

## Interview with Dr. Omar Damluji al Damluji

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Can you tell us your name, sir?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** My name is, uh, Dr. Omar Damluji al Damluji.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And can you briefly describe, as you did before, your personal background and history.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Yes, I am, uh, in fact, uh, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Baghdad. Um, I held the chair of civil engineering at the University of Baghdad [four] years, right before [of] the war. And I was reelected for the post right after this war of the 2003. And um, I became the, uh, Minister of Construction and Housing of Iraq, uh, during the interim government that was formed by the United Nations, uh, uh, l-, uh, right after when the, uh, Governing Council was dissolved.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay. And now, since you left the Ministry of Construction and Housing, do you have any involvement in the government, or not?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** No, I am not, uh, involved with the government now. But uh, I work within the Iraq Independent Democrats movement. It's one of the major political movements that, uh, was formed right after the war.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Um hm. Okay.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** It's a secular movement; it's democratic; it, it was formed out of a lot of intellectuals, uh, from inside of this society.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Tell us about Baghdad and what's happened to Baghdad.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Well, Baghdad, in fact, is my city. I was born here. Uh, raised, and also I had all my education here in Iraq. Baghdad is right inside of my heart, in fact, because I have lived all my life in this city. It's, it's, uh, the thing that, uh, I can remember from childhood. It's a pleasant city, with, uh, a cultured society. Has got a lot of history, and prospects for development. It's, uh, uh, it's, uh, the place where I personally feel that, uh, uh, uh, it involves a lot of, uh, aspects for anyone who would want to come and see about history; you must come here and see about, uh, the, uh, the past of...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you feel pressure to join the Baath Party, to behave in a way that was politically expedient or politically required, in order to survive?

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: No. I was never a Baath Party member.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And...

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: I was never a Baath Party member. And in fact, I was never pressured to become a Baath Party member.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see.

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: Um, I never, uh, approved of, uh, the, the measures of the Baath Party. I mean, for example, there were quite a lot of, um, atrocities during the Baath rule, and so forth. But I never approved of this. But, uh, as I told you, myself, as part of a whole group of intellectuals inside of this society, we were really never allowed to express our political points of view, as we are doing now openly. We were mainly people working in our professions.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: I was a professor; I used to give lectures in civil engineering. Uh, I, I never even ex-, expressed a single thought, a single political thought in front of, uh, either my students or even, uh, in front of, uh, people whom I, uh, [UI].

CHARLES FERGUSON: At the university now...

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: E-, either at the university, or even at my place, at home.

CHARLES FERGUSON: At the university now, do you feel afraid?

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: Now?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Do you go to the university now?

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: No. Of course, um, uh, the, the, uh, circumstances have changed since, uh, the Baath regime's at the university. Uh, there, there is now freedom of expression, even among the, uh, students...

CHARLES FERGUSON: No, I meant do you feel afraid for your own personal security; that you might be kidna-...

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: My personal security?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah.

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: Well, uh, uh, me being part of this society, we are all afraid; all the society is afraid. Not only the university professors. Yes, the university professors have, um, uh...uh, uh, uh, I mean, uh, they are really afraid for their lives now, especially with, uh, militias around, inside of, uh, this society, and through the threat that they are now having, uh, for difference, uh, for different reasons. People are threatened. And, and, uh, university professors, being part of this society, yes, [we are], uh, they feel that their lives are threatened.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Tell us about...

DR. OMAR DAMLUJI: There is another thing that I would want to mention, is that after the war, after this war, we wanted, as people living inside of Iraq, and as intellectuals, and part of the, uh, university; we wanted to express that we are thinking of this society as an integrated one. And that is, we wanted to [kick] aside all sectarian differences, and never to involve, um, religion inside of, uh, uh, political circles and on the decision table.

When I myself [UI], when I expressed this, especially a-, a-, among some politicians from the U.S., they would feel that I am a Baathist by doing this, [I]. I want to, eh, insist that I have never been a Baath Party member myself, yet I feel that this society — the Iraqi society — is, uh, is, as a whole, it is an integrated society. The, uh, it's, it contains a lot of, uh, ethnic groups, a lot of religions, a lot of sects by which we respect them all.

