

**Joost Hiltermann**  
October 12, 2007

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Hello.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Hello, this is Joost Hiltermann.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Hi this is Charles.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Hi Charles how are you?

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I'm well, thank you so much for agreeing to do this.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Sure, no problem.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, well -- what I would like to ask you about is basically the current situation in Iraq as you see it, and what you think the United States and/or other potential actors could or should do going forward, let's start I guess with the first subject. What do you think of what's going in Iraq now, let's say first politically and then otherwise?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, you know, we are in essentially a holding pattern in Iraq. The surge was designed to create space for the various Iraqi parties to make political deals that are to restabilize the country. And this was done by a military effort that suppressed, or meant to suppress, the most violent Iraqi actors, on the one hand Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which has a foreign leadership, and on the other hand the Mahdi Army, the jaish al-Mahdi. And what is happening now is that the military effort has in fact succeeded in reducing the level of violence in Baghdad, and it slowed down the sectarian cleansing that we saw there very heavily in 2006. But, at the same time we have seen absolutely no progress on the political front, and so we are in a holding pattern, and General Petraeus has now succeeded in extending the surge by a number of months until next summer essentially, but just like an airplane circling above the airport, it can perhaps be refueled, but eventually the plane must come down one way or the other, and it will either have a safe landing or it will crash. And in the absence of any serious progress on the political front, I'm afraid that US forces will be compelled to withdraw, or to draw down significantly probably and leave behind total vacuum, total chaos, and the possible disintegration of Iraq.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, so let's take those things one by one... you do concur that the surge has achieved at least some of its tactical military aims in the --?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I think it's in the process of doing that. Yes, it has made progress on the military front, I think that has to be acknowledged. I think also that General Petraeus has managed to persuade the Congress that that was the case.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, and you also say, however, that there has been no progress on the political front, that certainly is to what most, in fact virtually everybody tells me, do you think that there is anything that could produce progress on the political front?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, what we have argued in the past, even after, you know, the report criticizing the Baker/Hamilton report, parts of which we agreed with by the way, is that, you know, there is no solution with the current Iraqi parties in power. They are too weak, too divided, too dysfunctional, and frankly too unwilling to make the kinds of political deals that we are looking for to bring about a sort of new national compact, that would replace the constitution, which is clearly also a sectarian document, with something that is more inclusive. And so we have recommended taking the conflict a step further and away from internal issues, to a regional level, simply because whenever the United States puts pressure on the Shiite parties- Shiite Islamist parties that is to say- to reach out to their opponents across the divide, say Sunni insurgent leaders, these Shiite parties run back to Iran and say, "help, help we are under pressure," and the Iranians are more than willing to spoil any kind of American attempt to stabilize the situation in Iraq because as long as other issues are not resolved from the Iranian point of view they are not going to let the Americans gain any kind of advantage in Iraq. And so we need to take the Iranians out of the equation, or bring them into the equation in a different posture, and this will require serious negotiations between United States and Iran, but this cannot possibly be limited to the Iraq question and would have to include the more broader issues that divide the two countries including of course most importantly the nuclear question. So this is not easy, but we think that short of a change in the Iranian posture, the situation cannot be resolved in American's favor in Iraq.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, what do you think would happen if the United States Simply withdrew?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, if the United States withdrew, well it depends on when. If it withdrew now, today, the situation would immediately dissolve into total chaos and mayhem. Civil war would take over. There would be in fact three or four civil wars- one is a Sunni-Shiite sectarian one, one an intra-Sunni one, one an intra-Shiite one, and one possibly a Kurdish-Arab one, along the boundaries of Kurdistan. That would be inevitable and immediate. If the United States forces were to withdraw after a period of time, it would depend on what they left behind. If they were able to fill the security, managerial and political vacuums they created in 2003 with something stable, then civil war is not inevitable -- or escalation in the civil war is not inevitable. But that would take time, and, of course the US presence in Iraq causes other problems, in some ways it aggravates the current situation, and further inflames it. So it's a very difficult choice to make, and it's therefore very difficult for us, for example, to say well the United States should stay in Iraq because on balance, almost by default, they still serve a purpose. It's also very difficult for us to say, US forces should withdraw rapidly, because we do see that this would lead to a precipitous decline in the situation.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, let's take the risk of the various civil wars or intra-Iraqi conflicts. I recently spoke about these questions with Nir Rosen, who I think you know, and Nir's view is that actually the risk of major civil war, major internal conflict, has been reduced because ethnic cleansing in Iraq, especially in Baghdad, but else where as well, has proceeded to a point now where there is -- a decisive Shiite victory and there are now several million predominantly Sunni refugees outside of the country, and Iraq is now an overwhelmingly Shiite nation in every way, and that -- as a result there is likely to be increased stability in the place over time. You don't agree with that? Or what do you -- what do you think?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** No, I think Nir is totally and factually wrong on that. First of all Baghdad remains an intensely mixed city still today. It's just wrong to say that there is a Shiite victory. I think there is a potential Shiite victory, and I think if the surge hadn't happened that Shiite victory

