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**American University of Kurdistan**

**Middle East Peace and Security Forum**

**Special Conversation with Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson**

**Introducer & Moderator: Dr Ranj Alaaldin, Researcher**

**Duhok, Kurdistan**

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**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** (In progress) – again, and I’m afraid I’m starting to see signs, some signs that it is going to emerge again. And together, we’ve got to do everything in our power to make sure that that kind of nihilistic, death cult extremism never again threatens the people of Kurdistan or the region.

It’s more vital than ever now. With all the uncertainties that Ranj has rightly talked about, it’s more vital than ever that we are united in protecting our collective values, freedom, democracy, human rights, when they are grievously under threat from people who are willing to use force to terrorize civilians, to commit massacres of the innocent, whether in Ukraine or in Israel.

We should never therefore forget the modern history of this autonomous region, which I remember reporting on it when it happened at the time. I think I was at the European summit when John Major proposed that there should be – I think probably Francis was there, too – there should be safe havens for the – you were European minister at the time – safe havens for the Kurds because of the appalling treatment of that people by Saddam Hussein. That was way back in in 1991.

What Saddam was doing, of course I don’t have to remind you but I’ll say it anyway, he was using absolutely egregious and cynical methods to terrify innocent communities: poison gas, bombings, you name it.

It was that Major government in 1991 that proposed the safe havens, and I think it’s really grown from there. It’s incredible that we can come here and see modern Kurdistan, to wake up in Erbil, as I did, in an absolutely colossal hotel room, so big that I couldn’t find the bedroom. I found the bedroom eventually, but then I couldn’t find the bathroom. It was enormous, a fantastic place. As I looked out and I saw all the construction that’s taking place in Erbil, and I thought of the amazing potential of this region.

I want to say how much I congratulate Prime Minister Barzani on what you’ve been doing. Your economic reforms and what you’re doing with the digital banking, (it’s got to be done?). I think the government in the UK is taking a while to do some of these vital reforms. You’re getting on and doing it, but it’s absolutely vital, and I congratulate you.

By the way, can I say how good it is to see the unity of Kurdish politics incarnated here on the front row in the form of the KDP and the PUK? That is very, very encouraging to see as well. Of course, as Kurdistan’s number one export to Britain, my old friend and colleagues, Nadhim Zahawi, who, as was correctly pointed out earlier, was the architect of, I have no hesitation in reminding him of this, I’m sure he’d say the same, the fastest rollout of vaccines anywhere in Europe, which helped us to come out of lockdown faster than any other European country. Thank you, Nadhim, for what you did. That was a manifestation of natural Kurdish energy and drive, wouldn’t you say, Nadhim? I don’t think he would dissent from that. I think it was a wonderful thing that you organized.

Look, I just want you to know that you are going to have, Kurdistan is going to have our continued support, my continued support in this complex world. Particularly given all the complexities of your relations with Baghdad, you are going to have all my support in ensuring that we get solutions that are fair to the aspirations of the Kurdish people, that respect the rights of the Kurdish people, that respect the rights and obligations of the federal system, because I believe that justice requires it. I think that any excessive attempt to centralize and not to respect those rights, speaking from experience, will only be deeply counter-productive. It’s vitally important that we stick up for the rights of Kurdistan and for your economic freedoms as well.

Now, when I talk about your economic freedom, I think it’s vital for this whole region because as I say, you are an oasis, a beacon, a landmark in a way that is very different from any other parts of the Middle East.

Last time I was here, I was very proud to visit what was then the largest Jaguar showroom, Jaguar Land Rover showroom anywhere in the Middle East. I believe that it still is. At that time, I’m told that it’s getting bigger and bigger and that the proprietor of that JLR showroom has actually decided to buy another plot of land. Is that right? I’m delighted to hear it because actually, what I did then was, in order to promote Jaguar Land Rover, I got into it, one of these beautiful machines, and I got behind the wheel, and I drove out into the traffic, slightly to the surprise of my security people, who immediately tried to stop me. But my objective was to promote Jaguar Land Rovers, and I think I’ve been successful because I’m told that the sales continue to expand.

I’m delighted to see that there are now more than 100 companies, British companies that are doing business here, and that our trade is up 83% year on year. There’s one company in Halabja alone (inaudible/crosstalk) 22 tons pomegranates. Can you believe that, 22 tons of pomegranates to the United Kingdom, which is a lot of pomegranates.