It's just like, uh, the United States, for example. You have, uh, people coming over from all over, from all over the world. You have, uh, Catholics, you have Protestants, you have, uh, Jews, you have, uh, Islam, you have, eh, you have all, all, uh, religions. Yet, uh, all work for, uh, one cause, and that is for the betterment of your nation. We would want to see those groups, all those political groups, see for the betterment of this nation, of Iraq, through, uh, coherence, through building on the mutual aspects, rather than to, uh, dividing the society into, uh, ethnic and, uh, sectarian, uh, um...minorities.

And uh, and mind you, this is, uh, not the notion of the Baath Party. This is the notion of, uh, Iraqi nationalists.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Dr. Pachachi's party, if I recall, did not do well in the elections. What percentage of parliamentary...

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Well, uh, let me, uh, put it like this. There was this United Nations resolution, of 1546, which set out a timetable for, um, transferring this nation from under, uh, uh, occupation to a, a, a fully sovereign country. This timetable expressed the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 2004 as a date for elections, for the first elections; 15<sup>th</sup> of August as a date for, uh, finalizing, drafting out a constitution for this country; and the 15<sup>th</sup> of December of 2004 to have another election so that we have a permanent government in place, uh, ruling Iraq.

This timetable was abided by; totally; for reasons that I think have got to do with internal Western politics, especially in the United States. While, um, we see that, uh, we never really had coherent development. And the, uh, political aspects with, uh, internal, uh, developments.

By that I mean, let's say, for example: we never had, uh, an intact security conditions right after, uh, the 2003 war. We never had that. I mean, by the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 2004, we had a lot of problems. We had problems in Najaf area; uh, Najaf City. We had problems in, uh, Fallujah. And uh, there was, uh, a lot of distrust with the, um, uh, uh, Americans, with the, uh, uh, by the people. Um, this, this created, uh, a certain atmosphere among the people that they, uh, didn't want to come and participate in, uh, in the elections. Many were put aside. Let's say, uh, a lot of provinces would not participate in the elections.

And um...there were also a lot of, so we had one problem with security; another problem with, uh, uh, people coming out, especially from areas where, uh, they would, uh, support us, they wouldn't come out and support us. And in fact, I expressed, uh, personally my, uh, concerns about this to, um, uh, Senator Kerry when he came over to Baghdad, right before of the 15<sup>th</sup> of January.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** You met Senator Kerry.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Yeah. I told him that it is not the right time for elections, simply because that security is, uh, uh, is not intact; this is for one thing. And secondly, uh, uh, uh, the society became divided on sectarian basis. And that is why we need some time just to, uh, convince the people to come out and vote for us.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** But there...

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** He said what if you fail about this [UI]. Uh, uh, let's say we would give you a couple of months' time so that you can have your time to convince, uh, those people to come and, uh, vote. Who said that you will succeed with your end of it? Uh, well, I said that it is better to be given the chance rather than without it. I mean, this is for one thing.

And secondly, uh, uh, we need to be given the opportunity to explain for the people, uh, about our, uh...plans and so forth, because people, up until now, that was by January 2004; they never had any sort of idea about what those political groups whom they are going to go out and vote for; they never had any sort of idea about, eh, what they stand for; what is their, uh, plans for the future; what intentions, d-, uh, that they have for this society.

So it was a matter of, uh, near elections, according to, uh, uh, sectarian beliefs rather than onto plans for rebuilding this country.

Uh, and, and that was the case, in fact, in the 15<sup>th</sup> of January of 2004. And that brought another problem. And that is, when the, uh, National Assembly was formed, uh, it, and, and they had to draft out a constitution, they, they were large areas of, uh, from Iraq that were not represented on the decision table.

Well, they have to deal with this in a certain way, and that is to bring over people from different political groups. Again, who would say that those people are really representing, uh, from their areas? Because they were never elected.

