

A Conversation Between American and Iraqi Intellectuals
Baghdad, Iraq – January 16th, 2003

The following discussion took place between several American academics and professors from the College of Political Science at Baghdad University on January 16th, 2003. The invitation for the discussion was made by several senior faculty members of the College and was held without the supervision of Baathist party cadres. The Americans were Stephen Eric Bronner of Rutgers University, Anne Burns, Kurt Jacobsen from the University of Chicago, Michael Thompson from CUNY and the editor of *Logos* as well as Richard Couto, Antioch University and Dusan Bjelic from University of Southern Maine. The names of the Iraqis that participated have been withheld to avoid any form of political reprisal.

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Kurt Jacobsen: There is a point that Colin Powell brought out, when he was asked by the press, persistently asked by the press over the last couple of weeks, “why don’t you release this secret information if you have it?” And he said again, “we don’t know if we can trust Blix,” he didn’t say Blix explicitly, but he said basically we don’t know if we can trust the inspectors to leak the information in some inadvertent way to the Iraqi government, so that they can re-conceal information. That’s the sort of conundrum you’re in, now that also depends on whether or not the information is real—it might be, it might not be.

Iraqi Professor #1: I am just trying to seek the truth. So, correct me if I’m wrong. I remember when someone—I think it was Clinton—accused Iraq or Saddam, of trying to assassinate ex-president Bush in Kuwait. Incidentally, I happened to be outside Iraq at the time and saw a program on CNN with some military expert, and he said that all the evidence was given that certain samples of explosives, which are uniquely used by the Iraqi army, were used in Kuwait and he said: now, I can give you addresses of places in Europe and Washington, from whom you can buy these same explosives and from certain shops. The reporter said to him, don’t you think by doing that, by divulging

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that information don't you think you are defending a dictator against your own democratically elected president, he said I have nothing to do with Iraq or Saddam, what I care is that the White House should not spread lies

Stephen Eric Bronner: I think there is a simple way out, despite the conundrums. It's the United Nations that is supposed to making determined action, not the United States. I mean, that would be the first... It would be incumbent upon the United States to open all it's information for independent confirmation or skepticism, then we would know he either has it or doesn't. Certainly what Kurt said is correct. There is something, I think, important to note and that is there is a certain tradition of this in American politics, going back to Senator Joseph McCarthy, after the war, "I have here a list of Communists, but we're not going to show you what's on the list." Or, I have here, as in the case of Vietnam, we have information we don't have, but we're not going to show it to you. You are going to have to trust us. This is an anti-democratic procedure.

Iraqi Professor #1: I'd like to make two points concerning Iraq, which I know intimately. The first is this, and I don't think the regime would like it to be spread: the people are saying now, especially Arab thinkers outside Iraq, that Bush has chosen Iraq because it is an easy target. People are fed up with the sanctions and they are dehumanized and after the Iraqis resigned to liquidate their non-conventional arms, they are not as strong of a military force as they once were. And this is in fact the case when compared with the situation with North Korea in which you have a defying force, but defying the U.S. every twelve or every twenty-four hours with a new resolution.

And the other point which I want to raise is that I think most Iraqis—I don't know about the leadership, however—would like to see this country go through a peaceful transition of at least a quarter of a century, so that we could reach the living standards we had achieved by 1989. The quality of education is catastrophic; salaries are extremely low; so I don't think that it is true that Iraq is a threat, perhaps the Iraqi leadership because of reasons of dignity, especially dignity in an Arab sense wouldn't admit this much, but I don't think we do pose a threat to our neighbors and reconciliation in Iraq of, say, the Kurdish problem would help in achieving more peace. So what puzzles me is why the American administration doesn't take a constructive line toward the problem of Iraq by removing the sanctions, which—are readily admitted by even by the most Americans—is hurting innocent civilians much more than it is hurting the President Saddam or the

government. And secondly, why shouldn't they put some kind of indirect pressure for sorting out the Kurdish problem, for moving toward democratic transformation. Recently I met with some Libyan journalist and I said: look, there are things which are included in the term of sovereignty such as "regime change" or, especially, if, as the Americans have done, you support a certain opposition group and see them as the establishment. This is a violation of our sovereignty, but I don't think the insistence of human rights and the respect of human rights by the world community is a violation of national sovereignty, otherwise it is clear we are saying that any regime can torture people till they die and other nations should do nothing.

