

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq Experience Project

MUNTHIR NALU
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interviewed by: Stu Kennedy
Initial interview date: September 22, 2004
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Munthir Nalu was born in Baghdad in 1940. He was educated as a professional army officer and served in the Iraqi army (after three years in the military academy) from 1962 until he left Iraq in fear of his life in 1991. A Christian, during his military career he joined the Iraqi Staff Corps and served mainly in the Ministry of Defense working on training issues. His reason for fleeing the country fear of Saddam, who was murdering many of his fellow retired generals in order to keep any opposition from developing in the military ranks. Nalu was fortunate to have six brothers who were already in the United States. He joined them and became a U.S. citizen, living in California and Michigan.

In 2003 Nalu was recruited for the Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council, affiliated to the U.S. Department of Defense. There were about 120 Iraqi experts on the council, all serving in different capacities. Nalu served in Iraq from June 2003 to June 2004. Nalu worked with the U.S. military to establish a new Iraqi Ministry of Defense and help create a new Iraqi military.

One of the early policy decisions Nalu disagreed with was the disbanding of the Iraqi army, which he saw as a major mistake. The disbandment left too many trained soldiers without means of supporting their families. These soldiers became a fertile recruiting pool for dissidents.

Nalu felt that the Americans had the records of the Iraqi military from Saddam's time and that they could have created a good army from the ranks of those who had served before. This could have been done without making the new army a Baathist or Sunni organization. CPA disagreed with this view, failing to see the difference between the regular army and the organizations that Saddam had created such as the Special Republican Guard to protect him.

In an effort to quell anger, Nalu managed to get pensions for retired senior military officers. Nalu states that most Iraqi army officers had little education outside of the military. Consequently they did not have much opportunity to find other work. He also notes that the Iraqi army suffered from a lack of a strong non-commissioned officer corps.

Nalu felt that the creation of the Fallujah Brigade was poorly done. The commander was an Iraqi officer who had poor qualifications and was too old.

The Kurdish situation more or less took care of itself. Nalu was more concerned with a mandate to have a good balance between Sunni and Shia personnel in the new armed forces. He also noted that the new Minister of Defense, a civilian accountant, was a Shia. The minister brought a group of officials from his home town and put them in

high positions. Nalu disagreed with the selection, as he believes now is not the time to have the ministry run by an amateur. Instead, a tough military man is needed.

Nalu believes that an Iraqi army of about five divisions will be necessary for the future. He also believes that a U.S. military presence will need to be kept in the country for some time, although not in a combat role.

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Q: My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy. I'm interviewing General Munthir Nalu on behalf of the U.S. Institute for Peace. Today is the 23rd of September, 2004. General, I wonder, can we get a little biographic information first. When and where were you born, and can you tell me a little ...

NALU: Yes, I was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1940 on February 1st, 1940.

Q: Where were you educated?

NALU: I was educated – actually, I finished my high school in 1959, and after that, I joined the Military Academy for three years. I graduated as a lieutenant in 1962 and continued serving in the Iraqi army until the Gulf War, 1991. So, after that, Saddam Hussein wanted to execute me and my friends, and I have six other brothers in the States, already here, so I defected to the United States in 1991 until now. I am an American citizen now.

Q: General, what branch of the service were you in?

NALU: Well, actually, I was in the signal corps, but when I was a captain, I joined the Staff College. And in Iraq, when you join Staff College, you can serve in any corps.

Q: Did you – when you became a captain and went into the staff corps, did you have any particular – what sort of jobs did you have?

NALU: Well, I was a company commander before I joined the Staff College. But after I graduated from leadership at the Staff College in 1974, I served in the division headquarters, corps headquarters and the Ministry of Defense.

Q: And what type of work were you doing in the Ministry of Defense.

NALU: As a staff officer, I was secretary of deputy assistant for CGS for training, the last job I had in the Ministry of Defense.

Q: Well, then, what were you – during the Gulf War, what was your position at that

point?

NALU: Yes, this was my position. I was secretary of deputy assistant for CGS for training in Baghdad.

Q: What led you – you said that Saddam Hussein was going to have you killed. What led up to that?

NALU: Well, actually, Saddam Hussein, he cannot see high-ranking officers retire, sitting at home, so he started to execute most of my friends who were in the same neighborhood in Baghdad. Usually, we have an officer city, we have the same neighborhood. So he started to execute one by one. That's why he erodes Iraq for 35 years. He is a dictator.

Q: Well, was this designed to make sure that there was no cadre of people with military expertise who were sitting home and more or less free to do what they wanted.

NALU: Yes, everybody was afraid – the benefits I had, I have six brothers already in the States, and they linked me with them, and they brought me here. I came through – my brother is in the United States Army.

Q: So, just what are you doing now in Detroit?

NALU: Well, now, this is 12, 13 years I am in States, so actually I worked with my brother. He is an architect in San Diego, but unfortunately he passed away in 1998. I lived for three years in San Diego, California, when I arrived to the United States in 1991. But, in 1994, I moved to Detroit, Michigan. Also, I have my brother Farris . He is a civil engineer. And I have another two brothers here and a sister. So, since 1994 and until now, I am living in Detroit.

So, I worked with a company. My cousins, they have a heating and cooling company in Detroit, and sometimes I deal with used cars. I go to auctions and buy some cars and sell them, so this is the kind of job I have now.

