

ALI FADHIL
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CHARLES FERGUSON: First of all, tell me what Iraq is like now.

ALI FADHIL: What Iraq is like. Such a big question; well...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Start with daily life.

ALI FADHIL: Okay, well ...

CHARLES FERGUSON: And then after that I'd like to ask you about political...

ALI FADHIL: Well, first it's been exactly 20 months since I left Iraq, when I came back to Iraq this year, [December]. And 20 months, this is like a huge time in Iraq's calendar. And I was hearing, reading, seeing the news about Iraq, you know, myself being very interested in the news coming from Iraq, and also making all these phone calls throughout the year before I went to Iraq. And hearing from friends, relatives; you know I lost some friends as well; some relatives were killed. And when I arrived, I was struck by seeing the situation even worse than what they told me. Baghdad, for me, it's completely, completely devastated. It's like a war being there for 30 years; not four years, 30 years.

Streets are like death streets. You see the garbage everywhere. You see the dust everywhere, and everything is gray. All the color has disappeared from Baghdad, you know; I can assure you about this. There are no colors any more in Baghdad.

Then seeing the people and their lives; they are having more troubles than ever this year. They have problems with electricity, which is worse now; they have problems with water, which is now contaminated, and they have to boil it, or buy water, the bottled water, which is expensive compared to their salaries.

And they're having more problems in terms of getting to their jobs because most of the week, you can't predict the streets, you can't know what's going on. Shooting is just going on in, not all of Baghdad, but certain areas there, they're completely dead. [UI] west of Baghdad, which is generally west of Baghdad, is dead, and east of Baghdad is still alive, to a certain extent.

And they're having problems with the prices. Baghdad I thought was more expensive than Beirut. Like the most expensive; [maybe not] the most expensive, but it's an expensive city in the Middle East. Baghdad is really expensive.

You need \$80 to fill your car with gas from the black market, because it's impossible — nearly impossible — to get the fuel from the gas station, which is so crowded and most of the time closed because there is no fuel. The tanks can't come from the refineries because the road is closed or it's dangerous; besides also, the smuggling and the black market's going on.

Also, the problems of the schools; kids are finding it difficult. Many of my relatives are actually, they told their kids to stay home because it's difficult, it's dangerous; they don't know if their kids will come back or not.

And I think that's like a brief description. There's a lot more of what's going on. Life is really difficult right now in Baghdad; really difficult compared to 20 months ago.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do people have any comment on what's called, in the United States, “the surge”, the increased presence of the American military in Baghdad, and what effect it's having?

ALI FADHIL: Yes. They say it's — they said what you're seeing right now is paradise compared to what happened last year. They see a difference in the streets, yes, but it's not a huge difference. For them, many of them said, this is a chance for us to decide whether to stay or whether to move somewhere else outside Baghdad. So it's just for them, this is a breathing time.

They don't trust the Americans. They know they will pull their troops. They know they care about themselves — or at least this is what they think — and for them, they're preparing for what's going to happen next.

So it's a breathing time. It's better, although it's really bad, really, really bad. I mean, I've been in Iraq all of my life, and I've never seen people — I mean I saw once, actually, in Najaf, militias kidnapping an American journalist in front of me. But this time, I saw Iraqis kidnapping an Iraqi, I think, from his car, just literally 15 meters from a police checkpoint. And I had to stop, drive really fast [by] the checkpoint and tell police, they are kidnapping this guy, go and help him.

And I don't know if they help him or not, because I had to drive very fast and get away from the scene. It was really dangerous. The government - they were with AK-47 and they were threatening to shoot him, and I don't know who he was.

And it was, in fact — which was hilarious — the second block from the Green Zone, main gate.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes.

ALI FADHIL: Mr. Ferguson, there's another phone, someone calling me. I'll just tell them to hang up. Just a second, OK?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah. Go ahead. Hello?

ALI FADHIL: Mr. Ferguson?

CHARLES FERGUSON: You back?

ALI FADHIL: Yes.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

ALI FADHIL: Sorry about that.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So people in Baghdad feel that the surge has had some beneficial effect, but they fear that it won't last, or they believe that it won't last.

