



Remarks with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Baghdad, Iraq
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FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Welcome once more. I would like to warmly welcome Secretary of -- the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Baghdad. We met here once before and this visit is timely and very important, particularly considering the positive -- the very positive developments in the Iraqi political and security conditions and also on the regional level. We have had a session of talks during which we discussed the latest developments in the country and the diplomatic activities on the regional level. And I plan to visit -- recently I visited Egypt where I took part in the Arab League meetings and will also likewise visit Jordan and Kuwait and there is a positive turnaround in the Iraq condition. And we have -- we must build on these security and political initiative developments particularly in terms of the accountability and justice law that was passed and hopefully we would pass other laws in order to reinforce and enhance the national reconciliation.

Once more I would like to welcome Madame Secretary Condoleezza Rice in Baghdad.

SECRETARY RICE: My Arabic isn't very good, but I'm going to assume you welcomed me. (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Well, you're learning.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much for welcoming me here. And indeed I decided I was in the neighborhood and perhaps I should stop by because the President, of course, is on a multi-country effort here in the Middle East to do several things: to advance, of course, the democracy agenda, to look to support and push forward the efforts at peace between Israelis and Palestinians. But I can tell you that every stop along the way, particularly in the neighborhood, he has talked a lot about what is going on here in Iraq. He has talked about the importance that Iraq's neighbors support a democratic and unified Iraq, that the efforts that are being made here toward democracy and reconciliation are critical not just for the future of Iraq but for the future of the whole region and indeed for the future of the world.

And he is coming here at a time of progress on many fronts here in Iraq particularly on the security front. But I must say that from the time that I was here a month ago I've seen also continued progress on the political front particularly in the reconciliation that the Iraqi people themselves are carrying out at the grassroots level. You're seeing citizens emerge who are determined to fight the extremists, the terrorists, the foreign fighters who have been a scourge in this country and who have endangered the lives of Iraqis and the stability of this country. And as citizens are fighting back and taking control of their own lives, as provincial leadership is emerging and moving forward to deliver for their people, I also have had discussions with the national leadership during my time here and there seems to be a spirit of cooperation to move forward at the national front as well. And so this is a time of hope.

I can tell you, as your colleague and as your counterpart, Hoshyar, that the work that you have done to improve Iraq's relationship with its neighbors, to let people know in the neighborhood and in the world that this is a new day for Iraq when Iraq will be a fierce fighter against terrorism, when it will be a good and stable neighbor, when it will be an example of how people from many different ethnicities, backgrounds, religions can live together in a democratic framework. You've done a wonderful job in representing this country and I continue to look forward to working with you as the progress here in Iraq continues.

Thank you.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) (Inaudible) your friendship between the United States and Iraq --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, in fact, the elected Government of Iraq, the democratically elected Government of Iraq and the United States have agreed that there should be a long-term relationship between the two countries. We have long-term interests in common. And the most important of those is the emergence of an Iraq that is unified, an Iraq that can defend itself, that has security forces that are adequate to dealing with the challenges that Iraq faces. But it is not just a matter of security issues. It's not just a matter of continuing the work that we have been engaged in together in fighting terrorists and returning Iraqi neighborhoods and Iraqi provinces to the local people. It's not just the security relationship, it's also economic relationship and a political relationship.

The United States has been an important stabilizing force in this region and in the Gulf for a long time, for decades. And we look forward to a relationship with Iraq for the long term that would be befitting of friends who have sacrificed together to bring into being this democratic Iraq and to contributing to the stability of Iraq and, therefore, contributing to the stability of this whole region. So indeed we do have a set of principles from which we will proceed to negotiate that agreement. We do so understanding that this is a new Iraq, a sovereign Iraq, an Iraq that will leave we hope after this year behind its past with the international community, with the bad times than when the United Nations had to sanction Iraq for the bad behavior of the last regime and that we can move forward to now one based on equality, respect and the sovereignty of Iraq.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Certainly, our leaders have agreed to set a group of principles for the long-term treaty and as a lone government we have explained and we have this desire to the Arab head of states with whom we met. We have no secret agenda in this regard. This is a transparent process in which all Iraqis participate in the final and ultimate award goes to the Iraqi people, all influential Iraqi leaders that signed on this agreement would like to reach a political, economic, security culture agreement because we are in much need of such agreement until we are able to stand on our feet. The United States is a strategic and strong ally to Iraq and will remain to be so in the future. We have not come with any new idea. This is not brand new ideas. The United States does have similar agreements with other Arab states.

QUESTION: Graham Smith, NPR News. Thanks for taking my question. Despite the passage of the de-Baathification bill, which I think didn't go as far as a lot of people had hoped it would, I think there's concern that there still hasn't been the kind of progress politically that people had hoped would come while the troops were at elevated levels and they're already starting to draw down from the surge. I'm wondering specifically what are the next steps you'd like to see.

And also, if you have any sense now of what the horizon is for the end of what still feels and looks much like the occupation of Iraq.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me start with the last point. The multinational forces, including the forces of the United States, are here under a UN mandate to help Iraq to recover from years and years of tyranny, tyranny that ended up leading Iraq into Chapter 7 status with the international community and I think what was one of the most far-reaching sanctions resolutions of all time. And after the liberation of Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein there needed to be a force to help to rid Iraq of terrorist forces, foreign fighters, to give Iraq a chance to build stability, to train the Iraqi security forces because ultimately Iraqis have to defend this democracy, and to give comfort frankly to the neighborhood that Iraq would be a stabilizing force in the region. And that work is progressing but it's not yet done.

