

Interview with Omar Feikeiki

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us your first name.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Uh, Omar.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us your life story. Where you were born, raised; where you went to school; and then we'll get to what you've been doing for the last several years.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: I was born in, uh, Baghdad, in 1978. Uh, I was born to a family with, um, political background. Um, my father, uh, was a politician in the, uh, '50s and '60s. Uh, my uncle was also a politician and an, was in the Iraqi, um, uh, opposition, in London, but he died in nineteen-se-, ninety-seven. Um, uh, all my, uh, all my, um, uncles and aunts are, um, either doctors, engineers or, uh, painters, artists. But they all write, uh, in newspapers and write books.

Um, that's, that's where I got the, uh, uh, will to, to be a journalist. Um, I think so; it's inherited in my family.

I was, uh, raised in Baghdad. Um, I never, uh, I never le-, I, one, uh, one time I left, uh, Iraq, uh, in '92, to Jordan. And that was the only time I left Iraq until the, uh, invasion, 2003, when it became more, um, easier to leave the country, to vacations, and, uh, that's it.

So, um, uh, mostly I was imprisoned in Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us where you went to school, what you studied.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: I, um, studied English literature and language in, um, at [Tarot] University College. It's a private college in, uh, in Baghdad. Um, I studied there for, uh, four years. Uh, and I got a Bachelor Degree in English.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Now tell us what happened during the war and after the war; how you came to be a journalist.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Well uh, nine days after the, um, uh, American forces entered Baghdad — uh, April 9th — I believe, uh, uh, eh, let's say April 17th, uh, 2003, I went to the Palestine Hotel, where,

uh, um, the journalists were, most of the journalists were based during and after the war. I went there to, uh, um, try to get a phone, um, to call my relative in London, and, and tell them we survived the war.

Um, and um, there I met, um, one of the w-, uh, foreign reporters, uh, trying to talk to Iraqis; struggled, because he didn't speak Arabic; they didn't speak good English. So I, uh, volunteered to, uh, translate for her. And it was the first time in my life I speak to, uh, a native English speaker.

Um, then, uh, it, uh, I translated for, um, nn-, uh, one hour and a half. And then it started to be, uh, to get dark. I asked her to go, uh, I, I just said, um, okay, I'll, I'll leave now. And she introduced me to, um, my newspaper's bureau chief in Baghdad, and he offered me the job. And uh, I started, uh, April 18th with them. And I'm still doing it.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Now tell us what you think of the war and the occupation; all that.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Well {sigh}. I was, I graduated, uh, in 2002. And um, as most of the, um, Iraqi youth, I had no, um, future plans, because, uh, under Saddam Hussein the, uh, the government, um, planned for my future. Um, I wasn't able to leave the country, to start my own, uh, uh, career in anything. I wasn't able to start journalism here, because the journalism under Saddam wasn't what I wanted to do. Um, I didn't want to be a journalist directed by the government, and just a mouthpiece for the government, so I didn't have a fu-, a future. I just was waiting for the war to happen, because it was the only ray of hope I, uh, I had to look for.

Um, and when it happened, I was, uh, excited, uh, that things will move, um, slowly, but, um, towards a better, uh, circumstances.

Um, I, I, I, I, I don't want to say I'm frustrated now. I, I, I am not s-, frustrated yet, um, to the extent to, uh, um, hate, um, what happened in 2003. But I'm still waiting for the better future and circumstances for this country to happen. Uh, no signs of it yet.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What is life in Baghdad like now?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Every day is a, is a struggle to survive. Uh, you don't know, uh, if by accident, you're caught in crossfire, or um, a car bomb explodes ne-, close to your car; um, assassinations;

um, it doubles the, uh, risk for me, because I'm a journalist working for a foreign, uh, American newspaper. Um, I have to look into the side mirrors, and uh, uh, d-, uh, uh, when I drive, to see if anyone is chasing me.

Uh, mm-, I live in a very, um, let's say, uh, unstable neighborhood. It's a Sunni neighborhood, uh, in Western Baghdad, uh, where shootings is just normal.

So, but the problem is, not the problem: what makes it different for me is whenever there's shooting outside my door, my door, I believe, or I think, it's people coming after me. So it's very, it's a very tense, uh, life I'm, I'm living.

But it's not only me. It's, uh, many, uh, I would say majority of Iraqis are living this, um, chaos. Uh. Oh, I, I, I didn't lose hope yet.

