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Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

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Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz interviewed by Al Arabyia

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Q: Sir, [I'd like to ask] about the status of Saddam Hussein as an enemy prisoner of war. What does it mean exactly, and what does it mean to those Iraqis who would like to try Saddam in an Iraqi court by Iraqi judges for alleged crimes of genocide against his own people?

Wolfowitz: I think our President made it clear that the Iraqis are entitled to pass judgment on this man who did such damage to them. Of course there are other victims as well including neighboring countries, including American soldiers. There are many people who have various crimes to prosecute against him. In due course all of that will happen. He was initially determined to be an enemy prisoner, but his status can be determined in whatever other ways are appropriate.

What there should be absolutely no doubt about is that this man is one of the strongest candidates that I've ever known to be put before a court to account for his alleged crimes. I guess we have to say alleged, but there's really, the only question is how many, really. I think it's very important the Iraqi people have justice. The President has made that clear.

Q: The Secretary just said that his status may change. Secretary Rumsfeld. What would trigger such a change? Your investigation shows something new?

Wolfowitz: I think it's going to be a matter of bringing together the various charges from the various complainants. Obviously it has some connection to when we can get an Iraqi government established, but I'm not sure that it has to wait for that.

There are various pieces of the process that have to move forward. There's so much to bring together in the way of documents which assembling the case is a huge task.

Q: Although we have a huge amount of documents (inaudible).

Wolfowitz: That's part of the problem. In fact we were briefed the other day on the volume of documents that we've captured. It's something like five times the number that we had at the end of World War II. Just getting through them is a monumental task. We're obviously, I don't think we can hold him accountable for -- the number of crimes he might be tried for is monumental, but decisions will also have to be made which ones get

first priority.

Q: How long can he be kept like that without access to a lawyer or Red Cross or no date or time?

Wolfowitz: As an enemy prisoner he actually is not entitled to a lawyer. I suppose if he were brought to charges then certain rules would apply.

We're in a complicated regime where the U.S. has to operate under the Geneva Convention. A sovereign Iraqi government obviously would operate under Iraqi law.

Q: It has been reported that Saddam is still defiant and not cooperative. Is it safe to assume that the reports reaching your desk describe him as more laconic and less loquacious?

Wolfowitz: I don't look at daily reports on his status. I think he's already established very clearly in history what kind of person he is. It's just a wonderful thing that the Iraqis no longer have to fear him, no longer have to fear (inaudible) criminals will come back. To me that's what I keep reading, day after day, reports of more Iraqis coming forward to cooperate with us, more and more as his (inaudible) gang has been rounded up. So I think it's very hopeful for Iraq's future.

Q: Sir, the New York Times has reported that (inaudible) Saddam shows that he warned his subordinates not to join forces with the Jihadists who came to Iraq. Could that undermine your contention of previous collaboration between the former regime in Baghdad and (inaudible)?

Wolfowitz: It certainly has nothing to do with the evidence we have of earlier cooperation. If the New York Times article is describing the one thing that I've been briefed on, the warning about be careful that these people are kept under control. Not that you don't cooperate with them but that you control them. and that would be consistent with what we saw in late March, early April when the Marines in their movement north were capturing or finding documents of foreign fighters who had obviously come in through Iraqi-controlled border posts to go and fight Americans. So this has been a kind of a conveyor belt with foreign fighters and foreign terrorists that his regime has been bringing in since at least the early stages of the war.

Q: (inaudible) Iraq's porous borders. What is the status? What's happening on the (inaudible) Iraqi borders? We keep hearing conflicting reports (inaudible) cooperating now more than before, or (inaudible) is not as large as felt initially. What are the Syrians doing right now on the border issue?

Wolfowitz: The one thing we know is that people are coming in through that border more than others. But it's very hard to control populations, as I guess you know. And I've had people give accounts of what it's like at the Jordanian border. Just the sheer numbers of people moving back and forth make it hard to control.

The information that I'm getting suggests that while these people are a problem, the bigger problems is in fact what they call [informants], Saddam [loyalists].

Q: Sir, let's talk about WMD, weapons of mass destruction. Last week, I don't think it was a great thing for the Administration given that the Carnegie Endowment came up with a report, the Washington Post published a lengthy article, and then former Secretary Paul O'Neill, all potentially said the presence of weapons of mass destruction before the war (inaudible), and that all these programs (inaudible). Any concern about all these contentions?

