

Rice detours to Iraq from Saudi Arabia

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- U.S. President George Bush said Tuesday that he decided to send Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Iraq to build on the political progress being made. Rice made an unannounced detour Tuesday from Saudi Arabia to Baghdad to meet with Iraqi leaders. Bush, in Saudi Arabia, told reporters the decision to send Rice to Iraq was made about 10 days ago. "I decided when it looked like there was some momentum on the legislative front" she would go over to build on that "by her presence," he said. Bush said he thinks the Iraqis are "beginning to form the habits of self government." Rice was accompanying Bush on a Middle East tour to bolster the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While violence and casualties in Iraq are down somewhat, the Bush administration is reportedly frustrated by the delays in getting the Iraqi legislature to pass legislation to allow former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party to work in public service again and receive pensions, The New York Times reported. Another key piece of legislation languishing in Baghdad is a bill defining oil revenue sharing among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, reports said.

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