

\*REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY\*  
Opening Remarks of Chairman Bill Delahunt  
at a Briefing entitled:

The Future of U.S.–Iraqi Relations: The Perspective of the Iraqi Parliament

June 4, 2008

Today we are honored to have with us a distinguished delegation of our fellow parliamentarians from the Iraqi Council of Representatives, Sheikh Khalaf al-Ulayyan and Dr., Professor, if I may, Nadim al-Jaberi.

I will describe their backgrounds in more detail in a minute, but I think it is important to note that the Sheik is from Anbar in western Iraq and leads a Sunni coalition, and the professor lives in Baghdad and leads a Shi'ite party that is based largely in Basra in southern Iraq. To have them here together gives me hope that true reconciliation in a unified Iraq is still possible -- following the inevitable U.S. withdrawal.

This is the first time that I am aware of since the United States invaded Iraq that members of the Iraqi parliament have come to the Congress to engage in private and public discussions. I can think of no more important relationship for our Congress to develop than this one. And I hope we can formalize this relationship as an Iraqi-American parliamentary group as we have with other foreign legislative bodies.

I should tell our guests that I vigorously opposed the invasion, and I have voted since then to withdraw our troops, while my friend and ranking member Mr. Rohrabacher has often taken a contrary position. However, you should be assured that there is one thing that he and I agree on, which is the importance of dialogue and transparency in a democracy as we conduct our deliberations -- and it is in that spirit that he and I and the rest of the Subcommittee welcome you to our country and our Congress, Sheikh al-Ulayyan and Professor al-Jaberi.

We express our deepest appreciation for your willingness to accept this invitation and fly all the way here to take part in this briefing. I hope Mr. Rohrabacher and I and many of our colleagues can soon pay a return visit to you, and see Iraq from your perspective.

Let me now formally introduce our distinguished guests.

Sheikh Khalaf al-Ulayyan is a member of the Iraqi Parliament, the founder of the National Dialogue Council -- a nationalist Sunni Islamist political party. The Sheikh's party is one of three making up the Sunni Accord Front, which holds 44 seats in the 275-member parliament. His party is strongly against any partitioning of Iraq -- and strongly in favor of an end to what it calls the "occupation" of Iraq by U.S. and other foreign forces.

Sheikh al-Ulayyan served in the Iraqi Army until the early 1980's, rising to the rank of general -- and involving himself deeply in the education of young officers. Since then he has been an influential tribal leader in Anbar province, where there has been a much-discussed reduction in violence as a result of Sunni insurgents forming so-called Awakening groups.

Dr. Nadim al-Jaberi is also a member of the Iraqi parliament. He is a co-founder of the al-Fadhila -- Islamic Virtue -- Party, a nationalist Shi'ite political party based in southern Iraq. The al-Fadhilah party, which is also against a long-term presence of any foreign troops and in favor of maintaining a strong central government, holds 15 seats in the parliament. In March 2007 the party withdrew from the ruling Shi'ite Coalition and the executive branch.

Dr. al-Jaberi had a long career as a noted political science professor at the University of Baghdad -- until teaching became too dangerous in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion. The professor is the author of 15 books, and has trained a generation of Iraqi political scientists -- with more emphasis, he says, on the science and less on the politics. More importantly, he recently became a grandfather -- and I hope my daughters are listening as I express my congratulations and my jealousy, professor.

Gentlemen, as you present to us whatever you think we need to hear about Iraq and its future, I hope you will inform us about your perspective on the legal process and the outstanding issues in Iraq concerning the proposed U.S.-Iraq security and military agreement. Congress has received, to be polite, minimal information from the Bush administration on the agreement from the drafting of the Declaration of Principles to the latest sticking points in the negotiations -- so perhaps you can do their job and update us.

It would appear that no single issue is generating more discussion, concern, and public protest in Iraq right now than the proposed U.S.-Iraqi long-term security agreement. It seems as if every important political and religious figure has expressed concern about such reported U.S. demands – such as combat operations outside of Iraqi command, arrest and detention authority, long-term presence of troops, and immunity for civilian contractors.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Sheikh Moqtada al-Sadr, and even a powerful representative of a party within the executive branch, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, have stated publicly their strong reservations about such provisions.

Iraqi vice president Tareq al-Hashimi, a key Maliki ally, said on Monday: *'There is an Iraqi national consensus to reject the draft agreement.'*

And Ali Adeeb of the Dawa Party, which is also part of the ruling coalition, said: *"This agreement is between Iraq and the United States president, and the American policy is not clear. We can wait until the American elections to deal with a Democratic or Republican president."*

As the Subcommittee of this House with responsibility for oversight of State Department activities, we have held a series of five hearings on the negotiations between our government and the government of Iraq on this agreement. With the gracious support of my friend and ranking member Mr. Rohrabacher we have heard from legal scholars and regional experts on such topics as:

- how international agreements are approved in both countries,
- whether military commitments and authorizations can be contained in sole executive agreements, and
- under what legal authorities U.S. combat forces are now operating in Iraq.

And finally, after months of requests, we were able to ask these questions of administration witnesses in a hearing. And what we heard troubled me all the more:

- the Bush administration refused to commit to recognizing the constitutional role of the U.S. Congress in authorizing the commitment of U.S. military forces to fight in Iraq – and I note

that the existing authority will expire along with the UN Mandate at the end of 2008;

- The Bush administration has also been unclear as to its position if the Iraqi parliament is by-passed by the Maliki government in any agreement reached by the respective governments.

Both of these positions I find unsupported by the testimony of non-governmental experts from our hearings. The administration's claims are at variance with reality – but, of course, that won't be the first time when it comes to Iraq and its mysterious weapons of mass destruction and links to al-Qaeda.

Scott McClellan, the President's errand press secretary, recently wrote a book about what he calls the Bush administration's "culture of deception." Here is what he had to say: *The Bush administration lacked real accountability in large part because Bush himself did not embrace openness or government in the sunshine.*

Well, here we do embrace openness, not just because it is right in terms of our American values, but also because it is the most effective way to air all the options and come to the wisest, most pragmatic decisions when it comes to our national interests – which now by the very fact of our invasion and occupation of Iraq require us to support Iraq's emergence as a viable, healthy, and prosperous democracy. That is why we are so pleased to have this open and transparent discussion with our guests today.

Let me now turn to my friend from California for his opening remarks.

Thank you Dana. And now, fellow parliamentarians Professor al-Jaberi and Sheikh al-Ulwayyan, please proceed.