Uh, and the, uh, uh, the, uh, constitution was, uh, pa-, I, I, uh...uh...witnessed a lot of discussions on the decision table for more than a month last August and, and, uh, uh, the beginning of

September of last year, of 2004. An- fi-, in 2005. I witnessed a lot of these discussions. And I could see with my own eyes the different visions for the future of Iraq by each political group.

The Kurds had a vision different from, let's say, the Shia Islamists. The Sunni Islamists had, had a different vision for the future of Iraq. The secular group which I am part of ha-, had a different vision. What we needed to do is to sort of, um, melt all those ideas together, and agree upon our, uh, common, common areas, co-, common areas where we feel that we are, uh, uh, in, in, uh, common agreement about. Eh, eh, eh, so that we can emin-, emulate, uh, uh, something workable for this society.

Uh, I am afraid to say that up to a certain extent, uh, the, the constitution contains a lot of excellent things for this country. For example, the bill of human rights and so forth. And I have always said to the media that it will be, uh, uh...uh, s-, uh, uh, very important for, uh, uh, governments to come in Iraq to implement this aspect. Uh, yet, and it will be a challenge for these governments. Yet, on the other hand, uh, I think that Iraq, a lot of differences inside of this constitution that w-, will work as, uh, problems for the future of this country.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Can I ask you about being the Minister of Construction Housing?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Yes.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** What was it like?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:**...I assumed my position as, uh, minister of Construction and Housing of Iraq, at the first instant that I got there, uh, there was, uh, chaos around, everywhere. Because, as I have mentioned before, that I had facilities that were completely looted; others that were, uh, completely burnt down; and, uh, it is one of the largest ministries in Iraq, mind you. It contains something around, uh, 23,000, uh, people working in it.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** describe the physical facilities when you entered the ministry, when you took your job.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI DAMLUJI:** Yes. Uh, for example, the commission for building, which, uh, has the task of rebuilding this country, this commission was still in caravans. They were functioning from inside of caravans. And um, many people had no desks to, uh, sit behind. And um, it was a, a,

mo-, most of the, uh, equipment were looted, because you see, uh, this ministry has got, uh, uh, a lot of facilities. It, it has, uh, a commission for, um, uh, design and supervision of architectural and engineering [works]. It's, it has another commission for, uh, laboratory testing. It has another commission for roads and bridges. It has, uh, another commission for, uh, housing. Um, and it, uh, it, under its umbrella lies not less than 15 major contracting state-owned, contracted companies; huge ones, with, uh, a lot of experience.

Now, uh, as I told you, when I came, a lot of, uh, those, uh, companies and facilities were, uh, people had, uh, no jobs; nothing whatsoever. What I take pride in is that during, a-, an extremely short period of time, we were able to capacity build all these facilities. And in fact, when I left, most of the companies were making profits; the state-owned companies were able to make profits. They were having jobs, they were, uh, uh, functioning. Uh, I cannot say that they were in a totally healthy condition. But uh, they were all set on the right track. All their, uh, headquarters were rebuilt. And um, uh, they were taking jobs, as I have mentioned. And many of them were, uh, functioning, uh, properly.

Uh, from the construction aspects, when I came, there were only six, uh, uh, housing residential complexes that were, uh, uh, awarded for six, uh, different contracting companies. When I left, there were 21 of them; 21 additional ones, uh, what, uh, uh, new contracts were awarded for these jobs. There were, uh, uh, uh, a, huge plans and executions for roads and bridges. A lot of building refurbishments. And on, uh, top on, of that, uh, we were able to form what is called the Iraq, uh, House Fund. Which is something equivalent to what is called the Fannie Mae or the Freddy Mac, uh, uh, banking institutions in the United States. And I am really, uh, feeling now very proud that many people are, uh, making benefit out of this, uh, uh, idea right now in this country.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Are you optimistic about what has happened since you left in the ministry?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Well, um...due to the political, uh, turmoil of this country, and what, uh, accompanied from, uh, uh, security turbulences, th-, uh, this has made its major impact on, uh, a lot of things around. But yet, uh, I feel that for the future, uh, this, uh, country has, uh, great aspects. I

think, I think, uh, a lot of things can be done for the future, especially with this, uh, forthcoming, uh, permanent government. Uh, though this government is going to face, uh, a lot of problems.

