

AMIZIA BARAM
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CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us your name.

AMIZIA BARAN: My name? Okay, my name is Amizia Baran.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us what you do.

AMIZIA BARAN: I am a professor of Middle East history at the University of Haifa, in Israel. I am the director of the Cen-, uh, of the Center for Persian Gulf Studies at the University of Haifa. And presently, but only until, uh, two weeks from now, I am a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, uh, uh, because I am on sabbatical.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us what your area of specialization is.

AMIZIA BARAN: {sigh} My specialty is, eh, Middle East history. But uh, uh, most focused, uh, I am most focused on Iraqi history, Iraqi society, politics, culture.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us your previous background in Israel.

AMIZIA BARAN: Well, I'm, I'm born in Israel. I was raised in Israel. And uh, I, uh, started my academic career very late in life. I was a shepherd. And uh, an agriculturalist, on a kibbutz. Uh, s-, I started my studies and did my whole studies throughout, from the B.A. all the way to the Ph.D., in the Hebrew...

CHARLES FERGUSON: What did, what did you do in the Israeli military?

AMIZIA BARAN: I was a tank battalion commander.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And after that.

AMIZIA BARAN: Eh, only, only in the reserves. I, I was retired from the army, my, my, my, uh, compulsory service, I was, eh, just a sergeant.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: And in the reserves, I became, I became a battalion, tank battalion commander.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: And for a few years, I was on loan to the Iraqi military desk at the Israeli military intelligence.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. So you've been studying Iraq for how long?

AMIZIA BARAN: Uh, more or less from 1978. You can calculate how many years that is.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us what you thought, in 2002, when it became clear that the United States was probably going to invade Iraq.

AMIZIA BARAN: My feeling was that, uh, the U.S. had the right to do that, eh, mainly because the UN failed in what it was supposed to do. And that in itself was not sufficient justification for war. But what justified a war, to my mind, was the fact that Saddam — I believed, I really believed — that Saddam had enough WMDs to cause a lot of trouble. Maybe not, maybe not as much as some people believe, but enough to cause a lot of trouble. And I felt that it would be dangerous for America to leave him for a long time, much longer, um, uh, at large.

So my feeling was that America had the right to do that. Uh, I had my, of course, uh, trepidations about that, because I knew that Iraq was [the] most complicated state in the Middle East, and probably society and state, probably in the world. Uh, and that this was, would be a huge assignment — not the war itself, but the postwar era. At the same time, I personally felt that, uh, America had the right, and probably even the duty, eh, to do that, sooner or later.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you think, at the time, that there was a possibility that if it wasn't handled absolutely perfectly, that the result could end up being even worse than Iraq under Saddam?

AMIZIA BARAN: No, I didn't think so. And I'm not even sure about it now.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: If, eh, if all falls down; if all fails; I am not still sure it will be much worse than Saddam, not in a 20/20 hindsight, but rather what I believed the case to have been then — namely that Saddam did have a sufficient, uh...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: ...arsenal of WMDs, and that he intended to develop it further. Eh, looking at it from those days, from the point of view of those days, I don't think that even now, the situation is worse. It's just that now we know he didn't have it, he didn't have it. So now that we know he didn't have it, I would say, there is no hurry; you can wait. But, uh, at the time, what we knew, we knew. And what we believed in, we did. And I was told by many people who were, were supposed to know, that, uh, including the United Nations; the UNSCOM team people; that he still had enough to cause a lot of trouble. So I had no reason to doubt it.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us what you thought about; what issues, what problems; Iraq would pose in the postwar period.

AMIZIA BARAN: {sigh} The problem is this: that if the coalition — or actually America — fails in Iraq; if Iraq's, if Iraq, eh, disintegrates, and becomes a, uh, a, uh, an arena of, of civil war; eh, I see serious problems. Uh, because, uh, much of it will become like little Afghanistan. That's my fear. It's not just Iraq, which is bad enough. It's, it's where, eh, terrorists all over the world will find refuge. And so in a strange way, somebody in the West will have to come back, and reconquer the place.

So that's why, and, and of course, when, when, when, if and when a part of, a large part of Iraq becomes like little Afghanistan, the problem I see immediately is a destabilization, des-, destabilization of neighboring countries; mainly Kuwait and Jordan. To a certain extent, Saudi Arabia, too. And maybe some Gulf states, but that's less certain. But Kuwait and Jordan for sure.

This, the, the, the shock waves will be such that it will affect the whole Middle East, and certainly, I think, that's dangerous. It, it has to, great efforts have to be made to prevent that.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you think of the effect on Iran and/or Iran's effect on Iraq?

AMIZIA BARAN: First of all, right now, it's interesting: we know that there are a lot of Iranian agents in Iraq, most of them being Iraqis, actually, working for the Iranian intelligence. But some Iranians, too. Uh, we see their f-, footprints, uh, in many places, but we don't see them doing as much as they could had they wanted to. Uh, we have some, some sabotage and some mayhem in Basra, which

I believe is Iranian, uh, of Iranian making. But um, apart from that, the Iranians are biding their time. They're just waiting to see what's going to happen. And they want to have presence in Iraq; to know what's going on, and to be able to maneuver the Iraqi political system to their liking.