We have done that, we’re doing that, even without direct flights between London and Erbil. If I had one thing, it would be is direct flights now between London and Erbil, because there is a huge market for it, and the sooner the airlines get on, and I think the better for Erbil and the better for the people of London and the UK as well.

Thank you very much for your kindness in inviting me today, and may the ideas germinate in this conference. May the ideas, may the seeds of the idea be as densely packed and as profuse as the seeds of a Halabja pomegranate itself. And may our friendship grow stronger, and the partnership between the UK and the people of Kurdistan go from strength to strength.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be with you today. I would not have missed it for the world. (Inaudible) everybody. Thank you very.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Thanks very much for your remarks. There is so much (inaudible) packed in that speech, but I’m going to start here at home in Kurdistan. One of the themes you alluded to in your remarks was the future of Kurdistan Region. This ties in to the title of this particular panel, because this session looks at the future of the Western-led international order. I always say, if you want to look at the state of the Western-led international order, the international system, take a look at the West’s friends, the shape they’re in, the position they’re in, and that tells you a lot about where the West itself stands.

Kurdistan is currently under pressure as a result of several factors. Most urgently is the pressure it’s under from malign actors and institutions, hostile actors and institutions in Baghdad. (Inaudible) say that this can be tied directly to the legacy of Western engagement in Iraq over the past few decades, but also as a result of, let’s say, the West’s pivot to Asia, with its increasing focus on China as a result of its growing rivalry with Beijing.

How can that be addressed in this very tumultuous global climate? President Biden said a couple of weeks back that America can walk and chew gum, but I think the reality is a bit different when you look at the execution, the practicalities of Western engagement in the region as a result. I’d like you to answer that question, just to kick things off.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, well, that’s a pretty (inaudible), I think you would agree. I think what you’re really saying is, how can we encourage America to take up its responsibilities as the global hegemon, which it is. Frankly, I’d rather have America as a global hegemon than any of the other candidates. (Inaudible) maybe people in this room disagree, but I would much rather have American leadership.

I think when you look back at the period you’ve just mentioned, you can see several – and America, I think you’ve got to accept that what we did in 2003 was not well thought through, right, that we didn’t have a plan and we had a lot of chaos. But then having done it, we made it to work, (largely?) by pulling out totally in 2011, I think the situation became even worse.

When you look at what’s been happening over the last few years in Syria and Afghanistan, you’re seeing signs of too little, and there is (now too much?), in my view. I think that when Assad was able to bomb his citizens without any kind of retribution, the result (inaudible) the famous (inaudible) in 2014 in Crimea. You’re seeing a sense that America is not willing to act. And that’s even worse than America active, right? Both things can have terrible consequences, but a failure of leadership or an absence of leadership, a void is worse sometimes than firm leadership.

All human institutions evolve (anywhere?), and global politics is no exception. Somehow we have to encourage the U.S. to remember that it is the last, best (inaudible). When you look at American politics today, it’s very, very interesting. (Inaudible) I would say something that maybe surprise you. I think when you look at some of the things that Donald Trump actually did, as opposed to the things he said, or some of the views that were attributed to him, you can see him taking steps to assert America’s strength abroad, like the bombing after Assad used chemical weapons, or (inaudible) whatever. You can see an American willingness, a (inaudible) to engage.

I think my message to everybody today is thinking about what’s coming down the track, and (inaudible) President Trump, there may be some interesting upsides. You’re not reading about that much in the global media at the moment. But if you look at the record, the record is very different from the (inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** It’s interesting you say that.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s interesting. I thought that was (inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** (Inaudible/crosstalk).

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** (Inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Right, right. But in the way you’re emphasizing, stressing the role and importance of the individual and not the government or the state per se. You played a rather pivotal, instrumental role in galvanizing the European response to the war in Ukraine. History is made by individuals, their convictions, their impulses, their ideological outlook, and their sense of ownership and responsibility, quite frankly, towards global crises.

Therefore, is it right to say that if you’re the Kurdish leadership here in Kurdistan, it’s not so much a government of a state, but rather an individual, around which an outlook, whether it’s a five year, four year outlook, should be devised?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, look, I think you’re totally right, and I think it’s in history, in politics, I’m afraid individual actors almost always do make a profound difference in the choices they make, can really affect how things go. I’m not a Marxian believer in huge trends that they’re also important, but in the end, individual human beings can make a profound difference. You’ve seen that repeatedly in history of this just in this century.