would, might already have occurred. But maybe -- thanks to the - well I think, thanks to the surge, the Shiite militias have been unable to accomplish their plan to totally cleanse the city, not ethnically, but in a sectarian way, on a religious basis, of... Sunnis. The mosaic that Baghdad used to be has changed dramatically, but it has become a different kind of mosaic. Now people are not intermingled in neighborhoods, but people have consolidated in their own neighborhoods, which however remain commingled throughout the city. There is no line you can draw, well no single line you can draw, through the city that divides Sunnis from Shiites. They remain totally intermingled. And that is a good thing. But it's also a highly fragile situation that could easily come to an end, and certainly the Shiite militias could then push forward and complete the task, which is still going to create a lot of bloodshed and a lot of fighting. So that is Baghdad. There are other mixed areas and in fact one has to keep in mind that most of Iraq's population lives in mixed areas. You can look at Anbar and say that the people there are all Sunnis. This is correct, but proportionately speaking, not that many people live in Anbar. Mostly people live in mixed areas, and these areas remain mixed until this day.

It's a very uneasy relationship now, no doubt. And what the surge has done is to subdue the sectarian conflict and aggravate the intra-Sunni and intra-Shiite conflicts. The surge has encouraged Sunni sheikhs, and I'm not saying the Americans have encouraged this -- the surge has encouraged Sunni Sheikhs to stand up to Al-Qaeda, and that conflict has escalated, with some success here and there...and also setbacks. And the pressure on the Mahdi army has encouraged the Sadrists to lash back against the Supreme Council, which, of course, is allied with the Americans. We have seen a number of assassinations that appear to have been carried out by the Sadrists. We have seen clashes in Karbala that clearly were set off by the Sadrists. And so this conflict, which is essentially a class conflict, is also increasing. Now if American forces withdraw, we can easily see a recurrence of the sectarian conflict, or an intensification of the sectarian conflict, but I don't think we will see a disappearance of the intra-Shiite conflict. I think this, in fact, is something that's going to be defining the Iraqi future- this intra-Shiite conflict. And we may see a realignment within the Sunni camp to defend Sunnis against, what is seen as, an Iranian onslaught through the Shiite militias. And a Kurd-Arab conflict may take place as the

Kurds see an opportunity to push when the central government collapses totally in the wake of an American withdrawal. So, I see very much conflict in the future. I don't agree at all with Nir that the issue has been settled, far from it.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I see, okay. And you think that if the Americans withdrew without substantial improvement in the internal political situation, that the result would be very bloody.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Yeah, inevitably.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I see...okay. That certainly does seem to be the majority opinion, much spoken on --

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I hate to be part of the conventional wisdom, but this is our view and we have people on the ground in Iraq who report to us daily and this is certainly the sense we are getting.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Yeah. Now there are, of course, many people, primarily Americans that, not only Americans, who say that United States should simply withdraw anyway, is that --

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Yeah, yes.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** -- that -- yes it will be bloody when the United States leaves, but by staying we are only postponing the inevitable -- there is nothing that the United States can do that will fundamentally change the structure of the situation and so it's better to leave now, rather than later because in some ways the United States presence makes things worse. What do you think of that view?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, I find it highly irresponsible. These are people who, like me, probably were against the war in the first place. But as such, if you were against the war and against the Bush administration, why take your anger out on the Iraqis? The fact is that in April 2003, the situation in Iraq totally changed because of the US invasion, and whether we like it or not the war did happen, and US forces were on the ground. It was against our will. But now they are there, and to withdraw them now would be extremely dangerous because the situation has changed. And so I find it highly irresponsible; it is totally a sort of American navel-staring kind of approach by narcissistic people that has nothing to do with the well-being of Iraqis. And I find it very, very irresponsible. I'm very concerned

