

## Press Conference Following the International Ministerial Meeting of the Countries Neighboring Iraq, the G-8 and China

### Secretary Colin L. Powell

Movenpick Conference Center  
Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt  
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**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the United States, I want to extend my deep appreciation to President Mubarak, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit, and the Egyptian Government for hosting this important conference to help build a better future for Iraq. Let me take a moment to note that we had a very good and forward-looking meeting of the Quartet earlier this morning before the conference. In the Quartet meeting, we focused on practical measures that we can take to support Palestinian elections, to help with reconstruction in the territories, and to ensure that Israel's disengagement from Gaza and, initially, four settlements in the West Bank contribute to real progress on the Roadmap. And the Quartet will work very hard, work together very closely, in the weeks and months ahead through our Quartet mechanism and through other mechanisms to support reform and economic growth in the territories, and we will also do every thing we can to encourage others to help.

At this conference, the Ministerial Conference on Iraq, Iraq's neighbors and the international community have come together to support enhanced stability, faster economic reconstruction in Iraq, and to support free and fair elections in Iraq at the end of January 2005. We met here on the heels of two very important developments: Iraq's Paris Club creditors have rescheduled 80 percent of Iraq's official debt and, as you know, the Iraqi Government has set January 30th as the date for elections. On security, the coalition, augmented by NATO and other nations, is helping Iraq train its security forces so that increasingly Iraq can become more and more responsible for its own security, and coalition forces can play a lesser role.

The Iraqi Government, supported by the coalition, is reasserting government control in Fallujah, Samarra, and other cities in Iraq which have been previously lost to terrorists, to insurgents, to murderers, to those who do not wish the Iraqi people to live in freedom and to have open, free, fair elections. These developments—elections, debt relief, government control—form the basis for fulfillment of Resolution 1546: a democratic Iraq at peace with its people and with all of its neighbors. We all must help. To provide this help, all at today's conference pledged to support national reconciliation through dialogue and democratic participation. All of us will encourage Iraqis, all Iraqis, to organize themselves to participate and to vote in the forthcoming election. We must support the political process as the sole path to reconciliation.

To this end, the group condemned acts of terrorism in Iraq and vowed to prevent the

transit of terrorists, to prevent arms from flowing across borders to the terrorists, and to keep financing from crossing borders coming out of neighboring states. Working together, we can meet our obligation to help the Iraqi people resolutely face the challenges confronting them as they try to bring peace and democracy to their nation and to rebuild their towns and cities and institutions. The ultimate success will bring freedom, peace, and prosperity to Iraq, to the region, and to the world. Thank you very much, and I am prepared to take some questions.

**QUESTION:** While getting ready to resign from your post, what's the outcome of your experience during the past four years in dealing with the Middle East, especially that you have dealt with the Middle East twice: once as a military man, and the second as a diplomat? And the second part, why are you resigning from your post? Thank you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** On the first part, over the last four years we have removed two tyrannical dictatorial regimes as part of our global war against terrorists and our efforts to spread democracy and freedom in the world. The Taliban in Afghanistan is gone. Osama bin Laden is on the run. The evil people who were living in Afghanistan and who attacked the United States, and really attacked civilization on 9-11, are in hiding; a goodly number of their leaders have been brought to justice. The people of Afghanistan are moving toward their democracy. They had open, free, fair elections that brought in a fully-elected president. People from all over Afghanistan wanted that opportunity to vote, even though there were terrorists and murderers who said we will not let you go to the polling places. But they did go to the polling places, to include many of the 3.7 million Afghans who returned home. That country is now on the right path to freedom and democracy.

The same thing in Iraq. Saddam Hussein, who filled torture chambers, who murdered people, who had rape rooms, who wasted the resources of his land, is now in jail. And the remnants of his old regime and the terrorists who have come to make trouble are trying to keep the Iraqi people from moving down the same path that the Afghan people moved and so many others, and we're going to do everything we can, working with the Iraqi Government to keep that from happening.

In the Middle East we have worked hard. This Administration, and I have spent a great deal of time on this, developed the Road Map. The Road Map now is the single document being used, the single plan that is being used by both parties, as well as the international community, to get to that goal that the United States put forward, which also reflected the goals that the Arab League put forward, of having a Palestinian State, free and living in peace and security with the State of Israel.

So, I am very pleased at these accomplishments. There's much more that we have to do. There are still challenges and dangers ahead, but in my discussions with the President it was agreed that it was time for me to move on. But I think we have accomplished a great deal over the last four years, not only in the Middle East, but in many other parts of the world, and there is much more yet to be done. I am confident the President will continue to pursue this agenda in a very aggressive way.

