



## Interview by Salameh Nematt of Al Hayat

**Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary**  
Washington, DC  
October 25, 2004

**MR. NEMATT:** So we've had elections in Afghanistan. Are we going to have them in Iraq?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes. This was one of the subjects that I spoke about with the Deputy President today. He expressed his view that we should have these by the end of January and be all-inclusive, which is exactly our view as well.

**MR. NEMATT:** What does "all-inclusive" mean?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Open to all the citizens of Iraq.

**MR. NEMATT:** Is Allawi running? Do you know if Allawi is running?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't know if Mr. Allawi will run or not.

**MR. NEMATT:** You don't have any position on that?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** This is the business of Iraqis to decide. They're putting together their political parties, their slates. I note that the Secretary General's representative for elections, Mr. Valenzuela, he said that it's hard work but we can get it done, a lot to be done, but we can get these elections done.

**MR. NEMATT:** The security situation seems to be deteriorating there, you know, these days, and we lost a diplomat.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes, we did. That's why our flags are at half staff today. That was a very tragic thing. He was actually in his home in the shower when the rocket came in.

It depends on where you look -- the security situation. If you look in Najaf, it's quite a bit better. If you look in Samara, it's somewhat better. If you look in Al Fawr, or Sadr City, it's significantly better. I think they've had two weeks without an incident. But then again, if you go to Fallujah, it doesn't look good. If you go to Mosul, which is probably the one we worry about the most, it's a questionable situation.

**MR. NEMATT:** When is the major offensive on Fallujah?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** If I knew, why would I tell you?

**MR. NEMATT:** Well, it looks like, you know--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** They'll know it when it starts. This is a decision for Iraqis to make.

**MR. NEMATT:** The redeployment of British troops from the south to near Baghdad, is this related?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't want to speak about military and security related details, other than to acknowledge where it's good and where it's bad.

**MR. NEMATT:** So the Iraqi Government does not need to change it, if they're ready to move?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** The Iraqi--if there's a move in one of these areas, it'll be a decision of the Iraqi Government.

**MR. NEMATT:** So do I understand that the elections will be held regardless of the security situation and regardless of whether the United Nations is ready to actually supervise the --

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, right now, our view and the Iraqi view is that they will be held the end of January and be open to all, will be all-inclusive. That comports with the view of the UN's representative for elections. He said the same thing either yesterday or this morning. So that is our position.

**MR. NEMATT:** You're traveling to Kuwait and Jordan?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Sorry?

**MR. NEMATT:** You're traveling to Jordan and Kuwait?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes, I am. Yes.

**MR. NEMATT:** What are you telling them? Why are you going?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I'm going on a whole series of--to a whole series of countries. And Amman and Kuwait, two neighbors of Iraq, I think it's very important to keep them fully in the picture. I'll be looking forward to speaking to His Majesty and representatives of the new government of Jordan, the new Foreign Minister. We'll be comparing notes on the security situation. I'll also go to Baghdad and I'll go to Kuwait, for the same reason.

**MR. NEMATT:** How do you see the situation in Israel now after this first (inaudible)? Are you optimistic that the Israelis will come back to the roadmap? Will they eventually?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I wouldn't want you to be able to paint me optimistic or pessimistic. I think I would like you to be able to paint me as realistic. We've had a lot of trauma. There's been a great deal of difficulty in coming up with a negotiating partner for the Israelis among the Palestinians. Mr. Sharon appears sincere in his desire to get a political agreement with his government to get out of the 23 settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank. There's a lot of hard work to be done and Mr. Sharon will have to come up with payments and things of this nature for the settlers who will be moving. So there's a lot of work to be done, but I did note the other day that Mr. Sharon did say the roadmap was the only map, and that's our view, too.

**MR. NEMATT:** So you're confident that they're committed to the roadmap?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I think it depends on which Israeli you talk to, to the degree of commitment. But I--so I will--I think Mr. Sharon had said it, our President thinks Mr. Sharon is a man of his word, so we'll leave it at that.

**MR. NEMATT:** Do you hear anything about Arafat, his health?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yeah, I saw some news broadcast today about the Israelis saying he could travel to Ramallah, I believe, for his medical treatment, but I have no independent knowledge of the state of his health.

