

The U.S. and the Future of Iraq

Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad

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[Real Audio of briefing](#)



MR. DENIG: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center and welcome also to journalists assembled in our New York Foreign Press Center.

We are very pleased this morning to be able to welcome back to our podium Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, the new United States Ambassador to Iraq. Ambassador Khalilzad was sworn in on June 21st and is looking forward to his assignment in Iraq. He has agreed to come here today to

provide some perspectives on the U.S. and the future of Iraq. He'll have an opening statement to make and after that will be very glad to take your questions.

Mr. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you very much. First of all, good morning. I'm sorry that I could not be with you the last time when this program was announced. I had a slight medical problem that I had to deal with, but I've recovered and I'm ready to go to Baghdad to assume my new position. I know some of you send your best wishes. I thank you for that.

As I said, I'm ready to go to Baghdad. I'm looking forward in the coming days to continue to help the Iraqi people and their leaders to advance towards their goal of completing Iraq's democratic transition and building a successful Iraq. Iraq is poised at a crossroads between two starkly different visions. The foreign terrorists and hard-line Baathist insurgents want Iraq to fall into a civil war. The foreign terrorists do not care about Iraq or Iraqis. They see the Iraqi people, including Iraqi children, as cannon fodder to be sacrificed in the pursuit of an extremist agenda of conflict between civilizations. Hard-line Baathists want a civil war as a vehicle to restore their dictatorship, and if they cannot win

power, to take Iraq down with them.

Iraqis of all communities and sects, like people everywhere, want to establish peace and create prosperity so that they and their families can live normal lives and build a better future. They all deserve this future. No community should fear that they will not be accorded an appropriate role in the new Iraq or not to be treated fairly in a system based on the rule of law. The actions of Iraqis will determine which of these will be Iraq's future. However, I will lead the U.S. effort to support efforts by the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people to set their country on a more positive trajectory.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of the present situation. I also do not doubt that progress can be made, in some areas very quickly, if we can work on seven mutually reinforcing fronts.

First, I will work with Iraqi leaders to help them to develop a common and unifying vision, a national compact enshrined in the constitution, and to unite the people against the terrorists and hard-line Baathists.

Second, I will work with Iraqis to break the back of the insurgency, not only through a national compact that I mentioned, but also by exploiting the enemy's weaknesses through the integrated and balanced use of all our instruments of power, together with Iraqis. A key aspect of this work will be to increase the number and enhance the capabilities of Iraqi forces and security institutions. This also requires that we help to build security institutions in Iraq in which all Iraqis can have confidence. In this respect, though I will review all our training programs, I will specifically ensure that the police training program is based on a jointly developed U.S.-Iraqi plan that is recruiting and vetting candidates properly and that is designed to produce a force appropriate for the challenges facing Iraq.

Third, we seek an Iraq that has good relations with all its neighbors. Iraq will emerge from the current situation as a rich country and a key regional player. It is in the interest of all Iraq's neighbors to help Iraqis now in order to build positive relationships for the future.

Fourth, Iraqis, Americans and other friends of Iraq will work together to accelerate capacity-building efforts of Iraqi ministries and provincial government.

Fifth, I will take a look at the reconstruction program to ensure that we are not over-promising and under-delivering. I will take steps to decentralize the program, to give greater ownership and responsibility to Iraqi Government and people, and to put a higher priority on private sector development. My approach will be to under-promise and over-deliver.

Sixth, I'll be proactive in terms of public diplomacy. I'll explain that we do not seek Iraqi territory or wealth, but rather want a successful Iraq that works for all Iraqis and serves

as a positive role model in the region. I will also engage Iraqis in a dialogue about how other countries have succeeded by building their institutions on the basis of the universal ideals of freedom, popular sovereignty, democracy, the rule of law, economic liberty and self-reliance.

Seventh, I will work with Iraqis to set the conditions for a successful election under the new constitution, one that's held according to the timelines in UN resolutions and that establishes the foundation for a stable and moderate Iraq.

I understand that Iraqis are undergoing a difficult transition. I appreciate the hard work ahead for Iraqis and the friends of Iraq. Yet, I'm optimistic about Iraq's future because Iraqis themselves are determined to seize a moment that's rich with possibilities for their nation. I will work as hard as I can to help Iraqis realize, as soon as possible, their aspiration for an Iraq that can stand on its own feet.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

MR. DENIG: Let me ask you to keep your questions short so we can maximize them, wait for the microphone, introduce yourself and your news organization. Let's start with Jerusalem right here in the middle.

