



Launch of the Civilian Response Corps of... | Daily Press Briefing | What's New

U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

KEYWORD SEARCH
Subject Index

+ BOOKMARK

Home Issues & Press Travel & Business Countries Youth & Education Careers About State Video

You are in: [Under Secretary for Political Affairs](#) > [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs](#) > [Releases From the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs](#) > [Remarks About Near Eastern Affairs](#) > [2007 Remarks About Near Eastern Affairs](#) > [April](#)

Interview with Ambassador Ryan Crocker With Aziz Al-Hajj of Al-Iraqiya Television

Baghdad, Iraq
April 19, 2007

QUESTION: After toppling Saddam's regime you assumed the post of First Director of Governance for three months, from September to August [sic.]. Why did you leave Iraq?

AMB. CROCKER: I arrived here in Iraq very shortly after the fall of Saddam, April 2003, and I stayed until the beginning of August. What I came out primarily to do was assist the United States in the effort to establish a governing authority in Iraq. We had to consult with Iraqis, consult amongst ourselves, and consult with allies, the United Nations to determine the best way to proceed. The way we proceeded became known in July as the governing council of Iraq. So that was my main responsibility. When the governing council had been established and was in operation, that really concluded that main mission I had in coming to Iraq.

QUESTION: It's been said that you had your differences with Civil Governor Bremer over the de-Baathification law which was the main reason behind your departure. Is that true?

AMB. CROCKER: There are a lot of stories out there in a lot of newspapers. The reality is, as you recall, that was a tremendously busy time with not a lot of guideposts and not a lot of certainty on what the next step should be. There certainly was a lot of open debate and discussion among us, between Americans and other coalition members and Iraqis, and that's the way it should be. It was through that exchange of views among all of us that lead to steps forward.

On issues such as de-Baathification for example, a hugely complicated issue that isn't frozen in one point in time, as conditions evolve, policy needs to evolve. And that's why today of course we are so strongly in support of the moves to the Council of Representatives, a draft law on de-Baathification reform, because what has been done, however appropriate it had been for its time, as times change needs to be re-looked and that's what this reform legislation does.

QUESTION: During an address you delivered after being sworn in as the Chief of Mission in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, you said a fair law should be reached for de-Baathification. What do you mean by fair? And does this comment give credibility to reports about your position towards Bremer's decision over the de-Baathification law?

AMB. CROCKER: We're not in 2003. It's almost four years ago that those initial decisions were taken. And clearly it's important to, as times change, to change with them. Policies need to change. As I return to Iraq in 2007 it's clear to me from the beginning that an enormous priority for Iraq, and for all of us, is a national reconciliation process that brings all Iraqis together in a single nation working for common purposes. I see this whole process of de-Baathification reform as leading to that end. There are other steps as well that we will certainly be focused on, but as we sit here together in the first quarter of 2007 I think it is important to look at what helps national reconciliation. I think this does and we need to push forward.

QUESTION: You represented your country in Lebanon and you survived the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1983. How do you compare the situation in Lebanon in 1981 to the current situation in Iraq? And can Iraq overcome its crisis using the Lebanese way, or are there other solutions?

AMB. CROCKER: You mention the bombing of the embassy in Beirut in 1983, and I was in the embassy at the time. One thing that experience does for me here is, I think it helps me empathize very deeply with Iraqis as they face terrible attacks such as the one that occurred on Wednesday in the Sadiriya market. My heart goes out to the victims, their families, their friends, their loved ones and all Iraqis that have suffered so much through this wave of violence. But at the same time I see some encouraging things as I return to Iraq. As I have been around talking to Iraqis in my first weeks here, I have found a real sense of determination to find a way through these problems into an atmosphere of stability, security and reconciliation. I was very impressed, for example, after the bombing at the Council of Representatives last week that the representatives came together, determined that they would hold a session the next day, and they did, denouncing these acts of violence.

That goes to, I think, a very important point as we look at Iraq in 2007 and the challenges it faces, attacks like the one on the Council of Representatives, like the Wednesday attack in Sadiriya. These are not mass movements of Iraqi people against Iraqi people. These are acts of terror carried out by a very small number of individuals who are trying to break the will of the Iraqi people, and break down the fabric of society. I think it is important as you face these challenges that we all keep that in mind. These vicious attacks, as deadly as they have been, are being carried out by a small number of people with a very bloody agenda. The vast majority of Iraqis want something very different for their families, their communities and their country. And that is what gives me the sense of hope and encouragement as I start my mission here.

