

Interview with Dr. Ibrahim al Marashi

CHARLES FERGUSON: All right. Tell us your name.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Ibrahim Al-Marashi.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us your background.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Uh, originally, both my parents are from Iraq, from the city of Najaf. And uh, they both came from clerical families. They left in the late '60s, uh, to, uh, pursue work in the U.S.; they were both in the medical field. It's not that they left for political reasons, but they were never able to go back because of the political situation that developed in the '70s and '80s.

So I grew up in California; had most of my education there. And then, uh, s-, during my education, I became interested in studying Iraq. Uh, it was a subject that I had grown up with...but kind of in the background. My parents never really exposed to kind of Iraq's history, the culture, the political events that were happening that forced them to, uh, leave in the first place. Or not go back, in the first place.

So really, my education was kind of an attempt to satiate my curiosity. And it was my kind of, my interests as an undergrad that kind of propelled me on this path to become an academic who devoted my career to studying, uh, the politics of Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: When did you go to Iraq for the first time?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I went to Iraq for the first time after the, uh, 2003 Iraq war. It was, uh, s-, September-October 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us about that visit.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Th-, that first visit was, uh, uneventful. I went via the northern border. Uh, at that time, I was consulting for a company, and I was supposed to establish contacts between the company and this, uh, Kurdish official, for business purposes in the future.

And...going to the north of Iraq was...kind of not what I expected. This was, uh, relatively peaceful compared to the events that were happening in the south of the country. Uh, the area had developed. Of course, they had a 12-year head start, due to the establishment of the safe haven.

So really, what I saw in the north of Iraq wasn't the Iraq I was expecting. It was a safe, kind of prosperous, uh, booming, uh, area.

And what this businessman had offered me to do was, uh, to go to Baghdad. He would provide his guards, and for kind of the sake of the business, I could check out the contacts in Baghdad itself.

And really, I chickened out. You know, this was a country I had been dreaming all of my life to go to; to see Baghdad, the heart of the Iraqi nation. And I was too scared. The kind of security situation at that time was unstable. And uh, I never took him up on his offer. And that was a regret.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I had devoted my academic career to studying Iraq. Yet at that very juncture, I didn't even have enough courage to go see Iraq itself.

So what changed was kind of seeing how outside commentators were analyzing the postwar situation in Iraq. Many of them haven't gone to Iraq. So my question was, how can they comment on the postwar situation in Iraq if they haven't seen the events on the ground?

Then it came to me that how could I comment on the situation on postwar Iraq if I haven't actually seen the country? Been of Iraqi origin wasn't enough.

And so when this company offered me another chance to go to see the entire country; to accompany them on these business trips, uh, and see the entire country — this would be in, April 2004 — I took 'em up on their offer. I had to confront my fear.

My past fears of Iraq were kind of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and the fear of the Baathists; the, kind of the police state; this kind of totalitarian state. My kind of postwar fears was of the instability, the chaos, the kind of, uh, random acts of terror and kidnapping; that was my kind of postwar fear. And this is what I had to confront when I agreed to go with this kind of company on this tour of Iraq.

And so that, my second trip was in April 2004. Where I saw most of the country, from the north to the south. Kirkuk; Tikrit; Saddam's home town; Baghdad; uh, the south — Basra. And that was, uh, I had no idea it would be the worst time to go. It would be the time when, uh, contractors were killed in Fallujah. And Muqtada al-Sadr had started up his kind of own uprising against the U.S. forces.

So not only did I come, confront my fear, but I confronted it, I kind of, eh, one of the, the peaks of, uh, Iraq's instability. So the, those were really the first two experiences I had with Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And after that second trip, what did you conclude about the war, the American occupation, the condition of Iraq, the future of Iraq?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Before the war, I was, uh, optimistic. I thought that, uh, a year after the war — I gave Iraq a year — Iraq would be a prospering, uh, thriving country. Of course, I knew there was gonna be some kind of violence, instability. But I assumed, prior to the war, that the Americans would take of that; they would have a plan to kind of, uh, prevent the emergence of criminal gangs; of, uh, militias that had no regard for the law.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So before the war, you were in favor of American military intervention?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Well, saying it...to be in favor of American military intervention is a bit strong. I wouldn't say I was, I was...hopeful. Now to say I was in favor of Iraq, military intervention, as an Iraqi, that's very difficult for me to say. I mean, I, I couldn't say, uh, ca-, you know, my conscience couldn't-a let me say that.

What I would say was, my feelings were at that time, was, a war's gonna happen. There's nothing I can do about it. The war, I believe, was inevitable. And so the only option I had at that time was to wish for the best.

And that's what I was wishing for, and that's what kind of, deep down, when I was watching the bombing of Baghdad on the television, I was thinking to myself that this is a horrible thing. But perhaps it will yield a greater reward in the future.

And seeing Iraq in April 2004 was a huge disappointment. That Iraq had suffered, for what? I think prior to the war, my ultimate kind of objection to the Saddam government was Iraq civilians were getting killed. And my hope was that once the war would finish, Iraqi civilians would stop getting killed. I mean, it was that simple.

