

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



# Sayed Ammar Al-Hakeem on Pluralism and the Future of Iraq

## About Center

Baidar Center for Studies and Planning is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established in 2015 and registered with the NGO Directorate in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in Baghdad.

The Center seeks to contribute to developing the state and its institutions, by proposing ideas and practical solutions to the main problems and challenges facing the state, including improving public sector management, policies and strategic planning, using reliable data and best practices. The Center engages the relevant authorities in the state with regular meetings to support this objective and utilises the support of international organizations dedicated to assisting Iraq's development. The Center also seeks to support economic reforms, sustainable development and provide technical assistance to the public and private sectors. The Center also seeks to support development of the private sector to provide job opportunities for citizens through training and upskilling, in a way that reduces dependence on government institutions and contributes to supporting and diversifying the country's economy.

The Center aims to utilise the vast amount of potential in Iraq's human resources by organizing programs to prepare and develop promising young people, including leaders capable of proposing, adopting and implementing visions and future plans that advance society and preserve its value system based on the commitment to a high moral standard and rejection of all types of corruption.

## Sayed Ammar Al-Hakeem on Pluralism and the Future of Iraq

On Thursday, May 6, 2021, His Eminence Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim was hosted via Zoom by Harvard University, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs, to discuss Shi'ism, Pluralism and the Future of Iraq. Below were the main issues discussed during the conversation:

**- At our Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs, we have stressed the importance of approaching religion from a broad diverse framework and thinking about pluralism and diversity within Islam, meaning developing an inclusive approach to communities such as Shias and Sunnis, as well as internal diversity that exists within these groups as well. We were delighted to receive your statement on the importance of intra-Shi'a dialogue as part of our Symposium on Diversity and Unity in Transnational Shi'ism, which we recently published. How can we approach both intra-Shi'a dialogue and inter-faith dialogue between Sunnis and Shias?**

In fact, when we intend to address Shia-Shia Dialogue and Shia-Sunni Dialogue or any human Dialogue, we must focus first on an important question which is the concept of dialogue itself as well as its importance.

The military and even economic powers in nowadays world are not sufficient to add legitimacy and acceptability to the conducts of states, societies, and individuals as was done in the past. There is another crucial factor that was introduced a few centuries ago, and that is the

factor of rationality, reflection, culture, and sciences. Whoever wishes to be unique and have accessibility must not turn a blind eye to these key and important factors.

There is no doubt that the concept of dialogue is one of the most important aspect to said international mindset. When the peoples of the world open up to one another not for the purposes of occupation, slavery and exploitation, but for the purposes of understanding, cooperation and participation to guide the human life on our small planet in a better, safer and more luxurious manner with less hardships and selfishness.

Nowadays, we are living in an era where humanity is making extraordinary efforts also its approaches, ways of thinking, its interrelationships, knowledge, science and behaviors are featured by the highest degree of rationality. This is a joyful matter marking the demarcation line between the era of narrow-minded humanity and the logic of power and the era of openness, dialogue, cooperation and the power of logic.

The school of Ahl Al-Bayt (the blessed prophet descendants) abiding by the genuine Quranic understanding which this school has long worked so conscientiously for its deep implantation within the nation, and adopted dialogue, knowledge and tolerance as a means of approaching people regardless of their varieties sects and religions.

Anyone who follows Islamic history finds that there is something like a miracle in the survival, continuation and growth of the Ahl Al-Bayt School, peace be upon them, despite all the existential challenges that the school has faced since its inception.

As they, peace be upon them, did not possess the power, arms, money, equipment, or sufficient numbers to defend themselves or their followers in the face of these difficult challenges who were historically directed due to affiliation with School of Ahl Al-Bayt and they did not

resort to this except for their logic and their cognitive, moral, ethical and spiritual style, which today yielded hundreds of millions of Shiites, as well as the consensus of Muslims who revere, honour and appreciate these pure idols that come down from the line of the noble Prophet of Islam.

The Shiites are entrusted with this unique heritage of the Imamate, they must preserve it and take it as a path in a world that is moving and maturing day after day towards more advanced levels of rationality, dialogue and cooperation.