CHARLES FERGUSON: You say the majority of Iraqis. As you probably know, the American military maintains that there are only three or four provinces where there's a lot of violence, and the rest of Iraq is peaceful. Is that in fact your experience? Do you think that's true?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Um, a di-, uh, it, it depends on how we, um, explain it. Uh...it's like Baghdad. I, I believe, uh, the west part of Baghdad is controlled by, uh, insurgents. And the rest of Baghdad is controlled by, uh, militias. It's, it applies, um, on Iraqi as a whole: the west part and the north part of Baghdad, of Iraq, is controlled by, uh, are controlled by, uh, insurgents. The rest of Iraq is controlled by, uh, militias, whether Kurd, Kurdish militias, whether Shiite militias.

We, we can't call it the, the, uh, the quiet par-, relatively quiet part of Iraq are not safe. They are just quiet because militias are terrifying people, and to control the cities. They are not safe; they are quiet.

Eh, in the west, people, uh, uh, people are, uh, terrified by the insurgents. That's why they stay in their homes. But the insurgents, um, um, conduct the, um, uh, insurgents, uh, and operations. And that's why we hear about the bombings. It's not quite in the west. Or, or, or [they're] not. But it's not safe; any, any part of Iraq. Um, um, except for Kurdistan, because it's, it's, it's quiet and controlled for 14 years; it's a real state, separate state, for 14 years.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah. Back to life in Baghdad. What is it like to live in Baghdad now? Tell us about your own personal life over the last three years: what it's been like to live; what it's been like to work; what it's like for your family. Do you make enough money? What are your life circumstances? How do you spend your spare time, if you have any?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Well, uh, I, I live for the day. I don't have, uh, future plans for being in Iraq. Because there is no, uh, I don't see the, uh, bit of light in the, uh, at the end of the tunnel yet. Um, so I live for my day. I, I just come to work; um, uh, do my job; and even if I have spare time, I, I spend it sleeping. I don't have any place to go to, uh, after work. And that's why I used to work seven days a week; um, at least 14 hours a day: uh, because otherwise, I don't have anything to do.

Uh, my family, uh, lives, um, just...just to survive. Uh, like, uh, my parents, uh, spend the whole day in, in tension and worried about me and my other brothers; if they are coming back or, or not. Um, uh, the only fun thing we do is, uh, when we sit, uh, um, on dinner, and, and chat about the, also the daily life and the risks, uh, we have.

B-, uh, we, we started to joke about our life. Because it, uh, it is becoming a joke, uh, when, uh, when, w-, uh, when we started to laugh about, uh, someone telling us a situation where he was caught in, in, in a car bombing scene, I knew it's, it's, it's getting really, uh, frustrating. Because when you laugh on a story told by someone about a bombing scene, where people are, uh, crying and shouting, uh, b-, unconsciously, that's, that's, that's wrong. But that's what we have to talk about.

Uh, we don't have clubs to go to; we don't have, um, normal streets, where we go to shop. Even when I go clothes shopping, I go do it in 30 minutes. Uh, before the war, I used to go in groups with my friends, um, to spend a time doing window shopping or real shopping, and then we go to have dinners at restaurants, and I don't, I don't go back home, uh, until one a.m., two a.m. Not that the shops were open that time, but we just spent time in the streets, um, uh, and then go back home, and I find my, um, my hou-, my, my door in my house opened for me.

Now we close the door at eight, with the curfew. Uh, we, we, we lock the door at eight, because we don't expect anyone to go out or to come back to the house after eight, or 7:30.

Uh, in addition to the, uh, in addition to the, uh, services, we don't have, uh, uh, electricity; we don't have, um, stable running water. We don't have fuel. Um, uh, like we spent winter, uh, shivering, uh, and, and, uh, uh, covered in blankets, because we didn't have enough fuel to operate the, um, heaters. That's, that's, that's the life we live. But it, we, we, we're used to it now.

Uh, when you ask, uh, that's, that's why when I go report in the streets, when I ask Iraqis about, uh, their life, uh, they are very hopeful. But in fact, they seem helpful, uh, hopeful, but in fact, they are not. They are just, there is na-, not much worse than this, uh, to expect. So they just expect to, uh, the situation to improve, because it doesn't go worse than, than what is it, what it is now.

