

Remarks With His Excellency Barham Salih, Minister of Planning of the Republic of Iraq

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(2:45 a.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon, I'm very pleased to welcome Minister Barham Salih here, Minister for Planning and Cooperation in Iraq. We were just saying that when I was in Iraq, he was on his way here. So I'm glad that we could have a chance to meet, obviously. This is a time for great challenge -- of great challenge for the Iraqi people, but it is also a time of great opportunity.

We've had the chance to talk about the importance of an inclusive political process in Iraq, following on the historic elections that took place there. We've had a chance to talk about the infrastructure development in Iraq and how the United States and others internationally can assist the Iraqi people in that effort. We've talked about the security situation and the connections between the political development, the economic development and the security situation. And of course, we have talked about the extremely important role of neighbors in helping to secure a peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

So thank you very much for being here, Minister.

MINISTER SALIH: Thank you, Madame Secretary. And it was a pleasure and honor to have the opportunity to discuss with you the evolving situation in Iraq and also to have an opportunity to reaffirm our gratitude for the leadership of the United States to helping the people of Iraq overcome tyranny. Undeniably, we have a challenging transition. It's a transition from a country that has not known democracy and freedom for a long, long time. And because of that, possibly, one has to accept that there are difficulties in those transition. But these difficulties have to be assessed in that context and we all should understand that it pale in comparison to what we had to endure under the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. And we look to the engagement of the United States and the support of the United States, as we build the institutions of democracy in Iraq.

We have a taxing political process for the next few months, including the drafting of a permanent constitution and having general elections again in December and we look to the support of our friends here and in the international community and making sure that Iraq will end becoming a democratic state at peace with itself and at peace with its

neighbors.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary -- the challenging situation, difficulties, you've been there lately. Mr. Zoellick has been there twice. Even as the Iraqis take more charge of their lives, does the United States have to become more engaged? Are you -- is it more of a hands-on approach now?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I -- Barry, first of all, the Iraqi Government is a sovereign and democratically elected government. And our role as a supporter of that sovereign and democratically elected government is to go there, engage with the government, ask what we can do to help, be a part of the process of Iraq's emergence from tyranny into liberty and its road to peace and stability and prosperity. And these are decisions that Iraqis are taking and I want to be very clear that these are Iraqi decisions. This is an Iraqi process.

But anything that we can do to help, anything that we can do to talk with the neighbors about the importance of supporting this process -- the international community -- about supporting this process and indeed standing for what America stands for everywhere, which is freedom and democracy and the individual rights, the rights of women and of course the rights of minorities. I think it's important that we take those messages to Iraq just as we take them around the rest of the world.

QUESTION: This is a question for both Madame Secretary and the Minister. You'll be aware of the publication of photos of Saddam Hussein in prison. I just wondered what both your reaction is to that. And also, what you think the repercussions in Iraq and the wide Arab world?

SECRETARY RICE: Minister?

MINISTER SALIH: I saw the pictures today and I think we need to look into those -- in this situation and then how these pictures came out. We are bound by the rule of law and Saddam Hussein is accused of serious war crimes. But he will be judged in court at the end of the day and he has to be treated in accordance with what the law requires.

SECRETARY RICE: And I can add nothing to that. I have confidence in the Iraqi Government's desire and capability to live up to its obligations for international standards concerning the treatment of Saddam Hussein.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Saddam Hussein. When do you think, sir, we will have a trial for Saddam Hussein? And second question is to both, please: Are you, so far, happy with the neighbor's cooperation, if there is any help and cooperation?

MINISTER SALIH: On the first one, it is a decision for the judiciary in Iraq. In the new

Iraq, the judiciary is independent and the government truly has no influence in terms of deciding for the judiciary. But last time I met with the Chief Justice for the Special Tribunal that he's in charge of prosecuting Saddam and the other people accused of war crimes, they were telling me that within the next few months Saddam Hussein could be brought before the court.

Regarding the latter question on the issue of the neighbors, we remind our neighbors that Saddam Hussein was a source of aggression against the neighbors of Iraq. He has committed wars against Iran and against Kuwait and he was always a source of instability in the region. The new Iraq wants to be at peace with the neighbors of Iraq and they should be welcoming that. Some of the neighbors have been cooperating and have been true to their commitments to the Government of Iraq. But I would say that some of the neighbors need to do better and need to be more serious about the commitments that they declare.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. And I would agree the neighbors should remember that stability in the neighborhood is going to be good for the neighbors as well as for the people of Iraq. And this is an historic but difficult time and neighbors must do everything that they can to support the processes in Iraq.

It has been the position of the United States Government, as you know, that we are concerned in particular about Syrian behavior on its own border; about the support for terrorists that appears to be taking place from Syrian territory; about perhaps financial support that is coming from Syrian territory. And it really is time for Syria to realize that it is clearly out of step with where the region is going.

This is a power, Syria, which, finally, is beginning to -- which has begun to remove its forces from Lebanon, which were standing in the way of a free Lebanon. A Syria that is supporting Palestinian rejectionists at a time when the Palestinians and Israelis are trying to find their way to a two-state solution that would clearly serve the interests of the Palestinian people. And a Syria that is allowing its territory to be used to organize terrorist attacks against innocent Iraqis. This is a Syria that needs to understand that it should not think itself immune from the way that the region is going.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, just turning to Uzbekistan for a moment. In light of the apparent refusal of the President there to allow an international inquiry into the reports that security forces killed hundreds of civilians, do you think Uzbekistan should be on notice that there will be consequences?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we're urging the Karimov Government to allow inquiry into the events that took place there. We have been, for quite a long time, talking to the Karimov Government about the importance of an open political society. The President made very clear in his second Inaugural Address that our relations with countries around the world would have as a large part of that discussion human rights and democracy and Uzbekistan is not immune from that.

As to what consequences there might be, I think Uzbekistan does not want to endure further isolation from the international community. And secondly, I would just note that we have concerns about human rights, which we expressed through a human rights report and which actually have certain certification requirements for any assistance to Uzbekistan. We withheld \$11 million last year because of those requirements. There are additional funds that we cannot make available to the government without further human rights certification.

So, indeed, everyone is watching the situation in Uzbekistan. We do have relations with the Karimov Government and we're using those relations to tell the Karimov Government and to encourage the Karimov Government to respond positively to the international community's justified concerns about what happened there. And to respond positively in a way that can instill confidence in the Uzbek Government's dedication or willingness to move forward on political reform.

Thank you.

MINISTER SALIH: Thank you.

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