

Status of the Out-of-Country Voting Program for Iraqi Citizens in the United States and the Accelerating Pace of Preparations for Elections in Iraq

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MR. ERELI: Hello, everyone. Welcome. Pleased you could join us for what I'm sure will be a very informative briefing with our Acting Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, who will talk to us about what the U.S. -- cooperation with the U.S. Government, the Independent Election Commission of Iraq and the International Organization of Management to facilitate Out-of-Country voting in the United States by Iraqis in the elections and then be able to answer, perhaps, hopefully, other questions you might have about the electoral process from a human rights perspective.

Mike, welcome. Thank you

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Thanks, Adam. Thank you. I'm glad to have the opportunity.

I thought I might just briefly describe the different ways in which the U.S. Government is interacting with the Iraqi Independent Electoral Commission. As you probably know, this Commission is something that's separate from the executive branch or the legislative or judicial branches in Iraq. Under the Transitional Administrative Law, it was set up as a -- it was kind of like our SEC or something. It's an element of the government, but it's not subordinate to any of the political or judicial branches.

So they have control over the elections. They have been staffed up or receiving technical assistance in this from the United Nations, which has the lead, but also the American NGO, IFES, which is always the International Foundation for Electoral Systems -- I know acronyms better than I do names -- has been working under that UN aegis also in providing technical assistance.

So this is the whole range of things, from helping them write the regulations and write the rules for the elections, setting up the training courses and so on for poll workers and that whole range of activity. And it's been going on for some time. So that's one element in which you've got U.S. involvement but it's in that business of supporting the UN and

supporting the Iraqi Election Commission.

Another aspect that we've been working with is that there is a group of electoral officials from a number of different countries led by Canada and Yemen, but where they have a steering committee with, I think, 11 different countries and then officials from a lot of other countries that are going to provide sort of an assessment of the election. The UN doesn't observe elections that itself is running. And if it were in this hemisphere, you'd have the Organization of American States or the Carter Center watching after it. If it were in Europe or Eurasia, you'd have OSCE doing it. But there isn't such a critter in the Middle East area, so this has come together and we've been very supportive of that effort, as well.

And then the final element is this Out-of-Country voting where up until mid-November, I think the initial UN recommendation to the Iraqi Independent Electoral Commission had been, don't do overseas voting, it's just a complicated deal and you've got plenty on your plate already. But the Iraqi parties basically came and said, we really want to have this aspect, and the Iraqi Central Election Commission made the decision to do that.

They have made an arrangement with the International Organization for Migration to administer on their behalf, or help them create and administer and assist them to do this. They, after looking at where populations of Iraqis were located, the system they came up with involves having polling places in 14 different countries outside of Iraq. Again, I emphasize, this was not a decision made by the U.S. or that we had any particular part in; it's made by the Iraqis, they are financing this themselves out of their budget and they've contracted with, you know, a worldwide expert, IOM, to do this. IOM had done it in Bosnia, and most recently, in Afghanistan, so they do have some idea of what they're doing.

Where U.S. Government comes in in this in terms of the U.S. part of it; obviously a significant Iraqi population is resident in the United States. I think the first biggest is in Iran and Syria and Jordan and you've got, you know, the immediately neighboring countries. We have got a big chunk, and then there are some in Europe as well. But with each of those countries, IOM, acting on behalf of the Iraqi Commission entered into a memorandum of understanding, and, in our case, we joined with them in that. But our obligation is to facilitate their efforts. We're not the ones making the rules; we're not the ones selecting the sites, but we've facilitated them. In this case, Department of Homeland Security, for example, gave them the U.S. data about where Iraqi residents, as best we can tell, are located around the United States so that they could take that into account in trying to find, you know, the places that would be most convenient to people to be able to vote.

The procedures for voting and, you know, the days and the eligibility, again, all of that is being governed by them. We've been active and the White House has been active in working with, through the intergovernmental liaison with local authorities on issues like security and finding appropriate locales for these voting sites.

I think probably in that -- this is a somewhat unprecedented step. Normally, when countries do overseas elections in the United States or elsewhere, either they do them like we do with the mail, or, a lot of them do it in their embassies and/or their consulate. But here, because Iraq doesn't really -- they had not had very many embassies or consulates when the change of regime occurred, and, I guess, don't even have some in some of these places, they decided to go and just set up sites for those specific days that IOM is arranging. But our job has been facilitation, helping them get in touch with the right people to do security, giving them data and that type of thing.

On the details of, you know, who can vote, what the dates are, and that kind of thing, I'd refer you to the International Organization for Migration. They've got a website called -- what is it -- www.iraq.ocv.org -- for Out-of-Country voting -- .org.

MS. JOHNSTONE: No dot. It's iraqocv.org.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, iraqocv.org. I put one too many dots in there. Okay. And then they have a hotline as well that's listed there where people can call in to explain their own situation and get information.

