

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious and Most Merciful

Dear Guests....

Ladies and gentlemen....

Good Evening....

I am honored to be here with you all today, thanks to Mr. Zaid Sabah Al-Talaqani and the Rafidain Centre for Dialogue for organizing this important forum to discuss the security and stability in Iraq.

It has been a short time that we have celebrated the victory over the ISIS caliphate and we were all very pleased with the end of the ISIS Caliphate in Iraq. However, this is only the beginning, there are many other challenges remaining in post ISIS-Iraq, especially providing security, restoring stability and ensuring prosperity in Iraq.

The constant and extended violence, extremism and terrorism has become an international problem and a real threat on the peace, security, stability and all human and religious values in today's world in general and in particular in Iraq.

Before we think about the potential measures to confront terrorism, we have to think about the political, social, economic, religious and cultural environment and background in which terrorism grows. This is a fundamental step towards confronting terrorism and restoring stability and security.

After the collapse of the Iraqi Regime in 2003, a new governance system was devised and endorsed in the hope that all Iraqi communities become true partners and share the power after almost 80 years of one party and one man rule and dictatorship; which has ruled Iraq with an iron fist and brought about only destruction, mass killings and calamities to the Iraqi people and also to the neighboring countries.

Even after 2003, and the endorsement of a new constitution and a federal system, because of this bloody history, not one of the Iraqi communities trusted the other and all have serious fears from the past, present and for their future in Iraq.

Therefore, in all successive Iraqi cabinets, grave mistakes were committed, no one was able to enforce the rule of law to restore the most needed trust and confidence among all Iraqi components. Additionally, no cabinet was able to make the constitution a foundation for governance to turn people's hope to a better and prosperous future into reality. This resulted in further deepening political problems on a daily basis and dwindling the trust among the communities, and as Iraq moved towards unilateral governance and all communities felt that they were marginalized and lost hope and did not feel security and protection.

As a result, the government weakened in all levels and the emergence of economic, social, and religious problems, the spread of corruption, the formation of terror and killing groups across Iraq and diminishing of public services and job opportunities.

Moreover, this paved the way for regional and international players to intervene and meddle in the Iraqi internal affairs and using Iraq as a launching pad to settle their differences and interests. These issues all are the main factors that created a conducive environment for the growth of terrorism and terror groups in Iraq after 2003 and until now.

Due to the vulnerability and weaknesses of the government institutions, governance systems, and especially the security and military apparatus across Iraq, terrorists have been able to take advantage of the vacuum and make Iraq a fertile ground for terror production through sending trained terrorists and established a terrorism foundation and sleeping cells among the Iraqi communities.

On the other hand, the conduciveness of the social, economic, and religious environment helped in a way that the people could cooperate and assist and, in some case, even welcome terrorist groups in Iraq, especially in the majority Sunni populated areas.

As a result, the violence and terrorism have caused hundreds of thousands of civilians and security personnel to be killed, the outbreak of a bloody war, mass killings of innocent people, destruction of systems and infrastructure in Iraq, all under the cover of Jihad and extreme interpretation of Islam and terror ideology.

The Iraqi stability and security have direct impact on the security and stability of the neighboring countries and wider region, as Iraq has long borders with six countries, a population of roughly 38 million, and the religious, social and sectarian ties between the Iraqi communities and the neighboring countries as well as the trade, economic relations and existence of many border crossings and of course huge oil and gas reserves. Therefore, If Iraq could not protect its borders and ensure internal security and stability, without doubt it will have direct negative impact on the security and stability of the neighboring countries.

From 2003 until the emergence of ISIS in 2014, the terror groups have utilized all means to make Iraq a fertile ground for their terror activities and so far, they have been successful in their efforts to create sleeping cells and terror foundation among the Iraqis, and ISIS is still an Iraqi organization as most of its prominent leaders and majority members are Iraqis.

Despite the military success over ISIS, the ISIS and other terror groups continue to invent new ways, tactics, and methods to spread their violent ideology and target the vulnerable segments of society such as adults and youths to carry out terrorist activities in Iraq. They have been successful in particular in utilization of the new technology, such as social media, to influence weak individuals and reach the communities through publication of videos, and photo advertisement of their terror activities.