Iraqi Professor #2: I would like to point out to you, through some European cases, three examples in which the U.S. helped direct nations toward democracy without military aggression, without war. Those of Greece, Spain after Franco and Portugal after Salazar. The U.S. put the condition that they could not join the common market, or European market, unless they were democratic, and I as an Iraqi and as a Muslim who respects the sovereignty of Turkey, I think that if it wasn't for the European pressure, the Turkish government might very well have executed Ocalem and this would have created a great danger to Turkey itself because the Kurds would have fought for revenge, so the Turks were being helped through indirect pressures to move toward democracy. Why doesn't the U.S. adopt the same policy toward this poor miserable country which you have played a role in destroying and have played as much of a role in providing biological and chemical weapons—I assure you, I cannot say I promise or I swear, that all such weapons and the means to produce them came initially from the U.S., not a single one came from the Soviet Union or a socialist country.

But in the future even if the Americans, I mean the American army, even if they achieve certain victories in the first phases of any invasion, later on they will pay a high price because this country is full of problems; and some of its problems are related to regional instability. And I will say this, and I do not mind since I have written it in an open letter here in Iraq, I said if the Kurds would like to have an independent state, let them have a separate nation but if the Kurds have a separate state, I think Turkey would be against them. If Turkey was involved against them the Iranians would be involved against Turkey, and U.S. domination and so would Syria. So it would cause series of problems for both for the U.S. It is not necessary for America to create all these problems. You speak about the Shiites, but they are, I confess there is no method of knowing Shi'a opinion, but my impression from the streets is

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when we're in Lebanon rather than for Mr. Chalabi who is highly respected by the American lobby, and by American Congressmen. I think if the Shi'as were to vote in Iran they would vote 90 percent against Chalabi. But as for the future of Iraq, it looks to me as if there is no one truly informed in America, or in the West in general, these days. You don't have President de Gaulle, you don't have a Kennedy, or even an Eisenhower and his attitude in 1956, when he opposed the English and the French. I admit that Arab leaders are typically no better, they are simply following the course of events and they usually don't know what to do, but is it good for you to lack such informed leaders?

Kurt Jacobser. Well, one difference between the mid-90s situation that I just described and the current situation is that war was not imminent, now it is, and that is the reason why Steve's recommendation this should go to the UN to arbitrate is absolutely imperative.

Stephen Eric Bronner. We think, I mean maybe me, but I don't think there is anything that you've said, that anybody in this room would really disagree with.

Kurt Jacobser. There is nothing that you've said that I think factions within the Bush administration would not agree with.

Stephen Eric Bronner. Our problem is that just, quite frankly, that there's been a climate of nationalism that's been generated since September 11th and a constriction of civil liberties at home. This is something that is rarely discussed with regard to Iraq, but it's really a question of American self-interest as well. There's been a constriction of discourse in America. There's been a constriction of dissent, but there's great hope that there will be a change, that there will be support for not going to war and for recognizing the consequences. Actually today, there's a big demonstration and there should be a huge set of demonstrations in Washington and around the country.

Kurt Jacobser. In Europe too, I was at a demonstration with 400,000 in London. There were several hundred thousand in Washington in September. One of the reports in the Washington Post we read last night on the internet was that 60percent of the American people would back an invasion of Iraq, but the subtext of that and it should be screamingly apparent is that once you say American ground troops go into Iraq, it's 42percent, once you say

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Americans take casualties, it's 30percent. It's not just a question of pragmatics, many Americans have moral qualms over the legality of what's going on. There is a great deal of apprehension, a great deal of doubt that is becoming mobilized right now.

Iraqi Professor #1: I thank you for this information, but somehow I am aware of all that you have said. I would like to confess what worries me when I think of an Anglo-American invasion of this country taking place. Within one year or two, perhaps more, the current American and English administration would be finished, because they would be really trapped in a so-called Iraqi crossfire. Being an Iraqi I wouldn't like to contribute to civilization and a more democratic and open regime in Europe and America at our expense because there would be too many sacrifices—now I am a father, perhaps when I was twenty I wouldn't have spoken this way, but we don't want to give sacrifices for really nothing.

Kurt Jacobsen: You are speaking to a generation that remembers Vietnam very vividly and we speak out against all the horrors and atrocities.