QUESTION: Who is trying to destroy the social structure of the Iraqi society? Has the U.S. identified those responsible? Some Iraqi politicians have said that these attempts are the joint efforts of extremists and former Baathists. What is your opinion? Do you agree or do you read the situation differently?

Ambassador Crocker: It's as I said, I think at the core of the problem you have small groups of very violent extremists who seek more conflict, not less. Clearly there is an Al-Qaeda element that is active in Iraq and has been behind a number of these bombings. And it is very clear that what Al-Qaeda is aiming at is the destruction of Iraq as a unified, harmonious state. I think it is equally clear that the Iraqi people stand against that.

There are extremists on the other side, backed by other actors coming out of other communities. I think they are similarly very small in number, very evil in purpose. In none of these cases do I think these groups represent broad opinion in Iraqi society. That's why I think the Iraqi people can overcome them.

QUESTION: There are many regional and international agendas being pursued in Iraq, where Al-Qaeda is targeting civilians and the civilian infrastructure. What are the measures that are yet to be taken against Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, taking into consideration, as you know, that some countries in the region support these groups? So what are the procedures the U.S. needs to take to deal with this situation?

AMB. CROCKER: I think that's a very important question and it has answers at different levels. First, I think it is important to remember that we are in a long, hard war when it comes to Al Qaeda and groups affiliated with it. It's a war being fought in Iraq, but not only in Iraq.

I've just come from Pakistan, where Al-Qaeda is very much seeking to threaten not only the United States and the west but also the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This is a determined enemy and it's going to take determined, coordinated efforts to deal with this enemy.

As you note, the international community and the neighbors have a very important role to play. We can all do more. And that is, of course one of the points of focus that we'll have at the beginning of May in Sharm el Sheikh, when two important conferences take place: A Neighbors Conference with other participation, and then a conference to sign the International Compact with Iraq, dealing more with economic issues.

So I think in particular the Neighbors Conference is an opportunity for Iraq's neighbors to support Iraq, support Iraq's government, and support the Iraqi people in their efforts to build a secure, stable, prosperous state and not the opposite. So as we look at the neighborhood, I think this is a time for some of the neighbors - and I would specifically mention Iran and Syria - to reconsider their current policies and take the opportunity to adopt policies that support the good things that are aiming to afford a better future for Iraq and not the opposite.

QUESTION: The Sharm el Sheikh conference is an important event, and observers have rated it highly since it will host Iraq's neighboring countries, but Iran has said it will not take part. Do you think this will have an impact on the conference's results?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, it's up to Iran obviously to decide whether it participates and at what level. I note that Iran was a participant in the initial conference that was held here in Baghdad on the tenth of March.

As I said, this is an opportunity for the neighbors to come together and pledge themselves to a constructive endeavor on behalf of Iraq. It would seem to me that if a country deliberately chooses to be absent from those proceedings, then it is telling Iraq, the neighborhood and indeed the world something negative about its intentions.

QUESTION: The borders remain open, insurgents continue to cross in, and explosions continue to take place. The security plan is progressing and 20,000 additional U.S. soldiers have been deployed in support of this effort. Which sides are these troops backing and which are they targeting?

AMB. CROCKER: I think as one looks at the Baghdad Security Plan, one has to keep in mind that this is still in its early phases. The full deployment of U.S. forces in support of the plan has not taken place. It will be several months before the force levels reach their maximum and probably several months after that before we are able to gauge the full impact of the plan.

So it's clearly too early to make judgments, either positive or negative. The Wednesday attacks were terrible, bloody things. But they in no way mean that the plan is not working or the plan has failed.

We are dealing with a determined enemy out there. This enemy is a terrorist organization and it's going to do everything it can to disrupt the efforts we're making. But from what I have seen of the plan so far, I think it is being professionally implemented, Iraq is in the lead, Iraqi security forces are in the lead, (and) the Coalition is operating in support. I think that it is a well-organized, determined start, but we have to give it time. And the time will be measured in terms of month, not weeks.

QUESTION: I asked you about the deployment of 20,000 U.S. troops. Some believe the reason behind their deployment is to engage with Al-Mahdi Army and they refer to the large number of arrests among their ranks and the continuous operations in their strongholds.