What humanity has reached today, we are proud that it was consecrated, firm and crystallized in the Ahl al-Bayt School in the past, it should remain present today and in the future.

The approach of the Ahl Al-Bayt, peace be upon them, in opening up to everyone should be a way for the Shiites to open up to the Islamic world in particular and to the world and humanity as a whole in general, as well as to the Shiite-Shiite dialogue, which must be at the highest levels of understanding and appreciation.

We must have dialogue with others with all their human diversities from the prospective of commonality, concerns, issues and common outcomes, as well as respecting, accepting and understanding privacy. This equation, the more balanced and solid, the more practical and realistic solutions will be produced.

The aim behind dialogue is supposed to establish serious corporations in attaining the truth as it is (add the appraisal level) and equality and doing fairness as Ahl Al-Bayt putted (at the level of rights).

For example today, health, environment, security, food and economy in the world are intertwined and interdependent issues that cannot tolerate human intersections and disputes, whereas cultures, religions and idiosyncrasies are issues of concern to individuals and societies and

their sub-identities to a large extent, Infringing on them is considered prejudice to these major issues, and this requires all of us to manage this tremendous diversity and organize it with an accurate, reasonable and acceptable equation that pushes the world towards convergence and advancement, not intersection and war.

Our time should be the time of the honored person, the rational person who has no tool to administer except with mechanisms befitting him and his global position which he obtained with a torrent of tears, blood, sacrifices and painful experiences.

Hence, dialogue with all its types, levels, and mechanisms becomes an inevitable path, an indispensable necessity, and a priority that is second to none, and from which all the required assets and structures are branched out.

### **- What role can the dialogue between beliefs play in both Iraq and the Islamic world?**

As we mentioned, we see the rational human dialogue originally from the origins of our modern world, and certainly on the historical precedent for this dialogue in the Ahl Al-Bayt School, and the availability of religious, intellectual and Islamic cultural structures for it. We consider it necessary to revive and activate this approach in Shiite and Islamic circles.

Many factors have alienated our Islamic world from its origins, constants and original culture. Let's mention some:

1. Politics with its internal authoritarian or colonial external axes.
2. The convulsive and fanatical religious readings.
3. Intellectual, mental and psychological deformations.

4. Low community awareness and culture.
5. Moving away from the spirit of Islam and sticking to the scales.
6. Conflict of interests and intra-regional disputes.
7. Failure to keep pace with global shifts and changes.

And other factors, all of which were pressing and left their destructive effects on our societies, which were left behind by other global societies, not because of a lack of self in them, but because of the huge amount of obstructions and discomforts that it suffered throughout its history.

From here I see an imperative to restore the initiative and return to the dialogue table and its table by all the Shiite and Islamic political and intellectual elites in our Islamic world, not from the angle of courtesy, passing or politicized conferences or flashy slogans, but from the window of consideration of dialogue:

Originally from the origins of our modern world.

And a way to restore our Islamic civilization.

And a platform for our dialogue with all of humanity

If we want our countries to have stability, progress and growth, to have our fingerprints in our world in which we live, and not to be a burden on anyone in it, but rather respectable, influential and effective partners, we must dialogue with each other, agree on the formulas produced, and open up on the world.

Today, we strongly need to stop conflicts, zero out crises, and remove historical and mental accumulations in our Islamic world.

We must change the world's fear of Muslims into global hope, with the role and existence of Muslims.

The Islamic unity that we demand is not that unity that seeks to confront the world, or to follow it in everything that makes us in the eyes of others fierce enemies or imitators deprived of identity.

The unity that we call for is that civilized Islamic unity that contains the world and adds to it an original kind that harmonizes with common human issues and concerns and accompanies them and offers them solutions and effective prescriptions.

From here I think that if we succeed in transforming the Islamic compass from a state of hostility, stagnation and dependency (brought about by the false adherence of Islam, the extremist, the close minded, the sycophants those who are away from the spirit of Islam and reality) to a state of openness, progress and originality, we will save our Islamic world and our countries to which we belong, and we will join the ranks of our great world, as a partner, not as a follower, as an original, not as an imitator and as an additive, not as a receiver of addition.

The way to do this is dialogue, rationality, cognitive development, and the preservation of the spiritual–religious–ethical momentum that our world lacks.