But that's sort of the parameters of that part. I think it's an important step that they're taking. We were just talking. There are 14 million estimated voters in Iraq and they're estimating somewhere around a million in the exterior that are -- you know, it's always hard to tell who's going to turn up or who will claim eligibility, but potentially a million people that are in these other countries, including the United States.

So with that, maybe I'll go to questions.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) instead of being directed to computers while you're here. How many do you think are in the United States? What locations? Apparently, a couple of cities have been circled as good places to conduct this balloting. Can you provide any details?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, I think --

QUESTION: I mean, I know the caveat it's not the U.S.'s duty. It's Iraq. We don't --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Right, right, right. I'm going to give you an answer, too. (Laughter.) The initial estimate I think IOM had was around 100,000; now they have upped that to 240,000. So this shows the -- you know, it's an imprecise science, but they're gaining more information as time goes on.

The five cities that they have set upon as being places that both had concentrations and also were dispersed around the country, so as to be able to pick up people who were in places where there was less concentration are Washington, D.C., Chicago, Detroit, Los

Angeles and Nashville.

QUESTION: And if people, for whatever reason, cannot make it to those places, can they still mail in their ballots?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: My understanding is not, that it's you have to present yourself in person, both to register, and then you have to come back on voting day and vote in person.

QUESTION: You have to do both?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yes, it's two visits to the -- the dates for registration are next week, 17th through --

MS. JOHNSTONE: January 17th through the 23rd for registration.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: -- through the 23rd.

MS. JOHNSTONE: And 28th through 30th for voting.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, 28th through 30th. So, actually, they're getting three days to vote, whereas, in Iraq, there is one day where you can vote, but here they have spaced it out a little bit.

QUESTION: It's probably less dangerous here.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: (Laughter.) Some places.

QUESTION: Is the U.S., being so eager to see a good huge turnout, is the U.S. doing anything to help these would-be voters? Are you financing any of their trips to these places?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No.

QUESTION: Are you doing anything for them, serving coffee? I mean, what are you doing to -- (laughter) -- get them to the polls because, God knows, you want them to vote?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, actually, none of the above, I think, is probably the right answer. What we're doing is facilitating the work of IOM in setting up the places and getting the security for it and so on but people are desirous of voting. This isn't something where we're having to twist people's arms to get them to vote. When you look at polling come out of Iraq, 84 percent of Iraqis say they intend to vote, and this is not,

you know, with somebody twisting their arms.

As I mentioned earlier, I mean, the initial plan was not to have overseas voting and it was the Iraqis themselves that pushed the Iraqi Election Commission into making provision for it because people there were anxious to vote. And I think, as you may have seen him, I mean, some people here, it's not a question of us needing to encourage them to vote, people, if anything, are saying we'd like to have more places where we can go, we'd like to have more opportunity.

So there's a lot of anxiousness about this in a positive way. I was on a program the other day and was proceeded by an Iraqi-American gentleman and he was just saying these elections are a gift from God. We never thought we'd see this in our lifetime. We're all excited, both in Iraq and in the United States, or other countries where there are Iraqis.

QUESTION: I can't help noticing Iraqis having the right to vote in Washington have superior rights to District of Columbia residents, like me. (Laughter.) That's really democracy.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: (Laughter.) We'll stay out of that one.

QUESTION: Uh-huh.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: We're the State Department and D.C. is not a state. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Could I ask you if you're familiar with the situation in any of the 13 other countries? Do you know whether people will be able to vote just in the capital, or whether they're multiple sites in countries like Syria, Jordan, Iran?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. I think in Iran it's six sites. So that's actually the one that's got more sites than the United States. We've got five. And the others, some are one and some are two. Kari's my expert.

MS. JOHNSTONE: They range in number from one to three in most countries except for Iran and the U.S. that have more. The full list of all the cities are actually on the website, which --

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Yeah, just a couple things to clarify. The 240,000 figure, just -- that's the number of eligible Iraqi voters you think that are in the U.S.?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. 240,000 is the current estimation of eligible Iraqis. But see, part of the issue here is, to be eligible under the Iraqi Election Law is, you either have to be an Iraqi citizen or somebody who could qualify as an Iraqi citizen. So for example, if your father was an Iraqi citizen, even though you've never claimed Iraqi citizenship -- you're, you know, an American, you grew up in the United States -- you can still go and say, I'm over 18. My dad was an Iraqi. Here is some proof of this. I'm eligible therefore to -- I could claim Iraqi citizenship, therefore, I'm eligible to vote.

And so, you know, the way that we keep our data on who's a citizen, or our immigration authorities do, and the Iraqi voting law don't exactly mesh. So I think that's why there's a certain amount of guesstimation.

QUESTION: And it's father, not mother. Right? I mean, it's just a --

QUESTION: Or was that an example?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No that's -- it's father, not mother.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. JOHNSTONE: It's Iraqi law.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: It's Iraqi law, yeah.

