

# U.S., Arab Ambassadors Question Iraq War

*Following are excerpts from two presentations to the conference of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council's Corporate Cooperation Committee, held in Washington on Sept. 8-9. In announcing the program, the sponsors said, "Not since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon has there been a comparable period," in which the U.S. relationship to 22 Arab countries and 57 Islamic nations was subjected to such strain. But the "ties that link" the United States with the Arab and Islamic nations "withstood the strain" in the past, and would do so again. Such was the aim of the conference. The speeches here are by Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, Chief Representative of the League of Arab States to the U.S., and Ambassador Chas. W. Freeman, Jr., president of the Middle East Policy Council, former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Regional Affairs, and former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Subheads have been added. For previous coverage of the conference, see EIR, Sept. 20 and Oct. 4.*

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## Ambassador Hassouna

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Good evening: . . . I missed the beginning of the conference, but I was in Cairo attending the meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers and I hope to be able, maybe, to give you a little bit of an insight of what happened there. . . .

I think that we have heard a lot about Iraq already, but let me just describe it from my own experience. I was in the United Nations representing the League for five years; I've been following this problem for so long. . . .

I see Iraq having three dimensions, an inter-Arab problem, an Iraqi-UN problem, and Iraqi-U.S. problem.

The inter-Arab problem has evolved since the summit in Beirut [March 2002], where Iraq has recognized to respect the territory, integrity, and sovereignty of Kuwait. There have been some developments. The media complaints have stopped to a great extent between Iraq and its neighbors. Iraq has agreed to give back to Kuwait, the national archives, which it had taken away from Kuwait during the Gulf War, and this will take place some time next month, in coordination between the United Nations, the League of Arab States, and the parties concerned.

So the relationships between Iraq and its neighbors have

evolved. Trade agreements have been concluded; business people have been going between the different Arab countries and Iraq.

Between the United Nations and Iraq, the Arab League has been instrumental in the dialogue that has started on settling the problems within the United States and Iraq. The Secretary General went to Baghdad; that is, the Secretary General of the [Arab] League. In January of this year, he met President Saddam Hussein and after long talks, convinced him to resume the dialogue with the United Nations Secretary General.

There were three sessions of dialogue, the last one that took place in Vienna in July. They have not thought about the final solution, but at least they have focussed on the problems. And we hope in the Arab League—and this was the feeling of everyone present in Cairo—that the government of Iraq will continue the dialogue, will accept the return of the inspectors, and that eventually the problems will be solved, including the lifting the sanctions which have been so damaging to the civilian population in Iraq [emphasis added].

It is a difficult problem. It needs more talk. But we see it the only solution if you want to avoid war in the region. . . .

## 'War Might Destabilize the Whole Region'

We do not have to go into all the consequences and ramifications of a war in the Middle East. But it might dismember a country, to provoke—maybe, to affect the outflow of oil; might destabilize the whole region.

And the public opinion in the Arab world will be enraged. It is already enraged against what's happening to the Palestinian people. It might also be enraged at what happens, especially if we have many casualties, as a lot of people predict in any coming war.

So this is a very serious matter, . . . and I know the United States government is consulting with the [UN] Security Council, which also, in my view, is very important to preserve the unity of the Security Council to deal with such serious matters. If we have a divided Security Council, I think the United Nations would be much less effective than if the Council is united, and gives full mandate to the Secretary General, and full mandate to the inspection teams, if there's agreement for them to go back to Iraq.

I don't want to go [on] very long, but U.S.-Arab relations were also discussed in Cairo. And for the first time there were leaders of the Arab-American community present there. We had Jim Zogby, we had Jihad Assali, we had some leaders from Detroit. And they took part in the discussion with the ministers—for over three-and-a-half hours. There was a good discussion about what's happened, what can we do, where are we going, . . . but I can tell you, again, there was worry. But there was also a feeling that we want good relationships with the United States. The United States is a friend of the Arab world and the Arab world is a friend of the United States. It's a two-way relationship and we have so much [in] common

interests, which sometimes is overlooked.

But also, there was a feeling that whatever happened, we were shocked that those terrorists came from the Arab world. We were already the victims of terrorism before those events, and we do not accept the notion of collective guilt. We should work together with the United States, and with the rest of the world, to track down the terrorists, to get rid of those who kill innocent people. We should not be blamed for their doings, because they don't represent the Arab world. They don't represent the mainstream of Islam. Islam calls for the sanctity of the human life.

## Two Tracks in Arab-American Relations

Where are we now? In my view, the present state of Arab-American relationships can be summarized as . . . proceeding on two tracks, two *different tracks*. One is the official track, the responsible one, the rational one, that takes into account the enormous common interests we have, and that realizes . . . sometimes there is wrongdoing on both sides, that we need some self-criticism. We need to change our discourse, maybe, and we need reform, especially in the Arab world. But we admit it. . . . We recognize what is wrong, but we're also proud of our achievements.