with what happens to Iraq and what happens to Iraqis who were the victims in 2003 and will be the victims again now.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay. And what do you think the prospects are for the United States actually being able to affect some change in the internal Iraqi situation in a way that leaves behind, or creates a more stable structure, so that if and when the United States withdraws, either partially or totally, that there will be a stable government and there won't be a civil one?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, it will be extremely difficult and it may well fail. But unlike the critics, I don't say that failure is inevitable. I only say that a precipitous withdrawal would inevitably lead to further chaos and the breakup of the country, which would then lead to a regional war, which would then force the United States to come back in greater numbers. So it doesn't serve American strategic interests to withdraw from that point of view either. But I do think that as long as there is even a glimmer of hope, that things can be somehow stabilized in Iraq, then we should try that. But at the same time I believe that the United States should indicate that it has no long term intentions to remain in Iraq. At the same time it shouldn't probably give a narrow time table for withdrawal because to box itself in is also not wise. But the principle has to be clear that the United States has no interest in staying in Iraq and that, in fact, it wants to withdraw from Iraq and the rest of the Middle East and leave political matters to be decided by the people of the Middle East.

But in this interim period, as long as a security vacuum exists, the United States continues to play a role and this would have to consist of working with Iraq's neighbors to set up a regional security framework and an alliance of neighbors that have one thing in common, which is that none of them wants Iraq to fall apart. All of them would be harmed grievously if Iraq fell apart. This is a very important basis to work on and they could do so if the willingness was there. But then we go back to the one real issue that is aggravating existing conflicts in the Middle East, and that is the US-Iranian rivalry. And so we must see some kind of solution to some of the key questions on that front. If that fails then I think all hope is lost for Iraq and then there would be no more reason for the United States to keep forces on the ground there, but we are not there yet. That issue remains unresolved, and I think a

concerted effort should be made not to bomb Iran, but to find a negotiated solution to the very difficult question of its nuclear program.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And how do you think that could be done? I mean I -- I am personally extremely skeptical that there is anything that the United States or the West can offer the Iranians that would induce them to stop.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, that is not clear. The Iranians have in the past given clear indication that they were ready to talk about these things and even willing to talk about a grand bargain. I am not saying that had those talks begun they would have led to a grand bargain, but at least there was a willingness and it was an initiative of the Iranians. It was rejected in 2002 by the Bush administration as it was preparing for war with Iraq, the purpose of which, I think, was to send a signal to the Iranians that they should desist from developing nuclear weapons. The signal was lost because of America's failure in Iraq, and now the Iranians are much stronger than they were five years ago.

At the same time the Iranians are acutely aware of being encircled by pro-American regimes or countries that have US boots on the ground. And so they have a need to develop weapons such as nuclear weapons. The Iranians will need certain guarantees. They also want to be readmitted into the international community in various ways. A grand bargain is still a possibility, but I think that as long as we have Dick Cheney in the White House, and, you know, other neo-cons still putting pressure on this administration -- any kind of negotiated solution to the Iran question is in fact impossible. Maybe we have to wait for a new administration to come to power, unless somehow the tipping point is reached within this administration and serious talks are begun. I don't see it.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Again though, on the question of what the Iranians are interested and would be willing to do and could be induced to do...I -- it doesn't seem clear to me at all that it is in Iran's interest to have Iraq stabilized. In fact, I think there is a very strong argument that it's in Iran's interest for Iraq to remain in its unstable, dangerous, violent condition. Iranian influence is already high. It will remain high for the foreseeable future. The United States has half of its military pinned down there in a way that cripples America's ability to act in a credible way militarily anywhere else in the

world. It's enormously expensive and embarrassing for the United States. It almost guarantees that military reaction against Iran will be impractical. What -- what do you think about that?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I think the Iranian interest is that Iraq remain unified, friendly and relatively weak, certainly without weapons of mass destruction. I don't think it's an Iranian interest to have Iraq highly unstable. That said, for the moment the Iranians want Iraq to remain somewhat unstable. They want to keep things at a low boil in order to keep American forces tied down and on the defensive, as long as the Iranian conflict with the United States is not resolved. But I think in the longer term it is very dangerous for Iran if Iraq is destabilized because it may not control the outcome of that destabilization and Iraq may well fall apart. This would create serious problems for Iran, which has many minorities; this could have a very dangerous boomerang effect. So while, Iran, at the moment, has an interest in keeping things in Iraq somewhat destabilized, I don't think in the long term it has an interest in doing that. I also think, ironically, that Iran has an interest in American forces staying in Iraq. I think the Iranians are very worried that if American forces withdraw, Iraq will collapse, and that Iran would then have to fill the vacuum that American forces leave behind and I don't think Iranian leaders know how to do that.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** What would they have to fill that vacuum. It's not --