Stephen Eric Bronner: And as you pointed out before, we also come from an era where we understood that government lied and manipulated public opinion.

Dusan Bjelic: It doesn't really matter to the United States whether they have a rational explanation or not, what interests them is a temporary pragmatic solution to their problems and their interests, whether you agree rationally or not. But your strategy here should be to counter that and go ahead of the game, so to speak, and articulate an indigenous solution. In that case, the United States could respond to your indigenous movement which in a sense parallels the case of Yugoslavia when there was the creation of the student resistance movement. Then, only then, did the demonstrations take a positive attitude to the extent that they actually stopped talking to Milosovic. They stopped pressing them militarily; instead, they set up two agencies to try to help the movement, to give some sense how to develop this grass roots movement and prepare for an election and how to talk about the future, how to be proactive. So when you take proactive position that seems to be the only way in which administration can respond because the fact is—I know some people close to the administration—they don't know what they want, they want something, but they don't know exactly what.

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If you know how to come up with the proactive solution, or offer, or commitment to something that you can actually use the pressure for your benefit. What I want to ask you is this: what do you see as a possible offer or vision in which you can take some kind of proactive action here and now?

Iraqi Professor #1: I accept your argument, but I think the situation in Iraq is extremely different from that in Yugoslavia. I know that Milosovic was a hard person but I think the President of Iraq, Saddam, is in full control of the situation, so I think it is difficult to compare him to Milosevic. That's one thing that makes such a task very difficult, and secondly—and I don't want to hurt your feelings—but American policy in the area and the kind of opposition groups they support are hardly positive for this country. Again, I don't want to be rude to anyone, but Mr. Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress is an MIT graduate, he is very good at computerizing and he was involved with embezzling from the Petra Bank in Jordan. What I am saying is that when you find such a person supported by the American administration as the next leader of Iraq, we start thinking that the Americans are not interested in any viable solution for this country because he will not be accepted by the public here.

Now, my solution—and I was intending to speak yesterday and to salute Bianca Jagger—I think it is our responsibility to reach a peaceful conclusion with our brethren, the Kurds in the North of Iraq, and I will go further to say that the situation in the South of Iraq, where the Shi'a are living, is not as good as it should be and if you ask me who is responsible for that I will say that it is the regime, it is the present leadership, and I say this openly, even to the leadership because it is supposed to be the father of this country, so you don't blame a child for being slightly wicked, you blame the father for not raising his children in an acceptable way. I was telling an Iraqi friend yesterday that if Iraq was easily penetrated it would be the fault of our government who did not achieve reconciliation within the country so that Iraq would be unified, reconciled and united.

But as to the question of whether or not an opposition could come out of Iraq from the circumstances of encouraging civil strife, of encouraging civil war, this is simply impossible because President Saddam is much stronger and the political system is different from the one Milosovic was involved with. Secondly, because the Americans, at least of the present administration, have adopted the wrong course to submit to the Iraqi people. This American administration does not like opposition and the opposition groups they have

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shown some favor to have difficulties even among themselves; I can't see them ruling the country for a very long time. This is why I predict, and perhaps I am wrong, that in the initial phases of the armed conflict perhaps Iraq would be weak, but afterward the resistance would grow against the American invasion and the puppet regime they would like to place in this country. But had the American government since 1991 adopted a policy of saying, "look the sanctions are hurting, any collective punishment is wrong, by having measures and by objective law we are punishing innocent people for something that was done by someone who did not consult the population," things may have been different. The impression given in this country is that the American administration is interested in demoralizing this country to the extent that they will accept any terms dictated by the puppet regime or by American influence.

Well, you might ask why, why they have treated, say, Yugoslavia in a different way than that of Iraq? I think there is an essential mistake in the American policy that all Arab regimes should be weaker than Israel, and this point was not raised in the discussion which I attended because I think some of the Americans were courteous to the Iraqis and the Iraqis were also courteous to the Americans; but if we really want to solve these problems, we have to open them up and address them openly. I think there is a different American policy in Iraq because they want Iraq to be very weak so that Israel can be stronger than all Arab states. I wouldn't question the legality of the American attitude in preserving proper Israel, I can understand that attitude. In fact, most Arabs now distinguish between the Israel of 1948 and the Israel of 1967, but without complete Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 borders and the formation of a Palestinian state, and full Arab-Jewish co-existence—and by this I mean peaceful co-existence—you will continue to have a threat of imbalance in the region. This a problem which you have yet to confront. It is true that Americans encouraged the development of Japan, of Germany, even South Korea, but their force in the Arab region is completely different. Here, they always had to suppress attempts at industrialization.

