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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
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Subject: NYT Op-ED on Iraq from Allawi, al-Nujaifi, and al-Essawi

OP-ED CONTRIBUTORS

How to Save Iraq From Civil War

By AYAD ALLAWI, OSAMA AL-NUJAIFI and RAFE AL-ESSAWI

IRAQ today stands on the brink of disaster. President Obama kept his campaign pledge to end the war here, but it has not ended the way anyone in Washington wanted. The prize, for which so many American soldiers believed they were fighting, was a functioning democratic and nonsectarian state. But Iraq is now moving in the opposite direction — toward a sectarian autocracy that carries with it the threat of devastating civil war.

Since Iraq's 2010 election, we have witnessed the subordination of the state to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Dawa party, the erosion of judicial independence, the intimidation of opponents and the dismantling of independent institutions intended to promote clean elections and combat corruption. All of this happened during the Arab Spring, while other countries were ousting dictators in favor of democracy. Iraq had a chance to demonstrate, for the first time in the modern Middle East, that political power could peacefully pass between political rivals following proper elections. Instead, it has become a battleground of sects, in which identity politics have crippled democratic development.

We are leaders of Iraqiya, the political coalition that won the most seats in the 2010 election and represents more than a quarter of all Iraqis. We do not think of ourselves as Sunni or Shiite, but as Iraqis, with a constituency spanning the entire country. We are now being hounded and threatened by Mr. Maliki, who is attempting to drive us out of Iraqi political life and create an authoritarian one-party state.

In the past few weeks, as the American military presence ended, another military force moved in to fill the void. Our homes and offices in Baghdad's Green Zone were surrounded by Mr. Maliki's security forces. He has laid siege to our party, and has done so with the blessing of a politicized judiciary and law enforcement system that have become virtual extensions of his personal office. He has accused Iraq's vice president,

Tariq al-Hashimi, of terrorism; moved to fire Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq; and sought to investigate one of us, Rafe al-Essawi, for specious links to insurgents — all immediately after Mr. Maliki returned to Iraq from Washington, wrongly giving Iraqis the impression that he'd been given carte blanche by the United States to do so.

After Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. urged all parties to maintain a unity government on Dec. 16, Mr. Maliki threatened to form a government that completely excluded Iraqiya and other opposition voices. Meanwhile, Mr. Maliki is welcoming into the political process the Iranian-sponsored Shiite militia group Asaib Ahl al-Haq, whose leaders kidnapped and killed five American soldiers and murdered four British hostages in 2007.

It did not have to happen this way. The Iraqi people emerged from the bloody and painful transition after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime hoping for a brighter future. After the 2010 election, we felt there was a real opportunity to create a new Iraq that could be a model for the region. We needed the United States to protect the political process, to prevent violations of the Constitution and to help develop democratic institutions.

For the sake of stability, Iraqiya agreed to join the national unity government following a landmark power-sharing agreement reached a year ago in Erbil. However, for more than a year now Mr. Maliki has refused to implement this agreement, instead concentrating greater power in his own hands. As part of the Erbil agreement, one of us, Ayad Allawi, was designated to head a proposed policy council but declined this powerless appointment because Mr. Maliki refused to share any decision-making authority.

After the 2010 election, Mr. Maliki assumed the roles of minister of the interior, minister of defense and minister for national security. (He has since delegated the defense and national security portfolios to loyalists without parliamentary approval.) Unfortunately, the United States continued to support Mr. Maliki after he reneged on the Erbil agreement and strengthened security forces that operate without democratic oversight.

Now America is working with Iraqis to convene another national conference to resolve the crisis. We welcome this step and are ready to resolve our problems peacefully, using the Erbil agreement as a starting point. But first, Mr. Maliki's office must stop issuing directives to military units, making unilateral military appointments and seeking to influence the judiciary; his national security adviser must give up complete control over the Iraqi intelligence and national security agencies, which are supposed to be independent institutions but have become a virtual extension of Mr. Maliki's Dawa party; and his Dawa loyalists must give up control of the security units that oversee the Green Zone and intimidate political opponents.

The United States must make clear that a power-sharing government is the only viable option for Iraq and that American support for Mr. Maliki is conditional on his fulfilling the Erbil agreement and dissolving the unconstitutional entities through which he now rules. Likewise, American assistance to Iraq's army, police

and intelligence services must be conditioned on those institutions being representative of the nation rather than one sect or party.

For years, we have sought a strategic partnership with America to help us build the Iraq of our dreams: a nationalist, liberal, secular country, with democratic institutions and a democratic culture. But the American withdrawal may leave us with the Iraq of our nightmares: a country in which a partisan military protects a sectarian, self-serving regime rather than the people or the Constitution; the judiciary kowtows to those in power; and the nation's wealth is captured by a corrupt elite rather than invested in the development of the nation.

We are glad that your brave soldiers have made it home for the holidays and we wish them peace and happiness. But as Iraq once again teeters on the brink, we respectfully ask America's leaders to understand that unconditional support for Mr. Maliki is pushing Iraq down the path to civil war.

Unless America acts rapidly to help create a successful unity government, Iraq is doomed.

Ayad Allawi, leader of the Iraqiya coalition, was Iraq's prime minister from 2004-5. Osama al-Nujaifi is the speaker of the Iraqi Parliament. Rafe al-Essawi is Iraq's finance minister.

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