It doesn't necessarily have to be {clears throat} detrimental to, eh, a peaceful Iraq; I want to make it very clear. {clears throat} Not necessarily every Iranian {noise} interest in Iraq is detrimental to Iraq, or to, eh, or to, uh, regional, regional stability. But because I don't trust the Iranian leadership, especially parts of the Iranian leadership, um, my fear is that the more influence they have on various political parties and security agencies in Iraq, the less control the free world will have on Iraq, the less control Iraqis will have on Iraq, and this could eventually develop into something like Iranian hegemony, and destabilization of, of, uh, neighboring countries. So this is a potential. This potential has not yet been used, even, even halfway.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And what do you think about the effect of the Iraqi situation on the ability of the West to restrain, curtail, stop, Iranian nuclear weapons development?

AMIZIA BARAN: {sigh} All I can say, that, uh, there is some connection. In other words, the Iranians, eh, can threaten — they haven't done it so far, but they can threaten — uh, Western interests in Iraq if the West is trying to force them to stop their nuclear, eh, military nuclear development. That is a possibility. This is there. And so one has to take it into account. It doesn't mean that the West should not try and stop the Iranian military nuclear development, uh, because a nuclear Iran would be much more dangerous than some mayhem in Iraq; some, some, some [careless], more [careless] in Iraq. But I still think that this is affecting the West's, eh, ability to control the, uh, Iranian nuclear, em, weapons industry.

Having said that, however, I'll say that even had Saddam Hussein been in charge in Iraq, and had the Americans been in America, {STAMMER} in Afghanistan, not in Iraq, still, it would have been extremely difficult — close to impossible, extremely difficult — to, eh, uproot the nuclear teeth from the Iranian, eh, lion, if you wish, or tiger, because Iran is not Iraq. Sixty-something-million people; huge

area; eh, it's a different story. So, so yes; eh, the Iraqi situation complicates things. But it would have been extremely difficult to restrain the Iranian nuclear effort even without the Iraqi case.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. What do you think of how the United States conducted the occupation of Iraq? What do you think of U.S. occupation policy?

AMIZIA BARAN: Look: eh...the U.S. made many mistakes. There was hardly any doubt about that. Eh...when they came into the Iraqi scene, they didn't know Iraq. Uh, only few people could speak Arabic. They didn't have even, even, even interpreters, in, in sufficient numbers. That's a problem. Uh, not knowing anything about the local culture and the local society is another problem.

So that, that's the beginning of it all. In addition to that, many issues were, uh, were, were done in the wrong way. Uh, I ca-, there is a long list. But I have to say it very clearly: it's easy for me to criticize the American generals, and, and the Paul Bremer, whoever, eh, for having made mistakes. Uh, quite honestly, eh, had I been there; had I been Bremer's chief advisor; I am sure I would have made some big mistakes as well. Eh, because Iraqi society was not easily anticipated. You cannot anticipate exactly what [you were] going to happen. And some things which happened in Iraq, I didn't anticipate before the war.

And so, all I can say, that Americans could have been better prepared. But at the same time, Iraq would have been a very, very difficult place to, to pacify and to move towards, if you wish, stability and some kind of democracy. As I said, I believe the most difficult country in the Middle East.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think the administration understood how difficult the place was?

AMIZIA BARAN: I can say that the administration knew; that yes; they knew that {STAMMER} that when they were stepping on Iraqi soil, they were stepping into a mine field; they absolutely knew that. What mine field? How many mines? S-, what kind of mines? Uh, that was not very clear to many people. And quite honestly, not even to me. I'll just say that, um, I ex-, I anticipated, I, I certainly anticipated a, a, insurgency. I even felt that Saddam, I believed Saddam was preparing the insurgency, for precisely the kind of circumstances that evolved, eh, following the downfall of Baghdad.

But I myself didn't see the insurgency, eh, assuming the, assuming the proportions that it eventually did, that it, that it has now. I didn't see this happening. I see in-, insurgency. I see them trying to des-, to kill American soldiers. I definitely see, and succeeding. But what we see now is much wider than I had thought. So...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, if the administration understood that it was a mine field, why didn't they try and prepare a bit better?

AMIZIA BARAN: As I understand it, they had a set of priorities. And they prepared for those priorities. For example, they prepared for a mass refugee problem. Prepared well. This never happened. The other issues, they didn't simply think would happen. And uh, they did happen.

So I don't know. You are conquering [a new], it's not that things would have been done better. Pro-, probably they could have, even though I'm not a part of the planning; I, I have never been a part of the planning. But maybe there were some better ways of, of approaching certain issues. But on the whole, they were surprised by many things that happened.

I'll give you an example. Uh, where I would have acted differently, but why I, but where I still agree that the American commanders had a serious problem. A problem.

The issue of, eh, looting, which is very interesting, and which is ve-, was very destructive. And the repercussions are even felt today.

Uh, when the, the American commanders saw the beginning of the looting, eh, it didn't happen the way they thought it would happen, or, or I thought it would happen. I thought people from poor, eh, neighborhoods would rush into rich neighborhoods, and just plunder everything. [It will be also] murder, and so on.