ALI FADHIL: Oh, they are confident it's not gonna last, because this is not the first time. And they know this is just something they're — it's right now, for awhile, and then it will go. They know that very well. And to be honest with you, it's beyond the extent of the surge.

What happened, really, in the streets — which is something the Americans, I'm sure the American intelligence in Baghdad, they know about it, but they just don't tell the media and they're keeping it away from everyone — but what's happened, really, in the streets of Baghdad; the Americans prevented the militias and the gangs from appearing constantly on the streets, on the main streets. But it's right there on the side streets. They're everywhere. They're filling the neighborhoods. You can't get in the neighborhood without seeing the militias or the gangs.

They run checkpoints in the side roads. They leave the main road to the Americans and to the Iraqi army. And to a certain extent, some people said, even the Iraqi army, they see the militias and they know where they are, but they reached an agreement: leave us alone and we will leave you alone.

So the militias are on the side streets. They are controlling the neighborhoods. You can't move from one neighborhood to another if you're displaced by Shiites or Sunnis without getting permission from the militias or the Sunni insurgency in that neighborhood.

For example, in Baghdad streets right now the feared word is the office. When people say "the office" to me — and this was something astonishing to me — they say, they whisper, "the office." They don't say "the office," they whisper. And I said, why, and they say, you don't know why. These people are killing Shiites and Sunnis. They are the new Mukhabarat. That's what they are.

[UI] who were afraid to say [UI] Mukhabarat, just publicly and loudly. [We will say], we will whisper it; Mukhabarat, like this. And what's happening right now is, "the office" is the new Mukhabarat, which is, "the office" is their code name to the Sadr office. [UI] the Mahdi army militias in the neighborhoods. So you can't get into the neighborhood, move with your family, unless you go to the office first, get permission from them to move, and they will give you the permission after they make sure who you are and you're a clean person; you're not a Sunni or you're not a bad Shia; you're not working with the Americans. If you want to take your furniture out of the neighborhood, you have to get their permission as well, because you will be stuck by their checkpoints.

If you want to buy a house, you can't, unless you have permission from the office.

So it's like it's another government. Which in fact, to be honest with you, it's the real government. It's the real government. It's governing the lives of Iraqis inside Baghdad, and I believe it's the same in the other provinces in the South, if not worse.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And so if, when, the Americans leave, what's going to happen?

ALI FADHIL: I have no clue, and I don't think anyone can know. But I would say it would be the same [as] 2006, I think. I mean, there is nothing confirmed, but definitely it's really bad. And if the

Americans pull out from the streets, it will be worse. That's what I can tell you. But what's going to happen really, I don't know.

I mean, Iraq is really unpredictable. You can't know what's going to happen. But I assure you it will be worse. But how worse, I don't know. How much worse I don't know.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What do you think of what's going on politically in Iraq now; the Iraqi political leadership, the national government?

ALI FADHIL: I believe — and this is something I did not think about until I went to Baghdad — I realize that the government in Baghdad is becoming the biggest part of the problem in Iraq; a problem not only to the Iraqis and to themselves, but in fact the biggest problem to the U.S. as well, to the U.S. Army in Iraq.

It's becoming a fraction to the extent that militias and insurgencies are using it to get money to fund their operations. And you will hear in the news, and especially from the American officials about Iran funding the militias, the Shiite militias, or the fanatic Sunnis, or whatever.

In fact, to be honest with you, they are taking money out from the facilities, from the smaller institute, which is the hospitals, to the biggest ministry, to the Ministry of Oil, to everything. There are certain places — even the gas stations. It was in the *New York Times* lately, which is, I'm happy they put it.

The U.S. Army, they shut down two gas stations in Sadr City because the Mahdi Army are getting the revenues from these gas stations for their own selves. Which is happening not only in the oil industry. It's happening in the health sector.

I couldn't film in Yarmouk Hospital when I went to film for HBO, because the Mahdi Army running this hospital, and what I found out is the doctors weren't present in that hospital for two weeks because they had a problem with one of the Mahdi militias inside the hospital, and the end result; they [UI] from the Mahdi Army office — “the office,” as they say.