**QUESTION:** Yes, Mr. Secretary, you have received a pledge from the Israeli officials to make elections in the Palestinian areas smoother, and allow East Jerusalem residents to cast their votes in absentee? What do you mean by absentee? Does it imply that you do not recognize East Jerusalem as part of the occupied territories?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have agreed that the best way to make sure that the people living in East Jerusalem, Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, have opportunity to cast a vote is to use the model that was used in 1996 which would include canvassing to get people registered and then on the day that they vote, either leaving East Jerusalem or delivering a ballot at the post office for consolidation. And this is an arrangement that has been accepted by both the Palestinian side and the Israeli side, so they are cooperating to bring this about.

**QUESTION:** Let me first say about the sadness about your resignation. You are always a very kind man to the Arabs. My question, you have a pre-discussion today with Mr. Farouk Shara. Did you discuss with him the financial aid which supported to (inaudible) by the border, and did you think that the death of Arafat is positive for the Road Map? Thank you, sir.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** In my conversations with Mr. Shara of Syria, we discussed a variety of issues, our desire to see more done on the border to prevent the flow of terrorists and weapons and finances across the border. Yes, we discussed that rather directly. The Syrians have taken some steps recently, but we think there is a lot more they can do, and we're looking for greater opportunities to work with the Syrians. And I know that the Iraqis will be in regular consultation, more intensive consultation, with the Syrians about what they can do, and we will try to provide as much information to the Syrians about the activity that is taking place in Syria that they really need to get on top of and do something about.

The second part, I forget?

**QUESTION:** It is about death of Arafat.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I expressed yesterday to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people our sympathies over the death of Chairman Arafat. He is a historic figure, and he meant a great deal to the Palestinian people. But now it is time to move forward, and I think that new opportunities have been created for Palestinians to reform their leadership and I am very impressed at the way they have gone about this since the death of Chairman Arafat, and how they are now getting ready for the election. And I also conveyed to the Israelis that this new opportunity should be seized by them, as well. And so far, there is good cooperation between the two parties. They are both committed to the Road Map, and the first step ahead of us is to have a good, full, free, solid election on the ninth of January for a new president of the Palestinian Party.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned a fair election for the Iraqis, do think that dismantling the

mosques, and killing the civilians inside these mosques, or outside in Fallujah and Basra and other Iraqis capitals, do you think that this will affect the Iraqis to vote in the election and it will be a really fair elections? Thank you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I want these elections to be full, free and fair, and the Iraqi Government is determined for that to happen and they will have the support of the international community, as you heard here today, and they will have the support of the United Nations. We understand the sacred place in the life of Islam that mosques occupy, and our commanders are extremely sensitive to anything that would violate that concept. At the same time, we have found that many of the mosques are being used as arms depots. Terrorists, insurgents, those who do not want to see a free election, those who want to go back to the past, know that we will be restrained around mosques, so they have been using mosques to put weapons and ammunition. We have found some 60 mosques in Fallujah that have large stockpiles in them, and for that reason it is occasionally necessary to deal with that situation by going into a mosque to remove it, so it can be returned to its sacred purpose and not be used as a place to shoot at Iraqi forces, or to hold people, or murder, or behead people. The cause of the problem with mosques is not the actions of the coalition, or the Iraqi security forces--the action of those terrorists, criminals, who do not want to see the Iraqi people decide how they wish to be governed in the future, who do not want to see free elections. And we must fight against these evildoers and that's what we are trying to do, with full respect to the places that mosques and other religious activities have in life of the Iraqi nation and in the life of al Muslims.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, in the last 24 hours here how much doubt have you encountered among some of the delegates that indeed free, full, and fair elections can be held on the 30th of January, and were there any of the delegations who counseled a delay in the elections?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** None of the delegations that I spoke to, and I didn't speak to all of them, but none that I did speak to, and goodly numbers, suggested delay. In fact, if anything, there is a solid consensus that we must move forward and have these elections, and to have them on the time schedule laid out in 1546. There is work to be done. We must put down the insurgency. We must make sure that as many people as possible can participate in the election in order to give it the kind of credibility we want it to have, and that's what we will be working to accomplish over the next two months. But no delegation leader came to me in the course of the last 24 hours, and I am going to spend more time with them this afternoon, to say to me, "you know, you really ought to work with the Iraqis to delay the elections." Everybody, I think, realizes the importance of moving forward and that's what the Iraqi Government and their Electoral Commission is committed to do. That's why they went forward and put the date out today, so to say it's going to be on the 30th of January and all our efforts are going to be directed toward that end.

Thank you.

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