QUESTION: Yes. My name is Said Arikat from *Al Quds*, a daily newspaper. Sir, General Vines said the other day that the presence of American forces is an impetus for the insurgency and he talked about perhaps lifting the forces by next year in order to take the wind out of insurgency. Would you advise him or counsel him in that regard?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Having forces in Iraq for us is not an end in itself. We do not seek permanent U.S. military presence in Iraq. We want to have forces to be able to assist Iraq stand on its own feet because free people would like to be able to protect themselves. And I understand that Iraqis, over the long term, would not want to have foreign forces protecting them.

The issue that we face is, as the President said the other night, how to build down as the Iraqis build up. And this is something that we will work closely with the Iraqis and agree together on conditions where we can adjust the size of our forces as the Iraqi forces build up, as the circumstances in Iraq change.

QUESTION: Thank you. A quick follow-up. Would you agree with the general that, perhaps, the presence of such an overwhelming force is an impetus for the insurgency?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: My view is that a successful strategy requires a balance between the various instruments of U.S. power and influence, and that means diplomatic instrument, that means economic instrument and that means military instrument as well; and that we need to strive that the various instruments are in balance in relation to each other and that the net result, the configuration of the different elements, is appropriate to

the circumstances with the goals that we want to shorten the presence of the U.S. forces, the reliance on the U.S. forces, and to have Iraqis, as soon as possible, take over the responsibility for their own security.

MR. DENIG: Let's go to Turkey. First row, please.

QUESTION: Umit Enginsoy, NTV Television. The Turkish press is suggesting that two alleged al-Qaida terrorists, both of them Turkish nationals, who were reportedly involved in the Istanbul bombings nearly two years ago, have been captured in Iraq and are under American custody at the U.S.-controlled Abu Ghraib prison. Could you confirm this at all? If yes, is there an extradition effort? And also, what will happen to Kirkuk status? Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: On the first one, I don't have anything to report. On the second one, it's very important that the situation in Kirkuk is dealt with in a way that all communities -- this is a multiethnic community -- can feel that their rights are being protected and that they can see themselves in the picture that's Kirkuk. And we'll work with the local government as well as with the national government with the various communities that the situation in Kirkuk evolves in a positive direction.

MR. DENIG: Let's go to Kuwait in the third row, please.

QUESTION: Good morning, sir. Ron Baygents, Kuwait News Agency. Could you just give us an assessment of how you would like to see Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations developing beyond this year -- some specific things that you think you would envision?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: As I said in my general remark, we seek an Iraq that has good relations with all its neighbors. Iraq is on a path that is likely to become a very rich and powerful player in this region. And I think my advice to Kuwait and to other countries is to be proactive in helping this Iraq now. They will be investing, in terms of good relations, with an important player down the road.

There are issues with regard to the history of relations between Kuwait and Iraq, having to do with debt, having to do with reparations. Our position is that the local states in the area need to move forward like the Paris Club in terms of forgiving debt.

And we also believe that it's important to provide assistance to Iraq in various ways, in terms of Iraqi reconstruction. Those who have made pledges, for example, in Madrid or subsequently, need to accelerate the delivery of the reconstruction assistance program. They need to assist Iraq with regard to the border to make sure that terrorists do not cross the borders of neighboring countries into Iraq. They need to provide help in terms of investment, private investment. There are large parts of Iraq that are peaceful and can take investment and businesses. I would encourage them to do that as well.

MR. DENIG: All right. Let's go to Egypt, right there.

QUESTION: Thomas Gorguissian, *Al Gomhouria*, Egypt. Mr. Ambassador, you stress the importance of having good relations with the neighbors, Arab neighbors. Recently the abduction, the tragic abduction and the assassination of the Egyptian Ambassador, raised the question about the wisdom of the urgent request or demand by the Americans to have diplomatic presence there. Do you still believe it's wise to have, in this current situation -- unsettled situation? If so, what are the plan in your capacity to protect this diplomatic presence or not?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: First of all, the case of my Egyptian colleague indicates what kind of people these terrorists are. They go after children. They go after workers who have come to assist Iraqi people, whether for humanitarian purposes or for reconstruction purposes or people who are transporting goods that the Iraqis need. They go after UN people, as we know they did, who have come to assist Iraqis stand on their own feet, with the constitution, the political process. And they go after brotherly, neighborly diplomats even from an Arab Muslim country. That just shows, as I said, that they're barbaric. They are beyond the pale.