The serious dialogue that is not sufficient with using ornamental general words but that seek the truth seriously would be the only means to identify and eliminate gaps and develop a plan to address them.

The Ahl Al-Bayt School, peace be upon them, which is an integral part of our Islamic world and a natural extension of Islam, has the capacity and the cognitive and spiritual infrastructures that qualify the Shiites to be an integral part of this project and civilization journey.

Iraq, with its civilization, history, sanctities, authentic people and qualitative diversity, is also very qualified to be a global arena for such dialogues and ambitious Islamic, humanitarian and civilizational projects.



Iraq is seeking politically these days to be a bridge for communication between the countries of the region to restore relations between them, but we aspire to see Iraq as a stable and active country and a civilized bridge between the peoples of the region and its elites soon, by God's will. We are making great and sincere efforts for that and we hope that they will be deemed successful.

**- Iraq is home to important seminaries, particularly with the holy city of Najaf. It is a significant site of transnational pilgrimage from across the world, with the Arbaeen pilgrimage for Imam Hussein to Karbala being the largest religious pilgrimage in the world. What do you see to be the importance of Shi'ism and the future of Iraq? What is the position of Iraq in this transnational Shi'a world as well as the Islamic world?**

Iraq is the homeland of the original Shi'ism 1400 years ago and includes in its flanks many human, Islamic and Shiite landmarks:

Humanly: Iraq is the home of human civilizations (eg. Sumerian, Babylonian, Akkadian, Assyrian and Chaldean) as well as the home of the Prophet Ibrahim al-Khalil, the father of the prophets, and the great monotheistic human religions, in addition to the fact that it contains the remains of hundreds of great prophets, in the forefront of whom are: Adam, Noah, Saleh, Hood, Job and Zulkifle mentioned in the Holy Quran.

From Islamic perspective: it is the land of the Righteous and Islamic Alawite Caliphate and it is the home and burial place of the prophets and Ahl Al-Bayt Imamate, great imams and scholars of Islamic schools and Sufism methods, and in the forefront of them are: Imam Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Kilani.

Shiite: Iraq includes the shrines of 6 imams of Ahl Al-Bayt (Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, Hussein bin Ali, Musa bin Jaafar al-Kadhim, Muhammad bin Ali al-Jawad, Ali bin Muhammad alHadi and al-Hasan bin Ali al-Askari), peace be upon them, and the birthplace of the twelfth imam, Imam Mahdi, the awaited.

In addition to this, the shrines of hundreds of Alawite from the Hashemite family, led by Imam Zaid bin Ali bin Al Hussein, may God Almighty be pleased with him.

Also, the four Deputies of the Awaited Imam and the most senior Shi'a scholars, Al-Mufid, Al-Kulayni and Al-Tusi, are lying in Iraq.

The Shiite seminaries of Iraq in Najaf, Baghdad, Hilla, Karbala and Samarra are among the oldest and most prestigious Islamic and Shiite seminaries and universities in the world.

Also, Najaf today with its millennial history symbolizes all that scientific, knowledge and religious accumulation.

Iraq is also an original symbol of the Islamic civilization in its first centuries and the time of its scientific and cultural renaissance. Baghdad in particular symbolizes it as the capital of sciences, scholars, writers, culture and art throughout our Islamic history.

All these facts and foundations make the location of the Shiites in Iraq an original, rooted and solid site in the country. The ancient and modern history has proven that the Shiites were and still are a main pillar for the cohesion and unity of Iraq, in the darkest circumstances and the most difficult situations, and this also indicates a bright future for them, God willing.

As for the secret of the Shiites 'strength, their roots and their entrenchment in Iraq, I believe, they are all those foundations that we

mentioned and the following quartet:

1. Religious Marjaya .
2. The Hussaini rituals.
3. Internal cohesion.
4. National coexistence.

In addition to its pioneering religious leadership position in Iraq, the authority in Iraq represents social leadership, moderation, management and historically accumulated knowledge.

The Shiite religious establishment in Iraq had the most prominent role in the cohesion of the Shiite community and the preservation of its authentic identity and one of the components of the Shiite mobilization nationally and their peaceful coexistence with other components.