And they threatened them that they will check them out, and if anyone of them is bad or working against them, they will eliminate them. And also what I found in that hospital, that the office

army, the [UI], what they're doing, they're taking out money from the budget of the hospital, with the notice of the manager, who's saying, I have no authority to control these people; although he has four lines of defense, of security defenses. One is the police, national police; the other is the [FPS] special protection police; the other is the Iraqi army; and the last one, which is the most [influential] forces in the hospital, but still they can't control the [Mahdi Army] of-, militias, the Iraqi special police force.

And that's what the manager of the hospital told me; they said, we do what we want to do, and you should be quiet. And he just said that to me, frankly. He said, I have no authority on them whatsoever.

So that's the Iraqi army. What's going on in the political process; it's getting, it's becoming a dangerous point to the Americans and to the Iraqis, and to the Iraqis, of course, more than the Americans. But in fact it's also the money the Americans invested in this government is going right now through the small institutes of this government and through the facilities into the hands of the militias, frankly not like before.

Probably it was covertly going on; right now, it's just frankly. They told the doctors in the Yarmouk Hospital, for example, that if you – how do you want the Mujahideen, the Mahdi Army do their operations against the occupation if we don't take money from this hospital? What are we gonna do?

So it's like a prime thing going on. The people in Iraq, they know about it. If you would ask any Iraqi in Baghdad about this, he'll say, oh, of course; what's the problem with this? It's becoming a usual thing, a normal thing.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you think of the status, the condition of the Iraqi army? Efficient; inefficient; strong; weak; getting stronger; getting weaker; under whose control?

ALI FADHIL: Who's controlling the Iraqi army? As far as I know, and as far as I can tell you from my observations in Baghdad, the Iraqi army is really unprofessional, to the extent that they are incapable to do anything, even manning a checkpoint.

If you see them right now in Baghdad they – I mean, which is like, it's a joke in Baghdad, by the way, about the Iraqi army is becoming, we have the most advanced army in Iraq. This is a joke in Baghdad.

And you ask why. Because they have robots in the checkpoints. And when you ask about the robots in the checkpoints, they mean the Iraqi army people. Because what they're doing, they're having their cell phones on one hand, and the other hand, and they're looking at the other side. And the other hand they're just moving, just showing their fingers to get cars to pass through, without looking even at the driver or the car.

So they call them robots. The most technologized army in the world.

So they're incapable; they are unprofessional people. And they're not willing, actually, to do something, because this is who they are.

I mean, you have to ask yourself. They are actually poor people, coming from poor neighborhoods, such as Sadr City, such as poor areas in the South, and even poor areas from the Sunni areas. And everyone is looking to the other person in a suspicious eye, and thinks that they are against him or this is not a real job, this is just a job for money and that's it, or as happened in many occasions, they in fact have affiliations with other militias and insurgents.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And so...

ALI FADHIL: So it's not getting stronger or getting weaker. It is what it is. It's a group of people came and joined the U.S. Army — sorry, the Iraqi army — to get some money; that's it; because they're jobless in a country where the unemployment is really high.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And who has political control over the army? Is it the national government? Is it regionalized? Does it depend on individual units?

ALI FADHIL: No, it's basically individual units, and it basically belongs to, as I can say, belongs to whomever the officer is. So if the officer is from the Sadr office, this unit or this platoon belongs to the Sadr office. If the officer is from the Supreme Islamic Council, the Iraqi Islamic Council, they belong to the Supreme Islamic Council. And this is how it works. But basically, it's less sectarian than

the police, to be precise. It's less sectarian than the police, but still they obey the orders of their political leadership, which I mean by this, their party, their militia leaders.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you think the United States...

ALI FADHIL: Sorry, Mr. Ferguson. Just before I forget; just to follow up on this point. Now, certain neighborhoods in Baghdad — for example, Ghazalia, other neighborhoods; [UI] neighborhood — they prefer the army rather than the police.

Why? Because these armies — and this is like an American genius of plan, probably, heh heh; if it is, if I can call it like that — they brought people and officers and soldiers from, if it's a Sunni neighborhood right now, because Baghdad is basically ethnically divided. So if it's a Sunni neighborhood, they would bring a Sunni officer to take care of that neighborhood. And they're fine with it. And even insurgents, they're fine with it. So they have their agreements with the insurgents. If it's a Shiite neighborhood they bring an army with a Shiite leader, officer, so they get along with it.

