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**Presenter: Ambassador L. Paul Bremer**

**February 23, 2004**

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**Ambassador Bremer Media Availability with Traveling Press**

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Bremer: You come at a good time in the political transition which is really gaining quite a lot of momentum now. We're in the process of working with the Governing Council to finish up the transition law which we'll finish by Saturday.

It's one of a series of major steps towards full Iraqi sovereignty and democracy over the next year and a half as laid out in the September 15th agreement which provides for this transition law to get finished up the end of February, sovereignty will be returned to an Iraqi transitional government on June 30th, and we will then have at least three elections next year according to the November 15th agreement. An election for a constituent assembly, ratification of the constitution that assembly writes, and then elections by the end of next year.

My sense is there's a lot of momentum behind this desire for democracy here. We have had town hall meetings, selections of provincial councils, meetings of women's associations, human rights associations, NGOs, going on all over this country. There's a real thirst for democracy out there.

I had a very interesting meeting with the Baghdad City Council yesterday and you could just hear how much people are anxious to move forward. They're curious about it, they don't understand all what we mean by democracy, but there's a real interest in it. I think it's an important message that this thrust is really very strong right now.

Anyway, you're here at an interesting time.

Questions?

Q: Do they know what democracy is, and what are you doing to try to explain it to them? It's kind of a messy thing, sort of not working as planned.

Bremer: Democracy is messy. I mean, at the Baghdad City Council yesterday. What's tidy is dictatorship. We did that here, and that's gone and they're glad it's gone. Now we have democracy and it's untidy, it's complicated. When you have a process of finding a transitional government by June 30th and you can't do elections as the U.N. has concluded, you're thrown back on a variety of different complicated ways to get that transitional government chosen.

But if you look at the polls, and polling is still primitive here, poll after poll you'll find 85 percent say we want democracy right away or we want democracy. They say democracy means, interestingly, not just majority rule but protecting minority rights. The polls show for things like freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, you will find over 90 percent in one poll we have supporting those things.

So if you think of democracy in terms of the fundamental rights that democracy protects, there's quite a strong understanding of that. I think in accordance again with the outline of the November 15th agreement, we'll find a strong bill of rights, as we would call it, written into this transitional law that shows there's a real understanding of these elements of democracy. They haven't experienced it but they understand the elements.

Q: What did you and the Secretary discuss? Essentially what were your conversations and your briefings centered around?

Bremer: We talked about what you would expect us to talk about -- the security situation. But we spent a fair amount of time talking about the transition from the Coalition Provisional Authority into a U.S. mission, what will be the largest U.S. mission in the world and how to go about making that a smooth transition so it's not just a sudden thing that happens from one day to the next. You guys cover the Pentagon so you're familiar with the term right cheek, left cheek. We're going to start. We've already started transforming elements of the Coalition Provisional Authority into elements that will become part of the U.S. mission. We spent a fair amount of time on the sort of bureaucracies of that.

Q: On the security architecture, the \$3 billion plus for security, are you thinking now about moving some of those resources around to put more into the ICDC, perhaps less into the Iraqi Army? Just share with us your thinking on that.

Bremer: Yes. We've already made several reprogramming decisions. The security supplemental covers a variety of forces. It covers the Army, the Civil Defense Force, the police, and border security. We've already shifted some funds around in various places.

The net effect of it is to allow us to pay for the 36 battalions of the ICDC that we would like to have stood up by the middle of April, and I think in the end we probably will find we're going to need to spend a little bit more on the border police but we haven't reached any conclusions there. But we can move funds around as long as we meet the congressional requirements for notification. We'll do that.

Q: And is there an impact on the immediate size and direction for the Iraqi Army, or will that be unaffected?

Bremer: We're still planning to have an army of 27 battalions by September. It could affect the rate at which they buy equipment if we have to reprogram funds, but we're still counting on an army of 27 battalions. Twenty-four to 27. In that range. It doesn't affect --

Q: How many people is that?