We clearly notice that the religious authority, and despite all the challenges that the Shiites faced in their history of tyranny and dictatorship, never pushed them to work on geographic, political or social separation from the other components, but on the contrary they always urged and insistently the need for the Shiites to open up to their partners and integrate into Their homeland and coexist with their citizens and have a greater role in containing everyone. Also, the Marjaya, with its moderation of its positions and the wisdom of its decisions and historical measures, we see it pushed and pushed towards building an Iraqi state in which every Iraqi has a voice, every Iraqi has a decision, and every Iraqi has a fingerprint in the course and future of his country away from monopoly, tyranny and marginalization policies.

But also stood by for followers of the other doctrines and other religions along the history of Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Yazidis and Sabian. The human and Islamic values of religious and political freedom

were understood and confessed to the collective national identity and called for partnership in State Administration and not relying on the Shiite majority to take national resolution alone.

These positions of reference have achieved, throughout history, internal cohesion of the Shiites, and when the majority coalesces and is aware of the necessities of societal coexistence, the country holds on to its unity and identity, and this is what is happening.

On the other hand, the commitment of the Iraqi Shiites to establish the Hussaini rituals from a long history has been a major factor in their cohesion and their cultural, intellectual and behavioral development.

Al-Arba'een visit that you mentioned is one of the most important religious pilgrimages of millions, and not the only one. You see millions of visitors to Samarra, Kadhimiya, Najaf and other shrines as well throughout the year.

Yes, Al-Arba'een visit, and because it includes millions of people from outside Iraq, it took the central side and brought the world's attention to it.

The attendance of millions from 70-80 countries from around the world annually at the Hosseini carnival is amazing for days up to two weeks and the unparalleled free, excellent and generous hospitality provided by the Iraqi people to the guests of Abu Abdullah AlHussein, PBUH, created a qualitative impression on the Iraqi people that they are generous and generous, brave, committed and adhering to his moderate and humane values and habits.

In fact, all of these ingredients are strengths that have qualified the Shiites of Iraq to overcome existential, difficult and deadly challenges in their history, and there is an imperative to preserve them.

The future of the Iraqi Shiites depends on their adherence to the Quartet that we mentioned (Marjaya, rituals, unity, national identity).

Any manipulation of this strategic quartet or any neglect of it will put the Shiites in front of new and deadly dangers and challenges, God forbid.

**- Iraq is home to extraordinary diversity both in terms of religious (Shi'a, Sunni, different sects of Christianity, Yezidis) and ethnic groups (Arabs, Kurds, Turkomen, Persian-heritage communities). How does this religious pluralism impact the future of Iraqi national identity and peace in the country especially given the tensions that have existed with the legacy of Saddam's rule, the U.S.**

**invasion, and more recently, the rise of ISIS?**

At the outset, I would like to confirm my vision of this diversity and pluralism. Some say or many consider that this diversity represents a weakness for Iraq and Iraqi society and that it is an element that hinders societal cohesion, and from here either attack this diversity with titles (sectarian and racial) or call to transcend this diversity by jumping on the reality of its existence by promoting that these peculiarities must be eliminated in order to create national cohesion.

Personally, I disagree with all these propositions and visions and consider them wrong and unreal, as this diversity and plurality represents a great strength for Iraq.

Our world today is a world of diversity and multiplicity, and developed countries today go beyond the concepts of equality to reach the concept of managing diversity and investing it for the benefit of their countries, so why do we abandon this power and not invest it for the benefit of the Iraqi state

Personally, I call for the necessity of building the "Iraqi Nation" through a trilogy:

1. Respect privacy.

2. Diversity management.
3. Building the unifying national identity

Respecting privacy means: Yes to sect, no to sectarianism, yes to nationalism, no to racism, yes to religion, no to fanaticism.

Whither you are Shiite or Sunni, this very fact does not detract from your patriotism as long as are loyal to your nation and its interest. This is on of your natural national right to decide which way is the best for you. Adhering to one sect or doctrine is your understanding of the reality of Islam and it's you alone who be responsible for it in your relationship with Allah almighty. However, if you seek to deprive others of their rights or impose your opinion upon them, this will be utter virulent that threaten civil peace and national unity.