So basically in the neighborhoods, the people prefer the army rather than the police, because the police is really sectarian. It's worse than the army, in terms of very unprofessional and also full of gangs and thieves, basically. So they prefer the Iraqi army in certain neighborhoods for this reason.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What do you think the United States should do now?

ALI FADHIL: In terms...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, I guess two questions: one is, what should its attitude or policy toward Iraq's national government be; and then the second one is, what should the United States do militarily? But let's start with the first one, first.

I've heard some Iraqis recently tell me that they think that a military coup would be a good idea; that a military coup and declaring martial law would be healthy for the country.

ALI FADHIL: Which is basically going back to the dictatorship.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Something like, I guess.

ALI FADHIL: Military dictatorship we had, for the last 50 years.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes. What do you think?

ALI FADHIL: I would say anything the United States would do in Iraq will be wrong. I would say there is nothing the United States can do that is right. It's because basically they don't understand the situation there, and they are not paying – probably they are paying attention recently, but basically they – it's the foundations.

They have dealt with the situation the wrong way. It's not going to be solved until they go back to point zero. Probably the coup might, it would make a huge difference, of course.

Will it be successful? Maybe. It's not a bad idea. Going back to the dictatorship definitely will help.

I think if the United States wants to do something, that it's not gonna be the solution for us. It won't solve the problem 100 percent. But I think the basics are to get rid of the policy that is bringing democracy to the Middle East, starting with Iraq. That should be changed. We are a country – we can't, we are very young to democracy, to have this way, basically. I think we should – well I can't think, I can't tell you any solution. There is no solution, basically. But the best way is to go back to what it is, what it was, because we're having problems. We're having right now problems that will be forever. It won't be solved. We are having extremism; Sunni, Shiite extremism. We're having right now extremist Islamists. And the problem is they are actually raising a new generation. They're having their own schools in certain places, especially in the south and far to the west. So Shias and Sunnis, they're doing it the same. They're teaching the kids in Islamic schools, [Madrasah], basically. And we're having now – we'll have a new generation — we have it already — that is taught and raised on extreme values. They think of anyone wearing – anyone who's not wearing [UI], [UI] robes, he is, he should be killed; things like that.

So I think the best for the future is to get rid of the idea of bringing democracy.

Will the coup help? I think it will definitely help, because you will have a person like Saddam soon doing the same what he did. He'll prevent the Islamists from teaching Islam [UI]; he'll prevent the politicians — sorry, the fanatics — on each side to have a voice.

And this is what we need. Because we have lots of them, lots of these fanatics. And the problem is their voices are the voices in the air right now; voices you hear from the mosques, whether Shiite or Sunni.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that there are military leaders in Iraq who would be capable of mounting such a coup and running the country?

ALI FADHIL: Well, this is another problem. I've never heard of someone. But usually, reading the history of Iraq, none of the military leaders who – those who led the coup against the government in 1958, '63, '73, and even in '76; none of them was really famous at that time.

So probably anyone can do the job, I think; any military leader. Any officer who has spent 30 years in the army here is vicious enough to be a dictator, I think.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And do you think that the Americans should try and facilitate this process, or do you think the Americans should just stay away? Do you think the Americans should leave?

ALI FADHIL: I think the Americans should leave. That's what I think. I think there is no way they can help. Anything they will do right now will be wrong. Any government they will bring right now will be seen by everyone as a puppet of the Americans, even if it's a new dictator.

They'll probably, if they leave someone behind, you know, a new dictator, as you say, I would think he [UI]. He will be removed by somebody else. This is how it was in Iraq and this is how it's going to go, I think. Again, I think; I'm not sure about it.

Should the Americans facilitate this? Probably for their own good. Not for us. For their own good, I think they should.

Otherwise, if the current government go on, and stay like this, or at least if the Americans leave this government, and withdraw from Iraq, and they keep supporting this government, probably this government will have a new support from Iran, ['cause most of the people] [UI] they are basically saying, we have a new [plan] [UI] [Iran]; which will mean we will have an [Islamacy], [an allied] government, which is a copy of the Iranian government. Which is a big problem. But again, it's definitely better than the Americans in Iraq, definitely.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what about effectively or officially dividing the country up into regions?

