

Interview on CNN International

Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

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QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for joining us. You have been very closely involved, watching over those negotiations. Press reports say you've even offered compromises, pressing -- pushing for this constitutional draft to be agreed upon. Where do things stand?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, first, it's good to be with you. Of course, we have been helping the Iraqis in this very difficult task that they have in front of them in the midst of a conflict to agree to a constitution that can be a national compact, bringing Iraqi people together.

Where things stand right now is that there is agreement on many issues. There is agreement on the rights of Iraqi citizens, including women. There is agreement on the structure of government, the President and Prime Minister, the role of the assembly. There is agreement also in regard to the role of Islam. There are a couple of issues that need to still be agreed on in detail, although in principle there is agreement. One has to do with the issue of federalism.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask, sorry to --

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Another has to --

QUESTION: Yes, I'm sorry to interrupt. I wanted to ask you about what a Sunni leader in the negotiations by the name of Saleh Mutlak is saying that almost 50 percent of the constitution is finished, yet he expresses pessimism saying that there isn't that much of a drive among those involved to really get together and make the necessary compromises -- a very pessimistic outlook.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, that is pessimistic, but it isn't true. Mr. Mutlak is one of participants in the process. I know that his primary concern has been on the issue of federalism and that's one of the issues that remains, although as I said, that has broad agreement. He does not -- his views do not represent the views of the participants in the deliberations in general.

But listen, putting a constitution together in the midst of a conflict with people of various ethnicities, sects, is not easy, but the Iraqis have made a lot of progress. Some issues

remain, there are also technical issues that they faced last night of making sure that --

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, let me ask you this --

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: -- the language is the right language.

QUESTION: As you say and also I was listening to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday saying this is the most important document for the country's future. Also, the Prime Minister of Iraq al-Jaafari is saying that this document should not be presented in haste. Why is the U.S. in a hurry? Why is it pressuring the sides to agree on such fundamental issues with such haste?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: The deadline that the Iraqis set, August 15th, was an Iraqi deadline and we have been encouraging them as we encourage people everywhere to stick to deadlines. When we agree to a deadline ourselves, we try to make every effort to stick to it.

At the same time, the Iraqi process had in it the possibility to gain additional time if necessary and they exercised that. Our role is to encourage them to do the right thing, to do it in a timely manner and to help them when our help is asked, but --

QUESTION: One last --

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: -- we have no problem with them asking for these additional seven days.

QUESTION: We're almost out of time, Mr. Ambassador. I really want to ask you this. What if, what if they're not able to meet this new deadline, only a week, with such fundamental issues yet to be resolved? What are your biggest fears and concerns? What could be done at that point?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, I am not concerned about that at this point. I have every expectation that given the time that they have on the issues that remain that they will reach an agreement, not an agreement that will please everyone, but will please most of those who are participating; and an agreement that will be a good agreement, will put Iraq on the right path. I have every expectation that the Iraqis will succeed.

QUESTION: One quick last question, a very quick answer. Does that mean that some issues will be left unresolved for later on?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: It's possible that the constitution cannot deal in detail with every issue possible and that they could allow some issues to be dealt with by law, subsequently.

QUESTION: U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad. Thank you very much for joining us.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you.

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