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FPA Town Hall
Iraq Endgame: The Future of U.S. Involvement in Iraq
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Featuring:

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Frederick Kagan, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

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LAWRENCE KORB: I'd like to welcome you to this program of about the Iraq Endgame. And I have sort of the best and worst job tonight. The best job is we have two very distinguished people to discuss the subject of the future of U.S. involvement. The worst job is, I'm going to have to cut them off after a couple of minutes so we have enough time for questions.

The other thing is I have to weed through all of the questions that some of you already submitted, as well as in the audience. But I will do my best in according to the program they gave me was supposed to have all this done by seven fifteen. So, let's see what we can do. Our two panelists tonight, and I'll introduce them in the order that they will speak, and you've got their biography, so I won't have to go into great detail.

Dr. Fred Kagan who is a resident scholar in defense in security of policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He's a military historian, written very, very widely on the subject there. Very few people who know more about warfare and the history of warfare, that can comment on the situation on the ground in Iraq, and he's had a big role intellectually in some of the strategy that the president adopted about a little over a year ago.

Both of our speakers have taught at WestPoint among other things. And our other panelist tonight is professor Richard Norton who's the professor in the Department of International Relations and anthropology at Boston University. He is an expert in the Middle East, and all of the culture and the history of that area. In fact, he's on leave right now writing a book about the SUNNI Shia Rift.

Among his other accomplishments, both of them have PhD's, and Richard is also a retired Army Colonel with three years of combat zone. So we really have two people who I think can focus on where we are, where we ought to go. Now I'm going to spend a couple of minutes in setting the stage.

We all know that the war is in its sixth year; the fifth anniversary was last year. There have been high costs, both in terms of lives, for us and the Iraqis as well as financial costs. We do know that the violence got very high in the middle of last year, starting in 2006 and it has calmed down now, though events in the last couple of days, wonder if that's going to be permanent or whether it will stay down for a long period of time.

We do know that in the last year, we have what people call a surge. We have sent more troops, but because we don't have a large enough ground forces the surge will end this summer in terms of the extra thirty thousand troops. The question the president himself is deciding this week after consultations with General Petraeus and Admiral Fallon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whether to pause, whether to keep it going.

We know that there have been other things that have happened in the last year, where you've had the so called "awakening", where many of the former SUNNI and surgeons have partnered with us, and they were called the concerned local citizens, they're now know the sons of Iraq, and because of them partnered with us the violence has gone down, particularly now on Province.

You've also had Al-Qaeda Marauder, that's laid down his arms, but again we don't know what will happen as a result of the last couple of days. And the question is, "Okay, where do we go from here? Should we pause with the drawdown of the troops? What are the costs and benefits of staying, what are the benefits of leaving?"

And if we leave, under what circumstances should we leave? And what will tell us when we achieve our goals? What are our goals?" So with that introduction, let me ask Fred Kagan to the podium.

DR. FREDERICK KAGAN: Larry, thank you very much, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you all for coming out to talk about this very important topic. I was told I had to be very brief, so in a nutshell a rock surge went in good. Okay, thanks. Last, in December of 2006, we were unequivocally losing the war in Iraq and that was my evaluation.

It was my evaluation of the command in Iraq, the strategy was not working, and we were headed, the Iraqi's were headed to full-scale secretary and Civil War. And

there was no question about that, and you saw a mobilization of the Iraqi people to fight a full scale sectarian and Civil War, that individuals outside of organized groups, pursuing political objectives, individuals started to form vigil anti-groups in their own neighborhoods, and attack people of the other sect, in their own neighborhoods or outside.

And that was sort of the marker of a transition from an insurgency where you have multiple sides, where you have organized groups that are pursuing, using against civilians - - including to pursue political objectives. And that actual full scale in sectarian of conflict where people in each sector just going after people in the other sector.

We started to see that develop in mid 2006, and by the end of 2006, it looked like it was headed in an absolutely, uncontrollable - - . What we have seen over the past fifteen months is that it turns out that the Iraqi people were not in fact committed to or even desirous of having that kind of full scale Civil War, and given the opportunity, to mobilize instead, to resist those who were bringing violence they did.

That was the nature of the awakening movement, and it was the nature of a variety of movement on ground outside of the awakenings that have led to the assistance of the Iraqi population that was given to American and Iraqi forces to bring the violence under control. And so I think that it is fair to say at this point the Civil War is over.

There is not now is not a Civil War in Iraq, in the sense that you have communities mobilizing to kill each other. To the extent that you have popular mobilization on the ground, it is mobilization against people who may label as terrorists, and insurgents. Interestingly, that mobilization does include some former terrorists and insurgents, which tells you something about their belief in how this is going to come out.

The Civil War that immured in 2006 was overlaid on the Sunni Insurgency, which we had been combating since 2003, rather, ineffectively. And that was, that insurgency was based on the premise that the Sunni were not going to accept a Shia government and were going to use force to resist it, and we're not going to participate in the political process.

That has also been defeated in the sense that the overwhelming majority of the SUNNI Arab community in Iraq has decided that it is not going to use force at this point to pursue its former objectives, but it instead is going to use attempt to achieve its objectives through the political process, which brings me to the last point. Which is that the SUNNI insurgency and then the escalating Civil War created fertile ground for Al-Qaeda to establish itself in Iraq, which it did very early on and then to establish safe havens around the country, and then by the end of 2006, Al-Qaeda globally and in Iraq clearly thought that it was winning in Iraq and you could have made a very good damn case for it. They had very substantial urban and rural sanctuaries throughout the country and on bar in Baghdad up the

Dalia, up the Tigris, on the Euphrates, and it looked like they were doing very well.

