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# Operation Iraqi Freedom

BAGHDAD

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## Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses President Bush/PM Blair Meeting

10:10 A.M. EDT

DR. RICE: All right, I'm here to answer questions in what's obviously a very successful meeting between the Prime Minister and the President. They had a chance to talk about the Middle East, as the Prime Minister said. Dinner last night was fairly wide ranging. Talked quite a lot about the Middle East, in fact.

They had an opportunity to talk about the progress in the war, which they see as progressing according to plan and progressing well. But everybody wants to caution that there's still a lot of work to do. There is still fighting going on, there are still areas to be liberated.

But nonetheless, they talked as they have in all of these meetings, about making certain that the coalition can, working with the international community and others, begin to deliver for the Iraqi people on day one, and that the Iraqi people can, as soon as possible, begin to be involved again in their own future. So those were the subjects of the meeting.

Q Do they have a consensus on how much longer the war is going to last?

DR. RICE: I don't think anybody is trying to make a prediction on how much longer. It's going to last as long as it takes, because obviously good progress is being made, but the one thing that everybody is absolutely clear on is, this regime is coming down, Iraq is going to be returned to a -- to the Iraqi people in a way that it can be a good neighbor, can be thoroughly disarmed -- completely disarmed of its weapons of mass destruction, and can be put on a path to democratic development, keeping the territorial integrity of the country.

Q Do you have any new information since the President was asked about whether Saddam is alive?

DR. RICE: Don't have any new information. I don't think anybody knows, but the regime is going to be finished.

Q How soon do we have an interim authority up and running? And are you still considering doing it just in the south, or are you going to wait and see what happens in Baghdad?

DR. RICE: When I briefed on this last Friday, I think I said that a lot is going to be dictated by conditions on the ground. And obviously conditions on the ground are shifting. And so I think it will have to be a constant assessment of what the circumstances are on the ground, when it's best to start trying to put together an interim authority.

But obviously the President wanted to emphasize today that this is going to be a -- the President and the Prime Minister wanted to emphasize this is going to be a broad-based, representative interim authority, that its role is of course temporary or transitional, to give the Iraqis or to make certain that Iraqis have a role in the administration of their country and that as it matures that functions can be given over to it.

But it's not a substitute for what will eventually have to be an Iraqi government where all Iraqis can have a voice. But I think we aren't making any decisions right now on where it would be set up or on what time frame. We have to really watch how things are going on the ground.

There may be opportunities to get people together -- the already liberated people, the people who would be coming in from the outside -- but I don't think anybody is making a hasty decision on when to set up the interim authority.

Q The Secretary said -- that the United Nations could recommend some names for possible people.

DR. RICE: Of course, yes.

Q Has there been any clear idea of how people will be named or Iraqis get to name people, the U.N. gets to name people, I suppose we'll have a say. What would be the mechanism?

DR. RICE: Well, the President emphasized a couple of things. First of all, he and the Prime Minister wanted to make very clear that everybody understood that they have long believed that the U.N. will have a vital role, vital in helping to deliver food and medicine and goods, vital in helping the Iraqi people get back on their feet -- indeed, being able to make suggestions about who might be a part of the interim authority.

If Afghanistan is any guide -- and it might not be a perfect guide, but there is some experience with interim authorities -- people tend to underestimate the role of the people themselves in knowing the leaders among them, in the provinces, in governorships, in localities, that people emerge. And the people themselves will tell you, well, that person has been a leader. You know, you do have this very brutal regime on top, so people can't express themselves.

But there are leaders out there, some of whom we are able to identify as the liberation of the country has taken place, others of whom will be identified as liberation takes further. But I think there is a tendency to underestimate the degree of knowledge that you can really gain from talking to the Iraqi people themselves about what leaders should be emerging.

And both the Prime Minister and the President, if you noticed, emphasized that this is not an issue of the coalition or the U.N., this is an issue of the Iraqi people, as soon as possible, taking life into their own hands.