The second trend, I think, this is the irresponsible trend of some people who are either ignorant, or, have their own agenda. And those do a lot of damage to a long-standing relationship between the Arab world and the United States.

*And I think we should stand and speak up against them because they can derail our relationship and they can influence public opinion. They can engender more hatred. They can radicalize public opinion, and there are dangers*

At the same time, I think, looking into the future, we have to work together. One of the things which will be happening is that next year in May, a conference on the Arab relationship will take place in Detroit. It will be a comprehensive conference dealing with not only the political aspects, the culture, but will mainly focus on the economic aspects of our relationship, which are deep. . . . We need to understand that we have common goals and that is why we also should work together. . . . Peace cannot be achieved by one country alone. It is a common endeavor. We all have to join hands. And if we do so, I think we will win. Thank you very much.

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## Ambassador Freeman

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. . . I've been asked to provide a few reflections on a war—and another war, for me—with Iraq. I will say that I was a very strong supporter of military action to counterattack Iraq and to liberate Kuwait in 1991.

I remain unconvinced and full of many more questions than answers as I look at the situation today. . . .

On Thursday [Sept. 12], the President promises to explain our stand on these issues, and I hope that his address to the



*Chas. W. Freeman, Jr., former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Under Secretary of Defense for Regional Affairs, and a strong supporter of Desert Storm, explained why he is "unconvinced" about an Iraq war now.*

United Nations will help us, and me in particular (because I'm very selfish on this subject), to understand how we should respond to the view of friends in the region. But it is *nothing short of obscene* to be planning to add a U.S. war in the northern Gulf to existing U.S. backing for steadily escalating war in the Holy Land. And I'd like to know, also, how we should respond to the judgment of allies and friends in Europe and Asia, that the notion of pre-emptive attack at will by the United States amounts, both to a return to the pre-modern notion that "might makes right," and, to an abandonment of a century of largely successful American effort to create a rules-based international society. . . .

## 'Put the Dog on a Leash'

There are, I think, a few specific and not inconsequential questions we might usefully ponder before launching an unprovoked but pre-emptive attack on Iraq. And in my brief time with you today, I'm going to try to do just that: state a few questions. . . .

Why does Iraq want chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in the first place? Is this a strategy that springs from the evil mind of Saddam Hussein, or is it a strategy based on an Iraqi national interest in deterring a resumption of past assaults by Iran, Israel, Turkey, and the United States? What, in fact, is Iraq's defense against Israeli and Iranian weapons of mass destruction, other than its own weapons of mass destruction? Is it the UN Charter? Is the United Nations Charter now an effective constraint on American, Israeli, or Iranian actions against Iraq? Would regime change, by itself, alter the geo-strategic challenges facing Baghdad or in any way define Iraqi national interests?

Let me be more specific. Might not a democratically elected government be just as interested in weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent, as a democratically elected government of Israel has proven to be interested in and, in fact, developed such weapons?

*If regime change is the answer, what was the question?*

But mightn't Saddam attack the United States? Of course, if the international community were to accept the proposed doctrine of pre-emptive attack, then he probably would be justified in pre-emptively attacking the United States, given all the threats that we have been uttering against him for the last several years. So, why hasn't he? Is there any reason to doubt that Saddam doesn't understand the strength of the United States and the magnitude of our retaliation against him if he does attack us? Is there any evidence that Saddam or his regime are suicidal? Stupid as Saddam is, why, given all our bluster, would he not by now have prepared and possibly pre-positioned retaliation against the U.S. homeland?

Think about it. Isn't the most likely, indeed, almost the only conceivable circumstance leading to an Iraqi attack on the United States, a U.S. attack on Iraq that would leave Saddam with nothing to lose by retaliating against us?

Now given his behavior, why should we accept the assertion that Saddam cannot be deterred? He *didn't use* weapons of mass destruction in 1991, despite the fact that he possessed such weapons. . . . In other words, looking at the pattern of U.S.-Iraqi interaction over the past decade, the use of force has invariably been instigated by the stronger party—that's us—rather than by Iraq, which clearly understands its own relative weakness.

Some people might argue that this is a textbook example of deterrence in action. Saddam's neighbors, with the possible apparent exception of Kuwait, I would say, don't consider him to be an active or unmanageable military threat any more. Surely they know him better and surely they have more reason to fear him than we do. . . .

But why wouldn't it be possible? Why couldn't Saddam just transfer weapons of mass destruction to other enemies of the United States, including al-Qaeda? It's true that the United States has the capacity to unite our enemies against us, rather than doing what cautious strategic doctrine would suggest is wise, namely, to divide them.

But is there evidence that this is actually happening? If the worry is about nuclear weapons, how likely is it that Saddam would celebrate his acquisition of them by immediately turning over control of them to someone other than his own forces? Such acts of generosity are seldom seen in statecraft. Why is this not an instance in which deterrence is possible, and in which making it clear where U.S. red lines are, would be the best policy?