Being a Shiite or Sunni is not a defect, rather it is one of your natural rights to choose what you see as a good way. As for you seeking to exercise your right to take away the rights of others, that becomes a despicable and rejected sectarianism.

To be a Kurdish or Arab and take pride in your dress, holidays, language, and customs, that is a natural right that no one disputes with you, but if you prefer your nationalism and marginalize others, this is abhorrent and rejected racism.

To be a Muslim, Christian, Sabian, or religious and observant Yezidi, that is a natural right for you. Either you force others to convert to Islam, Christianity or other religions and treat the other with detestable nervousness, that is unacceptable.

The solution is not to jump over these identities and idiosyncrasies, but to respect and appreciate them, and to allow freedom for their adherents and their normal religious practice.

As for managing diversity, we first prevent sectarian, religious and

national retrenchment, meaning the closing of identities to themselves, and push these identities to share and cooperate, secondly, and to invest in the state's interest third.

Today, the Arabs of Iraq are the gateway to the country for more than 22 Arab countries.

Iraq's Kurds are the gateway to the Kurds in Syria, Iran and Turkey.

Turkmen in Iraq is the gateway to Turkification, just as the Shiites of Iraq are the gateway to the Shiites of Iran, the Gulf and the world.

This means the meeting of civilizations and peoples and the closer ties and interests between them, and it does not mean negative interference or interference in the affairs of others.

As for the unifying national identity, it is that identity formed from the group of major subscribers and sub-identities that guarantee the interest of all, and are embodied in the one and unified Iraqi nation.

The previous regime represented the sectarian and racist vision that sought to skip facts, eliminate idiosyncrasies, and monopolize the national identity in a single party.

The same applies to ISIS, which wanted to bring down the borders through an extremist, perverted and petrified ideology.

As for the Iraqi people, their choice is clear: coexistence, unity and cohesion, which is what we must all strive to preserve.

**- It has been over 18 years since the 2003 Iraq war. Looking back over this time period, what can you say are some of the major developments that have taken place in Iraq both positive and negative? What are some of the major roadblocks towards development and democracy in Iraq currently?**

The answer to this vital question in detail needs a lengthy explanation, but briefly:

Our Islamic and Arab region has not settled for nearly a century on stable formulas of governance systems and clear visions for state administration, and the region has attracted disparate and conflicting ideologies and regimes:

Governments in the form of monarchies, sheikhdoms, sultans, and Emirates on the one hand, and governments with military, religious, national, or ideological leaderships in general on the other hand.

The international influence of world powers in the region has divided it into conflicting loyalties and biases.

Cross-border national, political, and religious ideologies have divided nations and peoples into conflicting cantons.

Despotism and dictatorship have profoundly created gaps between peoples and governments. Militarism, coups and military ambitions have brought the region into many conflicts and external tensions or internal revolutions and revolutions.

In all of the above, Iraq had a large share of this tension and loss:

Iraq has gone through two major occupations in its history during the past 100 years (the British occupation in 1914 and the American occupation in 2003) as well as the regime's biases, sometimes with these international powers and at other times.

Iraq also experimented with various forms of regimes (the monarchy and the republic). He also experimented with various transnational ideologies (secular, religious, communist, nationalist, liberal and Islamic).



He has also undergone bitter experiences of military coups and exhausting wars in the region as a result of personal or party authoritarian ambitions.

It also suffered from despotic tyranny and dictatorship for a long history.

All these accumulations and complex problems brought the Iraqi state to a moment of complete disintegration and collapse in 2003, in addition to Iraq's loss of its sovereignty since 1990 as a result of UN decisions and its entry into Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Therefore, we can compare Iraq in 2003 and the birth of its new democratic system to that weak orphan child born by a complicated caesarean section under a circumstance of lack of care, vaccinations and necessary nutrition and at the mercy of forces who do not care much about his health as much as they care about this child's legacy of money and wealth, and On top of all that, this child has been subjected to violent shocks for 18 years as a result of the foreign military presence, terrorism, sabotage and interference in his affairs.

