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Baghdad, Iraq

August 14, 2005

Iraq is experiencing an unprecedented period of constructive political activity, and the United States is prepared to help Iraq as it sorts through the challenges of building a secure, democratic state, according to U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

The ambassador also stated the United States is not seeking a permanent military presence in Iraq.

"This is an exciting time for Iraq and Iraqis. They are getting together, Iraqis of various points of view, various ethnicities, various sects, to discuss a road map for Iraq's future and that road map, that national compact, is the constitution. They're dealing with very difficult issues, and they're making good progress," Khalilzad said in an August 14 interview with Al-Iraqiya television.

The ambassador said that he has spoken with the Iraqi leadership to express what the United States sees as "universal principles" that are necessary to ensure a nation's success, but he stressed that the Iraqis must find culturally appropriate ways of applying these general principles to Iraq's unique circumstances.

Khalilzad said that the multinational forces would stay in Iraq as long as necessary to ensure that Iraqi forces are capable of providing security. He said the composition and size of the multinational forces would be adjusted according to the evolving circumstances and in consultation with the new Iraqi government following the planned December 15 elections.

The ambassador dismissed the notion that the United States is seeking to maintain a long-term presence in Iraq.

"We do not seek permanent military bases in Iraq. Our goal is to help Iraq stand on its own feet, to be able to look after its own security, and to do what we can to help achieve that goal," he said.

He said the United States' primary interest is to see Iraq become a secure, stable, democratic nation.

"That's important for us, because Iraq and this region are important to us, and the problems of this region affect the security and well-being not only of the people of this area but of the world," he said. "This is the defining challenge of this time, the problems of this area. We wish Iraq to succeed as quickly as possible, to stand on its own feet as soon as possible."

Following are the transcripts of Khalilzad's interviews with Al-Iraqiya and Al-Arabiya:

U.S. Embassy in Baghdad
For Immediate Release
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Transcript of Al-Iraqiya TV Interview with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad
August 14, 2005

Q: First, how do you view the current developments taking place between the political powers regarding the constitution?

A: I'm very encouraged by the discussions among the Iraqis. This is an exciting time for Iraq and Iraqis. They are getting together, Iraqis of various points of view, various ethnicities, various sects, to discuss a road map for Iraq's future and that road map, that national compact, is the constitution. They're dealing with very difficult issues, and they're making good progress. I'm very encouraged about developments here.

Q: There have been information leaks that the US government objects to some of the articles of the Constitution, what can you tell us about this?

A: We have shared with our Iraqi friends our views with regard to what's required for a country to be successful. We want Iraq to succeed. Iraq's success is important, obviously for the Iraqis in the first instance, but it's also important for the region and the world. In terms of the world, where countries that have succeeded, have had certain principles that they have followed. Of course there are some unique circumstances that the Iraqis have, and there has to be a combination of the specific circumstances of Iraq with some general principles that have worked well and that have helped countries succeed. We have our shared views with them, but obviously the decision is for the Iraqis to make, this is their constitution, and we are here to help.

Q: What is the American reaction to Syria's and other countries' violations that permit terrorists to enter Iraq?

A: We think it's very important for the region and for Iraq to pass through this difficult transition that it's going through from a dictatorship to becoming a democracy, promoting regional cooperation rather than aggression towards its neighbors as quickly as possible. There are some countries in the area, particularly Syria and Iran, that are not being as helpful as they can be, to the Iraqis during this difficult time. We have made that clear to the Syrians and to the Iranians. We have also worked closely with the government in Iraq and with other countries to press these two countries to change their policies and to encourage them to think in new ways about relations between neighbors. They should not look at it as an opportunity when neighbors have difficulties but rather work with Iraqis at this time.

Iraq is going to succeed. The neighbors can delay Iraq's success but success is inevitable here. We are committed to the success of Iraq, Iraqis are committed to their success, and I do hope that there will be a change in the policies of Syria and Iran.

Q: Some says that there has been American pressure to finalize the drafting of constitution on time.

A: Once the constitution is passed there will be new elections. We think that it's important for the constitution draft to be produced on time. The Iraqis agree with that, they have committed themselves to finishing a draft on time. I'm encouraged by the progress that they have made, they have made agreements on many of the key issues, there are one or two issues still left for them to discuss. I am hopeful that they will be able to finish the draft of the constitution on time.

