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Update on Iraq

Ambassador David Satterfield, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Coordinator for Iraq

Foreign Press Center Briefing
Washington, DC
October 26, 2006

3:00 P.M. EDT

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MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the Foreign Press Center. This afternoon Ambassador David Satterfield, the Special Coordinator on Iraq, will be giving you an update on the situation in Iraq and our policy there. So without further ado, Ambassador Satterfield, thank you for coming.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you very much. The President has just spoken at length on U.S. policy towards Iraq. Secretary Rumsfeld spoke earlier in the day. In order to maximize the use of your time, I would be happy to go directly to questions rather than to reiterate what I think you have already heard in great detail from more senior officials than I. So with that --



MODERATOR: If you could wait for the mike and identify yourself.

QUESTION: Shyam Bhatia. I'm the foreign editor of a newspaper called Deccan Herald from Bangalore in India. My question's about the remnants of the Iraqi nuclear program. A large number of Iraqi scientists have since been disbanded with the U.S. encouragement have disappeared from sight. Can you tell us what's happened to them? Are you keeping track of them? Do you know if any of them have gone to Iran or to Korea or to any other countries?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Quite frankly, I have absolutely nothing for you on that. It's a question we'd be happy to

take.

QUESTION: Talha Musa from Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. Actually I have two questions (inaudible). Is Washington still giving full support to al-Maliki's government in Iraq? And my second question: How do you evaluate the Mecca declaration between Sunni and Shiite in Iraq? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Your first question, yes, we do strongly support Prime Minister Maliki and his national unity government. We look to that government; we look to Prime Minister Maliki, as the President made clear yesterday, to lead. We understand fully the very difficult circumstances that attain in Iraq today and we understand fully just how difficult the decisions are which the Iraqi leadership, which the Iraqi Government has to take. Difficult decisions on security, difficult decisions on political reconciliation, but these are critical decisions and they must in fact be confronted. They must be decided. Now, these decisions are all for the Iraqi Government, the sovereign Iraqi Government to make. We respect their sovereignty as the President made clear. But they're decisions that cannot be deferred without cost to the Iraqi people and the interest of a stable peaceful democratic Iraq.

Our role as the United States, our role as a lead member of the coalition, is to support the Iraqi government, support that Government's security forces to ensure that they have all of the tools that we can help provide for them to lead their country forward. But the decisions on the future of Iraq, on the political process, on security must be taken ultimately by Iraqis themselves. We do look to Prime Minister Maliki to take these decisions. We do have confidence in his leadership.

On the issue of the Mecca declaration, we think that the gathering together in Mecca under OIC sponsorship was an extremely important step. And we are very appreciative both to Saudi Government officials and to the Organization of the Islamic Conference leadership for helping make this possible. It's important that as many messages of reconciliation as possible be sent to the Iraqi people; that it be made as clear as possible that there is no legitimate violence against innocent Iraqis; that there is no excuse or justification for the killings of innocents, no matter from what source. And this was an important step in that process and we see it as a part of process, both on the political and on the religious side of addressing the question of how do you get to a peaceful Iraq. How do you bring sectarian violence to an end? How do you bring about ultimately an end to the presence of armed groups, militias, armed gangs that are responsible for so much of this violence?

MODERATOR: Umit.

QUESTION: Umit Enginsoy with Turkish NTV television. Nice to see you again.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you.

QUESTION: Two things: Recently a number of prominent former diplomats, including Richard Holbrooke and Peter Galbraith, have urged the U.S. Government to redeploy U.S. troops in Iraq in the Iraqi Kurdish control not in Iraq. Do you have any such plans? Would you comment on that? And secondly, are you happy with the position of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership in efforts to counter the PKK?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: With respect to your first question, a great many pundits have made a great many recommendations, some of them contradictory, on what the best course should be for the U.S. in Iraq and we appreciate

very much their suggestions. But at the end of the day, we will move forward on a course which reflects our own best thinking as well as our consultations with our other coalition partners and, of course, with the Iraqi Government.

With respect to your second question on the PKK, we do take very seriously the need to contain, confront the PKK and its engagement in violence and in terror. Too many Turks have suffered from PKK violence particularly over the last year. This needs to come to a halt. General Ralston, retired Lieutenant General Ralston's mission, is to work on how best to address this problem. Now, General Ralston is working with the Turkish Government. He is working with the Iraqi Government. He is working with officials of the Kurdish regional government with an aim to finding a way forward that brings this problem to a resolution, to a close. And the most important first step is an end to the terror, an end to the violence. And it does mean that the PKK must cease its involvement in violent activities. It must lay down its arms.

There are other steps that can be taken and must be taken by the Kurdish leadership: closure of PKK offices; other steps with constrain the ability of the PKK to function. Those are all extremely important measures. They are measures which General Ralston is working on with all of the authorities concerned, but we take this very seriously.