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Somebody has to fill the vacuum. The vacuum has to be filled.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Why?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** This is a fact of nature.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Why -- why would it not be perfectly satisfactory for Iran, from a very ruthless, self-interested point of view to have an Iraq that is in chaos, that has no effective Central government, that evolves into a warlord society, but one which is, however, dominated by various Shiite groups that would need Iranian support and money?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Because the stakes are so high- oil- and because all the neighboring states have what they consider proxies in Iraq that are fighting each other. In other words, what we are seeing today is a recurrence of the Iran-Iraq war, but now not between Iran and Iraq, but between Iran

and Iraq's former sponsors, over the corpse of Iraq, if you will. And if any of these neighboring states, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, feel that their proxies are faltering, they may have to back them up directly, either with putting boots on the ground or paying someone else to go in there in the Saudi case. And that would lead to a direct confrontation between these states, and this is certainly not in their interest; none of these states wants to get into direct confrontation with the other, but they may be dragged into it against their will. And this is what everybody fears and that's what everybody is talking about in the region.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay. Is it not the case though that -- that this could be quite nicely avoided, from the Iranian's point of view, simply by forcing the United States to keep 50,000 to 100,000 troops in Iraq indefinitely for another 10, 20 years?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** That's right, that's right, and that's why some people in the United States, cleverly, have suggested that the US should withdraw its troops just to force Iran's hand. It's a nice idea, but the consequences could be disastrous. But it is true. But the Iranians, of course, know also that American domestic opinion has turned against a prolonged American presence in Iraq and that American forces are going to withdraw sooner or later, as I think they will. It's not -- it's not a long-term option for the Iranians. So, I think the Iranians have an interest in talking to the Americans about Iraq. The fact that they did agree to talk with the Americans is very significant; they didn't have to.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Well, it was you know, I don't know how significant it was -- it was clever, it -- bought them some credibility in the international community and in the region. I don't -- you know, how serious they were about what they wanted to say, I think is very open to question.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Yeah, I think they wanted to score some rhetorical points, for sure, and use this, and they have. But I'm not too sure that the Iranians had to talk. They could easily have avoided it and gotten away with it. They have scored points in other places as well. I think the Iranians also realized they may have reached the limits of what they can achieve in the region; they don't want to be known as a Shiite power, they don't want to be known as a Persian power. They want to be known as a regional superpower, but this would set some constraints on their behavior in Lebanon, in Palestine, in

Iraq and also in Afghanistan. They have to be very careful about how they project themselves. And so this is something that United States could use, but -- and I think we have seen an attempt to use it -- the Bush administration is divided and so the attempt has not been sincere. It's been a trial balloon if anything.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Yeah. Okay, do you think that there is anything the United States can do to improve the internal, not just political, but administrative, governmental, technocratic, and military security policing situation inside Iraq? Or do you think that's now out of America's control?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** It's very, very difficult, because at the national level the government is very weak because it actually, despite having won two elections, has no popular support, except in Kurdistan, but that's a special issue and even that is contested. But so to the extent that the Americans are building up Iraqi security forces, they are basically arming potential factions in the civil wars that will break out or escalate or whatever term you want to use.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Now I would include the Iraqi army in that statement not just --

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Very much so -- very much so -- not just the police, but also the army. Now I think the Bush administration has recognized this and therefore has started to focus on making local deals and building up local forces. But the risk of that strategy is that in fact you are promoting warlordism, especially because you don't have a long-term political strategy for Iraq, again because there is no regional framework. And so what is happening now is that some Sunni sheikhs are being empowered, the Supreme Council is being empowered, but this is only going to lead to further intra-communal conflict, and it is not doing anything to generally bring down the levels of violence. And so again I don't see a viable internal strategy unless it is wedded to a viable regional strategy.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Some people have spoken to including some educated, secular, usually democracy-prone Iraqis have advocated a military coup and -- and the imposition of martial law following a military coup. What do you think of that as an idea?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, who would carry out a coup? The only army in Iraq is the American army. There is no Iraqi army that is strong enough to carry out a coup. As I said, the army will