CHARLES FERGUSON: It could get worse, though, and in fact, most people expect it to get worse, don't they? Most people expect the violence here will continue to increase. No? Yes?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Well, I, I hear them talking about a possible civil war. But in fact, it started a year ago. Since, uh, the, uh, new government took place, um, uh, when, if we go back on, on, on, uh, to our archives, we'll, we'll see how assassinations, um, u-, um, according to, uh, ethnic backgrounds and religious backgrounds increased since April, late April, uh, 2005.

Uh, the only thing I think will increase is the, is that the civil war will be more obvious. And people will talk about it more. Now, Iraqis' pride prevent them from talking about the civil war, because the term is just ugly; to say I, uh, I expect my Ira-, because it's, Iraq, Iraqi community and society is very mixed; uh, through marriage, through, mm-, uh, w-, uh, work, whatever. And that's why they don't want to talk about possibility of people fighting each other. But in fact, they are fighting each other.

Although it's not the same civil war, uh, we've heard about in Lebanon. It's now more, I don't like, uh, any[way] to call it civil war; it's ethnic cleansing. It's militias; um, belong to a certain ethnic, uh, uh, background, or religious background, killing the other side. Uh, and it's c- increasing. Average of 10 to 12 bodies found in, in, in Baghdad alone, every day. For, uh, unknown people, uh, their hands tied and blindfolded and shot in the head or the chest.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes. In fact, tell us what happened in your neighborhood two days ago, four days ago.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Um, it's not my neighborhood. It's, um, close to my neighborhood; adjacent to my neighborhood. Uh, w-, w-, we hear, uh, I read, in, in, um, I, I believe a British newspaper, uh, quoting, um, also, uh, a police officer in other neighborhood; uh, 14, uh, bodies, uh, were found. And um, there were, I, their Ids were attached to their chests. And their, all their names were Omar.

Omar is a very Sunni name. Although some, some Shiites name Omar, but not to the extent we say it's a Shiite name; it's a, it's a very Sunni name. Um, uh, in, in the Islamic history. And, and to, to hear that Omars were killed because they were Omars; their names were Omar; what else we could call ethnic cleansing? What else we could call, uh, the situation has become...uh...like, impossible to solve?

Uh...nn-, nn-, people are now being killed for months now. We hear people saying, and, uh, uh, uh, political parties saying, people are being killed according to their identifications. Uh, uh, fake checkpoints; in the streets; driving cars or whatever; people passing. And looking to their Ids. And see if they were Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs. And either kidnap them or kill them in the same place. That's, that's just not the Iraq we expected in March 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us what your observation of Iraq has been since April of 2003: what did it seem like immediately after the war, and what happened since? How has this progressed since?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: I have seen people, myself; I have seen people, uh, happy; um, welcoming the, um, uh, coalition troops. I have seen them myself, even in my neighborhood. Because we thought everything is planned; everything is prepared. Uh, eh, uh, a dictatorship is removed, and there is a government to take place, at least for three, six months, or, or a year, just to replace the government so law could be, uh, um, imposed on the community.

S-, times, uh, the time, time passed. And we didn't see any progress. The only thing, the only progress we found is the uncontrolled freedom looters had to loot all the governmental buildings, and even private-owned companies. That was, that was one of the mistakes after the, uh, invasion. Um, the he-, the, the, the most, uh, I don't know if I could say the word "silly."

The most, uh, silly mistake, uh, was to out-throw, or topple a government without having a replacement. And, uh, until now, we don't have a real government. Uh, w-, uh, we have parties gathered, and every-, everyone, um, is talking to, according to their interest. But si-, bu-, after they overthrew, uh, uh, Saddam Hussein and his government, they didn't have any replacement for that.

What did they expect? A country this, uh, ethnically diverse, religious, uh, b-, uh, uh, uh, differences; without a government, without a law to impose; what did they expect to have? Looters in the streets, and we saw, we saw that.

And it's not, it's not the first time that happens in, in Iraq. It happened in the '40s and in the '50s. We have a history of, of, uh, people uncontrolled. And we've seen; history tells us what happened, uh, uh, when, when, uh, w-, when law disappeared in, in, in, in Iraq.