Q: Well, now, how did you get sort of re-involved in Iraqi affairs when you came back, when you were in the United States?

NALU: How can ...

Q: Well, you went back to Iraq, didn't you?

NALU: Yes, I was in Iraq. I came back two months ago.

Q: You were in Iraq from when to when?

NALU: I went to Iraq actually on June 1st, 2003, and my contract is over with the Coalition Authority in the end of June 2004. So I served in Iraq for 13 months.

Q: Now, when you were hired, how were you hired? What sort of contract did you have?

NALU: Yes, actually, they established an IRDC. It's an Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council team, and we were at about more than 100, 120 Iraqi experts in different kinds of jobs. So, because I was a general, they put me with the U.S. Army. So I was a military adviser with them.

Q: Who was in charge – your organization was IRDC, is that Iraqi Reconstruction and ...

NALU: Development Council.

Q: Development Council.

NALU: Yes.

Q: Who was the head of this?

NALU: Imad Dhia.

Q: And to whom did this council report?

NALU: Well, actually Imad Dhia, he was in touch very close to Ambassador Bremer, the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) administrator.

Q: And what type of work were you – where were you assigned?

NALU: Well, actually, I worked closely with military officers in the U.S. Army in Baghdad, so I helped them a lot for recruiting and to review, evaluate and hire the Iraqis for a new Ministry of Defense and the Iraqi Armed Forces. And also I analyzed development situations and offered solutions to protect Iraqis and coalition interests, because I have a huge knowledge of Iraqi culture, history and geography, and I have many personal contacts throughout the country. I hired the majority of high-ranking officers in the new Iraqi army.

Q: When you arrived in Iraq in ...

NALU: June.

Q: ... June 2003, what was the situation there?

NALU: Well, it was better than now, and, you know, because those oppositions and Saddam's fellows, they were very weak in that time. But month after month, they gathered and they had a lot of influence.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the plan that you had with their organization? Did you expect to find things pretty much intact, or were you ready for the problems of the looting and all that?

NALU: Well, when we arrived, the big mistake that happened, they dissolved and disbanded the Iraqi army. And the big problem we faced was that the huge numbers of Iraqi officers and non-commissioned officers, they were on the street with no jobs, no money, no salaries. So we started to review some of them and find solutions for them, and we started to give them the stipend, some money to make their living. So it was terrible. The big mistake that happened, they disbanded the Iraqi army, and I didn't recommend that in the beginning, but I don't know – it happened, and this is the big issue of what is going on in Iraq nowadays.

Q: Well, I've heard some people say that essentially the Iraqi army was already disbanded by itself. The people had left, taken off their uniform and gone home.

NALU: Yes, sir, but after that, we have to call them up again to join the army, because they left the camps and the civilians, they come to the camps and they store all the equipment and all the ammunition. And, believe me, in our day, those opposition, they are fighting against us and against United States Army and the coalition, most of them from the Iraqi army.

Q: Well, at the time, when you left the Iraqi army, was the Iraqi army essentially – did it come from one of the religious or ethnic groups, or geographic groups, speaking of the officer corps?

NALU: Yes, of course, but in Saddam regime, he focused on Sunnis because he is Sunni, and he focused not on the qualified officers just because they are loyal to him. And he hired somebody from his town, from Tikrit.

Q: Were you able to reestablish contact with the officer corps when you came back?

NALU: Yes, yes, yes, sir, because I served more than 30 years in the army, so especially the senior leaders, they are mostly from my corps. Most of them, they are my students, so I brought all the senior leaders to the new Iraqi army, and they know that. Colonel

Durma and Mr. Fred Smith, the guys in the Ministry of Defense, I worked with them very closely for more than a year.

Q: What was the Ministry of Defense like when you got there? Had it been looted?

NALU: Yes, it was looted and I, [along] with General Eaton, we visited the minister of defense. We found the Iraqi civilians, finally, they were living in the building. Yes, and we visited the Military Academy, the same thing. I tell you, this is because they disbanded the Iraqi army, so everything was not under control.

Q: Well, when you arrived, had the army been disbanded yet?

NALU: Yes, yes, it was disbanded, and I have many, many friends in the former Iraqi army, and they were crying. They said, please, find us a solution, we have nothing. We are sitting home with no salaries, no nothing. So, we started to improve their lives. We started to give them this stipend. But, except those high-level in the Baath Party, we didn't give them anything until today.

Q: Was it difficult to sort out, as you were trying to reconstruct the Iraqi army, to sort out those who were prominent in the Saddam Hussein group and those who were just plain professional officers?

NALU: Of course, we didn't hire them, and I know them, and we are very fortunate we got all the computers and the profile of most of the Iraqi army. So we can go to the computer and find everything for any officers in the Iraqi army. So we didn't hire and meet with high-level Baath Party officers in the army.

Q: In other words, despite the looting, the personnel records of the army were available?

NALU: Yes, we have – available, yes. Yes, available. That's why we select the best officers and we join them to the new Iraqi army and send maybe more than 60 high-ranking officers to Washington to get a course there.

Q: What was the plan? What type of army were you all looking to reconstruct? Because Saddam had a very large army ...

NALU: Yes, half a million. He had half a million. But, the beginning, the U.S. government, it hasn't had such an idea to rebuild a new Iraqi army. But we told them – I gave them many recommendations. I told them, the country cannot live without an army, and besides, we need it for security. So we had this idea from the beginning and we started to establish the minister of defense and the joint forces.