QUESTION: And, do they have any estimate? If there are 2 -- if they think there are 240,000 eligible, do they have any estimate how many will actually vote? I mean, obviously, there's only five cities to do this, so --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I, you know, I don't think that anybody -- if you tried to make an estimate or a guesstimate, you'd probably be wrong. Have they -- do you know, Kari? Has anybody tried to put a peg on that?

All I've heard is what they -- they're trying to figure out many people could show up and make provision for that, and, you know, whether it's all of them or half of them -- who knows?

MS. JOHNSTONE: That's the maximum.

QUESTION: And in each of those cities, are there multiple --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, that max that they've --

MS. JOHNSTONE: That's their maximum estimate so they can build capacity. So they're

aiming a little high to make sure they can accommodate the maximum number, just to be fair.

QUESTION: And this just lastly, in those five cities --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: And what I don't want to do is get us so, sort of pegging to some goal that, you know, has to be X amount, because we, we just don't know, really, how many people are out there who even consider themselves -- it's probably somewhere between 100- and, you know, the 240,000, but who knows.

QUESTION: In each of the five cities, how many polling places are there? Are there -- do you have a total number of polling places that will --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I think we've got two in some places --

MS. JOHNSTONE: It's not finalized yet.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: It's not finalized? Okay.

QUESTION: But it will be just, like, one or two? It's just --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: One or two. Yeah. Yeah.

QUESTION: There have, actually, been reports of security concerns in U.S. cities. Could you talk about that a little bit?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, a number of local authorities, you know, had concerns, is this going to draw a problem and so on. And that's where inter-governmental liaison's been active with them and, you know, they worked it through. And I think in all but one place now, the local authorities are comfortable that they've got the security issues resolved.

QUESTION: Were they getting calls saying, we're going to sabotage your sites or --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, I don't think -- I think it was more just -- I am not aware of any specific threats of this. It's just that, you know, when a mayor or something suddenly has it sprung on him that there's an Iraqi election in his city, he says, oh, wow, you know, what's -- you know, what could that draw, and, you know, conjures up a lot of stuff. So that's where our people have been active in going through, okay, what is the threat information, what kind of security would be appropriate for this and working with their police forces and so on. And that's, that's resolved, I think, everywhere but California right now, and there they've got a task force that's working it and they should have it resolved pretty quickly.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: I just want to make sure I'm clear on this.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Thanks.

QUESTION: The U.S. will have no role in terms of ensuring the integrity of the vote, making sure those who show up are eligible and that sort of thing -- to make sure that, you know, all votes are counted, if you will?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Right. No. That's --

QUESTION: So will you have monitors at these sites?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No. You're correct. We don't have a role, the direct role in doing that. That is the role of the Iraqi election authorities.

Now, when I mentioned some of the other things we were doing earlier, and I'll mention a couple more, you know, with these international monitoring effort that's being ginned up that we've been supportive of. In Iraq itself -- National Endowment for Democracy, party institutes, National Democratic Institute and so on -- have been training, as they do in many countries, domestic observers that will go out and watch and try to verify that things are done fairly.

And then here, too, you have the added attraction that the people running this overseas voting on behalf of Iraqis is IOM, which, you know, I think everybody would feel fairly confident doesn't have a bias in favor of one or another Iraqi parties. They're a professional elections organization and so that's a built-in safeguard as well.

So the U.S. Government itself directly, no, we're not administering the elections, we are not observing them as the U.S. Government, but we have put a lot of effort and resources into helping Iraqis and others build up the capacity to do just that. And so there should be some judgment on the process.

QUESTION: Two questions. On that elimination group, the one that's being led by Canada and Yemen, will the U.S. Government -- you said they're going to do an assessment afterwards. Will the U.S. Government respect that assessment, whatever it is?

And secondly, the answer to this question is probably no, but does anybody have an idea of the sort of ethnic or religious makeup of Iraqis in this country? I think a lot of them, at least in the Detroit area, are Iraqi Christians, but do you know if they're Sunni, Shia, Kurds, Turkomen, whatever?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. On the first effort, I mean, I think it's -- that is an assessment we would take very seriously. I mean, these are professional election officials, folks from Elections Canada and so on, and we were very encouraging of this precisely so that it's not just the folks who are helping organize the election.

In the U.S., obviously, we have been very much involved in the, you know, setting up of the Interim Government and so on, so we're probably not the best objective observers, so we wanted to encourage others that don't have that same stake to get in there and look at it from a technical standpoint and say, are the rules fair, are people getting adequate access to the media, and all the things you'd look for when you're assessing an election. So we would expect to respect that very much.

And I think, you know, also, just in terms of expectations here, an Iraqi election, this is the first time they've had an election, you know, that was something other than a rigged election in over 40 years, so you're starting all the machinery from scratch. And there, you know, undoubtedly there are going to be all kinds of defects and mess-ups and so on. I mean, you have them even in the more advanced, mature systems than the one that's -- that we're getting off the ground. Of course there are going to be all kinds of technical problems.