What, what we saw after the invasion was everyone goes to the street, and does whatever he or she wants. Um, Iraq is not considered in, in, in, not the majorit-, nn-, nn-, the majority of Iraqis are not educated enough to rule themselves, for decades. And I'm not talking now of Saddam Hussein only. Uh, even before that. Since the state of Iraq, we had only dictatorships. Therefore, generations of Iraqis...are, uh...uh, taught how to follow the rules. They weren't taught how to rule themselves. Uh, they weren't told how to plan for themselves. We always had gover-, uh, before the 2003, we always had governments to tell us what we do. We don't have this mindset of, of planning for ourselves, of respecting the law. We had to fear the, the legislator, uh, le-, legislature, to, um, we didn't abide by the law. We feared the, uh, punishment.

And that's what we, uh, uh, what Iraq lacked after the invasion. There wasn't punishment. Therefore, there is no law. There was, maybe there was law, but people didn't abide by it, because there wasn't pu-, punishment.

And that was one of the mistakes. Uh, we are suffering it still, 'til now. They thought democracy will make people happy and controlled. But no: democracy needs rules. Democracy means, uh, uh, uh, uh, everyone should impose dictatorship on himself and his family. To be democratic to

others. Um, I have to be dictator on myself, not to break the law, so that my neighbor could, uh, took, could, could enjoy this law, and could, could joy, enjoy this, um, uh, uh, atmosphere.

But they just gave us, uh, uncontrolled freedom. I like to call it this way. Uh, still, we, we only ha[d] uncontrolled freedom.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Otherwise known as anarchy.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Exactly.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I remember I asked you this before, when we first spoke: Do you think it could have different? Do you think that things had to turn out this way, or do you think that it could have been different [than that]?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Uh, well, well I, I don't like to, uh, keep complaining about the, uh, past. One, one, but one thing: if they had, we have been hearing about the Iraqi, uh, opposition since ever; since Saddam took place and killed his people in, uh, '79 and in seventy-uh-eight, and '79. Uh, we have been hearing about the Iraqi groups, uh, gathering in, uh, different places in the world, uh, calling themselves opposition.

Uh, where were they when the invasion, uh, took place? Where were they? Why didn't they, uh, gather a month before the, uh, invasion, and form the government to take over after, after Saddam is thrown, and his regime?

Uh, if they just had, uh, formed this government, and came to us, and said, Saddam is gone, but we're here, pe-, uh, uh, it, it would have been totally different now. Three years of our lives wasted. And many more will be wasted.

Because we don't have any, we don't have any step forward yet. We had, we had three democratic, uh, uh, operations. We had the, uh, the...we had two elections; we had one referendum. But what's the results? We had referendum, uh, um, three months ago, four months ago, almost. Uh, or elections, sorry; four months ago. And we don't have a government yet.

Uh, I think it will be, it will be, I, I have said that before. Uh, f-, from here, we can't change anything, because it's, it's out of control now. The, uh, Ir-, Iraq will need more, um, sacrifices. Iraq, uh,

needs more people, innocent people, to be killed, so that the, uh, average Iraqi, uh, is shocked by the horror of the, uh, of the period we are living, and will be living. Uh, how many years we wasted of our time and our, uh, children time?

They will be shocked and then, uh, realize that kill, killings and assassin-, assassinations are not, um, the, uh, the right way to, uh, establish, um, a government, uh, or establish a country. And then, by then, when they, when they are, when the Iraqis are shocked by this reality, then they'll start the first step. They didn't yet; they haven't.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, there's by now — and I'm sure you know — there's people in the United States have a list of mistakes that the United States is said to have made in the course of planning and executing the war and the occupation. And the major things on that list are — well, it's a long list, actually — but the major things on the list are not having used enough troops; allowing the looting; dissolving the Iraqi army; not securing or destroying conventional weapons caches; excessive de-Baathification; removing too many people, thereby paralyzing government. What do you think of that list? Do you agree with it? Do you not agree with it? What's your sense about those things?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Uh, not having enough American troops, or coalition troops is just, um, something I don't believe in. Uh, the weapons and weapon caches, uh, is just another excuse.

Dissolving the Iraqi army was a huge mistake. The Iraqi army, uh, was the only, the only tool, uh, for the coalition forces to rule the country, to control the country. Uh, of course, I, I, I said that, and they had a government, um, to co-, to take over after Saddam Hussein. Uh, the Iraqi ar-, army will be linked and connected to that government, and the government could have, um, uh, um, uh, ordered the army to do whatever they wanted.