So we started to open a camp east of Baghdad, and we started to train some new volunteers on those camps for nine weeks. And sometimes we send some officers also to Jordan.

Q: Now, what were they doing? What sort of training were they getting in Jordan?

NALU: Yes, in the weapons and the inventory and some lectures. Yes, we send to Jordan lieutenants and captains to be ready to serve in the new Iraqi army as a platoon commander, as a company commander, as a battalion commander.

Q: Now, during Saddam's time, during the time you were a serving officer, how was the army used by the Saddam regime? I'm not talking about during the wars, but internally?

NALU: In the Saddam regime, there are many kinds of armies – regular army, which I belonged to, it was outside of – it was on the border. Most of the time it was on the border against Iran. But Saddam, he created a Republican Guard, a Special Republican Guard, and al-Kuddis , Jerusalem Army, the Fedayeen Army, to protect his regime.

Q: Well, now, was the Republican army, was this specially recruited? Because sometimes there are elite units, but was this more a political elite – I mean, were the people in the Republican Guard ...

NALU: Special Republican Guard?

Q: Yes, they were political more than ...

NALU: No, they are not political. They are from his own town. They are related to him. Most of them, they are cousins and friends and from his native town. So they are very loyal to Saddam, and they have many facilities and different clothes and different salaries. He gave them many benefits.

Q: When you came back, were the officers of the Republican Guard – or the Special Republican Guard, excluded from the reconstitution of the army?

NALU: Well, most of them, they fled to Jordan or to Syria, and most of them now, they are fighting us in Fallujah and in Tikrit and in Baquba, because they have money and they have some fellows. Yes, they are now fighting against us.

Q: Well, at the Ministry of Defense, when you first arrived there in June of 2003, were you looking towards setting up what kind of – a small army?

NALU: Yes, yes, the idea was to establish a quality army, small army, and I believe we established so far six, seven battalions. And the idea was to establish three divisions, a

division in Baghdad, and a division in the south and a division up north.

Q: Now, was this to be a volunteer force?

NALU: Yes, of course. Of course.

Q: Prior to that, there had been a draft. The army had not been volunteer, is that right?

NALU: Yes, before, yes, it was everybody. [One had] to serve in the Iraqi army as conscripts, but now it's all volunteers.

Q: Well, now, in your experience, had you had much experience with the military police side of the army?

NALU: Well, it was a part of the army. It wasn't so big. That's why it's my recommendation now we have to expand this police army, because they can't do the jobs the United States did before in patrolling and control inside the cities.

Q: Well, now, when you arrived, were you working to set up schools within Iraq, or for the various branches of the military?

NALU: Well, this is the second phase. The first phase is to establish only the inventory, the battalion inventory. Then, the second stage, we're going to go to establish the Military Academy, maybe staff academy, war academy. But we are in the beginning now.

Q: Well, did you find – when you started this recruitment to reconstitute the army, how did this work? The CPA had abolished the army, and then what happened?

NALU: We opened three recruiting centers, one in Baghdad, one in Mosul up north, and one in Basrah down south. So the people, they can report to this recruiting center, and there is a procedure. And I believe there was a company, Venali, that took the responsibility for reviewing and medical tests for those volunteers. So we have three recruiting centers.

Q: Did you have much involvement in the recruitment?

NALU: No, but just I know there are three, and so one day I visited them. And always we heard on the news they attack those recruiting centers, and they kill some, because there are many people there, and always we hear that some suicide bombing cars exploded there.

Q: Well, how did you find – what was your impression of the regular army officer corps

when you got there? Were they ready to come back in?

NALU: Yes, yes, very anxious to get back, because they are professionals and they have nothing to do. Not like the United States Army, they are professionals in their field only. They are not very, very educated, like the United States officers. Maybe they have other degrees in political and economy and business – no. So, most of them, they were very eager to come back to the army. And all my friends, they come to me and say, please, Munthir, help us to get back to the army.

But I told them, we haven't such an army like Saddam, half a million, so we cannot hire you all, so we select the best of them, the honest, non-Baathist. So we send, I told you, between 50 to 60 senior officers to Washington, DC to have a course there.

Q: Well, did you find that the de-Baathification, getting rid of the senior members of the Baath, did that seem to hurt the military, or were these people who really weren't very military?

NALU: Yes, this de-Baathification, it's good, but not to prevent them from the salary, because Ambassador Bremer, his order is not to give any salaries to this high level in the Baath Party. But they have families and they have to have their living. OK, I don't agree to recall them and join the army again, no. They are dangerous. We don't want them to get again to the army, but we have to pay them as a retirement salary.

Q: Were you able to get a retirement salary?

NALU: Yes, now, when I was in Baghdad, we established an office in the Ministry of Defense to deal with those officers. And they are working hard to get retirement salary for those officers.

Q: What do the retired officers say who had been members of the Baath Party. And you were saying, they have families, they have to live and all.

NALU: Yes, yes.

Q: Was there any effort made to get them into the business community or elsewhere? In other words ...

NALU: Yes, yes. It was one of the ideas to get them in the business, but, you know, the security situation, it's bad nowadays in Iraq. Everything is related to the security situation. If we provide the security, we can find them many jobs in the different ministries in Iraq, but everything is now – it's not going smoothly, you know.

