

U.S. Envoy to Iraq Cites Political, Economic, Security Progress

Khalilzad briefs press on developments during his five months in Iraq

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad reviewed progress achieved on the seven goals he laid out upon assuming his post during a year-end press conference December 20 in Baghdad, and spoke about the necessary conditions for continued progress.

He said the compromises reached in negotiating Iraq's new Constitution, including the mechanism for amending the document when the new Council of Representatives is seated, is an important step toward forging a national compact between all of the country's ethnic and sectarian communities.

He said the Iraqi security force is growing in size and capability and that coalition forces would give special attention to training the Iraqi police force in the coming year.

More of Iraq's Sunni Arab community is embracing the political process, according to Khalilzad, and he said he would continue working to bring all parties into the process to dry up support for the insurgency.

The ambassador said he has worked with Iraq's neighbors to rally support for the new government and put pressure on Syria and Iran to stop encouraging instability in Iraq.

He said the United States has worked to build capacity in the Iraqi ministries, particularly the ministries of interior and defense, to improve the government's ability to provide basic services to the population.

The Iraqi economy, Khalilzad said, is growing and the government is working to achieve forgiveness on a significant portion of its external debt.

Finally, Khalilzad said he has made every effort to be straightforward and candid in discussing Iraq's accomplishments and challenges.

For additional information, see [Iraq's Political Process](#).

Following is the text of Khalilzad's prepared remarks:

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YEAR END STATEMENT BY U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ ZALMAY KHALILZAD

I want to thank you all for attending today's press conference. I also want to thank you, as well as the organizations you represent, for your commitment to covering events in Iraq. You, too, are on the front lines, running the risks inherent in working in an active combat zone. The people - in Iraq, in the United States, in the region and in the rest of the world - depend on your efforts to develop informed judgments about the course of events and the way ahead in Iraq.

When I arrived in July 2005, I spoke about the seven lines of action that the United States and Iraq would need to advance and that I would be pursuing as the U.S. Ambassador. On each, I will quickly review the progress we have made and the specific goals we have for the year ahead. Then I will be happy to answer your questions.

First, I spoke of the need for Iraqis to reach a national compact - an agreement among all communities on a vision for their country and a plan for how to implement it.

-- A good deal of progress was made during the negotiation of the constitutional draft.

-- Differences among groups narrowed.

-- Many issues on which there were sharp disagreements were deferred to the next parliament, on the understanding that it was likely to be more representative.

-- Finally, to win support from some Sunni Arab groups, leaders of other groups agreed to a fast-track process for amendments.

-- This give-and-take and willingness to search for accommodations set the stage for the successful ratification of the constitution.

-- During the next year, if needed, I will work with leaders as they take advantage of the opportunity to amend the constitution and arrive at a national compact.

Second, the United States and Iraq are making progress on the Iraqization of the security effort.

-- During the past year, the number of Special Police and army combat battalions in the fight

against the insurgents increased from a mere handful to 128 operational, with 74 fighting side-by-side with Coalition forces and 54 taking the lead in the fight themselves.

-- We will work with Iraqis to increase the size, capability and credibility of the Iraqi forces-with emphasis on police. Next year will be the year of the police.

Third, when I arrived last July, I spoke about a concerted effort to break the back of the insurgency by pulling rejectionists into the political process, and isolating and weakening the hard-core terrorists and Saddamists.

-- The Mission engaged the Sunni Arab leaders. This assisted in convincing the Sunni Arab community to decisively participate in the December 15 election.

-- We have reviewed our counterinsurgency strategy and added area security as a principal mission and emphasize focused stabilization after military operations.

-- As an example, the Coalition and the Iraqi government worked together to develop and implement a plan to significantly improve security along the airport road.

-- During the next year, we will continue to work on political and security tracks against the insurgency.

-- We will continue work to bring more Iraqis into the political process, which will isolate the hard-core terrorists and Saddamists.

-- We will continue to go after the terrorists in focused operations.

Fourth, I spoke about creating a more favorable regional environment for the success of Iraq.

-- We have reached out to friends in the region to encourage them to reach out to the Iraqi government and to all Iraqi communities and lend their weight to foster national accord.

-- We have put pressure on Syria to prevent insurgents from operating on Syrian territory.

-- During the next year, we will continue to take steps to encourage our regional friends and allies to do more to support the reemergence of Iraq as a valued partner in regional political and economic systems. We will also take steps to stem unhelpful activities by Syria and Iran.

Fifth, the United States is working with the Iraqi government to enhance the capacity of Iraqi ministries and provincial and regional governments.

-- This year, we have increased our efforts accelerate the development of capacity in the Ministry of Defense and Interior.

-- Recently, we have agreed to create Provincial Reconstruction Teams to build capacity for governance at the provincial levels - which is particularly important because the new Iraqi constitution devolves major authority to the provinces.

-- During the next year, we intend to work with the Iraqi government to develop more systematic capacity building programs in key ministries and at the provincial level, with the goal of making significant progress toward enabling the Iraqi government to deliver basic services to its people.

Sixth, I spoke of the need to place new emphasis on stimulating economic growth in key economic sectors.

-- The Iraqi GDP grew at a rate of 3-4 percent in 2004.

-- Iraq has abided by the IMF stand-by arrangement, which has permitted one round of debt forgiveness and has set the stage for a second tranche that will bring debt forgiveness to 30 percent of Iraq's outstanding official debt.

-- We have recalibrated our reconstruction program to emphasize smaller projects reflecting the priorities of local communities and relying on Iraqi companies and workers to implement projects.

-- During the next year, the United States and the Iraq will work together on a plan to shift Iraqi resources from unproductive subsidies to productive uses that enable Iraqis to earn livelihoods for their families. This will be a difficult transition - but, if done wisely, will open the door to prosperity for Iraq.

Seventh, last July I told you that I would actively explain U.S. goals, policies, and programs to the Iraqi people, to regional publics, and to the American people.

-- I hope that you all judge that I have been candid - explaining the challenges as well as the progress, not sugar-coating difficult realities while explaining our efforts to change those realities.

-- During the next year, my plan is to continue these efforts - so we will see more of each other soon.

Thank you for your attention. I will now welcome your questions.

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