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Briefing En Route Baghdad, Iraq

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

En Route Baghdad, Iraq

October 5, 2006

10/05/2006 -- [Remarks With Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki After Their Meeting](#)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, as you know by now, we're headed to Baghdad...we're going to Baghdad because it's a quite critical time, I think, for the Iraqi Government as they work on their national compact, their national reconciliation plan. I just want to go to see what we can do to support that effort, to talk to Prime Minister Maliki and to support him, to see how our Embassy operations are working in support of both the international compact and the national reconciliation plan. So it seems a good time to stop in on Baghdad and we will -- I'll be talking to you during the trip, but I wanted just to come back and set it up.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I wanted to ask about Lebanon. At least twice on this trip you've publicly called on the Syrians to stop serving as a transshipment point for weapons to Hezbollah. Do you have reason to believe since the ceasefire was put into effect that Syria has made active attempts to rearm Hezbollah? And if so, to your knowledge, do you have any reason to believe that any of those attempts have succeeded?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't know about attempts. We don't have any reason to believe that there is a large-scale effort of any kind. I think it's just important to keep warning that there is in fact an international embargo and to keep reminding Syria of its obligations under that embargo. That's why we keep warning about it.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I realize this is why you're going to Baghdad, but can you give us a sense of what you think -- given how bad the sectarian violence has been, can you give us a sense of what more you can do to support Maliki? Do you have any ideas on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the government and Prime Minister Maliki believe very strongly that their most important work now is to be done in getting the political bargain in place in terms of national reconciliation. That means their

hydrocarbons law, their work on de-Baathification, their work ultimately on demobilization for militias. They are in very intense conversations themselves. As you know, the federalism issue has been there, the reform of the constitution issue. So they're dealing with very serious matters.

Our role is not to resolve those issues for them. They are going to have to resolve those issues among themselves. Our role though is to support all the parties and indeed to press all of the parties to work toward that resolution quickly because obviously the security situation is not one that can be tolerated and it is not one that is being helped by political inaction. And so that is a message that I think Prime Minister Maliki is trying to send. It's a message that we're trying to send as well. And anything that we can do with the various parties with whom we have very good relations to help to encourage the process forward, we want to do it.

We also have, as you know, an international compact part of this, and I had discussions when I was in Saudi Arabia and with the Gulf states about what parts of that international compact can start being put in place to help the Iraqis as well, including efforts at political reconciliation that some of the Gulf states have since they have very close ties with the tribes and with people who have not been part of the political process. So it's that whole complex of issues that I wanted to go out and see what we could do more to support Prime Minister Maliki.

QUESTION: It seems that every time you go there it's sort of a new, you know, push to -- by Maliki or by his predecessors to get a handle on the security situation and you talk every time about how they have to get a handle on the security situation, and yet it seems to be getting worse. Is there something more dramatic that the government should be doing or that you're going to urge them to do?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, they are in the midst of a security plan for Baghdad -- I mean a set of security operations in Baghdad -- and I think we need to let those finish. But I'm really here and more on the political side because obviously the political side and the security side are linked. The ability to get a national reconciliation plan, to get everybody to understand precisely how their interests are going to be represented and how their interests are going to be served in this political process, to pull more people into the political process and out of the insurgency, more people into the political process and out of connections with militias, that's why the political process is so central.

So I'm really more focused on the political process. I think George Casey and MNFI and Don have been very focused on the near-term security issue, but the core of getting a security environment, a stable security environment, really does rest on getting some of these political issues resolved.

QUESTION: You said that you'd like to pull -- you said you'd pull out -- into the political process people out of insurgency. Where do you draw the line of who that might be involved in the insurgency actually would be a welcome player in the political process?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, I think this is an issue for Iraqis to resolve. Obviously there are people who have -- who are still terrorists and are always going to be terrorists and who have been engaged in activities that's going to make it difficult for them to ever be a part of a political process. But really, this is an Iraqi process. I know what they're trying to do. Every country, when it goes through a war, has to go through this process of reconciliation and I think that's a conversation we have to let them have.

QUESTION: You mentioned the hydrocarbons issue... There are a lot of Kurdish leaders apparently who believe that new oil that is drilled in the Kurdish territories ought to be the property, basically, of the Kurdish community. Does the U.S. agree with that view?

SECRETARY RICE: We believe that oil has to be a resource for the Iraqi people as a whole and it has to benefit the Iraqi people as a whole. The relationship between the regions, the localities and the center on how exploration is done, how decisions are made, I think that's what the hydrocarbon law has to address.

But our only view, which we've communicated to the Iraqis and which I think most Iraqis agree, is that oil needs to be a unifying factor and not one that will help to make the country less unified.

QUESTION: And when we see the very slow progress in security in Iraq, do you think Maliki has the strength to gather enough support around him?

SECRETARY RICE: I do think he has the strength. I think he's a very good and strong prime minister. And you know, they're really starting to take actions. There was a lot made today of the fact that they pulled a police battalion out because they were concerned about its activities with death squads. That's a very positive thing because we've said many times that the Interior Ministry in the prior government before the permanent government was put in place was not active enough in really rooting out potential corruption and potential violence within the Ministry itself, or of the Ministry forces. And so they are starting to really take some actions of that kind.