Q: Well, when you arrived there, the security situation was not bad, is that right?

NALU: Well, it wasn't bad, but now, it is bad.

Q: Well, how did you see this – what happened, from your perspective?

NALU: Well, what happened, every country, if they haven't a strong army, a strong police, a strong security department, intelligence department, they cannot face those militants, those insurgents. There isn't such a power in Iraq nowadays. It's my suggestion to the United States Army, before and now, and we have to recall some, the honest officers from the Iraqi army, which I know them very well, and we have the computer. They have profiles in them. And my suggestion is to recall maybe 100,000 from those, Iraqi army.

Q: How about – one of the major efforts normally to put down an insurgency that's going on is intelligence.

NALU: Yes.

Q: And had the intelligence service become a major part of the Saddam regime, or was there an intelligence service that was a professional military intelligence?

NALU: Yes, yes, of course. Saddam, he has many different [forms] of intelligence – he has those Mukhabarat, like CIA, and he has intelligence. He has his fellows. He has Baath Party intelligence. So he based on those elements.

Q: Well, were you able to work to help reconstruct a military intelligence group that was going to be dealing with the insurgency? Normally, military intelligence deals with the army, the Iranian or Jordanian army or something like that. But to look at internally, were you making an intelligence organization to deal with the internal revolt?

NALU: Yes, I can help, and also, I hired some of my friends and I put them now in the Ministry of Defense as intelligence head sectors there. He is a good guy, he's very clever. Yes, he's working there in the Ministry of Defense. I brought him.

Q: Who was that?

NALU: His name is Abdel Razzak. He is also a general. He is in my corps, and he was Staff College dean. I hired him, and now I believe when I left Baghdad, he was in this position.

Q: When you first arrived, you say the situation wasn't too difficult.

NALU: Yes.

Q: As the roadside bombings and all – was this something that the Iraqi army could deal with?

NALU: Yes, believe me, if they call up some of the Iraqi army, the former officers, the former non-commissioned officers and retrain them again maybe for a period, some time, they can control those things. They cannot, because with all my respect to the United States Army, they are not familiar with this new society, new people. And, believe me, I can tell you that they are not stayed , they are very simple with those people.

We know Iraqi people. We can ask ourselves how Saddam Hussein, he ruled this country for 35 years. Of course, we don't be like Saddam, but in this period, we need to be tough with those insurgents.

Q: Had there been any planning for an insurgency, or did it – I mean, dealing with an insurgency, or when you arrived, did you expect this, and your colleagues expect this type of insurgency?

NALU: Yes, yes, because they didn't find a solution especially for those high-ranking officers and non-commissioned officers. They were on the street with no hope, no future, no salary. And, believe me, some of them, we interviewed them in the palace when I was in Baghdad. They told me, if you do not find us a solution, we're going to go and fight. I told them, don't say that. They say this is what we – how can we live?

So we have to solve their problems, we have to help them. I told them, not all the Iraqi army, they served with Saddam, they are Baathists and they are against the United States – no, most of them, they were scaring from Saddam.

Q: What was your impression as in the year you were there, as the American Army tried to put down the insurgency. Did you feel that they were creating more enemies than they were winning the battles, or how did you feel about this?

NALU: Well, they did a good job, of course, when they dealt with those insurgents, but I would like to see them go more active, because those who don't know what is diplomacy, we have to be strong against them. Don't give them something they can jump on us.

Q: Well, what about the insurgency that developed with Sadr and that Shia ...

NALU: Shias, yes. Believe me, the Shias, they are not so bad, like the Sunni. You know, I am Iraqi and I lived in Baghdad. I know this. Of course, I am a Christian. I am not a Sunni. I am not a Shia. But I know them very well. The Sunnis, especially in Fallujah and Tikrit, they are more dangerous than the Shias. The Shias, they are not good fighters, you know? And we can deal with the Shias more than the Sunni. The Sunni,

they don't want to see any foreign people in Iraq. They told me. They told me, we cannot see the American or the British or so and so and so. We cannot deal with them. The Shias, not. They are better than the Sunnis.

Q: Say, in Fallujah, did you get involved with the situation in Fallujah?

NALU: No, actually, but sometimes the Americans, they ask me some questions I answered. I didn't go to Fallujah.

Q: But what about the training? Did you feel that the coalition was doing enough in training the army? Did it take a long time, or ...

NALU: No, actually, I'll be honest with you, I wasn't satisfied with the training. Why? Because it's a short period. It's for eight, nine weeks only, and the trainers were American and Jordanian. At that time, I told them we have great Iraqi trainers, officers. They are sitting home. We can call them up, and they are professionals. I know them. And besides, we found them a job.

Q: But was there resistance on the part of the authorities, the CPA, to using Iraqi professional trainers?

NALU: Well, they could use them, but nobody called them – nobody. They brought Jordanian trainers over. The Jordanians, they are not better than Iraqi army. No.

Q: I mean, actually, with the Iranian war and all, your men would have quite a bit of experience.

NALU: Yes, yes, they have good experience, and especially in the training, because I told you, I was in the Ministry of Defense in the training office, so we have good officers in training – Military Academy and the Staff College, yes. And they are sitting home – many, many generals we have.

Q: What about – often, most of the training – I speak as a former enlisted man in the American Air Force. The real training often goes on by the sergeants. What about the non-commissioned officers.