Stephen Eric Bronner: . . . and democracy. . .

Iraqi Professor #1: . . . and democracy. And those that they did support, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are in a funny situation—they don't know what to do, just because ten Saudis were supporters of Osama bin Laden, they are now putting the Saudis in a very awkward position, because the Saudi regime lives on the support of America. So, there must be a change. Also, I should

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say that I am for *gradual* change, but *genuine, authentic, democratic* changes in this country. I am for national reconciliation. I will tell you openly, I still feel guilty about Iraqi behavior in and toward Kuwait; it was not necessary and it was immoral. But when I see the American policy of perpetuating continued starvation for Iraqis, preventing them from advancing technologically and develop politically especially in terms of democracy, in actual fact, by bringing people into this country from the outside, who are not accepted—such as these American-sponsored opposition groups—well, I will be very reluctant to support an opposition which would bypass the regime and have dialogue with the American administration. I wouldn't mind having a dialogue with you, or with those gentlemen, because you are academics and this is what academics do. But I would be very reluctant to have a dialogue with such a hostile American administration especially when there are many who do not have the interests of the Iraqi people at heart.

Iraqi Professor #2. But if you want to solve the main problem, first we have to reach some kind of understanding and solution for the Arab-Israeli dispute. At least in the way that my colleague has put it, in a way that is acceptable for everybody. And second, we have be sure that both the Iranians and the Turks will never try to put their hands on Iraq. There are many disputes that persist between Iraq, the Iranians and the Turks. So the question remains: how do you find the solution?

Anne Burns. Can I just say one thing? The desperation of the situation is urgent right now due to the possibility of bombing, and you have mentioned the Israeli problem several times, that it is part of the bigger problem and Iraq, being in a position right now to do something, can stop the bombing. Don't you think the Iraqis should somehow try to talk to Israel through an organization like Peace Now? If you made that attempt it would make Iraq look much better, and I've found that people here in Iraq don't even know what Peace Now is. I mean, for the Iraqis to approach Israel through Peace Now would make you look fantastic. And the Americans would have to stop and reconsider many of their plans.

Iraqi Professor #1: I think this is how it should be: the Israelis and the Iraqis could have some kind of dialogue. I would dare to suggest that the Iraqi regime would accept that. But for the time being under threat of American aggression and of Sharon's policies of complete occupation, Saddam would lose all his cards if he accepted what you are saying. For us, as individuals, I agree with you. In fact, when I was in England I used to invite Israelis—

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many were left-wing Israelis—to many meetings and conferences on this topic. And I tell you in all honesty that they were speaking for the Arab cause much more persuasively and eloquently than the Arabs simply because they were aware of past events, of the history. And now there is a new trend even among the Israeli historians. I've read in the *London Review of Books* and the *New York Review of Books* about those who are handling the problem in an objective, or near objective way, and also about Daniel Barenboim working with Edward Said. I mean, this sort of dialogue I do support. But obviously you ought to see the Iraqi point of view. If we were to invite an Israeli Jew to debate a right wing Zionist, and if he was not able to make a persuasive case in that scenario, we would be in a difficult situation because he was supposed to represent the other side of the debate, the *progressive* side. Otherwise it would look like we were naively pro-Israel and that, even through we are pro-peace, that we were selling out the country. So what I'm saying is that if we were to meet with Israelis, they would have to be very well-known people.

Kurt Jacobsen. That is precisely Anne's point. She wasn't recommending that Saddam go to Peace Now, but that organizations, lower-level, non-government organizations, make some kind of contact.

Stephen Eric Bronner. Or maybe universities could find some professors.

Kurt Jacobsen. We simply don't know if it's possible.

Anne Burns. It's on everyone's mind, every Iraqi academic we have spoken to. To make some kind of approach as academics to an organization like Peace Now would be a very progressive step.