During the four years of bloody war with ISIS, with the support of the international coalition and neighboring countries, we were able to liberate all Kurdistan and Iraqi lands and paid huge sacrifices.

Despite this victory, the terrorism is not finished, as they are active in the areas once under their full control; therefore, confronting terrorism only militarily is not enough, as there is a need for new ways and methods to be utilized to prevent the spread of violence and terror ideology; especially to protect our young and youths and vulnerable people from being exposed to the campaigns of the terrorists and extremists.

Additionally, we need to work to end the fertile environment in which terrorism grows such as political, economic, and social problems as well as religious extremism, takfiri and Islamic jihadism, etc., and once again bring back the hope to the people for a better, prosperous and peaceful future in Iraq.

Ensuring security and stability in Iraq and ending terrorism needs serious and brave steps to be taken by the Iraqi leaders to restore trust and rebuild confidence among the Iraqi communities to secure a better and prosperous life that Iraqi people deserve, and the steps include:

1. Starting a genuine reconciliation process, free from revenge, through an independent judicial process to bring all criminals to justice, such as ISIS members and members of formal armed forces and militia groups who committed crimes against the civilians and security forces across Iraq and provide restitution and compensation for all victims.
2. We should admit that security does not mean to have millions of men with guns, it is comprehensive and includes a professional force with procedures and processes, technology and intelligence analysis capability which operates within the law. Now it is time to start a quality reform process in the military and intelligence agencies, restructure and reorganize them based on the best international military standards, away from political, sectarian, ethnic and religious affiliation and loyalty so that they become trustworthy of all communities and become the protector of all Iraqis equally.
3. Prohibit and disarm all militia and non-formal armed groups outside the security and defense system in Iraq and ending impunity for all armed groups in any sectarian, ethnic and religious components in Iraq.
4. We should also work to prevent the spread of violent ideology in all its forms and protect our young and youths from being exposed to and to not become easy prey of extremists, and being influenced by them for takfiri, violence and terrorism.

This needs a joint effort and cooperation from all relevant institutions at the country, regional and international levels such as educational, religious government and non-government institutions, civil society groups, media outlets and agencies to prevent and confront extremism and terrorism effectively.

5. Provision of advanced technology to the security forces to investigate, monitor and screen for the purpose of strengthening security and protection as well as ensuring safety of all Iraqi civilians.

6. Development and expansion of the detention centres according to the international criteria and development of tailored programs for education and awareness raising to confront terrorism and extremism.
7. Opening tailored training courses for the security forces and employees who work in the detention centres on methods and processes to treat the terrorists to prevent the spread of violence and terror ideology and to rehabilitate the detainees.
8. Development of special educational programs in detention and reform centres to reform and rehabilitate all those who have been affected by terrorism and extremism ideology.
9. Development of a guidelines on extremism ideology for all teachers, preachers and religious leaders who work in the educational, social and religious centres and institutions to protect the young and youths from being exposed to this ideology.
10. Creation of jobs, economic and educational opportunities, social and cultural forums as well as vocational training for the young and youths to be aware and protected from terrorism and extremism ideology.
11. Exert more efforts to increase cooperation at the regional and international levels and strengthen intelligence gathering capabilities to confront and disclose terrorists, foil plots, securing international borders and drying up financial sources.
12. Starting a genuine national reconciliation, increasing more efforts to helping IDPs and the reconstruction process in the liberated areas and facilitate and assist the return of the IDPs to their homes in the liberated areas.
13. Strengthening cooperation and coordination between Iraqi Army and Peshmerga and intelligence agencies, reestablishment of joint security mechanisms in the disputed territories between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional government to ensure security and stability and safety of the communities and prevent potential risk of the reemergence of terrorists in these areas.

14.Reform and development of the education system in Iraq and include the human rights, values and principles as well as gender equality and peaceful coexistence, and religious tolerance.

Finally, we remember that Iraq is at the crossroad today; it must take the right choice. If we make the wrong choice, Iraq will be doomed to additional suffering and failure. If we chose wisely, we can together build a secure and stable Iraq that will prosper and be an example of which all Iraqis feel ownership, a sense of belonging and can be proud of.

Thank you again for this opportunity and for your attention....