The problems that, uh, it has to solve, uh, needed to be solved during the interim and transitional periods. What I mean by that is that this forthcoming government has to solve problems that must have been solved by the former governments.

Uh, the first thing this, uh, forth-govern-, forthcoming, uh, government needs to solve is to bring back all the society into, uh, thinking together. This is for one thing. E-, excluding differences, especially sectari-, sectarian and ethnic ones. This forthcoming government has to start out large-scale developments and investments, all over Iraq; to reduce unemployment. Many of, uh, what we are witnessing from, uh, assassinations and deteriorations in security is, uh, uh, is a cause of unemployment. Once you can, uh, offer people jobs and incomes, then the security conditions will, uh, become much better.

And I have always stressed on that. It is, uh, uh, not enough to spend only on the police force. It is important to spend on the police force. Has to have, a, a, a proper one. Yet at the same time, we need to make investments so that we can make, uh, people, uh, have, uh, proper incomes, and by that they would [UI] from getting into the, um, [UI] crime and so forth.

Uh, the, the, this is a-, another big marker that this, uh, forthcoming government needs to, uh, sort out.

Another thing is, uh, that this forthcoming government has to stress on means of, uh, bringing funds, uh, for this country. By funds, I mean, uh, uh, exports of oil. This is a major, uh, thing for this country. As you may know, the, uh, uh, uh, uh, the price of the barrel of oil has come up to 64 dollars, uh, uh, for a barrel. And by that, we need to sell some more oil. But this is faced with deteriorating security conditions — again, this is for one thing. And secondly, having to deal with, uh, inferior facilities; uh, facilities where, uh, uh, uh, by the, uh, uh, uh, best of cases, were, uh, uh, put by the end of the '70s of the last century. And by that, we need to renew our facilities and so forth.

Uh, uh, uh, so we need to set out the proper ground for, uh, building up, uh, an, uh, uh, oil exporting facilities, enhancing oil wealth; and also, building up an oil industry. This is very important. Enhancing, uh, agriculture; enhancing, uh, industry; enhancing all aspects of life.

This is what the forthcoming government needs to do so that the society can, uh, come in terms with itself.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** If you could speak about what happened specifically to the city of Baghdad...

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Yes.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** ...that would be...

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Yes, of course. I'll, I'll come to this. Because, uh, what I want to find out is that Iraq's problem is not an economic one. It's not a problem of having the expertise or experience. Everything is available here, in this country. The problem of Iraq has always been a political one. This is the main problem of Iraq. Once that we can solve this political problem, then we can sort out everything quite easily, and we will see development of this country, as we become, uh, an economic power.

This is how I described it, and I still describe it; as an economic power in the region. Once that the political aspects are set in the right place.

Um, right after the Iraq, eh, uh, right after the Kuwait war, there was this 12-year period of embargo. This period hit really hard onto this society, and especially on the people here inside of Baghdad.

Uh, um, a person who used to earn something 'round, uh, uh, let's say a thousand dollars or two thousand dollars a month — uh, which is, uh, an average here in this country — uh, declined back, um, and at certain, uh, cases, the, uh, they were dropped to two or three dollars a month.

And this situation created, thi-, this embargo was designed to be against the government of Iraq, headed by a dictatorship. What happened, really — and th-, and there was this, uh, uh, fault in, in the

whole system of the embargo imposed by the United Nations on Iraq — the fault was, uh, that the people paid the price of this embargo, rather than the, uh, government.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** What happened is that, uh, there weren't enough funding for, uh, developments around, especially in-, infrastructure, uh, aspects, like, uh, water supply; uh, electricity generation; um, education; um...all aspects of life, everything was, all funds were put down.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Tell us what Baghdad's infrastructure was like before this period began.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** For example, we never had cuts in electricity. In the '80s, we never had cuts in electricity, in Baghdad. This is for one thing. Um, we always had constant water supply. We had, uh, an intact sewerage system inside of the city. We were seeing developments around everywhere. By that, I mean new buildings; uh, um, new facilities set around; you could see, uh, let's say, the highways all over the city.