What we're really looking for, though, is is there -- is it a bunch of isolated technical problems that kind of cancel each other out or is there some kind of systematic fraud that's designed to bias the result in favor of one group or another. And I think that's the sort of key standard you're looking for here. At the end of the day, yeah, there are going to be all kinds of problems that pop up, but, you know, can you look at it and say this was something where people were able to vote freely, they were able to debate freely and they weren't being -- having their votes discounted through fraud or some -- or having their people kicked off the ballot or something like that.

The other part of your question --

QUESTION: That was the demographics of Iraqi Americans.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, the demographics. Again, I'm not so sure that we have the data on that. It depends on where you come from. I'm from California and I was getting interventions this morning on behalf of Armenian and Assyrian Iraqis, and there are Christians and -- I think probably nobody knows what the overseas community is because the fact is all the Iraqi parties pushed hard for this, I think each one of them figuring it would advantage them, so they are all sort of betting on the fact that their guys are the most dominant overseas, and I think probably no one knows. It'll come out in the wash.

QUESTION: Can I ask about the assessment, the international assessment?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Could you walk us through a little bit how that would happen from largely outside of the country? If my understanding is correct, it's maybe a hundred people who are going to be in the country and most outside?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. It's called -- I think they're calling it the International Mission for Iraqi Elections is the name that's been put on this. My understanding of what they're doing is a lot of long -- what we call long-term monitoring -- this isn't a -- to be fair, it's not an observation effort like you would have with the OSCE or something. It's a much more limited operation because of the situation.

But they're doing the kind of stuff that long-term observers would do; namely, you look at the rules that have been made. Are they fair or do they clearly advantage somebody? Look at the decisions the commission is making. Are they kicking everybody from one party and not registering them and registering somebody else, selective enforcement type stuff? They look at media access and so on.

They have set up shop in Amman, Jordan, and then they can make forays into Iraq from there, and I think have had people that are visiting or will be visiting, like, three different cities, have an office in Baghdad as well. So they've got some on-the-ground presence and then on election day their plan is to have about a hundred people in the country.

Now, you know, you look at different -- we just went through Ukraine, where we flowed a lot of people in, but I think the OSCE, the total observers there, were around 900 or something for a country of 40 million. So yeah, this may be -- it's a little on the low side but it's not -- it's not nothing, either.

But I think what you're really looking for, it's not -- you're clearly not going to get coverage at every polling station to see that, you know, the hanging chads or something were dealt with at that level, but it's really looking at it in a more systemic way and saying, is the system one that's designed to be fair, and is it, in general, being applied fairly? And then spot-checks.

QUESTION: Well, the 8,000 Iraqi observation --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, exactly. And that's -- I mentioned briefly earlier with the gentleman here, I mean, NDI has been working to train up Iraqi observers, so that's where you really get your -- you know, there's 6,000 polling places, you've got 8,000 Iraqi neutral observers who will then be plugging into this international system as well, so.

QUESTION: And to follow that, I know this may be above your pay grade, but if 2 percent of Sunnis vote, say, or less, how can anyone assess this as being a credible election?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: The same way you can assess any election where people

have the opportunity to vote and to vote freely and fairly and so on. If people decide to boycott an election, it's their -- that's their choice. It's part of your democratic choice. You can decide not to go to the polls and not -- but then you have no one to blame but yourself.

Now, is that a desirable result? Of course not. But in terms of the credibility of an election, where you're usually looking is one group, usually a group in power, trying to exclude some other group from voting. When a group excludes itself from voting, despite the efforts of the people in power to get them to come in and so on and so on, that's -- and you see it with the people who are doing the intimidation, too. They're mostly trying to intimidate their own group from voting, not trying to intimidate somebody else.

So I think there are two different things you have to look at. One is credibility of the election process. And if the process is clean, whether people choose to take advantage of it or not doesn't undermine its credibility.

The second, though, is political future of the country and what you'd like to see there, and obviously, we're encouraging people to participate. When you look at the slates that have been registered and that are on the ballot, they're multiethnic -- and many of them, I think most of them, each of the different slates are multiethnic. It's not that there's one slate of one group and one of another. There are also opportunities. I mean, as you know, this is an election to, in a sense, a constitutional convention.

This is not electing the new government, the new, permanent government. It'll be a temporary legislature; it will appoint the new president and so on. But its job is to draft a constitution, which, then, will be put up to a referendum later this year. And assuming it's approved, then there will be another election under the constitution for the government.

So in that context, when you're naming the commission to draft the constitution, the ethnic composition of that isn't governed -- it's not proportional representation like the assembly is. Who is in the ministries in the government, again, not -- there's no ethnic limitation on that. And I think it's a very positive sign when you look at it that all the different parties in Iraq are encouraging -- the other parties are all encouraging the Sunnis to participate and trying to draw them into the process, so again, I would make that distinction, though, between the credibility of the election and the desirability of Sunni participation -- two different things.

That's all. Let me get this gentleman over here because --

QUESTION: Thank you. I just wanted to go back to the registration process, particularly for Iraqis who are in the United States.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Right.