Look, would anybody else but Putin have been quite so nutty to have invaded a fellow Slav country like Ukraine? No democratic leader would have done that. Because you would have had – I couldn’t have gotten away with it, because I’d have had sensible people on the Tory back benches telling me they would have all revolted if I’d tried to do that. A democratic system doesn’t allow that to happen. But because you have a basically tyrannical system in Russia, Putin was able to get away with an absolutely disastrous mistake.

Talking of American intervention, look back at 2014. We did nothing. But who was the U.S. president who gave the Ukrainians Javelins? Who was it?

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Biden.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, it wasn’t Biden. It was the guy before Biden. It was Trump. Trump, yes, he, contrary to all the rhetoric about Americans and him being pro-Russian and whatever (inaudible) supposed to have, all this kind of malarkey, the stuff that went on in the hotel (inaudible) actually he gave the Ukrainians the Javelins.

I think that was very important, and that paved the way for the United States, for Joe Biden to take a very different approach on Ukraine, (that he did for Afghanistan?), which was a great, great thing.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Just to interrupt you, the issue here is that U.S. politics is volatile, and whether it’s Kurdistan or other regional actors, you simply cannot afford to bank on relying on the possibility of the next guy in charge will be a good friend and a good ally, a responsible leader.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. And so, what I’m proposing is – that’s right. What I’m trying to get over to you, in my relentlessly optimistic way, is that I think people are (apparently?) excessively pessimistic about the prospect of – from an international – I’m an internationalist – I think that there is every chance that America under a Trump presidency, just as it would be under a Biden presidency, will assume its international obligations, perhaps even more so. Perhaps even more so. That’s the paradox I want you all to think about here, because if you look at the record, Trump (inaudible) Obama (inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** (I think that’s absolutely?) in many ways. Lots to scrutinize on that topic, but I’ll move on to another.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** (You disagree with me?)?

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** I think we disagree on the sidelines rather than now, let’s say. Otherwise, we might be here all day.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** But this is the nature of informed debate (inaudible) champion in the university.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** I agree. You want to do that now? Boxing gloves on or off?

(Crosstalk.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** You said something like there is much to a challenge in what (inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Here’s what it ultimately comes down to, in my opinion. I’m not going to talk about Trump himself personally, but rather whether an individual per se is enough, is sufficient, because Trump represents himself in many ways rather than necessarily an entire category of politics. It wasn’t a Democrat, it wasn’t a Republican, it was –

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** (He was a?) Democrat actually. (Inaudible) a Republican.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** He won because he is Donald Trump.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** And quite frankly, I don’t think that’s reliable enough if you’re a reasonable actor looking towards the future to (inaudible) their well-being and so on and so forth. There needs to be some kind of stability in your partner.

And again, this is not about Trump per se, but rather the kind of politics that unfolded in the U.S..

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I accept that.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Let’s move on from what (inaudible/crosstalk).

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I see what you’re saying. You have a good point. But I think there are grounds for cautious optimism, because when you look at the actual record, I think (inaudible).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** How about China? This is a region that is looking increasingly towards China, not because it wants to. It still wants the West as a partner. But it seems the West is no longer being a reliable and committed partner. The West is letting its friends down in the region. I’m not just talking about Kurdistan; I’m talking about several GCC states and others. China is exploiting that perception. China is exploiting that strategic vacuum that the West is leaving.

I will challenge you a bit as using your UK hat here because the UK played a critical role in actually opening up a pathway for increased closer ties to China (inaudible). Is there room to coexist in the region, coexistence between the West, America, its European allies, and China?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** China and America are economically like Siamese twins. It’s madness to think that you could decouple America from China, or that there’s going to be some great wrench in the path of the (inaudible).

I happened to be in the headquarters of Walmart. Walmart is Walmart – well, Walmart is the woman is the biggest company in the world. It’s got 2.3 million employees. It’s bigger than the Chinese army, Walmart. It’s bigger than the National Health Service in the UK, which is 1.7 million, I think, roughly speaking. (Inaudible). It’s huge.

Walmart basically works with China in the most incredibly intimate way. So 80% of Walmart’s manufactured goods, and it is, as I say, the biggest company in the world, also the biggest company by revenues. You know what Walmart revenues are? $680 billion a year, right, one company. They get 80% of the manufacturing is in China. A Walmart bicycle, 92% from China, Walmart (inaudible) 92% from China and so on. (Inaudible). Now, are you really telling me that it’s in the economic interest, either of the United States or of China, to change that relationship? Of course not. It’s not going to happen.

