

## **Iraq: Post Referendum Update**

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**MR. BAILY:** Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, who is the Secretary's Senior Advisor on Iraq. He'll give you a brief opening statement and then be happy to ask your questions.

Ambassador Jeffrey.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Thank you, Jess. Good morning, everybody. It's a pleasure to be here and it's a pleasure to talk about a subject as important as the referendum in Iraq and the political process.



First of all, a brief review on what happened several days ago. You've all been following it so I won't take much of your time. We see this as a historic day. It was a great day for democracy; it was a great day for the Iraqi people. It was a very bad day for the terrorists who tried to disrupt the voting.

In terms of comparing what happened on Sunday with the 30th of January, which I'm aware because I was there then, we see approximately a million or a million-plus more voters. And in particular, we saw a much stronger turnout of Sunni voters -- in Fallujah alone, a hundred thousand and in the Baghdad area, the Mosul area, Diala, Tikrit -- in most areas, other than the western Anbar province, we saw a very, very strong turnout. That is a huge difference and a strategic difference from January of 2005.

Of course, the results we will not know, but in any case, this is a democratic process. There will be elections on the 15th of December regardless of whether the constitution does pass a referendum, in which case the elections will be under the new constitutional system. Or if the constitution were not to pass, then under the Transitional Administrative Law and the UN Security Council 1546 process, the country would have elections for a parliament that would then have to come up with a new constitution and go through the

referendum process once again.

Finally, before I take your questions, I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to the United Nations, which played a key role in working with the Iraqi Electoral Commission, the IECI, going around the country, putting in over a hundred people and a top team of elections advisors just like they did in January. And they really made a great deal of difference.

So thank you very much for being here today and I'm ready to take your questions.

**MR. BAILY:** If I could remind you to state your name and your news organization and somebody will pass a mike. We'll go to the front row here to Turkey.

**QUESTION:** Umit Engisoy, NTV, Turkey. Two quick questions. After this point, what do you want Turkey and the other neighboring countries to do?

And secondly, do you have anything to say about claims about election rigging?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** First of all, as we have done in the past, we want the countries in the region to play a key role in supporting the democratic political process in putting pressure on those countries -- Iran and Syria -- that are not being helpful in terms of controlling borders and political processes. And in the case of those countries that have made pledges at Madrid to work with the Iraqis to carry out those pledges. In the case of those countries that have significant Iraqi debt to meet the Paris Club's 80 percent debt forgiveness standard that was set a year ago. In the case of Turkey, in particular, Turkey has played a very helpful role, has received high level visits including the Prime Minister from Iraq and that's a particularly important relationship.

But, frankly, the relationship with of all Iraq's neighbors, immediate neighbors and further in the Arabic and Muslim world, is very, very important to the Iraqi people and to us as a partner of the Iraqis as well as many of the neighbors. So we are working very, very closely with them. I was recently in the region and visited six countries. We have a three-way dialogue with the Turkish Government and the Iraqi Government on the PKK issue. And we are continuing very extensively to press the regional angle here.

In terms of election irregularities, we've seen so far fewer reports of election irregularities than we saw in January. The IECI, supported by the UN, will look into them. We don't have any specific indications, one way or the other, whether they are, in fact, correct.

**QUESTION:** My name is Khaled Dawoud, correspondent for Egypt *Al-Ahram* paper. Again, can you explain to us why it is taking such a long time to release the results, considering that it's just a "yes" or "no" vote. And again, also can you clarify the statement of Secretary Rice concerning that the constitution has been passed already and the protests that came out after that from the Iraqi side itself?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Well, I think you should go back and check the transcript of what she said, which was that, "Preliminary indications from the field were that it looked like it was going to pass." She was very cautious and, you know, we cannot make an independent decision. That decision has got to be determined by the Iraqi authorities after they have finished, supported by the UN, doing a tally of all of the results from the 18 provinces. We never expected this to happen before, at a minimum, Wednesday. There are additional checks that the UN is making now based upon, and you've all seen the stories, the standard rule that whenever you get more than a 90 percent one way or another in a vote, you need to go and check the tally sheets and such. And the UN is doing that and that may take several more days.