I think that it is also now fair to say that Al-Qaeda has been defeated in the sense that it no longer stands any measurable chance of actually achieving its objective of establishing an Islamic state of this sort that it desires with the support of the Iraqi people, of the SUNNI population. Now, that doesn't mean that there isn't going to continue to be violence caused by Al-Qaeda as well as by Shia extremist groups.

It is still a war, these enemies have not conceded. Very brief I'm going to head with this, from a military standpoint if you've simply do the analysis of what kinds of forces are required in Iraq to maintain and extend the current gains. The idea of going below fifteen brigades this year is virtually inconceivable. In reality I think that the actual requirement is like seventeen or eighteen brigades.

I will be happy to talk if anyone's interested in why that is so and what that does for you. Think that we are entering a potentially transformative period in Iraqi politics and Iraqi society, there will be - - elections on October 1st of this year, and there will be new elections for the Iraqi Parliament by the end of next year.

Based on newest trips to Iraq, including my most recent in February, I do believe that the Iraqi political dynamics is changing very fundamentally, and that if these elections are held at the same sort of standard in terms of fairness and legitimacy as the previous elections were in Iraq were held, then you will see a change at the same sort of in the nature of the Iraqi political discourse in the coming year, which can in fact give us the opportunity to see success in Iraq in the sense of a stable democratic country that is an ally in the war on terror.

I have not, for those of you who don't know me, I have not been spinning this line since 2003, and I've been rather down on how things are going prior to the implementation of the surge. So, for what it's worth this is a new perspective for me as well. But I do think this is possible, I think success is possible and I think that it will be worth it, not only in terms of warding off the dangers that failure would bring upon us, but also in the positive benefits that it can bring us. I look forward to your questions.

[Applause]

PROFESSOR AUGUSTUS NORTON: It's very nice to be with you tonight. May I have the map please? I think we have a map that you can look at, which will show you Iraq, maybe, there it is. Great. I'm very pleased to be with you tonight, first of all, I wanted to say I am a great admirer of the Foreign Policy Association. I participated in Foreign Policy Association events, the last quarter century or so, written a few pieces for the association, and also had the pleasure of participating in numeral numbers of great discussions around the country.

So I just want to start, not talking about Iraq, but saluting the Foreign Policy Association for all the great things that it does, and thank all of you in the audience

who support it. I have a rather different perspective than what you've just heard. First of all I think that the surge as it's called has been in a technical sense a success.

As I was telling our moderator before I came in, I've known both of the principles who are involved in running the show in Iraq for a very long time Brian - - ambassador, is a man that I've known for almost thirty years. We were first together in Lebanon many, many years ago, and General Dave Petraeus is a friend and former colleague from the West Pointe faculty. These are two people who are as capable as you might probably imagine.

We're very fortunate to have, more or less, exactly the right people we should have on the scene running the show. And they have overseen a significant improvement in the situation, but the Iraq war is not close to being a success. In fact it's a horrible failure on many levels, and there's not much we can do to change that fact. We can mitigate the failure which is really what we need to think about doing.

For the Iraqi people it certainly hasn't been a success. There's an organization in Britain, Iraq Body Camp, which keeps track of casualties in Iraq. They're the most conservative organization that counts - - casualties. They estimate that based on multiple confirmations and so on that ninety thousand Iraqi civilians have died.

In estimate or studies, I should say have been published in News and Journal Medicine in January, for the period 2003 to 2006, come up with a higher number using statistically dependable techniques. Namely, one hundred and fifty one thousand civilian deaths.

There have been estimates of as high as one million civilian deaths since the U.S. invasion. Whether the Iraq Body Camp numbers are correct, or the higher numbers there's been a substantial total number there in Iraq. And unfortunately this has affected the attitude towards the U.S., both in Iraq and outside the country.

For U.S. soldiers, it's certainly been a horrible cost, and one of the problems we have right now is their army has been stretched, almost to the breaking point. The Generals don't talk about it very much, and they prefer not to do it publicly, because the data is so scary. But what's happening is right now, is you're losing an immense number of junior leaders from the army, particular experienced captains, and in some cases generals.

I can't give you full details because it would reveal my source, and I don't want to compromise the source. But, studies have been done that show that among the young officers leaving are those that tend to have the most combat experience, tend to have the best performance records, and the best college educations.

So we're really losing the best men and women from our commission ranks. As someone who spends a lot of time thinking about the Vietnam War, fighting in Vietnam, and having to serve as an officer in the Army following the Vietnam War, I

can tell you that the period of time it takes an Army to recover from that kind of damage is not trivial. It takes years and years.

In fact when I was serving at WestPoint in the 1980's, many of the young, bright officers who I was serving with, today, many of them are generals actually, were people who were very self conscious about recovering from the damages of that earlier conflict. So there are really fine limits in terms of what we can do. Fred might be right, the seventeen or eighteen combat brigades may be a great solution, but frankly speaking, when you begin to crunch the numbers, it's tough to come up with those numbers.

So we're really faced with some real limitations. Moreover, I don't have to tell you about the economy and the effect the wars had on the economy. The war's costing approximately five thousand dollars a second. If I'm successful in speaking only for five minutes, that will have cost you one million five hundred thousand dollars, in terms of Iraqi spending levels.

So From the standpoint of many of the structural constraints we face here in our own system, we have some pretty severe issues to grapple with. Now, a key question for Iraq is, "Is the Civil War over?" This is what Prime Minister Nuri al-Malaki said last week. He says the Civil War is over, he declared that in fact. I must say, I studied Civil Wars, I've lived in Civil Wars, and what I've learned is that these wars don't always keep the same character day after day.

They change, the constellation of forces change, militias and other groups participating build new alliances, and also they create their own, if you will, militias economies, where the a vested interest in maintaining them. So what we can say right now is that the Civil War is quiet right now. I think it's very optimistic to say the Civil War has ended.