Iraqi Professor #1: I think what you are saying is right, the cause seems absolutely right, and Iraqis are not accustomed to this logic. But, I will tell you one thing: did President Saddam—and I will defend him on this point—or any Iraqi, condemn Yassar Arafat because he is negotiating with the Israelis? We saw Arafat at the London conference speaking via satellite, which Sharon prevented him from going to, and is about the Palestinian government, and I think it is good for them because, after all, the Palestinian or Israeli problems are not going to be sorted out by a nuclear war, or by a new Saladin. This is a nuclear age, it is incredibly sorted out, but only by organizing two states, at least for the time being, and there through perhaps democratic interchange we might speak of a unified Israel or Palestine.

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But I think the Iraqis are not accustomed to this logic, but you should notice there is no criticism of opening up dialogues between Israelis and Arabs, especially the Palestinians, which is an important step. And this is why I told you that now the Arabs are becoming more accepting of the distinction between the Palestine of 1948 and the Palestine of 1967, they would be happy to support a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders, but only a *genuine state*, not a, what is the term?

Stephen Eric Bronner: . . . a greater Israel. . .

Iraqi Professor #1: . . . yes, that would be a positive step, one which is good. But I think for Saddam, who is a politician, rather than an intellectual, I do not think he would be accepting of this if, under American hostility, he gave his hand to any Israeli because the Arab masses don't know about Peace Now, or the "refusniks" or any other leftist and progressive groups within Israel. But we don't have any contacts, the Israelis know a lot about us from some books on Iraq or Syria and I am always impressed by their sources, but we are not equal to them in this regard.

Stephen Eric Bronner: I think then that this needs to be done using non-governmental organizations, I think this is Anne's point. This is fully understandable what you said about president Saddam, but I think, as much as possible, this would be in your interest as academics and as Iraqi patriots to try as much as possible to build ties and there really are people, by the way I would go one step further, I think that there is a far greater lack of unity among Israeli Jews than among American Jews. So, when you think of Peace Now, for example, I mean that really, even at its lowest point, had 25 to 30 percent of the population behind it, at its *lowest* point, and it's probably up to forty percent now. That is significant for a non-governmental actor. Among American Jews, I think it is even more important, because there is such a hegemony of Zionist organizers to try and build connections with American Jews.

Kurt Jacobsen: If it's possible again, we don't know how difficult it may be to reach out to non-governmental groups to an organization like Peace Now, but if it's possible to do so it would send out an enormous message that the democratic nucleus here has great potential, and for which your scenario of a twenty-five year democratic transition would then become extremely plausible and would undermine the argument of people that we should simply go in and crush the regime and not give a damn about the collateral

damage, the tens or hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed. Those kinds of things do have an impact on public opinion.

Richard Couto: Another reason to bring about dialogue between Iraqis and groups such as Peace Now is that this would be a message with a subtext, one that says that there is hope or a peaceful resolution of differences between Palestine and Israel. This means that Steve's point is essential: that if in fact there were soon to be an initiative of Iraqis in dialogue with an NGO, within Israel, you'd be saying to Americans there are Iraqis who are presently thinking in non-military terms.

Iraqi Professor #1: Yes, but this somehow indicates a counterpoint, because we don't know a lot about American internal policies, but we know that the present administration is a pro-Zionist one. This confirms the other point that somehow the American administration is moving toward a pro-Israeli policy, rather than fostering pro-American, democratic relations within the Middle East. So you see the difficulty, I heard about this book by Bob Woodward, but I haven't received a copy of it.

When I speak with other Iraqis about an opposition ending the regime, many points are raised. I say that what distinguishes human beings from animals is *dialogue*, human beings have dialogue. So if we continue to run into civil strife and have political revenge, then we are not human beings. So why not have civil dialogue with Israelis who support Palestinian lives and socialize with the Israeli government? But I have to admit, we seriously lack information about Israel. The first time I heard about Peace Now in a serious way, is from you, I thought it was just not an important movement. I will tell you one thing, when we suggested this meeting to those who knew about your delegation, one of them mentioned that some of them are Jewish, and immediately I said to him, "all the better" because we need this dialogue.