In addition, I would point out that it took the better part of a week to get even preliminary results from the elections in January. And it took several weeks for the IECI to officially certify the results. So, you know, despite the logistical capabilities of the Iraqis, and you have to look at what they've done, to put together twice, under horrific conditions, country-wide elections, it does take some time.

**MR. BAILY:** We can go right here.

**QUESTION:** [Tamam] Al-Barazi from Alwatan Alarabi magazine. Sir, the Saudi Foreign Minister expressed his concern about "handing over Iraq to Iran." So in light of this referendum, which everybody said that they will, you know, consolidate the allies of Iran. How can you allay the fears of the Arab in the region?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Well, first of all, by constant contacts and discussions. I was in Saudi Arabia and met with the Foreign Minister and other officials two weeks ago. Ambassador Khalilzad was there. Ambassador David Welch, our Assistant Secretary, was then there a few days later, so we have an extensive dialogue with both the Saudis and other friends in the region on just these sorts of things.

We take any expression of concern about Iran very seriously because we have our own very significant concerns about Iran's role in the region, be it supporting terrorism, be it in Iraq, be it human rights violations, be it its position on the Palestinian-Israeli political process or be it weapons of mass destruction.

So therefore we are certainly an unlikely candidate to be supporting the expansion of Iranian influence. We do believe that it is very important for Iraq to have normal relations with all of its neighbors, including Syria and Iran, and it is very important for those neighbors to behave. We have problems with Iran. The British have spoken out at the highest levels. We are also speaking out and we're going to watch that carefully.

Nevertheless, we do not think that a democratic process that allows people of the many diverse religious and ethnic groups that we have in Iraq to express themselves is tantamount to turning the country over to foreigners. We think that Iraqis, regardless of their religion and regardless of their ethnic background, are by and large patriotic Iraqis

who will do, if we trust them, what's necessary to keep their country strong and free.

**QUESTION:** [Joyce Karam, Al Hayat] Yes, sir. How do you read the rejection of the constitution in two Arab Sunni provinces especially given that they clearly rejected the federal state that's in the constitution? How are you going to deal with that? And if the constitution does not pass in Nineveh, do you fear a civil war or are you going to sponsor negotiations with Arab Sunnis?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** First of all, we -- the United States is not going to deal with this. This is an Iraqi political process. There are many international actors -- the United Nations; the surrounding countries -- we talked about them; we; other members of the coalition; the European Union; NATO -- who are involved and who all provide advice in various forms and ways. But the Iraqis will have to deal with this.

And my first comment is the most important thing is that the people of Anbar and Saladin Province, the two you mentioned, did vote. By and large they did not vote in January. So that's the first thing we should focus on and that is a very, very important, positive thing.

Secondly, regardless of whether the constitution passes or fails, the main issue that you've raised that seems to be the main concern among Sunni Arabs in that area is the question of the expansion of federalism, not from the provincial level because nobody has a problem, as far as I can see, about the constitutional provisions for each province having powers rather similar to those of the American states of the German "linder," but rather, the formulation of larger entities with those same powers in the south, for example. And that is an issue, first of all, that has been, if the constitution passes, pushed back to the next parliament, a parliament that should be even more representative of the Iraqi people if everybody votes in December as they have voted this month, to come up with a law that will determine under what circumstances that will be done.

In addition, as part of the final set of compromises, listening to our Sunni friends from that area, the Iraqi parliamentary parties agreed to a one-time review of constitutional provisions to take place on an urgent basis within four months of the new parliament coming into power in the end of December, beginning of January. So there are checks and balances if the constitution succeeds. If the constitution were to fail -- and I'm not predicting this -- if the constitution were to fail then, of course, the new parliament again, we presume more representative of the Iraqi people, including the Sunni Arabs, would have to draw up a new constitution, generally along the lines of the procedure that occurred before.