And what I was seeing in April 2004 was nothing had changed. Iraqi civilians were still getting killed. But it was, who do you blame their kind of deaths on? Do you blame it on these kind of insurgents, or kind of this, what they call collateral damage due to mm-, U.S. military actions? Nothing had changed, basically. As an Iraqi looking at the country, I was seeing that nothing had changed after the war.

And so for me, it was an, uh, da-, uh, complete, uh, I think, disappointment, that t his great vision I had for my native country was, uh, never fulfilled.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you attribute that to?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Bad timing. I think it was really that summer of 2003, that was a period where you could have made or break, broke Iraq. And I, I think that was the period where Iraq's kind of insecurity was, was set in stone.

Uh, the summer of 2003, we saw a disbanding of the Iraqi military; yet no efforts to kind of disband the Iraqi militias in place. Uh, we saw the formation of an Iraqi governing council that was very much established on a sectarian basis. That would kind of set the future for Iraq; a country run on which sect you belong to, rather than what were your political issues, what your ideological beliefs were. And uh, the failure to secure Iraq's borders.

Uh, I think once you combined all these things together, you were setting Iraq on an indefinite road of instability. And what was happening in the summer of 2003, I saw for myself in April 2004: the, the culmination of those, kind of failure to establish a effective, uh, security force inside of Iraq; the failure to defend Iraq's borders, allowing the kind of infiltration to take place; and no clear plan, no kind of elucidation of a future for Iraq. In other words, what were the Iraqis working for?

I think in that summer of April 2003, it was indicative of day-to-day planning. The way Iraq was being run I didn't see any kind of grand strategy for Iraq's future. What I saw were kind of day-to-day measures to deal with the situation in Iraq, but no kind of clear vision. The Iraqis had nothing to rally themselves behind.

And once you combined all these factors, you have the situation that we're living in now. It was those mistakes, I think, made in April 2003, we're trying to rectify, uh, uh, there's been, you know, attempts to rectify them. But uh...I, I, I think the, the situation is such that the U.S. is no longer gonna have patience to kind of invest in rectifying those problems. I think they're gonna find a kind of face-saving way to withdraw their troops, and leave it to a future Iraqi government to take care of those issues.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that if the United States did have patience, that it could do anything about it at this point?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: It's, well, you know, as we say, hindsight is 20/20. And uh...uh, I, I think, uh, really, there's —, there's no going back in the past and correcting those mistakes. And I, I, I think that, no, the patience has worn thin. Uh, there's been too many American casualties to really stick it [out] in the long term. And really, what I'm seeing now is kind of investing all American efforts into building up the Iraqi military forces. Leave the political affairs to the Iraqi government. And cut and leave. That's, uh, I think, what's, uh, gonna happen.

And it's, was done in the past as well. I mean, this is really, uh, what I'm seeing is kind of Britain's experiment with Iraq repeating itself. In the sense that, uh, Britain created an Iraqi military force. They kept a few British —, a British military presence confined in the base inside of Iraq. But then more or less, uh, left, and let the Iraqis...go at it, basically. And that kind of instability following Britain's experiment in Iraq culminated in a revolution in 1958. And that set Iraq on an indefinite path of instability that led to the rise of Saddam Hussein.

So one could draw analogies between the k-, the British, e-, experience in Iraq and the American experience in Iraq. It's, those analogies are valid, as I, I think so. Then one can say Iraq's future isn't gonna be stable in the near future, or the long term.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And what happened when you started talking with Iraqis in 2004, when you were going around the country? What was your experience of how Iraqis felt about the American occupation and about the situation in their country?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: It depended where I was. In the north of the country, speaking to Kurds, of course they were very grateful for what the U.S. had done. Basically their, uh, position was, the U.S. had liberated us from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

In the center of the country, where I was speaking to mostly, uh, Sunni Arabs: this was the irony was, I was speaking to Sunni Arabs from Tikrit; working for the Americans on a military base. Okay? So here were, were, they were. Their survival depended on the U.S. presence in Tikrit, or, uh, outside of Tikrit. Yet at the same time, they were, uh, still nostalgic about the old days. In other words, the old days when Iraq was theirs. Okay?

Now, they, they don't say it as, we, we miss the days when we dominated the country. But uh, they speak of kind of an Iraq where they could walk around in the streets without any, uh, kind of fear of getting kidnapped or being killed. I don't think it was a nostalgia of Saddam per se. Now mind you, this is Tikrit; this is Saddam's, uh, home town. But it was a nostalgia for a period of, uh, stability; of safety, of, uh, kind of security.

The south...uh, I found mixed opinions. Uh, I found, uh...Shiia Iraqis who were, of course, grateful for what they saw w-, of kind of opening Iraq f-, to Shiia control; in other words, giving Iraq to them. Okay.

But then, uh...they say these, c-, I mean they kind of express this to me indirectly. I mean, uh, I think it's always tricky for an Arab Iraqi to outwardly express his kind of gratitude to the Americans for removing Saddam. It's always done in kind of indirect terms, that sure, the Americans removed Saddam. We have control of the countries. But look at these mistakes they've made afterwards. Or that, uh, th-, they fear that kind of the U.S. is there to con-, control the resources of the country.