Q Condi, the President talked about the interim authority being there until the people themselves can select a government. What are the criteria -- what do we look for to make that -- reach that point?

DR. RICE: Again, not everything can be predicted or predictable at this point. The liberation is just progressing, the fighting is not done. There are whole areas of the country where the fighting is still quite intense. And so nobody wants to try to have a fixed timetable of when you take what steps.

But obviously there will have to come a time where there is a -- once the interim authority is in place, where processes that we would associate with democratic development take place, where you begin to move to some form of election and some form of validation of people who are going to be the leaders of the country. But that's a ways. Nobody can make a prediction on that.

In terms of the interim authority, though, it has to be -- even in itself, even though it is temporary, it has to be broad based, it has to include people who are inside the country and are just emerging. Undoubtedly there will be people who have not yet emerged who will over the next few days, next weeks.

And we shouldn't underestimate the importance of people who have been outside the country but have kept this flame alive for a free Iraq for more than a decade. And they will have an important role to play, as well as of course the Kurds, who have managed their own -- the northern territory, since 1991.

MR. FLEISCHER: Just one or two more.

Q Can I follow up on that? Was the President informed about Chalabis air liftings into Iraq, and what does he -- how does he feel?

DR. RICE: I'm sorry, I have been -- I was in Moscow. I'm a little bit uncut on this, and I'll get back to you with information about what may or may not be going on there. I just don't know.

Q Secretary Powell said yesterday that a team would be going over to Iraq some time next week. Do you know who those people are? And I know that you're saying people will emerge inside Iraq. But the people outside of Iraq -- are those people named already, and when will we know who those people are?

DR. RICE: Part of these people have been working with us for a long time. I mean, there are kind of two categories of people. There are people who have been part of opposition groups and there are some expats who have identified themselves as people who want to go back for 60 or 90 days to just help on the administrative side, to lend their skills to getting the place back up and running.

But I know it's very easy to want to go to governance issues early on. But the elements, as the liberation takes place, will be to make certain that the country is secure, that its territorial integrity is assured, that delivery of services to the Iraqi people can really take place, that humanitarian needs are taken care of. I mean, there are parts of the country where water is a problem, in large part because of the policies of the Iraqi government.

So something as important but simple as getting water to the people, we've got to keep that focus early on, and many of these issues will begin to sort themselves out. And there are opposition groups, there are also expats who have just said they want to go back a little while, a short time and help.

Q Did you patch things up with Putin? Did you begin to heal that relationship?

DR. RICE: Well, it was -- look, its been a difficult time for the relationship, everybody understands that. But the President -- both of them, Presidents Putin and President Bush, have said in a couple of different telephone calls and in contacts between their governments that the strategic relationship is extremely important to them, that they want to help to create the conditions under which the relationship can move forward.

And that was the purpose of my trip. We had a wide-ranging discussion, by the way. We talked about a lot of different elements of U.S.-Russian relations, but we also talked a little bit about the post-conflict Iraq situation and about trying to move constructively from where we are now to in the future.

Q I wanted to ask about Syria. Do we think that the Syrian government is actively collaborating with the Iraqi regime in terms of hiding weapons and moving people and scientists?

DR. RICE: I dont think we have clear enough answers from our part of view as to what Syrian activities may or may not be. But very clear messages have been delivered to the Syrian government that they should not engage in behavior that is anti-coalition and thereby anti-Iraqi people.

Okay, thanks.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

MR. FLEISCHER: This is a double header. We have Richard Haass on the record about Northern Ireland.

AMBASSADOR HAASS: Okay, you heard what the President said at the opening of the press conference. Weve also issued a statement, along with Ahern and Blair about the -- about Northern Ireland, so that gives you some detail. Let me just quickly run you through the meetings, and then Ill answer your questions.

They met as a trilateral, talking about the issues on Northern Ireland. Then the three of them met with the leaders of six pro-agreement parties. And at the outset of the meeting, Prime Minister Blair then Prime Minister Ahern then President Bush spoke.