Michael Thompson: I'd like to bring something else up. I mean when we're talking about Israel, the situation is obviously important, but I think dissecting the imperatives of the Bush Administration with respect to Iraq is of essential importance. The situation is imminent right now and I think that there has to be some understanding that one of the reasons in the United States that the Bush Administration has been so consistent on aggression in Iraq is that, in one sense, there is the political aspect of Israel's security and regional stability, but there also is the issue of oil. There is an economic dimension to all of this that we've been ignoring. I'm not being an economic

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determinist here—what I am saying is that the global political economy of oil is such that certain political measures will be chosen. I think it's true that this is one reason that Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries have been the object of political control by the United States for so long. Look, Israel is an important issue, but the oil is as well and the complexities of this situation need to be discussed because there's a lot of misconceptions—especially on the left in the West—about it.

Iraqi Professor #1: This point has been on my mind. You see in a situation of ignorance acclimated by political dictatorship and by the current system and that sort of thing and also encouraged unfortunately by the Western powers, it is difficult to have such detailed discussions. Speaking about the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* I don't think there is a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world because I know Arabs and Jews who are very good human beings and they have discussions and they have disputes, as you said. But I'll tell you, a lot of people are deeply influenced by conspiracy theories and their incorrect perceptions of history. And some of those people are Iraqis in Baghdad, but one thing I would like to mention is that I think that there is some sort of conspiracy of silence against the rational, democratic Iraqi opposition.

The key problem is that there is a critical discourse here and there, but it is not published. So on both sides we are not listened to. When you speak about opposition, you speak about Ahmad Chalabi, you speak about all sorts of people who in fact are recognized as "opposition" even by *Newsweek*. Surely, this sort of dialogue might open our minds, but we are mistaken if we think it is going to change anything here. And anyhow, I agree with your friend, public opinion doesn't change policy in any country or in most countries. But public dialogue, like ours, is going to have implications for academic freedom, for discussion...

Iraqi Professor #2: I also wanted to go back to this issue of the oil. Certainly, Iraq has lot's of oil, but this does not seem a good pretext for war. I mean, with all of this oil we have, we're not going to drink it—if the Americans want oil, we are willing to sit down with them and sell it at a fair price.

Michael Thompson: Well, I've heard this before from some of your colleagues, but I think there is a crucial element here that you may be missing. I mean, one thing that they really don't want is a free market on oil. With the rapid economic development of the Asian-Pacific region, for example—China particularly—there is a feeling, I think, on the part of the current

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administration that some degree of control over the flow of oil from the region is essential. When you have a free market, a *true* free market, one can always be outbid—that's something they don't want.

Dusan Bjelic. Very briefly, I want to go back to focusing on the possibility of doing something. You might also consider actually finding some Palestinian intellectuals who are already in dialogue with Israelis and join them. If you can establish some form of resistance then you are recognized as a human being. If you can bring you know this kind of Palestinians, Iraqis, and Israelis that creates new dynamics and then there is a different rhythm of the whole game.

Stephen Eric Bronner. I'm Jewish, and I can tell you that there are a lot of American Jews who are not supportive of Sharon and not supportive of Israeli policies and in the same way we draw a distinction between the Iraqi regime and the Iraqi people that has to be done here too. I think there are many misconceptions from what I've heard. There are really deep misconceptions about the role of Jews in American life and unfortunately an underestimation of their impact, American Jews, on Israel. It's a key matter that in some way the connection of the establishment to progressive Jews in the States and Israel. Because in all truth, your representation in America, and this is also true of the Palestinians, is terrible. The people you send there, the whole government and the way they present themselves; I said to you before, if you were on American TV, the whole perspective of the Iraqi situation would be different.

Dusan Bjelic. Let me just ask you, do you feel free to talk to the CNN?

Iraqi Professor #1: Well I would have to think about it. I'll tell you, while I was a student in England I had contacts with Israeli student groups and it was me who initiated contact. I saw their newsletter, wrote to them, and then I became President of the Union of Arab Students. On two very important occasions at our annual conferences we presented an Israeli speaker at the introduction of the conference. No one opposed this step. I did consider it a political risk and in fact I think it was. But since I came back to Iraq the whole question became moot because we don't have non-governmental organizations, but I wouldn't mind having a dialogue with Israelis who are reasonable and who are responsible even who care for their security but who also consider the Palestinians as human beings.