So I would say the general opinion in the south was a bit mixed. Okay? You have this, uh, kind of Shiia, in fact, if I can say, there's a general Shiia consensus. If I, if I'll go far as to say there, there's, uh, at least a opinion that the Shiia are better off, [but] now they're in control of the country. But nevertheless, when you're saying how do they feel towards America, they still have negative memories. Uh, f-, the 1991 uprising, for example, where many Shiia felt it was an American call for them to revolt

against Saddam Hussein. And then that American kind of support for their, uh, revolt was, uh, never forthcoming.

And it's those kind of memories that you can't forget. I mean, that even took place, uh, around 13 years ago. And that's, uh, well, thirte-, uh, well 12 ye-, 12 years prior to the war, let's say. And that, s-, uh, kind of the memories of that abandonment, I think, [is] seared in the memories of many Shiia Iraqis.

So I would say the feeling among the Shiia towards the U.S. is mixed.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And do you think of yourself as American; as Iraqi; as Shiia, Sunni, neither, both, what?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: The trip I took to Iraq in April 2004 really forced me to question my identity. I always felt that my, felt myself as, uh...an Iraqi first. Of course, I was growing up, I was always saying I'm an Iraqi American. And after you say these, this kind of, you identify yourself with being an Iraqi American first, what's the first thing you mention, is the fact that you're Iraqi, then American. And kind of subconsciously, I always felt that, as an Iraqi growing up as a U.S., more so after September 11th, that I was seen as an Iraqi first, then the American. Or I would always have to justify my Americanness.

So growing up in this kind of atmosphere, where I was, I was just a grade school student when the Iran-Iraq War started; I was a high school student when the '91 Gulf War started; I was a Ph.D. student when the 2003 Iraq War started. I grew up with three major crises with Iraq. And it was those crises that kind of, uh, differentiated myself from those Americans I was growing up with. And I think that left the impression on me, as growing up as, as an Iraqi in the U.S., I was an Iraqi first, then [the] American.

Now, going to Iraq...that Iraqi American juxtaposition shifted. I was an American first, then the Iraqi.

CHARLES FERGUSON: In your own view, or in the view of the Iraqis?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: In the view of the Iraqis. In the view of the Iraqis. Because whenever I would introduce myself to an Iraqi, they would say, okay, but your accent, you're not really an Iraqi. You, you, you speak like an American. So, uh, you must have grown up in America. And I said yes, I did.

Some Iraqis would say, okay, then how can you call yourself an Iraqi? Okay. You didn't know, you haven't gone through our hardship. You didn't go through the Iran-Iraq War. You didn't go through the '91 war. You didn't go through the 2003 Iraq War. How can you call yourself an Iraqi?

But I did go through those experiences. Okay? As an Iraqi living in the U.S. Okay. So I felt them. I mean, they were experiences that were very palpable for me. Okay. But nevertheless, because I'd, I was in the U.S., they just assumed I was safe, I was secure, I never, you know, had any kind of difficulties growing up during those periods of crises between Iraq and the U.S., for example. But nevertheless, I did. It did s-, help form my identity. But not to the point where those Iraqis would see me as one of theirs.

Now I'm a Iraqi, I'm a r-, r-, Shiia Iraqi, for example. And I assume that, uh, I never, uh, went to Iraq and said overtly, I'm a Shiia. But my parents did come from Najaf, and it just happens that most Iraqis who come from Najaf are Shiia. And so when they would ask...where are your parents from, I would say, from Najaf. I assumed that most of these Iraqis then would automatically know I was a, a Shiia.

Now my warmest reception would come, ironically, from the Arab Sunnis. Those Arab Sunnis in Tikrit. Okay? Kind of from Saddam's home town. When they met me, they looked at me, and they said, oh, you're one of our lost sons who's come back to his home. Okay. That's where I got the warmest reception.

What they saw me was, they, kind of the, try to find what united me. Uh, Iraqi American, with them. Iraqi Arabs [UI] from Tikrit. So they kind of ignored my American connections; they ignored my Shiia connections. They saw me as an Iraqi first; an Iraqi who has come to his home.

Whereas, uh, when I went to...when I talked to various Iraqi Shiias, okay, they knew I was Shiia, okay. They knew we had this common, uh, connection. But they looked at what divided us; that you didn't go through the suffering that the, your fellow Shiia did during the '91 uprising, or during the sanctions. You lived comfortably in the U.S. Your parents abandoned their country. And so they didn't really welcome me with kind of open arms, as I expected.

So, but nevertheless, that visit kind of made me realize that I can't deny my Americanness. My Americanness, and the fact that, uh, culturally, I was American. Okay. I had grown up there, and uh...when I went on this first journey to Iraq, I went with, uh, an American businessman. As well as a Palestinian and an Egyptian. And during that trip, it was the American who I was relating to. Both of us, we were looking at Iraq through American eyes. Even though I had fa-military, familiarity with the culture, I was making sense of it through the eyes of an American.