However, despite all these previous existential challenges, Iraq and its authentic, patient and conscious people were able to overcome 6 post-2003 challenges, which are:

1. Challenge the occupation.
2. Challenging sectarian strife.
3. Challenge Terror.
4. Partition Challenge.
5. The challenge of a return to tyranny.
6. The challenge of the collapse of the democratic choice

Each of these challenges nearly led to painful and dire consequences.

I imagine that the positives achieved by the Iraqi people amid this momentum of great challenges are many and very many, the most important of which is their boldness and courage to move forward by choosing a free democratic system and leaving the eras of tyranny and monopoly on the one hand and regaining the initiative in managing their affairs away from the international tutelage on the other hand.

We are also heading to 6 important issues to move from the stage (stopping the negatives, crises and repercussions) to the stage of accumulating positives and strength and consolidating them, which are:

1. Preserving the 6 achievements that we mentioned and consolidating them further.
2. Building the Iraqi nation.
3. Building the Iraqi state.
4. Building an integrated economic system.
5. Treatment of administrative and service weaknesses.
6. Complete the system of external relations for Iraq.

All of this requires 4 types of management:

1. Good governance management at the state level.
2. Managing diversity at the social level.
3. Managing ambition at the political level.
4. And managing interests at the regional and international level.

To this end, we put forward 3 main initiatives:

1. Calling for a social contract that leads to a new political contract.

2. Calling for the formation of cross-component political alliances.
3. Advocating for building an inclusive national identity.

**- You recently gave a speech where you introduced the idea of Shi'a nationality. What do you mean by this concept and why do you think it is important? How is Shi'ism interlinked with nationality and how would this form of nationalism look different than other forms of nationalism that Iraq has experienced in the recent past?**

Arab and Islamic countries in general faced many challenges regarding the processes of building a national identity after their independence from the Ottoman Empire or from the colonial countries.

These challenges can be summarized in 4 main points:

1. Challenging the compatibility between national and religious identity.
2. Challenging the compatibility between diversity, national and sectarian pluralism, and national identity in countries with pluralism.
3. The challenge of compatibility between transnational ideologies and national identity?
4. The challenge of identifying the foundations on which the national identity is built.

Many military or authoritarian regimes have taken the path of industrializing and imposing molded and ideological identities on their societies under politicized national or sectarian titles, which increased the problems, new crises that deepened the gap between citizens and their countries and homelands and did not solve the main problem.

On the other hand, the region witnessed opposition reactions manifested in skepticism or rejection of those imposed identities, and Islamic or secular theorizing across borders emerged to jump as well to the artificial or proposed identities.

The Shiite societies spread in many Arab and Islamic countries faced, like the rest of the citizens of their countries, duplication of identity and double dealing with them. This can be summed up by saying:

Many of the Shiite minorities in their countries have faced campaigns that question their loyalty to their countries and countries.

And a Shiite majority like the one in Iraq faced skepticism about loyalty on the one hand and the threat of its existence on the other hand due to tyranny and dictatorship.

These equations also culminated in reactions that called the Shiites to international and crossborder theorizing to preserve and defend their presence.

From here, and to solve the problem from its roots, we deliberately raised the issue openly and with clear candor, and this is summarized in:

First: The Shiites in terms of belief and belonging to the Ahl al-Bayt school, peace be upon them, are united everywhere, and they are proud of that and are honored.

But in terms of societies, they are geographically, historically, linguistically and nationally diverse from each other.

They are also, in terms of being individuals, who are diverse in their political, cultural and intellectual affiliations.

Hence, the solution is to preserve the common religious bond of the Shiites and to recognize their social and political diversity as is the case with catholic Christians who are citizens but like the Pope and Catholic Church which are cross borders global symbol.

Shi'ism, as a creed, transcends limits and determinants, just like any religion and sect.

But a Shiite, in terms of being an individual or a community, is defined by his historical, national, and geographical circumstance in which he is in.

His belonging to his country, in addition to feelings and emotions, is based on a historical and geographical accumulation and a social and political contract with his other partners, and it is a contract binding upon the agreement of all its parties.

From here we see that the equation is as follows:

Wherever the Shiites are in the majority, they should contain their other partners with the diversity of their affiliations in their countries as an elder brother and as a greater partner. Wherever they are a minority, they must adhere to the rights of citizenship, equal rights and duties with their countries and societies, and strive to win their rights at home, not across borders.