NALU: Yes, it's very weak. This circle in the Iraqi army, we need a non-commissioned officer academy. We have good curriculum training for officers. It is not good for non-commissioned officers.

Q: This seems to be a major problem with people who were brought up, ended up sort of – you might call it the Soviet system.

NALU: Yes.

Q: With a large officer corps and a rather weak non-commissioned officer corps.

NALU: Yes, it's like the Eastern doctrine, yes.

Q: Well, was there work to do something about the ...

NALU: Yes, that's why when we put the new organization for the MOD (Ministry of Defense), we put in a non-commissioned officer academy.

Q: When you were at the Ministry of Defense, who was your immediate superior there?

NALU: Yes, it was a general, three-star, Mohammad Abdel Hadr , and I brought him now as an adviser in the Ministry of Defense. Now he's working. I recommended to the Americans to bring him up, and we interviewed him. He's a good guy. Now he is working as a military adviser in the Ministry of Defense in Baghdad, a general, three-star, Mohammad Abdel Hadr .

Q: How about on the American side, what sort of authority? And was there a cadre of American officers at the Ministry of Defense?

NALU: Yes, I deal with General Eaton, Major General Eaton. He is from Fort Benning camp, from Georgia, Atlanta. And I deal with Colonel Durma , PJ Durma . He is now in Washington, also. If you want, to give you his telephone, you can contact him and ask him about me and about ...

Q: Do you have his telephone number?

NALU: Yes.

Q: Could I have it?

NALU: Yes, I have it. Colonel Durma , he is in Washington. 703.

Q: Seven-oh-three.

NALU: Seven-oh-three and 798 and 7413.

Q: Seven-four-one-three.

NALU: And I have another guy, Fred Smith. He was in the Office of Security Affairs. Also, he's a great guy, and he could be my reference also, and you can ask him about me.

Also 703.

Q: Seven-oh-three.

NALU: Six-zero-eight.

Q: Six-zero-eight.

NALU: Yes, and 4556.

Q: Four-five-five-six.

NALU: I worked very closely to those gentlemen for more than a year, and you can ask them what I did for the United States and for Iraq.

Q: Well, I'd like to have their experiences, too. Well, how did this work in the Ministry of Defense? Did you get together during the day and all of you sort of plan what you were going to do, or did you have specific jobs to work on?

NALU: My office, it was with Colonel Durma and Smith. I was with them all the time. So, in the beginning, they have this Office of National Security Affairs with Mr. Smith, he was the deputy of this office. And in the beginning, we established the Defense Support Agency, which we did some interviews for the former Iraqi army, civilians, and we found them jobs in those garrisons, military bases, like in Kirkush, it's east of Baquba and Taji, where we brought those volunteers and trained them there for nine weeks.

Q: Was the nine weeks training considered too short a time?

NALU: Yes, those new volunteers and new Iraqi army.

Q: Were most of the volunteers former soldiers?

NALU: No, they are some of them from previous army, some of them new. Yes.

Q: What about getting equipment for the soldiers, both weapons and body armor and night – vision things, all this? How was that working when you were there?

NALU: Well, I told you, the training was focused on the rifles and pistols and infantry. And I believe they put a plan to change maybe the weapons, because they have Kalashnikov now in the Iraqi army. It's a Soviet weapon. So they put up plans to replace – maybe the American weapons, in the future.

Q: Did you feel by the time you left that with the training and the equipment and all, that

the Iraqi army, those that had come into the new Iraqi army, were equipped and trained well enough to deal with an insurgency?

NALU: Yes, it is not enough. It is not enough. We have to put a plan for a new training. And as I told you, we have to call up some Iraqi officers. They have good experience in training, beside American officers.

Q: What about on the British side in the south. Were they doing – how was that brought in? Were they doing the same thing?

NALU: No, we haven't such a training in the south or in the north. We have, I told you, one major, big garrison training in Kirkush. It's east of Baquba. It's about two hours by car. So we trained them there, and we open also in Taji – it's north of Baghdad, it's maybe 45 minutes. So we haven't such a training in the south or in the north, no.

Q: Did you have any feel for how the British were running the sector they have, as far as security and all?

NALU: Well, I heard that they are doing fine, but I didn't see them.

Q: As you were working on the plan, what about the Kurds? Was this something you weren't going to deal with or what?

NALU: The Kurdish?

Q: Yes.

NALU: Yes, we went two times with Colonel Durma to interview some Kurdish up north in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah. Well, the Kurdish, they have their own army. They have two armies. Actually, the guys they are responsible for the army, Jalal Talabani in Sulaymaniyah, and they have another army with Mas'ud Barzani in Irbil. The ministers of defense of those two armies, they are my friends, in my class, and the same course in the military academy. So I talked to them.

They are happy with their armies there, but also they sent some volunteers to join the new Iraqi army. But they told me they prefer to serve up north.

Q: Well, in a way, then, when you were looking at the situation, you felt that you were really dealing with – the Kurdish area was not anything – I mean, you weren't concerned with that, is that right?

NALU: No, well, they are concerned. The Kurdish, they like their region before Iraq.

Q: What about in the south? Was there much in the way of – were you really looking at the problems in sort of what's called the Sunni Triangle and all?