China is a great fact of our lives. It’s a fifth of humanity. It’s a wonderful country, wonderful people. We don’t particularly want, the UK, we don’t want the Chinese in our critical national infrastructure. We don’t want Huawei in our (inaudible). We don’t want them running our nuclear power (inaudible). Well, that doesn’t mean you’re going to have a cold war with China. I’m against having a cold war with China. I’m in favor of engagement with China. That’s how I (inaudible). That is what the Americans do, by the way.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** What would be your warning to the region at large when it comes to the possibility of increased ties to China, potentially, especially if it comes at the expense of relations with the U.S. or the West?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** You’re much better off going with Western capitalism (inaudible) far, far better, because with investors like Jaguar Land Rover, or when it comes to green technology, which is, I think, what the government of Kurdistan is doing so well and championing the investment in new green industries.

There are trillions and trillions of dollars available in Western capital to get these things done. I would far, far recommend that you go to (inaudible) rather than the Chinese approach. (Inaudible)

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** (You stay where you are?).

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Because the Chinese approach very often is to build up dependencies, to build up a sense of obligation, and (inaudible/crosstalk) which is (inaudible) speaking entirely freely, a lot of countries around the world have problems (inaudible) China. They didn’t enjoy the experience. Get Western capital to help finance the green technology revolution, the switch to green technologies that already exist. That’s what I believe.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Thank you. Let’s talk about green. Prime Minister Barzani, in his opening remarks, stressed the importance of combating climate change. Kurdistan, Iraq is the fifth most vulnerable country to the effects of climate change. Nobody can really overstate the devastation of climate change and all its implications, both in the near future and the long term.

I know this is an issue that’s very close to your heart. As prime Minister, you passed a number of legislation that addressed this issue. But it seems like the international community, not just the West, is falling asleep at the wheel when it comes to this.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** You’re so right. You’re so right.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** What’s your reaction?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, look, I want to thank you very much what you just said about Prime Minister Barzani and what you’re trying to do in (Kurdistan?). It is a huge, huge challenge. But it’s also an opportunity because I think the commercial benefits of going green and switching to renewable technologies and all the jobs that they can create is fantastic.

In my own country, there’s a bit of a kind of debate going on, and we’re starting to have people want to reopen the coal mines and stuff like that. Well, Margaret Thatcher, as you may remember, you keen students of history here at the American University, Margaret Thatcher, the former conservative prime minister, went to great trouble to close the coal mines in the United Kingdom. She didn’t do it for environmental reasons really, to be totally honest. She did it because of the unions.

It’s madness to go back to coal or to think that hydrocarbons are going to be your long term solution. Yes, they have a role. And of course they’re very important in this region. But in the long term, the opportunities of solar, wind, nuclear, these are phenomenal.

We’ve shown in the UK that you can really produce huge amounts of domestic electric with renewable supplies. (Inaudible) offshore wind energy is (off mic).

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Let’s also talk a bit more about that in the context of decision-making. As the former prime minister, or as prime minister, you underwent numerous domestic political battles, and sometimes politics, government is slow, bureaucratic, and you’ve got rivals who are trying (inaudible). You’ve got a system that’s stacked against you. Nature of governance is simply complicated and congested.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s the worst system in the world, except for all the others. It’s called democracy.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** The question really is, how do you break through that barrier? How do you tear down that wall when it comes to getting things like green legislation through or mobilizing allies (inaudible), or (speaking?) to longstanding friends and getting them to stand by your side, to support you? Tell us a bit about your time as Prime Minister and how that can be undertaken.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** You’ve just got to be very (inaudible) people like Nadhim to get your vaccine rollout done, but you’ve got to be very (disciplined?), and you’ve got to believe what you do.

But I think that we’ve got to face it. We’re two democracies, and we’re facing a big challenge to the democratic system at the moment. We’ve got to stick up for democracy because in the end, they’re better and they work better than their rivals.

Look, I mean, I’d just ask you, did anybody here get vaccinated with Sputnik, for instance? Anybody use Sputnik or Sinovac from Covid? The vaccines that worked were made by the liberal, capitalist democracies. They were made by private sector investment in giant pharmaceutical companies that actually were responding to shareholder values, not the dictates of politicians, and they produced efficacious vaccines.