This didn't quite happen. On a very small scale, yes, but it, what, it didn't. What did happen was people did not want to bother with the rich; they wanted to go to government offices. Uh, where there wasn't very much to loot, but, but for very, very poor people, looting, eh, you know, an old computer, or even a door, means, or an old, you know, dilapidated Frigidaire, means something.

Uh, the American commanders didn't see this happening. But when it started happening, they had a problem, as far as I understand. They didn't want to shoot people. Because the same people who were looting a government, eh, ministry were waving at them, you know, to say, we like you. In other words, those were the same people who were, uh, very happy and very elated, even, when they saw Saddam Hussein's, eh, monument being torn down; the same people exactly.

So the American commanders had a problem, as I understand it; what to do about it. Eh, you would like to stop it. But if you stop it with fire, then you are no longer a friend. You are coming as a friend and liberator — that's what they really thought they were doing — not as a conqueror. It's not like Germany conquering Poland. They would shoot anybody; no problem. It's like America trying to liberate Iraq of Saddam's rule. And that's where the dilemma started.

Eh, maybe more soldiers could have helped, which I am not so sure. Maybe in some places they should have placed a tank or two, just in case. But on the whole, they had a serious dilemma; how to, how to stop the looting. And I, as I understand it, simply decided not to stop the looting; let peoples, allow people to let off steam. And uh, let's wait and see what happens. The result, of course, was very bad.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, there were 23 ministries; 500 soldiers surrounding each ministry building would have completely prevented people from entering. It doesn't take a lot of people. So, you know, it's hard...

AMIZIA BARAN: I believe this.

CHARLES FERGUSON: ...for me to...

AMIZIA BARAN: I believe, had they surrounded the ministries, and the National Museum, and the National Library — which, by the way, was, was not looted; but it should have been guarded anyway — this could have, a few tanks, just a few tanks, a couple of tanks; 20, 30 soldiers — that could have taken care of much, not all of, but much of the looting. Why this was not done quickly enough; again, the only reason I can, I can suggest is that they decided to allow people to let off steam — anti-Baath,

anti-regime, anti-government steam — and they didn't want to use, eh, lethal force. That's at least my analysis, or my understanding, but I was not there at the time.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us what you can — I understand that you, there may be some limits on what you can say — tell us what you can about your discussions with the administration before the war, particularly about the issue of the Iraqi army.

AMIZIA BARAN: {sigh} I discussed the Iraqi postwar situation with a few, eh, administration officials.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Senior administration officials.

AMIZIA BARAN: Mm, senior administration officials.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Very senior.

AMIZIA BARAN: Senior administration officials. And at least in one case — I don't remember what I said at each meeting; I cannot recall exactly — but at least in one of the meetings, my idea was that, eh, if you send the army home, you should pay them, eh, some, um, salary, or you can call it, uh, pension, you pension, you pension them off. So if you pension off somebody, you [UI] pension. Uh, I envy people who know everything, and, and who are sure that everything they think is absolutely correct. I don't know what would have happened had the administration decided to keep the army, eh, intact. And, uh, maybe to, to chop off the fi-, the, the general level, but leave it under colonels, and so on. Eh, I am not sure.

I can understand the consideration that led some people in the administration — eventually everybody — to agree to the dismantling, dis-, disbanding of the army. Because if you have a standing army, eh, say not for a hundred and fifty thousand, as you had, but only a hundred and fifty thousand who are the professional soldiers, who would like to stay in the army. Most of them would have liked to go home anyway. They were recruits; they were, uh, uh, s-, serving the national service, which they hated. But a hundred and fifty thousand also would have liked to stay, because they were career officers, career soldiers; eh, noncommissioned officers. If you ha[d] such an army — which you really, let's face

it; Saddam's army — you'll never know what problems you'll encounter when you have it. Now, we think we know what happen when you don't have it. [UI] insurgency.

But, eh, I, I appreciate the dilemma here. Again, it's very easy to say, oh, they should have kept the army, [UI], a piece of cake; no problem. And maybe I would have said yes to that. But, but the problems involved in keeping the army were also huge.

Now, my idea would be, my idea would be, eh, either to keep the army, [UI] if you feel this is becoming too dangerous and too risky, because you can have a coup d'etat, done by the army against you and against the new government; ah, you should at least pension them off. And pay them, eh, some kind of pension.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Excuse me, but isn't it kind of ridiculous to think that the remnants of the Iraqi army would attempt a coup d'etat against a hundred and fifty thousand American soldiers?

AMIZIA BARAN: It's not, eh, impossible for a standing army of say a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers — plus their officers and so on, excluding the generals, who will be pensioned off anyway — uh, to create such a degree of chaos in the country that will be almost impossible, and possi-, and maybe impossible for the Americans to control. They don't need, there's no need for an army unit to attack, eh, an American camp. Eh, it's not necessary. They could do a lot of damage from within the system, that will undermine the whole attempt to build a new Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: Eh...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Fair...

AMIZIA BARAN: ...you know, qui-, quiet sabotage. And intelligence, eh, information to insurgents. And so on, so forth. So this [involve] the problem; keeping the army. Again, my advice would have been to keep them. But this advice was not risk-free. It was certainly risky. What was less risky, in my view, was that if you decide to send them home — which you could do — you have to keep them dependent on you; you have to keep them connected to you. So you have to pay them salaries.

