



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

KEYWORD SEARCH

[Subject Index](#)+ BOOKMARK   [Home](#)[Issues & Press](#)[Travel & Business](#)[Countries](#)[Youth & Education](#)[Careers](#)[About State](#)

You are in: [Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs](#) > [Bureau of Public Affairs](#) > [Bureau of Public Affairs: Press Relations Office](#)
> [Press Releases \(Other\)](#) > [2007](#) > [March](#)

Press Statement

Office of the Spokesman

Conference Call From Baghdad

March 10, 2007

Conference Call With U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad

MR. CASEY: Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Appreciate you joining us and especially given the hour. I really appreciate the fact that Ambassador Khalilzad has been able to join us this afternoon to give us a little bit of an overview of today's meeting in Baghdad. Know this is something that's been of great interest to everyone and we really appreciate him being able to take the opportunity to join us before he heads back here to Washington for his confirmation hearings at the end of next week.

So with that, Mr. Ambassador, let me turn it over to you. And if you'd like to make some opening comments, and then we'll get to questions later.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Thank you, Tom. I will make three points. Point one that it was a good meeting. The exchanges were constructive and businesslike and aimed at seeking agreement or common ground on issues that were on the table. Second, that there was agreement that three working groups will be formed. One dealing with the issue of security and border. Second, a working group that will deal with the issue of energy and electricity and third, dealing with refugees. These working groups will produce recommendations for consideration by the meeting of ministers.

On the meeting with regard to ministers, they were all in agreement to have a ministerial meeting, but then there was two variations, one that -- which was a variation to the one that the Iraqis would like to have had which is a meeting of ministers in Baghdad. One variation of that was for a meeting to take place in Cairo if it wasn't tactical for the ministers to meet in Baghdad and a second variation or an addition to that was that a Turkish proposal to have a regional ministerial, all up to date, meaning plus P-5, but also to invite the G-8 countries because a lot of countries have shown interest in joining these discussions. And the idea was that these meetings should take place which one of -- whichever one comes first, and the expectation was generally, although there was no consensus that the next one might be the one in Turkey, that it should happen as soon as possible and in Istanbul perhaps. But the job was left to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Hoshyar, to consult with the ministers to come to that determination. So it is now his task to determine when, where and what composition the next meeting will have and in consultation with other

ministers. So that's where I will leave it in terms of an opening statement. I'll be glad to take questions.

MR. CASEY: Okay. And call manager could please bring in our questioners, it'll be great.

OPERATOR: Thank you. If you would like to ask a question, please press star-one on your touch tone phone. You will be prompted to record your name. Our first question comes from Andrea Mitchell with NBC News.

Thank you very much, Ambassador. Is there any contemplation of any more direct talks on the margins of this meeting or in the interim period between the United States, Iran, and Syria at any level?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, two points on that. First, that we did meet and greet with the Syrian and Iranian delegations and had brief conversation with each, and -- individually and then more substantive exchanges took place across the table for several hours and then in small groups to work out some of the differences that existed with regard to language in the statement that was to be read.

But as far as the next steps are concerned, of course, if there is a ministerial that I described with the regional ministers, the P-5 and the G-8, the Secretary of State will participate in that. We have stated that. And the foreign ministers of these two countries will be there, so there will be the opportunity for dialogue at the table at least. As far as more direct bilateral talks, this is something that I do not have anything to say at this time.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from E. Fleming with Reuters.

QUESTION: Hi. Could you please describe what your discussions were with the Iranians? What was the mood like? Did you express to them your misgivings about interference in Iraq and also about the EFPs?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, yes. If you've seen my statement, I did mention the issue of interference, the issue of weapons coming across, the issue of people coming across the borders, the issue of money, training, support for militias, support for other illegal arms group. And there was also the exchanges with regard to people that we are holding. Iranians raised the issue of the diplomats. We responded that they -- that those people that we are holding have not been established to be diplomats by the Iraqis or by us. There was -- overall mood as -- however, was businesslike, constructive exchanges and nobody was pounding the table or -- the exchanges were quite, I would say, not -- ordinary and there was, in a frank and sometimes even jovial exchanges.

