

Joint Roundtable With Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq

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MR. MCCORMACK: We have about 25 minutes. I don't think there are any opening statements, so why don't we just jump right into the questions. Who wants? AP.

QUESTION: May I ask either or both of you about the meetings with the prime minister in terms of what you've stressed as to what you think the priorities ought to be in the first weeks and months of the new government? And what did you hear from them that that you thought was (inaudible) in terms of (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first we asked about this priorities. I found him very focused and very clear that he understood his role and the role of the new government to really demonstrate that it's a government of national unity in which all Iraqis could trust and in which -- on which (inaudible) to say that the ministries also need to be ministries of national unity just like a government of national unity (inaudible). I think that he was very focused on the security situation, obviously, and on strengthening the Iraqi security forces but also the delivery of services. But he really emphasized this question of getting all Iraqis to feel that this is their government. And I found it both refreshing and really heartening. I found him a very focused person and I thought he was really impressive.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I think that could be said about all of the people we met today. I'd known some of them previously, but they certainly have been engaged in intensive discussions and it's clear they have come to reasonable understandings about what the Iraqi people expect of them. And I was -- I come away most encouraged by our meeting.

MR. MCCORMACK: Janine.

QUESTION: I'm Janine Zacharia of Bloomberg News. I know you both have both visited other places in the country, but today you will be flying to the Green Zone. You'll have to fly in in secret. What does that say about prospects for restoring security and stability here and the true state of the security situation here?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I guess I don't think it says anything about it. We came in here for a purpose. The last time I was here I was in, I don't know, five or six different cities. This time I was here to meet with General Casey and General Dempsey and General Chiarelli and several others and to do Defense Department business as well as to respond to the President's request that Condi and I come and meet with the new leadership and it happens that they are located here. But I just don't see anything to your question.

SECRETARY RICE: Could I just say, you know, I've also been out to Irbil and Mosul and other places. Obviously, the security situation will continue to take our attention and the attention of the Iraqis. But we've always said, and I feel it even more strongly today, that the terrorists are ultimately going to be defeated by a political process here. And what we are here to do today is to meet those new leaders, in particular those that we've not encountered, but ones that we have before, to let them know that they're going to have strong support from the United States.

And Don is spending time on Defense Department operations. I'm spending time on Embassy operations to make sure that we're really ready to lend that support, because the terrorists suffer a defeat every time the political process moves to another milestone and every time more Iraqis see their future with the political process, not with violence and destruction. And that's how I think you should think also about the security situation and why the political process is so important.

MR. MCCORMACK: Steve.

QUESTION: Yes, Madame Secretary, Secretaries Rice and Rumsfeld, if you'd both address this. You've both been saying that a major problem exists in removing the sectarian influence in the Interior Ministry and military forces. But given that there are, by many accounts, thousands of members of the Badr Brigade, for instance, in the interior forces, in that (inaudible) alone, how does that -- how can that be accomplished? Tell us how you -- to what extent you discussed it today. How can that be accomplished without a major disruption? I mean, should they be expelled, forced to renounce their ties to these militias? Exactly how do you accomplish the objective that both of you have said is so important?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I guess the first thing I have to say is we don't, the Iraqis do. And the Iraqis have a task, and it's a complicated set of tasks. The new government is -- will be addressing the security situation and the security forces, the roles of the two ministries. And it's their country. It's a sovereign country. This is not a government that has an interim in front of it or a transition in front of it. It's a government that's in for a period of years and undoubtedly, unquestionably, will be addressing the question as to how they can best provide for the security of all of their people.

And they discussed that today. They intended to approach those issues. They have a parliament and I'm sure they'll be working with the parliament on those issues. Other countries have dealt with these issues and done them in a reasonably orderly way and over a period of time in a manner that was, in many instances, without much violence. So it's possible that these things can be done.

