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Iraqi PM Addresses Congress

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SPEAKER: NOURI AL-MALIKI, PRIME MINISTER OF IRAQ

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AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Thank you. Thank you.

In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful, Your Excellency, the Speaker of the House, Mr. Vice President, honorable ladies and gentlemen, members of Congress. it is with great pleasure that I am able to take this opportunity to be the first democratically and constitutionally elected prime minister of Iraq to address you, the elected representatives of the American people. And I thank you for affording me this unique chance to speak at this respected assembly.

Let me begin by thanking the American people, through you, on behalf of the Iraqi people, for supporting our people and ousting dictatorship. Iraq will not forget those who stood with her and who continues to stand with her in times of need.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Thank you for your continued resolve in helping us fight the terrorists plaguing Iraq, which is a struggle to defend our nation's democracy and our people who aspire to liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. All of those are not Western values; they are universal values for humanity.

(APPLAUSE)

They are as much for me the pinnacle embodiment of my faith and religion, and they are for all free spirits.

The war on terror is a real war against those who wish to burn out the flame of freedom. And we are in this vanguard for defending the values of humanity.

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(APPLAUSE)

I know that some of you here question whether Iraq is part of the war on terror. Let me be very clear: This is a battle between true Islam, for which a person's liberty and rights constitute essential cornerstones, and terrorism, which wraps itself in a fake Islamic cloak; in reality, waging a war on Islam and Muslims and values.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): And spreads hatred between humanity, contrary to what come in our Koran, which says, "We have created you of male and female and made you tribes and families that you know each other." Surely (inaudible) of you in the sight of God is the best concept.

The truth is that terrorism has no religion. Our faith says that who kills an innocent, as if they have killed all mankind.

Thousands of lives were tragically lost on September 11th when these impostors of Islam reared their ugly head. Thousands more continue to die in Iraq today at the hands of the same terrorists who show complete disregard for human life.

Your loss on that day was the loss of all mankind, and our loss today is lost for all free people.

(APPLAUSE)

And wherever humankind suffers a loss at the hands of terrorists, it is a loss of all of humanity.

It is your duty and our duty to defeat this terror. Iraq is the front line in this struggle, and history will prove that the sacrifices of Iraqis for freedom will not be in vain. Iraqis are your allies in the war on terror.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): History will record their bravery and humanity.

The fate of our country and yours is tied. Should democracy be allowed to fail in Iraq and terror permitted to triumph, then the war on terror will never be won elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, we are building the new Iraq on the foundation of democracy and are erecting it through our belief in the rights of every individual -- just as Saddam has destroyed it through his abuse of all those rights -- so that future Iraqi generations can live in peace, prosperity and hope.

Iraqis have tasted freedom and we will defend it absolutely.

(APPLAUSE)

Every human possesses inalienable rights which transcend religion. As it is taken in the International Convention of Human Rights, they transcend religion, race and gender.

And God says in the Koran, "And surely we have honored all children of Adam."

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): I believe these human rights are not an artifact construct reserved for the few. They are the divine entitlement for all.

(APPLAUSE)

It is on this unwavering belief that we are determined to build our nation, a land whose people are free, whose air (ph) is liberty, and where the rule of law is supreme.

This is the new Iraq, which is emerging from the ashes of dictatorship and despite the carnage of extremists, a country which respects international conventions and practices noninterference in the internal affairs of others, relies on dialogue to resolve differences, and strives to develop strong relations with every country that espouses freedom and peace.

(APPLAUSE)

We are working diligently so that Iraq returns to take the position it deserves and it plays a positive role in its regional and international environment as a key, active player in spreading security and stability, to give an example of positive relationship between countries through denouncement of violence and resorting to constructive dialogue, solving problems between nations and peoples.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): And we have made progress. And we are correcting the damage inflicted by politics of the previous regime, in particular with our neighbors.