fracture immediately into warring factions, and the coup proposal, which was popular actually more than a year ago and it has now largely faded, was being banded about especially in Jordan and maybe some other places among secular Iraqis, educated ones, clever ones, mostly Sunni ones, but not exclusively so, who very much wanted -- their argument was that Iraq could not be a democracy and that the only viable option was a Saddam regime without Saddam, one that was not as cruel, - more like Jordan. And, you know, it's the Arab regimes that have argued for the same. Their favorite person is Iyad Allawi, who is in fact a little Saddam, but who has proven to be completely incompetent, totally corrupt and totally discredited among the Iraqi people inside Iraq. And so there is no clear alternative to that, but the main thing is there is no one who could bring about such a coup. There is no organized military force that could do it except the Americans and the Americans have already made their choice.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** So -- so you think that -- that there is no way that, for example- former Army officers now in Jordan and Syria would be able to command enough support in the existing Iraqi army to -- to be able to insert control over the country?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Absolutely not, the only support they have is with the insurgency groups because that's where their colleagues are. Very few of their colleagues are in the new Iraqi army. The Iraqi army consists now of former Badr militia members and Kurds. Some Sunnis have been brought back in, but these are the minority and they could never carry out a coup, never.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I see, okay. So your characterization of the Iraqi Army now is that it's fractured geographically and ethnically?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** No -- I wouldn't put it that way. Along ethnic and sectarian lines, yes.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I wouldn't call -- I wouldn't say geographically.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Oh, okay, well Nir, for example, asserted to me that -- that there are no major units of the Iraqi army who would be loyal beyond their immediate regional boundaries, so you

don't think that -- that is necessarily true. You think that it's primarily a matter of -- ethnicity and confessional affiliation.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, I think it's both true in the sense that it is -- it is primarily along ethnic and sectarian lines, but as the country is convulsed in violence you may well see a further breakdown into local groups. We have already seen it in some areas. I mean, the tribal sheikhs are essentially local power brokers, local warlords, and we will see it elsewhere as well. This is also one reason why I think this whole notion of soft partition, which should never be a prescription for moral reasons, also is not the likely outcome. I think it's a very unlikely outcome because what we are seeing is total fragmentation and not a division between Sunnis and Shiites, and Kurds and Arabs.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** So -- so the Sheikhs being supported by the Americans now have their own military forces?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** No, well, military forces is a big word. I mean the sheikhs have their own armed people -- you can call them militias, I guess. They arm their people. Thus they become militias and so there are a many of them, and they are not unified. And they are all protecting their own little territories, and that's all they probably are capable of doing and are willing to do.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Yeah, yeah. Okay, and what do -- what do you think of the way the Bush administration is now conducting itself in Iraq? Do you think that -- that it's doing a better job than it used to doing? Do you think that it's doing things reasonably well? Poorly? What could it be doing better?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** It is doing terribly. It lacks a political strategy. If it had a political strategy, I would say now we have something to work with, let's do it. But to have a military strategy without, at the same time, a political strategy is disastrous and I think even Petraeus has pointed that out.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Okay, so and what do you think of its military strategy? Competent, well executed, not --?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well you know, there is no such thing as a perfect military strategy. You could criticize this military strategy on a number of fronts. I have no doubt about that, but you

know, the success of a military strategy is so completely wound up with a political strategy that, you know, you can't look at it in isolation and say it's not working. It's not working because there is no political strategy that goes along with it. It cannot succeed without that, and so you can point at certain progress on certain fronts, and that's fine and well, but it's totally ephemeral, and it's pointless to continue this way as long as there is no political strategy that is simultaneous and tightly woven in with it.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And the critical element of the political strategy is engaging with the Iranians.

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Yes, there is the bottom line. I would say it was the regional states, but that actually does mean US - Iranian talks have to make progress, yes.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Yeah, yeah. Okay, what do you think is actually likely to occur, not with the --?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I think that the most likely scenario is increased fragmentation as the surge peters out over time, in the next six to nine months with a drawdown of American forces and certainly of British forces. Escalating conflict in various areas of Iraq, further fragmentation, and further conflict by proxy involving the neighboring states, and over time this can then lead to direct conflict between the neighboring states. And that I think, you know, could -- could lead to a very, very dangerous situation in the region.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And what do you think will be the consequences of refugee flows? The large number of refugees in Jordan and Syria, lesser numbers in other places. What do you think is going to happen as a result of the presence of those refugees?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Well, the situation there is fragile but stable at the moment. Jordan is not letting in any more refugees. Some may already have left, may have moved on to Egypt or other places. Not many, but in any case, no new ones are coming in. Syria has also put new restrictions in place, so it's harder for Iraqis to move to Syria. Should the situation deteriorate sharply in Iraq, new refugee flows will move towards the borders, but very likely the borders will be sealed closed, and

