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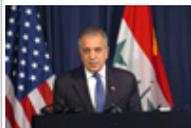
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Ambassador[About the Ambassador](#)[Ambassador's Speeches](#)[2005 Ambassador Speeches](#)[Former Ambassador's Speeches](#)[About the Embassy](#)[Latest Embassy News](#)[Programs and Events](#)**2006 ambassador speeches****Transcript of U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's Press Conference****On the Inauguration of the Permanent Government of Iraq
(Including opening statement and Q & A)**

Baghdad, Iraq

May 21, 2006

*Zalmay Khalilzad Press Conference*

Ambassador Khalilzad: Today marks a new milestone for Iraq. What happened in the assembly represents the end of Iraq's political transition that began in April 2003 from the American administration under occupation, to a democratically elected Iraqi

government. I congratulate the Iraqi people on the inauguration of their country's first-ever national unity government. Though the appointments of the Ministers of Defense and Interior will come in the next few days, the Iraqi people should take pride in the fact that the cabinet ministers announced today were approved by democratically elected leaders representing all areas of the country and all of Iraq's people. Iraqi leaders worked through their differences and forged compromises to create a permanent government. This process has been without precedent in Iraq's long history.

But Iraqi leaders have done more than form a government. First, they have agreed to power-sharing and confidence-building arrangements that are essential to catalyzing a productive political process capable of bridging divides among Iraqi communities. Second, they have agreed on common policy priorities that the government will focus on. These agreements mark a new chapter for Iraq.

The fact that Iraqi leaders are taking some additional time to name the security ministers shows the seriousness with which they have approached the task. Getting these appointments, right is essential to putting Iraq on a path to stability. Iraqi leaders have agreed that the security ministers must be unifiers, not dividers; professionals, not partisans; and free of links to crimes of the past regime and to today's sectarian militias. Moreover, Iraqi leaders have agreed that these choices must be made by consensus. It is important that these criteria are met.

Even with the formation of this unity government, tremendous challenges still lay ahead. Prime Minister Maliki realizes the new government must: Forge unity and reconciliation amongst the Iraqi people; Provide security for the Iraqi people; Deliver basic services, economic prosperity, and rule of law to the Iraqi people; and Lead the Iraqi people as they work to strengthen their new democratic institutions.

We recognize that this work will not be easy. But the cabinet ministers inaugurated today will give the new government a strong foundation for progress in Iraq. They must commit to building a better future for all Iraqis, and to put the interest of the people above those of their parties. The United States will work with the new government as it strives to bring security and economic prosperity to Iraq, and as it works to consolidate the democratic society the Iraqi people are building.

The future of Iraq will set the course for the future of the Greater Middle East. The future of this region will determine the future of the world over the next century. I therefore call upon the international community to join us in helping to support the democratically elected government of Iraq in its important work. Thank you, and May God bless the people of Iraq.

Sharon Behn (Washington Times): I would like to know how you would

characterize the walkout by the seventeen Sunnis that occurred this afternoon and how significant you think that is.

Ambassador Khalilzad: The current government represents some 85% of the forces that are in the assembly. Those who walked out today, some of them represent the National Dialogue led by Mr. Salih al-Mutlaq who has 11 members in the assembly. And a few members of the Al-Tawafuq, those associated with one faction inside the Tawafuq, led by Mr. Khalah al-Alayan. But Mr. al-Alayan himself the leader of that faction of the Tawafuq and speaker Al-Mashhadani, who is also from the same faction of course, were very much there.

I believe that what happened in terms of bringing people together is an extremely positive step in the right direction in terms of the breadth of support for the government that is there. The disagreement that was there today in the morning was that some thought that the two ministers should be named first, before the government – Interior and Defense – should be named before the government is introduced to the assembly, but as you know, the Prime Minister himself and his Deputy Prime Minister are caretakers until those two ministers are named.

Yes, sir.

