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Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

February 01, 2004

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Availability at Al Baiya Police Station, Baghdad

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Wolfowitz: It's been busy, informative, very good meetings with [Lt.] Gen. [Ricardo] Sanchez, Ambassador [Paul] Bremer and [Brig.] Gen. [Martin] Dempsey. Very encouraging first reports on how the handover is taking place among the military and a lot of good success on the intelligence side. Some of it attributable to the documents that were found with Saddam Hussein but I think more generally to a much greater degree of cooperation from Iraqis in the greater confidence they are having about their future.

In many ways one of the most impressive visits today has been this visit to a police station, and thinking about the danger these Iraqi police face every day. We had a reminder of that up in Mosul yesterday where a suicide bomber attacked a police station. It's what these criminals do. Criminals isn't a good enough word. But they are going to target success wherever they find it and they are going to try to intimidate Iraqis to go back into hiding.

I was very impressed with this police colonel who seems to me to be a highly motivated man who believes in what he is doing and you heard his own sense of how difficult it was to be a policeman under the old regime. The bad ones have left and we're working with the good ones to train them and equip them and give them the tools to do their job, because it is their job cause it is their job, it's their country.

Meeting with a group of Iraqi women. It was interesting to watch them argue about basic questions about the application of Muslim family law. But I must say on the whole it is encouraging to see the spirit of vigorous debate along lines that weren't entirely predictable.

I reinforce my strong belief that the United States has a big stake in making sure that Iraqi women have equal rights in the society and play an equal role in shaping its future. Their voice is a voice of moderation and a voice of democracy.

Overall, I would say that based on one quick day that I've seen progress in areas since I was here three months ago. Particularly in the area of security. There is still a lot of work to be done. We had very encouraging reports on the role of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. General Dempsey had really good things to say about their experience with them. And one of the things that I'm determined to do is to make sure that we are able to move the supplemental funding as quickly as possible into the equipping of the police force and the defense corps.

There was a nice anecdote that General Dempsey told us about an American changeover here in Baghdad

and a company of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps attended and we played the Star Spangled Banner and everyone saluted. After the Iraqis said well we saluted your national anthem, how come you didn't play ours? So the next ceremony they played both and the Americans saluted the Iraqis and the Iraqis saluted the Americans. There's real pride among those Iraqis who are on the frontlines fighting for their country. There are more and more of them every day and that's how we're going to win this.

Questions?

Q: You talk about the increase use of civil defense corps and the police. General Dempsey said that he's pulling a lot of his forces out of the center of the city so they can take over the middle. What makes you see they are ready for them to take that kind of a role?

Wolfowitz: You see as you go, I mean, it's almost condescending to use the training wheels on a bicycle analogy cause these people are not children and they are facing situations of great danger, but unless you give them a chance to practice their skills to go out there and face things on their own you'll never know what they can do. I think we're proceeding in a careful way. We're certainly not going to leave them on their own when they can't handle things. Clearly it's better for us if they are on the frontlines and it's better for them and better for their country.

And when difficult work has to be done, like going into a mosque to arrest anti-coalition cleric or pick up weapons. If Americans have to do it we'll do it. But it is so much better for Iraqis to be doing that kind of thing.

Q: What do you know about the bombings in Irbil?

Wolfowitz: Only that there were two very severe ones. They seemed to have attacked in almost the same time period a PUK headquarters and a KDP headquarters. They attacked precisely at a time when people were gathered to celebrate one of the holiest days in the Muslim calendar -- the Eid al-Adha. It just speaks volumes about what these extremists are all about. They are not about Islam, they're not about Muslims. They are about their own fanatical view of the world and they will kill to try to advance it.

But we're winning, and they are losing.