I hope it is, frankly, ended, but I'm a little bit skeptical of that claim. As we speak today, there's heavy fighting going on in Basra, Basra down here is Southern Iraq, of course the third largest city. It's a city which the British nominally controlled. But basically, the city has been controlled by several militias for the past several years. - - influence is very, very strong.

As we speak, heavy fighting is going on in Basra, the Iraqi Army, and in fact the Prime Minister is on the scene as well, has launched a campaign against one of the major Shia militias. - - militias - - . Whether or not this is going to be a successful campaign, we don't know yet. What we do know is, one of the things that has made the surge successful, is that this very important militias - - has been maintaining a cease fire since last August.

If that cease-fire comes unstuck, we may be into a new game; we may be into a new game. So we'll see. Now when you think about these militias by the way, we can't just simplify when we talk about - - Sunnis, Shias, I must say most of us now, we've been following this war, we have a pretty sophisticated understanding. I'll

finish in just a minute or so, Larry. But we have a pretty sophisticated understanding now, from reading the newspapers.

But still, you know, these categories are not enough. So, for example within the Shia community, you had some very substantial differences, based on differences in class, in privilege, in access to power and so on. So, from one perspective, for example, what's going on in Basra, maybe the central government putting down a significant militia, bringing Basra under control.

But, it may also be the central government acting as a sort of agent of some of the other major militias in the country. And we don't know enough yet, to know whether that's the case or not. So, we're faced with a very, very difficult situation. We think of ourselves as liberators. Technically speaking, the U.N. who is resolutions, has legitimated the U.S. occupations of Iraq. But from the standpoint of the Iraqi people, that doesn't wash.

The standpoint of the average Iraqis, what they're experiencing is American Ideal, or occupation, or American empire, or colonialism. This is the dominant narrative. So don't put too many bets on, and I won't say the awakening that's taken place in Iraq. Basically keeping people at bay. I would emphasize awakening, because the standard actually has many different forms.

So, don't put too much of a bet on the situation staying calm. These would be any of these communities; this would be the SUNNI community, or the Shia community and U.S. forces. It's all very, very, it seems to me perishable at this point, in terms of many of our assumptions. I'll close by saying, certainly I especially look forward to your questions, that it's obvious I say, at this point Fred Kagan and I probably agree emphatically, that what you can't do, given the present situation in Iraq is leave very quickly.

And the question is, "What are the terms of reference for leaving?" How fast you're going to draw down, what kind of residual benefits are likely to be there and for how long. But frankly speaking, we put ourselves in a kind of self-checkmate situation, where we're not going to be able to leave very quickly. I must say that's what I very much feared was going to happen five years ago, but in any case, I'm not particularly happy that it has, but that's the reality. Thank you very much.

MALE VOICE: There's been repeated talk about staying "until we win" Would both of you please define what winning would be?

DR. KORB: Okay, Fred?

DR. KAGAN: As I said in my opening marks, winning is, for me a stable democratic legitimate Iraqi government that is align in the war against Islamic extremists. That's what winning is to me, and I think that's attainable.

MALE VOICE: Is it the same for the Iraqis?

MALE VOICE: Let me, I guess the question becomes, some people argue that the administration has dumbed down its goals. It's sort of a negative goal instead of a positive goal. And there was an article that somebody mentioned it here in the Washington Post this week wherever they had this Colonel in Beluga, and the Iraqi police that said, "Iraqi. No democracy, it's always been ruled by a strong man."

DR. KAGAN: Yes, as my colleague can testify Colonels say a variety of interesting things which are not necessarily - - having worked for many Colonels in my time, I'll stand by that. Look, I don't think the administration has dumbed-down its goals, in the sense I don't think that President Bush has walked away from this as his objective, and I don't believe General Petraeus has either.

A variety of people, we can absolutely have a discussion about whether this is attainable or not.

DR. KORB: Okay. Richard, do you want to comment.

PROFESSOR NORTON: I just wanted to say that I'm very skeptical that Iraq will become a democracy, as we understand it anytime soon. And, my reading of the administration, both in Iraq and in the region in general, is that the enthusiasm for the democratic objective has disappeared. So, I think stability would be enough.

If you can obtain stability in Iraq, allies that would basically help us to ensure that there's not a significant threat of terrorism, and us and our friends that would probably be the best you can get.

DR. KORB: Would you accept an - - cater strong man.

PROFESSOR NORTON: Well let me tell you this, at a talk in Washington, May of 2003, I said "The day will come where a man on horseback will ride into Iraq, and you'll welcome him with flowers and candy." And I must say I stand by that, and if Nuri al-Malaki and anybody else can establish control in that country, we're not going to be too worried about the integrity in which they respect the principles of democracy.

DR. KORB : Let me go to another question that was written, Fred somebody says, I guess they're quoting Sun Sui, "The military force has a political objective, and the objective of the surge was to get the Iraqis to make the political compromise. Have they done enough of in your estimation given that the level that violence has gone down?" What can we do to get them to do more.

DR. KAGAN: The Iraqis have made remarkable strides, politically, over the past couple of months. In fact, I've been surprised at the amount of progress that they've made. If you go back and look at the congressional benchmarks, in which I was never a fan, because I'm not a fan of check lists, but that's their sort of form of merit these days for political progress.

I think you can make a good case that the Iraqis have met about twelve out of eighteen benchmarks and made progress on another five. They have notably

passed four out of five of the benchmark laws that were identified. The only one that they haven't passed is the Hydrocarbon's Law, a law which is mitigated somewhat, but not completely by the passage of a 2008 budget which addressed the question of oil revenue sharing, which is why we thought we cared about that law although it's not why we should.

