



Remarks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kuwait City, Kuwait

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SECRETARY RICE: Alright. Well, I'd like to thank very much my colleagues, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, Mr. Zebari, and the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ali Babacan. We have just had a very good discussion of the cooperation that the United States, Turkey and Iraq are undertaking on a number of issues related to the effort that we're all making for Iraq to be secure, to have secure borders. I want to say that I have been very pleased to listen to the progress that is being made between Turkey and Iraq on a whole range of issues that Ali talked about earlier in the meeting, including the very good visit of President Talabani to Turkey.

It's been an important discussion because, of course, we are all concerned that Iraq not be a place that can be a haven for terrorists to attack Turkey. It's not good for the Turkish people, it's not good for the Iraqi people, and it's not good for the region. And therefore, I think our cooperation is producing some results there. But the PKK, which is an enemy of stability and therefore an enemy of Iraq, Turkey and the United States, needs to understand that there will be cooperation to make sure that Iraq is not going to be a terrorist safe haven.

But our conversations have been broader than that. As he said, this is really a relationship that has been very good. And I think that the economic cooperation that's going on between Turkey and Iraq, the energy cooperation and the political support that Turkey has long extended to Iraq, is just very impressive.

So thank you for joining me. Do you have a word you'd like to say?

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Well, I would also maybe repeat what Condi has just said, that we are neighbors with Iraq. We are building better and better relations in many, many fields, and also we are cooperating on our struggle against terror, especially terrorist organization called PKK. Iraq is a country which has huge potential, and Turkey is ready to contribute more to stability in Iraq, to peace in Iraq, to economic prosperity that is going to come, we believe very soon. As long as all the (inaudible) join forces together, as long as (inaudible) the will to deal with the problems, we are sure that we are going to have success. And we are also very happy about the close cooperation that we are having with the Administration of the United States, and also Condi personally on all of these issues that we are facing.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Well, thank you. I'm very pleased to see you again. I mean, since Istanbul, many things have happened and changed, both our bilateral and in Iraq. I think as you mentioned, our Turkey-Iraq relations are solid, safe and healthy. And we are trying to push them on all fronts. Of course, the issue of the PKK terrorism is still there. And Iraq's position is very clear towards this organization: Its presence is unacceptable; we condemn their actions. And we expressed our willingness to work jointly with Turkey, with you, to address this issue.

But in our view, the stability of the region is very important. As we see in this conference, there has been a great appreciation of the progress that the Iraqi Government is making. But any distractions or any further military or unilateral actions would not be helpful to our bilateral relations and to the stability of (inaudible). We decided to work together very closely on these issues, and with the help of our common ally, the United States, indeed, to try to find a way forward, perhaps some strategic vision on the stability of the entire region. But I'm very pleased to meet my colleague (inaudible). *Ahlan wa sahlan.* (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: May I, please, Foreign Minister Zebari, were you at all disappointed that there wasn't more tangible expressions of support in the form of debt relief or new loans or specific pledges for diplomatic representation from the Arab states to Iraq today?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Well, no, actually, because I think we have some commitment. We have to be patient with our Arab brothers. I think the will is there. They want to reach out. They recognize that their action is not being helpful. But I think we have some commitment from them. I mean, you will see in the future there will be some ambassadors or naming of their ambassadors or re-opening the missions.

Secondly, I think we are looking for a bigger event for an Arab meeting in Baghdad as a sign of solidarity. And I think that will send all the right message.

On the debt relief, we've been discussing with them both multilaterally and unilaterally. In fact, we have some answers. But I think they will help, they will support Iraq in that. But again, we need to be patient. I mean, this is how politics works in this part of the world.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it's been a very good couple of days for Iraq, clearly being integrated into the neighborhood, being integrated into particularly the Arab neighborhood. And I was impressed at the desire to have some concrete steps towards getting representation in Iraq. I know that Hoshyar was asked to make some arrangements to answer some questions. We, of course, are also prepared to help in any way that we can. But I expect that there's going to be representation and relatively soon, as well as going back the other way, because I know that the Iraqis are doing some work to get their representation into the Arab countries as well.

And finally, I would just note that Iraq's inclusion in the GCC+2, plus the United States, which will now be the GCC+3, is a very good step forward. And the decision of this conference to express its intention to hold the next meeting in Baghdad is yet another sign that things are moving forward. So -- and Turkey, of course, already has representation in Baghdad.

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Also in Mosul and Basra.

SECRETARY RICE: -- and Basra, too.

