

Remarks to the Press With Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SALIH: (in Arabic) Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome Secretary of State Colin Powell in Baghdad. And through him, I would like to express our gratitude to the U.S. position in liberating Iraq and the continuous help and support in the process of reconstructing Iraq, and rebuilding its economy and supporting its march toward freedom and establishing a state of laws and democracy, which inevitably will lead to creating a positive relationship with the rest of the world, where Iraq will restore its place. The new experiment of Iraq in building a new, free democratic society is an important element in civilization and in promoting peace in the region. Our talks focused on the political process and the security situation in Iraq, as well as the issue of reconstructing Iraq. We have discussed various mechanisms of coordinating between the Iraqi government and the American side in terms of activating and accelerating the process of reconstruction and using the financial resources. Once again, I would like to welcome Secretary Powell and I would like to thank him for visiting my country. The floor is yours.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister. I am very pleased to be back in Iraq and to be in Baghdad. The country was liberated a year ago and now I am pleased to be back when it is under its own sovereign leadership. A government that is showing great courage and determination in dealing with the challenges that are ahead, but a government under your leadership, the leadership of the Prime Minister, the leadership of the President and all of your other cabinet ministers. A government that is determined to prevail over the insurgency that would deny the Iraqi people their hopes for a better life, their dreams for a safe future. I wanted to let all of the Iraqi leaders I have spoken to over the last day or so know that President Bush and his Administration and the other Coalition leaders remain firmly committed to the task that is ahead: to help the Iraqi forces and the Iraqi government defeat this insurgency, to get on with the preparation for elections that will take place by the end of the year or no later than January of next year, and from that we will see a transitional or a national assembly come into being with a new national government, leading to the finishing of the constitution next year and then full elections.

I am very pleased that the National Conference is being prepared, although there has been a two-week slip. It seems that this is an appropriate thing to do, in order to make sure that the preparations are made and made well, and that it goes off in a very, very

fine fashion. So, we look forward to the results of this Conference where the Iraqi people come together and talk to one another and talk to their Interim Government about their hopes and dreams and their plans for the future.

As the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned, we talked quite a bit about reconstruction and I've had good conversations in the course of the day, as well, with Ambassador Negroponte and his team. We want to speed up the flow of funds into the reconstruction effort. We want to rebuild the infrastructure. We want to create jobs. We want to show the Iraqi people that this money is being used for their benefit and to do it as quickly as we can. And I committed to the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as to the President and the Prime Minister, that we would be doing this in the very near future: to speed up the flow of money in order to get the job done, because reconstruction and security are two sides of the same coin. When people see things happening in the society, their economy is starting to be built up again, their water problems are being dealt with, electricity is being restored and other infrastructure problems are taken care of, that contributes to a sense of safety and improves the security environment.

It's important to note that the leaders of Iraq are very courageous. They put themselves at risk every day. We have to make sure that these insurgents understand that we will not be deterred; they will not be deterred. The insurgents, the terrorists will be defeated. There can be no other option. The Iraqi people deserve freedom; they deserve democracy. They want freedom, they want democracy and we must not let outsiders or insiders of any kind deny the Iraqi people that which they richly deserve and that which they want. Thank you very much for your hospitality, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister.

DEPUTY PM BARHAM SALIH: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We'll start with the Iraqi press.

QUESTION: (In Arabic) During the visit of Dr. Allawi, discussions took place regarding sending Islamic troops to Iraq. What is the role of the United States in this regard?

SECRETARY POWELL: This is an initiative that was put forward by the Saudi Government and the idea was to create circumstances and conditions, which might encourage more Muslim nations to contribute troops to the effort here. Both Prime Minister Allawi and I, and President Bush and my other colleagues back in Washington, and other members of the Coalition, as well as Secretary General Kofi Annan, think it is an interesting idea worth pursuing. And so, we are examining the idea, looking at the ideas that the Saudis put forward with respect to various conditions that have to be met. And it ultimately is a matter for the Iraqi Interim Government to decide whether or not it is a direction in which they wish to move. And we'll be in close consultation with the Prime Minister and his staff and with the Secretary General. And the United States will be playing its part in examining the Saudi proposal.

QUESTION: (in Arabic) Is the United States going to support this idea?

SECRETARY POWELL: It's premature to say. We support the concept, what they're thinking of doing. Whether all the conditions can be met and whether it actually produces contributions of troops remains to be seen. If it does that would be very, very welcome and certainly we would support it.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do you agree with the Defense Minister that Iran is the principal destabilizing force in Iraq or do you agree with others who say that Iran has shown a lot of restraint so far?

SECRETARY POWELL: The principal destabilizing force is those individuals inside of Iraq or who have come to Iraq and who are assassinating people who are trying to do their jobs, who are killing innocent Iraqis. Now, how they are being sustained either by support from within the country, by former regime elements, or assistance that is coming from outside the country, from neighboring countries, is a matter that we have to continue to study.