NALU: Well, I believe the south is much easier than the Sunni Triangle. They are very full people, and I visited all the provinces in Iraq with Colonel Durma , because we did the end reviews in the north and in the south. So I visited the 18 provinces in Iraq with Colonel Durma . So, you know, this is 12, 13 years I left Iraq. Saddam, he doesn't care about the south.

I thought I was in Samarra, when I went to Basrah and Samawah. Yes, he didn't take care of those cities in the south, because, you know, he doesn't like the Shias. They need help.

Q: Well, was the army seen – when you were there, were you beginning to see the army as a way of helping the poor areas? In other words, normally recruitment of armies – I mean, voluntary recruitment, usually the poorer the area, the more people are willing to go into the military. This was true for many years – it's changed now – but in our South. I mean, this is where we have a fairly large – some of the best recruitment has always been from the South.

NALU: Yes, most of the Iraqi soldiers, they are from the south, from the Shias. But I told you, the problem is how you make your living nowadays. Nobody has enough money. So this al Sadr and those militants, they call up and they establish their Mahdi army and so and so. Believe me, everything is about money, because he gives them – most of the Mahdi army, they belong to al Sadr, Moqtada al Sadr, they are soldiers, deserted from the Iraqi army, and they have no jobs. And Moqtada Sadr, he gives the 50 bucks, maybe 100 a month, and that's it, and he's going to fight. He's going to fight.

Q: Well, where is the money coming from, I mean, from your looking at it?

NALU: Well, they have many sources. They get donations from Iran, from Syria, yes. The money, it is not a problem for those.

Q: Was there any plan at the Ministry of Defense to use money itself and say let's buy these people?

NALU: Yes, this is the way. You can find them a job and maybe call them again to the army and give them some money. I believe they're going to leave al Sadr and those insurgents.

Q: Did you find in the officer corps there were many defections over to the insurgency? I'm talking about the ones who were recruited by you, I mean, the new ones. I mean, was this a problem?

NALU: Say it again. I don't understand.

Q: Yes, in other words, did you have problems of officers and enlisted men, whom you had trained and all, going over, becoming insurgents, leaving and becoming insurgents.

NALU: I told you, because in the beginning, when I arrived to Baghdad, we met many, many. They came to us, to the palace, to the front gate, and I went to them with U.S. Army officers and we talked with them, and they said find us a job, or give us a salary. And one of them, he was major general. He told me, Munthir, if you don't solve our problem, we're going to go and work with the insurgents. Yes, this is the problem.

Q: But after you had begun recruiting a new army ...

NALU: Yes.

Q: ... and the new soldiers, were any of them leaving and joining the insurgency once they had joined the new army?

NALU: Well, most of them, they came and we interviewed them, but if they had a bad background, we didn't accept him. But I believe that once we did accept and once he's still at home and he has a family, because those insurgents, they are offering them good money. It's a business, yes.

Q: Were there plans, for example, to use soldiers and officers of a Shia background to be used against the Sunnis, or were your troops mixed to make sure they were Sunni and Shia all together, at the battalions.

NALU: Well, in the new Iraqi army?

Q: Yes.

NALU: Yes, there's some formula with the Americans that they accept such a percentage from Sunni and Shia according – yes, it's mixed.

Q: Did this present a problem in the new army?

NALU: Yes, believe me, it is a problem, because I believe we have to go with the qualifications and with the good officers and not we have to go through the religions and the political and the parties and because he's Sunni have to get him, and because he's Shia, I have to get him. Well, I don't believe in this formula.

Q: Did you find that in the Ministry of Defense, was there much supervision from the

central part of the CPA, Bremer's office and all, or were you given ...

NALU: Yes, we gave them our advice; they were under our supervision. But nowadays, when we left, all of us, at the end of June, we came back to the United States. And I believe there is no control on them. That's why I suggest we have to have a committee to supervise what's going on in the Iraqi army, because the Iraqis, they go also, like before, they're going to bring their relatives, their friends. Like, as I know this minister of defense, he is Shia, from Diwaniyah. He brought most of his fellows from Diwaniyah, and they put them in the high positions in the Ministry of Defense.

Nowadays, there is not a chief of staff in the Iraqi army. They fired him, and his deputy, related to the minister of defense. That's why myself and the others, we would like to go again to Iraq, because we can adjust to those things.

Q: Well, how did you find – I mean, the provisional authority gave up its authority around 28th of June, just about the time you left, wasn't it?

NALU: Well, that's why the situation is getting worse after we left. Of course, when we are there, it was better. Yes, some supervision was going on. Still, we need to have advisers with the minister of defense nowadays, from our side, from the Americans.

Q: From what you hear, then, the recruitment of the army is becoming more and more – excuse my voice. I've got a little cold.

NALU: OK.

Q: Becoming more and more sort of back to the kinship and religion and who's in charge, and your friends come in and all that.

NALU: Yes. If we let them work by themselves, they're going to bring their relatives and their friends, and nobody looks to the Iraqi benefit.

Q: Yes, well, how did you find, as somebody who had left Iraq in order to make sure you weren't getting killed, on going to the United States, and 15 years – or 12 years – later, coming back. Sometimes, the people who were there, did they resent the fact that you had left and all?

NALU: Say it again, please?

Q: Did you have problems coming back, having gone to the United States and been there for about 12 years or so ...

NALU: Yes.

Q: ... did you find that your colleagues who knew you, who had to stay during the rest of the Saddam regime, did they resent you? Or were they unhappy that you ...

