

Joint Roundtable With Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld With Local Reporters

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq
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SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Actually, I have a 40-minute foreign policy address I'd like to give.

SECRETARY RICE: Go right ahead.

MR. MCCORMACK: Thank you, everybody, for coming here. Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld are ready to take your questions. I think you've organized yourselves in terms of who's going to be asking the first question, so why don't we get right to the question period.



QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) What's the U.S. position on the decision to incorporate militias into the Iraqi armed forces?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, clearly, one of the most important issues facing the new Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people is to get a hold of the security situation, to improve the security situation. And any society, especially any democratic society, has to be concerned about people carrying guns unauthorized, and that means that there will have to be an effort to demobilize those elements that are carrying guns illegally. We understand the history, but there needs to be one authority and that will have to be the government and its security forces.

How that is done I think is going to be a matter for the new Iraqi Government to work out, to work out with the parliament, to work out with its security ministers. But it's obviously a very high priority for this government.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) This is the first joint visit of your two personages to Iraq. Do you think that your ministries can improve their support for a free press, or have they done enough in the past, to help safeguard the media, which has come under attack by the terrorists, especially the Iraqi national media?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I'm not sure I followed the question. Did you?

SECRETARY RICE: I didn't understand the part about the media.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Yeah, I don't either.

QUESTION: (In Arabic.)

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I see your point. First of all, it's impressive to see that Iraq has a free press and so many people who are here at their own initiative reporting whatever they want to report, and I congratulate the country of Iraq for having a free press.

There is no question but that the insurgency and the terrorists have media committees. They try to manipulate the press. They try to do things and say things that advantage the cause of violent extremism. And we're on the other side. We think people want to live in peace and they're opposed to violent extremism. And part of the battles is in public opinion, as you suggest by your question. Part of it's here. Part of it's elsewhere in the world and part of it's in the United States.

The terrorists are not going to win a single battle in Iraq or in the Middle East or anywhere in the world in terms of a military battle. The battle they're engaged in is trying to win a test of wills and try to get other people to give up their free way of life. And we don't intend to give up our free way of life and we don't think the Iraqi people intend to give up their free way of life. And Zarqawi and his folks failed to stop the elections, they failed to stop the constitution, they tried to stop the formation of this government and they're going to fail there as well.

SECRETARY RICE: Next question.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) What message did you give to Prime Minister-elect Maliki?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, we brought a message of congratulations on his nomination because this is really a milestone for the Iraqi people. The nomination of the first freely elected permanent government of Iraq is a real milestone. And I said to him as well as to others, this is a day that the United States and the coalition and I think the Iraqi people have been looking forward to ever since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. So in that sense, it was a time to welcome the event, the formation of this government.

We also gave a message that the United States wants to be a good partner for this new government. We understand the tremendous challenges that the government has. We understand the concerns of the Iraqi people, indeed the impatience of the Iraqi people to deal with the security situation, to provide economic opportunities and to make certain that Iraq is on the right road to democracy and prosperity, and we pledged our partnership to do that. The President wanted us to come out and make certain that the United States is ready to provide whatever help we can to the new Iraqi Government.

But we also had a message that we found that the prime minister and the other leaders were also giving to us, which is this is a time that Iraqis are taking responsibility for their own future. We can be partners. We can support. We can help. But this is Iraq's time and the time for Iraq's newly elected leaders to take on these responsibilities and to represent the desires and the aspirations of the Iraqi people who voted in large numbers, who faced down terrorists in order to vote and express themselves. And so there is tremendous responsibility on this government and we wanted

to acknowledge that and to acknowledge that the United States is going to be a good partner.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) You are here heading up both ministries of foreign affairs and defense. Are you weighing in on Sunni participation in government, or the appointment of security ministers or portfolios, or sovereign ministers? Furthermore, Maliki is known to be somewhat of a hardliner, what was your advice to him?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I don't know that we really offered advice in that sense. We discussed the importance of the Iraqi security forces, the effort that's gone into training and equipping both the police and the army elements, our desire to continue to pass off responsibility to the Iraqi security forces as we've been doing with respect to provinces, real estate bases, assignments, the fact that we've been very pleased with their progress and the importance of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior working closely together to serve the Iraqi people. Needless to say, our hope is that we will see the government formed soon and that they will be people who are competent and capable and reflect the best interests of the Iraqi people. And I must say, I came away from my meetings with the government leaders today impressed with their seriousness of purpose, the constructive approach they take with each other and optimistic about their future.

SECRETARY RICE: If I could just add that we wanted to say how important it was that the ministries would be ministries of national unity, just as the government is a government of national unity. But before we could say that, the leaders said that to us. So I think that the leaders understand that the real goal now has to be to bring the Iraqi people together in one project, in one effort to build a unified Iraq.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Actually, the Iraqi people went out in great numbers and voted -- in fact, increasing numbers from the January election to the October referendum to the December election -- and spoke with a powerful voice that they wanted a unified country and they wanted a government that represented all the people of Iraq. And it's really quite an experience for us to see that and then to see that people they've selected assume that responsibility in such a responsible way.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) Now Zarqawi has come out with a new tape, a video. Regarding such groups, is the embassy thinking of reengaging with armed groups by the embassy or others and will this affect these groups at all?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Zarqawi is not somebody with whom you can negotiate. He wants one thing, which is to tear Iraq apart. And his video said to me that he has not been able to succeed in doing that despite threats and despite some very tragic incidents in which he and his terrorists have indeed killed people and assassinated people. And yet the political process goes on. He was unable to -- the terrorists were unable to stop the Iraqi people from voting, as Don said, in ever increasing numbers, including a significant and substantial Sunni vote in the last election, and this government of national unity is now about to be formed and it's quite clear that the worst thing that can happen to the terrorists is for the political process to move ahead and to be successful because that means that Iraqis have chosen compromise and politics over violence and repression.