Or, as I said, uh, pension. Reasonable, so they can survive. This way, at least you keep them, as much as you can, reasonably can, out of trouble.

Eh, this was done, but it was done late. And already, a lot of resentment was built up. And that's a pity.

So I can understand the decision to disband the army. But I still feel sorry that, that, that they didn't try to keep people attached to the new system, and somehow dependent on it, and to simply buy off the [goodwill].

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah, yeah, I understand. You also told me, when we spoke earlier, that you didn't think that it was a black or white situation; that there were many shades of gray; that it didn't have to be, you keep everybody, or you send everybody home.

AMIZIA BARAN: Yes. You could, if you decided to keep the army, and to take the risk, you could, and should have, perhaps, uh, eh, sent home all the generals. Never mind how many they were. Anybody with one star or more; send them home, and then try to filter them through, back into the system, so to say. Those whom, but very carefully, and very, eh, in a very controlled way.

Um, but I would say that with the lieutenant colonels; with the majors; that was less of a risk. Because some of them were very Baathi, very, like sworn Baathis, but really, really diehards. But most of them were not; were career officers.

So the army was less political than say the Special Republican Guard, or the intelligence services. So I would say, at least my idea would have been, to keep the majors, and maybe lieutenant colonels as well, and the rest of them, and anybody who wants to go home should go home.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

AMIZIA BARAN: And by the way, most, as I said from 450,000 [UI], uh, a-, in, in, armed forces, strong, armed forces people, eh, probably a hundred and fifty th-, eh, a hu-, one hundred and fifty thousand would have liked to stay in service, being career, eh, soldiers. And the rest would have been very glad to go home to Mama.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. When you had these discussions with senior administration officials about these questions, what was their response?

AMIZIA BARAN: Again, I think, I, I don't remember if I mentioned it in all my meetings. But in one of them I certainly did. And uh, I think it was accepted as very reasonable. As a reasonable, eh, proposition.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what did the administration do?

AMIZIA BARAN: Well, it's not clear to me what really happened, in the end. Uh, of course, we know that the initiative came from, uh, Paul Bremer...

CHARLES FERGUSON: No, but before that. Before the war.

AMIZIA BARAN: Ah. Eh, as I understand it — and again, that's based on some information which I haven't verified sufficiently — but as I understand it, eh, the administration actually prepared, eh, prepared a lot of money to pay salaries; to people; whoever. I, by the way, feel that, that the same [solution] [should have] been done with many officials who couldn't be retained.

CHARLES FERGUSON: They also, did they not, made a decision — the administration also made a decision — to keep the army, didn't they?

AMIZIA BARAN: Again, it has to be checked. My information is — and it's not fail proof; it's not fail proof — but my information is that actually there was a decision by the administration to keep the army, with some, eh, some, eh, of course, with forced retirements, and so on. But essentially, to keep the army. Eh, I am not sure what happened. But that's a kind of thing, eh, anybody who is doing [this, a] study has to look into.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

AMIZIA BARAN: Eh, so it's just, I'm giving you information that I haven't checked in depth.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. I've heard from other people who were in a position to know that you're correct; that they did decide to keep the army initially. But be that as it may.

Then what happened next?

AMIZIA BARAN: {sigh} Well, again, it's open to interpreta-, interpretation. And again, I envy people who know everything. I don't.

Um...many believe; many believe that the, uh, disbanding of the army; sending everybody home; at first without salary, and then with salary; eh, created what we see today, today, in terms of the insurgency. I cannot say it for sure. It's easy to say, had they done A, B, C, and D, all would have been fine. Knowing, knowing Iraqi, knowing Iraqi society, I can say, not all would have been fine. Eh, Iraqi society is so complex, and so, there is so much, eh, a cooped-up violence, in, in, in Iraqi society that things would have been very, very difficult anyway. But it is possible. I'll just say that. It is possible. It's conceivable that had the army been kept, or at least had there been, had they been paid some kind of, uh, uh, some kind of pension, uh, and kept; had they been kept somehow in the fold, somehow; eh, you would have less of an insurgency. It stands to reason.

But I must, having said that, I have to be very clear; I am not sure about it.

Because what happened in Iraq is something which people must realize: the destruction of Saddam Hussein and his system turned the table completely on the ruling elite of Iraq. And it's not just a few generals and a few politicians and officials. It's almost 20 percent of the Iraqi population. It's basically the Sunni Arabs. Who felt, and still feel, a deep sense of entitlement: we know how to run the state. The Shiites, they don't know. The Kurds: they're up there in the s-, uh, in the north; forget about the Kurds. And this kind of sense of entit-, -titlement and, and sense of, we know how to do it, is so powerful, and the [lost] of positions is so painful, that this, by, by necessity, would have created some crisis situations.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, what do you think about the de-Baathification order, and the way it was carried out, in that regard?

AMIZIA BARAN: The de-Baathifica-, I support, I support, I, I am in support of the de-, de-Baathification process. I am in support of it. The process is necessary.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Excuse me: *the* de-Baathification process, or *a* de-Baathif-...