NALU: Yes, I met many, many, many friends and my colleagues there. They were very happy when they saw me, because they know me, and they said we are happy to see you, because you are a good man and we know you very well. And you can be useful for the new Iraqi army. So I did my best. I brought the good ones to the army, as I know, and based on the computers and profile we have. And we get good guys.

But, you know, it is unfinished work. We have a lot of work to do there.

Q: Now, have you been involved in anything else dealing with this? As an advisor, or by ...

NALU: Well, yes, there is an offer. I have an offer, maybe next week, I don't know. There is also an Iraqi adviser task force. I'd like to join them.

Q: How did you feel the training – did you feel that when you left, you had recommended that more professional training officers be gotten from the former army.

NALU: Yes.

Q: Was that being changed with the new Iraqi ...

NALU: I don't know. I don't know. I recommended that, but this is two months I am here. I have no information what's going on inside. Sometimes, yes, I call some of my friends.

Q: Are you able to have any communication by Internet, or e-mail, or that sort of thing?

NALU: Yes, sometimes I call by telephone some friends there. They are waiting for my return. They want me to go back, because they know I could be very useful in that situation.

Q: How did you feel about the political situation? Did you feel that there is a chance for elections and ...

NALU: Yes, I believe Allawi and Shamari , they are good guys and the best we have nowadays. Allawi is a good guy, he's a very tough guy, I like him, yes. Because, you know the situation, you have to be tough with those insurgents, and he is very tough, Allawi. But also, I recommended at that time, I insisted, but this is a policy; I cannot change it. I prefer to have Ministry of Defense from the former generals, Iraqi army.

And I nominated some of them, and they told me no, their policy is to put a civilian guy in this position.

So they brought this Hazim al-Shalaan. Nowadays, he's the minister of defense. He's from Diwaniyah. He is an accountant. And I believe he is not fit for this position. We have a tough situation in Iraq. We have to have a retired general in this position for a short time, maybe for one year. I know the Americans, they want like the United States, a civilian in this position. But in this period, in this tough situation, we have to have a general in the Ministry of Defense.

And besides, he is a civilian, and now we have no chief of staff. And the deputy of chief of staff, he's a pilot. He hasn't that knowledge in the army. So this is also – this is a problem.

Q: Do you see – one goes back to the revolution in July of 1958, where essentially the army took control.

NALU: Yes.

Q: And this would seem to be something that might well happen again if things keep going down, I mean, the army being the only ...

NALU: No, I agree with you, but in the United States Army, for instance, in Iraq nowadays, we will not see such a revolution like 1958. I believe the United States, they should stay there in bases in Iraq for 10 years, for 20 years.

Q: Well, I mean, the hope is that within a reasonable time, that the Iraqi army will begin to do the patrols and all that.

NALU: Yes, they have to do the patrols. It is not – I wasn't very happy when I saw the United States Army patrolling inside the cities. It is not their jobs. And they lost a lot of soldiers in patrolling. They come from the back and they shoot them.

Q: There have been accounts that there was a Fallujah brigade made ...

NALU: Yes, yes.

Q: ... and it just sort of dissolved.

NALU: It is now dissolved, this brigade?

Q: I don't know. But, I mean, I'm told it was not effective.

NALU: No, it is not. It is not. In that time, they put this Mohammad al-Raheev , I know him, and we interviewed him, with Colonel Durma , and we didn't accept him. And one day, in the news, we saw his picture and his name. He became a Fallujah brigade commander. How come? He is not fit. He is old, he's 67 and he's not that big shot.

Q: I mean, were things of this nature happening in that appointments were made sort of locally? I mean, was the Ministry of Defense in control of the troops? Because if you have a general appointed in a crucial position in Fallujah . . . Was this done by local commanders?

NALU: Yes, that belongs to the U.S. Army, as I know, because there is maybe a division commander, United States division commander in that region. And he belongs to him.

Q: Did you find this a problem?

NALU: It is a problem. Yes, it is a problem.

Q: Because I've had people who were economists who were saying that the local commanders, American military commanders, are looking for peace in their area ...

NALU: Yes.

Q: And so that they were unwilling to put in some economic plans which would make sense for the future, but immediately – it's like raising the price of bread or what have you – or raising the price of gasoline. And they would resist this, because it would cause unrest in their particular area. Did you find that the local American military commanders were making decisions about their Iraqi military in their area, which were not coordinated with the Ministry of Defense?

NALU: Well, when I was in Baghdad, we weren't happy when they established this Fallujah brigade and they nominated this guy who is not fit for this position. And then there wasn't such a control from the new Iraqi army to this brigade. So, as I know, this belongs to the United States commander in the region. It is a problem, and I don't know. They didn't solve the problem there.

Q: No. I mean, this is a difficulty that the Ministry of Defense, including the Americans assigned to the Ministry of Defense, their control was not that strong out in the provinces.

NALU: Yes, that time, we suggest that there are some generals I know from Fallujah. They were ready to take over there, and one of them, he was my student. And he had a good reputation there. Maybe we could put a retired general from Fallujah, he's a good

one, he can cooperate with us – and put him in this area.

Q: As you left, had you found that – I mean, in the year you were there, had you found that those officers who had been disbanded from the army, were they able to – were they finding real jobs, or were they still ...