My presence here is a testament of the new politics of a democratic Iraq.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Ladies and gentlemen, in a short space of time, Iraq has gone from a dictatorship to a transitional administration, and now to a fully fledged democratic government.

This has happened despite the best efforts of the terrorists who are bent on either destroying democracy or Iraq, but by the courage of our

people who defied the terrorists every time they were called upon to make a choice, by risking their lives for the ballot box. They have stated over and over again, with their ink-stained fingers waving in pride, that they will always make the same choice.

(APPLAUSE)

Over fear...

PROTESTER: Iraqis want the troops to leave! Bring them home now! Iraqis want the troops to leave! Bring them home now!

HASTERT: If our honored guest will suspend for the moment, the chair notes disturbance in the gallery. The sergeant at arms will secure order by removing those engaging in disruption.

(APPLAUSE)

PROTESTER: Bring them home now!

HASTERT: The gentleman may resume.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Hope over fear; liberty over oppression; dignity over submission; democracy over dictatorship; federalism over a centralist state.

Let there be no doubt: Today Iraq is a democracy which stands firm because of the sacrifices of its people and the sacrifices of all those who stood with us in this crisis from nations and countries.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): And that's why -- thank you -- I would like to thank them very much for all their sacrifices.

Iraqis of all persuasions took part in the unanimously democratic election for the first parliament formed under the country's first permanent constitution after eight decades of temporary constitutions and dictatorship, a constitution written by the elected representatives of the people and ratified by the people.

Iraqis succeeded in forming a government of national unity based on an elected parliamentary foundation, and includes all of Iraq's religions, ethnicities and political groupings.

The journey has been perilous, and the future is not guaranteed. Yet many around the world who underestimated the resolve of Iraq's people

and were sure that we would never reach this stage. Few believed in us. But you, the American people, did, and we are grateful for this.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): The transformation in Iraq can sometimes be forgotten in the daily, futile violence.

Since liberation, we have witnessed great accomplishments in politics, the economy and civil society. We have gone from a one- party state, ruled by a small elite, to a multi-party system where politics is the domain of every citizen and parties compete at all levels.

(APPLAUSE)

What used to be a state-controlled media is now completely free and uncensored, something Iraq had never witnessed since its establishment as a modern state and something which remains alien to most of the region.

What used to be a command economy in Iraq, we are rapidly transforming into a free market economy.

In the past three years, our GDP per capita has more than doubled. And it is expected that our economy will continue to grow. Standards of living have been raised for most Iraqis as the markets witness an unprecedented level of prosperity. Many individuals are buying products and appliances which they would never have hoped to afford in the past.

And, in keeping with our economic vision of creating a free market economy, we will be presenting to parliament legislation which will lift current restrictions on foreign companies and investors who wish to come to Iraq.

(APPLAUSE)

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): While we are making great economic strides, the greatest transformation has been on Iraqi society.

We have gone from mass graves and torture chambers and chemical weapons to a flourishing -- to the rule of law and human rights.

The human rights and freedoms embodied in the new Iraq and consolidated in the constitution have provided a fertile environment for the ever-growing number of civil society institutions...

(APPLAUSE)

... which are increasing in scope and complexity and provide a healthy reflection of what is developing beneath the violence.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): The rights chartered in the constitution will also help consolidate the role of women in public life as equals to men.

(APPLAUSE)

And help them to play a greater role in political life.

(APPLAUSE)

I am proud to say that a quarter of Iraq's Council of Representatives is made up of women, but we still have much to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, our nascent democracy faces numerous challenges and impediments, but our resolve is unbreakable and we will overcome them.

The greatest threat Iraq's people face is terror: terror inflicted by extremists who value no life and who depend on the fear their wanton murder and destruction creates.

They have poured acid into Iraq's dictatorial wounds and created many of their own.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Iraq is free, and the terrorists cannot stand this.

They hope to undermine our democratically elected government through the random killing of civilians. They want to destroy Iraq's future by assassinating our leading scientific, political and community leaders. Above all, they wish to spread fear.