AMIZIA BARAN: A. A de-Baathif-, I am in support of a da-, a Ba-, de-Baathification process. Absolutely. In my view, though, um, at least I would have done it somewhat differently. I would not do it across the board; everybody at a certain level, which is, in this case, the [Firca], the level of the [Firca]. Which is fairly senior, middle, middle-senior party position. I would do it like that, on one higher notch, one notch higher. Which means n-, a far smaller number of people. Even automatically. It doesn't matter. But I would keep all the rest of the Baathis, eh, in service, unless I very quickly find out that this guy has blood on his hands, or that he is somehow dangerous to the new system.

So I would do it more on a person-by-person, uh, basis. Eh, not across the board. And look at this, the, the, this way: In many cases, eh, there were s-, uh, people who were kicked out of their jobs, even though they were, uh, just professionals — engineers, uh, directors, and so on, directors with, with administrative experience. And they were not, eh, they were not pa-, uh, Baath Party diehards. So I would do it more carefully, more selectively. The, the, the, the key word here is “more selectively.”

At the same time, having said that, I have to say that what I hear from people who were there at the time, that b-, because at first, they didn't do it right away, the Baathi, eh, the Baathi, eh, elite, in the ministries, and eh, so on, eh, felt that really, nothing has changed; the [Baathi is] still in power. And they started boasting around, and, and, and behaving as if nothing has happened. Like, we are still in charge, we are still in power. Nothing change[d]. And that also was dangerous.

So the, the de-Baathification had to steer a middle course between allowing everybody, or almost everybody to stay, and, and really, sabotage the b-, the new system from within, which is always a problem; still is today. And the other option of, of across-the-board ba-, de-Baathification. They had to be more di-, more discerning, more, more selective. Eh, that, that would be my, my, my observation.

And today, actually, what you see: first of all, in the army, as I am sure you know, a few weeks ago, the Iraqi government announced that from now, all, or now on, they are re-, eh, re-accepting, or re-
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CHARLES FERGUSON: Hiring.

AMIZIA BARAN: ...adopting, yes, re-allowing, eh, eh, eh-, B, eh-b, eh-, officers in the army to join the ranks, eh, up to the level of a major. And of course, it will have a, to be done through k-, some kind of a, uh, of a, uh, filtering system, obviously. That would have been my advice to do from the beginning.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you read the Iraqi newspapers now?

AMIZIA BARAN: I read whatever I can get. Because here in America, or n-, out of Iraq, it's difficult to get the newspapers. But I can say that, uh, there is a lot of the Iraqi press which comes out on the Web.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

AMIZIA BARAN: Eh, uh, almost, almost every party in Iraq today — certainly every single important party — has a Web site.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Have you been to Iraq since the war?

AMIZIA BARAN: No.

CHARLES FERGUSON: How come?

AMIZIA BARAN: I am an Israeli. I think this is not a good idea. I think that people in Iraq are very, very worried of Israeli...Israelis taking control of Iraq. Now, some ridiculous, some really...ridiculous rumors. Like, if you open up the Iraqi economy, the Israelis, eh, will buy off Iraq. You look at that, you say, how? How can this [UI], how can this happen? But the Iraqis, many Iraqis — maybe not most, but many — see an Israeli hand everywhere. Which is not the case, as we all know. And yet, if I go there — and many people know, know me because I am on TV o-, often; I have been on TV quite often — uhm, including, by the way, Iraqi TV, under Saddam. At least twice. Eh, if people see me, and identify me, uh, I think it would be very em-, very, very embarrassing for everybody. And, eh, eh, it won't represent anything, except my own expertise and my own wish to see Iraq, and I, I love Iraq, and I love the Iraqis, and I love Iraqi culture, and, uh, Iraqi society. I dedicated my life to Iraqi society and culture.

CHARLES FERGUSON: But you've never been to Iraq.

AMIZIA BARAN: I have never, but I have never been to Iraq. I am like an astronomer who is looking at, uh, say, Venus or Mars; uh, and studying it through a, uh, a telescope.

So certainly, after the war, I decided it would be very, very, um, problematic, and it could, it could just...it could just complicate things for anybody who wants to be in the new Iraq, because immediately, the, the radicals, the [UI] radicals, the, the insurgents, and the very extreme Shiites, like Muktaf al-Sadr, would use it to show, ah; we told you! You see? The Israelis are here.

The Israelis are not there. And I am, I am not going to where I am not wanted.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. What do you think of the Iraqi exiles — Chalabi and others — who apparently had so much influence over the administration?

AMIZIA BARAN: About the exile. It's very interesting. I'm an historian. And I study the history of a number of revolutions and coups d'état, and many revolutions; popular revolutions, in the Third World. And what you realize, the Algerian case is the best one. That once a revolution wins — in this case, the revolution won on American guns, okay. But the revolution won; the regime was gone. Once this happens, the people, the leaders from the outside are becoming fairly dominant. Not necessarily the only dominant power; there are a few of them. But in Algeria, the FLN; those who controlled Algeria after the French left; and actually, militarily, they lost the battle, but politically they won, uh, against the French government. Uh, they were mostly the exiles.