So the question is, people have always asked me this: do you think of yourself more as an Ir-, Iraqi, or more as an American? And it's impossible to, uh, differentiate between the two halves that form me. It's, uh, it's a mix that comes together, and uh, this kind of melange. And there's no way for me to separate them, so there's, really, after that trip to Iraq, I cou-, I could say, there's no way I could say I'm loyal to either/or. It's that I'm, I'm simply a mix, and there's no way to differentiate them, so those, if, if you can imagine that Iraqi-American, if you could remove the hyphen that usually separates that term, and make those two words come together, that would describe who, who, who I am.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you ever talk with American policymakers or American military officers about the nature of American policy and the way it had shaped post-2003 Iraq?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: No. I never, uh, I, after the...Iraq war, I was based in Oxford, finishing my Ph.D. And then after that, I moved to Turkey. Um, so I was really out of the loop. But even if I think, even if I was in the U.S., I'm not sure if I would have had access to kind of policymakers, or, uh, military, uh, the, the military kind of officers who were involved on the ground.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why do you think America made the mistakes that it made in handling Iraq? What do you think happened?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: It's, uh, I think a combination of factors. Uh, perhaps bureaucratic reasons that, in the beginning, the Department of Defense wanted to run the show. Whereas it's known that the State Department had a kind of Future of Iraq Project that kind of anticipated a lot of these, uh, problems that Iraq would face after the 2003 Iraq war: the looting; the failure to secure the borders; uh, the dangers of militias.

This, uh, Future of Iraq plan that, uh, was developed by the State Department, it was never implemented. And it's sad to think that was it just because of bureaucratic in-fighting that many of these problems in Iraq, that cost the lives of Iraqis as well as American soldiers; perhaps they could have been avoided if these two kind of...agencies — the State Department and the Department of Defense — had got their act together in the beginning, uh, uh, uh, of the kind of postwar reconstruction process, and work together, rather than kind of fight each other for a kind of bureaucratic turf.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you think that it was really just bureaucratic infighting, and...

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: It's, no, that, that was one of the factors. The other was that, uh...some of the top people who were making decisions about Iraq at that time, I'm not sure if they really have the kind of cultural familiarity with Iraq, the kind of necessary, uh, historical background; the, the complexities, the cultural nuances of Iraq. Uh, those in the CPA, I, some of those actions that they took made me wonder if they really knew Iraq, the, the history; uh, the culture, the kind of...what defined Iraq as a nation in the past. I really doubted that they, I, I think [that] what, the impression I got was they were kind of parachuted in, and tried to rebuild the country without the necessary background [knowledge].

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And tell us about your little adventure with the British using what you'd written.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: My doctoral thesis was about the state of Iraq's 19th province, quote unquote — in other words, Kuwait — during the 1990-'91 Gulf crisis, and the role the Iraqi intelligence agencies played during that crisis, as well as kind of Iraqi public diplomacy during that period; how kind

of Saddam Hussein justified the invasion; subsequent, uh, annexation of Kuwait; and the, uh, impending Gulf War to the Iraqi masses, to the Arab world, to the international community.

That was my thesis. And when I started studying the world of Saddam's intelligence agencies, I found it quite complex. It was very hard for myself to keep track of them.

So really, I set out in my, kind of Chapter 2 of my thesis, to help anyone who would first look at Iraq for the first time understand the world of Iraq's intelligence agencies; kind of Saddam's bureaucracy of repression, as human rights co-, u-, Human Rights Watch called it, or the Republic of Fear, as the Iraqi writer Kanan Makiya wrote.

I tried to help an outsider understand that. What were the agencies that kept Saddam in power? And how did those agencies help him incorporate Kuwait into Iraq during 1990 to 1991?

That was the object of my thesis. And that Chapter 2 was basically a schematic static breakdown of Iraq's intelligence agencies.

That chapter, I updated; got some kind of additional information; brought it up to the present of the time I was writing it, which was in September 2002. And published it with an online journal called The Middle East Review of International Affairs.

Now...publishing it online, I guess, gave it a wide audience. A wide audience that I would never expect to be so wide. An audience that included some members in No. 10 Downing Street, uh, in the British government. And apparently, from what I've been able to piece together, was that the British government...at that time was seeking to write a dossier about how Iraq's intelligence agencies were impeding the UN weapons inspection process. Okay, so the idea from the British government side was to write a dossier. This would be a, da-, uh, the second, uh, in a series of dossiers that the British government [was] issuing to kind of, uh, justify the, the argument for military action.

So this was to prove that Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was preventing UN weapon inspectors from doing their job. And it was these intelligence agencies that were responsible.

So apparently, in the process of drafting this British dossier, this British government dossier, they came across my article. Felt that the information was very good. Downloaded it. And incorporated it into the body of this British government dossier.