As I said earlier on, in a democratic system, Putin would never have done anything as arbitrary and stupid as invading a neighboring great Slav country. He just wouldn’t have done it. His backbenchers wouldn’t have let him.

XI Jinping in a democratic country would never have gone on with lockdown, his policy, far beyond the point when it was clearly democratically tolerable.

It may be painful, to get your point, it may be painful, it may be exhausting, but it is better than all the alternatives. Plus it produces far better music and far better restaurants and nightclubs. What else do we have in London? Museums. I don’t know about you, but nobody travels to hear Chinese or Russian techno funk, do they? They do travel to hear Taylor Swift. I don’t listen to Taylor Swift as much as I should, but I’m sure you do. You see what I’m trying to say?

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** I see your point. I see your point, absolutely.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** If you look at the music the world listens to, the films the world goes to watch, the clothes the world wants to wear, the culture the world loves and admires, it tends to be those things that come from liberal capitalist democracies. As well as being the real scientific breakthroughs. However grim and difficult it may be to run a liberal capitalist democracy, don’t give up on it is what I would say.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** We have a workshop yesterday, and one of the observations was that those actors, like Kurdistan, who have a historic track record for abiding by international norms, democratic values, have been let down by Western powers in favor of those actors, in fact, that do not abide by international norms, that are not democratic.

To be more specific, the Kurdish Liberation Movement, for example, has a history of not committing massacres, goes out of its way to ensure civilians are not harmed during conflict, whereas Kurdistan’s rivals, its enemies, have massacres, have committed ethnic cleansing. And yet, some Western countries still continue to appease those actors. What’s your response to that?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think what you said is absolutely right, and I think it’s why I have always insisted, ever since I had anything to do with it, that we in London prioritized (Kurdistan?), and we recognize it’s vitally important for the region.

Look, let’s not mince our words. One of the problems we’ve got now in Baghdad, let’s be absolutely clear, is that it’s not entirely obvious to me that it’s just the Iraqi interest that’s being represented in Baghdad. It’s pretty clear to me that the influence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (principals?) or whoever, is being felt there. Maybe this is not a particularly tactful thing to say, but I’ve never been (inaudible) in my tact, and I’ll repeat it, that it is very, very important when things are difficult that you recognize, that we in the West recognize the places where you have immense (inaudible), that is an oasis of liberal capitalist democracy in a very difficult and troubled area, and that we do everything we can to support, as I said in my speech, the rights, the economic and political rights of the peoples of that region. That’s what I believe the UK is going to continue to do, and I will give it every possible encouragement.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Let’s say you’re providing a recommendation or advising the Kurdish leadership or any leadership in the region, in fact. President XI turns up and promises an economic package over the course of 20 years, let’s say, 10 to 15, with billions of dollars, fundamental, crucial to the economic revival of some of these countries. The U.S. president also offers the same package.

There’s a crucial difference there. You know the president of the U.S. you’re speaking to might not be around in four years’ time. You do know President XI of China will most likely, highly likely be around for 10 to 15 years. In other words, one is actually capable of fulfilling a promise to that particular leader or government in the region. And the other one, again, very frankly, is not because of democratic governance, because of democracy. What would you recommend to that particular leader who is considering these two packages, these two offers?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I hope you took in what I was saying earlier on. All the people – you could go to the UN and you’d talk to (inaudible) whether in South Asia or Latin America or wherever, and people have built up colossal debts to China and find themselves now in a very difficult position, and they don’t like it.

Isn’t it much better to have the active and voluntary investment of Western capital markets, (helped and triggered?) by the actions of friendly, liberal, capitalist, democratic governments that will deliver long-term change for the better in your economy and your ability to tackle climate change or whatever? I think that’s the way I would go myself, rather than getting on the hook to Beijing. That’s what I would do (inaudible/crosstalk).

Yes, of course, it’s a de facto of democratic systems. The (inaudible), the leaders there (inaudible). I speak entirely personally in a way that can seem (off mic) irrational and yeah, that’s a picture of democracy. But then (inaudible) and better to have that system in which fundamentally the people are in charge than to have to have a democracy, not just because of the constraints that it provides for the (inaudible), but also for all the other economic and cultural scientific reasons that I’ve just given. It is the liberal democratic, liberal capitalist democracies that actually produce (inaudible/crosstalk).