QUESTION: Have any Iraqi officials been invited to the U.S. to oversee the registration process? The reason I'm asking is, let's say somebody on -- whatever that date that she mentioned --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Mm-hmm. The 17th through the 23rd.

QUESTION: Right. Let's say they'd go to register, but there are questions about their lineage or anything like that.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Right.

QUESTION: Is it this group, IOM, that'll make the final determination? Or will there be an official from Baghdad present to make that determination?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: There'll be some here, but I don't think in every polling place.

MR. DENEHY: The IOM, as the agent for the IECE is able to adjudicate complaints at the polling places.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah.

MR. DENEHY: However, there will be officials from the Election Commission of Iraq who will travel to all of the 14 countries to oversee the general process, the registration, as well as the count, because the counting will occur in the countries where the voting takes place.

QUESTION: And do you know how many have been invited to the U.S.?

MR. DENEHY: I don't think it was our invitation or IOM's --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No. It's how many have asked to come. Yeah.

MR. DENEHY: -- again, I -- we can get you the number. Off the top of my head, I don't know what it is.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yes.

QUESTION: You mentioned some of the imperfections that are likely in the vote --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah.

QUESTION: But you've also said some of the good things -- that the polling shows a lot of people want to vote. As a model for democracy or for an election in the Middle East,

how important do you think this election is? Or is it too flawed to be used as a model?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I think it's very important. And, you know, the model of it comes from -- it's not going to be from the perfection of implementation of every detail because, I mean, I hope it's perfect, but that would be a silly standard to -- when you're starting from scratch like this.

But what you can look on as models is already what's happened. Look at the regulations that the Iraqi Central Election Commission have issued on eligibility and the procedures for registering a party and media access and the impartiality of the Commission and its independence from the other branches of government.

I mean, already all of those things, I think, have been very successful and are models. And I think -- I haven't heard any real complaints about people saying, we'll gee, I was unfairly excluded from being able to register, for example. There's, you know, 111 or something slates now registered that are -- and this ballot is highly complicated (laughter) because it's huge with the number of candidates that are on it. But, I mean, all of those are good examples.

Now, you know, do you adopt the single, nationwide slate proportional representation system or some other system? There are all kinds of different models. There are different advantages and disadvantages. When you were mentioning registration, I mean, one of the reasons that they went with that approach, the UN recommended it, was precisely because it was a shortcut to establishing of a new registration system for people. They were using the food distribution system in Iraq that already existed. But, you know, if you tried to do it in district by district, it's harder to control people moving over to other districts.

But, so the Iraqis may well change that kind of thing themselves when they write the constitution. This is an election to get that temporary body to do constitution writing. They may seize on something else. But I think the parts that are a model and are clear are this -- sort of the impartiality, no -- you know, not trying to exclude parties because of their ties to -- or their ideology or their ties to one ethnic group or another.

One of the things I actually kind of liked in their rules was that they said parties that have armed militias cannot participate, which is a nice --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Well, it's how much they distance themselves from the militia, I guess. (Laughter.) It's a good model whether it gets implemented or not.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) This is ridiculous.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. No, I -- but it's -- it's a good idea whether they've been able to do it or not.

QUESTION: There are Kurdish elections --

QUESTION: So, as a --

QUESTION: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. As a follow-up and giving your wider brief of democracy and human rights, do you think then that the Iraqi election can influence democracy in the Middle East?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: You know, I say, yes, just on the grounds that I think everywhere, the more that you get democratic countries, you know, then other countries are adjacent to them and there's some bleed-over and it has an effect over time. I mean, it's not a -- you know, that there's some kind of automatic domino effect formula or something here. Each country you have to work it. You have to work with the people.

One of the rules that we follow is you can't, from the outside, create a democratic system in a country. You have to find the people in that country who are themselves pushing for it and then you can put your weight with them rather than the people that are trying to repress them. But you can't substitute for their efforts. And that's where these different models, people are going to have their own formulas. But there are those basics about, you know, the impartiality of the vote, the access to the media and so on, that are common to any democratic system, and systems that don't have them aren't democratic.

QUESTION: There are Kurdish elections, too. Have you fine-tuned this to the extent that Kurds living in this country can be distinguished from other Iraqis and vote without -- in the --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I don't think it's -- this does not cover the provincial elections. It's only for the national level elections that the Out-of-Country voting is applicable.

QUESTION: And can I follow up Barbara's good question? Maybe it's -- I don't want to just make a statement. I'd like to put it in question form. But this arrangement permits thousands, tens of thousands, of Iraqis who do not choose to return to the country --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- to determine the country's fate, whereas, tens of thousands who live there won't be voting. It sounds very weird. It sounds like, you know, a personal -- my father would have been able to vote for a Polish president because his father emigrated from Poland. He left Poland because it wasn't a nice place to live. These people that left

had reason to leave, especially Kurds, and you can't guarantee that it's going to be a better place to live after the election, although you hope so.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I mean, in some ways you can say the same thing. I think American expatriates tend to vote more than Americans living in the United States, you know.