**MR. NEMATT:** He is in Ramallah.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, that he's going to be able to travel to the hospital, move around, (inaudible).

**MR. NEMATT:** But not outside?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I didn't--I have no information on that.

**MR. NEMATT:** The Sudan. The situation in Sudan seems still to be as bad as, you know, it has been.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Why would you say that?

**MR. NEMATT:** Because we still hear reports about the continuing, you know, ethnic cleansing taking place and--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yeah, I don't think it's quite as bad as it was because of the tremendous amount of humanitarian and food and medical supplies that have gone in. We still have, although we're ready to move both Rwandan and Nigerian troops, and I don't believe they've started moving, have they?

**A PARTICIPANT:** No.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** They could move tomorrow or the next day. That will improve the situation, I think, rather dramatically. But at the end of the day, we still recognize that it's the Sudanese Government who has to rein in the Jingaweit and have to do everything they are required to do under the UN Security Council resolution.

**MR. NEMATT:** Syria and Lebanon. Where are we now and where are we going?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I've described the present government and Prime Minister of Lebanon as "Made in Damascus." Now, that doesn't seem in keeping with the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 or, for that matter, a much older document, the Taif Accords. It's about time that the future of Lebanon was decided by Lebanese.

**MR. NEMATT:** And if not?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, the international community has spoken with the UN Security Council resolution, (inaudible) presidential statements, and I think that until Syria makes up her mind to let Lebanon be Lebanon, then the international community will continue to focus on it.

**MR. NEMATT:** Are you still in coordination with the French on this matter and are you satisfied with the mechanisms at the Security Council to (inaudible)?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I have no reason to think we're not still in coordination with the French. I have not spoken to them recently about this. It looks to me like the presidential statement that was issued the other day at the UN makes it quite clear that the Secretary General will report at six-months intervals on the progress or lack thereof.

**MR. NEMATT:** You are satisfied with that process?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** We're satisfied.

**MR. NEMATT:** On the level of terror threats to the United States, you remember, you know, there were warnings that the U.S. might be attacked before the elections. Are you still concerned after reports by the FBI saying (inaudible) specific?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I've been concerned since September of 2001. There's no question that al-Qaida or their affiliates would like to do damage here, but I hope and trust that our disruptive activities of law enforcement and military, et cetera, have made it more difficult for them, and I did see the same acknowledgement that you did that the imminent threat might be down a little bit.

**MR. NEMATT:** Any progress on the Iran nuclear front? Signs from Iran that it might be accepting the European deal?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I've seen some leaks to that regard, but I think we have to let the Europeans go back on the 27th to Tehran and receive the answer of the Iranians, and then we'll be glad to listen to what the EU-3 has to say. We remain skeptical of the Iranians, as you know--that I trust you know. I'd be surprised if you didn't know.

**MR. NEMATT:** Any change on the border from the Iranians, the smuggling and the (inaudible)?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't see any change on the border with Iraq, which is what you're talking about. They continue to provide monies, et cetera, trying to buy favor with local mullahs, clerics. But I think they're meeting with some mixed success. It's not an easy slog for them because Iraqis are Iraqis, and there seems to be a large difference between an Arab Shia and a Persian Shia.

**MR. NEMATT:** This report this morning about the 380 tons of explosives that were looted. How did this happen?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I have no idea.

**MR. NEMATT:** Who was in charge of that (inaudible)?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Looks to me like somehow the multinational force didn't stay on top of this, but I have to refer you to the Pentagon. I saw the report, too. We're shocked.

**MR. NEMATT:** Any idea who's the one who looted it?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I haven't.

**MR. NEMATT:** This is really dangerous, isn't it?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No fooling.

**MR. NEMATT:** It's a major breach of security.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yeah.

**MR. NEMATT:** What else do you plan to discuss in Jordan and Kuwait? Are you discussing any possible sending of troops, too, or is this issue dead?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No, no.

**MR. NEMATT:** There is no talk about sending any--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I'm not going to discuss those.