**QUESTION:** [Joyce Karam, Al Hayat] You don't fear a civil war?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Well, okay. On the civil war -- about ten years ago, I was involved in the civil war in Bosnia. That was a civil war -- a country one-tenth the size in population and geographic spread of Iraq -- a 100,000 killed a year. We, obviously, are

concerned, as are Iraqis, about every possible contingency, every possible situation. But the thing that we do put our hope and our faith in is the strength of the Iraqi population, their basic decency and the fact the overwhelming majority of these people want to live in peace and I have yet to see any evidence that that is not the case. As long as that is so, we think that the Iraqis can find ways to avoid these sorts of situations. I'm trying to avoid that word so I hope I've succeeded.

**MR. BAILY:** The gentleman, far back there.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, sir. My name is Omar Razft, BBC out of UK. We have noticed that with every step of the democratic process sponsored by the United States there are more divisions religiously and -- religious and sectarian divisions in the Iraqi society itself. So the constitution campaign was running under religious and sectarian slogans. The Arab Sunnis are more -- there are more radical Arab Sunnis now and there are more radicals on the Shia side as well.

Do you think that this, by the end of this democratic process, we will find -- we will not find a unique united Iraq or you are not concerned that -- you are sure that there is, of course, the democratic process will be positive on the entity of Iraq? Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Let me start with the last question. Yes, I do believe that we have every expectation and every hope that we will arrive at a unified, democratic, pluralistic and federal Iraq, which are the four adjectives that are listed in the UN Security Council resolution, and we take all four of them seriously and urge others to do so.

That brings me to my second point. You said, "Sponsored by the U.S." I reject the position. We didn't sponsor this. This was sponsored by the United States and UN Security Council Resolution 1546 and they backed up this despite a horrible tragedy of the UN Mission in Iraq two years ago by sending a large mission to Iraq to assist the Iraqis in carrying out the elections. We are very actively involved in this. We are providing most of the security forces in the coalition and we're very delighted with what's happened, but I think we have to keep the focus on the Iraqi process.

In terms of more divisions, again, I would challenge the basic assumption. Back in January, the Sunni Arabs by and large boycotted this political process. This time they came out in large numbers. That's a step in the right direction. We're not there yet. We won't be there until we have a governmental system that truly reflects all of the various groups and until the violence ends. But I think this is a step in the right direction.

Now, you said that people are polarized, people are arguing with each other, people are taking up positions. Some of that is true, but a lot of that is what happens in a democratic system, particularly one under a great deal of stresses and strains. We see this in other countries. This is not necessarily a bad sign that people are speaking out, that they're expressing their desires and their concerns and their fears.

What I would say is, and some of you know Iraq certainly better than I, that these fears and divisions were always there. They were papered over by industrial strength oppression for decades, particularly by Saddam Hussein, until the malignancy spread into the region and the country had to be liberated from him. And now we're seeing some of these things bubble up and it's just natural.

**QUESTION:** My name is Munir Mawari from Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. Do you see any change in the Syrian position regarding supporting the political process in Iraq? They said that they're going to send an ambassador to Baghdad and we don't know if it's real change and ground?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Again, any step that any country takes to normalize relations with Iraq is very important and is to be welcomed. And the Syrians have taken several steps in the past. Nonetheless, the bottom line for us and for the Iraqis and for the international community is and should be, are the Syrians doing everything possible to stop the flood of foreign fighters, many of them suicide bombers, who flow into Iraq from Syria and, in many cases, devastate civilians and marketplaces and mosques on the streets with absolutely senseless violence. That has to be stopped. We're looking for a change in Syrian behavior. We have not yet seen it and we are impatient.

**MR. BAILY:** That one here.

**QUESTION:** Lambros Papantoniou, *Eleftheros Typos*, Greek Daily, Athens. Ambassador Jeffrey, how the new Iraqi constitution affects your policy vis-à-vis to the ambitions of the Kurdish people to create a separate entity in northern Iraq. It seems a lot of reporters say recently that the Kurdish leadership is moving to this direction for which the Turkish Government is very concerned, as you know?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Gee, which Kurdish leaders are you talking about? Perhaps Mr. Talabani who happens to be the president of Iraq. I mean, I've spent a great deal of time, as have had many other international visitors and folks who are working in Iraq with the Kurds and we consider our success after years of attempts by Saddam Hussein to stomp them out, of integrating them into the new Iraq to be one of the more successful efforts that have been achieved in the past several years.