And with regard to next steps, I think that it's important not to give in to the terrorists. We have to take appropriate security measures for the diplomats that are assigned to Baghdad. You know, it is a dangerous place. I don't want to understate that, but appropriate security measures can be taken and should be taken. That's the primary responsibility of the country that sends the diplomat and the host country, but we're willing to take a look at what it is that we can do to help [both of] them -- the host country and the country that is sending diplomats -- to see if we can be of any assistance.

MR. DENIG: I'll take the gentleman in the second row next to the pillar.

QUESTION: My name is Tammam Mocram Al-Barazi from *Alwatan Watan Magazine*. Sir, when you talk about neighborly country, what about the overwhelming presence of the Iranian regime through even, you know, there are reports that even the people in power are so pro-Iranian. And the visit of the Defense Minister of Iraq to Iran and the commitment he made to them. What can you do about that as U.S.?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: It's not the U.S. policy to advocate or promote a hostile relationship between Iraq and Iran. They are neighbors. We want to see these two countries have good relations with each other. But good relations also mean that everything is done, that there is no interference in Iraqi affairs. Good relations with regard to all the neighbors mean not to seek to dominate, particularly Iraqi institutions or Iraqi areas, and to work together to have an Iraq that works for all Iraqis that can stand on its own feet, is at peace internally and as well as at peace with the neighbors, to be a model.

There is a need for a change in the way one thinks about regional relations in this part of

the world. And that is not to look at things in a zero sum way, in an old geo-political kind of way, that in the weakness of one's neighbor to see advantages for oneself. That's what Europe did for centuries, and then in post-World War II there was a change in the mindset that, in fact, if your neighbor is poor, if your neighbor is in distress, it can only send problems for you. You can't sell goods to a neighbor that has that kind of problems. And Europeans learned through a huge number of wars -- and we all know about the history of Europe, to take another look, to take another approach.

And I think the time has come for the countries of this region as well to take another look, not to seek grandeur in the misery of your neighbors or in the fragmentation of the neighbor or to use elements of neighboring powers' state against the interest of that country. And I think this is the message that I'd like to send on the relations between Iraq and its neighbors.

MR. DENIG: Let's go to Radio Sawa back there, please.

QUESTION: Samir Nader, Radio Sawa. Mr. Ambassador, congratulations on your speedy recovery.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: I have two questions. First, what do you make of the contradicting statements by Iraqi and the Iranian officials on -- regarding Iran training Iraqi security forces? And second, what is the update on the coalition and U.S. forces dialogue or contacts with former Baathists or members of the insurgencies? And are you doing this in coordination with the Iraqi Government?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, I believe that any dialogue -- first of all, it's very important for the success of Iraq that the major Iraqi communities reach an agreement on the future of Iraq and that the constitutional process provides the best opportunity to get to what I call a kind of a national compact between the various communities. And I am very happy about the recent developments with regard with the Sunni Arab participation in the constitutional commission. With regard to the outreach to the elements that have opposed or have been not supportive of the process so far, it's very important that this takes place, but that it ought to take place and it will take place with a full understanding of our Iraqi friends.

With regard to your first question on --

QUESTION: Contradictory statements --

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Between Iran and Iraq. You'll have to ask them. I'd rather not speak for either one if you don't mind. Thank you.

QUESTION: Steve Collinson with AFP. Mr. Ambassador, can you give us an update on the bombing attack overnight, which killed 24 children? And in another event overnight, Prime Minister Jaafari said that he expected more violent attacks in the coming months, which were a sign of the success of the evolving Iraqi process. Is that something which you agree with?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, I can't say any more than what's in the news with regard to the attack that involved some children. As I said, that is yet another indication of the kind of people that these terrorists are. They use children, as well as target children.

With regard to the Prime Minister's comments, let me get over there to Baghdad and engage my mind with the situation before I predict as to the course of the insurgency. I believe that if we make progress with regard to this national compact, have a constitution and build the institutions that Iraqis all have confidence in, we will fundamentally undermine the insurgency. And then we will have to also develop an integrated, as I said, strategy using military, intelligence, economic and political means to provide increased security for the Iraqi people. And by "we" I mean both the U.S. and Iraqis and with an increased Iraqi role. I think that if we make progress, we would be fundamentally changing the situation, weakening the insurgency, although episodically there could be increases in violence. But strategically, I think we would be heading in the right direction.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, a follow-up on Iran situation again with Iraq. The new government has, of course, a new approach toward Iran. Is this -- they have a new assessment of Iran? Or Iran has changed, you know, its behavior toward Iraq? Can you elaborate on that, please?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Of course, the change in Iraq is of benefit to the region and the world. And Iran is one of the beneficiaries of the changed situation in Iraq. Saddam Hussein fought, attacked Iran, fought a protracted war against Iran. And you know, many, many Iranians were killed and became refugees. And there was hostility between Iran and Iraq for much of the last couple of decades.

