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Research Institute**

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**Panel Six:**

**International Support for State-building in Iraq**

- Matthew H. Tueller, US Ambassador to Iraq
- Alice Walpole, Deputy Special Representative for Iraq of the UN Secretary-General
- Tredene Dobson, New Zealand Ambassador to Iraq
- Farhad Alaaldin, Chairman of Iraq Advisory Council (Moderator)



In his introduction, panel chairman **Farhad Alaaldin** explained that Iraq is in a state of crisis. The current socio-political situation, as reflected by demonstrations and protests across the various governorates, is both complicated and complex. He explained that this panel,

featuring central players from the international community, would examine the contours of this crisis and solicit external perspectives.

**Matthew H. Tueller** focused on the pertinent question of state-building in Iraq. He noted concurrent protests happening in Lebanon and elsewhere, and framed this phenomenon as an important part of the state-building process. “Protests are actually a very healthy thing,” he emphasized, as citizens require viable mechanisms for conveying their needs and desires to political leaders. The prevalence and longevity of these protests reveals that young people, in particular, question the capacity of states to deliver on their promises to serve the people. The demand for jobs and resentment over inadequate services reflects the desire for a state with strong institutions, no tolerance for corruption, and leaders who demonstrate a statesman-like approach toward preserving the sovereignty of the nation. Change and reform are needed, and political leaders must recognize this awakening as an invitation to action.

*“Protests are actually a very healthy thing.” - Tueller*

Tueller went on to express deep concern over the unacceptable levels of violence and intimidation being leveraged against protestors, activists, and journalists. He stressed that the Iraqi government must respect international law and human rights in its response to these protests. If it continues in the wrong direction, Tueller warned, the Iraqi government will lose the critical international support on which it relies. There is also great danger in the use of violence, he emphasized. Protests are messages of hope and expectation from the populace; if these messages are violently suppressed, such tactics may threaten the remaining legitimacy, connection, and trust between the government and its citizens, which are in critical need of repair after 16 years of conflict. He expressed that, under the Strategic Framework Agreement, the U.S. would likely be receptive to requests from the Iraqi government for more training in effective, non-violent crowd control.

In order to maximize the opportunities presented by this crisis, Tueller cautioned the audience against adopting an inordinate focus on amending the constitution. No constitution is perfect, he acknowledged, and engaging in conversation about mechanisms that might facilitate its evolution is essential. However, the amendment process could introduce new concerns, as the existing constitution provides important protections and power-sharing arrangements for some components of the country. Therefore, he stressed that the Iraqi government should focus on addressing more immediate issues presented by protestors. Among these, he highlighted corruption and the perception that citizens are not receiving critical resources from the state because Iraqi wealth is being squandered for the benefit of the few; the electoral law, which is partially responsible for isolating political parties from their constituents, resulting in low voter engagement and a lack of faith in the political system; and the suspected involvement of the Iranian regime in Iraq, which hijacks the ability of the Iraqi people to control their own process. While constitutional reform can be included in the governmental response to these protests, Tueller argued that other objectives are central.

Finally, Tueller addressed concerns about the recent shift in U.S. policy toward Syria, and whether it portends a decline in the commitment of the United States to the KRI, Iraq, and the region as a whole. He reiterated that the former U.S. presence in Syria reflected “relationships of convenience,” as well as the commitment of the United States to answer

the threat posed to the international community by IS. In contrast, Tueller affirmed the ongoing commitment of the U.S. to a prosperous, strong, and secure Iraq. Because Iraq is a key partner of the U.S. in the region, the American government has both a “tremendous interest” and a “moral obligation” to support its transformation into a sovereign state with a fully functional and stable government. He reminded listeners of the Strategic Framework Agreement, as well as the significant resources the U.S. has devoted to supporting Iraq and bolstering its recovery since liberation: \$2.4 billion in total, with \$400 million being dedicated to Nineveh Province. Tueller argued that it is the responsibility of the Iraqi government to ensure the stability of the region in the future.

In her remarks, **Alice Walpole** responded to demands for the UN to supervise Iraq’s constitutional review process, as well as any upcoming elections. She stressed that the UN is present in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government, and that its practice within the country is guided by a Security Council mandate designed to respect and protect the sovereignty of the Iraqi state. Under this mandate, the UN is only authorized to play an ancillary role by advising, assisting, and supporting activities undertaken by the government. The UN may therefore draw on its collective expertise to offer policy advice, help with the electoral commission, monitor human rights, promote gender parity, or facilitate a national dialogue process. However, the ultimate decision-making capacity must remain with Iraqi institutions, as Iraq’s ownership of the process is imperative for the sustainability, legitimacy, and credibility of any changes.