So, there's been a lot of progress actually in terms of meeting the benchmarks, but as I said I was never that excited about the benchmarks to begin with, and I never thought this problem was going to be resolved by legislation coming out of the C.O.R. And I actually think that's more symptomatic than causal of anything.

What it's symptomatic of is what I saw and felt most dramatically on my most recent trip there, which is the development for the first time, I think, of the beginnings of issues of politics in Iraq, so that, this is especially noticeable in the Shia community, where for the first time, it's not enough for leaders like Nouri al-Maliki to say, "I am a Shia, you must support me, because I am a Shia."

Now increasingly local Shia are saying, "That's very nice, but what are you actually doing for me?" And that has put a tremendous amount of bottom up pressure on the Iraqi government, and when you talk as I did to Iraqi governor to especially, Shia governors, they're very concerned about being voted out of office in October. And, to me that's the most promising sign of the early development of an actual political discourse in Iraq.

DR. KORB: Okay. Richard, someone wants to know that advocates of an early withdrawal maintain that this would force the Iraqi factions to negotiate with each other. Is that a plausible rationale?

PROFESSOR NORTON: I think that, it depends on the pace of the withdrawal, obviously. I think that setting a iron flag date for withdrawal is probably a mistake, that's my view. And while I'm impressed with certain political candidates, who talk about leaving Iraq and so on, I'm also impressed by their likely intelligence when presented with the facts, which is to say, I think that those plans are likely to be mitigated, substantially.

So, if by an early withdrawal, which by basically, packing up our things and leaving as quickly as we can, I think that would be a very bad idea? I think because an enormous amount of problems in the neighborhoods sort to speak, and it would certainly pour gasoline on the Civil War.

DR. KORB: Okay. We're now ready to go back to the audience, yes ma'am. Yes Please.

MALE VOICE: My question is, I heard that Iran was funding the Iraqi police, and that we were funding neighborhood militias, in order to keep the death toll down. Is there any truth to that, I'm asking both of you?

PROFESSOR NORTON: Well we are funding militias, I mean, basically the awakenings, these local militias that have emerged in places like - - and so on, are being paid directly by the U.S., what three hundred dollars a month, I think. So and of course

in the past, we've directly funded various security institutions. But for example, the police, I don't know how much money the Iranians are putting in, certainly it's not a substantial, but a lot of these groups finance themselves, through corruption.

You know, to the extent that the police are routinely implicated in kidnapping schemes, various extortions schemes and so on. So it's a lot of sort of self financing, and for example, one of the reasons is that - - many of his people were uncomfortable with the cease fire that he declared last August, a lot of their income earning opportunities were reduced. You see?

MALE VOICE: So isn't it a conflict? Isn't it a conflict, if Iran is funding the police, and we're funding the militia, and the police are fighting against the militias?

DR. KAGAN: Iran is not funding the police.

MALE VOICE: What, sorry?

DR. KAGAN: Iran is not funding the police.

MALE VOICE: They're not?

DR. KAGAN: No.

MALE VOICE: Are they funding anything?

DR. KAGAN: Yes. The Iranians are funding as Dr. Norton said, are heavily funding Shia militias, particularly special groups that have a very complicated relationship with Jen, which are in fact controlled by R.I.G.C. goods force of officers, normally through Lebanese Hezbollah intermediaries in Iraq. And the amount of money is substantial, although Dr. Norton is right.

The militias make a lot of money on their own. But the Iranians are not funding any police, in the sense that you have some militia infiltration of the police. I think it's inappropriate to call the sons of Iraq movement as we're now calling the formerly concerned level citizens. To call that a militia, because to my mind the operative definition of militia is an armed organization that operates outside the law.

And that is absolutely not what sons of Iraq movement is. The sons of Iraq movement operates within framework of the Iraqi government structures, they owe allegiance, they swear allegiance directly or indirectly to the Iraqi government, and we supply a variety of information about them to the Iraqi government, and just to correct one myth, which is very out there very frequently, we do not arm them.

We do not weapons to sons of Iraq anywhere. We don't do that, what we do, do is pay them.

DR. KORB: In the back? Speak as loud as you can.

MALE VOICE: As an aside to the comment on the possible appropriation on the Iraqi revenues, it's perhaps worth noting, five percent of Iraqi revenues are directed to reparations for the first Gulf War, for the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, 1991, and that's done under U.N. resolutions, and it's, as I understand sort of great resentment among the Iraqi government officials, that's just five percent.

My question is it picks up about Kagan's point about - - political development in Iraq, and whether it's possible to have peace, security, and other things that we would term victory, in the absence of government that is perceived to be legitimate. It seems that one of the lessons of Vietnam is that you can pour in as many resources and tricks of training as you'd like, but if what you're doing is propping up a government, which is perceived locally as inefficient and corrupt, you're not going to get anywhere.

DR. KORB: Richard you want to try that?

PROFESSOR NORTON: Yeah. Well, first of all, you're quite right about the reparations. And in fact the Kuwait government, which is the victim of the 1990 invasion, has been approached and asked to basically stop the reparations and they said no way. So that's still very much going on and it will be going on into the future. Your point about the legitimacy of the government is right on target, it seems to me.

I mean, from the standpoint of many of the people involved, for example, in these awakenings, I would call them militias, to defend that, but from the standpoint of the people involved in the militias, SUNNI militias at least, the government is an alien government. In fact they refer to it as the government of Iranian or Persians, you know, so those sentiments run very, very deep. And what we had not seen, there had been some recent promising steps, for example, legislation had been last month with regards to the elections and amnesty for - - and all that.

But these are steps, but they have to go much, much further in order of those walls of separation to disappear. Right now, they're very, very severe, and with respect to the awakenings, and there are some Shia groups too who are participating in this program. It is true that with these groups do pledge allegiance to the state and all of that, but we do have documented cases, a fair number of them, of they challenging legitimate representatives of the state.