You, you, you can go now and uh, see about the ring ro-, ring road of the city of Baghdad. That was built, um, in the '70s, when the oi-, uh, oil prices went up, and the government could, uh, have gains out of it, you know, right after the 1973 oil embargo, it's, it's called the oil embargo of 1973. Uh, the government then had enough funds to spend on the, on the society.

While if you compare this to the '90s, you see that the government had no money whatsoever. And that, uh, made, uh, in fact, two generations — not only one — two generations have no prospects for the future. With the first generation is of the '80s, where it was wartime. In, in the '90s, it was the period of embargo, with no prospects for work and so forth here inside of Iraq.

That made a lot of people, especially the intellectuals, leave this country. And uh, people from the mint-, what we call the middle society; those are, uh, university graduates, uh, architects, engineers, artists, um, tho-, those who have ideas in their minds; uh, those had to leave this country. They left to Europe, to the United States; they left to the, uh, Gulf area, to other Arabian countries, so as to, uh, have their living.

What happened is that there was a total deterioration in all services of the city, with no funds. And we ha-, uh, uh, and we had to deal with all systems; uh, old, uh, sewerage system that was, uh, uh, built in the '70s. An, uh, an old, uh, uh, electricity system, and distribution network, that was, uh, uh, uh, put down in the '60s and in the '70s and so forth.

Uh, so there was a cut in all aspects of development. And uh, there was this, um, agreement with the United Nations, with the Iraq government then, as to, uh, provide for the humanitarian aspects of the Iraqi people. And there came, in fact, several committees, one of which was, uh, from Harvard University. And another one headed by, uh, [Tisari], who is, uh, the former president of Norway.

They came here, and they surveyed and reviewed all aspects of, um, the Iraqi people here. And in specially inside of the city of Baghdad. They, they witnessed, with their own eyes, the degree of deterioration in services and in all aspects. And, and the income of the people, and so forth.

And that, uh, had its heavy burden on the people, not only from the, uh, development aspects. But also on, uh, means for, uh, uh, uh, uh, progress. Uh, in fact, uh, we, as people living here inside of Iraq, and with these, uh, uh, difficult circumstances that we were suffering from; we had to work out, right from early morning 'til late night, this si-, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, it wasn't the case before. I mean, we used to work for long hours, uh, as to be able to provide for our families. And this, um, created, uh, a working force inside of this country, that totally [dependent] on itself, because we never had any sort of, uh, uh, communications with, uh, uh, let's say know-how, and so forth, from abroad.

That is why we have to rely on ourselves completely. Uh, and, and by that, the electricity, uh, and power generation was a bit better than the former periods, than, uh, the, uh, the early '90s. I am speaking about the late '90s, of the last century.

And the government, at some point, later on, six years after the embargo, they, uh, uh, approved of, uh, this, uh, new agreement between the United Nations and the government, which was called the Food and Drug for Oil, uh, Agreement. And that is to sell oil, uh, uh, for 1.6 billion dollars for six-month period. Uh, this was approved of by the Iraq government, by the late 1996. And it was implemented, uh, by 1998. And there was six months periods, from 1.6 billion only, and then that was

raised to 2 billion for six months. And right before of the war, it became, uh, 5.25 billion dollars for the six, uh, month period.

By that time, dur-, uh, since 1998, 'til 2003, there was a lot of, uh, works around in this country, with the, some development. Um, simple ones. But, uh, on the other hand, uh, uh, the, the, the government of Iraq had, uh, uh, no, uh, uh, grip on these funds. They are all put in a special, uh, uh, fund in New York, and so forth.