Dissolving hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, uh, who are members in the army was a huge mistake, because, and, and, and they didn't even solve their problem until now. These, uh, c-, eh, I, I can't believe they did that. Hundreds of thousands of families dependent, uh, on, on, on, on the army. They didn't have, uh, an income; they didn't have a source, um, to get money; they didn't have, um, uh,

providers. Uh, children, uh, ba-, w-, women, wives, uh, sisters, fathers, um, stopped eating because they didn't have enough money.

Eh, and that's why I, I think, I believe; that's why many of the, um, Iraqi, former Iraqi army members joined the resistance. They didn't have another source for money. How c-, how could they, uh, provide their families? How could they survive the inflation we have in Iraq?

Uh, anyone could come and give a former Iraqi soldier thousand dollars, just to go and plant an IED, IED. I don't, I don't blame them, surprisingly. I don't. Because they have, uh, bec-, I have a family to provide. And they have a family to provide. It's nonsense to s-, to, uh, consider them criminals.

Uh, no one offered them another job. Uh, they left, for three years now, they left them, well, for two years now, they call[ed] them back. For, for two years, they didn't have any other source, um, to get bread to eat, uh, and survive, um, uh. No one offered them, uh, even, uh, eh, eh, any kind of pension. They offer them maybe 80 dollars pe-, pension, or something like that? Which is...a week? Uh, maybe, uh, uh, b-, bread? Enough for a week?

That's just nonsense. Why do we blame people struggling to get, uh, food for their families, when we don't, when we don't try, even, to help them?

And when they s-, when, when, when Iraqis tell them, tell the government that we need jobs, we were in the army, and now we need jobs, because we don't have, uh, uh, uh, b-, uh, we don't have money to survive; they say, you are insurgents, or you are, uh, not trusted. Uh, you have background in the Iraqi army.

Well, millions of Iraqis were in the Iraqi army. Including people who are in the government now.

Nn-, what, what could they do, uh, else? Iraq had no job opportunities. For those uneducated, they had to go to the army, as in any other place in the world. They can't be blamed for that. They can't be blamed, blamed for, um, having a job to provide their families. That, that was a big mistake.

CHARLES FERGUSON: There's one other major item on the list that I forgot to mention, which is, well actually, there's two, and they're related. One is the militias: allowing militias to grow; not disarming them. And the other is the influence of Iran; involving people early in the occupation; giving power early in the occupation to people who were closely linked to Iran, and of course also to militias.

What do you think of those two issues? Were those significant things, or not? Were they mistakes, or not?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Uh, militias will never be disbanded. That's, that's what I believe. We have a different kind of militia. The obvious ones are, uh, battle troops. Which, uh, politically, um, turned itself to, uh, uh, uh, [UI] organization, civilian politician, political or-, organization. But I don't believe that, of course.

Uh, they, the, the, t-, t-, they're still carrying weapons. And those are, uh, thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands.

We have the Mahdi Army. Um, which is not, which is not armed, always, but it's just, uh, average Iraqis, uh, uneducated Iraqis, poor Iraqis, ready to carry weapons when their, uh...spiritual leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, calls them [in].

And we have the, uh, everlasting, uh, Peshmerga — Kurdish Peshmerga. It's, uh, just, uh...illogical to think these will be disbanded. Because each one, uh, each one of them, uh, protect a huge, uh, influential, uh, political party.

Uh, the Peshmerga, in, uh, in, in Kurdistan will not be disbanded, because this is the only formal, uh, army protecting the region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq, and they don't, uh, trust, um, Arabs to, uh, um, to protect them, or to, um, uh, defend them in, in case of any attack.

So the Peshmerga, w-, uh, is, and will be, in, in Kurdistan always. They, uh, eh, according to the, uh, Iraqi co-, constitution, um, militias have to, uh, disarm themselves and, uh, either join, uh, meld in the Iraqi, uh, army; or turn into, uh, civilian ministries, and be civilian, um, workers.

That was, um, I think a year ago; uh, when they decided this. But it didn't happen yet. And will not happen.