With respect to Iran, Iran has the potential for playing a helpful role but we are uneasy about some of the actions that Iran has been taking in the south, the influence that they are trying to gain in the south. And we hope that the Iranian authorities will realize that it is in their interests to have a stable Iraq as a neighbor. Too much blood has been shed between these two people over the years and it is now in the interest of the Iranian Government, the Iranian people, the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people, for them to find a way to work with each other and cooperate with each other. And so, any actions taken by Iran, which seek to gain influence in Iraq, we would look at with disfavor. And we continue to monitor the situation and discuss the situation with our Iraqi colleagues.

QUESTION: (in Arabic) Regarding the tour of Prime Minister Allawi in the region, did he reach an agreement with the Administration that you will support Iyad Allawi and all the various proposals that he carried with him to the Arab states that he visited? Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: We followed his tour through the neighboring states rather carefully and he and I had a good chance to discuss it yesterday. We think that he has achieved success in reaching out to his neighbors and explaining to Iraq's neighbors what your goals are, the direction in which you will be moving. We didn't get into any specifics with respect to any particular one of the countries. But, I think we will continue this process of consultation with your neighbors in the fall, to include perhaps a larger grouping of nations coming together to examine the situation, to see what else the international community can do with Iraq's neighbors to further the progress that we have seen so far, to further the process of reconstruction and democracy building within Iraq.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SALIH: (in Arabic) In addition to what the Secretary just mentioned regarding Iraq, Iraq has its own foreign policy that's based on continuation and contacts with the regional countries. For the stability of Iraq and the region it has to be a mutual interest with the neighboring countries and the Arabic and Islamic world on this basis. The Prime Minister did visit the region in order to emphasize the mutual

interest that exists. At the end of the day, stability in Iraq will benefit the region and instability, God forbid, will have serious consequences to the whole region.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do you have any information about the fate of the Indian hostage who's been threatened with death today? Is there anything you think the Coalition can do to save him? And to what extent do you think the hostage-taking phenomenon is both dissuading potential contributors of troops to Iraq and also undermining, or at the very least slowing, down the reconstruction effort?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't have any specific information about that particular hostage, and of course, if we had any information as to his location, if there was anything we could do to rescue him, we would certainly try to do so. These kinds of violent actions certainly do have a deterring effect with respect to nations providing troops or to progress with the reconstruction effort. But, we have to keep them very much in perspective. These are criminals, these are murderers, these are terrorists who are killing innocent people who have come to Iraq to help the Iraqi people to a better life. There is nothing romantic about this, there is nothing justified about this. These are murderous acts, they are terrorist acts and the world must stand united. We cannot let this kind of activity deter us or cause us to go off course. As tragic as these incidents are when they come along, kidnappings and then the murder of those who have been kidnapped, we must continue to persevere but, obviously, it does have a deterring effect.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I'll speak in English. Given the difficulties we've seen in preparing for the National Conference and given the precarious security situation in the country, do you think Iraq could still meet the date of January 2005 for national elections? Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: I have seen nothing to suggest that that date cannot be met. The Conference slipped, not so much because of security concerns, but to make sure that preparations were in place, to make sure there was going to be proper representation from all segments of Iraqi society. And that was the reason for the slip, at the specific recommendation of the United Nations, which is helping the Iraqi Government with that. So, I wouldn't view the slip of the Conference relating in any way to the elections. We discussed this at some length today, and the Government is committed to moving forward with the elections by the end of the year or the end of January 2005.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, can you be more specific about the increased flow of reconstruction aid in terms of how much and when? And also for both of you gentleman, is there any strategy you discussed, a new way of dealing with these kidnappings, the decrease in any kind of military presence or anything you can do in the weeks ahead to stop them?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't want to give any specific numbers right now, except to say that in my conversations with Ambassador Negroponte and his country team, and

with the Deputy Prime Minister and his principal administrators for public works and industry and minerals and housing, and others involved in reconstruction and infrastructure development, the message that came through clearly was we have to speed up the flow of funds, we have to generate projects that will use labor rapidly so that young people and not so young people who needed jobs and wanted to contribute to the rebuilding of their society get their opportunity. It has taken us a while to put in place our contracting procedures. It takes time from the passage of the Congressional Supplemental until the whole contracting process catches up with that. I think most of that work is now behind us. Meeting with the country team this morning, I come away encouraged that the rate of obligation, the rate of commitment, the rate of expenditure will be increasing markedly in the immediate future. And this will affect the security situation as people start to see their neighborhoods improve, their housing improve, the infrastructure improve. They will gain confidence in what we are doing. But, most importantly, they will gain confidence in their government's ability to deliver.