So I think this is a strong prime minister. It is going to take time. It did not get to this situation overnight and they're not going to get out of it overnight. But they really need to work on the political process in a unifying way. They need to continue to improve their security forces. We need to let the Baghdad security plan have a chance to work. And they need to do more of the kind of thing that apparently the Interior Ministry is trying to do.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, can you just tell us how you're going to get -- how you're going to suggest to him that he can get people more involved in the political process? And also, are you saying that you're not going to tell him that he's got to do more to disarm the militia?

SECRETARY RICE: I didn't say the latter. What I said was that they have to have a plan for the disarmament of the militias. He himself has said that. But of course you have to have a DD&R plan. You don't just go out and start pulling weapons out of people's hands.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, look, it ought to be very clear to everybody and I think it's especially clear to the Iraqi Government that these are urgent matters that they have to take on with great urgency. I find that Prime Minister Maliki shares that sense of urgency and shares the sense that things need to move forward.

But the Iraqis as a whole, all of the government, all of the leaders, really have got to be committed to moving this process forward. They don't have time for endless debate of these issues. They've really got to move it forward and that's one of the messages that I'll take. But it will also be a message of support and what can we do to help that process

to move forward, including working with their neighbors who have influence in different parts of the country.

QUESTION: You know, one thing I suspect you've happily missed is the Bob Woodward book tour over the last week. But, you know, his large theme has been that the Bush Administration has not told the truth about Iraq. Can you address that in a larger sense that they haven't told the truth in the beginning, they're still not telling the truth now? This is what he says every night on CNN.

SECRETARY RICE: Look, I'm not going to address Bob Woodward. I will just say this: The President of the United States has gone out there practically weekly, in some cases almost daily, and said here's what we're trying to do in Iraq, here's why it's important and here's why we believe we must succeed and will succeed. But it is very tough going for all of the following reasons: This is a very young political system that is trying to overcome differences that are decades old; it is coming out of tyranny; it has problems of sectarianism; it doesn't have adequate security forces. This is really hard going. And I would say go back and look at any presidential speech in the last year, and the discussion of the fact that this is very tough going is there.

Now, it's somehow considered contradictory to say that we nonetheless believe the Iraqis are making progress. When there is actually a functioning political system in place after three years, I think you can say they're making progress. When they're actually governing themselves, I think you can say that you're making progress. The reconstruction, which I think we began as frankly too big a national program, although some of that needed to be done, now has a more localized character and it is having an effect in a lot of the provinces. A lot of these provinces are stable. So not only do I think that the President and others have been clear with the American people that this is a struggle, he's been clear with the American people why he thinks it's a struggle that needs to be waged.

It's also the case that there is -- that what the American people see on their television screens every night is the struggle. It is harder to show the political process that is going on at local levels, at provincial levels, indeed at the national level, in which the political system is maturing to try to come to terms with their difficulties.

So I think that the Administration has been painting a very complex picture of Iraq for a long time and it is indeed a complex situation. But nobody doubts either the difficulty or the sacrifice that America is having to endure to try and finish this work. What the President is saying is it's essential that we finish this work.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, can you give us any indication of what the plans are now for a P-5+1 on Iran and what that will involve? And secondly just on this Baghdad trip, are you going to be meeting just with Maliki and his inner circle or are you going to be meeting with some of those that you're trying to bring into the process? Or are you just going to be talking, in other words, to those who are -- anyone outside the political system that you want to see involved, like the Sunnis particularly?

SECRETARY RICE: I will be meeting with Sunnis. I've been doing this for a while though with Sunnis and there are people who are in the process, in the government and at the edge of the process and the government, and I've had an opportunity to meet with all three categories. I will be meeting with Sunnis this time, both leadership and people in the government.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: There are some Sunnis who are in the parliament, for instance, but not in the executive branch of the government. I expect to see some of those people.

As to the P-5+1, we will see; it's not very easy to arrange, it turns out. We are having a little trouble getting a couple of the ministers to see if they can get there. We may be able to do it instead by a phone call over the weekend. We may try to do it that way instead. The political directors may meet to set that up. So I'll let you'll know. We just have to see whether or not we're going to do it.

But the outcome I think is -- the issue is to hear from Solana and to move, mostly likely to move on to sanctions. But whether or not we're going to have to get together to do that, I think we've still got some problems...for scheduling purposes.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: Look, we haven't -- the ministers have not discussed the terms of the resolution. The political directors are discussing the terms of the resolution. But what the ministers are going to do either in person or by telephone is to say it's -- you know, we've done the Solana effort and now we'll have to move to sanctions. That's the ministers' role. It's not to negotiate the words of the resolution. The ministers are not going to sit and do that.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: I think the political directors are actually talking today and then we will see also whether the ministers can get together. The way that this came about was that last weekend we had a phone call and people knew that I would be in the Middle East and it seemed like a good idea to try to get together again. It never got really scheduled for a whole variety of reasons, but we're holding open the possibility that it might -- we might still meet in London if we can get everybody there. If not, we'll do it by telephone.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: Robin, last weekend we said we would hear one more time from Solana and then we would follow the logic of 1696. So we're going to hear one more time from Solana.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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