QUESTION: But do you think that these are people with whom you can do business? Do you think that you'll build -- these are sort of the building blocks of a future relationship in trying to tackle what's happening in Iraq?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, they have stated that they see it as -- they have a common interest with us in terms of building a successful Iraq and they stated that clearly, that they want a democratic Iraq, they want this Government of Iraq to succeed, they want national reconciliation in Iraq, they want -- they're opposed to violence and terror. Those were all good words, welcomed words, but we will have to wait and see what happens on the ground, whether they stop the shipment of weapons, the EFPs across the border, whether they stop support for the militias, financial support,

training, and we will see what happens in terms of the statements that they make.

So as far as the conference, the first conference of this kind in which we have sat with them; the evaluation of today, I think, is a positive evaluation, but we will have to see in terms of the impact of this exchange and this discussion that they -- or the set of agreements that I referred to will have on the situation on the ground in terms of the working group, what they produced, and then -- you know, what happens in terms of actual policies. So, we're -- I think one has to be cautious about exaggerating the impact of what has happened, but what has happened, in my view, also cannot be dismissed. It was a good meeting.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Jonathan Beale with BBC.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you, Ambassador. Can you just -- I mean, was it exactly the same conversations that you had with the Syrians and the Iranians or was there anything different about the conversations you had and the response you got?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, we had a similar conversation with both, a somewhat longer conversation with the Syrians, perhaps, than with the Iranians just by a couple of minutes, and the same interest expressed by them as by the Iranians, a desire to engage, to say that they're willing to engage bilaterally as well as multilaterally, and that they -- that there is, from their perspective, area of common interest with regard to helping Iraq stabilize and succeed and in the course of the discussion about the issues offering, -- bridging proposals to narrow all the differences between the various sides.

So -- but again, we know that people come across that border from Syria into Iraq including terrorists who come across, foreigners who blow themselves up and kill a lot of Iraqis and coalitions, people, and that -- some of the insurgent groups operate out of Syria. We will have to see how what happened today and the next steps will impact the relationship between Iraq and Syria and the movement of people and the support for insurgents from Syria into Iraq.

QUESTION: And can I just add, did the Syrians accept any of your criticisms -- any of your concerns, rather?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, they did not respond directly to the issues that I raised in my statement, but in their parallel statement, they expressed support for Iraq, for reconciliation, for better relations and in the intervention subsequently a similar sentiment and even offering at times bridging formulas for narrowing the differences between various parties and as an expression of wanting to engage bilaterally as well as multilaterally with the United States on Iraq -- on the issue of Iraq.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Anne Gearan with Associated Press.

QUESTION: Hi. Yes. Ambassador, could you tell us who approached whom, both with the Iranians and the Syrians and also give us a little bit more details when in the meetings -- when in the course of the meetings did these bilaterals take place? And although you said the Syrian was a bit longer, could you give us the rough duration of each?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, the (inaudible) of the Iranian, the first meeting took place at -- while we were waiting for the Prime Minister to come in other words, for the meeting to formally start. Then it was because also the discussion that I was having with Mouwafak Rubaie, I was walking with him and he is the national security advisor of the Iraqi Prime Minister. And he called the Iranian Ambassador and he turned around and walked towards us and he did the introduction, we shook hands and said a few word -- pleasantries and we walked together towards the other members of his delegation and others who were in that area. Then subsequently upstairs where the discussions took place, there were a couple of other opportunities in the discussions with regard to the context and small grouping as people were gathering, different delegations, to work out the differences of view that existed to bridge them. And our discussions there with regard to the issues and then one last one before leaving, talking about next steps.

With regard to the Syrians, the discussions that took place, two or three times, again, in the groupings and then bilateral upstairs after the plenary that was opened up by the Prime Minister, the conference moved upstairs to -- and took the formal path -- seminar with everyone sitting across the table and having the discussions across the table with opening statements, intervention and discussions of various issues.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Karen DeYoung with *Washington Post*.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Ambassador, you've spoken several times about differences of view and bridging proposals. You discussed that in the context of things offered by both Iran and Syria. Could you talk a bit about what those differences of views were, what issues they were over and what kind of proposals were offered and whether things were resolved?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: All the issues are two kinds that -- one was the working group. Should the working group be established now? Should they be up to the ministerial to establish them? The membership of the working groups, the mandate and then the question of the next meeting, should it be just the neighbors and should it be in Baghdad. Should -- you know, what about Egypt, only neighbors, but in Egypt or neighbors plus P-5, plus G-8 and then the role of the non-regional players? This was kind of with regard to process around substance of issues, a discussion of the role of the neighbors, what the neighbors could do to assist on what issue, who was affected by what and -- or what has happened in Iraq and the Iraqis disputing some description of their situation by some of the neighbors. So there was on a variety of issues, was in terms of next steps and in terms of describing the current situation and there was a discussion of a different point of view. I said, for example, with regard to the Iranians that we are holding, there was a bit of a discussion between us and the Iranians and -- on the subject as one illustration.