QUESTION: Well, Greece has this kind of thing. Do grandchildren of Greek citizens vote?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. And, I mean, this is a question of Iraqi law. They made this judgment that people -- and I suspect part of it is, as I understand it, the law applies not just to the external voting but to internal. Because you could have people that came here, or came to another country just to escape from --

QUESTION: Right. Persecution.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, but there's a difference between -- from persecution, exactly; and then they go back. Okay, their kids may have married a foreigner when they were overseas; their kids may have been born in another country, so they're saying, no, you can still be eligible to be an Iraqi citizen even though you were born in another country and so there are peculiarities in every country's citizenship laws. And, you know, I guess I'm not out to question it here.

My guess is the Iraqis that really care about it are the ones that are going to vote, the ones who have abandoned their ties with Iraq and are comfortable living in the United States or another country are probably less inclined. But you know, it's -- I mean, I don't want to sort of pass a value judgment on different countries' immigration laws. You have weird things. Years ago I worked on the Panama Canal Treaties, and any American born in the Canal zone is a Panamanian citizen by birth and qualifies under the Constitution, so every kid of an American serviceman who was born there --

QUESTION: Right.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Senator McCain is a good example of that. He could go vote in a Panamanian election if he wanted to. He doesn't do it, but --

QUESTION: Is Israel one of the 14 countries for polling, considering there are about 11 Jews left in Iraq, speaking of persecution?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, it's not one of --

QUESTION: I mean, can Iraqi-Israelis or Israelis of Iraqi descent vote?

MR. DENEHY: The only country that is not allowing sort of dual voting like that is Iran. If you vote in an Iranian election, you cannot vote in an Iraqi election. But --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, but he's asking about Israel, though.

QUESTION: No, excuse me. I thought there were only 14 countries that are providing -- in which polling places are provided.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah.

MR. DENEHY: That is correct.

QUESTION: Is Israel one of those 14 countries?

MR. DENEHY: It is not.

QUESTION: But there is no provision prohibiting a citizen or resident of another country to go to one of those 14 countries and vote?

MR. DENEHY: Correct.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah. In other words, an Iraqi --

QUESTION: An Iraqi-Israeli (cross talk) -- the son of an Iraqi-Israeli -- will fly to Nashville and vote? I mean, --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, or to London or to --

QUESTION: It's a little expensive, isn't it?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Well, it's -- sometimes it is.

QUESTION: To follow up on the other part of Barbara's question on Sunni involvement here, we're not talking a question of boycotts. I mean, some of the Sunnis may not be voting because they're afraid they're going to get killed if they go to vote. So if you end up with a situation where you have this 275-member assembly, as Barbara proposed, only two percent or some low percentage of Sunnis, is there a mechanism to get more Sunni involvement in that constitutional rights process?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: As I said, I mean, they can try to bring more people in in the drafting process and that kind of thing or into the government itself because that -- you don't have to be a member of the assembly to be a minister in the government or something. You have to be a president or something. But --

QUESTION: More importantly on this --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Let me say something, Bill, about this kind of intimidation and violence. I mean, this, unfortunately, is not unique. I remember El Salvador in '84 because I was working that from the legal advisor's office in those days and there, the FMLN said that when the interim government that Duarte was heading up said, we're going to have free elections, the FMLN said, we're boycotting it and anybody who tries to vote, we'll kill them. And they shelled and killed poll workers and blew up polling stations. And you know, it was the same problem.

What are we going to do in the provinces where they're heavily present? The army, you know, was spread thin. What do you do? What do you do? At the end of the day, it was Salvadoran citizens who solved that problem. They went out and stared these guys down.

And it's not nice. Of course, the Government of Iraq and its allies have every obligation to try to improve the security situation for people, but at the end of the day, you know, they're going to be able to face down the guys who are trying to intimidate them. And they're making some, you know, accommodations for that in a number of the areas where there have been this heavy intimidation going on, the Election Commission has said, okay, you don't have to vote at your particular precinct. You can go to any precinct in the province and vote.

Now, that's not everywhere in Iraq but it's for some of the violence-prone areas. In Fallujah, where so many people are still displaced from the city because of the fighting that went on there earlier and the mess that it made of the city, they're setting up polling stations in the area where the people who are displaced are camped out so that they can vote.

So, you know, they're trying to do work-arounds. They're trying to do security. But the worst thing in the world in this kind of situation is to say the election is not valid because the intimidators succeeded in preventing some people from voting because that just encourages them to intimidate even more. So I'm not trying to discount the virtue of that. We're putting all maximum effort into trying to get as much security for people, to give them as many options as possible, but you can't predict everybody, everywhere, all the time.