SECRETARY RICE: And to the degree that the security forces themselves get better and gain the trust of the Iraqi people as a whole, then to the extent that anyone could argue that the need for sectarian forces is driven by the security situation and essentially start to remove that excuse, so to speak, or that rationale. And so I think they are very focused on improving their security forces, improving the capability of the police, getting MOI and MOD ministers, as well as other personnel, who will be competent and capable people so that the national forces of Iraq, whether you're talking about police -- or the national unity forces of Iraq, let me use that term, whether you're talking about police or the army, are really capable themselves of handling the security situation.

And as Don said, you know, we're not without examples throughout the world of militias that have been demobilized, reintegrated people, reintegrated people, retrained. There are many different models out there of how to do that. And I think they'll be examining precisely how to do it in Iraqi circumstances. But you also have to have security forces, and in particular police, that can protect the population from crime as well as from terrorism, and so they seem to be very focused on that aspect of it as well.

QUESTION: Did they indicate that they're prepared to move quickly on banning militias and on disarming them?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's clearly one of the high priorities for the government. I think you know that several days ago, almost I think the day after he was nominated, the prime minister said that one of the keys was going to be to have -- I'm paraphrasing now -- but to have the arms in the hands of the government, not in militias. Now, how they go about that I think is going to be something that they will have to work through. But they clearly understand and clearly believe that you cannot have a lot of unauthorized people who are carrying arms and in many cases frightening and terrorizing the population, that the process of protecting the population has to be one that the government takes responsible for. And they understand that those two are inconsistent with one another and it's obviously very much on their minds and it's going to be a high priority.

QUESTION: Would they use the U.S. military to disarm militias?

SECRETARY RICE: We did not get into details of how they are going to go about this. The government isn't even in being yet, so let's remember that what we have is a presidency council, speakers and deputies and a nominee for prime minister. What he's trying to do is to get his ministers, to get his program together. They've done a lot of work on this, but I think it's too early for detailed discussions of how they're going to go about it.

And after all, just to underscore something Don said, Iraqis will have to determine how to do this given their circumstances and given their capabilities. How we support them will be a part of that discussion.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: And I suspect, the way you cast your question, the implication was someone had to physically go in and disarm somebody. My guess is that in many instances this will be as much a political process as anything else. Look at Afghanistan. We ended up with a DDR process and Japan took the lead and over time the heavy weapons were put in cantonments and life went on. And weeks or months or a couple of years before that, people looked at it and said, oh, my goodness, all the warlords have these and they have this in and some that --

SECRETARY RICE: You were never going to disable them. Right.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: So I think that they'll -- the one thing I'm certain of, they'll come up with an Iraqi solution.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: This is an unprecedented visit, as far as I know, for the two Secretaries here for (inaudible) days after he was elected, before his government is even formed. You said that you wanted to show your support, but is there any concern that the pictures of the two of you here dramatically today would send the wrong message in this country and perhaps elsewhere in the Middle East that the new prime minister is less than fully autonomous?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't think there is any doubt in anyone's mind that the 11 million Iraqis who went out and voted were exercising sovereignty and that this prime minister intends to do what he thinks is best for the Iraqi people. This is someone who has a track record of having been a part of a number of important efforts for Iraq. We know that he's not always agreed with us, or we with him, but he is somebody who has always had the interests of the Iraqis at heart and who has worked hard on their behalf.

And you know, people can say whatever they please, but this is a sovereign government, a permanent government, a government that is being formed out of an electoral process in which Iraqis voted in overwhelming numbers, and it's the most democratic process ever in the Middle East. And I would challenge anybody in the Middle East who wants to talk about who this government is beholden to, to show me a process that is this democratic anywhere else in the Middle East.

MR. MCCORMACK: Nicholas.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I wanted to follow up on something you talked about (inaudible) the Embassy, which you just mentioned a few minutes, too. You said that you don't see a need to reorganize the operation. Can you tell us what (inaudible) Embassy tomorrow in terms of (inaudible)? And as (inaudible) talking about (inaudible) troops levels in Iraq (inaudible) personnel. I was wondering if (inaudible) the biggest embassy in the world (inaudible) China or India. How long do you plan to keep the level of your operation here at that level?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the nature of what we're engaged in here is, of course, much different than what we are engaged in a place like China or India. Those of you who travel with me will probably blanch again when I say this is probably the biggest example of transformational diplomacy that we are engaged in, which means that America's diplomats, America's personnel are working hand-in-hand in helping Iraqis try to create, really from the ground up, ministries that work, provincial leadership that works, local leadership that works, essential services that can be delivered, technical assistance to economic operations, financial operations. And so it's a very big effort and I suspect that it will be a very big effort for a while.