ALI FADHIL: That would be the worst thing for the United States to do. It would create three problems in the region. In addition it will give the opportunity for each side — for the Shiites in the south, and when I say the Shiites I mean the fanatic Shiites, the leaders, [UI] that we have right now; and the Sunnis also, not the politicians, but the extremists instead, the crazy people — they will, each one of them, they will have their own region, their own money, their own resources to create a new militia, new, probably, suicide bombers, or a new Al Qaeda, a new organization probably, a new terrorist organization; nobody knows.

So it's a big problem if they do that [to them] in the future. It will make the world, not only America, the world less safe and in great danger.

This is a very unstable area and it's very difficult if you divide it rather than have it as one country, you will end up giving each side the opportunity, the money, the land to do whatever they want. And whatever they want, of course, it means according to their extremist values and ideology. By the current situation, I mean by the current leadership. It will mean they will create those who will be extremist suicide bombers; a new Al-Qaeda organization, probably even worse than Al-Qaeda, in the region and in the world.

It's a dumb idea to divide the country. I mean, I can't think of anyone saying this. It's just, anyone who knows Iraq and anyone who has been in Iraq knows that if you give them the land and the money they will do exactly what their religion reads, and their religion reads, whether they are Shiites or Sunnis, is destroy the big Satan, destroy the West, destroy whatever. This is how, the end result of the extreme religion, whether it is Shiite or Sunni, that's what it preach, that's how it say. We have to reach this point to — they have to reach this point to have, to fulfill their ideology.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So what do you think the United States should do?

ALI FADHIL: They should pull out from Iraq as soon as possible.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Just leave?

ALI FADHIL: And before they pull out, they should weaken the government as much as possible.

CHARLES FERGUSON: If they weaken the government, then what do you think the result of that will be?

ALI FADHIL: The government will definitely break out the day the Americans pull out, the first soldier goes out. You will see provinces fall to the insurgents and to the Shiite militias. And by this time there will be civil war, definitely there will be chaos in Iraq; the one that was in 2003 and the one that was in 1991. And we will have our regional war, with Anbar Province fighting, probably, with Karbala and whatever with Najaf and the rest of the south; Baghdad, another Beirut city. That's true.

It will be a massacre. My parents probably, my brothers, they will be killed in Baghdad; my friends; and I will lose so many. Everyone will lose too many people everywhere to the civil war. But that's the only way I can see it; that's the only way to start to find the solution, just to start thinking about it. There is no way to think about it while the Americans are there. Because the Americans, they proved they are stubborn to the extent that they are ready to destroy themselves and to destroy Iraq, but not to change their strategy, their idiot strategy in Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So you think that a civil war would be preferable to the current situation.

ALI FADHIL: Oh, yes. Yes. People want to, you know, just to live, because they are trapped. They are not living in Baghdad. They're dying every day. They make jokes, and say, those who are dead – actually they are not jokes; they are saying this, they mean it. Those who are dead, they are lucky. But the ones who are living, we who are living, we're living in shit. We're living in a deep, deep shit. We have no electricity, only for two hours a day. That's all they have in Baghdad right now, only two hours a day. They have to buy electricity from the local supplier. And the local supplier charge about \$120 a month, which is a lot to too many people.

They have to buy their water. They have to say goodbye to everyone in the house who's going to their job in the morning, because they don't know if they're coming back or not. They have to live in

the expensive situation they're in with expensive foods and expensive supplies in Baghdad. Life is really expensive there.

They have to live through the challenges, the daily challenges of the fuel, the daily challenges of being displaced by a militia or by another, being killed by an accident, being killed by the Americans or by insurgents or by Shiites.

It's not a life for them. They are dying every day, and many of them lost their lives and now – which is really disappointing. It's really, really sad. People – some of the people, they are stubborn to the extent they stay there, and then they lose someone, and then they decide that they should go to Syria or to Jordan and be refugees there, after they lose someone. Many of them have no money to do so, and they're trapped inside.

