

Remarks on President Bush's Intention to Nominate Zalmay Khalilzad as Ambassador to Iraq

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Good afternoon. Just a little more than two years ago, Saddam Hussein was still in power in Iraq. Rape, murder and torture were daily facts of life for the Iraqi people. There was no free press or freedom of expression. Mass graves were brimming with tyranny's innocent victims.



Two years ago, the United States led a coalition to bring down the Saddam Hussein regime and liberate the people of Iraq. And now, the entire world is watching as the Iraqi people liberate themselves from their tragic past and embark on the noble path of democracy.

In January, millions of Iraqis voted in their first free elections. In Baghdad today, new leaders, blessed with the consent of the governed, are now debating their future.

Just like our own first debates as a free nation, the debates in Iraq today are sometimes quite lively. We celebrate this debate because this lively debate is the healthy sound of democracy, and that sound is resonating far and wide.

Indeed, today, we are seeing a growing chorus of voices in the broader Middle East, voices demanding liberty and democratic reform. In all that lies ahead in Iraq, the Iraqi people can know that they will have a strong and committed partner in the United States of America.

We have been inspired by their courage and we will stand with the people of Iraq because a free Iraq serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration to the world.

To continue our close partnership, today I am pleased to announce the President's intention to nominate Ambassador Zal Khalilzad to be our next Ambassador to Iraq. At this moment of challenge and opportunity for Iraq and the Middle East, it is essential that the United States have one of our best diplomats leading our mission in Baghdad. Zal

will, of course, follow Ambassador John Negroponte, who has served with honor and distinction in that post.

The President and I have chosen Zal for this important job because he has a proven record of building consensus and achieving results in very tough situations. For over a year now, Zal has been our Ambassador to Afghanistan. Zal helped lead America's efforts to help millions of Afghan refugees return to their country and rebuild their lives in freedom. He worked tirelessly to secure the rights of Afghan women who were brutalized and oppressed under the Taliban. And Zal helped lead our government's efforts to support the Afghan Government as they managed their first free and open elections in their entire history.

Zal has certainly been effective and now he will turn to the unique situation in Iraq. Soon, the new Iraqi Transitional National Assembly will begin work on Iraq's new constitution, the next steps toward the next round of elections in Iraq later this year. As this political process continues, Zal will be a valuable representative for the United States and a wise counselor to the new Iraqi Government.

But the political process is only a small part of our partnership with Iraq. Zal will also work with all institutions of our government and those of other nations to continue our efforts to help Iraq build the institutions of freedom, from training Iraqi security forces to training Iraqi teachers, from improving power plants to improving schools, from increasing access to health care to increasing the efficiency of Iraq's food delivery systems.

The President and I know Zal very well. Zal has served as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director at the National Security Council, where he worked to define America's forward strategy for freedom in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Before the liberation of Iraq, Zal also served as Special Envoy and Ambassador-at-Large for Free Iraqis.

Zal, President Bush and I know that you will dedicate every measure of your talents to the goal of liberty and democracy in Iraq. You've helped the people of Afghanistan begin their rapid progress toward a life of freedom, and the President and I will now look to you to bring that same sense of hope and optimism to your work in Iraq.

To Zal's wife, Cheryl and their sons, Max and Alex, all of America is grateful for the love and support that you give to Zal as he does this important work for our country. And, Zal, I look forward to working closely with you to support the advance of liberty in Iraq and throughout the wider world.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: I want to thank you, Madame Secretary, Condi, for your kind words. I also want to thank President Bush for again giving me the opportunity to serve our nation. Just as winning the Cold War was the focal point of our foreign policy in the latter half of the past century, winning the war against terrorism and extremism and

advancing the cause of freedom and prosperity for the people of the greater Middle East is the defining challenge of our time.

I have been privileged to help meet this challenge as Ambassador and Special Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan during the past 16 months. In partnership with the Afghan people and their leaders, particularly President Karzai, we have made great strides. Success in Afghanistan will lead to the political, economic, commercial and ultimately the geopolitical transformation of Central Asia and South Asia.

I want to note my appreciation to President Karzai for his graciousness during my tenure in Kabul. I wish the Afghan people well as they continue to take the needed steps toward joining the community of democratic nations. I shall not forget them.

I also want to thank everyone who has served at the U.S. Mission and Combined Forces Command in Kabul during my tenure as Ambassador. They have all made major contributions to our success.

If confirmed by the Senate as Ambassador, I will work with all Iraqis, all sects, all ethnic groups, men and women, to accelerate success in Iraq. By success, we mean an Iraq that can stand on its own feet in terms of providing security for its people, controlling its borders, delivering basic services such as education and health care, and creating the framework for a prosperous private sector.

Iraq, which is at the heart of a great civilization, has experienced great heights across the centuries and can rise to new heights by continuing the hard work of embracing the universal ideals of freedom, representative government, individual rights and the rule of law in a manner consistent with Iraqi traditions.

Iraq's own history has involved periods of great achievement and, unfortunately, periods of darkness as well. Iraq knew periods of glory and great flourishing of culture for centuries. Baghdad was a city that attracted great scholars, such as Farabi, and innovators in every field. Najaf, too, was a great seat of learning for centuries, giving rise to one of the world's first universities more than 1,000 years ago.

In the 20th century, as an Iraqi state reemerged, Iraq began recapturing its heritage. In the 1930s and '40s it enjoyed several successful multiparty elections for parliament. It had a free press and an independent judiciary and women were active in the professions, in the work force as well.

Then, in the late 1960s, this progress was cut short by the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein. I understand that there has been great suffering and hardship since the end of Saddam's regime. We are working hard to improve the situation, yet the liberation of Iraq by the coalition has given the Iraqi people the opportunity to renew their nation's greatness. The inspiring response of the Iraqi people on January 30th, when 8 million voted despite the threat of violence, shows that the Iraqis are ready to grasp this

opportunity. We must build on this.

If confirmed, I will lead the implementation of an integrated strategy to defeat the insurgency by working with the Iraqi Government to field effective Iraqi security forces, to engage politically with all elements in Iraq that wish to enact an enlightened constitution and build the new democratic political order, to increase the effectiveness of all Iraqi institutions and to improve the lives of the Iraqi people through reconstruction. We will also seek to broaden effective international and regional participation in support of these goals.

It is for the Iraqis to seize this historic moment by building an Iraq in which all Iraqis are vital and active participants and everyone's rights are respected. It will take time. It will not be easy. However, when the Iraqis succeed, they will become an example of a thriving democratic state and a prosperous society for the wider region.

If confirmed, I will make every effort to support and assist the Iraqi people in this historic project. We have a lot at stake in Iraq: A successful Iraq is in our own vital national interest. Helping Iraqis achieve this success is also the right thing to do. I'll be result-oriented and I will give this new assignment my all.

Madame Secretary, thank you again for the confidence that President Bush and you have expressed in me through this nomination. Thank you very much.

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