

The Third Annual



Sulaimani

March
11-12, 2015

Forum

**Fertile Crescent in Turmoil:
Challenges and Opportunities**





AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ
SULAIMANI

American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
Sulaimani – Kirkuk Main Road, Raparin
Sulaimani, Iraq
Tel: +964 (0)53-330-1011
E-mail: info@ais.edu.iq



ais.edu.iq



[/ais.edu.iq](https://www.facebook.com/ais.edu.iq)



[@ais_news](https://twitter.com/ais_news)



[/ais_eagles](https://www.instagram.com/ais_eagles)



[/aisvideos](https://www.youtube.com/aisvideos)



[/aisofficial](https://www.flickr.com/photos/aisofficial)



The Institute of Regional and International Studies
E-mail: iris@ais.edu.iq



twitter.com/IRISmideast



[Facebook.com/IRISmideast](https://www.facebook.com/IRISmideast)

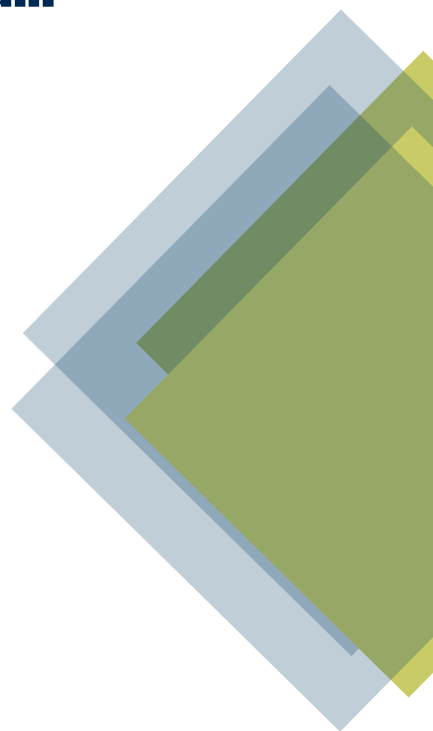
The Third Annual Sulaimani Forum

**Fertile Crescent in Turmoil:
Challenges and Opportunities**

**American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
March 11 & 12, 2015**

Conference Proceedings

**Edited by Alice Bosley
Design & Photography by Soran Naqishbandy**





Sponsored by





Table of Contents

6	• Introduction
9	• Executive Summary
11	• Opening Remarks, Dr. Barham Salih
12	• Keynote Speech, “Iraq and its Neighboring Countries”, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Foreign Minister of Iraq
14	• New Realities in Iraq
24	• Fertile Crescent in Turmoil: Challenges and Opportunities
32	• Energy Policy; Financial Crisis
44	• Strategy to Defeat DAESH: End Games or Seeds for New Conflict?
54	• Syria, Iraq Conflicts: Humanitarian Crisis for the Ages
64	• Emerging Kurdish Dynamics: Regional Implications
72	• Concluding Panel: Reflections; Beyond the Present
78	• A Conversation with General Petraeus
81	• #SuliForum: The Social Media Aspect
85	• About AUIS
89	• Behind the Scenes

Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)

The Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) is an independent research center based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Through multidisciplinary research, strategic partnerships and open dialogue events among experts and influential public leaders, IRIS examines the most complex issues facing the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East.

IRIS is housed at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), Iraq's only independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. IRIS's location offers academics, journalists and institutions access to areas of interest and a safe space in an otherwise unstable region, making it an attractive, unique meeting place.

The Institute's main focus areas include but are not limited to: security, energy, water resource management, regional geopolitics, socio-economics, gender and archeology.



Sulaimani Forum

The Sulaimani Forum is IRIS's signature annual event. Over the course of two days, scholars, experts, and policymakers from the region and the world convene to discuss the world's most pressing regional issues, current trends and points of conflict. This year's Forum, "Fertile Crescent in Turmoil: Challenges and Opportunities," convened at a pivotal time, amidst upheaval not seen before in the modern history of the Middle East. Focusing on Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, panels examined causes and solutions for the profound challenges facing the region through dialogue about the nation-state and governance, realigning geopolitical alliances, energy, finance and the humanitarian crisis. There was a particular focus on security issues and the war against ISIS as well as the implications of the crisis.

Participants included most high-level officials from the central government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Governments (KRG). Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari delivered the keynote address, and Speakers of Parliament Salim Al-Jabouri (Iraq) and Yousif Muhammed Sadiq (KRG), as well as H.E. Iraqi Minister of Higher Education Hussein Al-Shahrastani were on the first panel that focused on Iraq's political crisis. Humam Al-Hamoudi, the first deputy speaker of Iraqi Parliament and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy Lapo Pistelli spoke on the second panel on regional dynamics, followed by both Ministers of Finance, Hoshyar Zebari (Iraq) and Rebaz Muhammed Hamlan (KRG); both Ministers of Oil, Adil Abdul Mahdi (Iraq) and Ashti Hawrami (KRG) and the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones discussed energy policy and the financial crisis. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk presented on the war against ISIS along with the Iraqi National Security Advisor Faleh Fayadh, Vice-president of Iraq Osmaa Al-Nujaifi, Chief of Staff to KRG President Massoud Barzan Fuad Hussein and Saleh Muslim, the Co-Chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Gyorgy Busztin, DSRSG, represented the UN on a panel on humanitarian crisis with the Governor of Sulaimani Aso Fereydoon, and Governor of Dohuk Farhad Atrushi, and UK Consul General in Erbil Angus

McKee. In addition, former CIA Director and Commander of International Security Assistance Force in Iraq General David Petraeus was in the audience on his first trip back to Iraq since the end of his government service.

Leading thinkers and analysts were present on stage and in the audience, including Vitaly Naumkin of the Oriental Studies Institute in Russia and Kenneth Pollack of Brookings Institute in Washington. Randa Slim of Middle East Institute, Hayder Al-Khoei and Neil Quilliam of Chatham House, Joseph Bahout and Lina Khatib of Carnegie in Washington and Beirut, respectively, and Michael Knights of Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The leading journalists covering the Middle East were also participants: NPR's Deborah Amos, Washington Post's Liz Sly, Jane Arraf of Al Jazeera, the Economist's Amberin Zaman, and Cengiz Çandar of Hurriyet.

This year's Forum was built on the success of the two previous gatherings. The First Annual Forum in 2013, "The Changing Geopolitics of the Middle East," included distinguished international scholars, journalists and government officials. The second Forum, "Navigating Challenges in the Middle East," featured Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government Nechirvan Idris Barzani, as well as the Foreign Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu.

The Forum was organized by IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and Coordinator Zeina Najjar. Henri Barkey, member of the AUIS Board of Trustees and Professor at Lehigh University, was instrumental in the planning, oversight, and implementation of the event. The success of the Forum is due to the efforts of the AUIS Communications team, especially its Media and Public Relations Manager Bzhar Boskani, as well as the IT, Security and Facilities Management Departments and the tireless brigade of AUIS student and staff volunteers. IRIS and AUIS are deeply grateful to the efforts of the security forces of the Sulaimani Governorate and the Kurdistan Regional Government without whom the event would not have been possible. AUIS would especially like to thank the Protocol team of the KRG Prime Minister whose efforts greatly facilitated the organization of the Forum.

Executive Summary



On March 11 and 12, 2015, an impressive gathering of government officials, academics, policy analysts and journalists convened at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) to discuss the historic transitions, challenges and opportunities facing Iraq and the Middle East today. The Sulaimani Forum creates an annual opportunity to bring together the main stakeholders in regional affairs for intellectual, political and strategic debates of great relevance in today's world.

The theme of this year's Forum, "Fertile Crescent in Turmoil," reflects the upheaval and uncertainty – caused by the rise of ISIS, the drop in oil prices and geopolitical tensions – that have affected the Middle East over the past year. Diverse panels tackled both the humanitarian and political sides of the crisis surrounding the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), internal Iraqi politics – particularly regarding oil and finances – regional transitions, and the new levels of Kurdish cooperation in the region.

Discussing the changing situations within Iraq, participants noted the historic, external and internal dynamics that created the environment in which ISIS, also known by its Arabic acronyms DAESH, was able to flourish. Though historically the Fertile Crescent has been diverse and tolerant, nationalism and lack of economic opportunity, basic freedoms of expression and minority rights created tensions between different religious groups and ethnicities.

Many participants also noted that Iraq's long history of diversity could enable it to overcome these divides and turn it into an example of unity for the region. In fact, many believed that this unity would be necessary if Iraq and the region ever hoped to escape the specter of ISIS. The recent oil deals between Baghdad and Erbil, though not without their own challenges, were used as an example to illustrate the newfound cooperation between the center and Kurdish regions of Iraq – and a reason to hope for more cooperation in the future.

A panel discussing Kurdish regional dynamics analyzed how ISIS has improved the level of Kurdish cooperation throughout the region, particularly after the Peshmerga helped to liberate Kobane. Participants in that panel argued that Kurds should take advantage of the current regional Kurdish relationships to create a real strategy for greater Kurdistan moving into the future.



The Sulaimani Forum also focused on ISIS's deep impact on the region at a number of levels, including the regional humanitarian crisis and the local implications for women and the Yazidi community particularly. All participants agreed that ISIS represented what could be an existential threat to both Syria and Iraq – if not to the whole region – but many participants also expressed optimism stemming from the recent military victories throughout Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

Many participants noted that the real challenge would come after ISIS is defeated on a national and local level. Iraqi and Syrian political leaders and parties, as well as local communities, the fragmentation of Iraq and Syria, and the rebuilding of community structures destroyed by the occupation, were all noted as areas that need to be addressed as soon as possible. The humanitarian crisis also has far reaching and long-term implications for neighboring countries, host communities and regional dynamics.

Dr. Barham Salih, Founder and Chairman of AUIS

Opening Remarks

Dr. Barham Salih welcomed attendees to the Sulaimani Forum, noting that the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, strives to be a center of excellence in its region.

Salih delineated what he deemed to be a “fundamental upheaval” in the region, recently manifested in the battle against ISIS, saying, “Iraq is currently at the forefront of this fight against terrorism and extremism. However, although Peshmerga and Iraqi forces are battling the terrorists, DAESH is an issue for the entire world.”

“This scourge of terrorism is not a Sunni problem, is not a Shiite problem, is not a Kurdish problem, it is humanity’s problem. Therefore we are called upon to work in a serious way to eradicate this scourge. This part of the world, and the world at large, cannot afford this continuing violence. We had to deal with al-Qaeda and now we are dealing with DAESH, and if we don’t deal with the root causes with the seriousness and the urgency it merits, I dare say in years from now we will be dealing with another manifestation of extremism.”

Salih argued that the international community has a responsibility to Iraq, noting that ISIS is a threat to all, and is built from common legacies of the past. “This region is going through major upheaval, fundamental upheaval, lately manifested in this battle against DAESH. Here we are at the forefront of this fight against these terrorists, this scourge of extremism. Our Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi forces are battling these terrorists, but we have to understand this is not an issue for Iraq alone, this is an issue for the entire region and the entire world.”

Salih concluded by noting that the Sulaimani Forum brings together experts and distinguished personalities from across the region – Iraq, Kurdistan, the Middle East, and the rest of the world. He welcomed the participants and audience to the event.



Ibrahim Al-Jaafari - Foreign Minister of Iraq

Keynote Speech, “Iraq and its Neighboring Countries”

His Excellency Dr. Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, the foreign minister of Iraq, gave an overview of current and historical dynamics, challenges and opportunities of the Fertile Crescent region.

He began by emphasizing the significant place of the region in history, stating that the Fertile Crescent, named as such by the American archeologist and historian James Henry Breasted, is the cradle of civilization. The land was named after its fertile soil and abundance of water. This abundance of water was matched with an abundance of civilization, and humanity. In the past, Iraq embraced the diversity of ethnicities, religions, doctrines and political views. It was the center of global development and events.

Furthermore, he pointed out that the region is going through intense political disturbances. “Recent years have brought the Arab Spring, disturbances in Iraq, tension between Turkey and Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and other neighbors of Iraq. Injustices in Palestine have left a mark on Iraqis and Muslims throughout the world. This regional tension has penetrated Iraq, and led to the creation of groups such as the Islamic State.





Al-Jaafari spoke of the rise of modern terrorism, noting that modern terrorism began not in the Middle East, but in the U.S. on September 11. It then moved to Europe – Spain, London, etc. – then invaded Asia and the Middle East. Terrorism is truly global, and doesn't exclude any countries. Terrorism stems from divisions, and it is dividing the Kurds and Arabs, Sunnis and Shias, and Muslims and non-Muslims in Iraq.

In addition to terrorism, Al-Jaafari described other challenges facing Iraq, notably the poor economy and dropping oil prices which are extremely problematic. He went on to say however, that Iraq is strong, and the people in Iraq are uniting. Iraqi ministries are filled with different ethnicities, and the government is reinvestigating issues in the past to ensure a more stable future. Al-Jaafari described his hope that Iraq can be an example for other divided countries in the region, such as Syria, Libya and Yemen.

Al-Jaafari concluded by hoping that Iraq could carry a message of reform and civility to the rest of the world. He gave the Sulaimani Forum as an example of the dialogue and progress of politics in the country. He called on all Iraqis to take responsibility, work harder and understand the common humanity of everyone. He ended by thanking the courageous people of Iraq who have sacrificed throughout the country's history, during Anfal and today against ISIS.

