

Remarks With Iraqi Interim Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq

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(Gaps in recording)

PRIME MINISTER JA'AFARI: *(Via interpreter)* Today Dr. Rice, the US Secretary of State, visited us. We had extensive meetings. We talked about a variety of points. I will give the floor to Dr. Rice and after that I will say a few words.

Dr. Rice, the floor is yours.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister. I was delighted to have a chance to meet with the Prime Minister and with certain members of his team. I told the Prime Minister that the people of the world have been inspired by what the Iraqi people have done here in their decision to go to the polls despite the threats of terrorism and that they have won many friends in the way they have steadfastly insisted on democracy.

We talked about the importance of the political process which should be inclusive -- and we are impressed that the government is an inclusive government -- and the need for the constitutional process to be inclusive; about the importance of the international community providing support to the Iraqi people, particularly in the building of their infrastructure and in their capacity.

And of course we talked about the security situation, the importance of training Iraqi security forces, so that Iraqi security forces can defend their democracy. I assured the Prime Minister that the United States and Multi National Forces have that as a very major goal and that we will remain active with Iraq until Iraq is able to defend itself.

Mr. Prime Minister, we are impressed with your leadership of this democratically elected government --

PRIME MINISTER JA'AFARI: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: -- and we know that you will be a strong leader for a united Iraq in which all Iraqis belong.

PRIME MINISTER JA'AFARI: The meeting with Dr. Rice was a very good meeting (inaudible) the achievements of the Iraqi people through the democratization process

and through (inaudible) face many challenges but we were able to overcome many of those challenges. The formation of the new legislature (inaudible).

We have also talked, and I talked to Dr. Rice, about the support that Iraq is getting and we continue to count on this support from the world community and from the United States. And I also emphasize what we have seen, that the world community and the United States and everybody else respected the Iraqi democracy and outcome without any intervening from any country. And the elections that we have seen on January 30 was a good example of the exercise of democracy.

We also talked (inaudible) and the Iraqi people. We believe that the acceleration and building of capabilities would reduce the time that's needed (inaudible/skip) security.

(Inaudible block) providing more support for Iraq in order to improve Iraqi services. Dr. Rice will be playing a major role with the Donor's Conference (inaudible).

(Inaudible) it's a new political system that respects the right of every citizen and respects the wishes of every group.

(Inaudible) Dr. Rice (inaudible) and they will continue to support the Iraqi efforts in order to improve the services for the Iraqi people. The Iraqi people will always respect the support that they are getting, and the Iraqi people will never forget those who stand by them.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (In Arabic.) (Inaudible) strategy and timetable regarding when you are going to withdraw your forces from Iraq, especially after the election and after having the Iraqi Government and new Iraqi temporary parliament. Do you have a specific timetable and strategy for the withdrawal of US forces?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the strategy for the transfer of responsibility to the Iraqi security forces is to equip and train the Iraqi Security Forces as quickly as possible. I think that we are all impressed with the progress that Iraqi Security Forces are making. They really did have a very major role in securing the elections. I was talking with the Defense Minister here and the Minister of Interior and also with our people; everyone believes that the progress is being made.

But our promise to the Iraqi leadership is that the Multi National Forces are here to help Iraq defend itself until it can defend itself. And we want that to be as soon as possible. I assure you, we want it to be as soon as possible. We are fighting a very tough set of terrorists who are, it seems, determined to stop the progress of the Iraqi people and so we will continue to do that and continue to train Iraqi Security Forces as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Peter Mackler, Agence France Presse. Prime Minister, Madame Secretary, you both talked about inclusiveness in the government. There's been fears expressed about the low level of participation of Sunni Muslims on the Constitutional Drafting Committee. Mr. Prime Minister, do you have a plan to remedy that? And Madame Secretary, are you satisfied with what you've heard?

PRIME MINISTER JA'AFARI: Regarding the issue of the Constitution and the drafting of the Constitution, we are very keen to have this process (inaudible) result of the parliamentary elections that took place. This is basically the result of a democracy. This legislative body chose that committee. But we are trying to work very hard in order (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: I would just say that I am impressed with the commitment of this government and of the Iraqi people to one Iraq in which all people are represented.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) in the reconstruction efforts of Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: Well you know the United States has committed, through an Act of the United States Congress, \$20 billion to the reconstruction and development of Iraq. And we are working with the Iraqi Government to try and address its most urgent needs. We talked about services. We have of course also committed a lot of money to the training of the security forces in Iraq. But the key here is to work together. But the United States has already committed very, very large resources to the infrastructure development program here.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, after the meetings that you've had today, do you feel now an even greater sense of (inaudible)? You've talked a lot in the last day or so about keeping the political momentum up. What exactly do you want to see the government doing that it's not doing?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I believe that this government understands even better than we that the Iraqi people expect a lot of the government that they have now freely elected. And the Prime Minister has talked about his plans, his ministerial committees that are working on essential services for the Iraqi people, that are working on improvement of the security forces with the help of the Multi National Forces and that are attempting to keep this political process moving forward. So I believe that it is the government of Iraq that understands the need to keep the political momentum; because they were elected, the Iraqi people expect a great deal of them.

And as to the deadlines, I will only say that every time the Iraqi people have been given or presented with a deadline, they have met it. People said that sovereignty could not be transferred on June 30th. It was. People said that they could not hold elections on January 30th. They did. The Iraqi people are demonstrating a strong commitment and dedication to the democratic process, and therefore to a better future. And it is up to the international community, and the United States as a part of that community, to express

confidence in the Iraqi people for the difficult but excellent job that they are doing.

And let me just add, things do not happen over night. We have become very impatient people. But Iraq is emerging from a long national nightmare with tyranny, into freedom. This country has only been sovereign again for less than one year. This government has just come into power. It will take time to repair all of the damage that the last regime did. But I have great confidence in the leadership that the Iraqi people are -- the Iraqi leaders are showing, and in the dedication of the Iraqi people to democracy.

PRIME MINISTER JA'AFARI: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

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