Q: After setting a permanent constitution for Iraq, what is the future of the MNFI in Iraq?

A: We will talk to the new government after the elections that take place in the aftermath of the new constitution. With regard to the arrangements for the multinational forces in Iraq, having forces in Iraq is not an end in itself for us. We are here to help Iraq stand on its own feet, and we are going to stay as long as we are needed. We will change the composition and size of the force as circumstances warrant. These are issues that will be discussed once Iraq has a permanent government.

Q: In light of a permanent constitution for Iraq, is the US seeking an agreement with the Iraqi government to build military bases in Iraq?

A: We do not seek permanent military bases in Iraq. Our goal is to help Iraq stand on its own feet, to be able to look after its own security, and to do what we can to help achieve that goal.

Q: There are some fears by neighboring countries regarding the existence of American forces in Iraq, in your opinion, after the constitution will there be any justifications for these fears?

A: There are as you know, in this part of the world many conspiracy theories about anything you can think of, including the US role in Iraq and

our military presence. We are not here because of Iraq's treasure, we do not seek it. We are not here because we want a permanent military presence. We are here to help Iraq succeed, become a successful democratic country, looking after its people, and standing on its own feet. That's important for us, because Iraq and this region are important to us, and the problems of this region affect the security and well-being not only of the people of this area but of the world. This is the defining challenge of this time, the problems of this area. We wish Iraq to succeed as quickly as possible, to stand on its own feet as soon as possible, and when that mission is done we do not seek, at the present time there are no plans, for a permanent military base here.

(end transcript)

(begin transcript)

Transcript of Al-Arabiya Interview with Ambassador Khalilzad

August 14, 2005

Q: The first question is about the constitutional drafting negotiations, you had a continued and vital presence during the meetings. What role have you performed in these meetings?

The Ambassador: I have been as helpful as I can be to the Iraqis friends who are busy trying to draft a roadmap for Iraq's future - a national compact among Iraqis about the future of their country. My assistance has been in the form of providing them with options when there has been a disagreement and I have done that, at their request. The decision of course is theirs. I told them from the beginning and I think made this clear to the media as well, that I am here to help. I would be very happy if my help was not needed but if I can do anything to help, they can call me at any time and I will be available to help them.

Q: Some people believe that you have applied pressure on the political parties leaders.

The Ambassador: I shared with Iraqi political parties our views as with regards to what's needed for Iraq to be a successful country, such as universal principles, that are part and parcel of being a successful nation. Of course we recognize Iraq is a special country with a special history, a culture and circumstances and the challenges that they have, the Iraqi leaders have, to bring together the universal principles and requirements achieved in the world with the special circumstances and culture of Iraq. We have discussed these issues and these discussions have been very cordial and straightforward. Working in partnerships rather than pressure or unpleasant discussions.

Q: Why does the United States insist on finishing the constitution on time, and holding the election on time?

The Ambassador: We have encouraged the Iraqis to do what they can to make the commitment they have made. In truth it is their commitment, their decision to draft the Constitution on time. They had an opportunity on August the first to ask for an extension and they didn't, and they don't want to face a situation where they have to amend the TAL to get an extension. That's an option that's available to them. They don't want to do that, at least not until right now. The Iraqis have made a lot of progress on coming to agreement on some extremely difficult and complicated issues. They expect that they will be able to finish it on time, and we will have to wait and see. I'm encouraged by my discussions with them, but it's important that when you commit yourself to a date that you do all that you can to meet the deadline that you've set for yourself. The Iraqis have agreed to a deadline and we've been encouraging them to stick to it.

Q: We know that you are an expert on Iraqi issues; you studied the Iraq portfolio when you were in Afghanistan and even before the war, and that you were also close to the Iraqi situation when you were in the Kurdish region. What strategy will you follow, based on your deep knowledge of the Iraqi issue?