Uh, the, uh, battle troops, uh, hundreds of thousands of people — uh, Shiites; uh, who infiltrated in, you know, the, uh, Defense and uh, Interior ministry; where do they go? These also are, uh, B-, uh, members of families who have to provide themselves. If they want to disband them, that means they'll have, the Shiites have to trust the Sunnis. Uh, because they all work together. And this will not happen. Uh, there's still this, uh, differences between the Shiite political parties and the Sunni political parties. And the Shiites have to, uh, protect themselves from the Sunnis. So they'll have their, uh, uh, uh, militias always.

The Mahdi Army is just, uh, as I said, it's not a real army, but they are ready when someone, uh, when their spiritual leader calls them in.

And those are already, uh, in the, in the community, either, uh, teachers; uh, ba-, uh, uh, shop owners, or, uh, uh, police, eh, officers, policemen. And those will not, not in the soon future, uh, w-, uh, they will not, uh, disappear.

And that's why the Shiites insist on the minister of Interior. Because it includes the better, uh, troops, and the, uh, Mahdi Army. If the Sunnis get the, uh, uh, minister of Interior, that means there will be people fired from the Ministry. Where do they go?

CHARLES FERGUSON: What about Iran's influence on Iraq?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Hm. The influence of, uh, Iran. Uh, that's a fact. Um, we're, uh, we're hearing about, uh, the American-Iranian talks, in Iraq. And ah, I'm surprised by Iraqi politicians saying that, uh, this cannot be true, and this cannot happen, because Iranians shouldn't intervene in the Iraqi affairs, and Americans shouldn't talk to the Iranians; this is an Iraqi internal affair.

And this is just, uh, deceiving ourselves. Iran is controlling the Iraqi government to the bone. Iran is controlling the Iraqi community to the bone. That's the Iranian plan. And it's happening. And if the Americans and Iraqis don't sit on one table with the Iranians, this will continue. And that's why I always said, I always, when I talk to my friends: I always told them: we shouldn't deceive ourselves; we shouldn't lie to ourselves. Iran is in Iraq, and controlling Iraq. If we don't compromise with them, Iraq will be lost.

It's, uh, we're already losing Iraq because of Iran, because of the political and religious influence of Iran on Iraq. We shouldn't continue. We should sit with our...I don't want to call it enemy. We should sit with our, um, neighbors, to ask them not to affect us, uh, anymore. They are our neighbors; they will have their influence in Iraq, uh, we like it or not. Therefore, we have to monitor and observe this influence. And we have to, by anyway, control this influence. We'll, we'll never be able to stop it. But at least we have to observe it, monitor it, and control it.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, there's the questions that I want, but there's, you know, the questions you want. Or the issues you want. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to say something about?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Y-, yeah, about the national, uh, unity government they want...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Please.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: ...to form. Uh, I've, uh, we've been hearing about the national unity government; the Iraqi, uh, politicians are, uh, fighting each other to form. Uh, and I don't understand what, what do they mean by a national unity government. Because the current government, Jafari's government, is a national unity government. We have Kurds; we have Sunnis; we have, uh, Shiites; we have, uh, Arabs; and we have Christians. Uh, and, and, uh, Turkomen. In this, uh, Jafari's government. It is, uh, from outside, uh, for an outsider, this is a national unity government.

The thing they don't want to admit is that there will be no real national unity government unless the government works, works for the interest of the Iraqis. And that's not happening. Uh, if sh-, if, they want to bluff the Iraqis, uh, by the, uh, names and titles. This is a Sunni minister; this is Shiite minister; this is a Kurd president. Uh, uh, and the Iraqis will be bluffed by these names and titles, uh, and believe there is a national unity government. But what did the national unity, Jafari's national unity government give, uh, to the Sunnis? What did it give to the Shiites?

I, I go drive by Shiite neighborhoods now, in Baghdad, and I'm amazed by the...dirty streets. Sewage system is just unbelievable. We had, uh, today rainstorm in, in, in, in Baghdad, a few days ago. And Baghdad flooded with water. What did this national unity government give to Iraqis? What does a

national unity government, uh, expect to give to the Iraqis if they don't even agree on a name for the prime minister yet, for four months now?

The national unity, uh, group of politicians are fighting over a name of prime minister. They don't sit together. They, they, they discuss the political process separately. Or each, uh, friendly, uh, uh, uh...or, uh, uh, each, uh, political ba-, group, who is friendly to another group, sit on one table. But they fight with the other. This will never result in a national unity government.