What we have done -- and when I said I don't see any need to reorganize now, we reorganized at the time of the creation of the Embassy and we have had some important innovations like the Provincial Reconstruction Teams where we've had to reorganize quite a lot in the way that we do our work in the field. Part of what we're trying to do is to be outside of Baghdad more and into the provinces more, and so if you want to consider that a reorganization, I guess that is, in a sense, a reorganization. But it's a big effort. There is a lot to do and the Iraqis need a lot of support.

But I want to emphasize that what I came to here to do, in addition to meeting the new leadership and signaling support, is to make sure that we are prepared to deliver whatever support the Iraqis need; that we have the right personnel to do that, that we have the right skill sets of people to do that. I'll just give you one example. We believe that we ought to have one of the strongest political counselor offices here any place in the world. The person's who's going to head that up was our ambassador in Damascus. And so here you have a very senior person coming out to head up political operations. That's the kind of expertise that we're trying to draw to what is obviously one of our most important, but also one of our most challenging, posts.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, Secretary Rumsfeld, a couple of weeks ago, Secretary Rice had said that there were thousands of tactical errors made in Iraq (inaudible) took exception (inaudible). I wonder, if sitting here today, you believe that no errors were made on either the tactical or strategic level, or if looking at it there are things that, accepting, of course, that war plans do change in (inaudible), if there are things that --

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I don't think I did take exception to it. I said I hadn't seen it and I wasn't aware of what she meant. But she's right here and you can ask her. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: We've joked about it, yeah, yeah. Look, maybe you should ask me what I meant since -- (laughter) -- the people who are around this table who were traveling with me will remember that I took them to task for, first of all, taking what I thought was a figure of speech and taking it literally. I also say very often I've done that a thousand times; I don't mean that either. (Laughter.)

The context for this was that I was asked a question as to whether or not we had learned any lessons. And I said, look, I'm sure that we have made mistakes, probably thousands of tactical mistakes, meaning not in the military sense but to contrast that with the decision to actually take down Saddam Hussein, which was the big strategic decision in a sense. And I went on to say when I get back to Stanford and am overseeing dissertations, which I'm sure will chronicle the mistakes the Bush Administration has made, I'll be prepared at that time to discuss and assess what were mistakes and what were not. Because I'm enough of an historian to know that things that looked brilliant at the moment turn out later to have been mistakes, and things that at the moment seemed to have been mistakes turn out later on to have been the right call. That was the full discussion of this point.

And so, yeah, have we made mistakes? I'm sure we have. But what you have to do in an operation this complex, a big historical circumstance like this, you're going to do some things well and you're going to do some things not so well. But you have to make sure that when you are faced with the kind of really big decisions that you stay on course.

I'll give you an example. There were people when Saddam Hussein was overthrown who said, you know, Iraq is never going to really be capable or isn't going to be capable of self-governance. They're really not going to be capable of democracy. Why don't you find another strongman and put him in power? You remember those who said that.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Pardon me.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, no, there were a lot of people who said put a strongman in power and then you can have a slow transition to democracy. That would have been a mistake. And the Iraqi people are demonstrating that that would have been a mistake. There were people who said they'll never be ready for elections on January the 30th, postpone the elections. And it turns out that would have been a mistake.

So my whole point here was let's let history judge. For now, what we have to do every day is we have to get up and we have to work at our hardest to support an Iraqi effort that in many ways is unprecedented in this region. And some things are going to go well and some things are going to go wrong, but the broad course here, the Iraqis are doing the right thing.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: And the Department of Defense is an interesting institution in that they systematically engage in a lessons-learned process, which is intensive, broadly based and public. So it isn't as though anyone is saying, gee, we don't want to know what really took place. The Department of Defense engages in that process in a systematic way as it is currently and will in the future.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for two more questions. Why don't we go (inaudible).