Now, it's during that act of incorporation — basically, cutting and pasting my, uh, article into this British government dossier — that somehow, my name as the author of that first article was lost in this cutting and pasting process, as far as I can understand. And uh, somehow, in kind of churning out this British, uh...government dossier, they forget to change the wording. In other words, between the cutting and pasting process, much of the [key] wording I had used in my dossier was never changed. To the point that by the time this dossier was finally released, you basically had a article [that] [UI] cut and pasted, combined with some other information from the British government, and you had the release of a kind of British government dossier that was apparently what they said was based on new intelligence material. But in fact, a good number, a large percentage of the contents of this dossier was in fact based on an article I had written in, uh, September of 2002, based on a doctoral thesis I was writing at that time. And this was one of the do-, documents that basically, uh, justified the British decision to go to war.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did anybody in the British government or British intelligence agencies ever call you up to try to talk to you and find out what you thought, what you knew?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: No. So uh, neither the U.S. government nor the British government, uh. I was never contacted, that's...[no], you'd think somebody with my background would be ideal to kind of give advice. And the, uh, you know, an American of Iraqi origin, who's studying Iraq as a kind of an academic career. Uh, no one in the American governments or British governments ever did, contact[ed] me. Uh, but in the case of the British government, they did take my, they found my information, at least, valuable enough to kind of incorporate it into a dossier, but I was never contacted in person.

CHARLES FERGUSON: When you found out that they had used your article in this way, what did you do?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I...

CHARLES FERGUSON: What did you think?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I, I, I was shocked. In th[at] sense that...how could, uh, a government with a kind of multibillion-dollar, -sterling budget, in the case of the UK government; I would assume that they're, they would have enough funding that their intelligence assets would be very well advanced; that they wouldn't have to go to, uh, an article that I had written, and incorporate it into one of their documents.

Second, it kind of raised alarm bells, kind of, in my head. But uh, not enough that [a] fact is, if this is the way the British government is justifying the war, then perhaps is the UK, the U.S. government doing the same? In other words, are they kind of fabricating the case to war?

I thought that for a second. But then I said, no, that can't be true. There's no way the Americans would be going to war with Iraq based on fabricated kind of intelligence. This must be a mistake.

And perhaps this was kind of a r-, regret that I have, kind of looking back at that incident, was that I had insider knowledge that the, the kind of intelligence that both the British and American governments are going to war against, uh, Iraq on is, uh, a bit dodgy; fabricated. And I never really took my position, as somebody kind of personally involved with the kinda, this fabrication of intelligence, to kind of raise awareness of what was happening in the me-, uh, kind of in, during the media interviews I gave. I just really kind of framed it as, this was a mistake made on the British government; they never apologized to me. So it was very kind of petty from my side.

But nevertheless, uh, looking back, I should have realized that kind of, there's something wrong,, going, wrong going on here. That if, if they're doing this, uh, from the, you know, if the British government is taking information from me — plagiarizing information — how do we know that any of the intelligence that the U.S. government is using, kind of declaring Iraq has a weapons of mass destruction program — is, uh, valid as well?

Uh, I didn't do that. I didn't, it didn't really sink in at that time, that the American government would take such a gamble; launch a war against Iraq on the assumption that there could be weapons of mass destruction [there]. I assumed that they h-, really had solid intelligence. Looking back with, uh, my incident of, a-, and the plagiarism, I should have, uh, really kind of es-, this incident should have opened my eyes to what was going on [in these] kind of justifications against the war, uh, uh, uh, justifying the war against Iraq. But uh, and I, it didn't happen.

CHARLES FERGUSON: When did you first think that maybe the Americans had kind of blown it?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I think I had the sinking feeling that around, uh, June 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: How come?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Because [UI] they hadn't found weapons of mass destruction. Uh, that...then they're not gonna be found. In other words, that, uh...I knew Saddam, if he had a weapons of mass destruction program, it's, it's gonna be kind of a small scale thing. He would have kept a few, uh, munitions. But if, uh, a month had, uh, close to a month and a half had passed. And if they didn't find it around the vicinity of Baghdad, I really had the sinking feeling that there was never a WMD program to speak of. And that's when I had the sinking feeling that perhaps this war was kind of launched on a guess, on an assumption.

That really, what was happening was we were convinced that Iraq had a WMD program. I was convinced of it. And that it was kind of the mirage of this whole kind of justification of the war was being, uh, revealed.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well regardless of whether Saddam had WMD; regardless the motives for launching the war; there's the separate question of whether it was gonna turn out okay or not.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Hm.

CHARLES FERGUSON: When did you first think that maybe it wasn't gonna turn out so well?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: My, the first...in t-, uh...

I mean, personally speaking, it's, uh...when, I had relatives I was [starting to get to know]. I mean, th-, this was happening in, uh...around 2004. Right, right around that trip.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us about that.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I mean, well, uh, there, there's a couple of events, uh, I ha-, I have to say, that's kind of really started my kind of hopes a-, for a kind of, uh, a...thriving Iraq really, the first event was in August 2003, with the bombing of the UN headquarters. And this was the event when kind of, in my opinion, the violence in Iraq took a dangerous turn. That people were go-, f-, s-, people were gonna take their lives in order to, uh, conduct a, attacks in Iraq, suicide bombings; that the violence in Iraq took a whole, uh, turn for the worse. In a sense, this was a new conflict now. It wasn't simply kind of guerilla attacks against the U.S. forces. This was a kind of widening of the conflict, where civilians, in the United Nations building, g-, uh, would be targeted. It's not then, it's...[UI] from Iraqi civilians to be, uh, to become attacked, for example.