AMB. CROCKER: Again, as one looks at the Baghdad Security Plan, it's very important to bear in mind that this is an Iraqi security plan. It was approved by the Iraqi government and it has Iraqi security forces in the lead and Coalition forces in support, but that it is moving ahead at the direction of the Iraqi government.

It is not targeted against any specific party, organization or group. It is targeted against those who are seeking to create violence, instability and disruption in Iraq. So the plan and the forces carrying out the plan are operating with complete impartiality.

I think if you look at the results you can see that. Individuals are arrested without respect to what party they may represent or what community they may be coming from.

So members of all communities have been detained in this operation, Sunnis and Shi'a alike. Because its intent is to go after those who are causing harm to Iraq, the Iraqi people and Iraqi society, not to target any specific group.

QUESTION: Before the start of the security plan, some Sunni politicians said it was designed to target Sunni areas, and after the start of the plan, some Shiite politicians and the Shiite public said that the plan was against the Shiites, and it is directed against certain neighborhoods while other troubled areas were left without any intervention by forces. The urgent question is why do U.S. forces leave complete areas under the control of terrorists and do not allow any interventions in these Baghdad neighborhoods?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, I sometimes think that if everybody is complaining, that's a good sign, because it means it's being implemented fairly. And that very much is the case. It is absolutely incorrect that the plan is aiming at the Sunnis or the Shia. That's not what the plan does. The plan, as I said, is aiming at those who are trying to bring harm to Iraq and to the Iraqi people.

Now, again, this plan is different than anything that Iraqi and Coalition forces have tried in the past. It is much larger, it is much longer-term, and it's much longer-lasting. It also takes longer to fully implement. Iraqi and Coalition forces cannot be in every part of Baghdad and Anbar all at the same time. That's what I was saying earlier. It will take months before the full-force contingents are in place and operating - both Iraqi and Coalition. So it will take months before the entire

weight of this plan can be felt and the entire city can be touched by it.

So, there's a need here for some strategic patience, I think, on the part of both Iraqis and Americans, to give this plan time to develop the force levels, to see what the ultimate difference can be. We're in April now. I don't expect we'll have a full sense of the impact of this plan until the end of the summer.

QUESTION: Some opinions say that the deployment of the 20,000 U.S. soldiers and other Iraqi forces has come to engage the Mahdi Army at first, since it is the strongest force in Baghdad, and then turn to other weaker areas in the city. Other opinions say that U.S. forces are detaining members from Al-Mahdi Army and conduct other random detention operations in other areas to create a balance, and there are many other opinions. How credible are these views?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, again, the reality on the ground in Baghdad - and in other areas - because, the fact that the focus is on the Baghdad Security Plan, that doesn't mean that Iraqi and Coalition forces are not operating in other areas. We've just seen some successful joint operations in Diwaniyah, for example. It's also not the case that arrests are random or without a plan. People are being arrested because they are planning or engaged in acts against the Iraqi people, the Iraqi state, and the country of Iraq. Not because they are a member of this or that party or organization. But I would say that at this point, clearly we are at a time - as Iraqi security forces gain more and more strength and capability - we are at a point when the days of the militias should come to an end. If a young Iraqi wishes to carry a gun, then he should do so in the uniform of his country, in defense of his country. That would solve a lot of problems.

QUESTION: Some say that the U.S. failed in its post-Saddam strategy and was taken by surprise with the rise of Islamic parties, both Sunni and Shiite, with agendas that contradict with U.S. policies, and therefore, the U.S. is content with not intervening. Is the current situation in the hope that the people will later demand a secular and liberal government far from religious parties' agendas?

AMB. CROCKER: Clearly after the fall of Saddam we all faced a very complex situation in Iraq. And it was one without a roadmap. We had to deal with reality as we and the Iraqis found it. And the reality is, as you remember, in 2003, was that there were a number of parties that defined themselves in Islamic terms. And they were represented on that initial governing council. These were not only Shia Islamic parties; also Sunni Islamic parties. We - the United States, the Coalition - did not create these parties. We recognized their existence. We recognized their weight on the political stage, and we worked together to try to build a governing mechanism that would advance the cause of Iraq. Now in 2007, Iraq has had successful elections; it has a functioning government. It has a Council of Representatives. It has a Constitution. And it's really now for Iraqis to decide how they want their political future to advance.