QUESTION: Thank you. Madame Secretary and Mr. Secretary, you talked a little bit about some security challenges facing this new government, but there's a whole range of challenges, an economy that is not -- cannot quite jumpstart on electricity production and still rather low, prewar levels, problems with water (inaudible). The list goes on and on. You know the list.

What does this new government do to try to demonstrate sort of a break from the past and really deliver on things that previous governments maybe weren't able to do? Do they have that ability given that whole set of challenges? And what does the U.S. mission here and U.S. military do -- what can they do to try to help support, especially, you know, the first couple of months?

SECRETARY RICE: That is precisely the kind of conversation that we've been having. And I think the Iraqis have some ideas. You know, let us work them out with them before we go to the front pages with them ourselves. I mean, they have some ideas about how they would like to show the Iraqi people that it's a new day, that they have a permanent government that's going to be able to defend their interests.

On something like essential services, you know, I think we have made some progress. You've heard me say before the deteriorated state of the infrastructure was something that we clearly did not -- that we clearly under-predicted. We didn't realize, for instance, that they had 50 percent of

the electrical generating power in this country that they needed. And so when you look at a pre-war comparison, remember that Baghdad was getting 22 hours a day, but the rest of the country was getting very little at all and they were therefore living on generators. So the prewar/postwar comparison isn't really, I think, a good comparison because what we did was to even out the distribution and that meant that the inadequate power generation was then obvious.

We've also had problems because there was no maintenance done essentially on this generating capability for years. I mean, Saddam basically put nothing into the operation and maintenance of the grid. So we've substantially improved the generating capability at about the same time that demand has gone way up, because people feeling freer are now -- you go out there and you'll see the number of satellite dishes out here.

So we are -- I think we have improved the services. We need to improve them more. We're also working -- Don and I are working with General Casey and Zal together to try and improve infrastructure security, to try and improve the capability of the Iraqis to coordinate better between the various ministries that have to coordinate electricity, oil and so forth. And I think the whole package is one that should produce better outcomes on essential services over the next several months. But it is something that the prime minister emphasized to us that essential services is going to be something that he's very much paying attention to, that he's going to pay attention to in the ministries that are selected, and that we promised to try to be helpful with.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Matter of fact, General Casey mentioned this morning that the infrastructure security brigades that are being trained -- the Iraqis that are being trained and have been deployed and had some success already.

MR. MCCORMACK: Last question.

QUESTION: Did any of the Iraqi leaders (inaudible) today indicate that they would prefer fewer U. S. troops in their country or ask for any kind of a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No one I talked to. I indicated that, needless to say. You know, we talked about the levels of forces but there was no one who suggested that there should be lower levels than currently exist. What we did talk about was the importance of the new government meeting with General Casey and his people and discussing the kinds of steps that will be taken to continue to transfer over responsibilities to the Iraqis so that we can continue to reduce coalition forces. But there was no one who came up and said, gee, we think there ought to be more or less, at all. Neither one of those assertions were made by anyone I talked to.

SECRETARY RICE: No, me either.

QUESTION: A follow-up. You indicated (inaudible) were you hoping to hear that from the Iraqis?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No, no. I heard what I expected, that they -- the feeling is -- that I took away from the meetings that we need to -- the security situation needs to continue to improve; the Iraqi security forces need to continue to be increased in numbers and gaining experience and

taking over more responsibility; and that as that happens, the coalition forces will have less responsibility and that that is in everyone's interest. But no one asserted either that there currently should be more or less than there currently are.

QUESTION: Was there any discussion on the Zargawi tape that came out?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: It was raised in one meeting.

SECRETARY RICE: It was raised in one meeting --

QUESTION: Sir, do you have any thoughts on it?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I just spoke extensively on it in the prior meeting.

SECRETARY RICE: With the Arab media.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: With the Iraqi media.

QUESTION: Can you give us the short version, sir?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No, no. (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: It'll take five minutes for the full version. We'll give you the transcript.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: We'll give you the transcript.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. All right. Thanks everybody.

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