

Interview on Fox & Friends

Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq
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QUESTION: U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad joins us from Baghdad. It's great to have you back with us. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Good to be with you. Good morning.

QUESTION: Good morning. What exactly happened at the last moment? What were the sticking points?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, there were a couple of sticking points. I have to say first that Iraq is in the middle of a war by terrorists against them, are trying to put a national compact together, bringing various communities to agree on a roadmap for the future. That is absolutely necessary for the success of this nation.

Tough issues on the table. They had agreement on most things. A couple of issues that remain, one having to do with the powers between the president and the prime minister. That's the system that they are going for. Another having to deal with the issue of resources in a federal structure, how much central control, how much regional control. And there was also some procedural issues about the quality of the writing and the document. They needed more time. They could have declared prematurely that they have an agreement. They decided not to do that. The option was available to them to ask for more time, a legal option and exercise it. It's perfectly understandable they have lost some time in any case because of the sandstorm here.

I think the system has worked. It followed the right process and procedures. We are disappointed but, you know, it's an important thing for the Iraqis to get this right. We don't do constitutions every day. And they will succeed. They need a few more days. Perfectly, perfectly understandable.

QUESTION: Do the committee members understand what the reaction will be in the United States if they adopt Sharia Law as the law of the land?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: They will not adopt Sharia as the law of the land. That issue has been resolved. There is no dispute about that.

QUESTION: So women will have equal rights?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Iraqis -- women will have equal rights. That issue has been resolved.

QUESTION: Okay, I was unaware of that because all the reports that we had gotten was that that was still something that had to be worked out. But you say that it has been done.

All right. What about the status of Shiite clerics? That was another thing that people had said had not been worked out, that the Shiites wanted a special status for clerics. What does that mean and is that issue still on the table?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: As of now, that issue has also been resolved. There will be no reference to a special status for the Shiite clerics or for any other clerics. So it was part of the discussion, it did exist in one of the earlier drafts, but as of now that issue has been resolved as well.

QUESTION: What about the autonomy that the Kurds want? There had been a suggestion that they stay within this federation for eight years and then, at the end of eight years, have the option of becoming its own entity. Is that something that would be possibly viable?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: I don't believe that there is a clause in the current draft with regard to independence for the Kurds. The Kurds want to be part of Iraq but they want to be part of a federal and democratic and pluralistic Iraq with specified powers exercised by the Kurdish government and legislature. And there is broad agreement among the people who are writing the constitution here, the draft. There is one issue that remains, and that is the resource issue. How much of the oil resources of the Kurdish area should be controlled by the local government in terms of contracting, management and revenues, and how much by the central government? There is an agreement that with regard to the currently known reserves that it will be managed by the central government resources.

There is more of a discussion about potential oil discoveries with regard to the future. There is a good discussion going on now as to what the options are. We couldn't help them bridge that. We are thinking about options to help them. But, you know, these are very difficult, complicated issues with regard to the future because new reserves, who knows when they will be discovered, when they will be developed, and it's perfectly -- I have been with them for many, many hours and I know how difficult it is, what the arguments are.

So we should be pleased that these issues are being engaged in this fashion rather than what used to be the traditional method in Iraq where, you know, one dictator got up and said this is the way we are going to do things.

QUESTION: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, thank you very much for your time this morning.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, thank you.

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