That was August, uh, 2003. And again, that was also, I had a personal connection to that attack. I, I knew some people working in the UN building. And uh, so not only did I kind of lose acquaintances, uh, for me on a personal basis, the, the situation in Iraq was becoming much worse. But then I think for the a-, I knew that...the ramifications, uh, for the Iraqi nation as a whole were quite, uh...it was quite dangerous, in the sense that now the, the conflict had taken on a much more dangerous turn.

The second event that was also, had a personal basis, but kind of a greater ramifications for Iraq's security, was, uh...one of, one of my, uh, relatives was kidnapped. And the, this was around April 2004, just when I had gone to Iraq, to Baghdad, and these, uh, cities in the south.

And this kind of [raised] my attention to the fact that, uh...rai-, raised my awareness of how bad the, how, how serious the insecurity in the country was. That...

CHARLES FERGUSON: What happened, what...

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: My uncle, who was, uh, a doctor in Iraq, was, uh, kidnapped. And uh, the kidnapers, this was a very professional operation. The, the kidnapers knew his name; they knew his travel schedule; they stopped his car — he was traveling with a group of people. And they picked him out specifically. And uh, took him to kind of a safe house. Uh, demanded a ransom from his family. Uh, the ransom was, uh, finally paid. And they released him.

And uh, that uncle, after the kidnapping incident, finally had enough, and left.

And this kind of really made me wonder, that this relative of mine had survived the Iran-Iraq War, the '91 Gulf War; the 2003 Iraq War; a decade of sanctions. Yet he could not survive the postwar instability in Iraq. That's when I knew the situation was bad, that he could, if he could survive all those previous events, including the decade of sanctions, but could not survive in this kind of un-, nn-, quote unquote, new Iraq; then the situation is getting serious.

I mean, the, this is kind of a personal event that woke, awoke me to the kind of, what was really happening in Iraq after the war. And if he couldn't take it, then how does every Iraqi civilian survive in this kind of new Iraq? Whether it's the violence from the insurgency, or organized crime. This is one, uh, uh, uh, was really in April 2004, after I had left Iraq, that I kind of realized that things were...weren't going well, let me, let me put it that way, that, uh, that, eh, if this is the way, kind of, these are the critical years in the formation of Iraq, the, kind of the state-building experiment in Iraq. Eh, if this is what's gonna happen...how co-, how could I, you know, and va-, you know, a vision, that kind of stable Iraq in the future; I don't imagine, I can't imagine how these criminal gangs are going away. I can't imagine how these kind of militias, or these insurgent groups. I mean, I see them kind of ingrained inside of Iraq. And that a military solution is not gonna take care of all these problems.

A, ur-, ur-, really, I wonder...when...will there ever be a kind of a future, s-, s-, uh, stable Iraq. Um. I mean, if I, I look back, prior to the April 2003 Iraq War, I, I wouldn't have imagined myself saying this in, uh, 2006.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Didn't it make you nervous before the war that President Bush and Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld had all, all three of them had publicly stated at different times

that they kind of didn't believe in peacekeeping; didn't believe in nation-building? Didn't that make you nervous about how they'd handle Iraq after a war?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Very nervous. Because I knew the way Iraq was, uh...had been [ruled]. It was...Iraq s-, society was very much dominated by the Baath Party. And the Baath Party was very much, uh, dominated by one man; uh, Saddam Hussein. And I think, uh, what they were saying — Bush, uh, Rice, and Rumsfeld — was, uh, I think they were working under the assumption that if you remove Saddam, the Baath would crumble, and that the Iraqis would come together, and keep the country going; that they would be so grateful that they'll take affairs into their own hands; that, this kind of nation-building wouldn't be a kind of prerequisite, uh, you know, nation-building [times] wouldn't be a prerequisite to go, uh, l-, launch war, because the Iraqis would take affair-, you know, take affairs into their own hands, and keep the country running.

What scared me about that was, I knew that...[if like an Iraq] was dominated by the Baath. Then if the Baath were to go, and Saddam Hussein were to go, that whole entire system that he had built were to collapse, and Iraq would really develop into kind of a state of chaos, anarchy. Anywhere, those, uh, kind of Iraqis that the U.S. had hoped would keep the country running, uh, after the war wouldn't materialize. That really, it's, uh, Iraq's sys-, nn-, uh, na-, the nation of Ira-, or the state of Iraq would have to be rebuilt from scratch. And I don't think they really, uh, kind of appreciated this when they said that, you know, we're not into nation-building. When in fact is, if you kind of destroy the head of Iraq; they kind of imagined this kind of decapitation of the center. And then the rest would kind of come into place without, uh, Iraq without Saddam would, uh, kind of be a viable, functioning, uh...uh, entity after the war. But in fact was, I, I don't think they realized the responsibility that removing the head — in other words, Saddam — would entail. That in fact, that you would cause the collapse of the, kind of not only the...Iraqi government, but uh, all that, that was affiliated with the Baath — the police, uh, the various ministries — and uh, that they would have to be responsible for nation-building.