CHARLES FERGUSON: If the Americans leave, who do you think will win the civil war? I would assume that it would probably be the Mahdi Army, no?

ALI FADHIL: You mean, who is going to control?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes.

ALI FADHIL: Hello?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes.

ALI FADHIL: Yes, you mean who's going to control?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, who would win the civil war? Who would end up running the country? Muqtad al-Sadr, no?

ALI FADHIL: Well, not really. You see, Muqtad al-Sadr has another problem in addition to the Sunnis, which is the other Shia party, which is right now, and they're growing day after day. They have a problem of the Shiite, of the, I mean, [al-Sadr], he should face Abdul al-Hakim and his son and his militias, which is now part of the government, the army basically; many of the army units belong to Hakim; many of the police units as well.

In the south, governments, they belong to Abdul Hakim, so he has to fight all of these regional governments. And there is no way Abdul al-Hakim family, which is something, an Iraq thing, there is

no way a Hakim family and al-Sadr family will agree on each other, or will have a coalition together. Because they have never had a coalition together, never, ever. Even in the political process, they can't agree on each other.

So what's going on – what will happen; Muqtad have to face Abdul Hakim and Badr Brigade, and he have to face also (Hadeelah) and its militias. He has also to face Hezbollah, the Iraq organization, in the south as well.

So there's so many organizations. And each one will face, you know, there'll be internal fighting, [as there has been] along the last four years. They were fighting each other. And it will go on, and also in addition also to the fight against Al Qaeda and the Sunnis.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And so you don't have any prediction about who will win?

ALI FADHIL: I have no prediction at all, whatsoever. What I know, I know that they will hold the regions, but they will fight over Baghdad, and there'll be many, many attempts, many, many attempts, which is the Sunni and the Al Qaeda thing, to destroy, for example, Hussein Shrine and the [UI] Shrine, but basically Hussein Shrine, which is very close to Anbar Province.

That probably will really be a very good start for the civil war; if I can say that, a good start. So they'll try to destroy it by any way. But who's going to win, I have no clue. I can't, I mean, I know the Kurds will isolate themselves. They will have their own problems. They will go back to how they were during the '90s.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Your family is still in Iraq?

ALI FADHIL: Yeah. My parents, my brothers, my sister, they're still in Iraq; and all of my relatives and friends.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Are they all still okay?

ALI FADHIL: My family, they're okay. The problem is, several of my relatives died recently. They were killed by Americans, shot just by accident. And the Americans apologized, but that's meaningless.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Cousins of yours?

ALI FADHIL: Yeah, cousins. I had two cousins I lost at the beginning of the war, and now I have another two cousins also were killed.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And is your family thinking of leaving, or not?

ALI FADHIL: Not really; they want [them], and they wish to, but it's a big family and they prefer to stay there in their house, and they prefer if it's going to be [UI], they want to be there.

CHARLES FERGUSON: This is more or less what everybody tells me.

ALI FADHIL: Yeah. Yeah, well, it's getting worse. It's just getting worse. I went there hoping there would be a little peace, something that might change my mind. And probably there will be some hope with the surge. But I was very disappointed. It's worse than what I thought.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you see George Packer's recent article in *The New Yorker*?

ALI FADHIL: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

CHARLES FERGUSON: In which he basically argues that even though the Americans have failed, and have lost, that it's America's responsibility to stay, because if the United States leaves there will be so much death, so much violence.

ALI FADHIL: Yeah, but he contradicts himself. At the end, he's saying we should at least bring 100,000 of those who helped America and the American army in Iraq to America before we leave.

I – I mean he's my friend, but again, I don't like saying or having someone who is American, or even an Iraqi who's living here, including me, to say, this is what I think we should do. There is no way to know what we should do, or what should America do, in Iraq.

The situation is bad, but at least to think logically, logically, just logically, think about the people who are living there. They are dying every day. And they deserve to have a life after, now it's 40 years, more than 40 years of misery. So the best way is to remove the cause. I'm a physician, and this is how I think. The cause is the occupation. We should get rid of the occupation. Get it out, get them out, and then leave the people to solve their own problems.