### **Would War Against Iraq Be 'a cakewalk'?**

But isn't it better to be safe than sorry? What do we have to lose? Iraq is weak and it's much more vulnerable than

North Korea and Iran. Wouldn't invasion be, in the words of a friend of mine, "a cakewalk"?

Well, Iraq, I think, is clearly far weaker now than it was at the end of eight years of warfare with Iran, from which it emerged triumphant . . . [and] in 1991, the Iraqi troops, mainly conscripts, were seeking to hold onto what Iraq had seized in Kuwait. They were not defending Iraq. They had been bombed at the rate of one bomb per minute for 37 days. They were politically and emotionally isolated from the Arab world. Is their behavior—was their behavior on Feb. 23, 1991 when General Franks crossed the border, crossed the Iraqi line of defense—is their behavior then under those circumstances a good predictor of the behavior of a much smaller and more professional army defending its motherland against a foreign invasion, and backed, rather than opposed, by Arab opinion? I'm not convinced.

But wouldn't Iraqis, like Afghans, welcome liberation by the United States? By all accounts, ten years of sanctions and intermittent bombing have not endeared the United States to the Iraqi people. We don't seem to have many admirers left inside the country, while there are quite a few in the bars and hotel restaurants of London, Paris, and New York. . . . Why do we accept the speculative statements of people outside Iraq—Iraqis in exile—about Saddam's illegitimacy, as opposed to the much more persuasive and undeniable fact of his undisturbed control of Iraq? . . .

Finally, of course, there isn't, as there was in Afghanistan, a civil war in progress. We do not have the option of tipping the balance in an ongoing struggle and, thus, gaining a relatively easy, quick victory by helping one faction over another. . . .

How much support, if any, can we expect from NATO allies and Japan? How much acquiescence will they give? Can we take the use of bases in Europe and Japan for granted, when these bases are established and exist for purposes of common defense unrelated to U.S. unilateral actions out of area in Iraq? But doesn't the Afghan operation show that we don't need allies and partners to project enough power to take down the regime in Baghdad?

I think we have the world's greatest expert on this present, that our ability to project power to Afghanistan has rested on the use of bases, and friendly countries in the Persian Gulf . . . as well as overflight rights in Afghanistan's immediate neighbors—Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan—in particular . . . agreements with at least 85 different nations. It has required us to refuel our aircraft en route to the region many times, in some instances, and it's been crucial to be able to refuel them within the region to reach targets in Afghanistan.

In the Gulf War, we based 550,000 in theater and we stuffed 23 air bases to the breaking point. If Iraq's neighbors now deny us use of their airspace, ports, and bases, how can we even get there from here, still less sustain full-scale combat operations in Iraq?

And why do we assume that an attack on Iraq, that is opposed by most of the nations currently supporting our Afghan campaign, would not lead to their withdrawal of support for our increasingly unpopular operations in Afghanistan? . . .

## Who Will Pay?

A few remaining questions. How much might war with Iraq cost? Who will pay for it? In the Gulf War, I note, U.S. expenditures came to \$60 billion, *every cent of which* was paid for by someone else—Saudis, \$17 billion; Emirates, \$14 billion; Kuwaitis, Japanese, \$13 billion; Germans, \$11 billion . . . and so, a billion here and a billion there, and before you know it it adds up.

Saudi Arabia, as I said, alone paid \$17 billion to the U.S. and spent an additional \$50 billion on fuel, food, equipment, facility modification, and a host of other expenses. In addition to cash transfers to the United States, much support in kind was provided by other nations in the region and farther afield, and our allies paid their own way or were paid for by others.

Kuwait paid for its own reconstruction and oversaw it. . . . The total cost of the [planned] war remains uncalculated, but it's something over \$200 billion, not the silly figures you've seen in the press recently. Is the U.S. ready, on our own, to fund a war with Iraq and the subsequent nation-building effort there? Not a bad question. And I'd add, do we have commitments in place with Saudi Arabia and other oil producers to do what they did in 1990 to 1991, which was to forgo the opportunity for windfall profits from a spike in oil prices that could have devastated the United States and the global economies? Are they going to do that again, to support an adventure they don't agree with?

Why are we so confident, I repeat, that we can transform a thugdom into a democracy? What evidence is there of Iraqi traditions of democracy similar to those of the Weimar Republic or Japan in the 1920s, that underlay our successful transformations of Germany and Japan? Who is the equivalent of the Japanese Emperor, in terms of assuring Iraqi military and civilian cooperation with a U.S. occupation, rather than resistance to it along the lines of what we now see in the Occupied Territories?

If by democracy, we mean a regime in Iraq that endorses U.S. policies and supports U.S. interest in the Middle East, including those based on our solidarity with Israel, why do we assume that such a regime would have any legitimacy in Iraq or more broadly in the region?

And finally, if an Iraqi democracy decided to build weapons of mass destruction for validly deterrent purposes, would we respect that democratic decision and support it as we have elsewhere in the region? I could raise additional questions, but it's late in the day and these should probably be about enough to get a discussion started. So I will leave it at that and thank you.