So this is a positive change. And as the same is true with Kuwait, obviously, and the same would be true more broadly. But the key thing is that, at this point, Iraq is going through a difficult transition from one kind of a system -- of a totalitarian Saddamism -- to a new system where neighbors play a positive role, not to take advantage of this, the difficulties that are inherent in any transition; and that to switch off the old think and embrace a new approach, I know it's difficult because it's a new way of doing things, but I think Iraqi nationalism is strong. I think Iraqis would not want to be dominated by anybody, [even] by the United States. We don't seek to dominate it. Or by one of the neighbors. They're a proud country with a very long history, periods of darkness for sure, but periods of glory as well. And they want to be able to take care of their own destiny. And we wish them well. We're there for this transitional period to assist them. We feel a sense of responsibility for that because of what has happened. But I urge everyone in the neighborhood to think how to cooperate to help Iraq in this transition. It's a difficult

transition that they're going through.

MR. DENIG: First row, please.

QUESTION: Khalid Hasan, *Daily Times*, Lahore, Pakistan. Sir, I would like you to sum up, briefly, the situation in Afghanistan as you left it, with particular reference to the role Pakistan is playing or not playing, because in the past there had been some statements made by you to which the Government of Pakistan has taken exception. Also, could we please get a copy of your prepared statement?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Absolutely.

QUESTION: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, with regard to Afghanistan, I think that Afghanistan is heading in the right direction. It's on the right trajectory. It has made enormous progress in the course of the last three years. But it still has a long way to go to get to where it needs to go to be a successful, stable country.

I think that to achieve that goal, it requires sustained international engagement, support by an international community. That's there and that needs to be sustained. The United States is certainly committed to that sustained engagement with Afghanistan, to that support. We've signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement during President Karzai's visit here a few weeks ago that gives a direction, a longer-term direction, to the relationship between us and the Afghans.

On the neighboring states, including Pakistan, I have said the same thing that I said in regard to Iraq. Afghanistan is going through a difficult transition. The problem of state building, of nation building in a place that has seen war for a very long time, extremism, Soviet occupation, civil war, requires cooperation, requires that there be no sanctuary for those who want to undermine the system, requires every effort by the neighboring states that Afghanistan succeeds because success in Afghanistan will be beneficial to the neighbors.

We know that when Afghanistan was not working, it was a home for the headquarters of al-Qaida. It was sending millions of refugees to the neighboring states. Weapons were getting out of Afghanistan. Weapons were coming in but also were going out to the neighboring states. And now Afghanistan is no longer the headquarters of the al-Qaida, but 3 million refugees have come back. There is a lot of trade that's taking place. Pakistan exports over a billion dollars a year to Afghanistan. Under the Taliban, I think they exported less than 35 million a year.

So this is a very positive change that has taken place. And I hope that Pakistan will, as well as the other neighbors, cooperate in the restoration of Afghanistan's starring role as

a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia and that Afghanistan takes its rightful place in that region. Thank you.

MR. DENIG: Let's take the gentleman in the yellow jacket, please.

QUESTION: Raimund Loew, from Austrian Television ORF. Ambassador, more and more Europeans are leaving Iraq. The last country that has now put a timetable on leaving Iraq is Italy. The coalition seems to be weakening. Is that -- how big a problem is that for American policy in Iraq?

And let me ask you a second question. Can we understand from what you said that you would not exclude negotiations with parts of the insurgency? Because there seems to be different currents -- al-Qaida-type currents but nationalist currents. Would you be open to the idea to negotiate with some of these nationalist currents in the insurgency in Iraq? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: In regard to the first one, in terms of a military component of the coalition, there are changes that take place. Countries adjust their forces. But we have to look at the problem of the transition in Iraq in a comprehensive way, which has not only a military dimension but it also has building Iraqi institutions, training Iraqi security institutions or security forces.

On the economic front with regard to reconstruction, or on the political track with regard to the constitution, I think you'll find the opposite, that there is an increased engagement. I was in Brussels, for example, at the conference there. More than 80 countries participated and there was a kind of a new partnership with Iraq that was announced. We know that NATO -- has got an academy near Baghdad to train Iraqi officers, for example. We have more Europeans interested in playing a positive role with regard to funds that will contribute to Iraqi reconstruction.

