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Remarks from the Intervention at the Iraq Neighbors Conference

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt

May 4, 2007

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. I am going to follow on the fine example that's just been set by my Bahraini colleague, and I would like to make a few comments that are perhaps more responsive to the discussion as it has been unfolding.

This is indeed a significant time for Iraq and that means that this is a significant time in the region and from the international community, because if Iraq fails to achieve these goals of stability and democracy, we will all pay. And that is why we are all here, because of course we want to support Iraq in its journey towards stability and democracy, but we all have compelling self-interest also in achieving this goal, particularly those who live in the region.

I'd like to structure my remarks around the question that perhaps our Russian colleagues will know well: "what is to be done?" in order to help to bring about a stable and democratic Iraq. You will remember, Sergei, the name of a rather famous book in Russian history, *What is to be Done?*.

Well, I think we can divide what is to be done into the responsibilities of first and foremost Iraq and it's a democratically elected government, its leaders and its people. It is quite clear that Iraq needs a process of national reconciliation. It needs a successful and urgent process to bring all Iraqis into the belief that Iraq will be an Iraq for all Iraqis.

And this is something that, of course, only Iraqis can do. We can help. We can support. But the question of what kind of Iraq is going to be is one for Iraq's people and for its leaders. And in this regard, the program that Prime Minister Maliki and his government have developed is a program that can bring about that reconciliation, and it needs to be pursued urgently and it needs to be pursued to completion.

Among the elements of the program are the national oil law. A draft oil law is now available and it should be passed by the Council of Representatives with dispatch. There will be need for provincial elections. There will be need for revision of

de-Baathification laws. There will be a need for constitutional review. There will be a need to demobilize and dismantle militias. This is a program of the Iraqi Government and it is a program that we urge them to complete.

Secondly, there is the matter of what the neighbors need to do. This is an expansion of that format. But I'm very glad that the neighbors are meeting and I hope they will continue to meet because there's much that they can do to support the progress of Iraqi reconciliation and to create a better atmosphere in which it can take place.

That includes, of course, the matter of securing borders from terrorists who enter Iraq and from arms to terrorists which harm innocent Iraqis. It is a matter of helping the Iraqis with economic development, including energy supply. And of course, it is a matter of respecting Iraq's sovereignty, of noninterference in Iraq's affairs and respecting Iraq's democratic processes and its outcomes.

Third, it is a question of what the international community can do. And of course, the international community passed yesterday a Compact with Iraq with obligations on the Iraqis but it also puts obligations on us. And I hope that we will provide relief on debt from the Saddam Hussein era, that we will move quickly to fulfill pledges for Iraq's reconstruction, that we will move quickly to help with training of Iraqi cadres whether in security forces or in its civil service. These are things that the international community must and should do.

I would like to close with a word about the United States and what the United States sees as its role in helping to bring about a stable and democratic Iraq, to lay that foundation. And here, I just have to say something about history. Several colleagues have cited, I think quite rightly, the progress that Iraq has made from the days of the governing council to the elections which then established a constitution on the basis of which a democratically elected government is before us here today.

But let's remember this wouldn't have happened if Iraq had not been liberated from Saddam Hussein. The United States is very proud of the fact that it participated in the liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein. The United States, the United Kingdom, other members of the coalition gave blood and treasure to liberate Iraq, and frankly, to liberate the region from a dictator who had caused two wars in the matter of a little more than a decade, a million lives in two countries. And so we are very proud to have participated in the liberation of Iraq.

Now with Iraq liberated, of course, it is our goal to support the Maliki government and what it is doing, to support an international reconciliation, but to do so consistent with the fact that this is a sovereign government.

The United States is also involved in helping to secure Iraq. We are part of the multinational forces for Iraq which I will remind everyone is in Iraq by the request of the democratically elected government and a UN Security Council resolution. That is the status of the multinational forces in Iraq and of the American forces who serve as a part of that multinational force.

We are fighting and dying daily alongside Iraqi security forces and other coalition partners as the country tries to secure itself against a violent people who would frustrate the wishes of Iraqis who voted 12.5 million strong for a different kind of Iraq. I want to assure you that we are putting a great emphasis on training of Iraqi security forces, both army and the police, because no one looks more forward to the day when Iraqis can defend themselves. And I hope that we will intensify our efforts to train Iraqi security forces so that they can secure themselves and their people.

In addition, of course, we are currently engaged in the Baghdad security plan, a plan drawn up by Iraqis with the multinational forces to try and provide population security to the population of Baghdad which has gone through so much violence. That plan is showing some early progress, but there is still much to be done. And as the Iraqis take more and more responsibility for securing Baghdad, we look forward to greater and greater success.

But again, if we can stop the flow of foreign fighters, if we can stop the flow of arms to violent people who try and operate outside the law, we will hasten the day when these security plans are successful and when Iraq can secure itself.

There are also Iraqis who are standing up anew in places like Anbar Province where the tribal leaders and provincial leaders have clearly decided they've had enough of al-Qaida and of foreign fighters who seek to keep Iraq unstable and to impose their will on Iraq. And I might just note that, of course, al-Qaida is well known in the region. Not only are they a threat to Iraq, they are threat to every regional state and as we found out on September 11th they are a threat to every country in the international community no matter how strong. They have to be defeated and there are Iraqis at the front line of trying to help defeat them.

Finally, of course, the United States has been very actively engaged in the reconstruction of Iraq and in helping the Iraqis to build their government institutions. Today, the United States has spent about 20.6 billion of American taxpayer dollars to try and help with reconstruction in Iraq and we're going to continue to do it because we fundamentally believe that a stable, secure, democratic Iraq will be at the heart of a Middle East that can be stable, secure and democratic and therefore a strong pillar for international peace and security.

Now let me say that we recognize that not all has gone according to plan. I am sure there have been many things that could have done better and we face a lot of difficulties in Iraq and in the region. I recognize the number of refugees is a difficult issue for the region and we have been in contact with Jordan and Syria about the refugee issue and with the United Nations to try and provide for those refugees.

I also hope that this group, that this conference will produce working groups that really do work on issues of borders, on issues of refugees, on issues of electricity and supplies to Iraq. Because if we simply sit here only to meet again with nothing having happened between the time that we meet here in Sharm el-Sheikh and the next time that we meet, then the world will rightly judge us badly for not having taken action on those things that need to be done. And so let me strongly urge us to put great effort into working groups and to provide to them people who really will work and we can trust to work.

Finally, let me just say that it's a difficult time for Iraq, it's a difficult time for the region, frankly, not so easy for all of us who are involved in this quest. But I was really struck yesterday by the comments from a number of governments, from Poland, from South Korea, from Japan, about the fact that they, too, had come through extremely difficult circumstances to come out on the other side -- prosperous, free and secure. If each of us reaches back into our history, we will recognize that there were times of testing, but they were overcome with strong help at home and with help from others who cared.

We are here at the conference today because we each have a stake in how Iraq emerges from this crisis. But we're also here because we remember that when there are times of need by countries in the international system, it is the obligation and the responsibility of the international system to step up and to help. And to Prime Minister Maliki and members of

the Iraqi delegation, I want you to know that you will always have the support and help of the United States. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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