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Actually, all throughout the last five-year period, Turkey has never shut down its Embassy. We are always there to show our solidarity with Iraq, to show our solidarity to the people of Iraq. And we have opened a consulatory mission which is operational for the last two years, and now a new one in Basra. Again, this is going to be very important to give the right signals, so to say, to the international community about all of Iraq, not certain regions, but all of Iraq.

And also, maybe just a few words what Hoshyar just said about terror. In order to fight against a terrorist organization, it is very important to use many different instruments in a well-coordinated fashion (inaudible) many different instruments. This could be diplomacy, economic instruments, social (inaudible) instruments, military instruments. And Turkey has been using these instruments in a coordinated fashion (inaudible).

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, are you disappointed that Saudi Arabia has not come forward with a specific timeline and date to open embassies, and also on debt relief?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, on debt relief, the Saudis have already made a pledge as to what they will do, and it's very generous. But it takes some time to go through the terms of this, of course. The -- simply the technical work in terms of debt relief takes some time. But it's my understanding that this work is proceeding, that at one time there were some problems dealing with documentation, but that it's proceeding. And Saudi Arabia has already made known that it intends to be generous in its debt relief. In terms of representation, they've made known their intention to make a -- to appoint an ambassador to Iraq, and I'm sure that they will do so soon.

QUESTION: And any contacts with the Iranians yet? Any pleasantries? Any discussions on the sidelines?

SECRETARY RICE: No.

QUESTION: Or the Syrians?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, I greeted my Syrian colleague last night, and it was normal.

QUESTION: For Madame Secretary and Mr. Zebari, do you sense a new trust between Iraq and its Arab neighbors, and can you give anything tangible there?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: I think there is a new mood in the Arab world and in the region that this new Iraqi democratic regime is here to stay; that some people had some views before that it's doomed to fail, that all this that had taken place is not going to succeed. Now there is a better appreciation of the new system, political system, that the Iraqi people have chosen is here to stay. I think this is (inaudible).

Secondly, they are realizing that the fear of Iraq being dragged into a civil war is over, Iraq being dragged into a sectarian war is over, Iraq being deliberately divided is over. So all these are very encouraging signs, actually. But again, I'm a realist; I have to say that we need to be patient. What happened in Iraq is a major development in the region. I think there is a better realization of the positive development that Iraq is moving on the right path (inaudible). This is how I feel.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) what do you see as Iran and Syria's role in that regional dynamic that you're describing just now in the future, and what needs -- what are the possibilities for some sort of agreement with those countries?

And also, in relation to the wider region, related to Hamas and President Carter's comments that he never got the message from the State Department not to meet with the Hamas leadership, if you could comment on that, Madame Secretary.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, just on the first point, we're having a neighbors meeting because the countries here are the neighbors of Iraq, which is the case with Turkey, with Iran, with Syria. Turkey is an example of how to be a positive neighbor. And we would hope that all of Iraq's neighbors would choose to be positive neighbors. I think it's no secret that we do not think that that has been the case with all of Iraq's neighbors. And we believe that the obligations that have been undertaken here, by all who sit around that table, are to help to secure Iraq, to help to secure borders, to help to be -- to help in energy supply and to help with refugees.

And the good thing about a meeting like this is that it periodically calls people to account for precisely those issues. But it is not helpful to have interference in Iraq's affairs. It is not helpful to allow foreign fighters to come across the border or to train or equip militias. And again, there are positive examples of neighbors here and there are not so positive examples.

Let me just speak to the question you asked about Hamas. I want to be very clear. We counseled President Carter against coming to -- against going to the region, and particularly against having contacts with Hamas. We wanted to make sure that there would be no confusion and that there would be no sense that Hamas was somehow a party to peace negotiations which Abu Mazen has undertaken with the Israeli Prime Minister, and that is the Annapolis process and that is what we support.

Now, so there, again, is no confusion, let me just say it again: The policy of the United States is that there -- the Palestinians with whom we are dealing are the legitimately elected president of the Palestinian people, the president of the Palestinian Authority, his government headed by Salam Fayyad. That is the Palestinian leadership that is committed to peace, that has renounced violence, that is committed to a two-state solution and that is negotiating with the Israeli Government, with the support of those who were at Annapolis, including responsible Arab states, so that we can get to a two-state solution, hopefully, by the end of the year. And I just don't want there to be any confusion. The United States is not going to deal with Hamas, and we certainly told President Carter that we did not think meeting with Hamas was going to help the Palestinians who actually are devoted to peace.

MR. MCCORMACK: Alright. Thanks, guys.

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