Bremer: I think that's slated in those battalions at about 35,000, but you ought to get those details from Larry. Larry may know. I think it's 35,000.

Q: Ambassador Bremer, I know you are working with Secretary General Kofi Annan's recommendations, but still since you have the primary responsibility for it do you have any parameters in your own mind about what mechanism there ought to be now to approach the caucuses? What might be not acceptable to you, what you would rule out? What are your parameters on all this?

Bremer: We basically are, as you said, we're waiting to hear from the Secretary General and we hope to hear

in the next few days. We're not in the habit of ruling things in or out at this point. What we want to do is hear what their suggestions are.

The impression, the statement that Lakhdar Brahimi made was clear that elections are not possible by June, so the question then is how do we select a transitional government by June. There are literally dozens of different ways to do this. They're all complicated. There's no easy way. Caucuses are complicated. There are cascading caucuses, there are upward cascading caucuses, there are downward cascading caucuses, sideways caucuses, elections, partial elections, elections with caucuses. I've seen at least two dozen different ideas all of which have been presented at various times to the United Nations by us, by NGOs. Let's wait and see what they say and then we'll react.

Q: Do you think it's feasible to look at the notion of an expanded Governing Council here? Would that get public support as a mechanism?

Bremer: That's one of the many ideas that is around, and again, I just think it's -- you're asking me to speculate on a hypothetical. We're waiting to see what the advice is of the U.N. The Governing Council is waiting. Once we get that advice we'll consider it and talk to the Governing Council and we'll reach some conclusions as to how to go forward.

Q: You talked about the security situation with Secretary Rumsfeld, you're halfway through this changeover in troops and it doesn't sound like you've had a lot of attacks on the troops that are rotating either in or out. Can you talk a little bit about the security situation and how that has changed in the recent months.

Bremer: I think the most important -- There are two trends to point to. The arrest of Saddam Hussein had a beneficial impact on us because we got important intelligence as a result of that arrest about two things. About the organization of the insurgency, how is it actually wired together, and about its financing. And both of those tracks have allowed us to conduct much more precise, targeted actions by our forces, and we have as a result disrupted a lot of insurgent activities, we've captured a number of high value detainees, or high value targets. The more important impact has been I think on the psychological side which is that we're finding a lot of people who are fence-sitters have sort of said, they sort of said they don't want to be in the insurgency anymore. One of two things is happening. They're turning themselves in. We've had major generals come and turn themselves in. Or they are giving us information about the bad guys. They may have been afraid to do that while Saddam was still around. It is quite amazing how the fear of Saddam while he was still at large impacted on people. I've had a number of Iraqis tell me that they really felt liberated on December 13th when they knew he finally was captured. We've seen a lot of intelligence come in.

The second security problem is the, now it's quite clear in the last few months that we've seen a real step-up on the part of these professional terrorists from al Qaeda and Ansar Al Islam conducting suicide attacks. We had another one today in Kirkuk. I don't know whether, we don't have enough information yet. It certainly is the same method of operation we've seen before. The same MO, and it certainly suggests that these terrorists are targeting the Iraqi security forces because as the Zarkawi letter makes clear, that's one of his prime targets. He wants to stop the Iraqis from being responsible for their own security, and of course that's one of our main objectives.

Q: Are you in your office planning on developing a Status of Forces Agreement that will allow for a continued U.S. military presence here after the transfer of political power?

Bremer: The whole question of what kind of arrangements there will be is still to be discussed. The general political context is the following. On June 30th the occupation will end when we pass sovereignty from this office back to an Iraqi government, whatever it turns out to be.

At that moment the occupation ends we have a sovereign Iraqi government in place. It is clear that no matter

how well we do in building up the Iraqi security forces, and as you heard this morning there are more than 200,000 already at work, they will not be able to deal with the security threat that will still exist after June 30th. So the coalition that we have now will transform itself from being an occupation to being a partnership. We will be invited guests by the Iraqi government to help them assure their security. Exactly how that will be organized is a matter that still lies in the future, but the political context I think is quite clear and Iraqis when you look again at the polls and talk to a lot of Iraqi politicians, they understand that there's going to be a need for a partnership here after the first of July.