**MR. NEMATT:** Any strategy beyond the elections to deal with Iraq security?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Oh, sure. Lieutenant General Dave Petraeus, as rapidly as humanly possible, is standing up Iraqi forces, both national guard and army, as well as police forces. We haven't talked in some time, but the majority of the fighting in Najaf was done by Iraqi national guard. Most of the battalions -- most -- fought quite well. And it was that military pressure from Iraqis that allowed Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani to be successful in his negotiation where he had been unsuccessful in April because there had been no military pressure. The same is true of Samara and now in North Babil, where Iraqi forces are taking the majority of the fighting.

Listen, we understand that Iraqis want us out of their country. We clearly understand that. And the way to do this is to, as rapidly as possible, stand up these security forces and equip them so they can stand for their own defense.

**MR. NEMATT:** Do you see any possibility of a change of policy on Iraq after the elections?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, you mean if the Democrats win?

**MR. NEMATT:** For example.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't think I see much of a change in policy no matter who wins because what I've seen Mr. Kerry say is that--not that he disagrees with the policy, he'd do it better. I mean, that's the shorthand of what he's saying. And I think that gives most of our friends in Iraq some confidence that we would stay the course. We've made a tremendous investment, the U.S. Congress has, and in the lives of our young men and women, and so I think there won't be a major change of policy. I think we'll continue to try to stand up Iraqi security forces as fast as possible.

**MR. NEMATT:** Is the security situation blocking spending of the allocations for Iraq?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** It's not blocking it because we've been, since June 28th, we have spent out at about \$3-to-4 hundred million a month, that is, to actually disburse that much money. But clearly it makes it more difficult and we can't always disburse it in areas which we'd like to. But the needs of Iraq are quite great and so we always find some place to spend the money. I'm happy to report to you today that we had about a thousand kilowatt-hours of energy, more electricity today than previously, and much above the pre-war output. So there are some small signs of progress as we move ahead; indeed, oil is being produced at about 2.5, 2.6 million barrels a day, of which about 1.9 is exported. So the government--particularly \$54 a barrel of oil--the Government of Iraq is having some money to pay salaries and things of those nature. So it's a bumpy, difficult road but there are some short areas of smoothness in the road.

**MR. NEMATT:** How would you characterize U.S.-Saudi relations today?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Better than a year ago.

**MR. NEMATT:** What is--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** For several reasons. First of all, I think the Saudis got very energized on the counterterrorism account. After the terrible bombings they have suffered, they really energetically went after the terrorists and they went after the terrorist financing.

Number two, I think that more generally the atmosphere surrounding Saudi Arabia has changed due to the 9/11 Commission Report, which came out and said that Saudi Arabia was not involved in any way, the Government of Saudi Arabia, in 9/11, et cetera, and I thought that was very helpful. And we find them engaging with us now in a much more meaningful way than a year or two ago.

**MR. NEMATT:** There was a point when you talk about engaging regional, you know, neighbors of Iraq in border patrol beyond, you know, Syria and Iran aside, like, you know, Jordanian troops on the border.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, Jordanian troops are already on their border.

**MR. NEMATT:** Inside Iraq.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** On their side of the border?

**MR. NEMATT:** On other side as well.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** We're going to have--or there will be a meeting in Sharm el-Sheik on the 23rd of September<sup>1</sup>, the 22nd or 23rd, of the neighbors of Iraq, the G-8, the OIC, the Arab League, et cetera, to talk about regional security and, of course, how to better coordinate the porous nature of the border. Now, this will certainly be something the Iraqis raise.

**MR. NEMATT:** So what do you hope to achieve in that conference, from--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, it's the Iraqis who wanted the conference. I think they want to get a little more buy-in by the neighbors in terms of, first of all, to sincerely point out that they will offer no threat to their neighbors, that they expect their neighbors to do their part in helping to provide security for Iraq. Beyond that, I think there is some benefit from the leadership of Iraq being able to explain to a broader audience just what their hopes and aspirations are for the people of Iraq.

**MR. NEMATT:** So what was the Vice President, the Iraqi Vice President's message to you? What does he want?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Deputy President?

**MR. NEMATT:** Yes.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, we talked about, as I said, the elections, the need for elections to go forward at the right time, the need for us to continue to work hard to stand up security forces, which we're doing. We talked about, since he was formerly Prime Minister of the Kurdistan regional government, at one time, up till 1999, we talked about Kurdistan, the Kurds and Arab relations, as a general matter.