I mean that's, if you kind of...bring Iraq into this kind of situation, this kind of chaos and anarchy, that it's gonna be your responsibility to leave Iraq...in their ca-, in a stable condition.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, do you think that the chaos was the inevitable result simply of removing Saddam? Or do you think that it was the result of the other policies the Americans pursued; disbanding the army, disbanding the Baath Party, allowing the looting, all these other things? What do you think the ratio was of responsibility...

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I, I, eh, I'm, I'm not sure if you could break it down into kind of numbers or ratios. But it's a, it's a combination of all those factors coming together. It was, uh, kind of decapitating the state; removing the, the leadership, the, even though it was brutal, nevertheless it k-, kept the state together. It had infiltrated Iraqi society at all level.

So combine that with the kind of glue that kept Iraq together. Even though it was a kind of brutal, gruesome regime, it was, nevertheless, that's what kept Iraq together.

Combine it with, uh, failing to provide an alternative. In other words, a wait 'til you rebuild Iraq, keeping in mind that Iraq would collapse once you decapitated the regime; that was never provided for, as well, the alternative. And uh, combine it with, uh, kind of disbanding the military; failing to secure the borders: I think that's a recipe for chaos. And that, uh, what kind of re-, what can you attribute the chaos more: removing the regime or the actions taken by the CPA afterwards? It's hard to determine. I don't think you could put it in strict ratios. But I definitely can say that if you combine them all together, you're gonna lead Iraq on the road to instability. And that's, uh, what happened, really, what we're living in 2006, where it kinda, it's, Iraq is inheriting the problems, the mistakes, made in 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what do you think about disbanding the Iraqi army? Talk about that a bit.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Having studied Iraq's history, I knew the Iraqi army was double-edged sword; that this was the institution that kind of was crucial in the nation's, uh, in the kind of nation-building. It was that one institution that brought Kurds, Arab Sunnis, and Arab Shias into a body where they would kind of overcome their ethnosectarian differences. [And once, and once], and so it was very important for building the identity of the nation.

At the same time, this was the, also the vehicle for regime change in Iraq; that most of Iraq's coups would, of course, change the, uh, heads of s-, you know, the change in the government, were as a result of the kind of military intervention. So while at the same time it was a pillar stability, it was also, one could say, a pillar of instability, in the sense that Saddam Hussein came to power, for example, through the military. Even though he wasn't a military officer, he came to power through a change brought about by the military.

Nevertheless, having said that, disbanding the Iraqi military was a mistake, because that was the one institution that at least could have served as an internal deterrent to these various insurgent groups. That, or these kind of professional, uh, criminal gangs. And once the Iraqi military was disbanded, so a kind of military force of around 500,000 people; and all that was left in place was an American military force of more, a little bit more than a hundred thousand soldiers, that couldn't be everywhere, uh, and e-, at any time. Just the numbers of the American forces present in the country was not enough to serve as an effective deterrent.

I think that was a mistake, was that, eh, fine; if you had American military forces there, at least have the Iraqi military there, present, work with them. If you want, kind of, you could have purged some of the top-ranking Baathist military officers; those with, uh, Baathist allegiances. But kind of introduce some kind of amnesty into the military. Say, even if, uh, if you swear you don't have any allegiance to the Baath Party, we'll let you kind of continue taking your paycheck. You'll s-, c-, continue to serve in the Iraqi military.

This may, this would have served as a kind of effective deterrent against the insurgents' groups; against those Iraqis, at least, who could think they could take up a-, arms, and pursue the path of violence without any repercussions. And I think it wa-, uh, having a kind of Iraqi military presence would have made kind of these foreign fighters'...task of infiltrating Iraq a lot more difficult.

That is, if you had Iraqi military forces stationed along the Syrian border, for example, it would have made that task of infiltration a lot more difficult.

Of course, this was never done. The Iraqi military was simply disbanded. And the military was going to be created from scratch. But in that period, in the, you know, creating a, eh, a military is, uh, a, quite a difficult task. I mean, creating the Iraqi military in the '20s and '30s in Iraq took awhile. It was, uh, I would say, possibly that took a decade in the making.

And uh, this is what's gonna happen in Iraq as well.