*“Our role is to draw on all our expertise and experience and to give our best advice. [...] The core of this is the respect that we have for Iraq as a sovereign state with its own decision-making process.” - Walpole*

In terms of supporting electoral process reform, Walpole mentioned two distinct objectives. First, it is important that the electorate feel truly represented by members of parliament. The UN would like to help craft legislation that might keep MPs accountable and accessible, and bring them closer to their constituents. Second, striking apathy among youth was a source of grave concern in the last election. In some districts, voter turnout was as low as 10%, reflecting a wholesale disengagement from the political process and any sense of ownership over the country’s future. The UN would like to foster a political process which harnesses the dynamism, activism, and energy of the nation’s youth to shape its future.

In contrast to Tueller, Walpole emphasized the importance of enacting constitutional reforms in response to the recent protests. While she understands the widespread concern that constitutional changes could pose a potential threat to the KRI, she believes this fear is unfounded. From her position in Baghdad, she has not detected a general appetite for reducing the autonomy of the Kurdistan Region or stripping the rights from any Iraqi components. Rather, she sees constitutional reform as an avenue to win more opportunities for the country as a whole. To that end, she advocates for the implementation of an open, inclusive, and substantive national dialogue on this topic. She cautioned the Iraqi government against contenting itself with the adoption of “reactionary measures,” urging it to address the legitimate demands of protestors without allowing the immediacy and urgency of the crisis to overshadow the importance of solid, mature dialogue and incremental, sustainable progress.

Walpole also addressed the importance of women's inclusion in securing Iraq's future. She observed that Iraq cannot afford to ignore 50% of its population, and noted that many talented, motivated experts are included in that number. Iraq's existing problems, she argued, largely stem from ignoring the contributions of citizens who wish to steer it in the right direction. Therefore, the UN is committed to helping silenced demographics find their public voice. "Everybody is needed," Walpole insisted. She also condemned the recent use of violence against protestors, and encouraged the Iraqi government to better utilize its \$2 billion per week income to promote long-term economic development.

Like her fellow panelists, **Tredene Dobson** focused on the relevance of recent protests to Iraq's state-building project. These protests provide evidence that the nation's young people are dissatisfied with the state of their country. Like many of their counterparts around the world, Iraq's youth desire to feel some degree of ownership over their future, and are rising up to demand political and economic change. Although political reforms are necessary, Dobson diverged from her fellow panelists by reminding the audience that the demands of protestors are, first and foremost, socioeconomic. Youth under age 30 comprise 60% of Iraq's population, and nearly half are unemployed or underemployed. Providing jobs for Iraq's youth is, therefore, a critical priority.

While political reforms are difficult and time-intensive, Dobson argued that economic reforms can be initiated immediately, and that short-term economic opportunities can be provided through strategic partnerships. New Zealand's companies are intrepid, she emphasized, and eager to bring their business to the region and develop economic opportunities for Iraq's youth. However, while Iraq professes to want New Zealand's investment in trade, many Kiwi companies have been prevented from expanding to this area. She also noted that many young people are naturally entrepreneurial, and desire an opportunity to be self-made. While this is a difficult prospect in a country without a functioning banking system, support from the World Bank could facilitate rapid change. For such short-term solutions to grow and become sustainable, however, a structure that generates economic opportunity must be built. New Zealand and the international community stand willing to assist in the reform process, but require a commensurate commitment from the government to proceed.

*"We genuinely are a community of nations, regardless of distance and difference. We can come together and support each other in times of real challenge."* - Dobson

Dobson also noted that, in order to secure gainful employment for Iraq's youth, a robust commitment to education is critical. Too many young people are currently displaced, unable to receive an adequate education, and left without the necessary skills to thrive in adulthood. Others successfully complete a tertiary education only to find themselves without jobs. Dobson argued that members of the Iraqi community should have the capacity to think broadly about desirable economic opportunities and adjust their educational aspirations accordingly. Unless demands for education and economic opportunity are met, she warned, Iraq will see a continual cycle of protests.

*"The desires of Iraqis are the same as those of any country in the world: for peace and prosperity."*  
- Dobson