Do not think that this is an Iraqi problem. This terrorist front is a threat to every free country in the world and their citizens. What is at stake is nothing less than our freedom and liberty.

Confronting and dealing with this challenge is the responsibility of every liberal democracy that values its freedom. Iraq is the battle that will determine the war. If, in continued partnership, we have the strength of mind and commitment to defeat the terrorists and their ideology in Iraq, they will never be able to recover.

(APPLAUSE)

For the sake of success of the political process, I launched the National Reconciliation Initiative, which aims to draw in groups willing to accept the logic of dialogue and participation. This olive branch has received the backing of Iraq's parliamentary blocs and support further afield from large segments of the population.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): I remain determined to see this initiative succeed.

But let our enemies not mistake our outstretched hand for forgiveness as a sign of weakness. Whoever chooses violence against the people of Iraq, then the fate that awaits them will be the same that of the terrorist Zarqawi.

(APPLAUSE)

While political and economic efforts are essential, defeating terror in Iraq relies fundamentally on the building of sound Iraqi force, both in quantity and capability. The completion of Iraq's forces form the necessary basis for the withdrawal of multinational forces. But it's only then, only when Iraq's forces are fully capable, will the job of the multinational forces be complete.

Our Iraqi forces have accomplished much and have gained a great deal of field experience to eventually enable them to triumph over the terrorists and to take over the security portfolio and extend peace through the country.

The other impediment to Iraq's stability are the armed militias. I have on many occasions stated my determination to disband all militias without exception...

(APPLAUSE)

... and re-establish a state monopoly on arms and to guarantee citizens security so that they do not need others to provide it.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): It is imperative that the reconstruction starts now.

While small sections of central Iraq are unstable, large sections have remained peaceful, but ignored. For far too long, these were most deprived areas of Iraq under the previous regime and have been the most valiant in Iraq's struggle for freedom. We need to make an example out of these stable areas as models for the rest of the country.

(APPLAUSE)

Reconstruction projects in these areas will tackle unemployment, which will weaken the terrorists. They will become prototypes for other, more volatile regions aspire to. Undoubtedly, reconstruction in these areas will fuel economic growth and show what a prosperous, stable, democratic and federal Iraq would look like.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Members of the Congress, in this effort, we need your help. We need the help of the international community.

Much of the budget you had allocated for Iraq's reconstruction ended up paying for security firms and foreign companies, whose operating costs were vast. Instead, there needs to be a greater reliance on Iraqis and Iraqi companies, with foreign aid and assistance to help us rebuild Iraq.

(APPLAUSE)

We are rebuilding Iraq on a new, solid foundation: that of liberty, hope and equality. Iraq's democracy is young, but the will of its people is strong. It is because of this spirit and desire to be free that Iraq has taken the opportunity you gave us and we chose democracy.

We faced tyranny and oppression under the former regime. And we now face a different kind of terror. We did not bow then and we will not bow now.

(APPLAUSE)

I will not allow Iraq to become a launch pad for Al Qaida and other terrorist organizations.

AL-MALIKI (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): I will not allow terror to rob Iraqis of their hopes and dreams. I will not allow terrorists to dictate to us our future.

(APPLAUSE)

For decades, we struggled alone for our freedom. In 1991, when Iraqis tried to capitalize on the regime's momentary weakness and rose up, we were alone again.

The people of Iraq will not forget your continued support as we establish a secure, liberal democracy. Let 1991 never be repeated, for history will be most unforgiving.

(APPLAUSE)

The coming few days are difficult and the challenges are considerable. Iraq and America both need each other to defeat the terror engulfing the free world.

In partnership, we will be triumphant because we will never be slaves to terror, for God has made us free.

Trust that Iraq will be a grave for terrorism and terrorists.

(APPLAUSE)

Trust that Iraq will be the graveyard for terrorism and terrorists for the good of all humanity.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

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