When you talk about China, look at the U.S. in the last (few years?). Growth in the U.S., economic growth in the U.S. has been absolutely (staggering?). I think (inaudible/crosstalk) the EU and the U.S. were roughly the same economic size, about $14 trillion. I think the EU was slightly bigger by $15 trillion. The EU has 580 million people, by the way. The U.S. has about 330 million.

Today, 15 years after the crash, 15 years after 2008, do you know what the figures are, the size of the U.S. economy. The U.S. economy is guess how many trillions is it now? Anybody know? Well, that means (inaudible). I think it’s about 26 or 27 trillion. The EU is up. The EU is up only 17%. The growth in the U.S. has been phenomenal.

If you’re asking me, where should we bet? If you’re (inaudible) wondering which place to look to for the long term, go to America, fly over America, and you see it is a vast, rich, temperate, fertile, and above all, grossly underpopulated country. Where is everyone? You compare it to India or China. These are ancients. But per capita, the population per square mile in India and China is about 5 or 6 times bigger than in the U.S., to say nothing of Europe. The U.S. is in its infancy as an economic actor.

To get back to my first answer here to you, Ranj, we’ve got to make the Americans, encourage the Americans to understand this and to be a bit more self-confident about their role in the world, because I think that one thing we’ve been suffering from is an absence of American leadership rather than an oppressive America, which, if I’m honest, that’s what I think. Both things are bad, I guess, but I’d rather have American leadership at the moment.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Absolutely. We’re about to wrap up. I do have one final question for you, Boris.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** What was that note about, by the way?

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** You’ll get to know in just a few moments.

You spoke of your fondness for Kurdistan in your speech, and politics is dynamic. I know there’s a real possibility of you returning as prime minister in the UK. Now, given your fondness for Kurdistan, do you promised here and now in Kurdistan, to support, to recognize an independent Kurdish state, if you return as prime minister? (Applause.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Let me very first of all deal with the high problem, right? Because I always used to say is that I have about as much chance of being reincarnated as an olive or being decapitated by (inaudible) (and locked in a fridge?), as I do of becoming Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. (Inaudible) become president of the United Kingdom, so I had to rethink my statistics. But I think it’s very unlikely that the eventuality that you (inaudible) would happen.

But here’s what I will tell you. Whatever I do, whatever incarnation I have, I’m going to be back in Kurdistan, for the reasons I gave. (Applause.)

Now, as for the exact status of Kurdistan within the great comity of nations, that is a democratic question. (I do not ?) expect a politician (inaudible) come to England, to the UK, and to say how (inaudible/crosstalk) Wales or Scotland were to detach themselves from the United Kingdom, it would be a bit of a shock for at least some people already in the (inaudible). What I can say is I think it’s a democratic matter for the people here. It’s got to be a democratic matter in a democratic country.

But irrespective of what path Kurdistan chooses. I’ll say two things. Number one, you will have our support. You certainly have my support and have the UK’s support. But number two, the rights treaty and even the existing constitutional settlement has got to be properly respected, so as to recognize the legitimate aspirations of the people of Kurdistan. If that doesn’t happen, as I said earlier, if people feel that they are being shortchanged, if they feel that they’re being taken for granted, if they feel that they’re not getting (parity of esteem?), then that would have very, very bad, long term consequences. It’s very much in the interest of the Baghdad government to sort this out. That would be my take.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Well, that’s a very clear answer. I think we can all (inaudible). (Applause.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s about as (inaudible) as I get. Thank you.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Boris, before we conclude, I believe His Excellency, Prime Minister Barzani has a gift to give to you. (Inaudible) it was pomegranates and honey from –

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Pomegranates. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

How did you get me pomegranates so quickly?

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Mr. Prime Minister, please allow me on behalf of American University of Kurdistan, and the audience and people of Kurdistan, once again welcome you to Kurdistan and to the city of Duhok.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you.

**DR. RANJ ALAALDIN:** Thank you very much for your remarkable speech and also your (inaudible) here today. We all enjoyed it very much.

I’ll tell you what the note was. I just wanted him to not conclude the meeting, the panel, without giving me the chance to come here, and on behalf of the audience and the Kurdistani people, give you a very symbolic thank-you gift. You talked about the pomegranates. I’m going to give you a box of pomegranate from Kurdistan. And also I would like to tell you that we believe we have the best honey in the world. I will also give you another box of honey. (Applause.) I hope that (inaudible/applause).

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ve heard about the honey. I’ve heard about the honey.

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