But, uh, we can witness some developments around.

Uh, then came this war, of 2003, when the dictatorship was put down. This war brought a lot of hope for the Iraqi people. Uh, as I told you, we had no, uh, prospects for the future among the, uh, the youth. Now, w-, uh, right after the war, there was a lot of hope for development, especially [back] embargo was removed. And that a great country like the United States have come inside of Iraq, and that we would start out a wide-scale development in every aspect.

But the problem was, again, political. And there was, uh, divergence in the political thoughts of the political groups who mainly came, uh, from outside of this country. Uh, some of, uh, those, uh, political groups who have, uh, uh, uh...fundamental Islamic; others were, uh, putting, uh, uh, nationalistic and, um, uh, secular, uh, sectarian aspects as, uh, uh, a primary goal. Others were secular like our group.

But I digress...now let me speak something about my city, Baghdad. Because, uh, probably, this has taken too long.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Baghdad is totally destroyed. I call it now a wretched city. It is even worse than what it was during Saddam's time. Um...during the embargo period, uh, uh, a lot of, uh, uh, hardships were inflicted on this city. Yet right after the war, and through, uh, the war itself, most of the gover-, governmental facilities were either hit by warfare, or they were looted because of anarchy which happened right after the war. And uh, many of the, of these facilities were even burned down.

And I have even taken photographs of what happened right after the war. I really felt, uh, shaken to what happened to my city, uh, because of this war.

And I thought that, uh, the intellects of this society are to blame, for a certain extent, because they couldn't get up and stand against the dictatorship, and uh, to, um...prevent that dictatorship from getting into these, uh, conflicts that have gotten us, uh, nowhere. And that it is now the time for us — and the right time; right after this war — to, um, uh, come and, uh, express our ideas into the right direction, as to form, uh, a peace-loving society; a society where we would put all our, uh, uh, sectarian differences aside, and uh, to aspire for, uh, uh, a better place to live in.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Baghdad U-, University, just like any other, uh, facility which is functioning inside of this, uh, society; it is, uh, under a lot of hardships. And um, during the embargo period, uh, uh, l-, let me tell you one thing about Baghdad University, because, because both, uh, parents of mine — my father and my mother — were both professors at Baghdad University. And, and, uh, they, they were, uh, sort of, uh, uh, founders in certain aspects in their, uh, fields of specialization.

Now I remember in the, uh, when I was a kid, in the '60s, Baghdad University was considered to be the best in the Middle East, especially in, in certain disciplines, like medicine; engineering; and, and um, and arts; and uh, and many other aspects.

Most of the schools of Baghdad University were the very first in this area.

For example, the law school was formed in 1908. The, uh, college of engineering was founded in 1921. Um, the college of medicine was formed in 1927.

So you see that, uh, most of the schools were, uh, the very first in this region. In the whole of the Middle East. And they attained, uh, an excellent degree of, uh, uh, uh, uh, [and] standards, and excellent degrees of competence, even with institutions in the U.S.

We always have people who would go to universities in the West; let's say, uh, in, especially to Britain and to the United States. Because this country is mostly cultured towards English-speaking nations.

And uh, w-, we had those people coming back. And they would serve as to become, later on, uh, as professors in universities. And uh, by that, those, let me call them pioneers, were able to form, uh,

excellent schools. And w-, uh, uh, and all developments were, uh, coming over right away to this country, in all aspects of life.

But during the, um, embargo period, in the 1990s, uh, all sorts of corporation were prevented. And uh, uh, only lifesaving equipment were, uh, uh, allowed to get inside of this country. And this country was cut, cut off, totally, from the rest of the world, especially from the cultural point of view.

Um, and this had an important influence on the University of Baghdad itself.

So the time when we used to send people to study abroad, to the States; that was no longer the case.