And this is how it should be. But telling me that America has obligations – of course they have obligations. But in fact it's not about the obligation any more. America lost the war in Iraq. No matter

what they do, they lost the war in Iraq. I don't need to be a genius and I don't need to think about it. They just lost it. Anyone who goes to Iraq, just, you know, he can notice it. The moment the plane tries to – when the plane lands [in this spiral way], they are not living; they are living in the bases, and they're dying, even, inside the bases.

They can't go out and they can't even trust their armored Humvees, their armored vehicles, in the streets. Basically every project they're running is a total failure. Every money they're trying to pour in the projects for reconstruction to help the people ends up in the pockets of the contractors, whether they are Iraqis or foreigners.

There is nothing, nothing good, except the cell phones in Iraq and the Internet, America did; that's it. And probably, now people think it's not a good thing, toppling Saddam and killings Saddam.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you think about bringing refugees to the United States? Do you think that would be a good idea? How many Iraqis would want to come to the United States if...

ALI FADHIL: I would say 26 million.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see.

ALI FADHIL: I would say, bring all the Iraqis here. I would like to occupy New York and take New York from the Americans, heh heh, to be honest with you. I would love to have all of the Iraqis come here, just to, you know, to let you know that Iraq is a dead place; it's not a place to live anymore.

As many – I think anyone who wants to come to the United States should be allowed to come to the United States. It's – these people, you know, they didn't lose their homes; they lost their country; they lost [the names]. If you – in a couple of years, or in three or four years, when America is out of Iraq completely, totally; people will ask me, where are you from? I can't say Iraq, because Iraq would not be on the map. It will just be a place where militias and genocide and civil war, it will be a total mess.

So I think they should bring anyone who wants to come to America.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What are your personal plans? What are you going to do?

ALI FADHIL: I am going back in April to Iraq. I'm finishing – this is my last semester at NYU. And actually, then I am planning to work in the Middle East, I mean work [for] documentaries in the Middle East.

CHARLES FERGUSON: For whom?

ALI FADHIL: I have no plan. I have no plan. I have no...

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see.

ALI FADHIL: Yes, so it's something; still I'm thinking about it.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And is this because you will not be legally permitted to stay in the United States, or is it because you don't want to?

ALI FADHIL: Well I – my wife got the asylum status with the kids, so basically she's getting the green card this month. But I just, so I can just take it from her. But I just don't want to stay here. These are my plans.

I can't – I don't know. I feel, especially after this trip, I feel, it's very hard for me to just, you know, look at the people here and look at the Americans and think it's okay I'm here. It's just too difficult to me. Even though my kids and my wife, they're staying here, which is a total contradiction, and it's making me, it's causing me, it's resulting in a lot of havoc to me.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Have you spoken with George about this?

ALI FADHIL: No, not really. I mean, I was talking to him yesterday morning. We actually were talking about Iraqis who work for the Americans as translators. One of them is my brother, whom I didn't know he was working with Americans for two years. But I just knew [UI]. And...

CHARLES FERGUSON: [Did he] tell you?

ALI FADHIL: Yeah.

CHARLES FERGUSON: But you haven't spoken with George about the policy question, about, you know...

ALI FADHIL: Not really, because as soon as we start talking we usually end up in an argument and fight.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes.

ALI FADHIL: So it's better to keep away.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes. And you don't have any hope that a different American administration, a different president, would be able to behave more intelligently, in a way that would permit American policy to...

ALI FADHIL: Not really, Charles. It's – the problem is difficult. Even if a new administration comes out right now, the problem is this administration really blew everything. You have no man, no person to trust in Iraq. You can't trust anybody in Iraq. So you can't work with anyone to do anything good. That's the problem.

Anyone who is laughing in your face right now, he is in fact probably – if you check out, you'll find him dealing with the militias or the insurgents who are killing the Americans on the other side of the wall of the base.

The problem is they have no people to trust and to work with. And their opportunity in Iraq, [I think] they blew it. It's just...

CHARLES FERGUSON: It's too late.

ALI FADHIL: It's too late. It's really too late. That's how I see it right now in Iraq. And whatever George Packer or anybody writes about obligations, or we can do, or this is what we should do; I think it's just bullshit. There is no way to do anything else.