Wolfowitz: Obviously you have to be concerned when people make accusations (inaudible). The fact is that the consensus of everyone in our intelligence community, and most of the foreign intelligence services that I'm aware of, was that he had these programs, that we may have estimated them as more active than they turned out to be, but there was no misleading of the American public, and if you go back and look at the things that

President Clinton said in 1998, or for that matter what President Clinton said more recently, or what some Democratic senators said in 1998, everyone has believed firmly that it's there. It's not a question of anyone (inaudible).

I think the point that is often missed is U.N. Resolution 1441 didn't say that we have to prove that he has large quantities of weapons of mass destruction. It said this is his, what, 18th I guess and final chance to come clean and do what he was supposed to have done in 1991. And what seems clear from the evidence we have already is that he was still hiding things. You can argue whether they were significant or not, but he was hiding them. He was still pressuring Iraqis to lie to the inspectors. And the picture that's presented is a man that was trying to do what he had to to get rid of the inspectors so that he could then go on and rebuild his programs. He had not given up (inaudible).

Q: Many of the observers believe that most of the attacks on coalition forces are conducted by former regime loyalists, with the exception probably of (inaudible) al Qaeda. Those observers also say that you can contain these attacks only by military means, but also by providing (inaudible). Has the Administration and the authorities in Baghdad been slow in dealing with this issue? (inaudible)

Wolfowitz: I think it is very important to make sure that the Suni heads understand that they have a large place in the new Iraq, and we're trying to create the space for Iraqis to shape that new Iraq and it takes time. I don't believe that, I'm sure there's a lot of anxiety -- I read it, I hear about. I don't think people are killing Americans because they're anxious about their role in the future Iraq. I think the people who are killing Americans are the people who were killing Iraqis before and they're afraid about being held accountable in a new Iraq. They exploit freedoms that are around.

But I think it's an injustice to the Suni Arab community to suggest that in predominant numbers they supported this criminal regime. I still think we're dealing with two different kinds of minorities. A large, legitimate minority of Suni Arabs that want to make sure that they don't become a persecuted minority in a new Iraq, but then a very tiny minority of people who really have criminal records, who have every reason to fear being held accountable.

I must say, the sooner they stop killing innocent Iraqis and really innocent American soldiers who are there to help, the less they'll have to account for.

Q: (inaudible) change in Iraq. (inaudible) security for the average Iraqi. And he said that the attacks on U.S. forces are not unimportant, but they are of secondary significance, particularly because they are not very effective compared to providing security for the Iraqi people. He said the basic rule of any counterinsurgency operation, job one is making the local populace feel safe and we have singularly failed in that all-important mission. Indeed, by devoting so much of our effort to force protection at the expense of protecting the Iraqi people we are playing into the hands of the insurgents while undermining our own support among the Iraqi people.

Many people say that the Iraqis are (inaudible). Obviously that's (inaudible).

Wolfowitz: Security is a problem, and particularly if you go and empty, as he did last fall, your prisons of all your murderers -- I don't mean last fall, I mean the fall of 2002 -- let loose all the murderers and rapists you can find and you wonder what he had in mind when he did that. But it takes time to bring the situation under control.

Everything I read suggests that there is steady progress in that regard. There's a lot more progress in the south than in the north where we're not having to put as much effort into fighting the Ba'thists, but the real answer is not more Americans on the streets. Americans on the streets provide some security, they also create problems. The real answer is more Iraqis on the street and that's happening every day. I wouldn't want to

exaggerate what these numbers mean, but there are now some 200,000 Iraqis in different -- police, facilities protection, that's the biggest one, the civil defense corps which is growing fast. Iraqis should provide security for Iraqis and that will take some time, but we're moving very fast.

Q: (inaudible) recently stated his political opposition to the U.S. plan, especially his opposition to the notion of having (inaudible) the international (inaudible) election before June. Obviously that (inaudible). Can you reconcile these differences given the fact that his supporters are demonstrating in the streets and there are (inaudible) escalated political pressures?

Wolfowitz: I think it's a welcome development that people can demonstrate peacefully in Iraq on behalf of a political dissident -- something you couldn't do a year ago. It's great progress and it's irreversible progress.