Uh, by names; yeah, maybe. Omar is, uh, is a minister of, uh, Interior; Ali is the minister of Defense. But the, the, uh, uh, bes-, the, um, performance will never be a national unity performance. Because the politicians...keep this, uh, hatred of years in exile inside themselves, and they want to take revenge, and they are taking revenge.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, actually there is one other question I wanted to ask you. Do you think that the current level of sectarian hatred and sectarian violence, and ethnic cleansing; do you think that that was inevitable, that it was always present in Iraq, and as soon as Saddam was removed that was going to explode? Or do you think that it could have been avoided?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: There was always Sunnis and Shiites, Kurds and Arabs. This is just the mixed community in Iraq. Uh, we used to talk about Sunnis and Shiites. We used to talk about Kurds and Arabs. Uh...the only thing is different now, um, different now is that now we are free to talk about it; we are free to curse Shiites; we are free to curse Sunnis; and we are free to, uh, [UI] Kurds.

Under Saddam, there was a Sunni government. You couldn't talk about the Sunnis, publicly. And you couldn't talk about the Shiites, because that will, uh, create, eh, b-, eh, eh, a conflict and struggle in the community, which would affect the government. So also, you couldn't talk about the Shiites, uh, and uh, in bad terms, publicly.

But that was, um, uh, in Iraq always. I, I heard my family talking about Shiites and Sunnis, in, in the past. I heard about, uh, a Sunni who was hurt, uh, by a Shiite, by words, I mean. Uh, who was, uh, looked down at, uh, uh, a S-, a Sh-, a Shiite who was looked down at by a Sunni.

We always, uh, knew the, the Sunnis, the Sunnis weren't privileged under Saddam. But the people who were privileged under Saddam were Sunnis. Not Shiites. It's different; not all the Sunnis got privileges. But all those who got privileges were Sunnis. Uh, and now, we can talk about it. Now I can tell you about this. Now I can, I can tell my friend who is a Kurd or who is a, an Arab that I am better than you, you are better than me. I hate you, you hate me. Before we couldn't say that.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So you think that it was inevitable that this was going to happen; that these communities were going to hate each other this much, and display so much anger and violence towards each other?

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Yes. Yeah. This is, this is decades of, um, ts-, of hidden differences and hidden, um, unfortunately, it became, uh, uh, hatred; obvious hatred; over the last three years, because the Sunni insurgents killed many Iraqis who were Shiites. And Sunnis, but in general terms, Shiites were killed by Sunnis, and now the Shiites, people who are, who belong to the Shiite Islam are killing Sunnis. And that creates, that's logical; it creates hatred. And this will continue.

CHARLES FERGUSON: You know, if that's the case, how is that consistent with what you said earlier that you thought that this Kurd situation in Iraq could have been avoided if there had been a government, and the Iraqi army had been used to impose order on the country. But at the same time, you said that it was, you just said that it was inevitable that these ethnic tensions and even hatreds would come to the surface after Saddam left. So what do you mean by...

OMAR FEIKEIKI: Uh...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Say more [about that].

OMAR FEIKEIKI: ...[have] we had a government, and law enforced on Iraq, after the, uh, overthrow of, uh, Saddam Hussein's regime, we wouldn't have three years of, uh, um, ts-, killing and car bombings and mortar attacks and assassinations. We wouldn't have three years of Sunni insurgents killing, uh, uh, civilian Iraqis; we wouldn't have three years of militias, ethnic-,uh, -based militias killing civilian Iraqis, innocent Iraqis. And we wouldn't have, uh, people bombing, uh, Shiite shrines.

So there was no, um, there wouldn't be, uh, a reason why Iraqis would hate each other. Uh, the, the, uh, I, I said, um, uh, this was expected to come to the surface, because, um, because of the, uh, unstable, uh, security situation. If, if a Shiite kills a Sunni, of course the Sunnis will hate the Shiites. But if there was law to prevent that, the, uh, people wouldn't, wouldn't, um, fight each other. They don't fight each other yet, uh, because it's, it's now, um, um, organized militias and insurgents', uh, operations.

But I fear, this is my only fear now in Iraq; uh, we have had the worst three years in our lives. But the only fear I, uh, I think of now, and the only development I fear now is, uh, people killing each other in the street, which is, which I don't think will happen, but there is a chance it happens.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Thank you.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: You are welcome.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Thank you very much. Very much indeed.

OMAR FEIKEIKI: You are welcome.