QUESTION: If I could just follow up on that, the head of the Iranian delegation said afterwards that he had asked the United States for a timetable for withdrawal of American troops. Did that discussion take place and what was the nature of it?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, he did raise it in his intervention, the issue of withdrawal and there was -- on that intervention and subsequent discussion. We mentioned that the -- we were there and the coalition was there now at the request of the Iraqi Government, which led to a renewal of mandates for the presence of the coalition forces. And they -- and a couple of other members also raised the issue of ultimate withdrawal of the coalition forces; but not asking for a timetable, but saying that once the Iraqis are able to take care of their own security, that -- asserting the ultimate need for the coalition to withdraw.

But no one else that I recall pushed for a timetable. Even the Iranians did not call for that, an immediate timetable, but -- as I understood what the Iranian delegate said. So there wasn't a discussion of it. Nobody followed it up saying, "What about this idea, what do we do about this." No, this was his intervention and his was the only one to talk about that -- a timetable. But as I said, even he said -- he didn't want for an immediate timetable. I think that was implication -- that he said, as I understood it.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Nina Donaghy with Fox News.

QUESTION: Hello, Mr. Ambassador. Can you give us a sense of what the Saudi delegation brought to the table? Any particular concerns that they raised?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: The Saudi delegation talked about the issues in which -- besides a general statement of support for Iraq, that -- in the discussion of the working groups, he, for example, said that they didn't have an issue with regard to energy or refugees. For example, we were talking about these three groups of electricity, but that there was an issue of security and borders, that they had a row and that this is something that they were interested in participating. That was one of the specific issues on which they did comment, other than the general intervention in which they expressed their desire to be helpful to Iraq and the need for a ministerial and some of the decisions that some people wanted to be made now, to be made by the ministers.

QUESTION: Can I follow up? I hate to ask you to speculate, but the ministerial level meeting that will be coming up, can you anticipate the same kind of -- I'm not going to characterize it as direct talks, but sort of this open discussion between the U.S. and Iranians at that level?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, I think if things go as planned, and I want to make sure that's understood, the working group would be producing the recommendations. They will get to work and come up with some recommendations for the ministers to decide and there could be discussions. And if there is a meeting in which regional ministers and P-5 ministers and G-8 ministers participate, that there will be discussions with regard to those issues and others that the ministers might raise or some of the ministers might raise across the table. That certainly is possible, perhaps, for how things could develop from here.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Our next question is from Ken Damato with AFP.

QUESTION: Hello, Ambassador, thank you. I wanted to know if the -- if Iran had come at all close to admitting they had operatives or weapons or money going into Iraq?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: No, there was no admission that they were doing that.

Tom, it's almost 2 o'clock. If I could get one more question, I would --

MR. CASEY: I think -- why don't we do this; we'll do this, sir, and we'll let you take one more and then we'll call it a night

for you.

QUESTION: Thanks.

OPERATOR: And our next question is from Elaine Shannon with Time.

QUESTION: Hello, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you for speaking with us so late. Did any of the other countries, the representatives from the other countries also speak to the Iranians and Syrians about letting violent people across their borders? That is, did anyone else second the U.S. concerns about this?

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Well, not in a formal seconding the U.S. concern, but I think the issue of people coming across propaganda from neighboring countries, inciting violence, money, training, the issue was raised by -- certainly by Iraqis and by some of the others as well. But just -- I think the way it happened, the meeting was -- that there was a series of interventions that took place. By interventions, I mean just presentations were made sequentially and people were reading what looked like prepared statements.

I had a prepared statement and I presented that and then some exchanges on issues and what to do next. And there was -- the issue that you raised was brought up by several participants, several interventions.

MR. CASEY: Okay. I think with that and certainly, in light of the hour out in the Middle East, we'll call this a night. Thank you, again, everyone, for joining us. Thank you, Zal, for taking the time to do this after an extremely long day.

AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD: Take care. Thanks, everyone. Thanks and all the best. Thank you.

2007/180

#

 [BACK TO TOP](#)



[Updates](#) | [Frequent Questions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email this Page](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Search](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[About state.gov](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Copyright Information](#) | [Other U.S. Government Information](#)