MODERATOR: Right here.

QUESTION: Hi. Natalie Ahn with the Asahi Shimbun Japanese newspaper. In the past few days we've been hearing about discussions between coalition and Iraqi leaders to lay down benchmarks, but we're getting some different messages. First of all, I'm wondering if representatives of the Department of State have been involved and if you could help clarify the characterization of these discussions. Is this supposed to be a plan that comes together, a comprehensive set of benchmarks that we get by the end of the year or are these just ongoing identifying benchmarks as you go and are there a few that have already been agreed on? Is there anything that has been agreed on so far?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Over the course of the last two years, Iraq has had important goals, objective benchmarks laid out for its constitutional and electoral process. It was those benchmarks which led to the successful holding of elections, drafting the constitution, ratification of a constitution over the course of the last 18 months. We believe, the Iraqi Government believes -- this Iraqi Government believes that it is important to have benchmarks, goals and objectives on the political process and on the security process. These are benchmarks which all sides agree are important, which all sides agree are useful as tools to show to their public that there is a process forward, there is a set of things which the Iraqi Government wishes to do, intends to do.

On the economic side there is a similar set of benchmarks which will be embodied in the international compact for Iraq. So on all of these issues -- security, political and economic -- there is a need for guidelines, benchmarks, objectives and goals.

Now, the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi presidency on the 16th of October, made public a set of benchmarks on the political process. That's not an issue in debate. Those benchmarks exist. They have been put forward by the Iraqi Government. There is a process underway, I believe Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld spoke to this earlier today, to formulate similar benchmarks on the security track. And as I said earlier, on economic issues there is a very, very detailed set of benchmarks that will emerge in the form of the contract, or rather the compact, for Iraq.

In terms of the other part of the benchmark issue, timelines; clearly progress needs to be made on all of these tracks: security, political, economic, together and as rapidly as possible. There needs to be a sense in Iraqi minds, there needs to

be a sense frankly in the minds of all those engaged in Iraq that this is what needs to be done, these are the goals, and they need to be done as urgently as possible. Is there a specific dictated or, in the words of some comment, imposed timeline? No. These are benchmarks that reflect the desire, the understanding, the intentions of the Iraqi Government.

QUESTION: My name is Tammam Al-Barazi from Alwatan Alarabi magazine. Since you still repeat sovereign Iraq, so are you still in denial that there is no occupation? How can you define sovereignty with the occupation of 140,000-plus American troops? Secondly, before you left to Iraq and (inaudible) and you told me that the (inaudible) party in (inaudible) are not stooges of Iran. Did you change your mind or are you still with this position they are not -- they don't follow the orders of Tehran?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The occupation of Iraq ceased by the recognition of the international community and the United Nation Security Council some years ago. What is going on now is the strengthening, the stabilization of Iraq under a sovereign Iraqi government. And if your question is addressed to the basis for the presence of international forces, coalition forces in Iraq, that basis can be found in Resolution 1546 and 1637. It's extensions that were undertaken by the Security Council at the expressed will and request of the Iraqi Government, an Iraqi Government which in the case of Prime Minister Maliki is a government chosen by the Iraqi people under a sovereign Iraqi constitution.

With regard to the status of Iraqi political parties, whether SCIRI, the Dawa Parties or anyone else, the question of their political affiliation, desires, relationships with external parties are issues best addressed to those parties and their leadership themselves. We respect all of those Iraqi political parties as representing Iraqi interests. We do not believe that Iraqi senior political figures are puppets of Tehran or any other foreign government. Whatever their views may be, whether in accordance or disagreement or in between with the United States, we respect them as Iraqi leaders.

QUESTION: Dmitri Kirsanov, Russian News Agency, TASS. Getting back to the issue of benchmarks and timelines, sir, you make it sound as if the benchmarks and timelines that Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey spoke earlier in Baghdad were agreed upon in advance. Help me understand, then, why Prime Minister Maliki basically rejected them then and quoted this as an issue of election campaign here in the United States.

And second one, sir, a little off topic, a number of Russian diplomats were killed in Baghdad several months ago, as you know. And there has been some efforts between U.S., Russian and Iraqi Government to investigate. Is there any progress?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Your first question. The benchmarks of which Ambassador Khalilzad and Commanding General Casey spoke, on the political side have long been -- were long in discussions amongst Iraqis, between Iraqis and us, and between Iraqis and other parties. They are, at the end of the day, Iraqi political benchmarks, and they were articulated by the Iraqi Presidency in that sense. Do they reflect input? Do they reflect consideration from other sources including us? They do, but they are primarily agreed to amongst Iraqi parties.