Once again, I go back to the UN Security Council resolution: Democratic, federal, pluralistic and united. All four of them fit together. There are some people who like "democratic" and they don't like the others. There are many people who like "united" but they don't like "federal."

**QUESTION:** [Lambros Papantoniou, *Eleftheros Typos*, Greek Daily] You're not afraid even an autonomous (inaudible) to this effect?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** I think we're very pleased with the political process and the role that the Kurds are playing in a federal, united, democratic Iraq.

**MR. BAILY:** Go to the back there.

**QUESTION:** Yes, good morning Ambassador. I'm Meredith Buel with Voice of America. To follow-up on your earlier remarks about the vote count, again Iraqi election officials announced Monday that there is a concern that up to 99 percent of vote turnout and vote totals in some Shiite and Kurdish areas of Iraq and that they want to investigate that. You said earlier that the UN was, in fact, investigating that. But does this at least raise the concern that this could, you know, could end up taking the entire results of the referendum into some sort of question? And could it further complicate efforts to bring the Sunnis into the mainstream political process and away from the insurgency?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** First of all, I'd have to go back and check the transcript. I don't think I used "investigation." Did I use investigation? I think they're examining or they're looking into this issue, which is normal whenever you have a threshold of more than 90 percent. That's normal, but it's also not unexpected and it's not just in Shia or Kurdish areas.

We saw in Fallujah a very, very strong turnout, which we're very happy with and a very, very high percent -- I would venture to guess, over 90 percent easily -- of "no votes." And certainly in the January 30th elections, we did see in certain areas in -- not in uncertain areas in the south very, very strong majorities voting for either the Candle\* list that the Shia put together or the joint PUK, KDP Kurdish list. Certainly, they went into the 90s as well.

But our point is let's look into it and see what happens. The rest of these flow from that. I think that if there are real allegations, they'll have to be dealt with. If there aren't real allegations, I don't think they'll have an impact on either the Sunni integration or the rest of the political process.

**MR. BAILY:** On the front here.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Mounzer Sleiman, Almustaqbal Al Arabi. What's your assessment of the Arab League mission of Amr Moussa and do you think that it has a chance to succeed and in the connection with the development in Iraq that still have some doubt about the result of the constitution referendum. At the same time, if you also, what do you think your expectation of the trial that's going to start tomorrow for the former President Saddam Hussein and his colleagues?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** We're delighted that the Arab League is showing so much interest in expanding its relationship with Iraq. We think it's overdue. I met with Secretary General Amr Moussa on my trip to the region. We were very much encouraged that he has taken this decision. We're delighted that he sent the advance team there. We were shocked that they were attacked as they went to visit the Western Baghdad Muslim (inaudible) Council headquarters and we're looking forward to the visit of Secretary

General Moussa. And we believe that within the context of the UN democratization process that the Arab League can play a very important role, mobilizing support for Iraq and working to ensure that the political process is trusted by and open to everybody. I think that's a very important step.

**QUESTION:** -- the second part.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Of the trial. On the trial, this is an Iraqi decision. It's an Iraqi process. And Saddam Hussein is going to have to answer for his crimes and it is a good thing that the Iraqis are taking that responsibility on themselves and we'll just have to wait and see what comes out of this.

**QUESTION:** Mohammed [Elmenshawy] from TAQRIR Washington. First, I would like to know who will be supporting security for the trial of Saddam Hussein starting tomorrow. Will the U.S. troops be involved?

And second, on -- do you still believe that progress in Iraq so far help your ideal mission of transforming the Middle East for a more democratic region?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** On security for Saddam, the way that works, ever since Saddam -- shortly after Iraq became fully sovereign at the end of June 2004, assumed legal custody of Saddam Hussein because of the security situation in Iraq and because of the UN Security Council mandate that was given to the Coalition. The Coalition accepted a request by the Iraqi Government to provide some of the security for Saddam. It's a shared responsibility and it will be a shared responsibility at the trial. But he is maintained in a facility that is secured by U.S. troops but there are also Iraqi security and Iraqi officials there. But he is not an American or a coalition prisoner or a detainee. He is an Iraqi, basically, indicted prisoner.