In the '90s, we had to rely on ourselves. And that is why we started out with extensive programs in all disciplines, uh, to, uh, form postgraduate schools. And by that, uh, MSc and Ph.D. degrees were offered for, uh, people who were graduating from inside of Iraq. And Baghdad University was, uh, the main institute to be relied on, because it, it had, or it contained, the best of experiences and expertise in this country.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Was Baghdad University taken over by the politics in the Baathist Party?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Well, uh, to a certain extent, yes. Uh, and in certain disciplines. Let's say, if you are mentioning a discipline like political science, then yes, I would agree with you. But in other aspects, like for example, medicine, engineering, uh, basic sciences and these things: uh, that was not the case.

Yes, we had some, uh, Baath Party members inside the, uh, professor community. But they were in no way, uh, the, uh, majority.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I was told recently that since the war, almost 20 percent of the professors at Baghdad University have been assassinated. Is that true?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Well, uh, we have been receiving lists of people who were assassinated. And in fact, many of them were personal friends of mine.

For example, only a couple of weeks ago, um, the, uh, dean of the college of engineering at [UI] University, which is another university inside of the city of Baghdad, was assassinated. He was in fact, uh, abducted. And uh, a, a ransom was paid for, uh, his release. Yet he was killed. Uh, uh, instead of, uh, being freed alive.

And uh...he was my, uh, classmate, uh, at college. And um...we led a, a, a long, uh, uh, life together, through our, uh, mutual, uh, profession.

And uh, many people are, uh, being killed, um, not only from professors from universities, but, uh, the experts at large. I mean, for example...

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Why are they being assassinated?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** For, for, uh...I think, uh, because of the loss of the minimum requirements for security inside of this society, um, probably, uh, some would want to evacuate this society from, uh, knowledge and expertise. And by that, we will never have any sort of real development in this country.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Who's killing them?

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** Who is killing them? Some of them are only ordinary criminals...who would want to ask for, uh, money in return for their release. This is part of it.

And there is this other part, where, uh, it has got a political dimension. There are some of the political groups who are working inside of this society, who think that they are at war with the United, with the West in general, and with the United States in particular. And they wouldn't want to see this new experience, this new political experience inside of Iraq, to succeed.

By doing that — I mean, by assassinating, uh, uh, uh, people with knowledge and expertise in general — uh, they would want to make them leave the country, so that they'll no, uh, there'll never be s-, any sort of, uh, real development in this country.

How would any, uh, government function without having, uh, uh, expert people around, uh, inside of the society?

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** What about, some of the groups, exiles, who returned and are seen in some of the universities as belonging to the former government. They view them as Baathists, and even if it's untrue. And uh, might be assassinating them because they might belong to the Badr Corps, for example.

**DR. OMAR DAMLUJI:** I have my own point of view about this. I mean, as long as that we have started out with a new era, then I think we need to forget about the former deposed regime and that former period. I think what we need to do now is to try to express feelings of hope for the future, for this society.

By that, uh, through hope, I think people can, uh, get indulged into the, uh, new process, new political process, and to, uh, build on it.

If you are going to, uh, put the burden of the deposed regime on a certain group of people, then we will never see any development in the country, because those people are going to become the terrorists, or the mind-, masterminds for terror-or-ism.

Those people — even the former Baath, uh, Party members — they were, uh, not in agreement, uh, on what happened, especially right after the Kuwait war. They were all opposing. But they couldn't express themselves freely.

Now if you allow them; if you give them hope for the future, and make them come and join the political process; then we will see that all, all forces inside the society will work together for, uh, development.

This is what I feel about how to deal with this problem.

This in fact is a resident problem, for the, uh, political situation now in Iraq.

Some of the political groups would want to see that the, uh, former Baath, uh, Party members be put aside, and not to join the political process, and so forth.

I think this is, uh, this is my personal opinion: I think it is wrong. I am not advocating for, uh, uh, Baath politics. I think that Baath is no longer there; it's finished; it's a deposed regime; it's finished, it's a finished regime. Saddam Hussein is no longer there. Uh, we need to find, um, new political

groups inside of the society, where all those people who used to be Baath Party members, they should join these new political groups, and to work together for building this nation.