President Bush essentially made the points that the Northern Ireland has reached a historic juncture. There really is an historic opportunity here to fulfill the promise and the potential of the Good Friday Agreement. He called on the leaders to essentially exploit -- to seize the opportunity. And he said, do it not just for yourself, do it not just for your children, but also do it as an example.

And the President specifically linked it to the situation in the Middle East, in two ways. One, that if you make progress in Northern Ireland, it shows what diplomacy and negotiation can do. And secondly, the Middle East is in some ways a tragic reminder of what happens when the boulder gets rolled up the hill, leaders dont seize the opportunity, and then the situation can grow worse.

So basically appeal to the leadership of Northern Ireland again to take advantage of this, both for themselves and for others.

Q There was a critic in Northern Ireland who took the opposite view. Instead of seeing this as an example of how the Mideast peace process could be inspired, he said its hypocritical for President Bush to say -- take the peaceful route, while hes using -- while he has gone to war in Iraq. And I wondered if you could respond to that.

AMBASSADOR HAASS: I thought the President handled that perfectly well at the press conference. These two situations are fundamentally different. The United States has only used force in Iraq after more than a decade of diplomacy. And Saddam Hussein had every chance to avoid a war. All he had to do was meet his obligations on weapons of mass destruction, and he chose not to.

In the case of Northern Ireland, weve fortunately now been in a situation of -- a so-called cease fire for about a half dozen years. Its now, literally this week, the fifth anniversary in the five years of the Good Friday Agreement. And the situation here has evolved significantly. And again were at a point where is the chance to evolve that much more.

The two situations are apples and oranges. I would just say also it shows that U.S. foreign policy is different in different places. We dont simply have one set of tools, and whats appropriate for dealing with a situation in Iraq is obviously not the appropriate set of tools for dealing with other challenges. And in Northern Ireland, were 100 percent involved in diplomacy.

Q When did President Bush meet with Gerry Adams on the side, and was there any discussion about the FARC and anything along those lines?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: He met with the leadership of each of the six pro-agreement parties, including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, and talked with them about Northern Ireland, and also talked with them about the situation in Iraq. The situation you mentioned didnt come up.

Q Do you happen to know the other four names?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: The other four parties?

Q Yes. McGuinness, Adams --

AMBASSADOR HAASS: For Sinn Fein it was just Adams and McGuinness. Ill take you through the order. Ill see if my memory serves me well at 35,000 feet.

He began with the Ulster Unionist Party, the UUP. Then he met with David Trimble and Reg Empey. He then went to the SDLP, the Social Democratic and Labor Party and met with Mark Durkan and Brid Rodgers. Then he went to Sinn Fein and met with Gerry Adams and Mark McGuinness. And then I might have the order wrong on the next three, but met with the Alliance Party which is headed up by a man -- gentleman named David Ford, he also met with the number two there, Eileen Bell. And fifthly, he met with the Progressive Unionist Party, PUP, which is led by a gentleman named David Ervine, with an E, and also a gentleman whose last name is Smith. And then lastly he met with the Womens Coalition, which is headed by Monica McWilliams.

MR. FLEISCHER: Not bad at all.

Q So six separate meetings. They come into a room --

AMBASSADOR HAASS: No, what it was, was they were all arrayed around the room. It was one meeting. It was almost like, if you imagine a clock, one was at four oclock, one was at two oclock, and he basically went from each one and maybe spent -- he went along with the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Blair and the three of them engaged each one of the leadership pairs one at a time for about five minutes each.

Q The President essentially endorsed whats going to be published later this week by Blair. Has the President seen a draft of that?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: Weve been intimately involved in it, and hes been thoroughly briefed on the essence of the Hillsborough documents that will be released Thursday.

Q Do you expect another explicit endorsement on Thursday when it comes out?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: Ill talk with Mr. Fleischer about that. Were pretty clear, on the record, but we may again say something on Thursday. I certainly will. But no one has any doubt that the United States stands behind it and is prepared to help implement it.

Okay, Ive told you more than you want to know? Great.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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