In terms of transforming the Middle East, every step in any country towards more openness, more freedom and more democracy is a step in the right direction. This is not our process. We think it's a good thing. We're trying to support it. But ultimately, the people of the region have to decide whether they want to embrace the democratic values that we see in most other places in the world.

**QUESTION:** Vanichkin Pavel of TASS News Agency of Russia. Sir, let us suppose for a minute that the constitution was passed and let us suppose as well that the upcoming elections in December will go smoothly. In that case, early next year, the Iraqis will be forced to deal with this amendment process. Due to the fact that we are talking about the -- not the trivial issues but about very important problems such as the federation and (inaudible) and so on, do you think it would be a very long process? Don't you afraid that the new constitution with this amendment would be basically the new constitution but not the old one and it would be -- it would differ greatly?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Let me talk a bit about constitutions, sort of constitutions of philosophy. They do three things in general. First, they establish basic rights and freedoms and almost moral relationships at the highest level of political philosophy.

Think of many of your own constitutions. In my case, I think of the Bill of Rights.

The second thing is they establish a template for a government, how it runs, the nuts and bolts of a government, how often do you have elections, how many people sit in the parliament, what the powers of parliament are, on mundane issues -- how laws go through and such. And there's some blurring of things. The independence of the judiciary I would put in the first category, but how you select judges often goes in the second.

The third thing that any constitution does, certainly the American Constitution and I think if you look at the constitutions of the countries in Europe, the democratic constitutions there that I'm fairly aware of, be it the German or the French or the British. You see it is a vehicle for sharing power and brokering power between the many diverse groups that make up any democratic system. Democracy operates on the assumption that there are things that pull people together and there are things that push people apart; that all societies are pluralistic, they are not one unity; they are not one person standing behind a leader.

And therefore, you have to broker those power relationships. One major way that that is done, but there are others, is the powers you give to local authorities and regional authorities, which typically are more homogeneous than the society as a whole, and the powers that you give to the central government. That was a system -- or that was a situation America in 1789. It's the situation in many countries. It was the situation in Germany in 1945. And it is the situation in Iraq today.

And so I believe that, first of all, this process should not take a long time because there is a timeline for these amendments, four months for the amendments to be presented to the people for another one-time referendum. So this will not drag on for a long time.

But the debate, the discussion, the heated arguments about that, and there will be -- and some of you will again say, see, look what you've created. People are yelling at each other and they have different positions and you will be right -- will produce, we think, an even better system. But once again, that's up to the Iraqis. We can't make these judgments.

**MR. BAILY:** Go ahead, third row here.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Vladimir Kara-Murza, [RTV1] Television, Russia. Will the results of this referendum, in any way, affect the decision-making process here in Washington on whether or when to begin the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq? Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** No. The decision -- the short answer is no, but I'll qualify it a little bit. The decision to withdraw forces is based upon the -- in consultation with our coalition allies and with the Iraqi authorities, the situation on the ground, the most important element in that is the progress that the Iraqis are making and standing up capable forces and they're making a great deal of progress. As the President said last

month, "As the Iraqis stand up, coalition and U.S. forces will stand down."

The other considerations are the strength of the insurgency, and this is done region by region, the effectiveness of the government at the local level to pay people to deliver basic services and such. And finally the ability of the coalition to respond with heavy weaponry, with logistics and with other things as 9/11 for all the Iraqi security forces. So all of those things are being evaluated and it is done in contacts with the Iraqis. So directly the political process -- it is not a click, two steps forward on the political process, two steps towards withdrawal.

However, at another level, and that's why I'm trying to be careful after giving you a quick no. The political process is very important for defeating the insurgency, which is the overall goal of our presence and our work with the Iraqis. And therefore, this has to be a political as well as a military security process, and we hope and we believe that elections, in bringing all groups into the political process as we saw three days ago, is a step in the right direction to bring in many of the insurgents, the bulk of the indigenous insurgency, and to isolate the true terrorists, many of whom have come across one or another border into Iraq and who are pursuing a transnational horrific dream.

