

Remarks With Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(5:30 p.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I'm very pleased to welcome the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Mr. Zebari, to Washington. We met recently, of course, in Baghdad, which was a great thrill for me. Foreign Minister Zebari has been here to have discussions at the United Nations. He's having discussions with others, and of course, we have been talking about plans for a conference that the Iraqis will chair with the help of co-chairs from the United States and the European Union in Brussels in the third week in June. We've had a full discussion of the constitutional process that is now going on in Iraq and of the efforts to help the Iraqis with capacity building across the spectrum of governmental functions, including of course, on the security side. And so welcome, it's a great delight to have you here. We have nothing but admiration for the Iraqi people and admiration for your government in starting to lay a foundation now for a free, democratic and peaceful, unified Iraq. Thank you.



FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary Rice, I am very pleased to be here. I'm just coming from New York. We participated in the discussions in the Security Council for the review of the mandate of the multinational force, and the Iraqi Government message was that we need an extension because this is an Iraqi need more than anything else. We are working very hard to build our military and security capabilities where we would be able to take control and we are going also through a very important period in the political transition. We are addressing the issue of writing a constitution and ratifying it. This process, I reassured Secretary Rice, would be inclusive. All Iraqi communities would participate in that process. There would be no one marginalized at all. This is — this constitution would be for the future generation of Iraq and every Iraqi has the right to have a say in what the future of this country will hold for them.

Also, I discussed with Dr. Rice the preparations for the international conference on Iraq that will be held in June 21st-22nd in Brussels. Iraq will be there. Iraq will present its case to the international community and we will make our priorities to the international community for help and assistance on the political, economic and security sides. I am very pleased that the preparations are going very smoothly. We are getting a good deal

of positive response from all the countries we have been talking with and we think that this will be a very important event to reengage the international community in Iraq to help us overcome the current difficulties. We are confident we are going to succeed. The government is up and running. It is working more and more effectively. And thank you very much for listening. I am ready to take some of your questions. Thank you.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, what is your appraisal of the constitutional process at this point? Is it moving well enough? Are the provisions adequate for Sunni participation? Are you comfortable with the way it's going?

SECRETARY RICE: I am very comfortable with the commitment of the Iraqi Government to a process that is inclusive. As the Foreign Minister has just said, this is a constitution that will be for the future of Iraq and that means that all Iraqis need to be included. I just need to say that the Iraqis have met every political challenge that has been put before them. The transfer of sovereignty, the elections that were held on January 30th, the, of course, the writing of the Transitional Administrative Law. And they now are meeting the challenge of the development of a constitutional process that will be inclusive and create a constitution of which all Iraqis can be proud. I'm then quite certain that the elections will be held. That will then bring a permanent government into power.

So this is a process. It is underway. The Foreign Minister described to me some of the efforts that are being made to reach out to Sunnis and some of the efforts that are being made to reach out to the neighbors to also help in Iraq's political process because it's important that Iraq have support of its neighbors as well, which is one of the reasons that we're doing this international conference. But yes, I think it's a process that is well underway.

QUESTION: Mr. Minister, sir, how would you describe your relationship with Syria at the present time? The United States seem to think that Syria is not cooperating, but you are — are you in contact with the Syrian regime and are you moving along?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Yeah. We are in contact with the Syrian Government and we have engaged them over the last two years in many rounds of discussions of — bilaterally or multilaterally. And we have asked them repeatedly to help us, to cooperate with the new Iraqi Government and administration, to stabilize the situation. Iraq instability could affect Syria and the neighborhood directly. And we have received some assurances to that affect, that there would be some positive change in their attitude and their dealing, but practically, we haven't seen much. Really, they have not been cooperative, as cooperative as we want them to be. Our dialogue is still continuing with them, of course. We want them to help — especially to help us on stopping the flow of all those terrorists who are using Syrian territories to enter Iraq and to blow up innocent Iraqi lives every day.

QUESTION: Mr. Foreign Minister, you said, heading to New York, that you were concerned that the U.S. may pull out before Iraq was ready to have the multinational

force leave, but the U.S. has always said that it will stay as long as is necessary by mutual agreement. Can you talk about that, what led to your concerns?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: I don't know where I was quoted. I don't remember that, but really, we are going through a very important period in the entire political transition and we have made a great deal of progress. We think, for the time being or for the next few months, it's very important that the commitment of the United States, of the coalition countries, could be firm and solid, nobody should draw any misunderstanding. And this is what I have heard from Dr. Rice today, that the U.S. is fully committed to completing the mission and they are there as long as they are needed. We have this extension until the next election that we hope we will meet all the deadlines that are set and that Security Council Resolution 1546, regarding the writing, the ratification and the holding of elections. During this period, I think it's very important that nobody should draw any — miscalculation, let's say — from the commitment of the U.S. Government to stand by the Iraqi people to see this process through and this is the position of the United States, as far as I can understand.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, it most certainly is. Certainly.

PRIME MINISTER ZEBARI: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Great. Thank you.

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