**MR. NEMATT:** Any concern about participation for the Sunnis being torpedoed?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** The concern was the absolute necessity of having the Sunnis enfranchised and empowered, and so that they will be part of the life of the new Iraq. And this means they have to be able to stand up a list of candidates. They have to be able to, at the appropriate level, to hold office and seats in the parliament. So, absolutely, that was part of his presentation to me.

**MR. NEMATT:** Did you hear any concerns from neighboring states over this same matter?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No.

**MR. NEMATT:** From Jordan or Kuwait, for example?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No.

**MR. NEMATT:** Saudi Arabia?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No.

**MR. NEMATT:** They did not express any--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Not to me.

**MR. NEMATT:** Do you know anything about the Jordanian Foreign Minister being replaced? Was that --

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, he's got a different job.

**MR. NEMATT:** Was it a policy problem?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't think so; in fact, I'm quite sure it isn't. Marwan Muasher was a terrific representative of the country, and I think extraordinarily valued by His Majesty, King Abdullah.

**MR. NEMATT:** On terrorism, cooperation on terrorism, can you say that Syria continues to cooperate on that level because it--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, it depends on which terrorists. You see, originally, as you know, she was quite cooperative with us on the question of al-Qaida but not at all on Hamas and Hezbollah. This is still the case. We have seen, however, in recent weeks, responding certainly to a plea from the Iraqi Government, but perhaps also to discussions with Bill Burns in Damascus, a little better attitude on behalf of the Syrians regarding the Syrian-Iraqi border. And as you know, there are some mechanisms now to cooperate a little better on that border.

**MR. NEMATT:** Do you have assurances from the Israelis they won't intervene militarily in Syria or Iraq -- Iran, with relationship to the nuclear--?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No sovereign country is going to unilaterally give up their right to self-defense, period.

**MR. NEMATT:** So the answer is no, you have no assurances?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** The answer is, I would not ask them or expect them to. No country unilaterally give up their rights to self-defense. Now, having said that, we have a very close relationship with Israel and would expect Israel to consult with us if anything were going to happen, but we have not asked Israel to give up its unilateral right to self-defense.

**MR. NEMATT:** Did they communicate their concern that they might--that they feel threatened by the Iranian, you know, launch the new missile on (inaudible)?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I think it's not just Israel that feels threatened. I think many countries in the Gulf have historically been threatened from Iran and do feel threatened. I think many minds in Europe are coming to the view that Iran, if allowed to develop nuclear weapons and delivery systems, which she already apparently has, is a threat to European interests. So don't put Israel alone in that.

**MR. NEMATT:** The Jordanians have been concerned that with the failure to move forward with the peace process, that the Israelis might opt for the "Jordan is Palestine" option, and I have been hearing basically that the concern that the Sharon government has not assured the Jordanians. Are you (inaudible)?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** No, I mean, this was much more a part of daily discussion back in the late '80s, when Mr. Sharon uttered some remarks, as he did. But more recently, the relationship between Israel and Jordan has been somewhat better. I would be very surprised if that were much in the forefront of Israeli thinking. I haven't seen it lately, nor have I heard it, and I haven't heard it raised by Jordanian interlocutors for years.

**MR. NEMATT:** All right. Well, thank you very much, unless you have a scoop you want to give me again.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I gave you the scoop on Mr. Karami: "Made in Damascus."

**MR. NEMATT:** Yeah. Well, I mean, Karami is helpless in that sense, isn't he?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Was his father helpless?

**MR. NEMATT:** Well, I mean, you know--you know the situation in Lebanon.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yeah.

**MR. NEMATT:** And the, you know, Lebanese were hoping that the U.S. would be more aggressive in pursuing this Security Council resolution.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** The Lebanese?

**MR. NEMATT:** Follow-up to the Security Council.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** We had interesting discussions with Lebanese friends about this.

**MR. NEMATT:** So you do expect further steps to be taken within--

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Well, I think the international community has spoken. Clearly, Syria has not lived up to her responsibilities under 1559. The fact that the Secretary General will be required to report every six months, I think makes it clear to friends in Damascus that this spotlight is not going to go away.

**MR. NEMATT:** Thank you very much.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Nice to see you.

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