



Remarks With Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq

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FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Okay. First of all, let me welcome you all with the -- Secretary Rice again to Baghdad. We're very pleased to see you again here among us. And I'm delighted to see a great deal of progress thanks to your efforts and the efforts of the Multi-National Forces and the Iraqi security forces. That really has changed the situation on the ground. I think today was one of the rare moments where Secretary Rice had lunch in the Red Zone in Baghdad. I think it was an interesting experience.

Anyway, but there has been a great deal of progress as you can see. This is thanks, you see, to the joint efforts by the Iraqi Government and the help and the support of the Multi-National forces. These gains are really very significant. We see them in the streets of Baghdad in many provinces. This needs to be pressed on. I think we need a political and legislative surge also, you see, to augment and strengthen these gains. Also, I reassured Secretary Rice about our continued efforts to ensure a better regional cooperation with the efforts of the Iraqi Government. I think we are making some progress here also with our neighbors.

And on the international level, also, I think we are entering into a new period or area in our relations with you. Early next year, we hope to start serious negotiation about the long term security, economic, and political agreement between Iraq and the United States. So once again, I'd like to welcome you here, again, a most special welcome. Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you very much, Minister Zebari. I want to thank you for your leadership as one of your country's political leaders, but also you've been a terrific colleague as Foreign Minister and I look forward to working with you. First of all, there has been progress made here and we're continuing our discussions about how to build on the security and economic progress that is being made here and the significant developments -- political developments at the local and provincial level to make certain that national reconciliation takes place.

We are also -- we've been very active in talking about my visit to Kirkuk this morning, which was a very good visit, and I had a chance to meet also with UN Special Representative de Mistura. That speaks to the improved international climate to which the Foreign Minister spoke because the United Nations mandate under 1770 is an expanded mandate and I think that there is much that the UN can do in areas with technical support for Kirkuk and other issues. And finally, on the regional side, I do believe that you have improved relations with your neighbors. We look forward to another meeting of the neighbors conference, the expanded neighbors conference sometime relatively early next year. But again, thank you for your leadership and we look forward to continuing to support the Iraqi people in their march toward democracy.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Thank you.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for a few questions. The first one is Sylvie Lanteaume from AFP.

QUESTION: I had a question for both of you. Secretary, in terms of the Turkish army and of the Iraqi territory today, just when you were in northern Iraq -- I wanted to know if, first, the Turks informed you in advance of this operation and if the U.S. helped them with intelligence. And Mr. Minister, did you raise this -- the question of the incursion of the Turks in the Iraqi territory with the Secretary today?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, the United States, Iraq, and Turkey share a common interest in stopping the activities of the PKK which threaten to undo the stability of the north, which clearly have resulted in deaths in Turkey, and when we were recently together in Istanbul, we actually had a trilateral discussion about our common interest in dealing with this problem. This is a circumstance in which the United States has constantly counseled that we need an overall comprehensive approach to this problem, that we should do nothing and no one should do anything that threatens to destabilize the north.

As to the activities, things unfortunately do go along -- go on along this border. As to the activity last Sunday, this was a Turkish decision and we have made clear to the Turkish Government that we continue to be concerned about anything that could lead to innocent civilian casualties or to a destabilization of the north.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Well, the Iraqi Government has protested to the Turkish Government over the attacks on the civilians recently. And as we speak, also there is another limited military incursion going on, but high up in the mountains in unpopulated areas. But the Iraqi Government and the regional authorities are monitoring that very, very closely. I think as the Secretary said, we have shared common goals here. We want stability and security in Iraq and with Iraq's neighbors also and the border areas. PKK presence is unacceptable. PKK has conducted terrorist activities against Turkish interests and civilians and their presence is not acceptable, neither by the Iraqi Government or the KRG authorities.

We also have sought to work together jointly in a trilateral way. Only recently before this incident, in fact, the Iraqi Government took the initiative to invite for -- to ask for a meeting where the United States and Turkey tried to follow up on this. We believe any unilateral actions to destabilize the situation will harm Iraq's interests and Turkish interests at the same time, but in the same time, we fully understand and appreciate the legitimate security concern Turkey has over the PKK terrorist activities against them.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) (Inaudible) from the (inaudible) newspaper in UK agency. My question to Secretary Rice, sometimes the democratic opinion becomes blood against the Iraqis themselves and the American forces. How do you see the differences in opinion between the political leaders? Has it been translated on the ground in blood? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I believe that the differences between the political leaders are differences that emerge in a democratic process, but the key is that the key democratic leaders here who represent large elected blocs put together an agreement on August 26th on a way forward. It had, as its mission, political reconciliation. It has a legislative agenda. It has a set of steps to make Iraq a more efficient and functioning place. I think that it leads, in a way, to a roadmap where the Iraqis -- the Iraqi central government to work with its provinces, to make certain that the whole system is working.

