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Remarks to U.S. Mission Personnel in Iraq

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq

February 17, 2007

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming. It's my honor to welcome the Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, my boss. The people here, Madame Secretary, are from all over the world and they're here to work together to help Iraq succeed because, as you know and as the President stated it so clearly at so many times, Iraq's success is important not only for the Iraqis and not only for the region but for the future of the world. And I would like to thank them, Madame Secretary, for their service here.

The Secretary is visiting at a time of transition. We've had review, a review of our strategy, and have adjusted it appropriately. We've got a new team coming in place to lead the effort. But the commitment to the mission, the mission being success in Iraq, helping Iraqis succeed, helping them make the decisions that they need to make for their country to become a successful nation -- this ancient land but a new nation -- is important, remains important, remains vital. And the Secretary is obviously one of the leading architects of our efforts to help Iraqis succeed, so it's my honor and my privilege once again to welcome Dr. Rice to Baghdad.

Madame Secretary. (Applause.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Well, first, I'd like to thank Zal and his team for the outstanding job that he is doing here. I have an opportunity to see Zal two or three times a week across a little screen on a CIVITS that we do, and I don't know any ambassador, any envoy in the world, who is working harder and more diligently to try and bring peace and security not just to Iraq but peace and security to the Middle East and peace and security to the world. And so, Zal, thank you very much for your commitment. (Applause.)

I also want to thank our military leadership: General Casey, who has just come back to the States and will become Army Chief of Staff; and we're all excited by General Dave Patraeus' arrival here. I don't think there is a story any better than the way that our men and women in uniform and our diplomats and our civilians are working together to bring peace and stability. It's really, usually people think of war and peace. Well, of course, we know that in between there's a lot,

and there's a lot of work to do. And that's why it's so important that we're one team. It's why it's so important that we recognize each other's sacrifices, that we support each other fully. And I think here in Baghdad we have forged an extraordinary civil-military team and civil-military cooperation. And that's thanks, of course, to our leadership, but it's also thanks to each one each one of you, because on any given day I know you're working like partners. And I just want you to know that that's recognized at home, it's appreciated at home, and we want it to continue. So thanks very much for working together as such a terrific team. Whether you're in uniform or not, thanks for working together as such a terrific team.

Now, I want to say a couple things about this mission. First of all, this is an essential mission for the security and well-being of the United States of America. I know we talk a great deal about helping the Iraqi people to find their way out of violence, out of tyranny, to democracy and to living together in peace and prosperity. And that's a noble cause, and America has always been at its best when it uses its power for noble causes. But this mission, bringing a stable and secure Iraq, is also essential for the security of the United States of America. Because on September 11th when those 19 men drove our own airplanes into the Pentagon and into the World Trade Center and would have driven it into the Capitol in Washington, we realized that we were no longer isolated from danger and terror, that the great oceans that had protected us for almost 200 years were no barrier to fear and destruction on our own territory, and we recognized at that point that we were going to have to come to the source of the problem, that we were going to have to go on the offense, that no matter how well we tried to defend America with port security and airport security, we couldn't play defense because the terrorists only have to be right once and we have to be right 100 percent of the time.

And that's an unfair fight, and therefore we decided we had to go on the offense. And that meant coming to the source of the problem here in the Middle East and trying nothing more grand than trying to actually bring about a different kind of Middle East. And a different kind of Iraq, an Iraq freed of Saddam Hussein, an Iraq freed of the tyranny that was a part of this land for so long, that's the different kind of Iraq that can be a pillar of that different kind of Middle East.

And so when you get up and go to work every day in what I know are extremely difficult circumstances, when you get up and go to work every day far from family and far from friends, when you get up and go to work every day and perhaps have to mourn the loss of a fallen comrade, I just want you to know that the work that you're doing is noble, but the work that you're doing is also necessary. It's necessary for generations of Americans to be able to live in peace and in security.

And I know sometimes that it must seem extremely difficult and maybe at times you must think is it even possible. But when you think that, I'd like you to think back to all the other things in history that people thought impossible at the time that just a little while later seemed inevitable.

I spent some time a couple of summers ago reading the biographies of the Founding Fathers. And I'm going to tell you something. By all rights, the United States of America should never have come into being. If you looked at fighting the greatest military power of the time, Great Britain; if you looked at trying to conquer this new land; if you looked at the squabbling between the Founding Fathers, they were wonderful, but boy, did they fight. And if you looked at the way that our country, even conceived as a perfect union was so imperfect at its start, because at its start, of course, Mr. Jefferson's constitution counted my ancestors as three-fifths of a man. And now here I stand some years later, a descendant of those people who were counted as three-fifths of a man, and I'm the Secretary of State. (Applause.) And I'm not even the first black Secretary of State. (Applause.)

So when you watch the Iraqis toiling and struggling and squabbling to try to find a way to live together in democracy

rather than in tyranny, remember it's not easy. And we as Americans should recognize more than any people that it's not easy.

I know, too, that you work side by side with some very brave Iraqis. Whether you work side by side with them in the field as military officers, as police, or whether you work with Foreign Service Nationals here, these are the people who are showing the way to their own countrymen, showing the way that there's nothing wrong with Iraqis. Iraqis want the same things that men and women all across the world want, what the President has called the "non-negotiable demands of human dignity." They just want a chance to have a say in who's going to lead them. They just want to have a chance to raise their boys and girls in peace. They just want to be free from the knock of the secret police at night. They just want to have the same liberty and freedoms that we have been so fortunate to enjoy. And so when you work with them, I hope you also reach out a hand and realize what they're going through.

And the final thing I want to say is I know that a lot's going on in Washington and that you're hearing it. A lot's going on because we are a great democracy. And people have their views and they're going to express them. And some do not think that this was the right war to fight, and others think that we in the Administration haven't fought this war quite right. By the way, all of them know that the sacrifice and the labor of our men and women here has been honorable. And so when you hear the criticism of the war or the criticism of the President or of me or of anybody else, I do want you to know that to a person at home, your honor and your sacrifice and your labor is appreciated. People know what you're doing and it's appreciated across the board. I don't care what people think of the policies; it's appreciated across the board.

And I'll tell you something else about the American people. I keep hearing and reading the American people don't want to fight this war anymore. I don't think that's right. The American people want to know that we can succeed. Because they, too, want to succeed. And so we will have our discussions and our debates at home, but Americans want to win this war. They want to leave an Iraq that is better than the one they found. They want to leave an Iraq that is going to be a pillar of a stable Middle East. The President has put forward a new plan to help us do that. I'm energized, I'm ready to go, and I know that each and every one of you is ready to go, too.

So thank you for what you do every day. I cannot thank you more on behalf of our nation all who are working here -- coalition, Iraqis and Americans -- you're in a noble cause and we're going to succeed. Thank you. (Applause.)

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