So I see the trend overall, although if you take any one part of the elements you could maybe come to a different judgment, but if you do a net assessment of the various instruments, an increase toward multilateralism in terms of efforts to help Iraq stand on its own feet. And certainly, I will encourage that and I'll try, when I'm in Baghdad, to coordinate and cooperate more with our colleagues from Europe and from Asia. The Japanese obviously are playing a very big important role in Iraq and with the United Nations. I did that in Afghanistan. We worked very well together, the international community, and I hope to duplicate that in Iraq as well.

QUESTION: And the question of the negotiations with --

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, I think we want to isolate the foreign terrorist element and the very hard-line Baathists who are seeking to restore the old order. And the old order will not come back. The old order is dead; it's finished. The foreign terrorists, as I said before, have no interest in Iraq. The worse the situation in Iraq, the

more Iraqis get killed, civil war in Iraq, the better from their sort of more global agenda perspective. So we want to isolate those. But Iraqis who have an interest in a successful Iraq, who would like to live in a situation where minority rights are protected, where Iraq can work for Iraqis -- yeah, we're willing, in cooperation with the Iraqi Government and others, to talk to them.

QUESTION: Hasan Hazar, *Turkiye Daily*. As you pointed out, the importance of cooperation with Iraqi neighbors.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Yes.

QUESTION: So my question is about that. What kind of cooperation with Turkey do you expect?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, Turkey is obviously a very important neighbor, has played a positive role. Turkey has a lot to contribute -- is contributing already. First, of course, with regard to the economic reconstruction of Iraq, Turkey is a natural partner. In the fight against terrorism, Turkey has concerns and we appreciate that. And Turkey wants to do more trade and business. It's very positive. And Turkey is playing a leading role in bringing neighbors together with Iraqis on the political track, to cooperate with regard to security and that's very positive. I look forward to working with Turkey. I was there, as some of you know, for a while before the war in Iraq and I worked closely with our colleagues and the foreign ministry and the TGS to make sure Turkish interests were taken into account and that despite the disagreement on the use of Turkish territory for sending forces there, that we remain cooperative with regard to Iraq. And I look forward to resuming those discussions in this new context, in this new environment.

MR. DENIG: Let's move on to the gentleman in the blue jacket. I'm afraid that will have to be the last question.

QUESTION: Ambassador, Alec Russell from the *Daily Telegraph* of London. A couple of quick questions if that's okay.

One, you were credited in Afghanistan with, as it were, knocking heads together and helping to get a political settlement through quite swiftly. In contrast to Iraq, as we all know, is how shall we say, has had a very troubled transition. I wonder, what are you going to do that's different from your predecessors, recent predecessor, as the sort of senior American civilian representative in Iraq? Do you have a big idea, as it were, that you're going to bring in?

And the second question is about troops. There was a British briefing paper that emerged recently that suggested that one goal for the American forces is to reduce them significantly by the middle of next year, to say, 70,000 or something. Is that a timetable and how viable is it?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: With regard to the second one, let me say that we'd like to reduce forces, sure, but that it will be condition-driven. And as I said, maintaining troops in Iraq for us is not an end in itself. Our goal is to get Iraq to stand on its own feet. And that's the goal that we understand the Iraqis also have from surveys that have been done.

And the question of what rate to reduce, when to start reduction, will be something that will be condition-driven and we will get agreement with the Iraqis. I look forward to starting those discussions with them when I get to Baghdad. But we'll not leave the Iraqis in the lurch. We are determined that Iraq succeeds and we'll be there in the configuration that is needed and we both agree to for as long as it takes for Iraq to succeed. So I don't want any misunderstanding of that. The composition, the size, could vary as the circumstances change. But we will provide assistance that is needed for Iraq to be able to stand on its own feet.

With regard to the first question, Iraq is different than Afghanistan and Afghanistan is different from Iraq, but I am the same person. I have a particular style and a particular approach. I know the Iraqi leaders and they know me. I'll be the happiest -- I've said this before -- if they don't need me and they can reach agreements on the key issues on their own. But it is clear that -- and I have said that to them before and I will say it again -- that failure is not an option. If they need my help, I'm going to be available no matter what time it is of the day, for as long as it's required, until we achieve agreement.

And how I would practice -- I don't want to compare myself to my predecessors. Each person has his or her own style. But mine will be one of engagement and partnership with them to achieve common goals, and to work as hard as I can with them, for as long as it takes, so that we achieve our common goals. We have some ideas, as I said, on this national compact. We have ideas on the various elements with regard to reconstruction. And I would also be adaptive and change -- I've alluded to those and I will elaborate on them when I get to Baghdad, after I've become more familiar with the situation. But I will give it my all and work as hard as I can with them. Thank you.

MR. DENIG: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much also.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you.

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