So I was not surprised at all that the exiles were beca-, became very prominent. But now, you see all the corrections; you see the corrections. Uh, it's not that the exiles are unimportant. The exiles are still important. But you have also other forces coming up. And those exiles connected with the West are m-, m-, usually more secular. And because Iraq became very religious during the last 15 to 20 years, for a number of important reasons; very religious. If you come from abroad, even if you come from London, and you are very religious, and you are a fundamentalist — Shiia or Sunni, whatever — you have a chance; you have a better chance, of succeeding elections. If you come from Iran, like Mu-, like S-, like the [Hakim] family, eh, eh, eh, eh, then you have even a better chance, okay?

But, eh, it's not because you're an exile, or it's because you, you are a fundamentalist. In Iraq today, there is a very massive, uh, move towards Islamic fundamentalism. Uh, when it comes to the public at large, not just the leadership. And dependence, tremendous dependence on the mullahs, and on the [olama], on the, uh...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why do you think that's happening?

AMIZIA BARAN: Well that's a, a development that I would say started about 20 years ago, maybe 25 years ago, and continues even today. It started with the Iraq-Iran War, [it is] Khomeini's, Khomeini's rise to power in Tehran. When the Shiites all of a sudden, being under a Sunni yoke in Saddam's Baathi yoke, saw that here, something succeeds; a Shiia revolution succeeded, and it's religious. So power and success attract, and you started having in Iraq, mainly in the [Shiif], eh, Shiia ranks, sort of movement towards more religiosity, imitating Khomeini and his revolution. Then you started the same movement among the Sunnis, because they saw how the Shiites fought the war against the Iraqi soldiers in the Iraq-Iran War, 1980 to 1988. And they saw this bravery, this tremendous, eh, uh, readiness for sacrifice; total readi-, readiness. They, even the Sunnis were impressed. You started having some movement towards religiosity, Sunni Islamic, not Shiia, but yes, eh, amongst the Sunnis, too.

Then you had the Kuwait war, in ni-, in the Gulf War, [what you, what you call] Gulf War, in 1991. Destruction of the Iraqi army, destruction again of the Iraq economy. Tremendous economic hardships as a result of the wars. And the embargo. And people, and, and a lot of [social] [kills], by the way. We don't know how much [kills]. We didn't know how much [kills] there was in Iraq, even under Saddam.

So people were, in a way, going back to a place where they felt safer. That was religion, which they knew from childhood. And that was the mosque, where you had less government intervention. A lot of it, but less than anywhere else. You had only the party, and the mosque. And the mosque was the only thing left which was not fully under party control. And that's why people went back to the mosque; Sunnis as well as Shiias.

Saddam jumped on the bandwagon, in 1992, 1993, and started what he called, uh, al-Hamlah al-Imaniyyah, which means “The Faith Campaign.” And this Faith Campaign, eh, further pushed people back into the mosque.

So you had, in Iraq, a long history, from 1980, maybe, of g-, of gradual rel-, religio-, uh, growing religiosity. This growing religio-, religiosity is still there in Iraq. So if you had people like Chelabi; like [Allowi]; like, uh, [Yahwer]; all these fairly secular, or secular leaders, who were indeed exiles, they fare, but they don’t fare very well. If you have another exile, like Hakim; another e-, exile like, like, the, the present prime minister, Jaafari, and others, they were exiles too. But they were fundamentalist exiles. And they [want] a lot of support amongst, amongst the Shiia.

Amongst the Sunnis, you have the Iraq Islamic Party, which is really the, the, the Muslim Brothers. They are the Muslim Brothers. They are fundamentalist Sunnis — not radical, but definitely fundamentalist. They are the strongest power now in the Sunni part of Iraq, and they’ve got the, 44 seats in Parliament[s], and by far the largest amongst the Sunnis.

So again, it’s no longer so much a matter of exile versus people who stayed. It’s if you are fundamentalist, or very Islamic, or not. The one exception is Muktd al Sadr. Muktd al Sadr is both a fundamentalist; real diehard; and he has never left Iraq, except for a few days in Tehran. \And, after the war. After the liberation of Iraq. And as a result, Muktd al Sadr is getting a lot of support, because he was there; he suffered like everybody else; he did not run away; he stayed; and so on. So he’s, he’s a combination of both. And that explains why he did so well in this election.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that it would have been wise for the Americans to imprison or kill him?

AMIZIA BARAN: I would say that the time to have done that would have been very early on. He started behaving in a way which was very hostile to America, and even, even, uh, he built his own, his own state. Uh, Muktd al Sadr today, and from June 2003; two or three months after the war, already Muktd al Sadr had his own state within a state. His own army; militia. His own schools; his own hospitals; his own courts; his own police; everything. The courts were issuing, uh, judgments, and, and

uh, uh, you, you know, orders. And the, the [mahadi] army, the militia, was carrying out. So the guy built a state within a state very early on.

The way to deal with it was to arrest him then, especially if he was accused, and I think there was some evidence that he, his people murdered a very important cleric, uh, at the beginning of the war. Um, and, and to, eh, dismantle his, his organization.

What the considerations that, that were then, uh, uh, guiding the American, eh, administration were that they didn't want any trouble in Iraq. They wanted to look like — and they were — a democratic rule, as much as you can. So they decided not to do it. But of course, at a certain point, it became impossible. He, he, he ki-, acquired too much power, too much name recognition, too much support.