Right now, it's the end stage. Right now, everyone is tired, including the Iraqis, not only the Americans. The Iraqis themselves, they're really tired, and they really want a solution.

CHARLES FERGUSON: But do you think that people – I understand that things are horrible now and that they're continuing to get worse. But if the Americans pull out and there's a civil war and it's basically the Badr organization versus the Mahdi Army versus, you know, another one or two Shiite militias, versus Al Qaeda, that's not going to be better, that's going to be worse. And if one of them wins, especially if it's the Mahdi army, then...

ALI FADHIL: I think it's difficult to have any of them to win the war. The thing is, which is the best thing, is to have them exhaust each other. And that's the best [possibility] right now, a lot of them right now being [feeded], embraced by the Americans.

We need them to exhaust each other; that's the only way. The only way to do that is to allow them to fight with each other. And to allow them to fight with each other, you can't do it while the Americans are there; they just don't understand.

They will deal with one side. And they think that's the government or that's the legal side. But you don't know, and they don't know. And so I don't think the Mahdi Army will win, or the Badr Brigade. It'll be just war, a pointless war between them. But the end result will be [that] they will weaken each other to the extent that at the end, they will know that there is no way just to live with each other.

And what I'm hoping is to – because in Iraq, the military organization, although the Americans dismantled the Iraqi army, it's still an active organization in Iraq. And I'm hoping it will come back — it will come back by itself, not by the Americans or anyone else — it will come back by itself again, and they will get rid of the fanatics by somehow. But they can't do that right now, while the Americans are there. They can't.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Where are these people now? The people who – I assume you're referring to the former officer corps of the Iraqi army.

ALI FADHIL: The former officers, who were, many of them were Baathists, by the way; but many of them were in the Baath Party just to...

CHARLES FERGUSON: So where are they now? Are they in the new army now, or are they...

ALI FADHIL: Believe it or not, many of them worked with the Americans at the beginning. And then, when they saw that the Americans are really not doing a lot in supporting them, but in fact they gave them as a gift to the Shiite militias, who started [to] assassinate them...

I found many of these people in Jordan and in Syria. They are organizing themselves in movements, and they are waiting for the Americans to pull out. That's what they are doing. They're

officers, they're high-ranking officers. They worked in the new Iraqi government under the Americans and basically under Ayad Allawi. And now, with Ayad Allawi, they're in fact, I think with his help — not officially, but unofficially, with his help— they're organized; they have their own meetings every now and then; and they're in constant contact with each other. And if you would go to the Middle East, I will put you in touch with many of them.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that they would have enough power to be able to take control of the government at some point? I mean...

ALI FADHIL: Well that's the secret of the army. You know, there are officers who spend 30 years, and right now they're 39, 36, 42 years old — and also there are officers, 60 years old — they know how the army runs.

And basically, the army always wins in a battle against militias. Militias are really disorganized, and especially our militias. You have to see them, how they shoot the [RPGs], or how they work. They're really disorganized, compared to the army.

So many of these officers, if they would come back — and to be honest with you, which is something sad to say — but many of them, they will have, right now — they will revenge, basically; they will have their own revenge. There will be lots of killing against the Shiites and against some of the Sunnis. But I mean, this is how it works; this is a civil war.

CHARLES FERGUSON: But who will do the fighting for them? You know, officers don't usually....

ALI FADHIL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but they have their soldiers who are still back in Iraq. They have their own people. They will know how to organize this, and also, don't forget; they will have money, lots of money.

They are staying in Jordan and Syria by special visas from King Abdullah and from the Syrian government. They are staying there, well basically, in Jordan, they are staying there with a special invitation from the King. So they will come back with money, and all [what you] need in Iraq to have

an army is money, and to call your old guys, and bring them back, do something. It looks like an American movie, heh. But this is how they are thinking it's coming back. These are their words.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Oh boy.

ALI FADHIL: You must be really tired from Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, yes, but not as tired as you are; not as tired as an Iraqi is.

ALI FADHIL: Yeah. Anyway...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Thank you very, very much.

ALI FADHIL: You are welcome, you're welcome.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Take care. We'll talk soon.

ALI FADHIL: All right, take care. Bye.

END OF RECORDING