Similarly, the process that will lead to the articulation, we hope, of security benchmarks is a process which, at the end of the day, has to be Iraqi. There must be internal Iraqi agreement on this because they will come from Iraqi sources. They will not be issued by us. It's an Iraqi (inaudible). It's a set of Iraqi goals and objectives. The same holds true for economic benchmarks, though in that case they will reflect primarily the product of understandings, agreements, discussion between Iraq and the United Nations as represented primarily through the World Bank.

With regard to Prime Minister Maliki's remarks yesterday, I think if you read through the full transcript of what the Prime Minister said rather than take the very few selective quotes that have been made, you will find that there is not a significant degree of disagreement at all between what the President, Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey have said and what the Prime Minister is saying. No one is imposing benchmarks or ordering timelines, and the Prime Minister acknowledges this. As the value of benchmarks, that is something which Prime Minister Maliki, President Talabani, the Iraqi Government as a whole has recognized, has spoken to and in the case of the political process has actually acted upon in terms of putting such benchmarks out.

On the Russian diplomats, obviously this was a terrible tragedy and it is something that we feel very deeply. We, the U.S. mission in Iraq, both military and civilian, have been engaged with the Russian Embassy, with the Russian Government in Moscow to do all that we can of both in terms of sharing of information but also developments upon information received to try to see what can be done to resolve the fate of these individuals. I have nothing beyond that for you.

QUESTION: Giampiero Gramaglia, Italian News Agency, ANSA. I have two questions. The first one is on the benchmarks again. What happens if the Iraqi Government and the American authorities don't agree on the same benchmarks? And what happens if one of the benchmarks agreed is not respected in time or in the goals?

The second question. We are used to speak about the lack of satisfaction for the military -- for the security progresses in Iraq. Did you take in account of the military, political and economic side there is one satisfactory side.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'm not sure I understood your second question.

QUESTION: Is one of the three sides, the political, the security and the economic satisfactory for Americans?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The whole concept of goals, objectives, benchmarks, achievements to be made as a useful shaping tool is very much an Iraqi product. It is an Iraqi tool. It is something that is reached mainly in internal consultation amongst Iraqis, secondarily in consultation with us, either with us in a civilian sense or us with MNFI on security issues. But at the end it is Iraq. And the question of if there are disagreements the only benchmarks that are going to be articulated are benchmarks that the Iraqi themselves agree are goals that they wish to see achieved.

With respect to what happens if benchmarks are not met, the consequences of not meeting benchmarks are first and foremost consequences for the Iraqi people. The impact is on them in terms of security, political and economic developments that are not achieved and negative developments that do take place in the absence of progress in a positive sense. The consequences are primarily for them.

With respect to your second question on the three tracks, we do see progress being made on the economic track, significant progress. The Iraqi Government has undertaken a number of actions both in the form of legislation on privatization, on an investment bill, on liberalization of private sector fuel importation, but we've also seen execution of legislative changes and executive order changes. Fuel subsidies have been reduced by some 60 percent over the course of the last 10 months in Iraq, a very, very, important step. And further reductions will take place.

We do see Iraq moving on the economic track and moving very well, and that is the same judgment I believe of international financial institutions, including the IMF. On the political track, there are many difficulties confronting progress on some very

naughty issues including questions involving amnesty, reform of de-Baathification procedures, how you move forward through a reconciliation agreement on a demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process that ends the existence of armed groups of militias and brings them back into society, back into the state.

But we have seen progress on the political track as well. Cross-sectarian alliances were formed with the active support of the Iraqi Government that produced what we think are very good resolutions in the Council of Representatives on how one is to go forward with the possibility of creating federal regions, and the timeframe for consideration of possible revisions or amendments to the constitution. These were important steps. We expect other progress on the political track will come.

On security. The security situation, as the President noted yesterday quite graphically, is not satisfactory, not satisfactory in Baghdad, not satisfactory elsewhere. We are doing what we can in terms of adapting our tactics and strategy, in terms of the work that we do in support of Iraqi security forces, our engagement with the Prime Minister and his government, civilian leadership of Iraq to address this problem. But again, I would echo the remarks of Ambassador Khalilzad, General Casey and the President in noting that if you wish to take any one of these tracks, security, political, economic, in isolation, you have to move forward on all collectively for each to reinforce the other. You will not get adequate progress on economics, on politics if you don't have security. You will not get sufficient sustainable progress on security unless you have an active political and economic track moving ahead. All reinforce the other. They all need to be moved forward at the same time.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, Ambassador. Viviana Hurtado from Al Jazeera International. I wanted to ask about the visit that the Secretary General of NATO will have tomorrow here in Washington. Specifically I wanted to ask you if you can talk about the challenges that the U.S. and NATO is facing in Afghanistan with the increase of the violence certainly and also with the fact that one of the U.S.'s commitments seem to be shifting. That connects to my second question about Iraq.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, before you pose your second question, I'm delighted to be able to tell you I bear no responsibility whatsoever for Afghanistan. It's right up there with the peace process issues I don't handle and am happy for it.

