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Opening Remarks in Baghdad

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

Baghdad, Iraq

June 14, 2007

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE NEGROPONTE: Good Afternoon. Thank you all for being here.

This is my first trip back to Iraq since returning to the State Department as Deputy Secretary in February. I am happy to be back and to have had the opportunity to meet with a number of Iraq's senior leadership over the past two days in Baghdad and to visit Erbil, Mosul, and Ramadi.

I want to begin by joining with the people of Iraq and reiterating our condemnation of Wednesday morning's vicious attack which destroyed two minarets of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra. This brutal action on one of Iraq's holiest shrines is a deliberate attempt by al-Qaeda to sow dissent and inflame sectarian strife among the people of Iraq. It is further evidence of the enemy's indiscriminate violence, and efforts to obstruct the peaceful political and economic development of a democratic Iraq.

We share in the outrage of the Iraqi people against this crime, and during my visit I have reiterated the need for all Iraqis to reject this call to violence. Those who perpetrated this violence cannot be allowed to succeed with their sinister aims.

I have been joined on this trip by Ambassador David Satterfield, the Secretary's Special Advisor for Iraq, and of course we have had a good opportunity to consult with Ambassador Crocker and his team, and with General Petraeus.

Tuesday we met with Prime Minister Maliki and I reiterated our support for his government and for the Iraqi people as they continue the struggle for stability and security in this country. I encouraged the efforts he and other members of government have made towards national reconciliation and stressed the urgency of making political progress that will reinforce efforts by Coalition and Iraqi security forces to restore stability. I enjoyed similar discussions with other senior leaders, including President Talabani, Vice Presidents Tariq Al Hashemi and Adel Abdel Mehdi, as well as with Deputy Prime Minister Zobei. In Erbil, I met KRG President Masud Barzani and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. In all my meetings I stressed the importance of achieving concrete results that will encourage Iraq's citizens and its neighbors that the political leadership of Iraq is willing to make difficult compromises needed to advance the reconciliation process. Success in Iraq will depend on the commitment and actions of Iraq's leaders, who have all made clear to me their commitment to success and who, I believe, are prepared to work even harder to achieve it.

My briefings in Ramadi made clear that Iraq's citizens can also do more to retake control of their towns and cities. Working in coordination with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces, Anbar leaders are reversing the control Al Qaeda once had in their province.

We are working alongside Iraqis to provide the external framework of security that they need to achieve their goals. The Baghdad Security Plan is just now reaching its full stride, with the last of surge troops arriving into country this month. We expect that the fight for security will get harder over the coming months as we engage an increasingly desperate enemy. I have had a chance to speak at length with Ambassador Crocker and his team as well as General Petraeus and MNF-I, and I have confidence in their efforts.

I have also had a chance to meet and talk with the men and women serving at the U.S. Embassy. Without question they are working in the most difficult and demanding diplomatic environment imaginable. They are separated from their homes and families and risk their lives everyday in support of a united, stable, and democratic Iraq. Their sacrifices do not go unnoticed. Both the Secretary and I are fully committed to providing the talent, training, and resources that the Embassy needs to succeed in their efforts.

I also had the opportunity to visit our colleagues in a number of provincial reconstruction teams throughout Iraq. These pioneers of diplomacy are working alongside the military to promote reconciliation, foster economic development, and build capacity in the provinces. Iraq is not just Baghdad -- the security, stability, and development of the provinces is vital to Iraq's future.

Thank you very much. I am going to answer a few questions.

Released on June 14, 2007



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