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Ambassador of Iraq to the United States
Remarks at Conference on “Totalitarianism in Saddam’s Iraq”
Hoover Institution, Stanford University
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I want to thank Mr. Eric Waken for that great introduction.

I thank you all for coming here today.

And, I thank Stanford University and the Hoover Institution for all their efforts in maintaining this comprehensive archive of the records of the Baath Party in Iraq. I would also like to thank the Iraq Memory Foundation, who have worked so tirelessly throughout the years to ensure that these records were preserved, and eventually found their way to the Hoover Institution.

Eleven million digitized pages and 108 video files in total –these records contain vital testimony for how a dictator can not only tyrannize but terrorize a great nation that is the heir to thousands of years of civilization.

Everything that we have heard today –and everything in the Baath Party records here at the Hoover Institution and elsewhere–teaches us why we must never allow one man, one party, and one repressive regime to gain total control over a country.

I know that much has been written and spoken about how events during and after Saddam’s dictatorship reflect religious, regional and ethnic divisions within our society.

But, as these records reveal, the Baathist regime persecuted all of our people, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of sect, and, often, regardless of religion. Then and now, the greatest divisions within our country have been between the great majority who want to live in peace with their neighbors and a small minority who pursue absolute power by violent means.

For those who have never suffered under a totalitarian regime, it is difficult to imagine the constant cruelty, the senseless slaughter, and the endless efforts to intimidate an entire population.

That is why it is so essential that these records must be maintained, not only as a testimony to the evil that was inflicted upon Iraq but also as a warning to people everywhere.

The truth is that it will take some time for Iraqis to come to terms with their past. While Iraqis in their entirety continue to suffer from the legacy of the Baath regime, it is important to acknowledge that communities have been victimized in their own particular way. The historical memory of our nation was exploited by the former regime to justify its barbaric treatment towards its own people.

Until today, remnants of Saddam’s regime fail to even acknowledge the crimes they committed against their own people. This has left their victims with gaping wounds that have yet to heal. That is why these archives are so important for us to find some sense of closure. By closure, I do not mean that we should simply consign our recent experiences to the history books, but rather, that we are able to find a way to ensure that Saddam’s legacy can no longer impede us from moving forward.

For the people of Iraq –and our friends and allies in the United States and throughout the world – we must take stock of these lessons and move forward to build a peaceful and prosperous democracy in place of the fallen dictatorship.

Here in the United States, there has been considerable debate about whether Iraq was worth America’s blood and treasure.

But, despite all the problems of the past decade, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis agree that we’re better off today than under Hussein’s brutal dictatorship.

Iraqis remain grateful for the U.S. role and for the losses sustained by American military and civilian personnel, and their families, that contributed to ending Hussein’s rule. These losses pale by comparison, of course, to those sustained by the Iraqi people. Our blood is mixed together on Iraqi soil.

The great majority of Iraqis emerge from this experience determined to ensure that these sacrifices contribute to a future of freedom and prosperity for our country.

As this archive and this conference underscore, the Iraqi people are making a difficult journey from despotism to democracy.

After more than a half century of dictatorship, three wars, international isolation, and sectarian strife, progress has not been easy. But we are moving forward.

Just a little more than a month ago, on April 30th, some 60 percent of Iraq’s eligible voters participated in the parliamentary elections.

While elections on their own are not sufficient to fix our broken country, one should not underestimate the power of elections to inspire change and fuel debate about the direction of our country.

Iraqis chose among more than 9,000 candidates from over 100 political entities for 328 parliamentary seats.

There were more than 8,000 polling centers in Iraq. And, for Iraqis overseas, there was out-of-country voting in 19 nations. Here in the United States, there were polling stations here in California, as well as in Illinois, Michigan, Texas, Arizona, Virginia and Tennessee.

Today, as we recall the totalitarian past, we should also recognize that this election marked a milestone in Iraq’s journey toward democracy.

Our electoral process is designed to encourage an inclusive government. We want to repair the religious, regional, and ethnic rifts that violent extremists exploit. After being ruled for so long by one man and one party, we have learned the lesson that no segment of our society should dominate our diverse people.

While negotiations about the new government are continuing, every vote that was cast was a strong vote against the violent extremists.

As we move forward, we must be informed by –but not preoccupied with –the terrible events of the totalitarian past.

It is time for Iraqis and our friends everywhere to resolve that totalitarianism should never again return to our beloved Iraq. And, having taken stock of the lessons learned, it is also time for all of us to move forward.

Together, we will build an Iraq where everyone can make themselves heard; where we determine our future with ballots and not bullets; and where our children and grandchildren will learn about tyranny and terrorism from their history books and read about democracy and prosperity in their daily newspapers.

Thank you all for everything you are doing to make sure that our past will be neither forgotten nor repeated -- and that our future will be worthy of our struggles and sacrifices.

And now I would be glad to take your questions.