Therefore, we called for the necessity of the Shiite national identity and its consolidation within the unifying Iraqi national identity, and we believe that the Shiites of Iraq in particular are very much attached to this identity:

The fact that their Islam and Shiism is completely consistent with the geography and history of their country, and there is no objection to that.

And the fact that the historical positions of the Iraqi Shiites prove the extent of their adherence to this identity and in defense of it.

As well as the absence of vows of dictatorship, militarism and sectarianism that threatened their existence and monopolized patriotism.

We focus on this concept, not by questioning the patriotism of the Shiites, but rather to consolidate it and liberate it from the accumulations of the past and the defensive mentality entrenched in their midst.

We believe that the Shiites of Iraq and the region are experiencing a great opportunity to restore their natural roles in their countries, due to the political, intellectual and psychological changes that the region is going through, and that the Shiites should seek to invest these opportunities in their countries and to be an active part in them.

Our advice to all political systems is:

The necessity of breaking traditional molds and searching for building real national identities, through the equation of rights, duties and political contracts that are binding and reassuring for all in accordance with the principles of citizenship and societal peace.

The people of the country are more important to them than others, and the homelands do not survive except with their people, and the states do not settle except with the stability of souls and texts.

**- What role do you see Iraq playing in the Middle East in terms of leadership?**

**How can Iraq be a bridge between different countries and axes of the region?**

To answer this question, we must talk about 3 axes:

The first question:

It is the historical and geographical axis: Iraq, with its ancient civilization, its authentic people, and its rich heritage, which constitutes a rich historical memory in the hearts and minds of its children, is able to rise from its failures and more quickly than other countries.

And the existential challenges that we have overcome in the past 17 years are the biggest proof of what we are saying. Every one of these challenges will disintegrate entire countries, not be overcome in short periods of time, as happened in Iraq.

The large geography of Iraq and its enormous wealth constitute the foundations and infrastructures available for this rise.

The second Theme:

It is the focus of the present of Iraq. The Iraqis have chosen the most difficult and difficult paths for their present and future, and it is the path and choice to build a system, state, and identity different from their history and the history of their modern region, which is the democratic system, state, constitutional and national identity, away from tyranny and monopoly. And dictatorship.

This option, which is unique in the Arab world and in Islam, despite its difficulties, challenges and hardships, if it succeeds and grows up and matures more quickly than it is, it will be an advanced choice and a deep-rooted and previous experience unique in the region and it is what we hope for and work on.

This experience will allow the Iraqis to have high flexibility in movement, communication, and building balanced relationships and partnerships with the neighborhood and the world, and it will add additional strength to the country.

The third Theme:

It is the question of the future of Iraq and the region: Iraq is located between 3 important and ancient civilizations, the Persian civilization, the Turkish civilization and the Arab civilization, with an important internal national, religious and sectarian diversity, which allows it to play important civilizational, political and cultural roles between the

civilizations of the region and Their people.

Iraq's civilization, the originality of its people, its geographical location, its enormous wealth, its free and flexible system, its peaceful and conscious will, are all components of the strength of Iraq. But it is not that destructive, destructive and expansionist force that frightens others, but rather that civilized, economic and peaceful force that attracts others, contains them, and binds them together.

We want Iraq to be a main station and a tight bridge for all the energies of the region through major partnerships and major interests that restore the region's importance, stature and constructive roles.

Iraq is choosing for itself not to be a tool for sabotage, settling scores and intersection, but rather as a bridge for communication, interdependence and construction.

Let me here wrap up by sharing with you two messages.

The first: the Shias represent the majority of Iraqi population. No stability for this country without Shias playing pivotal role in it. In fact, this is what other Iraqi components demand. Let me say that no stability can be created in the region without Iraq being historically the capital of it. Iraqi Shias are the key for regional stability.

The second message is that the modern political philosophy which has produced the modern political system in the world; free from ideology and dependent on ballots boxes and reciprocal interest, is competent to respond to the Shias political thought in Najaf to create strong political system, which shape the region in such a way that will ensure the interest of all players and at the same time establish itself according to modern political tenets.