And so of course today, I think that he is the most dangerous man in, most dangerous man in Iraq. I think that he aspires to become a Shii-i Saddam Hussein, or, or an Iraqi Khomeini; either of the two, or both. Eh, but I think that now the Iraqis will have to deal with him, and right now, they are very successfully trying to — successfully, though not very — trying to, um, contain him. And that actually to buy, buy him off by getting him into the electoral system, and the democratic system, rather than keeping him out of it. And today, he won many, many seats — I think close to, I think 25, or close to 30 seats — in Parliament, as a part of the Shii-i coalition. So right now, the way to deal with it is a democratic way, and that's how this is going to work.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that Iraq might become a Shiia fundamentalist state?

AMIZIA BARAN: It cannot become Shiia fundamentalist state. Absolutely not. It will become that only if it breaks apart. It can become a more or less fundamentalist Islamic state. And again, excluding Kurdistan, and the Kurdish, the whole Kurdish area. Because the Kurdish area is quite secular. But you have very strong Islamic sentiments in the Sunni Arab area, in the Sunni Arab triangle, west and north of Baghdad. You have very strong [Su-], fundamentalist sentiments in the Shii-i south of Iraq.

And so it's possible that Iraq will become some kind of a cocktail, or a concoction, or a conglomerate. Eh, in certain part[s], in the south, you will really have an Islamic republic, just like the

worst places in Iran; the most extreme places in Iran. 'Cause even in Iran, it's not the same everywhere. Basra; [Nassaria]; [I can see] [UI]. The south. Baghdad will be a mix. Certainly a mix. Najaf and Qabalah will be religious, but not fanatical. Uh, Fallujah, Ramadi; much of the Sunni Triangle will become very Islamic, but Sunni. Uh, further north, uh, along the, the Tigris, eh, city, towns like Saddam Hussein's home town, Tikrit; eh, like, tow-, like, like [Bajee]; like, uh, like even Mosul; will be religious, but not fundamentalistic Sunni. Religious. The Kurdish area will be fairly secular.

So you'll have, and you'll have local laws, in every place. Eh, eh, more powerful than the federal laws. And this way, for example, in the Shiia areas, especially in the far south, or in Najaf and Qabalah, you'll have, eh, Islamic courts, eh, in charge of issues of personal status. Women; you know, and so on. While in Baghdad, it will be a mixed case; in Kurdistan, it will be civil courts; and so on. So Iraq will become really a, uh, like a, uh, mosaic, rather than highly centralized state.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Did you talk to senior administration officials about other subjects besides the dissolution of the army, or the condition of the army, the status of the army?

AMIZIA BARAN: W-, w-, we, well we, I discussed with them what, what I saw could happen in Iraq after the war. And uh, we mentioned many issues. I, I am not, uh, it doesn't really matter very much what we exactly discussed, because I know that I was one of many...whom they consulted. I was one of many. Eh, there were a large number. There was, there was a lot of American experts whom they c-, well, a number of American experts whom they consulted. So I was one person. And my advice, eh, was good, was not so good; who, what do I know? Eh, eventually, they had to make a decision, and to, and to do what they felt they needed to do. And so it's not like I am, eh, in any way an oracle, eh, telling them what's going to [occur]. Many things, as I said, some things, well, some important things which happened, didn't happen the way I thought they would. Eh, and I don't know anybody who could predict, with much greater degree of, of, eh, accuracy, uh, or maybe there are somebody, but I don't know about it — eh, uh, what really would happen.

So I was wary; I was wary of the dangers. And uh, as I said, I did think that, I did believe that this was a mine field. That was hard, difficult not to see. But, eh, we discussed many issues. It wa-, wa-,

doesn't really [UI], it's just pure historical now. The question is, what, what you need to do now? That's the question.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What do you think we should do now?

AMIZIA BARAN: Well, I think that Iraq is continuously, continually, all the time, the most baffling issue for anybody who is trying to assess what is going on. On the one hand, you have huge problems, huge dangers. And not just dangers; also practical, practical problems; explosions. People are dying. Electricity; water; and infrastructure. Uh, jobs. Uh, uh, crime. I'm not talking even about political crime; I talk about criminal crime, of ordinary crime. Uh, eh, organized crime. It's, it's horrible. It's very, very bad. Uh, the economy is basically moving forward, but in, in fits and start, and, and it's, it's, it's not doing well enough for people to feel that this new system is giving them something.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So what should we do?

AMIZIA BARAN: On the other hand, so that's what, things are very bad. [Well]. On, on the other hand, there are substantial successes. I can say that I myself surprised how successful all the elections campaigns and the, and the, uh, plebiscite and so on; how it all went, eh, you know, without a hitch, practically. And the people really participated, and the degree of participation, the last elections, eh, close to 70 percent. It's a very high representation; very high participation, I mean.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What should we do?

AMIZIA BARAN: Okay. I'll just say that on the political level, the development from the first elections then, uh, the, the, the most recent elections, all the election campaigns and so on; very successful; surprisingly successful. And it shows public deep interest in moving forward, along more or less democratic lines. It's not perfect, because everything is done according to, and voting is mostly along, uh, sectarian lines. But in a country that that's the reality, that's what you get when you go to elections, so that's not surprising, and I don't see, see this as a great tragic, not at all.