**QUESTION:** Sue Penny from Reuters. You said that the day of the referendum was a bad day for terrorists and an historic day -- and a great day for democracy. Recent statistics that went from the White House to Congress showed that the number of attacks has actually increased in the weeks and months leading up to the referendum. I just wonder, when do you think you're going to get a handle on, you know, crushing the insurgency or managing to improve the situation on the ground? Because unless you have more stability on the ground, it's going to be very hard for you to push the political process forward.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Well, first of all, stability is very important and all of our efforts are devoted either primarily or secondarily through the political process, through economic efforts, to stability. However, I don't think that your statement that attacks have climbed up in the past few months, which is true, and my statement that it was a bad day for the terrorists are contradictory. In fact, I think they reinforce each other.

The insurgent attacks are up some measure 20 percent over the past eight, nine months, although the Defense Department can give you more specific statistics on that. But what we didn't see this time was the spike in attacks the week before the referendum, as we saw before the January 30th election, and the number of attacks on January 30th versus the number of attacks that we had on Sunday were dramatically down on Sunday, be they attacks on polling places and the electoral process, which were down by two thirds, or overall attacks country, which were down by, again, two thirds. On January 30th we had the highest number of attacks that we've had in any one day in the history of our involvement in Iraq, and that was approximately 300, including over 100 directed at polling places or other electoral installations.

So it's a good news story specifically in terms of this, thus it was a bad day for the terrorists. But we still have an active insurgency and that insurgency has to be dealt with militarily but also through the political process.

**MR. BAILY:** Down here on the fourth row.

**QUESTION:** I'm Tarek Rashed from Middle East News Agency. With Shiites making up the majority of terrorists and taking into mind the strong relations they have with Iran, so what countries do you have to curb the future influence of Iran on the politics in Iraq?

And the second part is what do you expect the future role of Saudi Arabia, especially that it sees the Shiite influence is coming down from Iran into Iraq and might be threaten its Sunni majority?

Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Yeah, in a way, these are two ways of asking the same question. I would question the quote, "Strong ties of the Shia" in Iraq to Iran. First of all, there are different ethnic and linguistic groups. The Shia that I know, other than the Shia Kurds and a few Shia Turkomen are strong believers in their Arab as well as in their religious identity. I think that's very important.

Secondly, you all know the history of Shia Islam and it's hard for me to think that an Iraqi Shia would feel that they are the junior partner to an Iran where Shia Islam came a thousand years later.

Thirdly, there are significant differences in the philosophies that drive the Iranian branch of Shia Islam and that that we associate with Najaf. So I think all three of those things are important.

But the other thing is, remember, why are these ties -- why did some of the political leaders of the current Iraq find refuge in Iran? Because they like the food there? I don't think so. I think it's because they were driven out of that country and many of their family members were slaughtered by Saddam Hussein. And I think in any discussion of that issue you have to go back to what happened under Saddam Hussein in particular.

In terms of Saudi Arabia, once again, they have concerns. We are in constant touch with them and we listen carefully to them and we try to present our arguments that a pluralistic regional system is not necessarily antagonistic to unity but rather it may be the only way absent the kind of industrial strength oppression we saw under Saddam to hold a country together. And that's the issue that is before everybody in the Middle East, not just us and not just the Saudis.

**MR. BAILY:** I think we have time for about two more. We'll go in the back row here.

**QUESTION:** I am Alain de Chelvron from the French Television France2. It's a question about the trial. The Iraqi laws say that in case of a death penalty it must be executed within 30 days after last appeal. So my question is, don't you fear that the main crimes of Saddam Hussein against the Kurds or the Shias maybe will never have a trial?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** That's an interesting and important question but it's a question that has to be directed to the Iraqis, who have a real interest in clarifying all of the crimes that were committed in that era, many of which Saddam Hussein had his fingerprints all over. But as I said, as we're not participating in that trial, we're not driving it, it's really something I can't answer.

**MR. BAILY:** One last one here. Second row.

**QUESTION:** [Khaled Dawoud, Al Ahram] I just want to follow up on the Iran issue. I mean, when you have the Badr organization financed and paid by the Iranians, 10,000 fighters, and you have Mr. Hakim -- he was sitting -- living there for more than 20 years -- I mean, how come you just try to say that they have no influence on the Iran issue?