Question: Mr. Ambassador, Rich Opiel with the New York Times. You said in your remarks that you thought that MOD and MOI could be named within a few days. What is it that gives you optimism that it can happen that quickly after the time it's taken so far?

Ambassador Khalilzad: Sure. Well, they have given themselves, as I understand, seven days to come to a decision and there has been of course a lot of time spent on this already and a lot of names have been identified. Some of the background checks of some of the names are still going on. I believe that these two appointments are extremely important, as I said in my statement, for the future of Iraq, so it's important to get them right. I believe that they're going to work very hard to come to a decision within the time that they have set for themselves.

Yes, sir.

Question: Ghazi Balkiz, NBC News. Sir, the word on the street that the last government did not do a really good job. There's still unemployment, services are not [inaudible], but most importantly security situation is still bad. And especially taking into consideration that there were death squads operating from within the Ministry of Interior, why is this government going to be different? What plans do they have to make the situation better?

Ambassador Khalilzad: Part of the problem of the earlier period was that the Sunni Arab community did not participate in the political process. It took a lot of effort to get them to participate first in the constitutional discussions, and then in the vote on the ratification, and then in the elections. And now they are fully politically represented and their representatives, like the representatives of other communities, are in the government. So that's one difference, because one reason for the violence was the lack of political participation by the Sunni Arabs. There are other reasons, too, like terror, which will take time to overcome. And there is the insurgency that also will take time, although I believe the political progress that has been made will have a positive impact over time with regard to the insurgency.

Now, another factor was of course the issue of ministries. And one lesson learned from the experience of the early period is that the ministers, it was emphasized, had to be people who have the confidence of all communities – who are unifiers, as we mentioned. And it's very important that the people have confidence in those institutions of – the security institutions, army and police. And who the minister is – if he's a unifier, somebody without ties to unauthorized military formations, whether Shia or Sunni, somebody who has a good reputation, a trusted – will send a good message in terms of the trust in the institution.

So those are some of the factors that will affect the security situation, as will the political factor of bringing Iraqis together, reconciliation and unity, and also dealing with, obviously, with the unauthorized military formation issue, including the militias.

Yes, sir.

Question: Thank you, Paul Schemm, AFP. Some members of the government now have said privately that they came under massive US pressure in the course of the government formation, sometimes it was

almost... they described as U.S. interference. I was wondering how you would sort of respond to such talk and sort of describe the U.S. role in the whole process.

Ambassador Khalilzad: Well I've said to you repeatedly that we are here.. and myself... my role, has been to help. And we have a lot at stake in terms of Iraq's success. That's no secret. And when my help has been needed, I have been there to provide it. And I've said ever since I've come to Iraq that I'll be available to Iraqi leaders at anytime day or night. And I have participated in a lot of meetings with a lot of Iraqis, all factions, all groups, from all sides, often at their request, and we have tried to facilitate, to bridge differences, when they have asked for our opinion, to transmit messages or proposals or suggestions when people felt that that may be a good means for communicating. But decisions have ultimately always been Iraqi decisions, and I very much appreciate the fact that compromise does not come easily here and there's a lot of mistrust and distrust and it has taken a lot of time and a lot of work to build bridges of confidence. The job of completing the building of the bridges that I talked about is not done yet. It needs to continue. And I am very pleased with the position that Prime Minister Maliki has taken. He comes across as a very effective, hands-on, no nonsense serious leader. He has dedicated himself to the goal of building trust among Iraqis, and emphasizing reconciliation, unity. And I think those are very important objectives in order to effect the security situation and everything else in Iraq. Yes, Sir.

Question: Mr. Ambassador. Nelson Hernandez with the Washington Post. You said that it's going to be a long road. I'm wondering, how long do you think it's going to be before you see a meaningful change in Iraqis' daily lives.

