

The United States and the UN

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The Honorable Zalmay Khalilzad
United States Ambassador to the United Nations,
Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan

Moderated by Michael Parks
Director of the School of Journalism, USC

Michael Parks: I think the question that's foremost in our minds is Iraq. We have our service men and women in Iraq and we want to know how the situation is. We're well into President Bush's escalation, the surge. What is your estimation of the security situation but perhaps more importantly what's your estimation of the political situation there now?

Amb. Khalilzad: If I may take a minute to put the Iraq in a broader context. During much of the 19th and early 20th centuries the world faced security challenges, the most important ones came from one region of the world and that was Europe. Managing the balance of power in Europe was the defining challenge of that period and the European problems caused huge suffering and losses that became world wars and dragging us in twice in the beginning of the century. After World War II Europe began to get its act together and become a functional regional of the world with our help. Then the challenge of managing the Soviet Union became the defining geo-political problem of the subsequent period, and now it is the broader Middle East that is producing the most serious security problems of the current period; normalizing this region, helping this region, working with constructive forces, moderate forces to face extremist forces so that this region now becomes functional and normal. Politically, there are many issues. There are a number of global problems but geo-politically this is the region that is the defining challenge that we face. And, therefore, what happens in Iraq will impact the region in a substantial way.

In terms of what we're facing there, it's clear that the new strategy that was initiated almost a year ago has produced a positive security situation. The level of violence is down, the population protection strategy that General Petraeus has followed has produced results; both our casualties and Iraqi casualties are down.

Two other things have happened which are important. One, al Qaeda, which is a substantial factor in causing sectarian violence was attacking innocent Shiite Arabs to provoke them to attack Sunni Arabs, has been weakened dramatically. There is agreement about that. Two, our relationship with the Sunni Arab population has improved and that is one of the issues I worked very much on when I was there. While we had good relations with the Shia and Kurdish population who had suffered under Saddam the Sunni Arab population was not as pleased with the change and thought that we had some inherent hostility to them. We have managed to improve relations with them without losing positive relations with the Shia and the Kurds. There

are some Shia Arabs and some Sunni Arabs who are still unhappy with us, but I think overall relations are such that we can work with all sides. Those are two important factors.

But politically at the national level unfortunately there hasn't been positive developments and for security gains to be lasting I think there is a need of progress on the political track and that means an agreement among Iraqis on what it means to be Iraqi in this new context, how to share economic and political power. They're facing big issues; big challenges and those of you who know European history know that these things take time. Look at the history of Germany or the history of France or the history of Italy these things have not been easy to overcome, but on security progress and political agreement at the national level there's not much to report.

Michael Parks: So, how do we get there? How do we get that political progress? You got people together in Afghanistan, is that a simpler country?

Amb. Khalilzad: I believe that in Afghanistan the people were exhausted and tired after 30 years of one war or another; they resisted brilliantly and bravely the Soviet Union and paid a huge price. Then there was the pain of civil war, then the Taliban, and the Afghans were looking for normalcy and I was very pleased with their reaction that they welcomed the change and performed their duty in having elections. In Iraq I think there is more energy there, yet a compact to be arrived at on the big issues. They have not suffered as a people to the degree which the Afghans have suffered; the Iraqis have suffered, too, because of the war and the oppression of Saddam Hussein, but not in the degree that the Afghans have.

The Afghans came together yes; in Iraq we brought them together, too. There was some progress on the constitution and they came together. But I believe that they face the issues of how to distribute trillions of dollars of oil money among themselves. They have to deal with internal boundaries; they have to deal with federalism—what kind of federalism? I believe that in order for them to come together the neighbors also have to help. Iraq is a transition country between Arab, Persia and the Turkish world, Islam, Shia and Sunnis meet there, and because the outcome in Iraq will be so consequential for the region the neighbors are also playing a big role. But they are not altogether being helpful to Iraq. Some of them do not want a democratic Iraq because that could also have some implications for them, others are interfering because they don't like U.S. presence or they favor one faction. One of the reasons I took the U.N. job was because of my understanding of Iraq. There was initially significant disagreement among the countries around the world about Iraq. Now we have a unanimous Security Council resolution that says the U.N. will take the lead in facilitating dialogue and agreement among Iraqis and to bring the neighbors together on this issue. But I don't want to mislead you because it's still going to take time and will take significant effort to overcome this issue but also I want to reemphasize how important it is that this comes out right and I think ultimately it will work. But it's a difficult and complicated issue that we are facing there.