New Realities in Iraq

Moderated by Christine van den Toorn
Director of IRIS

Salim Al-Jabouri

Speaker of Parliament of Iraq

Yousif Mohammed Sadiq

Speaker of Parliament of the Kurdistan Regional
Government Parliament

Hussein Al-Shahrastani

Minister of Higher Education of Iraq

Hiwa Osman

Founder and CEO of Mediawan

Zaid Al-Ali

Senior Adviser, International IDEA

Hayder Al-Khoei

Associate Fellow, Chatham House

In this panel, a group of distinguished politicians and analysts discussed the current state of affairs in Iraq, with a particular focus on what has to be done to ensure Iraq's stability in the long run. Interventions ranged from discussing ISIS, external factors, internal divisions and opportunities, the political status quo and the potential steps that need to be taken to ensure Iraq's security and wellbeing moving forward. Panelists came from different parts of Iraq, and shared an exciting diversity of viewpoints, opinions, and solutions to the great challenges that are facing Iraq and Iraqis today.

Salim Al-Jabouri

Speaker of the Parliament of Iraq



“

Weapons must be limited to the state, and the state must dominate through the strength of institutions and the strength of the law.

”

According to His Excellency Dr. Salim Al-Jabouri, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, there are four crucial factors – mainly external – that will determine the future of Iraq through the current crises.

Firstly, Al-Jabouri discussed the three types of neighbors in Iraq's region: those who actively participate in events in Iraq, such as Turkey; those who have remained neutral or inactive during the current crisis, such as the Gulf and Arab countries; and finally, those countries that have been neutral or active according to their interest, such as Iran. Currently, all of these types of countries have taken on different roles with regard to Iraq, based solely on their interests. Al-Jabouri argued that Iraq should control its relationships with countries in its region; unfortunately, that has not been the case through the current crisis.

Secondly, Al-Jabouri noted that proliferation of weapons and armed actors in Iraq has become an important issue within the country. Currently, tribes, militias and ordinary civilians are taking up arms to fight ISIS. An important question to ask, however, is whether these armed civilians will respect government institutions again after ISIS has been defeated.

Thirdly, Al-Jabouri argued that the American and Iranian conflict has had an important effect on Iraq in the past and present. The conflict can be seen to stem from different types of competition: for oil, geography, or distribution of roles and power in the region. While this competition plays out during the conflict with ISIS, it is important for the Iraqi government again to control these relationships for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

Hussain Al-Shahristani

Minister of Higher Education of Iraq

Finally, Al-Jabouri asked where extremists will go once ISIS is defeated. He noted that extremists will still exist, and may spread and continue their activity under other names. The land that ISIS has controlled must be rebuilt, and the women, children and communities devastated by the war must be supported and healed. It is crucial to think of these questions now, and to ensure that the roots of extremism are eradicated before they spread further. Al-Jabouri warned that these issues cannot be ignored, or Iraq may end up divided.

In response to fellow panelist Hiwa Osman's question regarding Sunni mobilization against ISIS, Al-Jabouri affirmed that Sunni leadership does indeed have a part to play in the fight against ISIS. Al-Jabouri noted, "After 2003 Sunni armed resistance groups were formed but later disbanded. Sunni tribes are now insufficiently armed and disorganized, and it is up to their leadership to get them back to a point where they are able to confront ISIS in occupied areas with the assistance of the international community."

Al-Jabouri concluded by stating his conviction that if the current Iraqi government is backed, the Parliament positively empowered, and effective support is offered by the international community, the current crisis can be overcome because the Iraqi people still feel that there is hope and government institutions are in place despite the serious security challenges currently facing Iraq.



Iraqis will be able to defeat DAESH on Iraqi soil and spare humanity the misery we went through alongside Syria. DAESH must be stopped by the efforts of Iraqis themselves.

Iraqi Minister of Higher Education Dr. Hussain Al-Shahristani focused his talk on the opportunities as well as the extreme challenges for Iraq in battling ISIS. Al-Shahristani began by arguing that the ISIS invasion is unprecedented in Iraq, even after the centuries of conflict that the country has seen. ISIS “is not targeting the human being, but targeting humanity.” Iraq, then, is not only defending itself, but the security and values of the whole world from ISIS.

Al-Shahristani commended the heroic Iraqi forces, Al-Hashid Al-Shaabi, the Peshmerga, and the tribes for fighting ISIS on numerous fronts; though success will be difficult, he argued that Iraq will be able to defeat ISIS. He noted, however, that the biggest battle will not be against ISIS, but in uniting Iraqis above differences and conflicts. There is no point in liberating the country and losing the civilians; there

is no point in winning against ISIS if Iraqi citizens cannot unite.

Despite some failures, Al-Shahristani emphasized the many successes in Iraq since the fall of the dictatorial regime. Democracy and free and fair elections, a constitution and constitutional institutions, a free economy, and civil, economic and social rights for Iraqi citizens have been put into place. Iraqis now have a historic chance to come together in the battle against ISIS and for Iraq.

For this union to happen, Al-Shahristani described a second battle that has to occur: the battle against corruption. Money should go to the Iraqi people, not the governments. This is crucial in order for Iraq to become a united and fair country.



Yousif Muhammed Sadiq

Speaker of Parliament of the Kurdistan Regional Government



“
We need to take a brave stand. Iraqi political elites should meet and rethink the structure of Iraq. Without doing so, we cannot fix our problems.

His Excellency Yousif Sadiq, the speaker of parliament of the Kurdistan Regional Government, gave an overview of some of the main internal factors that are important to Iraq's stability in the future. Sadiq noted that continuous conflict in Iraq may have led to a security gap of which terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda were able to take advantage. He delved into some of these internal issues in order to provide recommendations for moving forward.

The United Nations considers Iraq one of the least successful, most corrupt countries in the world. Sadiq argued that Iraqis should stop blaming external actors for their problems, but rather work to create better understanding between the three main parties in Iraq. The constitution of Iraq supports decentralization and autonomy, principles that other modern nations have already embraced. Sadiq argued that forced, centralized rule is one of the major problems in Iraq currently, and that it amounts to the punishing of regions by the center.

Sadiq noted that the problems facing Iraq currently existed before terrorism. If Iraq were stable, both politically and economically, the country would not be threatened by ISIS. It is in the common interest of all Iraqis to work on political stability and economic advancement. Finally, he noted that Iraq's internal problems need to be resolved through dialogue, not through pressure or the 'forcing' of political players.

”

Hayder Al-Khoei

Associate Fellow, Chatham House



Ayatollah Sistani saw no other option but to issue this historic fatwa and call to arms. A fatwa we haven't seen the likes of for almost one hundred years... The Hashd Al Shaabi is first and foremost a local response... whether you like them or not, [they] are a social political grass roots reaction to ISIS and the collapse of the armed forces.

Al-Khoei, associate fellow at Chatham House, focused his intervention on the rise of Shi'a militias in Iraq, Iran's influence during the current crisis and questions for the long run stability of Iraq.

According to Al-Khoei, "in June 2014 as ISIS was knocking on the gates of Baghdad, the United States effectively abandoned Iraq." While the U.S. focused on ousting Maliki and pursuing their long-term strategic interests, Iran stepped up and offered military assistance. Al-Khoei quoted a senior Iraqi official in saying, "both the Americans and the Iranians are our strategic allies but the Iranians don't let us down in our times of need." Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa, calling for Iraqis to defend their nation against terrorists. The Iraqi government and Iraqis responded to the call, forming official forces like Al-Hashid Al-Shaabi, as well as unofficial groups like Shia militias.

Al-Khoei then described the rise in Shi'a militia groups and their potential impact on Iraq's stability. Shi'a militia groups were brought together under the official state-sponsored military committee, Al-Hashid Al-Shaabi, which is first and foremost a local response to ISIS. However, he noted that the manner in which Baghdad deals with the swelling ranks of the Hashid will be crucial in shaping Iraq's future after ISIS is contained or defeated.

While Al-Khoei noted that Iraq currently needs Iran, he argued that Iraq needs to plan to demobilize or integrate militias afterwards or "the rope that saves



you from the flood may become a noose around your neck.” The majority of Shi’a fighters will want to go home to their families after the fighting is over, but he noted the more organized fighters will want to be rewarded for their victory. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard will also be reluctant to see these militia put under the full control of the Iraqi state.

Al-Khoei concluded by asking the audience a few crucial questions about Iraq’s current lack of military unification: How can Iraq ensure that this state of affairs doesn’t become destabilizing once ISIS is contained? How will the Hashid Al-Shaabi be demobilized or integrated? How will Iran respond to Iraq’s actions?

Hiwa Osman

Founder and CEO of Mediawan



All talk of national reconciliation in the absence of including remnants of the former regime is ineffective, and has been ineffective.

“Twelve years ago, Iraq as we know it ended,” said Hiwa Osman, the Founder and CEO of Mediawan. The United States and international community ended the “old” Iraq, yet Iraqis failed to create a new Iraq; instead, numerous catastrophes have taken place on the path to trying to create this new Iraq.

Since independence, Osman argued that the greatest achievement of Iraqis has been the constitution, and the creation of the idea of a federalist, democratic, pluralistic, and inclusive Iraq. Unfortunately, he noted, that idea of Iraq was never turned into a reality. Instead, we now have an Iraq that is partitioned between Shi’as, Sunnis and Kurds.

Osman then discussed the situation in the Kurdish region, where citizens are “trapped between an Islamic State and an Islamic Republic.” Erbil and Baghdad have two different understandings of the word “federalism”, and two different understandings of what their relationship should be. Osman argued that young Kurds will refuse to take part in this status quo. He argued that even before ISIS, minorities have been mistreated – like Christians mistreated in Baghdad and Basra, and Yazidis mistreated in ISIS-dominated areas.

Osman noted that ISIS was able to take over Iraq’s second largest city overnight because they have a strong local element. Osman argued that in order to effectively end ISIS, local Sunnis will need to band together and delegitimize the structures that ISIS has created over the past year. When the local population rises up against ISIS, the international

community, Kurds and Shi'a militias should be ready to support them. Osman noted that locating, labeling, and harassing Christian families in Mosul has been a clear example of cooperation between the local population and ISIS.

Finally, Osman asked a question to the Speaker of Iraq's Parliament: If millions of Sunni Arabs voted in the elections, where are those people on the ground? If there is truly a popular rejection of ISIS, where is the organization that is mobilizing the population against ISIS?

Zaid Al-Ali **Senior Advisor, International IDEA**



I am very concerned by Iraq's long-term prospects mainly because it will depend on the ability of Iraq's political class to do what it has so far failed to do since 2005, which is to engage in some serious critical and radical reforms.

Zaid Al-Ali, senior advisor for International IDEA, discussed long-term prospects for Iraq and argued that radical reform is needed. While confident that reconciliation after ISIS will not be a problem, as Iraqis in 2006 and 2007 were able to build bridges across communities and come together as a people, he argued that the long-term prospects for Iraq depend on the government creating serious and radical reforms – something it has failed to do since 2005.

While not all factors that led to the fall of Tikrit and Mosul were under the government's control, there were some factors impacting Iraq's security situation that should have been handled better.

Firstly, he mentioned that effective policing has not been in place since 2003. ISIS had a network of extortion, kidnapping and criminal activity in and around Tikrit and Mosul for years before they invaded. While this situation was well known, there was no serious effort by anyone in the government or security forces to deal with the security threats in those areas.

Secondly, he noted that corruption in Iraq has exploded in recent years. Tikrit fell in thirty minutes, without a single shot fired; this alone illustrates the corruption throughout Iraq's government. Iraq's main anti-corruption body is in itself corrupt, and has deteriorated over time. According to data, in 2010, 100 percent of Iraq's officials declared their income to the state; currently, that number is down to 46 percent. Al-Ali argued that it is necessary for the anti-corruption body to follow the path that has

already been established for them, and to curb the graft and waste throughout the government. Moreover, he noted the corruption of Iraq's justice sector; abuse and torture happens frequently in detention, though people refuse to talk about it. Proposals have been on the table to reform the justice sector, but nothing has yet to be done.

Finally, Al-Ali argued that treatment of women in Iraq is shameful. Across the world, the liberation of women is reiterated as one of the most effective conflict-reduction mechanisms over the long run. However, this is never discussed within Iraq, and there is still extreme gender imbalance in daily life and the government. Iraq is focused on ethnic and sectarian conflicts and women are forgotten.

Al-Ali argued that it is time for the Iraqi government to move beyond the same discussions that have been happening since 2005, and instead deliver tangible actions and reforms at an institutional level.



Fertile Crescent in Turmoil: Challenges and Opportunities

Moderated by Hoshyar Zebari
Minister of Finance of Iraq

Humam Al-Hamoudi

First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Iraq

Cengiz Çandar

Columnist, Hurriyet

Randa Slim

Director, Track II Dialogues, Middle East Institute;
Research Fellow, New American Foundation

Lapo Pistelli

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy

Vitaly Naumkin

Director, Institute for Oriental Studies

Kenneth Pollack

Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

Over the past few years, Syria has fallen into chaos, ISIS has invaded Iraq, regional power structures have gone through intense transitions, and international actors have been struggling to respond. This panel brought together stakeholders from Iraq, Turkey, Russia, Europe and the United States to discuss the current challenges facing the Fertile Crescent and to present potential solutions to the challenges. Speakers used their diverse viewpoints to analyze the historical trends, current environments, and geopolitical tensions that have collided to create current crises in the region.

Humam Al-Hamoudi

First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Iraq



We have to end the roots of ISIS. It is not enough to kill ISIS fighters; we must kill the disease that ISIS has created inside people's minds.

Humam Al-Hamoudi succinctly described the historical features of Iraq and the region that created today's crises, as well as what these historical lessons can teach us about hopes for the future.

