

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi of Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters

July 26, 2021

President Biden. Well, I'm honored to welcome the Prime Minister. We've known each other for some time. And welcome to the White House, welcome to the Oval, Mr. Prime Minister.

Iraq has been a vital part for the—partner of the United States for some time now in the Middle East. And we've—I've engaged deeply in Iraq for my entire career, back in the Senate, as Vice President, and as President. And I've worked with Iraq to—and matter of fact, my son Beau was in Iraq for a year with the Army National Guard.

And the sacrifices that so many—so many—have made to build the U.S.-Iraq partnership has been real, and it's consequential. And my administration is committed to strengthening that partnership, Mr. Prime Minister.

And the U.S.-Iraqi strategic dialogue is about commitments that expand our cooperation on issues like health care, climate, energy. For, as a matter of fact, I wanted to tell you: I was told you—the half a million—500,000—doses of COVID vaccine we're sending—I was told you were told they wouldn't come for a while. They'll be there in a couple of weeks.

Prime Minister Kadhimi. Thank you.

President Biden. They'll be there quickly. And you know, we support strengthening Iraq's democracy, and we're anxious to make sure the election goes forward in October. And we're also committed to our security cooperation. Our shared fight against ISIS is critical for the stability of the region. And our counterterrorism cooperation will continue, even as we shift to this new phase we're going to be talking about.

I'm looking forward to consulting with the Prime Minister today. We have a lot to talk about. He's been a good friend. And I'm anxious to get going.

The floor is yours, sir.

Prime Minister Kadhimi. Thank you, Mr. President. It's a great honor to be here today with our American friends. We have strategic partnership. I'm happy here in Washington to discuss the future of our nation and how to improve this relation between our two countries.

America, they help Iraq. Together, we fight and defeat Daesh—ISIS. And I'd like to thank the American people on behalf of all Iraq's people. Mr. President, I thank you for all the blood and treasure that America has given for a free and democratic Iraq.

Today, our relation is stronger than ever. Our partnership exists for economy, the environment, health, education, culture, and more. I'm looking forward to work with you, Mr. President, to bring our two countries more closer for benefit of Iraq and United States.

God bless our two countries. Thank you, sir, Mr. President.

President Biden. Thank you. Thank you, folks.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister—

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

Q. [Inaudible]—Veterans Affairs is going to—[inaudible].

President Biden. Whoa, whoa, whoa.

Q. Mr. President, Veterans Affairs——

President Biden. Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hang on a second. If you want to talk about Iraq, ask me a question about Iraq.

U.S. Military Operations in Iraq

Q. Yes, sir. I have a question about Iraq. Thank you, Mr. President. How many troops would you like to see in Iraq by the end of this year? And how does the relationship changes, considering this is the last strategic dialogue that you have with Iraq and the Prime Minister?

President Biden. This most recent dialogue you mean.

Q. Correct.

President Biden. Well, we've been talking a lot. Our Foreign Ministers, our Cabinet members have been talking. We're looking forward to seeing an election in October. We're working very hard with the Iraqi Government to make sure the U.N. and the GCC are—we have oversight; that there's—these are full and fair elections.

I've been in contact with Kadhim. I have—at any rate, I think things are going well. Our role in Iraq will be as a—dealing with not—it's just to be available, to continue to train, to assist, to help, and to deal with ISIS as it arrives. But we're not going to be, by the end of the year, in a combat mission.

Department of Veterans Affairs Coronavirus Vaccine Mandate

Q. Mr. President, Veterans Affairs. Mr. President, Veterans Affairs is going to have a mandate for its health care——

President Biden. You are such a pain in the neck, but I'm going to answer your question because we've known each other for so long. It has nothing to do with Iraq.

Q. I take that as a compliment, Mr. President.

President Biden. [Laughter] I'll answer your question. Yes, Veteran Affairs is going to, in fact, require that all docs working in that—in facilities are going to have to be vaccinated.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Secretary Antony J. Blinken; and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Husayn of Iraq. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization, also known as Daesh.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Iraq, Prime Minister Kadhim.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Blinken, Antony J.; Husayn, Fuad; Kadhim, Mustafa al-

Subjects: Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Iraq : Democracy efforts; Iraq : Elections; Iraq : Minister of Foreign Affairs; Iraq : Prime Minister; Iraq : Relations with U.S.; Iraq : Security cooperation with U.S.; Iraq : U.S. assistance; State, Department of : Secretary; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Veterans Health Administration.

DCPD Number: DCPD202100612.