Mr. Parks: So no wine before it's time. The situation needs to mature. What's the end game?

Amb. Khalilzad: The end game is probably a better Iraq. The Kurds of Iraq want to run their own affairs internally and so because of that the country will be better off, the issues is how the rest of Iraq, the Arab part of Iraq, will be organized and what the Shiites and Sunnis and the Kurds will agree on in terms of the division of resources. There are several options. One option is that the rest of Iraq will be a single federal unit so that Iraq will be made of two units, Kurdish and Arab, someone has proposed three units and some say that each province of Iraq would be a federal unit. But I believe that they will eventually come to an agreement.

Mr. Parks: What's the process to get there?

Amb. Khalilzad: The process is that they will have to discuss amending their constitution. It will be a unified Iraq. I'm not one that gives a significant probability to the disintegration of Iraq. There was an agreement on the constitution but the Sunni Arabs were not satisfied because they had not participated in the political a process earlier. But I negotiated an agreement among Iraqis that in exchange for Sunnis participating in the political process the other communities agreed that there would be an early review and amending of the constitution so that the Sunni Arabs would have the opportunity to express their views and see what changes they thought would be required in the constitution. That amendment process has not completed yet because there is no agreement on some of these basic issues. Once there is an agreement it will be reflected not only in legislation but also in an amended constitution. We have amended our constitution a number of times and we've had our own difficulties as a nation and that's what the Iraqis are dealing with and I think they will come out of it, but the question is how quickly. We are a very impatient people but I think they will ultimately work it out.

Mr. Parks: How much money do we have to divide over there? In some sense it's a division of money, who gets how much? How much money are we talking about in terms of oil revenues?

Amb. Khalilzad: Well, right now with the current prices of oil the Iraqis are doing well. Iraq is not Afghanistan unfortunately for Afghanistan because Afghanistan needs a lot of international help. Its resources have not been developed. In the case of Iraq right now they're making over \$40 billion dollars of their own, perhaps closer to \$50 billion. Their reserves are up to about \$30 billion. I think once they get their political act together this is a country that has huge potential. Not only does it have huge oil reserves but also gas, water, good land to population ratio, relatively educated people. The whole country is one large museum. You have pre-Islamic civilization as we all know from history and then Islamic civilization. So there will be a time that Iraq will make more money from tourism. Talking about it now seems awfully crazy but when you project 20, 30, 40 years from now Iraq will be in an extremely good situation, but in order to get there they need to overcome the current political difficulties.

Mr. Parks: Not a short process. I do want to get you back to Afghanistan but first Iran. What are we supposed to make of this new intelligence estimate? What are we supposed to make of President Bush's commentary on it and the fundamental question is how dangerous do you see, should we see, Iran?

Amb. Khalilzad: The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) is an assessment and if you look at the history of assessments done by intelligence about political and technical issues we have instances in which we have overestimated and periods when we have underestimated. I've been in the business long enough to have experienced a whole range of these. Take Iraq for example, when we went in to liberate Kuwait our estimation of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was a huge underestimation. After the war some [Iraqi experts] came across the border and from that we learned how advanced and substantial the WMD program was. This time, the last time we went into Iraq in 2003, there was a significant overestimation.

So, the point that I'm making is that these are estimates, these are assessments and the information is often contradictory so we have to make judgments, human judgments. This estimate is about one piece of the puzzle of a nuclear program. The puzzle has at least three pieces. One is the material for making a bomb, either enriched uranium or plutonium. The

second piece is to make into a weapon, the design of the bomb and the third element is to deliver these rockets.

Mr. Parks: We actually have this question with North Korea about how big a bomb they have and what the yield was.

