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## Not yet a civil war ... Iraq is still an "open crisis"

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Aabha Gandhi

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KUWAIT: Jusoor Arabiya and Smdja associates organized the fourth Global Strategy Group Middle East (GSGME) roundtable debate on Monday evening at the Marina Hotel. Held under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, the diverse panel of experts discussed the current situation in Iraq and the way forward for the country to move. The debate was titled "Iraq: Is there hope?"

The panel consisted of high powered officials from Iraq and the United States. Arguing on the current situation in Iraq, panelists agreed that the situation in Iraq right now does not qualify as a civil war, however what the country is currently facing is an "open crisis" situation; panelists argued that different groups in Iraq have different agendas but civilians have not picked up arms against each other.

The moderator for the debate was Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra, President of Jusoor Arabiya. The panelist consisted of Zuhair Humadi, who is a Political Scientist and Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi; Saifaldin Abdulrahman, who is Senior Aide coordinating public policy and public relations for the other Iraqi Vice President Tareq Al-Hashemi; Rend Al-Rahim Francke, the Executive Director of the Iraq Foundation and First Ambassador for the Iraqi Governing Council based in Washington DC, and Joseph P. Hoar, the Former Commander in Chief of US Central Command (1991-94) and the US Marine Corps Chief of Staff of operations during the 1991 Gulf War.

The panelists highlighted that qualified Iraqi individuals or the "educated elite" have either left the country or are leaving the country, "the situation has reached a point where they [Iraqi civilians] don't feel the same anymore."

The issue of sectarianism and the consequent "Lebanonization" of Iraq was raised as well as the fact that there can be no stability in Iraq (and consequently in the region) as long as sectarianism is the basis of Iraqi politics. Some of the panelists argued that the region must find another blueprint, a new paradigm, for Iraqi politics if there is to be a stable Iraq and hence a stable region.

Adding another perspective to the debate, Joseph Hoar said that when the US entered the war with Iraq, things that were told to the US people were not correct and "today there is a growing dissatisfaction."

The panelist agreed that the solution to the problem in Iraq now is through political consensus. "Time is running out for the US... there needs to be major improvement...otherwise it would be disastrous," said Hoar.

The Daily Star asked Al-Rahim on the sidelines of the debate if a complete withdrawal of US troops in Iraq is the solution now. "I think withdrawing US troops quickly is a disaster and soon would lead to total chaos in Iraq and what I just argued is that we simply do not have the elements of a viable state yet and before we have the element of a viable state, before we have agreement between the political party and political groups on what kind of Iraq they want then we cant have the US withdrawal so quickly because we will simply descend into total war," he replied

Asked if it has become a Catch 22 situation for the US? Al-Rahim said, "I have to say it is a catch 22 situation for the US. I am very sympathetic to the US and want to see a reduction in casualties. I personally do not want to see a 20-year-old American man dying in Iraq frankly, but we are talking about US national interest and in enduring things, when the US went in, they went in to protect their interests in the region, and I think if they withdraw they will be allowing their strategic interest to be prey to total chaos."

Dr. Ghabra asked the panelist the one key mistake the US made when they entered Iraq in 2003, the panelist stated that disbanding the Iraqi army and the de-baathification led to Iraqi people losing complete faith in the army.

In closing statements the panelists questioned the US government's entry into Iraq with no coherent policy, "now on troop withdrawal what is the coherent policy that the US is looking at?" they asked.

The GSGME conference, which is organized by Jusoor and Smdja associates, a strategic advisory group in Switzerland, brings together top executives of companies and experts from around the world in order to discuss the region and global strategies about the economic, social and political issues shaping the future in the region.

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