They're sort of pushing out of the way elected political representatives and so on. So they haven't necessarily always done what they said they were going to do and lived up to the standards that they said they were going to live up to, except they haven't attacked the U.S. soldiers for the most part.

DR. KORB: Fred do you want to?

DR. KAGAN: Yeah. Well, if your standard is perfection, I can guarantee you, as you well know that it will never be met in Iraq or anywhere else. As for the point about Kuwaiti recreations, it's unconscionable that the Kuwait's won't waive those, if everyone who visits Iraq goes through Kuwait city, and you can see all the construction going on, it's quite a place. They don't need the money.

It's a reflection that the Arab governments have not yet accepted the Iraqi government because they see it as a Shia government, and you hear that all the time. Interestingly, by the way, when I was talking to the governor of Kabala, I think it was, he also said they were Persians, and he's a Shia. So this is not such a silly thing, although Dr. Norton is absolutely right, that it runs deep in the SUNNI community, and the questioner is absolutely right, no, there is no prospect for stability in a country absent of some absolute dictatorship.

I would never support if the government is seen as illegitimate. That's why it's incredibly important that we help shepherd the Iraqis through the next two elections in a way that is inclusive in the SUNNI community, that gives the leaders of some of these movements, the awakening movements, in the SUNNI community, and in the Shia community, the opportunity to run for office, and see themselves actually represented.

Various factions, including elements within the government will certainly try to rig the elections, or deter people from voting, or get people to vote in certain ways, unquestionably. One of our challenges will be to do what we can to mitigate that. Fortunately, in this regard, we have a very powerful ally in the U.N. Representatives, Staffan de Mistura, whom I had the pleasure to meet in Baghdad on one of our compounds, who is profoundly committed to insuring free and legitimate elections, and to working very closely with us to make that happen.

And I think as Senator Clinton has called for an increase in the U.N. role, in Iraq, we have already seen a significant increase in the U.N. enroll in Iraq, and it's a very positive thing and I hope that it will continue.

MALE VOICE: One question for both of you, what should be the relative priorities of Afghanistan and Iraq?

PROFESSOR NORTON: Afghanistan is terribly important. If there is a legitimate concern with al-Qaeda, it's a concern geographically centers on Northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, and I worry a lot, and I think many people worry a lot about the extent in which we may not be succeeding, in Afghanistan. We've had to twist a lot of arms from our European allies, to get significant trope contributions.

We haven't had too much luck, although I gather the French said they're going to send more forces, which is good news. So, I think we have plenty inadequate attention on Afghanistan. I'm one of those people who felt we should have finished the job we started, when we invaded in 2001. I think it's a pity that we didn't.

I think we're paying the cost of not having done so today. And the situation is becoming more complicated because I'm sure you've been following the results of the Pakistan elections. The new government in Pakistan has told us that in no uncertain terms that they're not sort of buying into our anti-terrorism program.

So we're going to have a much difficult time conducting these selective operations in the Northwest Providence of Pakistan, so that will necessarily impact our

neighboring Afghanistan. That's a major area of concern and it's one that we really need to be paying a lot of attention to. And unfortunately at various times, the Iraq war has diverted us from that area, and that's where we pity.

DR. KAGAN: Okay. I would like to, can I talk all night?

I'm also concerned about what's going on in Afghanistan, but I completely disagree that, from the standpoint of worrying about Al-Qaeda that Afghanistan is the priority. Speaking to that theatre first, there is very little Al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda does not maintain large bases in Afghanistan, the forces that were fighting primarily are Taliban forces which in some areas have been Al-Qaedasized, and in some areas have not been as much.

And a hand full of Al-Qaeda fighters, who mainly come in to have the pleasure of killing Americans, or to get experience using their weapons and wildfire exercises, not really for anything else. And the reason is very simple, Afghanistan is a large pile of rocks, and it has virtually nothing of interest to anyone, with the exception of poppies, but, Andy poppies are great, but they will not.

PROFESSOR NORTON: Some people like them.

DR. KAGAN: Yeah. But, it not be a lack of poppy, of opium trade to tap into, whether it's in Afghanistan or not. The prize for Al-Qaeda is Pakistan, and increasingly we've seen that the Al-Qaeda movement that is based in Pakistan is focused on Islamabad

And the bases that we need to be concerned about, that are permanent bases where the Al-Qaeda leaders are at, with the swimming pools, and the palm trees, and the whole nine yards, and I'm not entirely kidding, are areas in Tracheal, which is in the Northwest frontier Province, and in Waziristan, which is in the federally administered tribal areas, which are not even legally part of Pakistan in the same way that Pakistan are the Providences are.

So the problem that I have with the assertion that Afghanistan is where we really should be is that we could throw five hundred thousand troops into Afghanistan, crush all the insurgences, make it a peaceful place, and find some way to get the economy going there, and it would do very little to address the whole Al-Qaeda problem which isn't there.

And I think it's incredibly important that we focus on this, and I think it's incredibly important that we succeed in Afghanistan, and I think it's incredibly important that we develop a regional strategy to figure out how to go after the Al-Qaeda safe havens that are in Pakistan.

But that at this point is fundamentally a Pakistani problem, and I for one am rather reluctant to recommend a military solution to that problem. So, I think that when you actually parse the Al-Qaeda problem, in South Asia closely, you see the issue of troop levels in Afghanistan is secondary. But I also want to take just a minute, and I'll be brief Larry, I promise, to attack another myth, which is prevalent, that Al-Qaeda in Iraq is somehow not really Al-Qaeda.

It absolutely is. There is no question that the Al-Qaeda in Iraq franchise is part of the global Al-Qaeda movement. It swears filthily to Osama Bin Laden, Bin Laden recognizes it, it was interesting, the New York Times not very long ago released a list of all of Bin Laden's statements since 2001.