And yet common people actually have a very strong weapon in their hands. We saw it in Salvador. We saw it recently in Afghanistan in some areas there where people were trying to intimidate them from voting and they said no, we won't be intimidated. We saw it in Peru with Shining Path trying to do the same thing. So there's -- you know, this is not unique, is all I'm saying, and we've got to work it as hard as we can but --

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Yeah, I have a question about media access to the polling stations. As far as I know, the stations have not been made public, the exact locations, for example, here in D.C. When will that become public and is there a credentialing process to go through?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: The answer is I don't know at this -- I know that they haven't gotten pinned down where the sites are going to be in some of the cities, but they should have --

MR. DENEHY: IOM.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, IOM should have that up on that website we gave, and I would be in touch with them about accreditation. I just don't know whether they're planning to have --

MR. DENEHY: They are.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: They are? They're --

MR. DENEHY: You have to go through IOM.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Okay, so that's the place to go and you get credentialed and go report on it.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Can you tell us more about the staffing of the polling stations in this country? Who are these people? Are they getting any training? Because, apparently, they're the ones who will determine who is eligible and who's not eligible, right? Is that right?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: That's -- yes. And it's --

QUESTION: And it's all --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: But they're employees of IOM. There's people that are being recruited by IOM. I don't know how many of them are from the Iraqi population here or --

MR. DENEHY: The majority.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Majority? Yeah, so that they have language skills and so on. But they --

MS. JOHNSTONE: IOM had been training them and sent several of their core trainers to where IOM has headquartered the voting process to get training directly there from Iraqi authorities.

QUESTION: And can you just quickly remind us, how did --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I think the check in this, so the import of your question, is that it's not like we're going to -- that they're going, you know, to the leaders of this community or that community and saying, "Would you guys please set this up?" They're going out. IOM is going out and trying to select people that they believe will be unbiased and will be properly trained and everything so that it will have credibility and impartiality.

QUESTION: I can't recall it very well, but how did this process happen in the Afghan election? Were they able to vote by mail or do you remember the criteria?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: I will turn that to Kari, since she -- I sent her for two weeks to Afghanistan and she didn't see her husband for seven months and ran this process there.

MS. JOHNSTONE: IOM also ran the Out-of-Country voting and it was only in Pakistan and Iran and it was also an in-person registration process followed by, a few days later, in-person voting. Very similar process.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: That's the answer.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what the numbers were on the Out-of-Country voting for the Afghan?

MS. JOHNSTONE: I believe it was approximately 800,000 total in both Pakistan and Iran.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: So kind of the same level that we're anticipating here globally for Iraqis.

MS. JOHNSTONE: Mm-hmm.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: So, again, a follow-on to the sort of the kind of comment that Barbara raised. I've seen it reported that the United States pushed very hard for this slate type of vote to facilitate this expatriate voting, but now has sort of a case of buyer's remorse, realizing that it will accentuate the marginalization of the Sunnis.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No. I would say no precisely because there wasn't -- there was no conception of having Out-of-Country voting until November of this year and the slate system was developed by the UN back during -- before the transition of authority to this interim government. So it couldn't -- the slate system wasn't picked because of Out-of-Country voting because both the UN and we were saying that's not necessary.

As I understand it, the main driver on this was, if you're going to have elections in a short period of time, you don't have time to create this whole registration system and the slate system facilitated that. It's also if you're doing -- if you're trying to develop a constitution or something, having proportionate representation, I mean, it's slates and then proportional to those slates, is not a bad idea.

I mean, you're getting that way, hopefully -- if all these slates were only tied to particular ethnic groups, you'd still have, presumably, percentages that would reflect the percentage of those people in the population. Now, as it's turned out -- I mean, to me, it's a very healthy thing that all of them are looking and saying, well, you know, maybe I've got 60 percent but I don't want to have the other 40 percent alienated from me so I need to pick up some guys from this community and that community and get them on my slate.

I mean, we're used to in this country, you know, the sort of two-party system and you either win the presidency or you don't, or you win a majority in the House or you don't. But as you all know, I mean, countries that have parliamentary systems and have proportionate representation, you know, they're constantly -- they're making coalitions before the election and they make coalitions after the election to get the job done.

And so, to me, that's what's really healthy when you look at Iraq these days is that all of these guys are looking around saying, you know, I don't want to get this guy too mad at me because I may need him to get something I care about passed when we're drafting the constitution or when we're appointing the new government. And so, you know, there's advantages and disadvantages to almost any system you can think of, but this is the one we got. It's -- and I think it can work quite well.

QUESTION: Can I ask you a quick question on outreach? How are you going to notify Iraqi Americans that these are the specific polling locations? Do you plan an ad campaign, advertisements, commercials, these kinds of --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, IOM has got posters that they've put up already. Again, this is not -- it's not a U.S. Government function. I mean, we're in this position here where we're trying to facilitate this. Obviously, we want -- we have a big interest in seeing these elections work and work well and for all the obvious reasons. At the same time, we're not running them. They're not ours and we don't want to overstep our bounds and start to get -- to do that.

That's why I keep making that caveat. I'm trying to tell you what we know about it and

what we're doing. But the IOM people on behalf of the Iraqi authorities are doing that. They're doing outreach with local authorities and with the communities. I mean, in many of these places, you know, through churches and so on you can get the word around pretty quickly.

