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Remarks at Expanded Neighboring Countries of Iraq Foreign Ministers Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Istanbul, Turkey

November 3, 2007

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Let me join my colleagues in thanking the Government of Turkey for arranging this meeting here in Istanbul, this beautiful city. I would like to thank Prime Minister Erdogan for coming this morning to lead off. And Turkey has made excellent arrangements and is very greatly appreciated.

The United States remains, of course, completely devoted to a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq; an Iraq that can be for all Iraqis, an Iraq that can take its rightful place among the international community of states. And that is the Iraq for which we all work.

I think that since our last meeting we can report that there has been some progress toward that goal. And I just want to underscore that that is first and foremost because of the efforts of the Iraqi people themselves. Yes, it is extremely important that an international coalition of military forces has helped the Iraqis, but the Iraqi people are demonstrating across Iraq that they will not be held hostage to terrorism, that they will not be held hostage to foreign fighters. They're doing it in places like Anbar. They're doing it in places like Diyala. They are doing it in the neighborhoods of Baghdad.

And because of that, and because of the work of the coalition forces with them, security has improved for the people of Iraq. And we hope to see continued improvements in the security environment.

The Iraqi security forces are also performing well and better, and we will continue to train and equip those forces, looking forward to the day that Iraq is able to guarantee its security for itself.

Secondly, the progress is taking place because there is not only the effort of the people of these provinces and at the local level to have an active security role, but they are also active politically. You are seeing the development of local and provincial governments throughout Iraq that are able to deliver their people services, with the help of the central government through a much improved ability to get budget resources from the center to the provinces. This is also

an extremely important development in Iraq.

And finally, the situation in Iraq is improving because the political reconciliation continues. It continues among peoples on a horizontal basis. It continues at the national level. But we frankly would encourage the Iraqi Government to accelerate now its efforts at political reconciliation, at the passage of a national oil law, at reforming the efforts that were begun on de-Baathification, on reforming the constitution, on pressing for provincial powers. Because it is extremely important to cement and to further the progress that is being made in Iraq. But without more acceleration of the national reconciliation process, it will be difficult to build on these gains.

The challenges remain for Iraq. Iraq remains a country that needs to root out sectarianism, that needs to root out from those parts of the population still violent people who act on the basis of sectarianism. And the security forces of Iraq need to be devoted to that goal.

Iraq, of course, still needs a considerable help in building its political and economic and institutions of governance because it is a country that is recovering not only from war but is recovering from a long nightmare with one of the most tyrannical governments known to the 20th and 21st century. And so rebuilding political and economic and security institutions must continue.

Iraq -- of course, we have talked about it, and here in Turkey it is important to mention -- that Iraq needs and wants to be a country in which terrorism cannot emanate from its soil to hurt its neighbors. And therefore, the actions of the PKK are to be condemned. They have been condemned by the Iraqi Government. But much more needs to be done to make certain that Iraq's neighbors do not suffer from terrorism.

In all of this work that Iraq is attempting to do, it needs the support of its neighbors and it needs the support of the international community. But it needs the support, not the condemnation. It needs the support, not the interference, of its neighbors and the international community. Because these are efforts that Iraqis themselves must succeed in if, in fact, Iraq is going to succeed.

The United Nations plays a special and important role in providing that international support, and we do welcome the appointment of Mr. de Mistura and we'll give all of our support to him.

We also welcome this expanded neighbors forum because it is an opportunity for Iraqis -- Iraq's neighbors, who form the core group -- to enjoy the broader support of the international community as a whole. And so working together with the core group, to keep pressing forward on the agenda of dealing with any humanitarian situation that has arisen in Iraq for displaced persons, in dealing with border security, in dealing with issues of energy. We must be a forum that does not just get together to talk every several months, but that really follows up on the actions that we've agreed to take. And that's why we in the United States support the establishment of an Iraqi-led support mechanism that can follow up on the actions that are proposed to make certain that we are actually taking the actions that we have proposed.

All in all, the story of Iraq is still unfolding. There are many, many challenges across the security, political and economic fronts. But it is a better story than it was when we last met. And if the Iraqis continue their valiant efforts at the local level, at the provincial level, at the national level; if Iraqis continue to show themselves willing to sacrifice for a future Iraq that will be democratic and unified and stable, I am quite certain that as we continue to meet as an expanded support -- group of supporters of Iraq, that we will continue to see the progress that we've seen thus far.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

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