About a third of them were devoted to Iraq, most of those, especially the more recent ones, in terms that made it very clear for him Iraq is absolutely a major front and an area where he's very concerned about. And look, this is the sort of conversation that you can only have if you don't go there and talk to our soldiers who captured these guys, who interrogate them and see these guys.

I went down this last time to Camp Bucca where we hold these detainees, and I spoke with some of the detainees, which was an interesting experience, and of course, with our guys who talk with them all the time. There's no question about the very close relationship between that movement, particularly its leadership, and the global Al-Qaeda movement. So, we have a situation where in Iraq, we are fighting Al-Qaeda every day. Are these the guys who attacked us on 9/11? No.

This is a franchise of the movement, which is disaster that attack, right. But we're fighting that franchise everyday in Iraq. In Afghanistan we're fundamentally fighting Taliban, and very few Al-Qaeda.

It doesn't mean that it's not important. But it does mean that the importance of Afghanistan to the global war on terror is secondary, whereas the importance of Iraq and Pakistan are primary. But because Pakistan is primary does not equal we should be throwing a lot of forces into Afghanistan, necessarily, although it's a discussion we should have.

DR. KORB: Okay. I can see the detail of what your next panel is going to be. We have a group of high school students. Here do any of you have a question? Nope?

DR. KAGAN: Don't put them on the spot like that.

DR. KORB: No? Okay, I didn't want you to be intimidated. Here.

DR. KAGAN: I think you intimidated them more.

PROFESSOR NORTON: If I may add one thing.

DR. KORB: Go ahead. We'll give you a couple of seconds.

PROFESSOR NORTON: Look. There are about forty thousand. Really bad guys out there who are Muslim extremists in the world. Forty thousand, let's see, if you look at all the Muslims in the world, let's say there are one point two billion Muslims in the world. That means that 99.99998% are not a problem, right? It's those fractions of ten thousandths, if you will, of the total number that's the problem.

Forty thousand, and there are more of them today in the world, than when we invaded Iraq, because Iraq has served as a kind of recruiting poster for Al-Qaeda there's no doubts about that. We can find significant numbers of Al-Qaeda

synthesizers, franchisers, whatever you like to call them, and they vary. In Morocco for example, find significant numbers in Saudi Arabia. Find substantial numbers in Jordan; find non-trivial numbers in Egypt. It's a global phenomenon that we're dealing with right now. And it's going to be with us for a very, very long time, but we need to be clear about the fact that we're probably talking about forty thousand, maybe fifty thousand really bad people, and not take actions, that basically alienate the 99.999% of Muslims.

Now that means, for example, in a place like Europe, we need to be paying attention to the conditions under which people are living, trying to maintain level of stability and so on. But we're not going to be able to solve their problems completely in Iraq; we're not going to be able to solve the Al-Qaeda problem completely in Iraq. We're not going to be able to solve it anywhere, anytime soon.

In Afghanistan, which I've referenced, and you've got to understand Pakistan are sort of joined at the hip, there are no sort of disconnecting those problems. My concern there is that you have a situation where the control of many of the Provinces today is up the air, right. That the central government in Kabul has very tenuous control over these areas.

And there is this kind of connection between the Northwest Province, and so on. So you know, it's not the only Al-Qaeda problem, but it is a significant Al-Qaeda problem and it will get worse if that country becomes more unstable over time.

And that's why we need to pay an awful a lot of attention to it in my opinion, but it's a global problem we're dealing with.

DR. KORB: Okay, over there.

MALE VOICE: We've heard that we could be in Iraq for a hundred years. Anybody here maybe willing to refine that number a little bit? And, Dr. Kagan said, I think, we're going to be perhaps out of there by the end of next year, everything's going to be perfect, it'll be a democracy.

DR. KAGAN: I never said we'd be out of there by the end of next year.

MALE VOICE: You said everything will be fine and it'll be a democracy.

DR. KAGAN: First of all I didn't say by the end of the year everything will be fine; I said that we would have a transformational period.

MALE VOICE: How long do you think we'll be there?

DR. KAGAN: I think we'll be there for a long time.

MALE VOICE: Can you put it ten years?

DR. KAGAN: No, if I sat you down in 1945 and asked you how long we were going to be in Germany, what would you have said? The issue is this, do we think we're going to be in Iraq for decades, fighting this kind of war with our soldiers taking casualties

everyday? No. I don't think that's going to happen, frankly, I don't think that's going to happen.

One of two things will happen, either the violence will subside and the situation will continue to stabilize, and if we continue to be in Iraq, it will be in a way very similar to why we were in Germany, and it will simply be an overseas deployment for our soldiers. Or, Korea is a better example, since we've actually real danger there.

MALE VOICE: How long do you think it'll be 'til we get there?

DR. KAGAN: I don't know, the funny thing about war, as the Bush administration has repeatedly demonstrated, predictions are not worth a damn. I'm perfectly willing to tell you that I think we're going to have significant numbers and troops for a while, meaning, years. What I hope is that in a few years the level of violence would have dropped down to the point where we're not fundamentally taking casualties there anymore, and we're not fundamentally patrolling the streets with Iraqis doing active counter insurgency. That's my hope, but I can make something up for you, but it wouldn't be meaningful.

DR. KORB: Okay. Richard, do you have any idea how?

PROFESSOR NORTON: My hunch is that, well first of all, we cannot sustain anything like the current number of troops that we have in Iraq, the foreseeable future, we cannot sustain it. I'm talking beyond the next few months, into the next year. We have to, basically reduce our troops in Iraq, unless we're going to increase the size of the Army, or reinstall the draft, or do something else. Even that doesn't solve the problem immediately. So, we are constrained, we are going to have to have reductions. My hunch is we're going to have reductions down on the order of eighty thousand troops, and I think that those eighty thousand troops more or less are likely to be there for a substantial amount of time to come. Five, six, seven, eight years.