The Ambassador: What's immediate for Iraq to succeed, first is a national compact, a constitution that all Iraqis can agree to and that is an agreement about how Iraq moves from here to become a successful country. Second, what's needed is a military strategy that is focused on groups that are not willing to reconcile, and the importance of a constitution is hopefully to get Iraqis that do not currently see them in the picture of this new Iraq, to join with those that do, and to isolate the extremists and those who want the old regime back. So our military status is not to act on those that I call irreconcilable, it really is to build up Iraqi security

institutions so that Iraqis can look after themselves. The bigger problem is institutions need not only numbers of forces, but also the quality of the forces, and institutions built in a way that Iraqis can have confidence in them and can press them, and of course, you also need reconciliation among Iraqis. Accountability is needed for sure, but also reconciliation. You need economic development and progress. You also need a new wave of interaction between Iraq and its neighbors. Some of the neighbors are seeing opportunities for themselves in the difficulties of Iraq, but Iraq must achieve. It will take more time if the neighbors are unhelpful; it behooves the neighbors to have positive relations with this new Iraq, so that Iraq, as it becomes rich and powerful once again, and would seek better relations with them. Those are I think, the key elements of what's required for Iraq to succeed. The United States will do all that it can to help Iraq achieve success as soon as possible.

Q: About MNF-I, we heard that the United States and other countries have asked the Iraqi government to put forth alternative plans for MNF withdrawal from Iraq. At the same time President Bush stated that US Forces will stay in Iraq until Iraqi forces are able to control security. Which story is more accurate?

The Ambassador: Having forces in Iraq is not an end in itself for the US. The goal is for Iraq to be able to stand on its own feet. With the liberation of Iraq, new Iraqi institutions have been built up, Iraqi army, Iraqi police, and other institutions. Those institutions are being rebuilt on a new basis and as I said before, these institutions have to have the right number, that they are successful and as they are able to take over more and more responsibility, as they stand up. The coalition forces that are now here will come down as necessary. So as one comes up, the other will go down. How much it will go down, at what rate, what would be the configuration of the forces, the mix of forces, how much heavy, how much light, for example, the forces, will depend on the sort of circumstances. The President will look to the military commanders here to have the best understanding of the circumstances to advise them on that, and he will make decisions based on that. The way to think of it is one coming up and the other coming down. Of course we understand that Iraqis would like Iraqis to defend themselves, have Iraqis to protect themselves and we support that; we appreciate that and the major focus of our efforts is to help Iraqi forces stand on their own feet.

Q: There is another issue, which is the interference that neighboring countries are applying to the internal issues of Iraq. In a recent statement, the (U.S.) Secretary of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) said that "Iranian weapons with Iranian numbers and Iranian made, have been discovered in Iraq. There is evidence of Iranian interfere in Iraq", The Iraqi government did not have a final statement about this issue or about the Secretary of Defense's statement. How will you deal with this subject? Will you engage in this issue?

The Ambassador: We have evidence of weapons and people coming across the Iranian border into Iraq, and we regard that to be unhelpful. We have made our displeasure known to the Iranians and we have discussed this issue with the Iraqi government, and the Iraqi government has discussed this with the Iranians. We will continue to work with the Iraqi government and we expect Iran to honor its international obligations not to allow its territory to be used to cause difficulties, security problems for Iraq. Iran has a dual type policy towards Iraq; on one hand, state-to-state relations are quite good, based on visits and discussions that have taken place but there is another fact, also, in policy that has the features that we've discussed, as I said before. For this reason, the time has come for countries to think in new ways about interacting with each other, to look for opportunity for increased cooperation and prosperity for all sides, and to see that as positive for everyone, rather than seeing the difficulties of your neighbor as opportunities for yourself. Because if your neighbor has a difficulty, what it can do is export problems to you too, ultimately. My hope is that they develop a plan to learn that there is centuries of conflict, to embrace a new model of thinking, and that sort of thinking will also make its way to the Middle East. The time has come for a different approach.

Q. What about Syria? There is Syrian interference, and there are infiltrators that come across the Syrian border into Iraq. A few days ago, a group of infiltrators were captured and some of the detainees had Syrian IDs. What will happen to Syria if it continues to interfere in Iraq?

The Ambassador: I think Syria is causing great difficulties. This is unacceptable and there has to be a change in Syrian policy in this regard.

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