The Fertile Crescent gathers all of the ancient cultures of the world, and Al-Hamoudi argued that it is also the region where the world's problems begin. He noted that, since it was formed, most of the UN's decisions have been focused on the Middle East. Oil price fluctuations, movements for independence, the Arab Spring, and regional competition between different groups all form the backdrop to today's upheaval. People in the region have been brought up in environments of displacement, subpar education systems, poor health care, and other factors, creating a population of uneducated people who feel fear, hatred and intolerance towards others.

The armed groups in the region have preyed on these uneducated groups and recruited many of them. Al-Hamoudi went further, stating that ISIS in Iraq is the result of uneducated populations created through Saddam's regime. He argued that ISIS has been extremely successful at winning people over and creating supporters, and will not be easily dealt with in the short term.

Al-Hamoudi concluded by posing a number of questions to the audience. What are Iraq's most important goals at this time? To defeat ISIS? To achieve independence? What is the plan for after ISIS is defeated? He argued that Iraq needs to use its special characteristics to be united, and to help others unite. In order for ISIS to truly be defeated, the disease inside people's minds must first be defeated.

Cengiz Çandar

Columnist, Hurriyet



I think it is not only turmoil, but a very dizzying transitional period. We are moving from a well-defined world into a one of very chaotic change, which requires reinvention.

Cengiz Çandar of Hurriyet described Turkey's changing role in the region as one example of broader power shifts and transitions across the Middle East.

Çandar noted that at last year's Sulaimani Forum, Turkey was considered a regional leader and powerhouse. In the past year, however, it seems to have become a very lonely country in the region. Çandar gave the example of the tomb of Suleyman Shah, the grandfather of the Ottoman Empire, in Kobane, 23 km from the Turkish border. Turkey had difficulty defending the tomb from ISIS, and had to send troops across the border to bring it back to Turkey.

While ISIS has a military component, Çandar argued that the real problem of ISIS is not its military, but rather the state collapse in the areas where ISIS has the most power. Based on the past number of months' experiences, Çandar noted he believed ISIS can be defeated militarily; however, the lack of state structure in those areas will be more difficult to remedy. Çandar mentioned Egypt, Syria, and Iraq as examples of states that were created by the Sykes- Picot agreement, and that have all recently seen power struggles or state collapse. He described a type of "conceptual turmoil" in the region, where the lines between state and non-state actors are blurring.

About the regional power vacuum, Saudi Arabia is becoming the leader of the Sunni world. Çandar argued that this is not a positive scenario, as Saudi Arabia lacks the ability to lead the region from both a cultural and historical perspective. Çandar closed by stating that if real changes are not made soon, he is afraid that the next Sulaimani Forum will feature discussions of even further turmoil in the region.

Randa Slim

**Director, Track II Dialogues, Middle East Institute;
Research Fellow, New America Foundation**



This is a historical transformation that is testing borders and state systems that have been established since the demise of the Ottoman Empire, and it is happening at a time when we have a lack of visionary leadership in the region.

Randa Slim, Director of Track II Dialogues at the Middle East Institute, gave an overview of the current situation inside Syria, as well as the different, and sometimes conflicting, approaches that are being taken to address the conflict by international actors. Slim noted that current conflict is testing borders and state systems that have been in place since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and comes at a time when the region is lacking visionary leadership and strong regional institutions to offer ideas of ways forward.

Slim began by describing the internal situation in Syria, which she argued would be in a stalemate for at least the next two years. Currently, all internal actors are pursuing military rather than political solutions. Syrians that used to identify themselves in nationalist terms now only identify themselves using narrow sectarian identities. Moreover, Syria is being emptied of its people, as more flee across the border to neighboring countries. Iran and Hezbollah are both supporting state institutions, however she reflected that it seems unlikely that any state institutions will still be intact by the end of the conflict.

Slim described the diverse solutions to the Syrian conflict pursued by various actors, amongst which any form of significant coordination has been lacking. Firstly, UN Special Envoy for Syria, de Mistura, has pursued a “freeze plan”, but Slim argued the plan is too narrow to solve the conflict. A Russian initiative, orchestrated by Dr. Naumkin, has tried to create a political solution to the conflict,

however has not welcomed all of the opposition to the table. Slim noted that the Egyptian initiative to create a unified opposition deserves wider support, but still at this time fails to include the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which is an important part of the Syrian opposition. Finally, she noted major continuing competition between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, while the United States has no real strategy for Syria moving forward. Slim argued that all of these potential solutions are narrowly focused and fail to coordinate between all actors.

In Syria itself, different actors are losing control. The government remains in control on the surface, but in fact has very little control over the National Defense Forces. Slim noted that the Forces are answering to their funders and trainers, mainly the Iranians. On the opposition's side, the Free Syrian Army makes up 10 to 15 percent of the opposition brigades, while the rest belong to ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusrah.

Slim argued that a comprehensive strategy is needed to beat ISIS in Syria and Iraq at the same time. Slim attributed the root cause of ISIS to the Assad Regime, which, she reminded the audience, facilitated the entry of jihadists into Iraq from 2006 to 2008. The Assad regime is willing to use any tool to survive, and has no intention of entering into a power-sharing agreement. Slim concluded that any negotiation between the regime and opposition is futile; the violence will continue until the international community reconsiders its stance on regime change in Syria.

Lapo Pistelli

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy



I have considered for all my life that this part of the world is a place where all the different religions have been able to exist together, so I am really scared by this sort of black and white world where no diversity is allowed.

The Deputy Minister of Italian Foreign Affairs Lapo Pistelli was asked to provide the Italian and European perspective on how the Middle East can be stabilized, and how Europe could more proactively engage with the region.

Pistelli remarked that ISIS has launched an unprecedented threat to the region and beyond. Pistelli noted that ISIS is trying to change the whole power structure of the region, voicing his concern that many families have accepted its narrative and vision. He also noted the religious aspect of ISIS and the “black and white” world they are creating with regards to ethnic and religious minorities. This narrative against coexistence can only be defeated by other Muslims in the region. As other speakers, Pistelli argued that the answer to ISIS must be a multilayered strategy, countering military, finance and narrative.

Pistelli mentioned two other issues in the Middle East that have affected the current conflicts. First, the structure of regional leadership is changing, leaving a power vacuum when there needs to be strong leadership. He noted that Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and other large actors in the region have all recently changed leadership. Additionally, low oil prices create even more pressure on countries that rely on oil revenues, and can trigger crises where services to the people have to be cut back due to lack of budget.

Pistelli then discussed Europe’s role in the region, which he noted has been characterized by re-activism and flip-flopping throughout the Arab Spring and afterwards. As the “neighbor of the Arab Spring”, Italy was able to see that the crises in the Maghreb emerged out of a demographic surge, high rates of

unemployment, and new access to technology and smart phones. Pistelli noted that Europe was naïvely excited about the Arab Spring, then was disappointed by the results of the elections that followed. While Europe was tempted to take a step back from the region, Pistelli argued that ISIS necessitates Europe’s reengagement with both the coalition and region.

Pistelli concluded by arguing that Europe needs to elaborate a long-term strategy for the region, and to stop being reactive and inconsistent with regard to short-term challenges. Italy, he noted, is a friend of Iraq, and has been providing weapons and humanitarian support. It is also currently pursuing an initiative to help Yezidi women that have been held captive and abused by ISIS.



Vitaly Naumkin

Director, Institute for Oriental Studies



Regardless of their differences on several issues, most of all on the Syrian crisis, Russia's relationship with Turkey is still very important in terms of economic, humanitarian, political and security dimensions.

Vitaly Naumkin gave an overview of Russia's role in the region and in the current crises in Iraq and Syria. Naumkin noted that Russia is a multicultural, multiethnic country, with Muslims making up over 20 percent of the population.

Naumkin remarked that it seems the Middle East is going through an identity crisis; one that can be felt even within the Muslim population in Russia. As the most populous Christian country in the world, Russia has been concerned about the changing demographics of the region, as Christians leave it to escape violence. However, Naumkin noted that Russia has a special relationship with countries adjacent to former Soviet states, such as Turkey - with which they have open borders and a strong energy relationship - and Iran. Russia is also active on the world stage, working with the U.S. to confront terrorism, among other issues.

Naumkin then described Russia's role in Syria, noting that there has been a past disagreement over how to approach the Syria conflict. Russia does not believe in a military victory, but rather believes in national reconciliation for a peaceful solution. Russia organized the first intra-Syrian talks, bringing together different parties to the negotiation table. Naumkin argued that military victory will not be possible, and Russia will continue to pursue negotiations moving forward.

Kenneth Pollack

Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution



“

The United States is deeply ambivalent about its role in the Middle East and that has been the case from the get go.

”

Kenneth Pollack, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, provided his viewpoints on America's strategy toward Iraq and ISIS, and some of the major strengths and weakness of the American approach. As a Brookings Fellow, Pollack emphasized that his views do not represent the official American viewpoint, but rather his own perspective.

Pollack reminded the audience that the U.S. has always been deeply ambivalent about its role in the Middle East. The U.S. accepted its role in the region hesitantly after Britain left the Middle East in 1968. After 2001 the Bush administration decided to embrace its role in the region; however, there was strong backlash inside the U.S. to what many Americans view as too much of an investment in the Middle East. When the Obama administration then came to power, they disengaged from the region almost completely.

According to Pollack, the Obama administration in 2014 realized that disengagement was not working. Despite laying out a smart strategy for a U.S. approach to the region, the administration drifted away from that strategy since September. In Iraq, the U.S.'s approach is heavily militarized and does not have the essential political pieces that would create lasting stability. Like Slim, Pollack argued that a victory in Iraq without a victory in Syria would not be possible. Pollack noted that if ISIS is pushed back across the border into Syria, they will wait, regroup and return when Iraq's other political problems reemerge. Pollack concluded by reminding the audience that current conflicts represent a broader trend of disenfranchised and discontented populations around the region. The great question for the U.S. is how to create a long-term strategy to address these root causes, rather than just the current conflicts that arise as a result of them.

Energy Policy; Financial Crisis

Moderated by Bilal Wahab

Assistant Professor, Social Sciences Department, AUIS

Adil Abdul Mahdi

Minister of Oil of Iraq

Ashti Hawrami

Minister of Natural Resources of the Kurdistan
Regional Government

Hoshyar Zebari

Minister of Finance of Iraq

Rebaz Muhammed Hamlan

Minister of Finance of the Kurdistan Regional
Government

Stuart Jones

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

Ben Van Heuvelen

Managing Editor, Iraq Oil Report

By late 2014, the joint pressures of falling oil prices and the invasion of ISIS created a unique opportunity for Baghdad and Erbil to make a mutually beneficial agreement. An oil deal, followed by a 2015 budget deal, have created an unprecedented level of agreement between the two governments with regard to oil exportation and financial cooperation. However, as this panel showed, there are still a number of issues to be worked out on both sides. This panel brought together the Ministers of Finance of the KRG and Iraq, Ministers of Natural Resources and the Minister of Oil of the KRG and Iraq, and area experts to discuss the current state of play between the two governments, the challenges faced by both side and the areas for further improvement and cooperation.

Adil Abdul-Mahdi

Minister of Oil of Iraq



Both articles 112 and 111 insist on cooperation between the central government and the other governments, be it the government of Kurdistan or other provinces. Unfortunately, this is not the way things are working out and there is not one side to blame.

The Iraqi Minister of Oil, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, delved into the latest updates on the negotiations between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding oil management and the hydrocarbon law.

According to Abdul-Mahdi, the process of establishing an agreement with the KRG has been divided into three stages. The first stage, reestablishing trust between the two sides, began with negotiations over the final two months of 2014 and ended in an agreement by the central government to purchase 150,000 barrels of oil per day in exchange for \$500 million.

In the second stage, the KRG and central government reached a budget agreement for 2015, in which they set the price of oil per barrel and level of production for the amount of oil that the KRG would be exporting under supervision of the federal state. An agreement was reached for the KRG to provide 550,000 barrels on average per day – 250,000 from within the KRG, and 300,000 from Kirkuk. Abdul-Mahdi noted that the KRG has not reached that average, but has rather experienced declining levels of oil exportation during January and February, stemming from technical and other difficulties in the fields, including acts of sabotage.

Abdul-Mahdi argued that some of the current challenges stem from past issues, such as the absence of a legitimate oil and gas law in the KRG, and the absence of cooperation between the central government and regional governments as described in articles 112 and 111 of the constitution. After 2008, when production began at Taq Taq in the KRG, there was a chance to create an agreement; political

conflicts made it impossible to reach an agreement despite the meetings that took place. Abdul-Mahdi noted that mistakes have been made on all sides, and that no one is to blame.

In March 2014, Kirkuk's production was halted due to the destruction of the pipelines in Mosul; however, the KRG's own pipeline ensured the survival of Kirkuk's production, and proved extremely helpful in this crisis.

In four to six months, the third stage of the negotiations will begin, when a second meeting about budgets will take place. Despite differences in opinions, Abdul-Mahdi noted that Iraq is a united country today, and negotiations need to move forward in the interest of everyone. The people of Kurdistan will develop under real established unity, and both sides will benefit from an oil agreement that binds together the oil and gas law, finance, as well as other issues.

Ashti Hawrami **Minister of Natural Resources of the** **Kurdistan Regional Government**



Can somebody please explain to the Kurdish people, to the leaders and politicians in Kurdistan, why we are still being punished?

The KRG Minister of Natural Resources, Dr. Ashti Hawrami, discussed his perspective on the current KRG-Baghdad framework, in addition to a framework for moving forward. He noted specific challenges faced by the KRG with regards to the recent oil deals.

Hawrami noted that the agreements reached so far between the central government and the KRG have been a positive achievement for Iraq, and that he hopes all parties can continue to move forward. Hawrami argued that in the face of multiple challenges in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including ISIS, the influx of refugees and IDPs, and budget issues, an agreement is essential to achieve stability. The result of this need was the budget agreement in 2015. However, Hawrami then noted inconsistencies in pay from the central government from the original budget agreement.

Hawrami then discussed the cooperative agreement between the KRG and Baghdad for 2015 on the new

pipeline that the KRG built for Kirkuk and additional KRG production. Hawrami noted that the two sides agreed that the KRG would produce 250,000 bbl/day from fields in the KRG; however, it was understood by both sides that this number would amount to the average production per day over time, rather than an absolute number per day. Many challenges limited the production in the first months of 2015, including war, sabotage, and bottlenecks caused by infrastructure issues in the KRG, such as lack of pumps and metering, and the need to revitalize or build new pipe lines. Hawrami noted that if these issues are fixed, the surplus in production over the next few months will allow them to successfully achieve the stated average for 2015.

Despite these achievements, Hawrami noted that the KRG only received \$200 million in three months rather than the promised \$3.6 billion. Hawrami concluded by asking the central government to state their reasons for punishing the KRG.



Hoshyar Zebari

Minister of Finance of Iraq



The budget law really went through a process of balancing between different needs and commitments, between the way this country was run as a rentier state economy, based on one source of revenue with this expanding, overblown bureaucracy.

Hoshyar Zebari, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of Iraq, outlined Iraq's strategy for economic stability and his optimism for Iraq moving forward.

Zebari began by outlining the major challenges Iraq is currently facing. Last year, Iraq operated without a budget, there was a political breakdown between Baghdad and the KRG, and ISIS was controlling one third of the country. However, elections peacefully changed the government and improved the people's trust in it. He noted that Iraq's budget challenges were impossible to resolve without first solving some issues between Baghdad and Erbil.

Zebari noted that the major challenges facing Iraq's budgetary stability include, firstly, the high cost of security in fighting ISIS and secondly, the price of oil dropping by 60 percent. However, in that time of crisis, the two sides came together to create a budget deal – a step towards a much more positive future and a great achievement for all parties. Zebari noted this deal as one way that ISIS did indeed unite the country against a common threat.

Zebari argued that it is necessary to balance current needs and commitments with the ways Iraq has been run in the past. Iraq has only one source of revenue and an overblown bureaucracy; last year \$4 billion was paid to government employees monthly. Zebari became Minister of Finance with the new government and balanced the price of oil while cutting spending in ministries and Parliament. He noted that both the KRG and the central government have faulty expectations of each other's budgets, and need to be more trusting.



Zebari concluded by describing the options moving forward. He first stated that the oil agreement must survive, as there are no other alternatives left to Iraq. The federal government will pay the KRG, but is currently struggling to get money from banks.

Finally, he argued that Iraq needs better financial management, and is moving towards financial reform with regards to oil contracts, increased revenue shares, taxation and foreign investment.

Rebaz Muhammed Hamlan **Minister of Finance and Economy of the** **Kurdistan Regional Government**



It has had a very negative effect on KRG's share of the budget precisely and whatever its reason might be, only the people of Iraq and KRG have paid the price.

”

The KRG Minister of Finance and Economy Rebaz Muhammed Hamlan was asked to offer his perspective on what the KRG has learned from recent financial issues and ways that it should reform its economy. Hamlan began by describing the heavy impact that recent crises have had on Kurdistan: the budget was cut in July 2014, ISIS attacked Kurdistan one month later and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to Kurdistan from Syria and other parts of Iraq.

Hamlan noted that the KRG's budget issues have been serious, particularly with the drop in oil prices, Iraq's one source of income. For two months, the regional government has not been able to pay wages to government employees, families of martyrs, or retired employees – a total of over a million people. While crucial security costs to the Peshmerga and Ministry of Interior are nonnegotiable in the current crisis, even the Peshmerga have gone without pay for the past two months, as money has not been received from the central government since the 2015 budget agreement.

”
In December of 2014, we visited Baghdad in order to discuss, understand, and set the budget for 2015. But the mechanism for applying the budget agreement was left a blank space and remains so.



Hamlan then discussed the KRG's short and long-term plans to address the crisis. Firstly, the government has started storing tax and revenue information in a modern way, using information and data technologies. Secondly, the government will aim to curb all expenditures that are burdening the KRG. Moreover, the government will aim to lessen Kurdistan's economic dependence on oil as the only source of income. Just as the UAE has successfully weaned its economy off oil, now only 30 percent of its income, the KRG will try to do the same. Finally, Hamlan gave a few examples of recent reforms.

The KRG has started a pilot program to pay salaries through banks using cash and credit. Additionally, it has begun creating an e-government system to ensure efficiency and information sharing between all ministries in the KRG.

Stuart Jones

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq



“There is a lot of engagement and excitement for what can happen in this country and I think the best way for that to happen is by opening up the private sector, creating investment opportunities, affording

greater transparency, and really encouraging people in Iraq to take advantages of the international opportunities that are awaiting you not only in the oil sector but in the agriculture sector, infrastructure, healthcare and other areas.”

The United States Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones gave recommendations for Iraq’s economic reconstruction in the post-ISIS period by using some examples from the United States’ recent financial crisis.

Jones began by sharing lessons learned from America’s recession in 2007 and 2008. During the recession, the American economy shrank by three percent, the stock market was down by 50 percent, and businesses and individuals alike were negatively affected. At the heart of the financial crisis, the U.S. relied on the private sector to pull Americans out of the recession, and the government made sure the private sector had the ability to recover fully. Moreover, the government expanded the social safety

net, particularly unemployment benefits for those who lost their jobs during the period of the crisis. Finally, the government pursued important financial reforms, including holding the banking sector responsible for the damage done to the economy and businesses.

Out of crisis comes opportunity, emphasized Jones, saying that there is an opportunity during this time for Iraq. Jones reaffirmed that ISIS will be defeated. With U.S. and coalition airstrikes and other advances, the ISIS army is being reduced. Territory is being recovered in Tikrit, near Baghdad, and in other locations with the militias, Peshmerga, and military.

At this time, Jones argued, it is possible to look forward to the rebuilding phase, through what he termed the ‘three Rs’: reconstruction, reform, and

reconciliation. There has been talk in past months about the creation of an international fund to support Iraq’s reconstruction. Jones noted that the U.S. would be happy to support this endeavor, and hopes other countries such as the Gulf States would support it as well.

Finally, Jones argued that Iraq will need to reform its economy by diversifying and supporting the private sector. He noted that the U.S. wants to be an economic partner to Iraq, and wants to develop private sector investment and business partnerships. Opening the private sector will enable an expanding relationship with the U.S., engender greater transparency, and help create investment opportunities. Jones noted that economic growth in turn will spark reconciliation and further rebuilding.



Ben Van Heuvelen

Managing Editor, Iraq Oil Report



“
***Iraq’s oil in my view
is rooted in a more
fundamental question
that goes beyond oil,
and that is how do you
balance the powers of
the state?***

”



The Managing Editor of Iraq Oil Report Ben Van Heuvelen aimed to provide the context and background to the earlier panelists’ discussions on Iraq’s oil and finances. According to Van Heuvelen, Iraq’s oil issues all stem from the fundamental question of how to balance the powers of state.

Iraq’s constitution outlines a federal structure, yet is open to a fair amount of interpretation. All efforts to pass an oil law since 2007 have failed, and Van Heuvelen argued that one of the main reasons for this failure is the competing interpretations and interests of the different parties. The KRG’s overriding



imperative is the principle of self-determination, while the Iraqi government's overriding imperative is to avoid a potential fracturing of the country. He noted that the central government's imperative makes them wary of any region trying to gain more autonomy, as it might set off a chain reaction in other parts of the country.

Van Heuvelen noted that, in a state where all income stems from oil, controlling the revenue of that oil ends up being a very important piece of these power plays. In Iraq, due to the lack of an overarching oil deal has led to the development of two separate oil sectors. According to Van Heuvelen, the KRG

has been using oil to move towards economic independence, as illustrated by the construction of the new pipeline to Turkey, the recent energy agreement with Turkey, and the move towards autonomous oil exports.

However, the recent financial and security crises have brought Baghdad and the KRG back together, resulting in the deal discussed by earlier participants. Van Heuvelen noted that if the two sides work together, there is a chance to export hundreds of thousands of barrels from Kirkuk to Turkey through the KRG's pipeline. This cooperative arrangement could end up being very beneficial to both sides.

Strategy to Defeat DAESH (ISIS): End Games or Seeds for New Conflict?

Moderated by Dov Zakheim

Senior Fellow, Center for Naval Analyses, USA;
Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees

Osama Al-Nujaifi

Vice President of Iraq

Faleh Fayadh

National Security Advisor of Iraq

Fuad Hussein

Chief of Staff to the President of the Kurdistan
Regional Government

Brett McGurk

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iran and Iraq;
Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for the Global
Coalition to Counter ISIL, U.S. Department of
State

Liz Sly

Beirut Bureau Chief, Washington Post

Michael Knights

Lafer Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East
Policy

ISIS's emergence in Iraq, Syria, and the region has been called unprecedented, an existential threat to human values, and a crisis of epic proportions. However, others note with confidence that 25 percent of territory under ISIS control has been regained in Iraq and that the tides of battle seem to be turning. This panel brought together Iraqi government officials, experts, and an American government official to dig into these seemingly contradictory opinions of the future of the Islamic State, uncover the root causes of their success in the region, and recommend ways that the international community can address those root causes to terminate ISIS and its ideology in the future.

Osama Al-Nujaifi

Vice President of Iraq



I feel positive about the support that we are getting from different partners to defeat this mutual enemy, including the support from Sunni leaders who are trying

to reveal the truth of this enemy and show that their principles are not Islamic at all but radically twisted and inhumane.

Vice President of Iraq Osama Al-Nujaifi described the enabling environments within Iraq that allowed ISIS and its violence to take hold. He described five main environments that he believes gave them the room to grow and take advantage of Iraq's instability.

Al-Nujaifi argued that the first environment was the creation of an Islam that serves political and personal beliefs rather than the Prophet's true message. The core of Islam is built on generosity, forgiveness and consciousness; yet a new type of Islam has been created that ignores these crucial pillars. He identified the second environment as the social factors that are linked to this new Islam - the inauthentic narrative and history that ISIS has created to explain its existence.

Thirdly, he mentioned the injustice and dictatorship that has sprung up in different parts of Iraq, and that has given Iraqis a reason to join terror groups. Al-Nujaifi argued that some areas of Iraq have taken away the rights of citizens, particularly of minorities. Against this backdrop of injustice, the fourth environment of social media has allowed ISIS to brainwash people with their own messages and narrative.

Lastly, Al-Nujaifi mentioned that the final environment is one brought about by the United States after the war in Iraq, which created an unstable democracy and fanned the fire of differences between different groups of people. Terrorist groups were able

to find the support of political parties and certain personalities because of such heightened differences and divisions.

These enabling environments show that the military cannot be the only solution to ISIS, as they will just return under another name and continue wreaking havoc. Rather, the root causes need to be addressed. Al-Nujaifi argued that Iraq needs to fight for equality and freedom of expression, and to fight against discrimination, religious intolerance, and injustice. He noted that Iraqis need to be educated about their rights; moreover, Islamic leaders should educate their followers about the true face of Islam.



Faleh Fayadh

National Security Advisor of Iraq



“

We need a government that works for the benefit of Iraq to defeat this organization that works so hard to destroy Iraq. The usual ways of defeating enemies are no longer useful.

”

The National Security Advisor of Iraq Faleh Fayadh provided a global lens through which to view ISIS. According to Fayadh, the strategy for fighting ISIS within individual countries can be local, but its “twisted mentality” needs to be attacked on a global level.

Iraq has a history of violent movements, and ISIS, like previous movements, took power by taking advantage of differences between people to create fear and panic. In Mosul, as in Syria, ISIS took advantage of political, religious and ethnic rifts to secure its own power.

Fayadh spoke at length on the religious aspect of the ISIS. As ISIS is using a religious narrative to build its messages of hatred, it is important for religious authorities to take the lead in denouncing their narrative. Sunni leaders especially must play an active and visible role in exposing the misuse of Sunni Islam for ISIS’s purposes. Fayadh mentioned that he was pleased to note that Sunni leaders and parties were already working towards showing that the message of ISIS was a twisted and inhumane message, rather than a religious one.

Fayadh ended by remarking that ISIS needs to be defeated mentally, culturally and socially. He argued that a separation of governments will not help Iraq, but rather that Iraqis need to work together to fight this common enemy.

Fuad Hussein

Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government



The fight must be collaborative. We are very grateful for the airstrikes, but of course we are talking about

destroying DAESH as a whole because they might come back in a different form and threaten the area again. The best way to do so is by destroying them in Iraq and Syria for good.

Dr. Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government, was asked to share his thoughts on the KRG's approach to ISIS. Though ISIS was closing in on Erbil in August, the situation has recently changed significantly.

Hussein stated that the tide has turned against ISIS, and the Peshmerga are drawing closer to their strongholds. While ISIS used to attack Iraqis, Hussein celebrated that Iraqi forces are attacking them. Peshmerga troops are currently closing in on Mosul and getting closer. He remarked that ISIS has been pushed back from important Kurdish areas, including Kirkuk, Sinjar Mountain and the Mosul Tal Afer Road. The loss of these routes especially has made it more difficult for ISIS to get to the Syrian border.



The first stage of liberation has been successful, but Hussein asked whether there are clear next steps. Are the second and third stages to liberate Mosul and Anbar? He argued for a clear strategy that outlines the necessary next steps. One way to look at it is that Mosul is the most important location to ISIS, since it was where they began their attack on Iraq and where they declared their caliphate.

Hussein stressed the need to remember that ISIS is an international organization with international aspirations. Their ideology and strategy show that they want to move from Iraq to take over Syria, Jordan, Iran, Afghanistan, and then the Gulf countries, Europe, and the rest of the world. The international community needs to decide whether they want to simply push ISIS from Iraq, or to truly end them as a global organization.

Iraq is grateful for the United States' support, but Hussein noted that ISIS also needs to be destroyed in Syria, where there is much less support in the fight. While in Iraq the Shi'a and Sunni fighters are working with the Peshmerga, in Syria there are no partners that can be relied upon.

In conclusion, Hussein argued that the liberation of Mosul is the most immediate concern, and he commended the Peshmerga and other fighters for doing their best in reaching this objective.

Brett McGurk

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iran and Iraq; Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, US Department of State



History is being written in Kobane, and it is a very different history than it would have been thanks to Fuad and President Barzani, and many of the people in this room.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk focused on the unique and daunting global character of ISIS, and developments in the war against them in Iraq.

Recounting his recent trip around the world with General John Allen, McGurk stated, “All over the world it [ISIS] is the number one item of the national security agenda.” He was in Paris when the office of Charlie Hebdo was attacked, and in Amman only days after ISIS executed Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh. Explaining the magnitude of the terrorist group, he said “The world has never seen terrorism challenge like this” especially the “foreign fighter flow into Syria and Iraq” which “pales in comparison to what we saw in Afghanistan.” ISIS is able to recruit young men and women from all over the world, said McGurk, citing that they have recorded 20,000 from 90 countries, many of whom are suicide bombers.

Despite the tremendous global challenge ISIS presents, McGurk argued that there have been positive developments considering where we were in June when Mosul fell and many people predicted Baghdad would fall within 72 hours. Now, ISIS territory has shrunk by 25 percent and coalition forces are on the offensive. This progress is a testament to the Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces as well as the tribes. McGurk. He highlighted several key U.S., Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish collaborations that led to turning the tides in the war against ISIS.

McGurk concluded that the region is going through a “transformational change” and recent gains do not point to a win anytime soon. Rather, “this is going to play out for a long time in great power politics and local politics.” Reassuring is that “people are working hard to resolve these issues and this terrorist group that is a threat to Syrians, Iraqis and to all of us.”

Liz Sly

Beirut Bureau Chief, Washington Post



I think we should be thinking of ISIS in Syria and ISIS in Iraq as one single conflict, rather than two separate conflicts that can be solved in a straight line.

Liz Sly of the Washington Post presented a few challenges and recommendations regarding Iraq's internal political dynamics, as well as the unique dynamic between Syria and Iraq's fight with ISIS.

Based on a recent trip to Baghdad, Sly argued that the internal discussions within Iraq had not changed as much as other participants in the Forum had presented. Sunni politicians continue expressing fears to journalists that Iran will take over Iraq, and that the U.S. has left them open targets to ethnic hatred. Shi'as continue to believe Sunnis are terrorists or Baathists. Sly noted that there is a lack of dialogue; politicians are not talking to each other, particularly about what will happen if ISIS is defeated.

Sly then discussed the ongoing battle against ISIS, calling it the current embodiment of an endless cycle of conflict in the region. Sly warned that battle lines and events move much faster than anticipated, and that all actors should create better contingency plans to respond to these changes. Currently, Iraq and Syria are treated as two different battlefields, with an assumption that Iraq should be dealt with before the focus is placed on Syria. However, Sly argued, ISIS is treating Syria and Iraq as one battlefield, and that in fact, Syria may present an easier opportunity to defeat ISIS. Sly noted that we may see people rise up against ISIS in Syria, or that ISIS might split under internal pressures. The implications of any of these changes on Iraq are unknown, and should be discussed.

Sly concluded by repeating that all parties must better prepare for inevitable changes that will occur on the battlefield, and to remember that Iraq and Syria are inevitably linked in their fates.

Michael Knights

Lafer Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy



“When the Peshmerga are going to go forward, I think they have mature thinking. They have made the wise decision to not go further than the range of the communities who are willing to accept them.”



Michael Knights of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy gave a hopeful summary of the current state of affairs against ISIS, in addition to outlining ways in which Iraq may benefit from opportunities to become stronger than it was before.

In the past year, 25 percent of terrain has been recovered from ISIS in locations around Kirkuk, Sinjar, and in federal areas such as the Baghdad-Kirkuk road and around Anbar, among others. Knights noted that while only 25 percent of terrain has been recovered, a much greater percentage of the population has been taken back, due to the focus of operations on river valleys and population centers. Federal forces, the Peshmerga and militias have all been impressive in creating a strong defense line.



Knights particularly focused on the positive situation of the Peshmerga, who have had great success recently. Knights mentioned the robust air support provided by the U.S. and its allies, and noted that a lot of the buffer zone has been recovered, creating a firm base for future operations. The Peshmerga-led operation to take back Sinjar Mountain was particularly well planned. Knights believes the operation will go down in Iraqi military history and lauded the Peshmerga's decision to not lead operations past the range of communities that would welcome them, but rather opt to support other actors in operations in those areas.

Looking at the future, Knights argued that Iraq has the opportunity to get back to the pre-ISIS Iraq

of 2013, and even potentially back to the Iraq of 2009 when the future seemed much brighter. Mosul will be a huge part of this transition, however, as Knights warned that taking Mosul will be a complex operation, closer in nature to Ramadi – with street fighting and ongoing tension – than like Kobane. On a positive note, Knights noted that the international community is now more interested in Iraq than it has ever been, since the current war is not linked to the U.S.'s 2003 invasion. Thus, Iraq has an opportunity to get back on the right track.

Knights closed with an ambitious statement: if oil prices go up in the near future, this year could be the last bad year for Iraq and the future could be much brighter.

Syria, Iraq Conflicts: Humanitarian Crisis for the Ages

Moderated by Jane Arraf
Middle East Correspondent, Al Jazeera News

Farhad Atrushi
Governor of Duhok

Aso Fereydoon
Governor of Sulaimani

Gyorgy Busztin
Deputy Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General (DSRSG), United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

Angus McKee
Consul General of the United Kingdom to the Kurdistan Region and Northern Iraq

Deborah Amos
Middle East Correspondent, NPR News

Choman Hardi
Assistant Professor, English Department, AUIS

Over half of Syria's pre-crisis population is in need, with over 3 million displaced Syrians across the region currently; in Iraq, over 5.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. These staggering numbers illustrate the enormous humanitarian crisis facing Syria and Iraq, and the burden faced by neighboring countries and host communities in responding to the influx. In this panel, the governors of Dohuk and Sulaimani provinces discussed their experiences with the influx of refugees and IDPs in their governorates, while representatives from the UN, UK, NPR, and AUIS described the international, donor, media and gendered approaches to the current humanitarian catastrophe. The panel gave an overview of the current state of affairs, as well as potential points of contention and challenges in supporting such a large displaced population moving forward.

Farhad Atrushi

Governor of Dohuk



Most IDPs that came to Dohuk in the second wave this August were Yezidis, and they were the biggest victims of this crisis.

Farhad Atrushi, governor of Dohuk, spoke at length about both the logistical and economic impact of displacement in Dohuk, but also of the social and psychological impact on the people, particularly women and children, whose lives have been affected by ISIS.

Dohuk has been the most affected province in the KRG by the mass displacement from Syria, other parts of Iraq and Turkey. In 2012, around 250,000 refugees arrived in Dohuk from Syria; while some of these refugees have since moved on to Erbil and Sulaimani, the majority are still in Dohuk, in four main refugee camps. Another wave of 33,000 refugees arrived from Kobane, most of who still remain in Dohuk today.

In addition to cross-border displacement, Dohuk has also seen many internally displaced persons arriving from Mosul, Fallujah, Anbar and Baghdad. According to Atrushi, the first wave of roughly 170,000 IDPs arrived two to three years ago; these IDPs are often forgotten because they moved in with relatives or friends into apartments and houses, rather than tents. After Mosul collapsed in June 2014, thousands of IDPs made up a second wave. Finally, in late August, after Sinjar fell to ISIS, the largest wave of IDPs – hundreds of thousands of Yezidis and others – arrived in Dohuk to find shelter.

According to official calculations, Atrushi stated that there is currently a total of 820,000 refugees and IDPs in Dohuk province. Dohuk has 20 camps: 16 for IDPs and 4 for refugees, of which seven have been build by the UN. Two camps are currently being built. These camps are a huge logistical and economic burden on Dohuk and the KRG; for

example, the Department of Electricity has calculated that the electricity for these camps alone is costing the KRG \$270 million.

The two main issues that Atrushi saw with regards to the humanitarian situation in Dohuk are funding to support those who have been displaced, and the psychological and social impact of violence on the populations. The UN in the KRG recently announced that by March or April they may run out of funds, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without food or services. This is a huge issue for the KRG, and one that Atrushi hopes will be resolved. Secondly and lastly, Atrushi emphasized the horrific acts that have been committed against mainly Yezidi women and children, including rape, abduction and sexual slavery.

Aso Fereydoon

Governor of Sulaimani



“

We have now started with the help of the UNHCR to build another government-owned camp for 148,000 IDP families. It is 25,000 meters squared and holds 17,000 people or 2,000 families.

”

Sulaimani Governor Aso Fereydoon gave an overview of the challenges faced by Sulaimani due to the influx of IDPs and refugees in the area, describing the current actions of Sulaimani's governorate, as well as what the governorate will do in future.

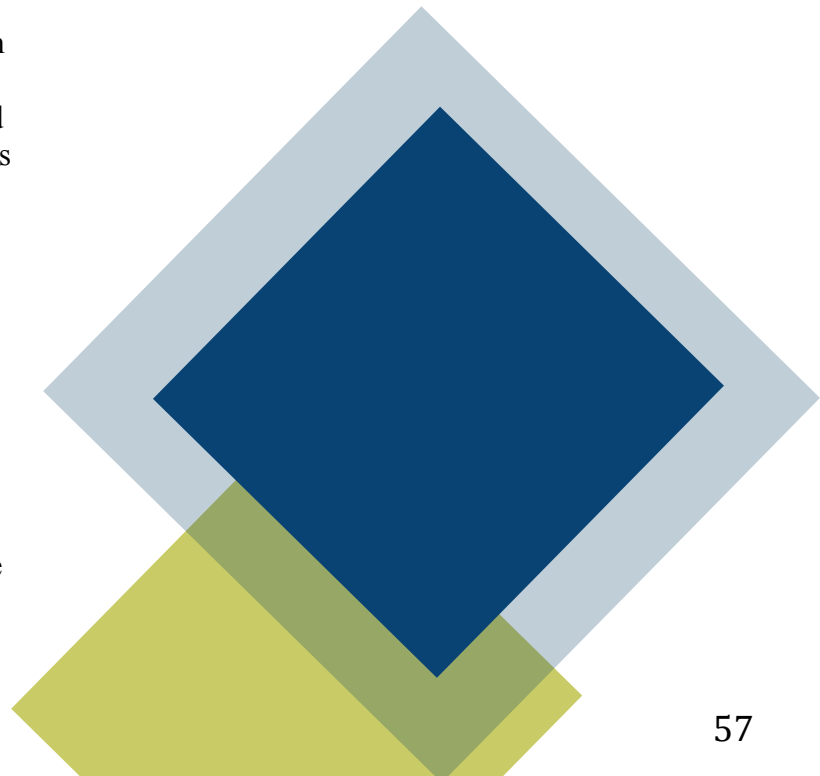
Fereydoon noted that the Kurdish governorates do not have experience managing refugee or IDP influxes, as they used to be refugees and IDPs themselves. The humanitarian crisis has been a challenge and a learning process for the governorate over the past years.

Refugees began arriving in Sulaimani in 2011, but Fereydoon stated that the true influx was in August 2013, when the largest number of Syrians moved into the city. The government moved refugees into mosques and schools, built transit camps, then finally built long-term camps. There are currently 23,000 refugees (10,161 families) in Sulaimani, mostly from the Kurdish region of Syria. In June 2014, the first camp, Arbat, was built to host 10,000 people (around 2000 families) in eight blocks. While only five blocks of the camp are complete, the rest will be filled as soon as they are ready.

Fereydoon mentioned the different situations faced by refugees and IDPs in the Sulaimani governorate. Refugees are scattered all around Sulaimani, Garmian, Tasluja, Pirmagrun and other areas, without enough camps to hold them. However, these refugees are given access to education, residency, work permits and other social services in the KRG. On the other hand, IDPs are a different matter. While IDPs started arriving in 2006-2007, by August 28, 2014, there were over 290,000 IDPs in Sulaimani.

Fereydoon noted that a total of 315,000 people are currently seeking shelter and security in Sulaimani. A new camp to house 148,000 IDP families is currently being built by the government and UNHCR.

Fereydoon concluded by outlining some of the major challenges faced with refugees and IDPs in Sulaimani. Firstly, while there are many people seeking shelter, there are not enough camps to house them all. Secondly, Fereydoon pointed to health as a major issue; 11 percent of medical consultations in Sulaimani are from refugees, and 16 percent of the births in the hospitals in town are from refugees or IDPs. Finally, there is a lack of schools for Arabic-speaking children. However, more Arabic language schools are currently being built in Sulaimani to accommodate IDPs.



Georgy Busztin

**Deputy Special Representative of the
Secretary-General, United Nations
Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)**



“The host community seen in the Kurdish region has done a magnificent job, but also host communities in the central area, and in the south in particular, have done a great deal. We are extremely indebted to them.”



Georgy Busztin, the Deputy SRSR for UNAMI, gave an overview of the current humanitarian situation in Iraq and the work being done by the UN and other international actors to mitigate the situation. He also noted the enormous challenges faced by Iraq and the UN to support the heavy humanitarian burden.

Firstly, Busztin voiced his appreciation of the Kurdish region in support of refugees and IDPs, including the government, governors in different regions and their various partner organizations. He also noted the positive change in attitudes since the new government in Baghdad was formed.

However, Busztin stated that there are 5.2 million



people across Iraq that are in need of humanitarian assistance. The UN alone cannot cope with this huge number, but rather, he argued, needs support from the government and the international community. In Kurdistan, one in every six persons is an IDP, which is an unprecedented ratio. Busztin argued that the crisis is testing Kurdish hospitality to its limits, and more importantly is not sustainable.

Moreover, the cost of operations in Iraq is enormous. The full cost of the UN's operations in the coming months will be \$2.3 billion. Busztin called on donor countries to change their attitudes towards the crisis and contribute to the cause. He noted the recent generous contribution by Saudi Arabia of \$5 million.

Busztin argued that the international community should consider the situation in Iraq to be the most complex of all crises, and made the case for support to the country.

Finally, Busztin noted that the 19 UN agencies on the ground in Iraq are working to improve their cooperation, particularly with regards to civil-military cooperation. There was a major aid delivery problem, but that has been addressed. Displaced persons are scared to go back to their homes, but once the situation is more secure, greater numbers will be willing to return. In conclusion, he reinforced that the UN will continue to be a partner to Iraq throughout this crisis and in the future.

Angus McKee

Consul General of the United Kingdom to the Kurdistan Region and Northern Iraq



This is a crisis that is the sum of many local crises, so it is one of epic proportions. It is also a humanitarian crisis - a human crisis and an inhuman crisis. In these conflicts, we have seen indiscriminate and orchestrated violence against civilians.

General Consul Angus McKee of the United Kingdom discussed ISIS and the ongoing challenges in the region from a donor's perspective. According to McKee, the 3 million Syrian refugees across the region today, up from 70 thousand in the spring of 2012, have turned the crisis into one of epic proportions. As over half of the pre-crisis population is in need, there is a huge burden placed on neighboring governments to deal with the influx.

In 2011, the main issues were the acts of the Syrian government against its own people, such as barrel bombs, use of chemical weapons, and bombardments of neighborhoods. The Syrian government has since continued to press for the removal of key humanitarian officials from Syria so as to retain its impunity. The Syrian crisis is still a massive problem, with its 2015 appeal reaching \$8.4 billion – the largest amount for any single crisis in history.

McKee noted that he was proud that the UK has been the second largest bilateral donor to the Syria emergency, having donated 800 million pounds (\$1.2 billion). However, the latest appeal for Iraq is currently only 40 percent funded, and last year's appeal for Syria was only 57 percent funded. He expressed hope that the upcoming Kuwaiti conference will be a step forward in donor commitment to support the neighboring countries and host communities in Syria.

He concluded by remarking that he was impressed with the work of the people. He mentioned the new joint crisis coordination center in Erbil, which will hopefully improve the information flow between all sides. McKee called for the governments' budgets to remain committed to these efforts moving forward.

Choman Hardi

**Assistant Professor, English Department,
AUIS**



In Kobane, we witnessed the defeat of a patriarchal, radical religious group, which consisted mainly of male fighters at the hands of a group that consisted of 35 percent women and a female leader through co-leadership.

Dr. Choman Hardi of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, described the gender dimensions of the ISIS onslaught, particularly focusing on the horrific treatment of Yezidi women and children throughout the conflict. Hardi described the gender dimension to people who decide to join ISIS from around the world. Men are lured into ISIS with the promise of sex, money, power and, ultimately, heaven at the end of their service. Hardi noted that women are also mobilized globally to join ISIS to provide sex and comfort to the warriors; moreover, women in Mosul who refuse to join the jihad have been killed.

Hardi also touched on the gender dimension in ISIS' treatment of its enemies. Men who resist ISIS, refuse to convert to the ideology of ISIS or who are homosexual are considered infidels and are beheaded, burned alive or otherwise killed. However, women are treated as spoils of war and are raped, sold into sexual slavery or trafficked out of Iraq. Reliable data by a Yezidi activist states that roughly 4,601 women and children are still missing from Yezidi communities.

Hardi argued that the KRG should create a program to find and recover women that are still in captivity, and to decide in consultation with them whether they should go home, or be given a new identity to escape stigma. Hardi noted one positive trend: though women who were raped during Anfal were socially stigmatized, today the spiritual Yezidi leader Baba Sheikh has urged the Yezidi community to welcome back and support these women.

Finally, Hardi celebrated the women fighters of Kobane. The group that defeated ISIS was thirty-five percent women, and she argued that these women should be celebrated for their bravery, patriotism and leadership – and should be the first step in reconsidering traditional concepts of gender.

Deborah Amos

Middle East Correspondent, NPR News



Humanitarian reporting is one of the hardest things to do. One refugee is a tragedy, any more are a statistic. The battle in covering these crises is to find individual stories to highlight the larger plight, and that takes resources, work and time.



Deborah Amos of National Public Radio described what she sees as a systemic flaw in the UN's response to humanitarian conflicts, as shown by her experiences in reporting in Iraq and Syria.

Amos began by describing humanitarian reporting as the most difficult type of reporting. A story describing any more than one person becomes a "statistic" and editors get tired of hearing the stories over and over. Reporters are faced with the same challenges that aid agencies are faced with; namely, finding a new adjective to get others to pay attention to what is happening on the ground during a crisis.

Based on her experiences in Iraq and Syria, Amos described what she sees as a structural flaw in the United Nations mechanism in reacting to



humanitarian crises. In Yarmouk camp, inhabitants were faced with starvation because of politics, and the humanitarian system couldn't stop it. In another case, the Syrian government removed all medical supplies from aid trucks and withheld food from civilians in opposition areas. Both food and medicine have been used as weapons of war, and based on the rules governing the UN system, humanitarians were not able to stop these actions.

Amos gave a second example of this systemic UN failure in the World Health Organization's (WHO) inability to catch a polio epidemic in Syria. The WHO was bound by UN policy to test samples provided by the government of Syria, who asserted that polio did not exist within the country. However, other samples were smuggled to Turkey, where the

Turkish government was able to prove that there was in fact a polio epidemic. The WHO was only then forced to acknowledge the epidemic.

Amos argued that the Iraqi government has also been guilty of similar failures towards its people. At an IDP camp in Dohuk, Amos met IDPs that told her no Iraqi government official from Baghdad had ever come to see them. IDPs from Mosul said the same thing. While the work of the Kurdish government supporting people has been impressive, Amos noted that IDPs should be the responsibility of the central government, which needs to address the humanitarian crisis like the long-term issue it is.

Emerging Kurdish Dynamics; Regional Implications

Moderated by Henri Barkey

**Professor, Lehigh University; Member of the AUIS
Board of Trustees**

Saleh Muslim

Co-Chair, Democratic Union Party (PYD)

Hafize Ipek

Co-Chair, Party of Democratic Regions (DBP)
Diyarbakir

Kamran Qaradaghi

Journalist; advisor to former Iraqi President Jalal
Talabani

Joost Hiltermann

Program Director, Middle East and North Africa
International Crisis Group

Amberin Zaman

Turkey Correspondent, The Economist

In this panel, representatives of Kurdish parties in Syria, Turkey and Iraq, as well as expert analysts summarized the current Kurdish geopolitics of the Middle East. Many of the panelists foreshadowed the beginning of a new era of Kurdish cooperation throughout the region after the Peshmerga and allied troops liberated Kobane. The convening of these different voices reinforced the importance of continued dialogue and organization between Kurdish parties during this time of regional upheaval.

Saleh Muslim

Co-Chair, Democratic Union Party (PYD)



We chose this model of democratic self administration in the Rojava area and it is an example for Syria, for future Syria. It could be a model for all the Middle East.

Saleh Muslim, the Co-Chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), gave an overview of the history of diversity and minorities in the region, then offered recommendations on how to address ISIS based on the successful example of Rojava, his place of origin.

Mesopotamia is an ancient place, and has for thousands of years been home to diverse groups of people and nations including Kurds, Assyrians, Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Yezidis and others. Together they defended themselves against outside invasions. However, Muslim stated, in the 20th century, nationalists rose to power in the Middle East and began to enforce divisions without truly understanding the region or its human geography. The victims of this division were the Kurds, Assyrians and other minorities that were not able to govern themselves.

Muslim used Rojava as an example of specific challenges and opportunities in facing ISIS. Rojava has been fighting ISIS for two years; however, Muslim saw that once people organized themselves properly, they were able to defeat them. In Kobane, ISIS was defeated for three reasons: the organization of the people of Kobane, help from Peshmerga and airstrikes from the international coalition. In Rojava, citizens established a model of democracy and self-administration to organize social support and security. Muslim argued that these good examples can be used across the Middle East to help organize against ISIS and combat the causes that has led to their success.

Hafize Ipek

Co-Chair, Regional Democratic Party (DBP), Diyarbakir



It is imperative for the Kurdish Conference to take place sooner rather than later. Otherwise, there will always be a lack of consistency, and we should not let that become a barrier as it could lead to the disintegration of all that has been accomplished so far.

Hafize Ipek, Co-Chair of the DBP in Diyarbakir, gave an overview of trends in the region that have defined current dynamics both among Kurds and between Kurdish regions and central governments. According to Ipek, the region has been in a state of continuous war, created by the self-interested and single-minded views of different parties. The current needs or interests of parties are put before any thoughts of the future. Assimilation policies in the region have also had long lasting effects by creating fear and divisions between Kurds in different countries.

Ipek argued that Kurds need to stand together and protect themselves. Ipek noted that it is important for a Kurdish Conference to take place soon, to ensure that recent gains in Kurdish unity can be built upon rather than lost to disintegration.

Ipek then discussed the situation of Kurds in Turkey and the current negotiations between Abdullah Ocalan and the Turkish government. When negotiations between Mr. Ocalan and the government began, three Kurdish activists were murdered in Paris. Later, Sinjar was attacked, and women from Sinjar were sold on the slave market in Mosul. These acts show that certain forces hope the negotiations will not be successful.

Ipek also noted that women's rights and the rights of other minorities are extremely important, and should be safeguarded. She called for equal rights for all people in Turkey, arguing that the Turkish government needs to take real and concrete action. In closing, Ipek described the positive trends with regard to Kurdish unity, and argued that Kurds and others should continue to fight for their democratic rights.

Kamaran Qaradaghi

Journalist; Advisor to Former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani



We can't continue dealing with developments as they appear. We must have scenarios, we must have different solutions for expected and unexpected problems that may appear.

Kamran Qaradaghi described how the Middle East has changed in the past two years, and argued that ignored long-term issues between Iraq and Kurdistan need to be dealt with to allow Iraq to escape its cycle of violence.

Qaradaghi argued that many issues that were supposed to be dealt with in Iraq have been put on hold because of the ongoing fight against ISIS. These issues include article 140, challenges with transparency and corruption, the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad, as well as oil issues between the two governments. Qaradaghi also mentioned issues within the Kurdish region itself, such as the dynamics between different groups within the KRG, and between the KRG and other neighboring regions. Qaradaghi argued that Kurdistan has always been distracted by the next crisis, and therefore doesn't have a clear vision to approach important issues over the long run. He called for a different approach to the future; a road map for the post-ISIS period.

One positive development that Qaradaghi pointed towards was that the fighting against ISIS has created more unity amongst all Kurds. Kobane was an example of practical cooperation among Kurds, and of an impetus to defend Kurds in other countries. Additionally, some central governments have granted unspoken consent to the recent blurring of borders in the fight against ISIS. Qaradaghi added that, moving forward, the Peshmerga should be the stable military force of the Kurdish region.

Despite the difficulties currently faced by the region, Qaradaghi was hopeful that Kurdish unity can continue to be improved, and that longer-term solutions to existing issues can be developed.

Joost Hiltermann

Program Director, Middle East and North Africa, International Crisis Group



The only way to secure the Southern border of Kurdistan is to have a viable Iraqi State to the South that can actually control both the Shi'a and Sunni areas in a way that will not pose a threat to the Kurdish region.

Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis group (ICG) summarized main points of the upcoming ICG report on Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly focusing on the impact of ISIS on Kurdistan. He enumerated four major phenomena caused by ISIS in Iraq; that it has caused the weak state system of Iraq to collapse, creating total fragmentation; that the response to ISIS has been purely militaristic, rather than political; that these have sparked a popular mobilization of militias, further fragmenting the military response against ISIS; and finally, that this has opened the door to foreign intervention in support of the various fragmented militias. He noted the fragmentation in different parties and personalities in the KRG. Militarily, the response to ISIS was made up of various private guards, oil guards and Peshmerga supporting different parties, with the goals of defending the front line, but also to take control of areas historically claimed by Kurds and abandoned by the Iraqi military.

He noted two important dynamics currently at play in Iraqi Kurdistan, the KRG-Baghdad dynamic and intra-party dynamics. With regard to the first, pressure from the international community and budgetary constraints led to an oil. However, Hiltermann believes this fix is only temporary. Regarding intra-party dynamics, the KDP and PUK's strategic partnership has ended. Hilterman concluded with three recommendations for the KRG: that it should secure the Southern border by strengthening the Iraqi state, work towards the inclusion of the local populace, negotiate with Baghdad about the taken border areas rather than unilaterally controlling them. Finally, the KRG needs to put its own house in order by unifying and building stronger institutions, rather than dividing along party lines.

Amberin Zaman

Turkey Correspondent, The Economist



On June 7th, Turkey will be holding parliamentary elections and, in some respects, we can say that the Kurds hold the key to the future of Turkey's democracy.

Amberin Zaman, a Turkish national who covers Turkey for The Economist, gave her perspective of the Turkish dimension of current Kurdish dynamics. As she noted, Turkey has more Kurds than all other countries combined, so what happens in Turkey will have an important effect on the future of Kurds in the region.

Turkey will hold elections on June 7, and these elections will mark the first time a Kurdish party, the People's Democratic Party, will run for Parliamentary seats. In order to win seats in Parliament, a party must receive at least 10 percent of the total vote. This law was originally passed in order to keep the Kurds out of Parliament, but now the Kurdish party feels confident that it can secure the requisite 10 percent. Last August's presidential election in Turkey gave a Kurdish candidate 9.7 percent of the vote, proving that Kurds are close to their goal of 10 percent.

Zaman noted that if the Kurds are not elected to Parliament, the AKP will sweep up their seats. This would allow the AKP the majority necessary to amend the constitution and make President Erdoğan an executive authority. Zaman stated that in many ways, Kurds hold the future of Turkey in their hands. Mr. Erdoğan will gain much more power if the Kurdish party doesn't win the seats; moreover, Kurds will then create an alternative Parliament in their region, widening the chasm between them and the rest of the region.

Zaman stated that Kurds are speaking more openly of an independent Kurdistan after Kobane. She called for Turks to openly embrace the Kurds of Rojava and Kobane in an effort to create unity and cooperation as they move forward, instead of furthering separations.

Muhammed Hajji Mahmoud

Peshmerga Commander speaks at Sulaimani Forum



Muhammed Hajji Mahmoud, leader of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party and veteran Peshmerga leader whose son was killed in the war against ISIS, delivered a memorable speech and received a standing ovation in the Question and Answer session of the panel on Kurdish dynamics.

He spoke frankly, recounting that the history of modern Iraq as one of bloodshed and violence, in which leader after leader was assassinated. Unfortunately, after the United States removed Saddam Hussein, Iraqis were unable to build a “democratic, humanitarian state.” The “lack



of cooperation and communication” between communities and leaders, Sunni and Shia, Baghdad and Erbil, allowed a “breeding ground for terrorists,” of which ISIS is only the most recent. In addition to defeating ISIS militarily, Hajji Muhammed argued that Iraq needs a new political system, confederalism, to survive. Hajji Muhammed thanked the world for its support in the war against ISIS, but issued a plea for more weapons and support for the Kurds and the Peshmerga in their struggle against terrorism.



Concluding Panel: Reflections; Beyond the Present

Moderated by Hoshyar Zebari
Minister of Finance of Iraq

Raghida Dergham

Founder and Executive Chairman, Beirut Institute

Joseph Bahout

Professor, Sciences Po; Visiting Scholar, Carnegie
Endowment for International Peace

Neil Quilliam

Acting Head, Middle East and North Africa
Programme, Chatham House

Azzam Alwash

Founder, Nature Iraq; Member of the Board of
Trustees, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Randa Slim

Director, Track II Dialogue, Middle East Institute;
Research Fellow, New America Foundation

An impressive group of analysts and experts came together, with Hoshyar Zebari acting as moderator, to discuss the main points from the 2015 Sulaimani Forum in this concluding panel. Participants reacted very positively to the level of analysis and dialogue throughout the Forum, and added some important topics that they felt should have also been covered. The concluding panel not only gave a succinct overview of the Forum, but also added thoughtful analysis of points that had not been touched upon by previous panelists.

Raghida Dergham

Founder and Executive Chairman, Beirut Institute



A healthy Iraq cannot only live off a healthy relationship with Iran. A very important component is that it has to be in a good relationship with Iran, but it cannot live in an imbalance with the Arab neighborhood.

Founder and Executive Chairman of the Beirut Institute Raghida Dergham discussed some of the key features that she felt were missing from the Sulaimani Forum – issues that she believes Iraq needs to consider in order to have a truly prosperous future.

Dergham noted that though most participants in the Forum were inspired by the fight against ISIS and its place at the frontline of international peace and security, people should not forget that Iraq was already invaded so the war against al-Qaeda could be fought on its land. Iraq has been at the forefront of many wars, but this does not allow for a premature celebration of affairs in the current fight.

Dergham continued that a year ago, it seemed there was a new page in the relationship between Iraq and its neighbors in the Arab world. However, she argued that she could not see any appreciation of these relationships in current discussions. Dergham noted that there was an absence of Arabs in the Sulaimani Forum conversation, and that Iraq needed a healthier relationship with its own neighborhood, rather than only Iran. When Hoshyar Zebari countered, noting that the Iranians were supporting Iraq because there were no other countries doing so, Dergham stated that Iraq's future could not practically survive on solely a good relationship with Iran.

Dergham pointed to two relationships that should have been discussed more during the Sulaimani Forum: the relationship between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and the new dynamics between the United States and Iraq. She warned that internal U.S. divisions towards America's approach to ISIS may end up being an issue, and that Iraq should not prematurely celebrate a victory against ISIS.

Joseph Bahout

**Professor, Sciences Po; Visiting Fellow,
Carnegie Endowment for International
Peace**



We have to learn in this region to address this question of diversity. Not only from an ideological point of view, but also from a mechanical and constitutional point of view.

Joseph Bahout of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace discussed what he believed were the main takeaways and remaining questions from the two days of the Sulaimani Forum.

Bahout began by commending the level of debate throughout the Forum, noting that if the future of the region can be judged by the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, then it will be bright indeed.

The two main points that stood out to Bahout were whether Iraqis would be able to accommodate differences peacefully, and whether Iraq can rebound after the recent crises. These questions were important to Bahout's native Lebanon as well. Lebanon's experience of quarreling, divisions and wars has many parallels with the current situation in Iraq.

As many people alluded during the conference, Bahout agreed that ISIS is the convergence of certain trends in the region. The first is the imbalance in the West's over-involvement in Iraq and its under-involvement in Syria between 2011-2014. Secondly, the numerous unresolved issues with governments in the region since the 1950s has had a role in creating a movement like ISIS.

Bahout concluded with what he saw as the crucial question from the Sulaimani Forum: how can we accommodate our identities and differences? The first day's oil panel showed that living together in one state involves questions of identity but also questions of technicality and constitutional mechanisms. If Iraq learns how to create these technical mechanisms to deal with its diversity, this will be a defining moment for the region.

Neil Quilliam

Acting Head, Middle East and North Africa Program, Chatham House



I think this shift - this demographic, economic shift across the region - is going to impose a significant challenge to the authorities of central governments.

Neil Quilliam of Chatham House reflected on the two days of discussion at the Sulaimani Forum, particularly focusing on the transformations in the region and their long-term impact.

Quilliam argued that there are three important trends in the region that were not mentioned during the Forum. Firstly, it is important to remember the lessons learned from the ‘Arab Spring’, which gave rise to most of the change that has sparked across the region. Secondly, it is important to consider what the long-term impact of Syria’s crisis will be on its immediate neighbors. And thirdly, Quilliam stated that though the borders in the region have not moved, people have. This migration will have huge implications for the geopolitics of the Middle East in the future.

Quilliam then discussed a current project at Chatham House to study the long-term impacts of the Syrian crisis on its immediate neighbors, including economy, security, identity, politics, and demography. He gave an example of an area in Jordan, where the local government is straining under the huge influx of refugees. The government has few resources to create the necessary infrastructure, such as garbage collection and water treatment, to support the inflated population. Quilliam noted that most cases resemble this example, where local governments are carrying a bigger burden than central governments. These trends will create a movement towards decentralization in neighboring countries, and may potentially create the foundation for tension and clashes in the next five to ten years.

Azzam Alwash

Founder, Nature Iraq; Member of the AUIS Board of Trustees



“

Regardless of the rulers, regardless of the leaders, regardless of their need to grab onto power, if they want to stay and have true democracy, they are going to have to devolve power and leave it to the communities, not make all the decisions in Baghdad.

”

Azzam Alwash, founder of Nature Iraq, was asked to give his perspective on this year's Sulaimani Forum in comparison with the two previous Forums he attended.

Alwash noted that the biggest difference between this year's Forum and the previous years' was the current focus on unity. In previous years, conversations mostly focused on divisions in Iraq and the region. Alwash continued, saying that before 2003, Iraq was united by a shared hatred of Saddam Hussein. Now, with the common enemy of ISIS, Iraq is once again talking about reconciliation and unity.

Alwash argued, however, that this talk of reconciliation is not the whole truth. Where he lives in the South, people speak of distrust for the Kurds, and vice versa in the Kurdish region. Alwash argued that Iraq needs to devolve its power; that a plan for this exists, but just has not been executed. As an earlier speaker noted, Iraq needs to change or die.

Alwash finished by supporting the idea of democracy and decentralization in Iraq, in order to make leaders more accountable on a local level. The students of AUIS, he affirmed, are the future. Iraq needs to dream of the future and stop arguing about the past.

Randa Slim

Director, Track II Dialogues, Middle East Institute; Research Fellow, New America Foundation



There is a crisis, and crises always create opportunities. This is an opportunity for Iraqis to get into serious dialogues about the social contract between the different components of society. This problem is not unique to Iraq but I hope that Iraq can set an example for the rest of the region.

Randa Slim of the Middle East Institute discussed her concern over the changing character – both demographic and ideological - of the region.

Slim argued that the tolerance for differences has disappeared in the region, and has led to diminishing diversity. In Lebanon with Christians, and in Iraq and Syria with different minorities, groups are leaving their home countries and are not coming back. This exodus is irreversibly changing the region for the worst.

Slim also noted the huge challenge of dialogue and national reconciliation. While there may be a place for dialogue in Iraq with the new Prime Minister, she argued that the past Prime Minister did not offer any space for discussion. While this lack of true dialogue is not unique to Iraq, Iraq now has an opportunity to set a good example for this region. She noted that there has not been one successful national reconciliation process in the Arab region; all attempts at reconciliation after civil wars were eventually aborted.

Slim concluded by encouraging Iraqis to take this opportunity to renegotiate their social contract, and to set Iraq on a better course.

A Decade of U.S. Engagement in Iraq: What Went Wrong? What Went Right? Lessons Learned

A conversation with General David H. Petraeus



I do think that in Iraq I have a degree of optimism for the shaab al Iraqi, there is talent, there is farmland, it is the land of two rivers, there is a lot of potential, once this security issues is sorted out and you can cement it with a political deal and we can get people working not fighting.

This year, the Forum included an unannounced appearance by General David H. Petraeus, Chairman of the KKR Global Institute, who was on his first trip back to Iraq since 2011 when he was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Dr. Barham Salih, founder and chairman of the Board of Trustees of AUIS, interviewed General Petraeus in front of an audience of 200 distinguished guests - ministers, officials, analysts and scholars - of the Forum. The conversation began with “lessons learned” during the General’s time in Iraq in 2007 and 2008, then moved to parallels with and solutions to Iraq’s current crisis, and finally to regional dynamics. The focus was on whether or not Iraq will survive considering the current internal and external elements.

As the Commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq, in 2007 General Petraeus orchestrated the “Surge,” which, along with the Sahwa, or Awakening, defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a pivotal time which holds many parallels with Iraq today.

Today, Iraq finds itself in a crisis of similar weight to that of 2005 and 2006. Then, Shi’a militias and AQI, as well as other extremist groups, were ripping the country apart, causing a degeneration into sectarian violence not seen in modern times. Today, many Shi’a militias have resurrected and a new volunteer army,



the Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi has formed to combat ISIS, which has committed atrocities on an unparalleled scale. Various Shia militias have also been accused of extrajudicial sectarian killings and destruction of property.

Dr. Salih and General Petraeus first reflected on the General's service in Iraq and lessons that apply to the current crisis. In 2007 and 2008, his Surge and the Awakening, which rallied Sunni tribes against AQI, were able to bring an end to much of the sectarian violence of the "bad years" of 2005 and 2006. Could a neo-Sahwa work today? Can the Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces defeat ISIS? Can Mosul be retaken? If so how and by whom?

General Petraeus was reservedly optimistic. He said defeating ISIS and rebuilding Iraq was "hard but not hopeless." Adding that the Tikrit operation has showed that the Iraqi Security Forces should not be underestimated, that "there is capability."

The General did have reservations. Without tens of thousands of U.S. boots on the ground and American diplomats promoting reconciliation on a level as they did in 2007, and with the increase in Iranian and Shi'a militia influence and power, defeating ISIS would be challenging.

The more difficult battle will come post-ISIS in the political and social spheres, Dr. Salih and General Petraeus agreed. "ISIS is beatable, the question is who holds the area after ISIS is cleared," argued Petraeus considering the backdrop of his own time in Iraq when, after military victories during the Surge, political leaders did not seize the political opportunities. He said the challenge in Mosul, for example, "is not clearing ISIS" but "who is going to hold Mosul after it has been cleared...The forces have to have legitimacy in the eyes of the people and that means they will have to be local."

Describing the lack of political progress after the Surge as tragic, Petraeus argued that, similar to that

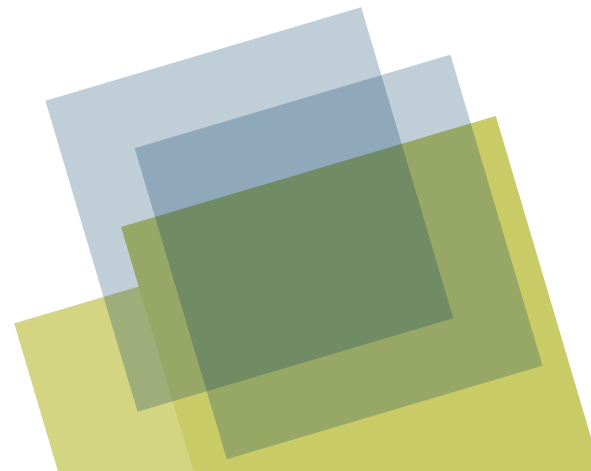
time, the foremost threat to Iraq's long-term stability is in fact not DAESH, but what comes after. The General offered strategic advice for Iraq and KRG military and political officials: Firstly, the solution lies with Iraqis not Americans or regional powers, because "at the end of the day this needs to be done by Iraqis," he said. Secondly, "security forces need to be legitimate in the eyes of the people they are securing." Local forces, not Shi'a militias, need to hold areas. While "everyone must be thanked, like the Shi'a, who fought for their country," Petraeus continued, "they need to be brought into legitimate security forces." Selection of commanders and officers in the army is also key. Next, steps should be taken to facilitate the local populations' return to their homes; "legitimate citizens need to be allowed back to their homes and that is something Iraq has to get right." Lastly, the General emphasized that the political pact that comes after the war against ISIS is key and that "You can achieve security gains, but none of that is solidified until there is a sustainable political deal."

Dr. Salih questioned the General about why he thought it would work now, if it didn't work then, when American engagement does not exist and the Iraqi political players are generally the same. General Petraeus said that in fact there was a diplomatic and security commitment from the United States, look at the Embassy, joint command center and the airstrikes, he said. Petraeus quoted an earlier speaker: "never let a crisis go to waste." This is "a 1776 moment for Iraq and the recognition that 'Iraq has this one last chance' will push people to solve the crisis. Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa that led Iraqis to 'rise to the defense of the country,' was also a sign that Iraq can rebuild and survive," said Petraeus.

While acknowledging geopolitical problems, General Petraeus also cited improved regional relations as an encouraging sign for Iraq's future. The General pointed out that there is more engagement in Iraq today, for example with Saudi Arabia. Both Dr. Salih and General Petraeus noted the improved yet tumultuous relationship with Turkey as a factor. New actors like the YPG in Syria are playing an important role in the war against ISIS and regional geopolitics, said Dr. Salih, stating that U.S. airstrikes have even supported them in Kobane.

Both leaders expressed grave concern about the situation in Syria, and affirmed that both Syria and Iraq must be factored into the equation if the region is ever to stabilize. Dr. Salih saw Iraq's fate as not in her own hands. While he hoped DAESH would be a "unifier" and leave countries "no choice but to work together," he raised concerns that "the grave, poisonous political context between Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey is not so easy, and is shaping to be more of a regional dynamic, of which Iraq is a part."

Despite internal and regional challenges, General Petraeus thought that Iraq could put itself back together.



#Sulaimani Forum 2015: The Social Media Aspect



This year's conference generated an extremely interesting and interactive discussion on Twitter among numerous students, panelist, academics, journalists, attendees and viewers of the online streaming who tweeted about the Forum's themes using the hashtag #SuliForum. By the end of the Forum, the event was trending with more than a thousand people engaged in the conversation

and sending tweets in English, Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish. The tweets made over 87,334,351 impressions and reached an amazing total of 55,407,501 people around the world.

The discussion can be tracked by searching #SuliForum to follow participants' tweets, which records key quotes and moments during the two days of the Forum. Below are some of the most memorable tweets about the forum:



Barham Salih @BarhamSalih Mar 12

Thanks to our staff & student volunteers, @IRISmideast @AUIS_ NEWS team for making **#SuliForum** such a great success.



Amanj Saeed @Amanjsaeed Mar 12

Hoshyar Zebari: I will consider Suli Forum as a parameter for Iraqi politics #SuliForum



Shajwan @Shajwaan Mar 12

#SuliForum will always be an event we look forward to for the content and the people it brings to the scene. Thank you #AUIS . #TwitterKurds



Joseph Bahout @jobahout Mar 11

Real questions now put on **#SuliForum**'s table: sectarianism & corruption as State pillars, identity contradictions, regional conflict hegemonies



Henri Barkey @hbarkey Mar 11

Heated debate between Iraqi federal oil minister abdulmahdi and Kurdish energy minister hawrami at [#SuliForum](#)



Aro Latif Omar @AroLatifOmar Mar 12

Glad to hear a panelist acknowledging significance of student participation and contribution with their questions [#SuliForum](#)



Rori Donaghy @roridonaghy86 Mar 12

«If we develop democracy, society will have capacity to defeat IS - when you share, you can succeed,» Kurdish leader Salih Muslim [#SuliForum](#)



Barham H. Mustafa @BarhamHassanM Mar 12

Legendary #peshmerga Kak Hama Haji Mahmoud speaking at [#SuliForum](#) , receives standing ovation



Sam Morris @morrissammo Mar 12

Two Kurdish leaders, Kak Hama Haji Mahmoud and Salih Muslim, have both lost sons fighting ISIS, and are together speaking at [#SuliForum](#)



Hayder al-Khoei @Hayder_alKhoei Mar 12

Fascinating conversations at the [#SuliForum](#). Great work by @BarhamSalih & the lovely AUIS staff & student volunteers who made it all happen!



Xendan @Xendanorg Mar 12

Raghida Dergham: This conference has been a very solid introduction to what is happening now in Iraq. [#SuliForum](#)



Christina BacheFidan @peacemissions Mar 12
[#suliforum](#) Thank you for bringing together such a distinguished group of individuals concerned with the future of the region.



Lara Fatah @Lara_FFatah Mar 12
@BarhamSalih <we don't need to go to far away lands to discuss our problems, this is the epicentre of change> [#SuliForum](#) #Kurdistan #no2isis



Fazel Hawramy @FazelHawramy Mar 12
Last word from @BarhamSalih : Things can be different in this part of the world in order to shape a better future [#SuliForum](#)



Patrick Osgood @PatrickOsgood Mar 12
Congratulations to @BarhamSalih, @vandentoorn and all the @AUIS team on a great [#SuliForum](#). Gets more impressive every year!



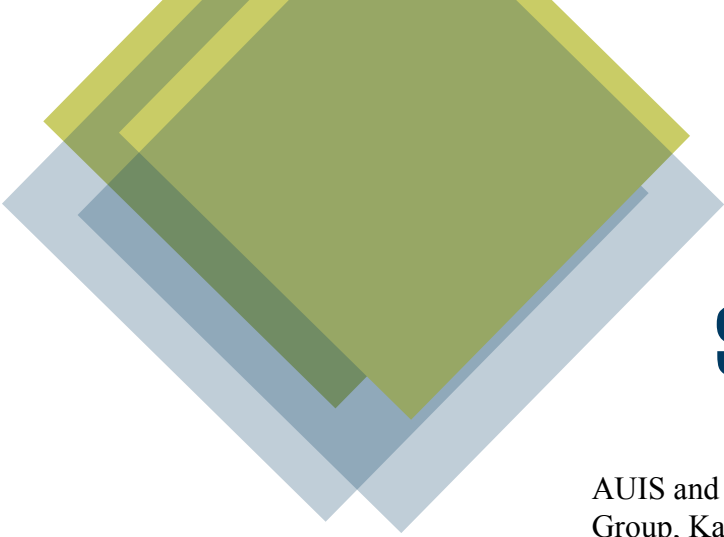
Wladimir @vvanwilgenburg Mar 12
Very successful and interesting conference. Especially second day was very interesting [#suliforum](#)



Aws Al-Nuaimi @Aws_Mohammed Mar 12
Everyone concurred that the 3rd annual [#SuliForum](#) was a huge success and contributed in bringing everyone together. @IRISmideast @AUIS_NEWS



Educating Iraq @djenebajalan Mar 14
@BarhamSalih Well done on [#SuliForum](#) ... This event could not happen anywhere else in #Iraq or the #MiddleEast



Support AUIS

AUIS and IRIS would like to thank its sponsors Qaiwan Group, Kar Group, Rudaw, Genel Energy, Faruk Holding, Amed bo Reklam, Lafarge, Hama Agency, Cacon Print House and Titanic Hotel and Spa. This Forum was made possible through their generous contributions.

The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani is a non-profit institution for public benefit and seeks to be a resource for the entire community. It is with the contributions of its generous donors, ranging from companies and organizations to individuals and families that the University is able to offer an education that has an impact on the future of the region.

AUIS accepts support for its institute IRIS to continue its activities to advance research and scholarship in the region and promote dialogue through events such as the annual ***Sulaimani Forum***. There are many ways to support higher education at AUIS, namely sponsoring new scholarships, establishing faculty chairs, expanding the library's collection and resources, supporting the continued development of the campus, among many other opportunities.

Please contact the office of Institutional Development at support@auis.edu.iq if you are interested in discussing ways you or your organization can support AUIS.



About AUIS



The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani was established in 2007 to be a catalyst for innovation in higher education in Iraq. The University is a not-for-profit institution that strives to be a resource to the entire community and an institute for public benefit. Since its inception, the University has been dedicated to offering its students a comprehensive liberal arts education that develops strengths in critical thinking, the ability to communicate well, a strong work ethic, good citizenship and personal integrity.

As a not-for-profit institute, the University relies on contributions to carry out its mission. That is to provide its students with an education that prepares them for a pluralistic and global society, to make available the opportunities and skills needed for success and to be a resource to the entire community with a lasting impact on education and the educational culture of the region.

The Founder Dr. Barham Salih, with the support of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and the aid of private sector companies and a group of prominent individuals created an institution not only innovative in its teaching methodology but also unique in its role as an establishment of learning unaffected by sectarian divides and affiliations.

The University's campus is now located on a hill overlooking the city and includes an academic building with lecture halls, classrooms and offices; an administrative building with a cafeteria and large conference facilities; two basketball courts and a soccer field; a 400-bed residence hall; and an additional building with high-quality lab facilities and equipment. The grounds at AUIS will be able to accommodate the continuous growth of its student body and the demand for wide-ranging educational opportunities.

The University's academic programs include majors in Engineering, Business Administration, English Literature and Journalism, Information Technology and International Studies. With English being the language of instruction, AUIS students are required to have excellent language skills which they develop in the Academic Preparatory Program, where learning how to read and write in English is juxtaposed with student success skills. Students enrolled in the undergraduate program receive a well-rounded education grounded in the liberal arts with core multi-disciplinary courses that foster creativity, analytical and critical thinking and greater knowledge of the world. AUIS professors integrate hands-on learning into the curriculum and provide an alternative to the 'memorization and repetition' style of education prevalent in the Middle East.

The University is the destination of choice for top students from all over the country, even attracting Kurds and Arabs studying in the United States, UK and Europe. In 2012-2013, AUIS created the KRG Academic Excellence Scholarship, with a donation from the KRG, which enabled it to support bright students with full merit scholarships. In addition, the

University awards high-performing students with lower tuition rates that are directly linked to their high school scores.

At AUIS, staff and faculty members are proactive in creating partnerships and associations that will benefit the educational experience of AUIS students. The University currently has partnerships with many universities in the United States and Europe and these have resulted in the creation of different programs and opportunities for AUIS students. Additionally, AUIS students have participated in a wide-range of international competitions and conferences.

There is a strong emphasis on extracurricular activities at AUIS as well and the University encourages and actively promotes student engagement in volunteering initiatives, community outreach programs, internships, clubs, athletics and the creative arts. The University boasts two women's and men's basketball teams, a soccer team and more than 20 student-sponsored clubs and associations, including the Development Club, the Model United Nation, an internationally competitive debate society, and the Drama Club, which puts on plays for the





***Do not only
thrive in the
world around
you. Dare to
change it!***



University and wider community; two of its members have performed in Sharjah and under the guidance of Kevin Spacey. AUIS is also home to the first and only independent student newspaper, the Voice. The AUIS motto is “learn today, lead tomorrow” and the University is committed to providing the space and support for student activities that encourage initiative, creativity, service to community and leadership.



The University promotes research and open dialogue in the region through its Institute for Regional and International Studies. Every year, IRIS supports researchers interested in the region by providing them with fellowships that include involving AUIS students in the study of the complex geopolitics of the Middle East. The Sulaimani Forum is the institute's flagship event and takes place every year

on AUIS campus. The University therefore becomes the meeting ground for Iraqi political leaders, foreign dignitaries, journalist and academics. The Forum brings politically and academically important figures in close contact with AUIS students who have the opportunity not only to listen to the frank discussion of panelists but also to pose their own questions regarding matters of importance to them.

Graduates of AUIS therefore have been exposed to many experiences that prepare them for a bright future and are a distinct point of pride for the University whose mission it is to facilitate the transition from the university and the world of education to the workforce and the world at large. Commencement ceremonies at AUIS are memorable events that celebrate the diligence and dedication involved in completing an undergraduate program. Thomas Friedman, author and New York Times columnist, gave the commencement speech at the University's third ceremony and was deeply impressed by the cadre of graduates who he challenged to change the world around them.

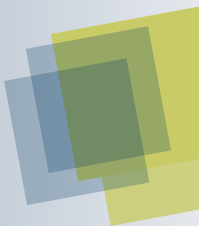
The objective of the University is to produce graduates of responsible character with the necessary knowledge and skills for professional and national leadership. Students are prepared for successful careers that ultimately have an impact on the entire region. Investment in AUIS is thus an investment in the educational culture and future of the country.



Behind the Scenes









AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ —SULAIMANI—