There are lots of variables, what's our relationship with Iran? Do we maintain the peaceful relationship with Iran; do we improve our ties to Iran? That would make a substantial difference if we were able to do that. Not able to do it, it would make our situation in Iraq, perhaps more difficult, how about the internal context within Iraq.

In the Shia community, Shia makeup, we don't know exactly, there hasn't been a consensus in Iraq, but Shia make up at least sixty percent of the population, some people think, sixty five percent of the population. So that means population of twenty eight million people, are they constitute, about seventeen point five million people. Substantial community. Many of the poor members of that community are not well represented in the current system.

They - - better organized what if Moktada al Sadr or some successor organizes them and you have something like his bulla in Iraqi context, it may be very difficult for us to stay under those circumstances. But, you know, taking into account all

these variables, and agreeing things could change dramatically and horribly, I would say is likely we're going to be there for some time to come, and I would be surprised if all of the forces are withdrawn from Iraq by the end of this next president, two-term presidency.

MALE VOICE: I'm basically looking for you to take a systemic approach to this, I don't see any talk about how peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians would improve this situation. I don't see any talk about how we literally cannot afford Mr. Kagan's attitude because we will be bankrupt, unless we bring in alternative partners through some sort of a regional process.

The American economy cannot stand the government; the military cannot stand to be there. Like, we have been in Germany, equipment needs to be replaced, we cannot afford your attitude, I humbly assert, so I'd like to hear some sort of esthetic approach to recognizing that we cannot afford this. We have to get out, which means we have to have other people helping, we can't just America the Imperialists, getting ourselves out of this mess, we need help.

DR. KORB: Okay, some question about that, too.

MALE VOICE: With about the Iraqi people, one about the affordability.

MALE VOICE: Okay, some, and I know that Senator Biden being among them have suggested that the ultimate disposition for Iraq would be, federal state in which some partition. The Shia, The Sunni and the Kurdish areas would have considerable autonomy, and this would be a way of reducing the sectarian strife that we've seen in the last two years. Do you think that's a realistic option, and if not, why not?

DR. KORB: Okay, the last question.

MALE VOICE: And just as a follow-up, if it was a realistic option as far as the Iraqi The Shias, the SUNNI's, etcetera, to go along that path and separate should the United States and could it, either intervene or stop it, or push it forward.

DR. KORB: Okay, Richard, we'll let you go.

PROFESSOR NORTON: Okay, I'm going to pick up on the last point and make another point to the gentlemen in the audience, if I may. Larry, and I were both advisors to the Iraq study group, and this question came up repeatedly in the course of the study group, deliberations. As you know the study group was headed by Jim Baker in the Hamilton and Research Support and report in December of 2006. And I think the position that most of us agreed upon was, struck me as a sensible, position, is that Iraq might be moving in the direction of the assertive partition that Joe Butane was talking about, but the U.S. cannot be in a position where it is endorsing that as a policy objective, because that then becomes a self fulfilling prophecy, and accelerates the disintegration, if you will, of the state, and maybe brings in neighboring states.

And just to put some numbers on how immense the problems could become, or how much worse they can become, right now there are twenty eight million Iraqi citizens more or less. About two million of them have been displaced internally, right. And you have about a million and a half who are in Syria, about seven hundred and fifty thousand in Jordan, so you've got four million Iraqis already displaced, by the way, they're not coming back.

I talked to a colleague in Baghdad just yesterday morning, actually, about the question of the Syrian refugees, they're still there, they're trickling back, but in very small numbers, they're not coming back to Jordan.

So basically, you promote this kind of idea, you accelerate those sorts of people movements, and you potentially destabilize neighboring countries, and so on and then you're left with the problem of Baghdad, the capital, which is a city with a mixed population of Christians, and Kurds, and SUNNI's and Shias.

And it's very hard to solve that in the partition context. In terms of the gentlemen's question in the about a systemic solutions, and the Israeli conflict, I agree with you very much, the U.S. needs to be working, at least, I infer your attitude, maybe I'm wrong, but U.S. needs to be working much more assiduously, towards a solution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict in particular.

And I think that would mitigate some of our problems in the region, we have a horrible public relations problem in the region. I was in the middle east for the last nine, eighteen months, and Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and so on, and I must tell you, the level of animosity out there towards the U.S. not to mention the incredulity about U.S. policy in Iraq is just astounding, and if we could, a sort of success to nail up on the wall. I think that would help a little bit. But it would not help very much with the kind of deep problems that we've both been talking about, we've all been talking about in Iraq.

DR. KORB: Okay, terrific. Good.

DR. KAGAN: I'll be brief on federalism, because I fundamentally agree with Dr. Norton, although I don't think that Iraq is heading in that direction anymore, I think the trend has been reversed, I'm very glad, by the way that the refugees are not coming back, because the conditions are not set yet for the refugees to come back.

The concern at this point is that they'll come back too quickly, but we'll see. Look, the fact of the matter is Baghdad remains a mixed city and it does not belong to any stable border. The river does not divide SUNNI Baghdad, To Shia Baghdad. And there are still mixed neighborhoods on both sides of the river.

Dalia, if you look to the Northeast of Baghdad, is a very mixed province, and south of Baghdad in Baghdad province in all in northern province, you still have a lot of mixed areas, if you were going to have a three federal solutions region, you would either have to come up with some sort of special status for those areas, and it's really hard to imagine anyone being comfortable with that, or you'd have to have

several million more people probably displaced and killed, in a further sectarian cleansing.

