

## NPR Interview Transcript

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With U.S. forces scheduled to begin withdrawal from Iraq this summer, Iraq must now take the lead in rebuilding itself. Iraqi scientists and engineers will hold the key to the future, and Iraqi women hope to be a part of that. Liane Hansen speaks to Dr. Alkazragy and Dr. Mustafa, two female Iraqi scientists who are visiting scholars at American universities. The doctors have asked that their first names be withheld for security concerns.

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LIANE HANSEN, host:

U.S. forces are scheduled to begin to withdraw from Iraq this summer. A stripped down mission will remain. President Obama said last week it will be called Operation New Dawn.

As the title implies, the operation signals a new chapter for U.S. involvement in Iraq and a new beginning for the country itself. Since 2003, the U.S. has spent more than \$50 billion in reconstruction in Iraq, but major problems remain with water and sewage systems, medical care, education, transportation and energy production.

American commitment to Iraq reconstruction will continue, but Iraq now must take the lead in rebuilding itself. Iraqi scientists and engineers will hold the key to the country's future, and Iraqi women hope to be a part of that.

Dr. Alkazragy is an assistant professor of power engineering at the University of Technology in Baghdad. Dr. Mustafa is a lecturer in electronic and communication engineering at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil. Both women are now in the United States as part of a program created by the Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation. And Dr. Alkazragy and Dr. Mustafa join us in the studio. Welcome to both of you.

Dr. MUSTAFA (Electronic and Communication Engineering, University of Salahaddin in Erbil): Thank you.

Dr. ALKAZRAGY (Power Engineering, University of Technology in Baghdad): Thank you very much for this opportunity.

HANSEN: Dr. Alkazragy, your field is power engineering, and you're visiting Stanford University. What are you learning there that you'll be able to take back to your country?

Dr. ALKAZRAGY: Well, first of all, the first semester I did a large number of classes. Some of these classes are related to my specialties and the others are new fields. And I think these fields are very important now for my country, such as management and economics of, you know, energy. Also, I'm very interested now in learning about this

solar energy because it's very important nowadays to apply this technology in these fields.

HANSEN: You, Dr. Mustafa, are a communications engineer. What do you think that you will be able to take from your experience at Berkeley back to Iraq that will help you rebuild that country?

Dr. MUSTAFA: First, because I'm lecturer in one of the Iraqi university, I will try to learn as much as I can. I'm observing some classes in Berkeley University with, like - how can I say - it wasn't even a dream for me to audit such classes from such professors. So, I'm learning. And the system here, I like it very much. There's a very great relation between the university and industry of fields, like, you will build a bridge between theory and application.

HANSEN: So, reconstructing, I mean, making those bridges between the universities and the businesses to help do this.

Dr. MUSTAFA: Yes.

HANSEN: Are the Iraqi universities operating on the level where enough future scientists and engineers are going to graduate - that they can graduate enough people? Dr. Mustafa?

Dr. MUSTAFA: Yes, it's different from university to university. We are doing our best, but, you know, because of the long year of the wars, everything, we can say, is destroyed and we need to rebuild, to reconstruct. You know, that we are separated from the outside world for more than 30 years. So, we have these structures, as I told you. But the practical part of our university is very weak now. So, we need to rebuild these laboratories and have new equipment using the new technology in the world.

So, we have the science, we have the willing from my colleagues, from my students to learn, but we still have a shortage of the equipment and the application part in our study.

HANSEN: Well, both of you are here, as I mentioned, through the Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation, and its aim is to train Iraqi women scientists so you can take leadership roles in the country's reconstruction and its future. Do you think there is a special role for women in the rebuilding of the country? Dr. Mustafa?

Dr. MUSTAFA: Special role, I think, yes. The woman is most important part of any community. I think for the Iraqi woman we had always that special position. And we have - there's great engineers, lawyers, doctors. And the position of the woman in our family is very respectable because it's the symbol of the honor of the family, it's the pride of the family. During the wars that we had, most of our men were fighting and the woman took their job and ran the whole country and have the great responsibility in

their homes and in their work. As a woman and as an Iraqi, I'm very proud to speak about the Iraqi woman.

HANSEN: Scientists, however, I mean, there are hundreds of Iraqi intellectuals and academics that have been killed since the U.S. led invasion and many in sectarian violence. And there's also been a brain drain - what we call a brain drain - in Iraq, many fled the country. How is morale among the academics and the scientists in Iraq now? Do they fear for their lives?

Dr. ALKAZRAGY: Yes, like everyone. Yes. You have, like, trying always to survive, to live.

Dr. MUSTAFA: We must do and continue the message of our professors who were killed. For example, my professor was executed in my university. So he paid his life to let me be here or to come here. So it's a continuous message that I must teach to my students. I'm not afraid to die, but I'm afraid to die without teaching my students so that they can continue after me.

HANSEN: You mentioned your professor was executed. Why? Why were members of academia targeted for execution?

Dr. MUSTAFA: Well, we lost more than 250 professors with different specialties. Each one is a treasure for us, they were. And, really, we don't know who was responsible for that, but we know why. They want us to be ignorant. They want to destroy the Iraqi people, the Iraqi institutes and to stop us from creating. And because of the Iraqi, let me say, mind because they are always creative and exchanging knowledge, we have this ability to rebuild. Even from the zero we can rebuild and stand up again. So I think they actual - just to hate us, to stop the progress of our country.

HANSEN: And you both seem very optimistic about the future of your country.

Dr. MUSTAFA: We believe it will - takes long time, yes, but we can do.

HANSEN: Yes.

Dr. ALKAZRAGY: Nothing is impossible. We have to start. We have to start, surely.

Dr. MUSTAFA: Yes. We're going to start with the first step and maybe our students will continue after us.

HANSEN: Dr. Alkazragy is an assistant professor at the University of Technology in Baghdad. Dr. Mustafa is a lecturer at the engineering college at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil. Thank you so much for coming in and taking the time to talk to us.

Dr. ALKAZRAGY: Thank you.

Dr. MUSTAFA: Thank you very much for the opportunity. Thank you.

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