And so this force that you see here is with its Iraqi counterparts helping to provide security to the Iraqi people, helping to fight the likes of al-Qaida that claimed that they

had taken over Anbar. And so however it looks to you, I hope that to the Iraqi people it means that those markets that I just passed can now open, that celebrations can take place again. And that's why our forces and the forces of the multinational forces are here.

As to the political progress, you know, I come from a democratic country. I assume that you do, too. I don't know any law that has ever been passed that is everything that everybody wanted. That's the nature of democracy. The law will be more than some wanted. It will be less than some wanted. That's the nature of democratic compromise. And this law, the accountability and justice law is clearly a step forward for national reconciliation. It is clearly a step forward for the process of healing the wounds of the past. And it will have to be followed up by implementation that is in the same spirit of national reconciliation. It is also that any law that passes anywhere in the world has to be implemented in a way that is in the spirit of the law. And so that is the work ahead.

But let me just note that it comes in the wake also of a pensions law that extends the pensions to all Iraqis, that was also an important element of reconciliation, an effort to bring people back into the armed forces who were not tainted with the political legacy of Saddam Hussein. It comes in the wake of what happened in Anbar with the awakening movement and now the political efforts that are being made at the provincial level, some of which I've seen myself in places like Kirkuk to deal with very, very difficult issues. So there is a lot going on in this country in terms of the politics of reconciliation.

I was just with His Eminence Mr. Hakim who talked about the importance of local citizens committees that are coming out and defending themselves. Yes, there is still a lot of work to be done. Yes, I talked with the leaders today about a provincial powers law, about the needs of provincial elections. We talked about the need for a hydrocarbons law, although of course the resources from hydrocarbon production are being distributed by budget law. And I believe that the Iraqi parliament will soon pass a new budget. So I hope that we will focus on what needs to be done, but also on how much has been done. Because when I hear that the surge was to give the Iraqi people a chance for political reconciliation, I say that's absolutely right. And while it hasn't always moved as fast as some of us sitting in Washington would like, it has certainly moved. And given the history and the legacy and the stains of tyranny, it's moved quite remarkably.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the horizon as you see it.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. Which horizon?

QUESTION: For when the U.S. (inaudible) for change.

SECRETARY RICE: The President has been very clear that we are going to -- he will take recommendations from his commander about conditions on the ground. The one thing that we want to do is to be certain that when -- as the true presence is assessed here, it is assessed in terms of the realities on the ground. It's assessed in terms of the capabilities of Iraqi forces. It's assessed in terms of the capabilities of the enemy, frankly. And so the President is going to take those decisions based on what is needed to continue the progress that has been seen. But he said that he believes we're on track for the initial drawdown that General Petraeus talked about when he was back in Washington. Anything further they'll have to look at.

We can take maybe one more. Yeah. Mm-hmm, yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from Al Arabiya. Ms. Rice, it's clear that the meetings that President Bush held with Arab heads of state and talked dealt with this (inaudible) in Iraq before it was dealt with the accountability and justice law. Are there any expectations on the regional level about preconditions to improve the relations between Iraq and the Arab states and also I'd like to ask the Foreign Minister of Iraq about Article 140 and the new developments and also the efforts to expand the political participation and widen the political process.

SECRETARY RICE: I believe that relations between Iraq and its neighbors have been improving over time. The meetings that the Foreign Minister has been so instrumental in arranging on behalf of the Iraqi Government, first the neighbors meetings and then the expanded neighbors meetings, I can tell you that the tone of -- we've had two and the first expanded neighbors meeting, there was great worrying about what was happening in Iraq and concern that nothing was moving forward. And the one that we had in Istanbul, although people recognize the challenges ahead, had a quite different character. People are now talking more about the future of Iraq. And I think you will start to see increasing diplomatic representation here. I think you will continue to see the neighbors meeting.

The International Compact for Iraq which, as Iraq makes its changes, promises assistance from the international community, these are all very, very positive developments. The accountability and justice act passed about two days into the President's trip -- three or four days into the President's trip -- and everybody's taken note of that, that it is a good step on the road toward reconciliation. And the more steps that they are taking toward reconciliation, the more fundamental belief that it's going to be in the neighborhood that this is going to work, but I think people know that a democratic and unified Iraq is here to stay. And while it may have challenges, it has passed through some very difficult times and is now moving forward in a way that is promising. It's still fragile.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: I would like to add to what Secretary Rice said today. I think we also feel we have a sense of satisfaction about the progress and hopefully we are trying harder to change the mood of the country and also to continue our efforts in order to support our friends. I think this has created a new climate on the regional level and also vis-à-vis there are states that we visited recently. We are -- I do believe that this year will witness a response from the Arab States in terms of reaching out to Iraq. I think the Arab League has an initiative and hopefully it will rejuvenate or revive its regional initiatives to enforce the national reconciliation. I think this is a result of the improvement in the security climate in Iraq. And I think the Arab states do share a desire to help Iraq out.

And in terms of -- as for the Article 140, I think this is a constitutional article. As a result of the deadlines, I do believe that the government in coordination with the United Nations decided to delay it for another six months. So we do have plenty of time to reach a resolution. And I think the government is serious about reaching an agreement and implement its constitutional obligations. As for the government, the government represents the majority -- it's a constitutional -- a legitimate one. And I think there's a political process and there are new alliances being built and being formed. I don't think you should be terrified of such political. I think it's all healthy. And but as long as we agree on how far we've gotten. There's a constitution that controls the process and there are mechanisms to change the government through the parliament and through the institutions. This government does exist and effective -- and I think all parties are represented in this government. I think we should continue on the path forward. And I think that objective will happen through representation of everyone.

There are daily dialogues there among the leaders or (inaudible). And I think the political elite in Iraq share an understanding that they must support the government through their participation in the political process. And I think we have witnessed over the past two days -- we view these developments as a positive step forward.

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