Q: Given the volatility of the situation, what of the gaps, to use your term -- what if the government decides, in whichever form it takes that a U.S. military presence for some reason is not needed?

Bremer: It's a hypothetical question and not very likely. If you look at the current situation and talk to Iraqis, they understand that there's going to be a security situation with both the dimensions I talked about. An active insurgency though I think reducing but a real threat from these external terrorists. They understand that they will need the partners to deal with that in the time going ahead.

Q: Do you feel that you need a Status of Forces Agreement in place before June 30th?

Bremer: We're operating here now under a U.N. Resolution, 1511, which authorizes a multinational force under, as it happens, American command. And that provides the framework that is in effect now and will be in effect until June 30th.

Q: What are the basic elements of the transitional law that you talked about? Does it resolve this issue of Islamic law --

Bremer: The transitional draft, and it's still a draft, but the latest draft conforms to the principles that were set out on November 15th. It provides for a very robust bill of rights -- freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to strike, freedom of religion and religious beliefs. It provides, in other words, for a framework of rule of law. It provides for an independent judiciary. It provides for civilian control of the military. It provides for the separation of power among the branches of government.

The freedom of religion is actually confirmed in two different places in the current draft. Islam is recognized as the state religion and as the religion of the majority of the Iraqi people, again, in conformity with the November 15th agreement.

This document is a revolutionary document in Iraqi history. There's nothing like it. One of the Iraqi Governing Council members said to me last night when we were talking about it, he said it's not only revolutionary in Iraq, it's revolutionary in this part of the world for its forward-looking defense of individual freedoms. It's a fitting tribute to the Iraqis that they should be able to write such a document, and of course the inspiration is the tyranny that they lived under. They don't want anything like that again.

Q: What are you going to do after June 30th?

Bremer: I am going home to sleep for a very long time. I'll show you my house in Vermont where I'll be if you want, but I won't tell you the phone number. (Laughter.)

Q: [Could you clarify] a statement that you will have broad support from the Shiites?

Bremer: I think we're going to have to have a very substantial information campaign on the transitional law all across the country. In fact we started a major IO campaign about a month ago. Of course not on the text of the law because we didn't know the text, but on the general principles. The principle of the bill of the rights, what does it mean, independent judiciary, the civilian control of the military, and on federalism which is another

concept that's in there.

Some of these concepts like the concept of federalism, are new to Iraqis and we're going to have to talk to a lot of people, as we already have, about federalism, and why we think it works. We think it works because it provides for the devolution of power away from Baghdad out to the provinces, and therefore makes it more difficult for tyranny to have a rebirth here.

When we explain that to Iraqis they understand that immediately and instinctively, and they said that's wonderful.

So I think we're going to have to do a lot of work to get everybody to understand it, to answer your question. But when I sit and talk to Iraqi groups, focus groups, women's groups, Shia, Kurds, Sunnis, and talk it through, people understand it. Federalism is the part of all of that that's harder to understand. The rest of the bill of rights people understand.

Q: July 1st does your position go away, or will you stay for some transition to be determined?

Bremer: No. When the CPA -- The CPA will go out of existence on June 30th when authority is passed from the CPA to the sovereign Iraqi government. At that point the position that I am in goes away. But it's very important to stress that that's about all that changes. There will be the world's largest embassy here. We will have more than 100,000 troops here. The embassy will be responsible for overseeing the spending of \$18.6 billion, the largest amount of aid we've ever given any country in history. The American presence will continue to be strong and we will stay here until the job is done, as the President has said, and that's going to take time.

The only thing really that changes is that I leave and will be replaced by an American ambassador to the mission.

Q: Thank you.

Bremer: Thank you.