refugees will be stranded in the desert where they will either have to turn back or move in to tent encampments that the international community would facilitate. So, I don't see refugees destabilizing the neighboring states at this point.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And how about their long-term presence? It's difficult for me to imagine that large numbers of those people are going to want to go back to Iraq anytime soon. You know, most people that I speak to think that the -- the people who already left and they are now leaving in either Jordan or Syria are likely to remain there for years, possibly decades. Do you think they are going to have any effect on those societies, and if so, what do you think that effect will be?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** It's very hard to say. I mean, of course these regimes will try to gradually assimilate these populations into their own. I mean that has happened with the Palestinian refugees as well. Of course many are still in camps, and there are still problems. But by and large, the Palestinian refugees in Jordan and in Syria have become part of the landscape, and it may even be a positive thing for Jordan, for example, that Iraqi refugees will dilute the majority Palestinian population in Jordan, which is an existential threat, in some ways, to the Jordanian regime and to the trans-Jordanian presence. So it's not necessarily a negative thing, it's the process, it's how it is accomplished that is difficult to manage, and this is where the Jordanians will want to act very carefully.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And how about Syria?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Syria I don't know enough about, so I would hesitate to say something about it.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Yeah, all right. Do you speak with people in the United States government about these things?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** Of course. On an ongoing basis.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And what do they say when you tell them what you said to me?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** There might be a sort of pained recognition of the realities that are upon us. I found this now for the last year or two, and this is true wherever I speak, which is at the State Department where I give roundtable discussions, where officials of the State Department, but also the

Pentagon and various agencies are present- at the National Security Council, and on the Hill. And so, I find an audience, a ready audience for my analysis and I find also the response, “well what can we do? We are locked into a very difficult situation.”

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** When you advocated engaging with the Iranians?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** There is -- I certainly find an echo, but there are still very powerful forces that are opposed to that, or they say that it's just not possible, or that it is not realistic, or as you say that the Iranians are not particularly interested in coming to a deal on the nuclear issue. They may be right, you may be right. I don't know, but I think it should be tried, because if we don't, then I think the consequences will be dire.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And what did they say when you say that? When you say “yes it is bad, it is difficult -- it might not work, but you have to try.” What’s the response?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** It's hard to say. Generally people, the officials I meet with, they accept the analysis. They may quibble with certain points, with certain ways of looking at it. I think they prefer to continue to work through the current government of Iraq and the constitution, mostly because they have invested so much in it. We say that it's time to depart from that approach and take it to a regional level. So, I think, generally that we tend to agree on what ails the place, but the current preference is to go with the security plan of Baghdad, with the surge, with Petraeus, with working with the current government as long as it is going, and as long as it has some chance of success. It's just that we argue that's it is unlikely to lead to success. I think that is where we differ.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Have you spoken to Secretary Rice or to Secretary Gates about these questions?

**JOOST HILTERMANN:** I personally have not. The head of my organization, Gareth Evans, has met with Secretary Rice – I can't remember if he has met with Secretary Gates as well, I don't think so -- but so -- these concerns are communicated. Of course these discussions, at that level, cover a number of issues, not just Iraq, and so it tends to be, you know, when it concerns Iraq, it's fairly brief. But that's all I can say about that.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Okay thank you, anything else you would like to add?

JOOST HILTERMANN: No, except that we are in a very tight spot. I'm just -- what I'm worried about is that I see the American public wanting to get out and I fully understand it. I'm fully sympathetic to it even. Coming also from the position where I was, where I totally opposed this war because it was done on false pretenses, it was done in a wrong way, everything else. But I just think it's totally irresponsible now to seek a quick withdrawal, and I think what the American public should do is force the Bush administration to do the right thing. And we need to work out together what that is, that is what the challenge is.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay, all right thank you very much -- very much.

JOOST HILTERMANN: That's all right, my pleasure, and still congratulations with the success of your film. I think it has done really well. I have yet to see it, but your colleague sent me a copy and as soon as I have fully moved in with my appliances and equipment, I will actually be able to view it.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. All right, well let me know what you think. I would be very interested in your reaction.

JOOST HILTERMANN: All right, we will do. Thanks very much.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Thank you.

JOOST HILTERMANN: All right, all the best, yeah bye-bye.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Bye-bye.

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