With respect to kidnapping, we will just have to do a better job of passive and active protective measures of our contractors and others who may be put at risk. But, it will remain a risk. But, we cannot allow this tactic to stop us from moving forward or to say, "this is too hard, we are going to get off course and we are going to stop what we are doing." That is not going to happen. We are going to stick with this and I have been talking to Coalition partners and some have found it necessary to leave. But, I also sense that most understand why they are here and the importance of the mission and they cannot be deterred by these kind of violent acts.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SALIH: On the issue of hostage taking, undoubtedly this is a serious concern for the government. And I can tell you last week, for example, a major band involved with hostage taking has been arrested, taken in by the Interior Ministry. There are a number of elements who are involved in these hostage takings. Undoubtedly, some of them are these extremist terrorist groups but also organized crime who are doing this thing for ransom. But, I can assure you that the government and the security agencies are working hard to make sure we deal with this problem. And I want to reaffirm that this process in Iraq of reconstruction and helping the people of Iraq build a democracy in the heart of the Islamic Middle East is not an easy proposition. Iraqi people need help, but those who would come to help us hopefully understand that they must not be deterred by the acts of criminals because acceding to their demands can only lead to the greater threat to all civilized communities of nations.

On the issue of reconstruction, if I may, based on our consultations and discussions with Ambassador Negroponte, based on the data we have, by the end of December we will have as much as nine billion dollars of obligated funds. And we are working with the embassy and USAID to make sure that these projects are accelerated and with the view as the Secretary said, creating employment opportunities. That's important for stability, that's important for the economy, and is important to stabilize the overall environment here.

QUESTION: (in Arabic) Mr. Powell, what's happening in Iraq and what the Iraqi people

are subject to is between a rock and the hard place. The rock is the occupation the hard place is the resistance. Now, we are Islamic people. The Islamic religion imposes on the people to fight, to kick out the occupiers. Hundreds of Iraqis are dying. The choice is before you: either all of those resistance people, who are hundreds of thousands, should all be killed, or you withdraw from Iraq and Islamic and international forces would replace you.

Second point, what is happening in Fallujah and Ramadi and other Islamic towns what you call them terrorists, I have visited them myself and I found them that they are the actual residents of the city. They were civilians in the past, they were not terrorists in the past but now they are living their life afraid of the U.S. forces going inside to raid in random ways. That is why they are siding with the resistance and they are not terrorists as you described them. They are subject to air raids, random killing without any evidence except some intelligence information that could be wrong. Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY POWELL: I did not hear a specific question, but I will just answer this way. The United States and its Coalition partners have done everything we can do in recent months to turn sovereignty and responsibility over to the Interim Government, and to put the increasing burden for security on Iraq's security forces—police, army as it is built up, national guard, intervention and other sorts of forces—so that the Iraqi people can protect themselves.

The United States does not wish to be an occupying authority. The United States wishes to help the sovereign government of Iraq protect its people and build a better future for its people. But, to say that this somehow, in some how, in some way, permits or endorses the kinds of actions that we have seen with bombs going off, killing innocent people. It is the Iraqis who are now in charge of their country. We are here as guests of your country to help you until such a time as you can provide for your own security. And we will continue to work with the Iraqi Interim Government in helping with that security situation. And the people who are denying the Iraqi people the opportunity to have free, open, fair elections to decide the nature of their leadership, and as the Deputy Prime Minister said, to create a unique kind of country and political system in this part of the world, are those who are conducting these bombings, who are conducting these kidnappings. And there can be no excuse for this kind of activity, and there can be no rationale for this kind of activity. It's not as if the United States has come here to do anything other than to return full sovereignty and to give every opportunity to the Iraqi people to live in peace, freedom and democracy and to build a better future for themselves.

And those who are setting off these bombs, those who are conducting these kidnappings, are doing them for the purpose of returning to the past. Returning to the days of a Saddam Hussein-like regime, which will fill mass graves, which will have rape rooms again, which will destroy your infrastructure, which was destroyed by 35 years of dictatorial leadership, not by the conflict of last year. And, I do not think the Iraqi people want to go back to the past. And, in order for them not to go back to the past, the United States and its Coalition partners will stand firm with the new government, sovereign

government of Iraq and its leaders. Thank you.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SALIH: (In Arabic) I feel that I have to respond. I would like to answer your question because you are giving a justification to some of these actions that are taking place in Iraq. Go to Baquba and see for yourself what those who are calling themselves resistance movement to end occupation have done. Occupation has ended. Those who wish Iraq well should cooperate with their government to cut the road in front of those who do not wish Iraq well. Those inclinations and those views are expressed in order to portray the picture as if those who are killers and detonating bombs are resistance. This is not resistance. This is not reflecting the situation in Iraq. Thank you very much.

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