QUESTION: Can you speak about maybe any possibility of the U.S. asking NATO partners to assume more of an active role in Iraq?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, there is a NATO training mission, which is in fact active and has been active, in Iraq. And the head of our military transition training mission, Lieutenant General Marty Dempsey is co-hatted as head of the NATO mission in Iraq at the same time.

With respect to any possible contemplation of augmentation or increases a NATO role, you have to direct that question to NATO itself. No comment.

QUESTION: Umit Enginsoy, Mr. Ambassador, I'd like actually -- I'd like to get some clearer answers to my earlier questions. Basically, is redeployment to northern Iraq among your options? Could you say yes or no? And secondly, what I asked was thank you for your comments about countering the PKK, but are you happy with the Iraqi-Kurdish stance on that? Could you directly respond to these, please.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Your first question, I'm not going to comment further on what ultimate decision we,

working with the government of Iraq, may reach in terms of military posture or footprint. Those are issues for the future for discussion. I'm simply not going to go in speculation on that.

No, we are not satisfied with progress on the PKK. There are more steps that need to be taken to ensure that the PKK does not return to violence. And that's General Ralston's mission to pursue those steps. I can't give you more specifics than that other than to say it is very important that there be no return to violence.

QUESTION: You are not happy with the Kurdish threat towards (inaudible?)

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: What it means is that more steps need to be taken with respect to the PKK.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: My name is Rusen Cakir. I'm from Turkey, too, for Vatan Newspaper. I have some few very short questions. First of all, is there a civil war in Iraq? So many people are (inaudible?) And secondly, after the killing of Zarqawi there were so many expectations. But as I see, there's a kind of -- things are getting worse? Is it true? What do you think about it? Thanks.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: With respect to your first question, look, we could to date hear for the rest of today different academic models and definitions of civil war and it would be a largely sterile discussion. The fact is there is sectarian violence, sectarian killing and sectarian conflict in Iraq. And if it is not addressed and if it is not brought to a close and brought to a close rapidly, it threatens more than any other security challenge in Iraq, it threatens the fabric of Iraqi society, it threatens the ability of Iraq to move forward on security, on political track and with respect to economic growth and development. And that's the issue that people should be addressing, not the endless pursuit of definitions of civil war, civil conflict. There is sectarian violence. People are being murdered, innocents in this name and this has to come to a halt.

Your second question, Zarqawi's killing, we made very clear immediately after the elimination of Zarqawi that everyone should be circumspect in what the results of this would be, that the organization that he had led, that movement remained very vital, very active, very threatening, very lethal and that remains the case.

QUESTION: A follow-up on your -- you mentioned amnesty, the resistance or the insurgent, the insurgency order that (inaudible) whatever you call them, they refuse to communicate except to the Americans to negotiate except the American regarding this amnesty. So is the American negotiating with the insurgency or the resistance? That's first. Secondly, since you mention about the civil war and since in your answer you told me you are not occupier of Iraq. You are authorized by United Nations to do it. So is it not your responsibility to stop the civil war in Iraq as occupier or as United Nations authorize you to occupy Iraq?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, I find your remarks very interesting. I'll attempt to answer whatever questions I find in them. On the first question that you posed, we are in contact, as we have stated, with those who purport to speak for or represent the insurgency, insurgents, those involved in the insurgency. We are in touch with them for the purpose of seeing whether or not in fact they are credibly able to deliver an end to violence whether or not in fact, they are credibly able to deliver an end to violence, whether in fact they are able and willing and interested in ending the violence and coming into a

political process. I do not accept your premise that only we speak to these individuals. In fact, there are a great number of interlocutors other than the United States speaking with these individuals. But the goal here is to see if a way to end the violence can be achieved nothing more nothing less.

On your second question, obviously we are gravely concerned as the President made clear yesterday, as I've made clear today about sectarian violence, sectarian killings, about the rise of militias of armed groups, of gangs involved in this kind of violence. It's enormously destructive of the fabric of Iraqi life. It has to be brought to the close. We are doing all we can to help the Iraqi Government in addressing this problem. But this is an Iraqi phenomenon. At the end of the day, it is Iraqi leadership and Iraqi decisions which will be responsible for helping to bring it to a close in forming a new basis for coexistence within that country.

MODERATOR: Time for one last one.

QUESTION: Dmitry Kirsanov from TASS again. Let me follow (inaudible) and try to get a yes or no answer from you. Has Prime Minister Maliki been in advance notified of General Casey's intention to give a year or a year and half timeline in the security area? Did he know about that?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We discussed with the Iraqi political and military leadership one a continuous basis how we and they intend, hope, plan, to progress together to progressively transition, command, control responsibility at a civilian level, at a national level, at a military level, at a provincial level authorities to Iraqis. That is part of what we do every single day with the Iraqi Government.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much.



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