Amb. Khalilzad: Exactly. That's determined in part by the quality of the material and the quality of the design of the weapon. So, Iran had a covert program, the Estimate now says, working on the design of the weapons and because of what was going on at that time there was a threat of the program being discovered. Libya had happened, the A. Q. Khan network had come to light and there was some information regarding that with regard to Iran that's come to light, and then we were in Iraq because of WMD-related issues. In that environment, concerned about international repercussions, the Iranian government stopped that program. But the production of material—uranium, plutonium, heavy water—and the delivery system continues, although the material production can be justified for civilian purposes. The same process that produces slightly enriched uranium for fuel purposes can be used to enrich it to a higher level that can be used for weapons purposes. And because of particularly this regime's record and the president of Iran's rhetoric it is regarded particularly dangerous if a nuclear weapon is acquired and is able to be delivered by Iran. Therefore the United Nations passed two resolutions saying "suspend," not end, "suspend" the activities on enrichment and on reprocessing on the heavy water reactor. We understand that Iran is going to have nuclear electricity, nuclear reactors, and Iran has legitimate interest in terms of wanting the fuel for the reactor. We're saying suspend the current activity, let's sit together and Secretary Rice has said that she will personally sit with the Iranians, to find solutions to the legitimate concerns and to deal with other issues.

Mr. Parks: So, how does that stand?

Amb. Khalilzad: So far, the Iranian government has said no to suspension and because they're in violation of the two resolutions calling for them to suspend we, and a number of other countries, believe that we need to put more pressure on the government but continue to engage.

Mr. Parks: But it becomes, forgive me, a hell of a lot harder as you go to your colleagues and say, "Well, there are no weaponization and there hasn't been for the last four or five years but we really should be worried about the enrichment.

Amb. Khalilzad: That's what I will say but perhaps I will be using some different words. I'll say that we have asked the government in Iran to suspend with two unanimous resolutions—not just the United States, everybody in the Security Council—certain activities and they have not. What do we do? In our view we need to continue our engagement but at the same time put more pressure and incentivize them to suspend because getting the ability to enrich uranium will bring Iran very close to a nuclear weapons capability. Two-thirds of the problem to producing a nuclear weapon is fissile materials.

Mr. Parks: So how do you get along with our Iranian colleagues?

Amb. Khalilzad: I have talked with the Iranians over the years. I have had perhaps more meetings with the Iranian officials than any other U.S. official. Before we went into Afghanistan, and then in Afghanistan, I asked for authority to speak with the Iranians when I was in Iraq and the president granted to me that authority. Michael Carter, my successor, has that authority and has met a couple of times already and will meet again with the Iranians. But we have said that

until they suspend that our standard policies until they agree to suspend we will not meet with them to deal with other issues and that's where we are. So, therefore, I don't have meetings with my colleague from Iran in the United Nations.

Mr. Parks: I promised one question on Afghanistan. Is the Taliban coming back? They seem to be coming back bit by bit.

Amb. Khalilzad: Afghanistan has had a lot of success. When the Taliban was there, there were about 800,000 to 900,000 kids going to school. Now, six million kids are going to school, including two million girls. When I first landed and drove to Kabul it was January 2002, if I'm not mistaken, it was a quiet city; you could hardly see people on the street, not much traffic, the stores were all dark, not much to offer, but by the time I left as Ambassador which was May 2005, Kabul was a hugely booming city. I remember we had to bring in Swedish telephones to be able to communicate with each other and now there are 3.6 million cell phones and private investments in Afghanistan. I could go on, President Karzai does a much better job describing the positive side but there are negative things that are of concern. Security in some parts of the country has increased and there is the problem of a Taliban sanctuary that's threatening both Pakistan and Afghanistan. It's a headache perceived to be not only a threat for Afghanistan but now some parts of Pakistan are being threatened by the Taliban. That is the issue of the ability of the government to deliver services not meeting the expectations that people have after say, five, six years have past. There are issues of corruption; there is the narcotics issue that hasn't been dealt with successfully because alternatives haven't been found and when you have a criminal economy with so much money it affects state institutions as well, and then you have the issue of coordination among internationals. Afghanistan is truly an international effort with all kinds of countries involved helping there. Their coordination, our coordination among ourselves, and between them in Afghanistan are issues that are having an impact. I don't think the Taliban will come back in the sense of winning the war in Afghanistan, but I believe that there has to be a process in which those who are willing to live in this new Afghanistan peacefully will need to be engaged and brought into the political process. At the same time I think we, as a coalition and the Afghan government, need to do better in dealing with some of the issues that I describe.

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