

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Dr. Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State
Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Iraq Minister of Foreign Affairs**

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Mr. Hoshyar Zebari**

REPORTERS:

**Ben Smith from NPR News
Unidentified reporter from Al-Huriya
Al-Nasari[ph] from Al-Arabiya**

REPORTERS 1-3

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MINISTER
ZEBARI:**

Speaks in Arabic.

[interpretation was not available for the first 90 seconds of Minister Zebari's remarks]

INT:

...particularly in terms of the accountability was in order to reinforce and enhance the national reconciliation. Once more, I would like to welcome Madame Secretary Condoleezza Rice and very glad[?]. Shukran.

**SEC OF STATE
RICE:**

Thank you very much. Unfortunately my Arabic isn't very good but...

**MINISTER
ZEBARI:**

Well, you are learning.

**SEC OF STATE
RICE:**

...I assume you welcomed me.

[laughter]

**SEC of STATE
RICE:**

Thank you very much for welcoming me here. And indeed, I decided I was in the neighborhood, 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. 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 are 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 the 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, I've heard 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.

**MINISTER
ZEBARI:**

Thank you. Thank you.

REP1:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

I work for Al-Huriya. Has the U.S. president proposed a long-term treaty of friendship between the United States and Iraq?

**SEC of STATE
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 the 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, and an Iraq that will leave—we hope after this year—behind it's past with the international community, with the bad times 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.

**MINISTER
ZEBARI:
INT:**

Speaks in Arabic.

Certainly our leaders have, I believe, to set a group of principles for the long-term treaty. And as a lone government we have explained and we've...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 work goes to the Iraqi people. All influential Iraqi leaders that signed on this agreement would like to reach a political, economic, security, cultural 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 Iraq [unintelligible] and will remain to be so in the future. We have not come with any new ideas. This is not a brand new ideas. The United States does have similar agreements with other Arab states.

**SEC of STATE
RICE:**

Yes.

REP2:

Ben Smith, NPR News. Thanks for taking my question. Despite the passage of the deBaathification bill which I think didn't go as far as a lot of people had hoped it would, I think there is 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 drawdown 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.

**SEC of STATE
RICE:**

Well, let me start with the last point. The Multi-National 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 in, 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-Qaeda that claimed that they had taken over Anbar. 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 has 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 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, Minister Hakim, who talked about the importance of local citizens committees that are coming out and defending themselves. Yes, there's still a lot of work to be done. Yes, I talked with the leaders today about a provincial powers law, about the needs for 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.

REP2: I'm sorry, the horizon as you see it...

**SEC of STATE
RICE:** Yeah. Which horizon?

REP2: For when the U.S. presence will change here.

**SEC of STATE
RICE:** The president has been very clear that we're 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 troop presence is assessed here, it is assessed in terms of the real...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's said that he believes we are 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.

REP3: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Al-Nasari[ph] from Al-Arabiya. Miss Rice, it's clear that the meetings that President Bush held with Arab heads of states fault them toward the situation in Iraq before it was...dealt with the Accountability and Justice Law. Are there any expectations on the regional level about preconditions to improve relations between Iraq and the Arab states? And I'd also like to ask the foreign minister of Iraq about Article 140 and any new developments. And also the efforts to expand the political participation and widen the political process.

**SEC of STATE
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. In 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, four days into the president's trip and everybody has taken note of 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 there is 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 if still fragile.

**MINISTER
ZEBARI:**

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

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 the Arab states that we visited recently. We are, I do believe, that this year will witness a better 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 original initiatives to reinforce 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. In terms of the...as for the Article 140, I think this 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...its constitutional and legitimate one. And I think there's a political process and there are new alliances being built and being formed. I don't think we should be terrified of such political. I think it's all healthy but as long as we agree on how far we've come. 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 an objective will happen through the participation of everyone. There are daily dialogs among the leaders [unintelligible]. 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've witnessed [that] over the past two days. We view these developments as a positive step forward. Shukran.

UNIDENTIFIED: Okay. Thank you. Always nice to...

SEC of STATE Good to see you, too, even if briefly.
RICE: