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**“Iraq-US Relations: A View from Baghdad”**

Let me first thank you, Dr Anthony for that great introduction. And let me also thank you all for coming here this week for the 23rd Annual US-Arab Policymakers Conference.

I want to congratulate the National Council on US-Arab Relations for their continued efforts in organizing this prestigious event and for their ongoing work to promote greater understanding between the United States and my region, the Arab World.

This conference could not be more timely. And the issues we are addressing could not be more urgent.

You have asked me to discuss, “Iraq-US Relations: A View from Baghdad.”

To put it plainly, the view from Baghdad is that Iraq is on the frontlines of the struggle with the best-funded, best-organized, and best-equipped terrorist organization on Earth.

For the so called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which I will thereafter refer to as DAISH, brutality is its ideology, its strategy, and its very reason for existence. Make no mistake about it: DAISH seeks to subjugate or exterminate

everyone who will not swear allegiance to its warped interpretation of Islam.

Wherever DAISH raises its terrorist flag, minorities are murdered, non-believers, are beheaded, women and girls are sold into slavery, and the ancient tradition of my region for hospitality to strangers is violated with a vengeance.

For my country, for our region and for the entire world, our common challenge is to defeat these transnational terrorists. As President Obama has declared, we must “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS.

Degrading, defeating, and, ultimately, destroying DAISH demands military action – and much much more.

The current crisis can only be quelled with a comprehensive strategy that includes military action; and also political, economic, humanitarian and diplomatic efforts by all the affected parties in our region and the elsewhere.

In the long run, containment is not an option because, as long as DAISH exists, it will seek to eradicate ‘the other.’ And “the other” means all of us, whatever our religious confession, whatever our ethnicity, and certainly, regardless of national borders.

But, in the immediate future, we can – and must – counter DAISH first in Iraq.

Yes, DAISH is a threat on both sides of the border between Iraq and Syria.

But there are gains that can and must be made against DAISH in Iraq. If DAISH is allowed to keep the territory it has taken, much less to conquer more communities in Iraq, the cost will be incalculable in terms of human suffering and international security.

Together, we can and must hold the line and push DAISH back; since the coalition has a partner in Iraq but are still seeking one in Syria. We have to control the border between Syria and Iraq. We have to prevent Jihadists from crossing that border. And we have to clamp down on the networks of financial backers and illicit smugglers of weapons, oil and fighters that allow ISIL to generate millions of dollars a month.

From Baghdad to all of our battlefields within Iraq, we, Iraqis, are doing our part at a very high price.

Since 2003, the road to democracy which our people adopted has not been an easy ride. Even in times of crisis, the democratic process does not respond as rapidly as tyrants or terrorists. But, ultimately representative government and the rule of law do offer the greatest opportunities for ensuring that everyone has a voice and no one feels excluded.

Following free elections in April, in which approximately 60 percent of the people participated, the process of forming a new government moved ahead within constitutional deadlines.

The new Prime Minister Dr Abadi has formed a new inclusive national unity government, incorporating all Iraqis -- Sunnis,

Shias, and Kurds and others. Earlier this month the Kurdish ministers have been sworn in and officially joined the cabinet. This signals the backing of all the major political blocs for the new government – a major accomplishment.

For the first time since 2010, there are ministers of Interior and Defense. Prime Minister Abadi has taken decisive measures to restructure the security apparatus, replacing key officers and commanders.

With new leadership – and the support of Coalition airstrikes – the Iraqi security forces have made significant gains over the past two months.

These include: The liberation of Mosul Dam. Ending the siege of Amerli, reducing the threat to Baghdad and Erbil by fortifying defenses; and enhanced and unprecedented cooperation – including joint operations – between the Iraqi Army and the Kurdish Peshmerga. Only few days ago we liberated the town of Zumar in the north and the strategic area of Jorf AlSakhar in the midland.

This is Iraq's fight. But we cannot wage and win this fight alone.

We fully support President Obama's strategy, and we understand that it requires patience and persistence by the Iraqi people and our allies.

Let me be clear: The Iraqi government does not need nor is asking for combat boots on the ground.

But Iraq does need American know-how, including intelligence-sharing and expedited transfers of arms and equipment which we have been and will continue to pay for.

For Iraqis, Americans, and all our regional and global allies, our challenge is to overcome DAISH and the problems that give rise to extremism and terrorism.

We cannot solve these problems overnight. But we, Iraqis, countries in the regional, and our global partners, all need to get to work, as hard as we must and as long as it takes.

Once again, let me make it clear that our new government and the Iraqi people are doing our part. But we all must be realistic about the dimensions of the challenges that we face and the difficulty of the work that we must do.

Consider the problems that the new Prime Minister has had to deal with from Day One.

First, our fiscal challenges:

We are at war. And war costs money.

Moreover, ninety-five percent of Iraq's revenues are dependent on oil. And oil prices have been fluctuating.

On the humanitarian front, Iraq has 1.8 million internally displaced people. They are not settled in camps. In fact, they are often settled in schools, with the result that, the opening of many schools has been delayed.

Our government will work with international agencies to provide adequate relief for our internally displaced and to help them return home, safe and secure.

To protect the interests of all Iraqis and fight for the rights of all citizens, our government is implementing a series of political and economic reforms.

On the economic front, our goal is to promote economic growth, with a fair distribution of wealth and opportunity. The government will pursue a policy of administrative and economic decentralization that will compliment robust measures to combat corruption. We will continue to increase oil and gas production and oil export capacity. Our economic and financial reforms will assist the transition to a market economy.

The government will work tirelessly to improve public services, with a focus on health, education, transportation and the electrical grid. Because the central and local governments must be able to meet basic needs, from sanitation to schools, we will implement revenue-sharing policies that will serve the interests of all Iraqis.

To better combat DAISH at the local level, the government will pursue social as well as military solutions. As part of this effort, we plan to work with national and religious establishments and community leaders to introduce de-radicalization programs in local mosques. These efforts, which seek to counter extremist views, will be aimed at the younger members of society, who are particularly vulnerable to vicious indoctrination.

We must act at the grassroots – and also globally.

The causes and consequences of terrorism are transnational. And the efforts to solve these problems must be regional and global in scope.

For the entire Middle East, the ultimate question is: Do we take the threat of DAISH seriously enough to address all the challenges in our region? Are we all willing to take this threat seriously enough to change and move out of zero-sum mentalities to one of win-win?

A clear and new anti-terrorism doctrine needs to be introduced and adopted in the region:

Now is the time for a regional conversation and dialogue about the constellation of challenges that we face: religious, economic, political and social – as well as terrorism and security.

First and foremost, we need all the religious leaders from both sects of Islam to come together against terrorism. Terrorism is not a tactic. Terrorism is an atrocity. And we need to declare together, in no uncertain terms, that DAISH's brutalities are wrong in any place and at any time – yesterday, today and tomorrow.

To have a dialogue about our future, we need to bring all the stakeholders together – governments, religious leaders, the institutions of civil society.

We need to talk about how we can build a Middle East where the poor have hope, the displaced have homes, the minorities are safe, and the strong are just.

And, yes, we need to have every stakeholder at the table. If others want to join the fight against DAISH, we cannot afford to have them sitting on the sidelines.

We need them to sit alongside us in this dialogue so that they can fight alongside us in this common conflict. The future of our nation, our region, and our world are all at stake, and we must not exclude any stakeholder; and focus on the big picture.

As we resist DAISH and rebuild our country, the United States and Iraq are forever tied together because of the loss of lives and treasure expended by both of our countries over the past decade, fighting terrorism ,extremism and develop and democratic society.

Together, and with the world community at our side, we can defeat the transnational terrorists who are our common enemies and build a secure and stable Middle East which is our common goal. Transnational terrorism is our common enemy. Defeating transnational terrorism must be our common cause.