Ambassador Khalilzad: Well, psychologically, of course, in terms of how people feel, of course, I'm saying that analytically almost, because I can't speak obviously for the Iraqi street. The fact that now Iraq has a government of national unity in which the people that represent the different communities are all there should itself make them begin to feel better about the prospects for Iraq. So. Two, with regard to security, which is obviously important, without security everything is at risk...it will take time. The Prime Minister has emphasized the importance of security for Baghdad first, to put a lot of emphasis on Baghdad, and we think that's a very commendable goal, it's the capital of the country, 6 - 7 million people live here. So, he has ideas and concepts that our people are working with him on. We anticipate that over time, with the implementation of his ideas and plans, things should move in the right direction. Also, he has emphasized electricity, particularly electricity for Baghdad is another priority of his, and again, his own people, people from the Iraqi government, and from our side, have been working with him during the transition of the last few weeks, on this in terms of generation of power, in terms of distribution, in terms of security of various corridors. So I believe that things will improve, but I'm not here to signal that just because the government is formed, national unity, things will improve dramatically overnight. Things will improve, I believe, with the formation of the national unity government Iraq strategically is put on the right path. Now all major communities are stakeholders with regard to this new Iraq. There will be tactical challenges and difficulties, clearly, but fundamentally the country is now – is on the right track with the participation of all the major communities in the political process.

Yes sir.

Question: Ned Parker with the Times of London. Just wondering, how will this change the U.S. role, this unity government? Will it allow a major withdrawal of troops this year, a change of strategy in how U.S. forces are used?

Ambassador Khalilzad: Of course as I've said before, that the current size of our forces, current composition of our forces, the current mission of our forces -- are not ends in themselves for us. Our goal is Iraqi self-reliance and increased security for Iraqis. And I believe that with the political changes taking place, with the emphasis on unity and reconciliation, with effective ministers, with associated activities – that conditions are likely to move in the right direction and that would allow adjustments, in terms of the size, composition, and the mission of our forces. And I believe that the direction is, as we anticipate things move in the right direction, would be – although there will be tactical increases here and there, but strategically we're going to be moving in the direction of downsizing our forces. But that's always dependent on the condition of course, and we anticipate that this government, with the participation of all groups, will have a positive affect on the conditions.

Yes sir.

Question: Jim Rainey from the Los Angeles Times. I'm curious, are you concerned... the way this vote was handled today? From the lawmakers that we talked to, many of the people who were nomi--- err, that they voted on, they didn't know their resumes. And then there was a very quick hand vote, we had a few members who obviously weren't happy with that. Are you worried that the people who watched this on TV are going to feel like this was a sort of ramroded through and are going to question the legitimacy of the vote because it was done so quickly?

Ambassador Khalilzad: The agreement with regard to the cabinet came between various blocks that have a significant following in the assembly. And those blocks are of course: the Kurdish Alliance, as you know; the UIA, the United Iraqi Alliance, which has about 130 seats in parliament; the Kurdish Alliance some 56 or so, and then the Tawafuq - the group or the three factions that I described, together have about 44; and the Iraqiya, led by Mr. Alawi, which has something like 25. And those four main groups, those are the four largest groups in parliament - in the Assembly. And their leadership negotiated over the past you know twenty-five/six days since the Mr. Maliki was nominated. And individual members of the blocks may not know a lot about some of ministers, perhaps. But I think in terms of the leadership of the blocks, and the majority of the blocks, this has been going back and forth. Each block has discussed these names internally, in detail for a long time. So I think, my assumption is that with a rare exceptions that should be - these people should be broadly very well known to the members the various blocs. And those forces together that I described, the four main forces represent more than 90% of the membership and I said or 85% - this governments support allowed for the walkout in case they didn't ultimately will support or not the government, but it did allow for that. And the fact that Fadhila, which is one of the seven factions inside the UIA, did not participate, although it is our understanding that the leadership has said to vote with the government.

Okay? Well thank you - it is good to be with you.

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