I don't think that it's moving in that direction, and I don't think it's desirable to move in that direction. Interestingly now, the word that goes around Baghdad streets is, "We are a mixed city, we are a mixed community, this is our heritage and this is the way we want to be, and we are opposed to those who wants to turn us into cleansed areas."

That's what Baghdadi's will tell you. That what they tell you and what they do are two different things, but got it, that's the mythos right that is prevalent there. So, I don't think federalism is a good idea, and I entirely agree that the worst possible thing that we could do is endorse it as a plan. As for the Arab Israeli issue, I've heard no reports whatever, of any fighters going into battle, yelling, "Allahu Akbar, go long for the Syrians."

You could solve the Palestinian issue tomorrow, and it would have very little affect in Iraq. They are not fighting each other, and they are not fighting us because of the Arab Israeli problem, that isn't to say that it's not important, and we shouldn't address it, but it is to say that we can fix that problem tomorrow and Iraq would be fundamentally Iraq. Iraqis really don't give a damn, about Palestinians or Israelis.

Iraqis are very proud people, very focused on their own religion, their own distinctness, and I've never heard and Iraqi express an opinion, except for increasingly Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which is now starting to play this card, of it's going to be the vanguard in the fight against the Israelis, which tell you actually how desperate they are, because when an Islamism moves in a direction, I'm telling you, you need to give them money, because part of it will go to the Palestinians, you know that they're in real trouble.

As for the expense of the war, if I grant your premise that we can't afford this, then my next question would be, "What makes you think the pulling out would be cheaper?" The question is, what are the consequences?

You have an obligation if you're going to make that argument. To lay out the scenarios you think will evolve in Iraq and in a region, and explain why you think they will be more economically beneficial to the United States of America.

MALE VOICE: To bring in partners.

DR. KAGAN: Okay, the problem is we only control ourselves. We can't give orders to would-be partners, and we can negotiate with people all we want, but in the end of the day, and I'm in favor of that, and I would like to bring in partners, and I think the vice-president has been going around talking to Arab states, and trying to bring them in, and I think we should work very hard to do that.

We would have to have a whole other evening to talk about the Iranians, but and by the way, yes, I think the Iranians, would be thrilled to help us out on condition that we give them the country absolutely. I'm sure they would not hesitate a

moment to make that deal with us, which is what we would be doing, so I'm not in favor of that.

But we can't order partners to come and we can negotiate, but it doesn't mean they'll show up. So the question a responsible strategist has to ask is, "If that's desirable, if it turns out to be possible, what do we do?" And, what I don't see is an alternative to trying to succeed at this point, given where we are.

That's likely to have a better cost benefit analysis. The terrific question that was asked, I'm really glad that you brought that question, that was an outstanding question, "How do the Iraqis feel about our presence?" Iraqi attitudes toward our presence have been changing very dramatically over the course of the past fifteen months, as we have started to finally deliver the one thing that a force that is seen as an occupier can give it some sort of legitimacy, namely security.

And when you have armed forces in someone else's country, and they're still getting blown up and killed, everyday, then of course no one wants you there. But when you are actually seem to be protecting people from violence, then attitudes change a lot. The role that we're actually in, in Iraq, in my viewpoint at this point is armed mediation.

Both sides, all sides, if you bring in the Kurds and the Christians and so forth, see us as easier to deal with, easier to make deals with than it is to make deals with each other, and that's one of the things that these awakening movements reflect. Is the fact that in a SUNNI community, it's astonishing where the SUNNI community had been?

They trust us more than they trust the Iraqi government, now that's obviously bad in the long term, if we can't connect them to the Iraqi government, that's been the aim of our policy, we either will succeed or we won't succeed in human affairs, there are no guarantees.

But, that's the situation that we're in right now, so if you go into SUNNI areas now, and you say, "How do you feel about us staying?" Mostly what they'll say is, "We want you to stay, we want you to eventually go, you have to promise that you'll leave we don't want you here forever, but we don't want you to go soon. We want you to help us out for a while."

Increasingly, we're hearing that in the Shia areas, and not only are we hearing that "We don't want you to leave." We're also hearing "We want you to come." And so there have been vocal requests for areas in the Shia heartland the five cities area, Najaf, Karbala, Diwaniya, Hillah, Kut, for American P.R.T.'s Provincial Reconstruction Teams, to come, and sometimes for American forces to come.

And Shia in that area that I spoke to said, "We will feel good about this next election if there is an American soldier standing on the ballot box." I said, "Well that ain't going to happen." So, we're going to have to find another way to do this, but that is reflective of attitudes. There is a general understanding among the Iraqi

governing elite, that our continued presence is essential to maintain security, and any sort of forward progress in that country for years to come.

The level of our forces will be something increasingly, that we will negotiate with the Iraqis, and that's why I think it's so unfortunate that the issue of whether the administration calls a long-term security agreement.

It is in fact, what they're really negotiating is status of forces agreement, which is a bilateral agreement, that gives us legal rights to be in Iraq, negotiated directly with Iraq, rather than through the United Nations, has become such a controversial issue, because in fact, that's the way sovereign states deal with one another, and what should be going on here, is that the Iraqi government should be communicating with the American government about the force levels of American troops that it desires, and what it wants to do, and we present our views, and we come to a negotiation, and that's the way it should be.

By the way, that is traditionally how it has been more or less with the Malachi government since 2007. We are not there in greater strength than the Iraqi government wants us to be there, and we are not talking about being there in greater strength than the Iraqi government is talking about. I have detected no diversions between our positions about force levels, and the Iraqi positions, except sometimes the Iraqis will tell you they wish we had more forces there.

DR. KORB: Okay, well on that note, let's bring this to a conclusion. Two things, if you've got more questions, you can ask our panelists in the room next door at the reception, but please join me in thanking them very much for their time. Okay.

DR. KAGAN: Thank you.

PROFESSOR NORTON: Okay.