And the second thing, also related to the trial, you know, again, I've seen a report by Human Rights Watch saying this is an entirely American process, that the Iraqi judges are not prepared and you've paid something like \$130 (sic) to finance the trial. So again, you know, I mean, I find it difficult to believe this repeated line of this is an entirely Iraqi process.

Thank you, sir.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Yeah, first of all, the Shia of Iraq are a very pluralistic group, like all of the other groups in Iraq, and some of them have had closer ties to Iran than others. You've selected one of the examples of very close ties but there are many elements of -- just take the Candle coalition that was put together back for the January elections. There are many elements that are associated with the Najafi Shia clergy. There are elements that are associated with Dawa, such as the Prime Minister; elements associated with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, that's SCIRI, the Badr Brigade and, as you said, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. There are elements associated with Mr. Chalabi. There are elements associated with Mr. Shah Sistani. There are elements associated with Mouhkter Al-Sada(ph). That is a very pluralistic group that has a whole variety of attitudes towards regionalism, towards the unity of the state and towards Iran. And I think we have to trust the political process, the democratic process to sort these things out above them. This isn't a monolithic group of people.

**QUESTION:** The trial?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** The trial. Again, this is an Iraqi process. The fact, believe me I can cite from experience, the fact that we are providing support, funding and advice

to various Iraqi operations, does not mean that we are calling the shots. It does not mean that we're controlling what's going on. We're doing this in a transparent way in order to allow the Iraqis to come up with their own solutions.

Now, you made a point on Human Rights Watch and you said two separate things and put them together. Could you repeat the question?

**QUESTION:** It's about the ability of the Iraqi judges and that basically you are the ones who are calling all the shots.

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Yeah, yeah, I think I would have to look at the report because I don't want to consider Human Rights Watch when it's your question that I should be criticizing. I think that there may be problems of experience with Iraqi judges. Gee, there are problems of experience with almost every Iraqi in any official position in the country, but they're working their way through it because they weren't allowed to form these democratic, these pluralistic, these free institutions under Saddam Hussein. But that doesn't mean that just because there are problems that you can make the connection and say, therefore, the Americans must be running everything.

And I think a better conclusion would be that they're going to have to work their way through all of these issues, be it the question that your French colleague raised or be it your own question, that is not inaccurate that there is a certain degree of inexperience. But I wouldn't leap from that to the assumption that America or the coalition is controlling everything.

**MR. BAILY:** Do we have time for one more?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** Yeah.

**MR. BAILY:** Last question.

**QUESTION:** [Tamam Al Barazi, Alwatan Alarabi] Sir, there are five Arab journalists, our colleagues, been captured by the American troop. One of them the Al Arabiya channel and one for CBS and others and it is not -- they are not in the hands of the Iraqi. So why -- they've been for months in prison. Why are you keeping them in prison? Why don't you put them here in front of courts or what?

**AMBASSADOR JEFFREY:** We look particularly closely in any case involving a journalist who has been detained because of the particular history and record of journalists who have been caught in cross-fires, journalists who have been shot and such in Iraq and because of our own traditions and because of the -- many American journalists, such as Mr. Byrd who has been killed while doing their journey. So it is something that we consider very, very closely. And as someone who was there when many of the incidents came up, we do look at them very closely.

That said, under the authorities that have been granted to us by the Iraqi Government and by UN Security Council Resolution 1546, we detain people who we think are immediate security threat to the Iraqis or to the coalition forces. We do not do this lightly. We have released a large percent of the people we have detained. We have turned over thousands more when there is specific evidence that can be used in a trial to the Iraqi authorities. In this case, this is being reviewed all of the time. Eventually, if there is strong evidence that can be used in a case against these people, they would be presumably turned over to the Iraqis for judicial action. If these people are not a threat, they will be released. But they're not being held simply out of pique or simply because we just nonchalantly are grabbing journalists off the street. There was some real indications that these people posed a threat to Iraqis or to security forces.

That's it.

**MR. BAILY:** Ambassador, thank you very much. Thank you.

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