There is clearly a lot of freedom here: Freedom to organize; freedom to state your views; freedom to publish your views. And freedom to establish or join political parties that reflect your opinion, be they of a religious orientation or a secular orientation. There is room in Iraq for all of these. What we must have in Iraq is a commitment that differences will be settled through debate, discussion, by political means - not by violence. So, it isn't really a question of whether a party is founded on religious principles or not. It's a question of how it advances its agenda; through free debate and democratic efforts, or by violence. Because violence is refused, be it from religious elements or secular elements. And I think that's what our resolve must be.

QUESTION: The Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Syria recently, and other members of the U.S. Congress have also expressed a will to visit Syria and Iran. Does this mark an intention to open

dialogue channels far from the White House, or does it point towards a confrontation with the White House, and how will this affect Iraq and the region?

AMB. CROCKER: Well first, with respect to Iraq, I think it's important that Iraqis, private citizens, members of civil society - as well as members of the government - maintain contacts with all of Iraq's neighbors. They are your neighbors, and I think interaction is important - again, with all of them, with Turkey, with Iran, with Syria, with Saudi Arabia, with Kuwait; with the other Gulf peninsula states. That's the logic that leads us to the Neighbors Conference that Iraq is convening in Sharm el Sheikh. With respect to our own contacts, of course we have an embassy in Damascus; we're in regular touch with the Syrians. They certainly know our concerns over their behavior with respect to Iraq and with respect to other issues. With regard to Iran, there are two. They should be under no illusion and have no confusion over what our concerns are. Iran needs to take some steps with respect to its nuclear program, with respect to its involvement in Iraq - to show that it's a responsible member of the international community and of the neighborhood. We'd like to see them take those steps. And if this regional engagement process is a means for them to do so, then we would welcome it.

QUESTION: Ambassador Khalilzad was one of the rare available communication channels to Iran. Do you believe that the U.S. will grant you the same authorization to engage with Iran, especially after Iran's refusal to talk with Ambassador Khalilzad, and do you believe that direct talks with Iran is the right path to take?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, as you know, in the first Neighbors Conference that convened here in Baghdad, there was discussion between us and the Iranians in the context of that conference. I think we both had the opportunity to say directly what concerned us. If the Iranians attend at Sharm el Sheikh, that will also provide an opportunity. So, we're certainly open to discussions with all of Iraq's neighbors on the subject of what it is they're doing - or should be doing, or could be doing - to support the Government of Iraq and the people of Iraq.

QUESTION: The Sadr movement has withdrawn its six ministers from the government and authorized Prime Minister Maliki to choose their replacements according to their qualifications. Do you think that this step represents a blow to sectarian-based power sharing, and don't you believe that under a democratic system, the results of elections should be respected and the Prime Minister should be free in selecting his ministers?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, this is a complex issue that really isn't appropriate for me to evaluate. It strikes me as part of the open political process in Iraq. Parties are free to take the choices that they want, and clearly the Prime Minister has an obligation to take the necessary choices to ensure that he has a government that functions and will implement his policies. Whatever happens with these ministerial portfolios, we would hope - as a friend of Iraq - that they are placed in the hands of individuals who have both the vision and the capability to carry out their responsibilities in a way that benefits the Iraqi people. I think that's what is important.

QUESTION: Do you think that new alliance will emerge in the aftermath of the Sadr movement's withdrawal from government, and do you think that other alliances might be formed on the basis of the positions towards Constitution item 140 [Kirkuk] with so many different opinions present over this item, and will item 140 create a crisis within the country?

AMB. CROCKER: There are a number of very important issues that the government and the Council of Representatives are going to have to debate and take positions on. This is one of them. We've talked about another, which is the de-Baathification reform. There are also questions of the hydrocarbon legislation package, which we think is very important

to complete and move to a vote. There are issues such as constitutional reform and provincial elections. These are all important issues for Iraq's present and Iraq's future.

As an American, I can't say in every case what the outcome should be. But I think it's pretty clear that as Iraqis aim at national reconciliation as a means to resolve conflict, strengthen security, set the conditions for prosperity and democratic development, it's important that all parties move forward in a responsible way in debating these measures, in determining their options and in understanding that swift positive action is going to be necessary to provide the essential political support to back up the Baghdad Security Plan. Because, the plan itself can buy time, but it can only buy time for a successful political process. And a successful political process, in my view, is going to be defined in the weeks and months ahead by how the government and the Council of Representatives deals with all of these key issues.

