

Interview

Office of the Spokesman

Baghdad, Iraq

August 16, 2005

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad On MSNBC

(As-aired portions of interview)

QUESTION: The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told me that a number of sticking points, including how the Islamic religion, will be reflected in the new government already have been agreed upon.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: A lot of the major issues have been resolved. The issues having to do with the role of Islam has been resolved. The issues having to do with the women's status has been resolved. The issue with regard to the structure of government has been resolved. There are issues having to do with the bill of rights of Iraqi citizens have been resolved. There are a couple of issues, resources issues between the center and the regions that are very close, but not yet completely resolved. There is also the issue of the distribution of power between the President and the Prime Minister because they are choosing a mixed system, which will be similar to France. And that is still needs to be worked out and there are a couple of other issues that with regard to federalism that needs to have some refinement. But that is also the issue of making sure that the language is the right language, right constitutional legal language and experts are looking at the text. And other than announcing an agreement last night and working these issues in the aftermath of the agreement, they chose the option that is available in the law, which was to ask for more time and get the support of the assembly and they did that. It shows that this is an Iraqi process. They're dealing, of course, with a difficult issue. They're talking about a national compact, a roadmap for the future. You know, our own constitution, as you know, took a very long time to come to an agreement on. In the case of Iraq, it's a very, very speedy process. A little more time is perfectly understandable.

QUESTION: And you can see more of my interview with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, coming up in our 11 o'clock eastern hour.

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QUESTION: Iraqi officials say there are still a number of disagreements to be worked out before next week's deadline for finalizing the Iraqi constitution. However, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told me that a number of sticking points, including how the Islamic religion will be reflected in the new government already have been

agreed upon.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: (In progress) ...most issues of substance, agreements were in place. A lot of the major issues have been resolved. The issues having to do with the role of Islam has been resolved. The issues having to do with the women's status has been resolved. The issue with regard to the structure of government has been resolved. They're making progress. We should recognize the success they have achieved. We should recognize the process has been a process that is legal and is working. And we should be encouraged and recognizing that it is a difficult process.

QUESTION: You said the women's rights issue has been resolved. Before I ask you a question, let's listen to what our Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said about that:

"On women's rights, I think we've been very clear that a modern Iraq will be an Iraq in which women are recognized as full and equal citizens and I have every confidence that that is how Iraqis feel."

And yet, just yesterday, we saw a poll where only 12 percent of Iraqis believe that women and men should have equal rights. So is there a disconnection between what Iraqis feel and what the U.S. thinks the Iraqis should feel?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, of course, there are cultural differences, attitudinal differences and there is -- I don't know how the question was asked and what the Iraqis understood the question to be, but Iraq wants to be a successful country and you cannot be a successful country if you discriminate against half of your population, you do not give them all the opportunities that are needed for them to achieve and contribute all they can.

QUESTION: Sir, what will your role be in any negotiations between now and Monday?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: I have said to the Iraqis that I'm here to help. I'm available at any time. Failure is not an option because of what's at stake for us and what's at stake for them. And if they need my help, I'm available at any time and I will be involved as I have been during the past 20 days or so that I have been here as the new U.S. Ambassador. If they need our help in terms of bridging options that they can choose from, I'm available to provide that help.

We must succeed, Iraq will succeed and that is a U.S.-Iraqi partnership. The UN is also involved; we're not the only ones involved. Other countries are also involved in the process to help Iraq. It's vital for the security of the United States, the security of the world, indeed, for Iraq to succeed and I'm confident, as difficult as the process is, time as the process will take, Iraq will ultimately succeed and we're making a difference here in helping them.

QUESTION: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, we thank you so much for your time this

morning, appreciate your comments.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you very much. Have a good day.

2005/788

Released on August 16, 2005