And then once people know that this opportunity is out there -- and I think your -- hopefully, your stories and so on will continue to make that known to them -- if they know that okay, I can go on this website and I can find out the latest information and learn where I have to go and when I have to go and what documents I need to bring with me, that's as good as it gets.

QUESTION: Can you talk -- I mean, just to follow on that, I have actually two questions. Who's going to be paying for security? Is it the Iraqis through the IOM or is it the U.S.? And also, to continue on the outreach, is there going to be a voter education? Because you know, there's not -- there can't necessarily be a campaign here in the United States because the candidates obviously are over there.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Right.

QUESTION: So how do you educate the Iraqi Americans about who's running, what they -- what their platform is?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, it's -- I think it's very much the same as what happens when you're an American overseas. You know, the -- well, as we were teasing earlier, the French press may tell you who to vote for, but most countries, you know, you have to get your information on what's going on in the U.S. by, you know, getting on the Web or talking to your family back home or something. There's not a lot of information.

You'll get information through the consulate on, you know, what the model ballot looks like or where to send for it or something, but you -- the voter education, it's really going to depend on their own self help. We're not doing anything on that front and I don't think -- IOM's job is not to do that either. They're not advertising the platforms of the different groups.

But on the education about how you can go vote and so on, yeah, that's where they've got websites up and they're --

QUESTION: And on security?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: And TV and radio ads.

On security, the sites themselves, they are financing all of that. Now, whether it involves -- I don't know what they've worked out in terms of sharing costs if the local police think that they need to up the --

MR. DENEHY: No, it's very little government involvement. IOM is accepting the burden of cost.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah.

MR. ERELI: Let's see. There's a few more -- two more questions.

Barbara.

QUESTION: I just have one more question if I could.

It was my understanding that the assembly that's going to be elected is a constituent assembly and that the assembly itself would be writing the constitution. You're saying that the assembly will appoint a commission and that they could bring in people who are not elected to put on this commission?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, I mean, I was getting more to the proportions of it. One assumes that they will not all sit as a group of 275 and write everything together, but they'll name a committee like congresses do. And so what I'm saying is, if they want to, the balance on that committee doesn't have to reflect the exact proportions within the overall body. But --

QUESTION: But presumably, they would all have to be members of the assembly. Or not?

Not necessary?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No. You can always get experts and so on to come in. Again, there are all kinds of different models, but -- but where you are right is that at the end of the day, the 275 have to vote for whatever the product is. And then the Iraqi people also have to vote for it because it has to be approved by referendum.

MR. DENEHY: Right. A great precedent in Iraq is Iraqi Constitutional Scholars, and they're -- it's presumed that they'll be part of that process.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ERELI: Well, let's do one more question.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yes, as you know, there is a Kurdish organization called PKK and, which is accepted as a terrorist organization by the State Department. And they have a presence

in camps not only in northern Iraq, but in -- here; in Europe they have a great presence. So they will be allowed to participate in the elections? And what is the situation with Turkey? Do you have anything?

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Yeah, well, you know, in terms of excluding terrorists. If somebody knows that somebody is a terrorist, they'd probably get arrested, I would imagine, if the Iraqis have any sense. But I mean, if somebody is a secret member of a terrorist organization --

QUESTION: Not a secret, they have the camps over there.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: -- there, they may vote in our elections, too. You don't know -- I mean that's -- it's an enforcement problem, I would say, more than a conceptual problem.

QUESTION: Why I'm asking this --

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Turkey --

MR. DENEHY: Turkey has an OCV. It concluded an agreement with IOM and Iraqis in Turkey will be eligible to vote.

QUESTION: Because Turkey's government just very recently opposed participation of two parties in the elections because they represent PKK.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Okay, but the eligibility here to vote is whether or not you're an Iraqi citizen. It's not who you're affiliated with. I'm saying if you're a criminal and, you know, if they have a record of that, I don't know what Iraqi law is. It may disqualify you, but I just don't know.

But just, you know, the polling people can't tell when somebody walks in -- I'm just being practical -- you know, it's like in this country. If somebody walks into the polling station and they're registered, they're a citizen of Virginia or something, you know, maybe they belong to a bad organization, but you can't expect the poll workers to figure that out, so --

QUESTION: No, just a practical question, you know, if they have the two parties list on the ballot paper --

MR. DENEHY: Yes, Turkey -- I mean, the ballot in Iraq -- the ballot is the same all over the world.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: No, but is the PKK on --

MR. DENEHY: No, the PKK is not on it.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: The PKK is not a party here.

QUESTION: Well, they have two parties, which have great connections with PKK.

MR. DENEHY: Right, but there's obviously -- the question -- I think the point is that the ballot that's in Iraq will be the ballot that's going to be in the 14 countries. So if the two parties appear on the ballot in Iraq, it will appear in the other 14 countries.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. ERELI: Thanks very much, Mike.

AMBASSADOR KOZAK: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:30 p.m.)

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