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Press Briefing After Meeting With Iranian Officials

Amb. Ryan C. Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq

May 28, 2007

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Good Afternoon. I apologize for being a little late. The talks ran a little longer than expected. I'll just make a few comments to characterize them and then I'll be happy to take your questions.

As you know, U.S. and Iranian delegations met this morning at the Prime Minister's office -- hosted by the Prime Minister -- for talks that ran in total for about four hours. I would characterize the atmosphere of the talks as business-like.

The Iranians as well as ourselves laid out the principals that guide our respective policies toward Iraq. There was pretty good congruence right down the line -- support for a secure, stable, democratic, federal Iraq, in control of its own security, at peace with its neighbors.

We both laid out our support for the governor of -- Prime Minister Maliki -- as he undertakes a number of very difficult challenges and we all agreed -- Iraqis, Americans, and Iranians, that the focus of our discussions was on Iraq and Iraq only and how we might support as effectively as possible Iraq, it's people and it's government in restoring security and stability to the country and furthering a political reconciliation process.

We also made it clear from the American point of view that this is about actions not just principles and I laid out before the Iranians a number of our direct specific concerns about their behavior in Iraq, their support for militias that are fighting both the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces.

The fact that a lot of the explosives and ammunition that are used by these groups are coming in from Iran, that such activities led by the IRGC Quds Force needed to cease, and that we would be looking for results. The Iranians did not respond directly to that. They did again emphasize that their policy is support of the government and the Government of Iraq itself thanked both delegations for the statements of support that were laid out today and we'll see what happens next.

Happy to take your questions.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yes ma'am?

QUESTION: What were some of the concerns the Iranians had and what your reaction was to those?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: The Iranians did not go into any great detail. They made the assertion that the Coalition presence was an occupation and that the effort to train and equip the Iraqi security forces had been inadequate to the challenges faced. We of course responded on both points, making clear that coalition forces are here at the Iraqi government's invitation and under security council authorities and that we have put literally billions of dollars into training and equipping an increasingly capable set of Iraqi security forces.

They -- the Iranians -- did propose a trilateral mechanism to coordinate on security matters. That of course would be a decision for Washington. The point that I made in the meeting is that the purpose of the meeting was not to discuss further meetings. It was to layout concrete concerns as we did and our expectation that action would be taken on them.

QUESTION: [In Arabic]. Your Excellency. Did you find the Iranian side in their negotiation today, positive and will open the road for other negotiations that could be useful to the Americans?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: The Iranians, again, laid out their policy toward Iraq -- their aims and goals in terms very similar to our own policy and very similar to what the Iraqi government has set as its own set of guiding principles. From that point of view I would say that the talks proceeded positively.

What we underscored to the Iranians, though, is that beyond principle there is practice and what we need to see is Iranian actions on the ground come into harmony with their stated principles because right now the action that I described to them and that I just described to you are running at cross purposes to their own policy.

So, in terms of what happens next I think we're going to want to wait and see not what is said next, but what happens next on the ground -- whether we start to see indications of a change in Iranian behavior.

QUESTION: [In Arabic]. Did you agree with the Iranians on other meetings or will the meetings end today? We heard from some sources that the American requests to Iran -- Iran responded by giving American incentives. Is this true? What are these American incentives that will be provided to Iran? (Inaudible).

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: The Iraqi government said it would extend an invitation in the period ahead for another meeting. We'll obviously consider that invitation when we receive it. With respect to, again, the substance of the exchange -- the Iranian side did not respond in detail to the points I laid out nor did they have specific issues to put on the table themselves beyond those that I mentioned and which we dealt with in the discussion concerning the status of Coalition Forces and our efforts at training and equipping Iraqi security forces. Their main focus was on mechanisms -- if you will -- and principles rather than the detailed security substance that we need to see improvement in the future for the sake of Iraq, its government and its people.

QUESTION: Did the subject of the seven Iranians currently being held in U.S. custody come up in the talks and was there any progress on that front?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: It was not raised.

QUESTION: [In Arabic]. Sabah Newspaper. Did they raise the scheduling of the withdrawal of American forces?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: There was no discussion concerning a withdrawal of Coalition Forces or a timetable.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, thank you. Were there any concrete agreements that were reached that could lower or improve the security in the country in the short term -- anything at all. And what was the mechanism -- the security

tri-lateral mechanism they talked about, if you could expand on that.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Again, at the level of principle and policy there was broad agreement -- Iraqis, Iranian and Americans. In terms of security specifics we laid out a number of them. The Iranians did not offer any detailed response. They did say they rejected such allegations but, again, there was no detailed exchange. The mechanism they propose for trilateral security cooperation did not go beyond pretty much that simple characterization.

My observation on it was, again, that the purpose of a meeting should not be simply to arrange other meetings, but also that it seemed to me that what we were doing today and the structure we had to do it -- Iraqis, Americans, Iranians -- that effectively was a security committee. Because again, on the level of policy, there isn't a great deal to argue about. We all are pretty much in the same place in terms of declaratory policy. The problem lies, in our view, with the Iranians not bringing their behavior on the ground into line with their own policy.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: [In Arabic]. (Inaudible). What was the position of the Iraqi side? Did they intervene or propose anything in the meeting?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: As you know, Prime Minister Maliki himself hosted these talks. And I think you all saw his televised statement at the opening session. The Iraqis, led by the Prime Minister, were not only present but very active really in overseeing the discussion. You could say, if you will, that this was an Iraqi-led process. Iraqis were in the chair for this. Both my Iranian colleague and I deferred to the Iraqi chair either the Prime Minister, or in the follow on sessions, the national security advisor, Dr. Rubaie. So, I think it's fair to say that the Iraqi government was not only present and was not only a participant to a very important degree, it was Iraq that led the discussions.

QUESTION: [In Arabic]. Arabiya Channel. Your Excellency. Iran perhaps is looking for an assuring message for nonintervention by America in Iran. During this meeting today with the Iranians, did you mention that you are willing to provide such a comforting message?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Again, one of the points of agreement among all the three of us -- Iraq, Iran and the United States -- was that the subject of discussion would be the situation in Iraq and how the United States and Iran can work to improve conditions here. We both respected that so there was no discussion of issues outside of that framework including the one you mentioned.

QUESTION: Steven Farrell, The London Times. Did you, at any stage, present evidence -- pictorial, data or otherwise -- about the claims you've been making about Iranian supply of weapons attacking Coalition forces. And it sounds like, from what you're saying, if you were speaking in detail and they were in generalities -- did most of the talking come from your side as it were?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Again, the purpose of our effort in this meeting was not to build a legal case, presumably the Iranians know what they're doing. Our point was simply to say we know as well this is dangerous for Iraq, it contravenes Iran's own stated policy, and it is dangerous for the region because it can produce widespread instability. So, we were not there for the purpose of trying to lay out a judicial case on this. Simply to say, look, this is what's happening, this is what needs to stop. I really can't give you a word count except to say that, as you surely know among diplomats, you don't need a lot of substance to take up a lot of time.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Thank you all. Appreciate it.

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