And that's the way that democratic leaders should get together and should resolve their differences and that's to agree on a way forward and they have a way forward. And I have strongly encouraged the leaders with whom I've met today, and I will soon meet with the Prime Minister and I will do the same, that there be urgent implementation of that August 26th agreement, that there be urgent attempts to -- urgent efforts to make certain that the legislative agenda is moving forward, that there will be passage of the budget so that money can get to the governments, the provincial and local governments, as well as be used for services to support the Iraqi people.

I think we should note that there is some -- there's been some important progress. There was a pension law passed very recently which is a very good law that benefits all Iraqis. The Iraqis have improved their budget execution and we know that the 2007 budget was spent much more effectively on behalf of the people of Iraq, so differences are going to emerge. But the importance is that when you have differences, political leaders who have been elected by the people to work together on behalf of the people have to overcome those differences and implement policies.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, just to follow up on that question, you've been here a great many times to urge the national political leadership to try to achieve reconciliation and you've gotten assurances a great many times that they would do so and yet it has been agonizingly difficult for them to do that. Can you elaborate a little bit on why you think the circumstances are so different now that this will actually lead to more progress?

And, Mr. Foreign Minister, can you tell us why Iraq chose not to attend the Annapolis conference last month?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Arshad, you're right, I have urged political reconciliation. I want to emphasize that there are some elements of that political reconciliation that are not represented in the so-called benchmark laws -- by the way, benchmarks that the Iraqis themselves set, that we need to clearly recognize that those have gone forward; for instance, the pension law is very important. The fact that this is a government that was able to pass a budget in 2007 and then to allocate that funding out to the provinces, so that revenue is being shared with the provinces.

But I remember very well discussions here a year or so ago when the leadership said very bluntly that without an improvement in the security situation, without the population beginning to feel more secure, without Iraq feeling that it was getting performance from its security services in conjunction with the coalition forces, that it was very hard to keep one's mind on politics and that's completely understandable. But the surge that the President offered -- ordered as well as the efforts of Iraqi security forces and the efforts of concerned citizens and local efforts like the one that took place in Anbar have improved the security situation and they have given a kind of window in which political reconciliation needs to take place, but these two are not unrelated. And one reason that I am more hopeful being here today at the end of 2007 than perhaps a year or so ago is that these improvements do show that Iraqis can count on a future with this democracy, a future in which violence is not necessarily a daily way of life. But it's going to take a really large effort by these political leaders to push forward.

We have to recognize these are existential issues of a young democracy. We all understand that democracy is hard and that it takes time. But it is also the case that when people elect their leaders, they expect them to make very strong efforts to move forward and that's the conversation that we had today and that's the conversation we're going to have with the Prime Minister shortly.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: On -- the reason why Iraq did not attend the Annapolis conference -- in fact, it was a government decision not to attend. And the main reason was because we had just concluded this long term agreement with the United States and if we go to Annapolis the next day or the day after, people will jump into conclusion. But in fact, that decision was debated, was discussed in the government, and the opinion -- we were divided, but the final decision was not to go.

QUESTION: Jumped to what conclusion?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Sorry?

QUESTION: Jumped to what conclusion? What (inaudible)?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: The conclusion is what this long-term -- declaration of long-term principle will take you to Annapolis.

SECRETARY RICE: Some kind of deal. (Laughter.) Is that what you're saying?

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) (Inaudible) news agency. My question is directed to Secretary Rice. With regard to the agreement -- the security agreement, there are some objections from the Iraqi politicians. They are saying we must go back to the Iraqi parliament with regard to the security agreement. This is my first question.

The second question is that there are some doubts from some Iraqis. They are saying that the improvement in the security situation at this time specifically is attributed to the fact that the United States wants, at this time, for the security situation to improve. What is your response to that? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States has wanted the security situation to improve and the President did add additional American forces to help. But it is also due to the efforts of the Iraqi security forces which have been stronger and stronger as we've gone along. I have listened each week as the commanders have briefed President Bush about the performance of the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi people should be very proud of how well their security forces are performing; sometimes on their own, sometimes in the lead, sometimes in -- but always in close coordination with the coalition forces. This is a real success story for the Iraqis who are defending Iraq. It is also a factor -- the factor of local people deciding that they are not going to allow their streets to be taken by terrorists and by criminals and making certain that they protect their communities and that they cooperate with authorities for their protection.

As to the long term security agreement, this is something that has been worked out with the elected government of Iraq and I leave it to Iraq to decide what needs to be done in terms of the finalization of that agreement.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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