much more engaged and proactive approach” on the part of the Americans.

The lack of U.S. involvement stands in stark contrast to the implications of the Arab Spring for Turkey. The various revolutions challenged Turkey’s ‘zero problems’ foreign policy, Henri Barkey argued, and the stability of its political and economic alliances. For example, the state had major business ties with Libya under Qaddafi as well as in Assad’s Syria. Turkey was forced to respond and pick sides in contentious struggles, and consequently, the Arab Spring “stopped Turkey’s rise politically within the Arab world.”

Barkey also answered a timely question about

the Sunna based protest movement going on in the rest of Iraq. Whether it grows and becomes more violent will depend on how the Maliki regime responds. Bashar al Assad responded with violence to the initial protests, and Syria is now in a civil war, a dynamic which will also enflame the protest movement in Iraq. Furthermore, looking ahead “what if Bashar al Assad falls in six months? What will happen to those fighters that know nothing but to fight?” asked Barkey, implying that Iraq could be their next stop.

All the conversation seemed to lead to this single question: How is democracy possible in Iraq and the Middle East? Max Rodenbeck proposed that you “must get the people to understand what it means.” Mubarak, for example, explained democracy as when “a commanding officer listens to his officers and then makes a decision.” The problem here, according to Rodenbeck, is that democracy is oversimplified. In Iraq “there has been a tendency in different parties to understand that democracy is simply the rule of the majority. You win the elections and you get to do whatever you like.” Rather, a state needs time, constitutional guarantees and a constitution that really works. Not to mention a class of professional politicians who understand the game of politics, argued Rodenbeck. Sir Basil added that “democracy is not imposed; it grows from the bottom up” and that laws alone are not enough. It is their implementation and the existence of a citizenry that understands and has the ability and desire to abide by them that matters. “The laws can help,” observed Sir Basil, “but they can’t impose a certain behavior.”



# Sulaimani Forum 2013: The Social Media Aspect



A lively discussion of the *Forum* occurred on Twitter, as numerous students, panelists, and journalists live-tweeted the event. The discussion, which centered on the hashtag #SulaimaniForum, included paraphrasing speakers, asking questions, and offering opinions about comments made by panelists. Additionally, many Twitter users posted photos of the *Forum* and complimented the quality of the event. At the end of the *Forum*, over 600 tweets with the hashtag #SulaimaniForum were posted on Twitter, causing the event to trend in Egypt and Iraq (Twitter's trending algorithm identified #SulaimaniForum as one of the most frequently mentioned hashtag in tweets in both countries).

Listed below are some of the tweets that indicate the *Sulaimani Forum*'s impact:



**@hiwaosman Hiwa Osman**

#SulaimaniForum is the first real attempt to discuss #Iraq in Iraq & not in remote cities & capitals. It just becomes much more relevant



**@emile\_hokayem Emile Hokayem**

Impressed by level of openness at #SulaimaniForum. All difficult issues (federalism, oil, KRG performance, reg rels) addressed. Well done.



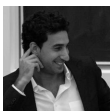
**@rebazq Rebaz Qaradaghi**

The Success of #SulaimaniForum is open debate bw politicians, journalists, students, academics, etc. Happening in the heart of #Kurdistan



**@shwanzulal Shwan Zulal**

A promising & impressive start for 1st #SulaimaniForum @AUIS\_NEWS with snowy mountain in the background future ME #Davos comes to mind!



**@ksadjadpour Karim Sadjadpour**

The rich & open discussion at the #SulaimaniForum in Iraqi Kurdistan is a model for the region. Thanks @BarhamSalih and his terrific team.



**@qubadjt Qubad Talabani**

Riveting discussions at @AUIS\_NEWS #SulaimaniForum. I enjoyed chairing the panel on Iraq's internal developments & foreign relations



**@jpscasteras JP Schnapper-Casteras**

Lots of thoughtful questions from students here at the #SulaimaniForum @AUIS\_NEWS



**@azheenfuad Azheen Ihsan Fuad**

First day of the #SulaimaniForum was a complete success! Looking forward to tomorrow.



**@lawenazad Lawen Azad**

Big congratulations to Dr @BarhamSalih and @AUIS\_NEWS for a great two days with the first annual #SulaimaniForum It was fantastic! Congrats!



**@nuhaserrac Nuha Serrac**

Hoshyar Zebari: this is the greatest forum I've attended. There's a local taste. #SulaimaniForum



AUIS's significant Facebook following also enjoyed live coverage of the event, receiving continuous posts of photos on AUIS's Facebook page. Photos of the event were continuously posted on the AUIS Facebook page during the conference. These albums showed up on the feeds of over 14,000 Facebook users, with close to 3,500 of those users engaging with them by liking, sharing, or commenting on the photos.

## IRIS Social Media

The social media buzz at the *Sulaimani Forum* has led IRIS to create its own Facebook and Twitter platforms. Users can like IRIS's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/IRISMideast](http://www.facebook.com/IRISMideast)) and follow IRIS on Twitter (@IRISMideast) to receive regular news updates, engage in conversation on some of the region's most pressing issues, and tune in live to the many IRIS lectures, roundtables, and conferences that take place throughout the year. Social media users should also be sure to follow the hashtag #SulaimaniForum and #IRIS2014 to be an active participant during the next *Sulaimani Forum* March 4-5, 2014.

## Support IRIS and AUIS

The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) is a non-profit institution for public benefit dependent on the generosity of donors from companies, organizations, and individuals and families. These contributions are vital for the sustainability of the University. Support of AUIS, through direct and indirect means, will ensure that AUIS can continue to provide a quality education with regional impact.

AUIS is accepting support to sustain the various activities of the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) including the *Sulaimani Forum*. In addition, there are numerous other ways to support AUIS: donors can sponsor a new scholarship for students, establish a faculty chair, expand the library's collection, or support the continued development of the campus, among many other opportunities.

Please contact the Office of Institutional Development at [support@auis.edu.iq](mailto:support@auis.edu.iq) if you are interested in discussing ways you or your organization can support AUIS.





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