QUESTION: Ambassador Khalilzad revealed contacts were being made with armed groups, while the Iraqi government is about to announce the names of five groups being engaged. Will you continue with these talks, and have you personally met with these groups? Will you continue with this predetermined policy?

AMB. CROCKER: We are open to contacts with a wide spectrum of individuals in political life. Indeed, in my three weeks here I myself have had a number of contacts with parties that have a very great range in their viewpoints, from left to right, liberal to conservative and so forth. What we will not do is deal with terrorists. That is a longstanding feature of U. S. policy; so that we will not do.

However, we are open, we are flexible; we want to hear different viewpoints. We would like to see these viewpoints come together for the greater good of the country. And in all of this we've maintained, of course, close coordination with the government to ensure that we're all moving and working in the same direction.

QUESTION: There have been statements by U.S. officials regarding how the Iraqi government should pursue national reconciliation, and these statements came to an end after the Iraqi government committed itself to the path of reconciliation and national unity. How far does the U.S. government's support for Prime Minister Maliki's government go, and how does the U.S. government and the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq assess the Iraqi government's dealing with the issue of national unity?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, I think these are key issues. National unity at this time is a very pressing need for Iraq and Iraqis. This is clearly the aim of the government of Prime Minister Maliki. He's made that clear publicly and privately, and we see our role as supporting him as he moves forward in the various areas that I have already mentioned: de-Baathification reform, hydrocarbons, provincial elections, constitutional reform and so forth. Ultimately, this has to be an Iraqi process.

The United States and other friends of Iraq can support the process. We will be at Sharm el Sheikh, both for the Neighbors Conference and for the signing of the International Compact with Iraq. But the hard decisions for national, for the sake of national unity - the compromises that will be necessary to achieve national unity - these have to be Iraqi decisions and Iraqi compromises. No outsider can step into that room and make the deal, make the decision. These have to be Iraqi decisions. What we can do is provide the encouragement, in some cases the resources support through our economic and financial assistance. And through our involvement in the Baghdad Security Plan, and other security operations, Coalition Forces can buy time for political leaders to come to terms with these hard decisions through an improved security environment. But the decisions themselves are going to have to be Iraqi decisions.

QUESTION: Last question. The cycle of violence continues in Iraq. The security plan has started and has proven successful at the beginning of its implementation, but the terrorists' tactics and their means of execution have changed since, and the U.S. has drawn in additional troops to support the plan. When will the cycle of violence come to an end in Iraq? Iraqis say they are implementing a security plan, while the Americans say that political reform and national reconciliation is needed. But the only thing the Iraqi citizen wants to know is when will Iraq overcome this crisis?

AMB. CROCKER: You are absolutely right. That is the question that, that Iraqis everywhere have and it is the right question. The Iraqi people have exhibited extraordinary courage, determination and patience as they just go through their daily lives, trying to get their kids to school, to go to work, to do the shopping, to maintain a household under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances, and I have extraordinary admiration for people everywhere in this country who are just getting on with life. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis are asking that question. They want an end to the violence. It is the tiniest percentage here in Iraq that are actually causing the violence. And I think that determination and that weight of numbers works very much in Iraq's favor.

I hope that the people of Iraq can continue to show some strategic patience with the current circumstances, continue to show courage and determination not to allow the terrorists and the extremists to win. That means they have to refrain from taking up arms against their neighbors. If they do that, the terrorists win. They have to show a spirit of tolerance and not desire to carry out revenge against other innocent people. The terrorists win if they do that. And to give it some time, to give Iraqi security forces and Coalition security forces some more time to move forward with this plan, because, as I said, it's not a plan that can be implemented overnight. We have weeks and months ahead of us as more forces flow into the area, before we will reach the full peak of our effort. And then it will still take several months before we can see the full results.

So the Iraqi people need to show what they have already shown; that determination and commitment for a better life for themselves, and more importantly for their children, while we try to bring the level of violence down. It's also important, I think, that the Iraqi governing class - the politicians, members of government, members of the Council of Representatives - listen to the Iraqi people on this. Because the Iraqi people want their government, their representatives, to take action that will produce the spirit of national unity and then allow a political consolidation of what our security forces are trying to win on the ground, which is an improved security climate. I think that if we can bring all of that together the people of Iraq, and especially the children of Iraq, can look forward to a much better life.

Released on April 19, 2007





[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](#)