And the only thing that the terrorists have to offer is violence and repression. The Iraqi people want a good livelihood. They want compromise. They want to live together in peace. They want their children to go to school. They want to be able to select their leaders. And the terrorists can't offer that and so there really isn't anything to negotiate with Zarqawi.

I know that there are people who have been involved, who were involved with the insurgency, who may now choose to join the political process. There are, I think, legitimate grassroots Sunni leaders who can represent the interests of all Iraqis. And clearly, Iraqis will have to make those decisions. But when it comes to these foreign terrorists -- and I want to emphasize foreign terrorists who came from outside Iraq into Iraq to kill Iraqi children, to kill Iraqi soldiers, to kill Iraqi policemen, in a case that I remember most vividly, to go into a school and to kill an Iraqi teacher -- that's what people like Zarqawi came to do. And I think the Iraqi people are saying resoundingly that they want nothing to do with that.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) After Prime Minister-elect Maliki's statements what will be the timeframe for withdrawing U.S. forces.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: We have all -- the United States and coalition countries have always felt that the important thing was the success of the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government and that the conditions would determine the pace at which we would be able to pass over responsibility to the Iraqi security forces. My impression is that that's been the opinion of the successive Iraqi governments, including the leadership that we've met with today. And what will take place, obviously, will be meetings between the new Iraqi Government as it's formed and the coalition forces and a discussion about the conditions in Iraq and the pace at which those reductions could take place. It is clearly in our interest to have reductions over time and it's clearly in the interest of the Iraqi Government that that take place. It is also in the interests of the Iraqi people and the United States to have it done in a way that the conditions permit, and so those discussions will be taking place in the weeks and months ahead.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) What do you think about former Prime Minister Allawi's comments and others that the new government is based on sectarian divisions? Will they join this government? Secretary Rumsfeld, what's your view on the Zarqawi video?

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. First of all, in meeting with this government, I think you -- the members who have already been selected -- that is, the presidency and the speakers and deputies and the nominee for prime minister -- I think you see that you have a wide range of people involved in this government and I think you will see that even more as ministers are selected. This was, after all, a government formation process built on a broad coalition, depending on elections of people of various parties, how they did in the elections, and then they were represented in this coalition building process.

I can tell you that even though this is not the system that the United States uses -- we elect a president who then appoints his cabinet members -- but in much of Europe this is exactly the system that is used, in Great Britain or in Germany, where, by the way, it took them two months to select a government after their elections. And so it's a process that after the elections all of the

parties come together and they form a government.

I fully hope that Mr. Allawi, who won seats in the election, will in some way be a part of this great moment in Iraq's history. We have good relations with him. He was a very good interim prime minister for this country. And so I hope that he will -- he or his party will be involved. But this is obviously up to the Iraqis to decide and up to Mr. Allawi to decide what role he will play. But we've always had good relations with him and he's played an important role thus far in the history of this country, in the history of the freedom of this country.

Don.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: With respect to the question about the Zarqawi tape, I've not seen it. I had it reported to me this morning. And it strikes me that anyone, any Iraqi, listening to that tape insofar as it was briefed to me would have to come away with the firm conclusion that Zarqawi is the number one enemy of the Iraqi people, the number one enemy of a free Iraq, the enemy of people who voted, the enemy of people who are serving in government and the perpetrator of murder against innocent men, women and children who are Iraqis. I don't see how any other interpretation of that tape can be made.

QUESTION: (Translated from Arabic.) We have your trip today and the trip to Turkey. James Baker is now traveling in the region. Is the U.S., with these activities, redrawing the map or reorienting its focus in the region?

SECRETARY RICE: To rearrange the map or -- the map?

QUESTION: (In Arabic.)

SECRETARY RICE: No, we have no such intention. The United States is trying to do one thing and one thing only, which is to support Iraqi patriots and the Iraqi people as well as people throughout this region who have long been denied the aspiration to human liberty and to freedom, to pursue one's own life knowing that you can select those who are going to govern you, who have a say in that -- in those -- in selecting those who are going to govern you, to be able to say what you think, to be able to educate your children, both boys and girls, to be able to worship as you wish, to be able to have a free press that defends your interests.

The President has called these the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, and all that that means is that we as Americans are fortunate to have these freedoms and we believe that everyone all over the world wants to have the same freedoms. And so the United States is here to support those who are fighting for those freedoms, who are working for those freedoms, and not to rearrange any maps. We aren't interested in trying to rearrange borders. That belongs to another century. What belongs to this century is the forward march of freedom and that the desires of people for those liberties are finally being met in the Middle East.

And in many ways it's beginning here in Iraq. Iraq is a great culture. It has always been an important culture in the Middle East, in the Arab world and the Middle East. And it is a place where

people come from different ethnic backgrounds, from different religious backgrounds, and yet you see emerging here in Iraq a democratic society where those differences are being overcome by politics and compromise, not by violence and not by repression. And that is going to be a tremendous pillar of stability throughout the Middle East, and so it's wonderful to be here and to be a small part of that.

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm afraid that we are out of time. Thank you very much for coming here and thank you for your questions.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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