So my question was, why did the U.S. kind of feel it was necessary to reinvent the wheel, when you have the, kind of [an] [uh] military force in there to begin with?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well the claim, of course, that has been made by the people who are responsible for it — people to whom I've spoken; Walter Slocombe, for example — was that the Iraqi army had already disbanded itself, and that all of its bases and logistics and vehicles and weapons had been destroyed or looted; there was nothing left; there was no way to base them, no way to feed them, no way to transport them. And so, you know, effectively they had already been disbanded, and also that there was this top-heavy leadership of 10,000 Sunni Baathist generals. What do you say to that?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Well, uh, uh, a leadership of 10,000 Sunni Baathist generals [is] there, but you also had a body of fi-, um, of more than around 500,000 troops as well. Perhaps they didn't have the logistics. As well. The, they didn't have, uh, the necessary equipment. But they did have the training. They were soldiers; they did have the necessary training. So if that's the justification, that it had disbanded itself, then it would have been the, eh, eh, I would say, the Americans' responsibility to re-band it, so to speak. Uh, given the weapons, given the logistics, given the kind of transportation. But the key was, if they had the training, then why start from scratch? If this, uh, was the situation that they, they, they poorly, they had poor organization in the past, then kind of provide them with that organization.

The fact of the matter was that you still had the organization of the Iraqi military there. They were still organizing the brigades; they knew who their officers were. Uh, uh, they, they had their ranks, and they had the necessary background to conduct military operations. So my question is, then, why not reconstitute an already existing Iraqi military, than disbanding it and recreating it from the beginning?

Uh, the fact that...you know, they were in a poor condition prior to the 2003 Iraq war was, uh, kind of indicative of how Saddam felt about the Iraqi military, was that he di-, he didn't trust their loyalty; that he kind of invested most of his, uh, resources into the more loyal Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard. Which could be, [one say], uh, advantageous. The, they had their problems with Saddam. And that perhaps this, uh, kind of created a, uh, lest the Iraqi military — the regular military, that is — disinherited with [the Baath]. This would have been a good sign, sign, and that the U.S. should have kind of taken the initiative, and used that to reconstitute a new Iraqi military force that would have been loyal to to the nation, opposed to any kind of, uh, party, for example, such as the Baath, in the past.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What do your parents think of all this?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: My parents...have not been to Iraq since, uh, the, I guess, well, it's been 30 years from now. I think I saw like a glint of hope in their eyes, that after this war, they w-, they would go back. At least just to visit. To go see Najaf, Baghdad, these places that were so dear to them. And I think that glimmer of hope has really disappeared. I think that...there's, disenchanted with the current situation; they were disenchanted with Iraq's past. I think really right now it's that any hope of even visiting the country, establishing some kind of link, is gone. The, they're really, that their new lives are in the U.S., are in America, and that what's the point of kind of...they worked so hard to kind of suppress that, the pain of leaving, the bad memories, 30 years ago. What's the point of going back and resuscitating those bad memories? I think that's the point. If they see Iraq in the situation that it is now, with the kind of, uh, the random violence, so on and so forth, is only gonna s-, s-, create new, uh, painful memories in their mind. And I think they just want to avoid that.

And it's, uh. It's, uh, quite sad, because my family's links to Iraq, which stretch back, uh, generations, has really been severed, uh, since the end of this war. Uh, that r-, relative I mentioned to you; he's one of the last, uh, relatives who had a c-, you know, who was keeping our fana-, family's connection with Iraq alive. But uh, he left. And uh, I, I think the rel-, number of relatives we have in

Iraq are too, uh, I mean, I do-, I don't know anyone else, personally, who's there. So I mean, really, my family's connection to Iraq, I could say, has been severed.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What about you?

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: I, I, I tried to keep that relation alive. I mean, I think this is a, probably perhaps a one-man mission, in terms of keeping my family's relation with that country alive.

But then again, it's what kind of relation is it? I go to Iraq knowing that I might not come out alive, for example. I mean, uh, I s-, I fear for my life every time I go there. And is that mm-, really kind of a relationship you can form with a country, your native country?

I mean, really, the Iraq I have a connection to is really what's in my mind. It was an Iraq I imagined growing up, as a child in the U.S. It's Iraq I dreamed about going back to during the 2003 Iraq War, that I thought would be a possibility for the first time, that I would go back to I-, I-, uh, this Iraq that I had created in my mind. And really, the Iraq I go back to is only-y a country I could go back to for short visits.

And it's, again, it's something that I still create in my mind; it's still a country I imagine about; it's still a country that I hope will be a successful, stable country in the future. But nevertheless, it's a country that I have a k-, a tumultuous relationship with.

I mean, the Iraq I grew up with was a country that I fear; a country I associated with Saddam Hussein; a country that I know I couldn't go back to because Saddam might do bad things to me, because I, I belong to a family that has, uh, you know, a, a kind of a dissident family, in, uh, in the views of the Baath.

So the Iraq I knew was something I fear. Saddam's Iraq was something I feared. And the Iraq of today is still something I fear. It's not necessarily the head of state, but I, it's I fear other chaos; I fear the insurgents; I fear death. And so that kind of republic of fear that Kanan Makiya described, that I grew up with, as a kind of young child and teenager, I'll argue it's still there; it's still a, a kind of a republic of fear. It's just the fear comes from a different place. And it's hard, how you forge a relationship with your

kind of ancestral home that you fear. But nevertheless, I, I, I still fear it, in the sense that I know that anytime I could go to Iraq in the future, I don't know, I could come back alive.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Thank you.

IBRAHIM AL-MARASHI: Sure.