The [electora seat] is going to get fixed, it's being fixed even as we sit here. It will not only get better than it was before the war, in a few years it will eclipse anything that Saddam ever provided. We're never going to go back to the terror and the fear and the oppression and that's I think a very important point.

In these differences that are reflected in [Sistani's] views and multiple others, our goal is to move forward. Obviously we're not opposed to elections. We believe in the fundamental principle of democracy. The issue there primarily is whether in the current conditions in Iraq and with no certainty about voter roles and things like that, whether elections will slow down the very important process of transferring sovereignty to the Iraqis.

We're very appreciative that the U.N. is coming in to help. This is a complicated negotiation. Our main interest is to have some kind of a consensus, a way forward to a democratic Iraq. I believe, and this is the important point, that a free and democratic Iraq is our goal, it's our goal, it's] goal, it's the goal of the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. And naturally I think given that base we'll make progress one way or another.

Q: (inaudible)

Wolfowitz: As much agreement as possible in the way ahead. One thing that Americans have learned with more than two centuries of operating a democracy, a democracy is about compromise. It's not do it my way or the highway, it's let's figure out -- I have my way, you have your way, let's find a way forward that makes everybody equally unhappy.

It's a negotiating process and I'm confident, very appreciative that the U.N. is stepping back in. I think Mr. [Bahine's] role in Afghanistan was very constructive in (inaudible) in Iraq.

Q: Any frustration because (inaudible) officials there, including Ambassador Bremer?

Wolfowitz: I don't know how to read that one. The American way is the direct way. It's easier to deal with things that way.

I was the American Ambassador in Indonesia for three years. By the way, there are 200 million Muslims in Indonesia. But their customs are not (inaudible) Southeast Asia and they almost never do business directly, you always learn to find the right intermediary. So sometimes that works.

I think it's important, though, as important as [Ayatollah Sistani] obviously is, he's only one Iraqi, and he only represents some number. It may be a very large number, but everyone has to understand that democracies are [based] on compromise, taking account of everyone's views including those Suni Arabs that you were talking about before. Including Kurds and Turkamen and Syrians and Caldians. (Laughter) -- actually how complicated the country is. So is the United States.

Q: Yes.

Speaking of Kurds, also (inaudible) and the United States as well as (inaudible) on the concept of (inaudible). Turkamen and Arabs, and the Americans are objecting to it. Again, is that too serious an issue? I'm sure (inaudible) now.

Wolfowitz: To us what's important is that things be worked out peacefully, that they be worked out on the basis of freedom and democracy, and that they be worked out on the basis of keeping Iraq whole as a country. Within those very important limits, and they're very important, you can think of a lot of solutions.

If I have any concern right now it's that some things in Kirkuk seem to be not so peaceful. I think that's wrong. There are many Kurds who were forced to leave, expelled from their homes, and they have legitimate complaints, and those complaints are being resolved by peaceful means. The future of Northern Iraq has to be as part of the whole country, not as (inaudible).

Q: Fair or unfair you have been classified in American media and the Arab media (inaudible) media as a member of the (inaudible). A group of people who again were behind the (inaudible) preemption, and the (inaudible) in Iraq and (inaudible). Recently two of that movement, (inaudible) against terror in which they also posed some radical solutions (inaudible) Iran and (inaudible). Are you part of that company? Because your views on (inaudible) issues do not jive with --

Wolfowitz: I don't have a membership card. I believe in making up my own mind on issues. I frankly believe that you've got to face facts and not thing that everything can be decided from some doctrine. If you say (inaudible), I certainly disagree with that. I think the only way forward is to (inaudible) almost daily, is what the President laid out which is a two-state solution and territorial compromise and terrorism and settlement. And I believe that the President has identified the means to get to that end has to be to have institutions that genuinely reflect the will of the people on both sides.

I do think, and I could be proven wrong, but I think given the opportunity to express (inaudible), and given a real choice for peace the overwhelming majority of Israelis and I think almost as large a majority of Palestinians would say enough is enough. Peace is worth the price of compromise, as long as it's within reasonable boundaries. The tragedy is I think we've come awfully close to those reasonable boundaries in the recent past. I think it's a tragedy that the Oslo Process (inaudible). I think we were starting to get back on track at Sharm al Sheik last spring. I hope we'll get back there.

There's no question in my mind about the President's commitment to that two-state solution and his willingness to do whatever the United States can do to contribute to that.