NALU: No, no, no, they are on the street. They are taxi drivers. That's why I told you we have to find them a solution, find them a job. The best ones, the good ones, we can call them up and give them a position in the new Iraqi army. Why not? We know them and we have their file, and they are not dangerous to the new government.

Q: What about, like, the air force? I mean, air force officers, as things are today, there really isn't much call for air force officers.

NALU: Yes, we established a small air force, and we sent some helicopter pilots to Jordan to train them on the Bell Helicopter. And we nominated an air force commander. He was one of my students. He is Kurdish. Kamal is his name.

Q: But, in a way, the air force cadre is not very useful at a time like this.

NALU: No, no. They cannot do nothing, now.

Q: What about the navy, was there any ...

NALU: Well, also, they hired some navy officers in Basrah. Also, we have small shores in the south, just to watching the shores there. We don't need such a big air force, such a big navy, no.

Q: Well, while you were working with the Ministry of Defense, were all of you sort of looking at Iran and being concerned about maybe a threat from Iran?

NALU: Yes.

Q: How did you look at Iran at that time?

NALU: Well, you know, the cause was from Saddam. He jumped on Iran in 1980. There is a conflict between Iran and the Iraq for many, many years in the border, but nobody led it to the war, except Saddam.

Q: So, I mean, you didn't see, while you were there, that you had to really prepare an army to deal with Iran.

NALU: Yes, we need some of these border forces to watch the border with Iran, with

Syria, and that's why this is a big problem nowadays, those insurgents coming through the borders. It's very easy to go through Iraq nowadays, because we haven't these border forces. We need to watch the borders, especially those Iranians, and they send them to Najaf and Karbala to fight.

Q: Did you have any feel for foreigners, people from Saudi Arabia coming in to ...

NALU: Oh, yes, yes. Iraq, nowadays, is a theater for Arab countries. There are Jordanians, Yemenis, Saudis, Syrians. They are all in Iraq nowadays, and they are fighting against us, yes. That's why, because we have an open border.

Q: Were you able to establish intelligence on these people, or military intelligence, because Iraqis themselves would be more likely to identify who's a Jordanian or ...

NALU: Yes, yes, yes. That's why we have to focus on intelligence, yes. And we have to have a section, intelligence against Syria, against Saudi, against Iran, yes – specialists in these regions.

Q: What about equipment such as, oh, tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and that sort of thing? Was this type of equipment being made available?

NALU: Well, don't count on the Iraqi army equipment. Everything is gone, now. Everything is gone, and stalled, and sold outside Iraq, as I know. But we have to have these light vehicles, like the Humvees, to make patrolling inside the cities.

Q: Well, looking at this overall, to sort of finish this interview ...

NALU: Yes.

Q: What do you feel were sort of your greatest successes and your failures, both?

NALU: In serving in Iraq?

Q: Yes, yes.

NALU: Yes, believe me, I am happy, because I did something good for the United States and Iraq, because now I am an Iraqi-American citizen. So I know Iraq very well. I spent 51 years in Iraq when I left in 1991 to the States. So I put all my effort in that period I served in Iraq, and also I am ready to go again and serve this bad situation. Because I feel I could make a difference in this situation, as an Iraqi-American, and I served more than for 30 years in the Iraqi army, so I can be very useful in this field.

But that I am sorry to tell you that not all my recommendations took part in the situation

there. They said this is our policy, we don't agree with you with this and with that, but I told you before, with all my respect to the American expertise there, we know Iraq better than them. I am not saying that because – I am not better than them, but I am better than them in Iraq. This is the fact.

Q: Well, what about – there has been – as the casualties mount and the insurgency seems to be growing, rather than going away, there has been talk about, well, maybe the Americans should pull out and leave it to the Iraqis. What do you think would happen if the Americans ...

NALU: No, not now, not now, not now.

Q: What would happen?

NALU: Well, I don't see it's a civil war. Maybe something like civil war. But the United States should stay there for a long time, until we get a strong army, a strong police, a strong intelligence. Not now, yes.

Q: What can be done to ensure that the military – say you've got a strong military – will not become, as almost all the militaries in the Middle East have become, sort of running the country.

NALU: Not like before. I am not asking for a huge army, like Saddam's army, but at least we're going to have some units in each province, from the people of these provinces, because they know the provinces, the cities, and they have the authority from the people there. So I told you, we need to have maybe five divisions nowadays. We can call up some good ones from the former Iraqi army, and I can be the reference of them. I know most of them, and we have the database of them, and we can collect 100 officers and non-commissioned officers and establish from them five divisions. And we can, the disputed Iraqi provinces, control the cities. It's better than now – we have nothing.

Q: Well, do you feel that an Iraqi army is really beginning to develop, or is it failing?

NALU: Nowadays?

Q: Yes.

NALU: No, it is not developing, no. No, it is still weak.

Q: But is work being done that it will be stronger, or do you feel that nothing much is being done?

NALU: No, nothing much is done, because when I left, I don't feel that progress there.

No, no. There is a lot of work. There is a lot of work.

Q: Well, is it work – do you feel that the government in place now under Allawi is interested in doing something about it, or is it ...

NALU: Yes, yes. Allawi, I told you, is a good guy and he has good ideas in the future. I would love to see him elected in the next year. He's the best one nowadays. Yes.

Q: All right. Well, I think we might stop at this point. I want to thank you.

NALU: Thank you very much.