So on that one, the administration did extremely well. So there is no success, no meaningful success, on development and on normalization; very impressive success on the political process. I am hopeful, I am hopeful that the leaderships now can, can talk it over, and can somehow reach an

agreement — that's crucial — over the, uh, over the constitution, and over jobs, and, and the ministries. So. That will leave, because everybody sees it as a, as a, as a zero sum game. All the three main groups see it as a zero sum game; you gain, I lose. Your gain is my loss.

Then the solution must be that everybody, by the end of the day, and it's quite possible, when the agreement is, is, is, is reached, everybody will be reasonably unhappy; that's the secret. If everybody is reasonably unhappy, we, I think we solve the problems [at top].

And now the question is, what to do about the rest of it.

I'll put it this way: the insurgency, if an agreement is reached at the top, will very, very slowly decrease. But almost imperceptibly at first; and a little more later.

So you cannot solve it tomorrow morning. No way. It will take years. But the, eh, crime level is so high now that to my mind, you'll have, within months, the, this government, the new government, will have perhaps one year to prove itself. In one year, they have to do a lot. So they have to l-, to reduce the level of crime by at least 50 percent. And the only way to do it is to send into the street h-, eh, tens of thousands, especially in Bag-, in Baghdad, where it's worse, and in Basra; tens of thousands of policemen and militiamen, I mean, militiamen, the, uh, like national guard; [it is] belonging to the government, not to the parties — and make order.

Can they do it? I think, within a few months, they can do it. And they have to do it like a shock treatment. Because otherwise, this is going to go on, and people will simply, the intellectuals and the middle class will leave Iraq, and those who will be left there, it'll be a miserable place.

Second of all, infrastructure. Look: all the attempts to increase the, the, the, uh, electricity output, the electricity output of the system failed. There is a certain increase, but it's still roughly half of what Iraq needs. The way to deal with it is to s-, partially decentralize the electric system; to give every large neighborhood a generator of its own, and they'll look after it, and they know how to do it. Eh, and once the central system is shutting off, the local system is kicking in immediately. This is happening in ma-, in, in some places in Iraq already, but only people who have a lot of money can afford it.

So that's very, very important. Electricity means water; it means jobs; it means [UI] cities at night, elite, {mumble} city streets at night; it means everything is different. People feel differently. So just that aspect.

There are many other issues. I would say also, I would build, I would encourage neighborhoods to have neighborhood watch. It has to be a part of a nationwide system. You have, we c-, you can call it civil, civil service, or civil, uh, guard, civil guard. Each neighborhood gets a few hundreds of people who are volunteering; no money; just volunteering. And they are patrolling the streets. But they are all under the Ministry of the Interior. All of them; all the police, uh, command.

AMIZIA BARAN: You have to look at Iraq no longer as one highly centralized state, which it is not anymore, and no need for it to be. It will, it, you have to look at it at, as, as, as a, as a patchwork; as a, uh, as a mosaic. And treat it as such. And I think this is going to work very well. Each place to treat, to tr-, to treat it according to the local conditions. That's when it comes to the infrastructure, and it comes to security, personal security, I mean, eh, anti-crime campaign, and so on.

But you also have the problem of the, uh, administration; the, the, the, the bureaucracy. Iraqi bureaucracy now is inexperienced. There has to be an international effort to take these people for a month, for two months, for three months; teach them how you run a cabinet minis-, uh, a, a government ministry. How you run a region. Tell them, tell them what to do, in practical, eh, very practically, because these people are not very experienced. The ministers are not experienced.

We have a huge problem here with a whole new elite, that doesn't have the, the, the background needed to run a country, and they may be [uh] well meaning, and so on. And of course, you have the issue of, of corruption. So you have corruption shooters in every cabinet ministry, in ev-, in every government ministry, in every, on every level, you have to have people who will be paid well, they'll take a risk, 'cause they can be killed. But they have to be reporting to the center what's happening.

So you have so many issues here, the, the, the legal system. You have very quickly to build a proper legal system, because without a legal system, the police is no good, either. So, and the crime is, is,

is, uh, is rife. S-, in other words, in everywhere where you touch, you have a problem, you have to approach it. And if you can, even, in a way, decentralize it.

For example: If the City of New York, for example, or the city of Washington, D., or [the] Washington, D.C., could adopt a certain part of Baghdad — not the whole of Baghdad — eh, a couple of neighborhoods. And send people, or get people out to, to, to New York; to teach them what to do. And it has to be done, America can, America, here's a big country. America can do that.

In other words, you have to try and, and solve the problems practically on the ground, and I, again, I don't think that there's a, a, a magic, a magic solution. But, a magic wand. But you really need to set for yourself priorities. And to my mind, electricity is a priority; policing the streets, en masse, is a priority. And of course, eh, jobs, but jobs are more difficult to create.

I'll just say this: So far, Iraqis have not lost their faith in democracy. Most of them would like to have a democratic system. Most of them. But in Germany of the 1920s, this was the case as well. And by 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power because people felt that democracy was not providing for them. So if democracy cannot provide for the Iraqi people, people are gonna say, to hell with democracy; we need a strong man. And I can see the strong man already, in the office. His name is Muqtad-al Sadr. And I would say, this is not a good choice for the future leader of Iraq.