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Iraqi Professor #2: Well I will tell you one thing, there was a meeting at an intellectual center run by the government and it openly raised two points. First, that to talk now about the Palestine of 1948 is irrational and irresponsible and it would strengthen the position of extremist Zionists for while weakening the Palestinian cause of achieving a state within the 1967 borders. I said this in front of a government organization and everything. I said I totally respect people who sacrifice their life for what they believe, I am astonished, but is the suicidal operations inside Israel proper helping the Palestinian cause or hurting it? I think we should consider this matter because I haven't reached a conclusion. You see, unfortunately, the Zionists don't leave the Palestinians any cards, any room, for maneuvering and their only and last option is martyrdom. You call it terrorism, you are entitled to your view. So is it good to deprive them of the means for life but at the same time you have to ask the question: is it right to kill civilians even in a war? Isn't this alienating peaceful Israelis? We are aware of their presence, perhaps not in full detail, but I am of the opinion that says the Palestinians should declare a truce even from one side for say one year. They should declare that they will not exercise suicidal attacks inside or outside Israel, but on the condition that if the Israelis met within a certain period of time, that would be fine.

Stephen Eric Bronner: Well, I think that Edward Said literally changed the perspective of the way things were seen when he came out and said what Palestine needs is a Nelson Mandela. I mean, that was just a brilliant formulation.

Iraqi Professor #1: Yes, because some Zionist groups feel that this means the end of the Jewish state. So perhaps it is not acceptable for them to hear that there is need of a Nelson Mandela.

Stephen Eric Bronner: Let me be clear. What he meant was a change of tactics and a person who would project a moral persona, in a way that hasn't been done on American television. This is something—and I mean this with all due respect—this is something that is underestimated in the Arab world. There is a sense here that when you speak to us, there is very little to say we agree with you. The question is how you portray this and particularly how you portray this to people who really don't know. Now, if you just come out and give facts, in America, for example, if you speak about the Zionist enemy, that would immediately be rejected. Just in terms of the skeptics, before you even said another word everything else would be rejected not simply because it's true or not true, it would be because you used a term,

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“Zionist enemy,” in a place where this has a different meaning—not just among Jews, but among non-Jews as well.

I think there has to be a base of interchange. You can criticize Israel, radically, which I do, without subscribing to the idea that by criticizing the state you are somehow also anti-semitic. What I found with many Iraqis is literally acceptance of the idea that Judaism and the state of Israel are the same and this creates false strategies.

Kurt Jacobsen. To symbolize the problem with an example from yesterday, we went to Babylon University and witnessed a demonstration. The chant was, we were told by a friend of ours who speaks Arabic, despite “we want peace, we want peace” another chant was “Saddam is Iraq, Iraq is Saddam.” The message we discovered is that many people have the energy, and in this case it is self-defeating, against Sharon or Zionism, i.e., that Sharon is Israel, and Israel is Sharon which is a terrible pre-conception to begin with.

Dusan Bjelic. You have to think about how to build public forum and how to build consensus, which is a keep element to any democratic society. Your society and my society are very different, the history shows that the absence of this domain—the public sphere—was very detrimental to the political process because we always talk of things that changed resolutions and those that they didn’t. What changes things is building consensus and building consensus is often very docile growing thing to do. It doesn’t create healers. If you don’t have healers you don’t have leaders. You have everybody in charge and as long as you have everybody, as long you have consensus then the soul sleeps. When you lose consensus somebody has to keep order. If you cannot rule yourself, somebody else has to. So you have to think about how you can open this sphere in which you can actually talk about things, not against the regime in terms of the content, but in terms of effects of creating a public sphere in the long-run which can bring processes of change, and I think that is something that you as a political scientist have to think about, even in your classes, to kind of promote a public sphere.

Iraqi Professor #1: In this country, people have often said we don’t want a mere country, we want a homeland in which Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Christians of different nationality rather than Arab, Muslims, and Shii and Sunnis, Jews, and Christians should live as equal peoples. When this consensus is achieved without necessarily defying the regime, this consensus will impose itself, in some form or another—perhaps not in my lifetime, perhaps in a few days, I

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just don't know—will impose itself as a political reality. I agree with you, but I would like also to warn against a kind of populism. Once in Jordan, I was there and heard some people talking about the Oslo agreement, which Arafat signed with Rabin and I just wanted to go there, the speakers themselves were not particularly important, and see how an Arab audience and Arab speakers could have conflict on such an important issue and what the reaction would be in the audience; and, you know, it was tremendous, it was better than a debate in England or even in America.