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Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

February 02, 2004

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Joint Media Availability

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Wolfowitz: I'll try to be brief.

Q: We've heard that before.

Wolfowitz: You've heard it before. [Laughter]

Anyway, I think the Arabic that we kept hearing today is "Al Iraq al Jedid", "The New Iraq", and it seems to me it is very significant that that is in a lot of people's minds including that officer who was saluting us down at the Northern Iraq Training Center and the people we've talked with today.

I found the whole ceremony at the House of Hope extremely moving. The suffering that these people have been through is obviously dramatic. The needs are enormous. The willingness to pitch in together to get that done.

Tragically, by the way, the two Japanese civilians who were killed have kept that project from growing as rapidly as we would like to. Another example of where the terrorists target success, but I'm hopeful the Japanese will come and it will become the City of Hope and not just the Village of Hope.

We had to rush through it, but that training base for the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps I found very encouraging, as I think I've said to you folks already. I think the Civil Defense Corps is going to be a real key to establishing stability here. It's the real answer to many of the problem areas that were mentioned around the table here because the answer to militias is to have disciplined security forces that are under unified command and we're training those people and doing it with impressive speed. I must say I'm pleased by the progress that's been made since I was here before.

I've seen the handover issues first-hand both up in Mosul and here in Kirkuk. It's like wrenching a limb away I think to take these good guys out for the people here, but I feel very very good about the thought that's

gone into the handover already and the fact that we're able to go around with the successor commanders right next to the people that are leaving. I think before long they'll say - who was Odierno? And who was Petraeus? But we won't forget you. [Laughter]

This city here is in some respects a model and if it's successful it will be a real model. I think it was interesting, some of it may have been in the translation but I think what the Deputy Governor was saying at the end was yes, there are problems but if we hadn't had some successes this place would have already fallen apart in the last nine months and it's almost a miracle that we're sitting here and we're arguing whether the success was large or small instead of looking at a catastrophic failure.

But I really do think that addressing the kinds of problems that are evident that because of the close communal relations between people of different religions, people of different persuasions of the Muslim religion, people of different ethnicity, that one, the city is successful. Remember, we're talking about 1.8 million people. It's not a small town.

Mosul, what's -- 800,000. It's still pretty big.

I think the effect on the whole region, the whole country is very important so I'm encouraged.

The most discouraging news of the last couple of days is the bombing up in Irbil and it really is incredible the evil that these people perpetrate. They took advantage of the Eid al-Adha, which is one of the holiest days for Muslims, when people were assembled to celebrate and security they knew would be relaxed and they go and kill Muslims. How that fanaticism can be done in the name of any religion is beyond me.

But like so many of these previous events and I think I said this in Wuerzburg, September 11th has united Americans; and Bali united Indonesians; and this terrible thing is going to unite Iraqis. It's not going to have the effect the terrorists seem to want.

We have a lot of tough work ahead of us but we have some amazing people doing it and I think some very good Iraqi partners.

We'll take a few questions.

Q: [Inaudible – Re: Irbil bombing]

Wolfowitz: No. I think the only thing I've heard is that they apparently posed as journalists. Sorry. It may or may not be true. That's the report we got, which of course is the way Masud was murdered in Afghanistan.

It does tell you something about these people, however they are, that they're not simply after Americans. They're after anything that is successful in this part of the world. And for Ansar al Islam the targets aren't just Americans, the targets are Kurds, and Shia and anyone who is cooperating to build this new Iraq. The more successful we are the more we can expect them to go after those things that represent success. But we're gaining ground and they're losing ground every day.

Q: What are the chances [inaudible]? What can you do to resolve the kinds of questions we heard today? The Shia calling for direct elections. That's not American policy. The Sunnis saying they feel like they are being

discriminated against. What does America and the policy from the military standpoint need to do?

Wolfowitz: Several things. These are not unknown problems to us. We're working on them. I think we know the outlines of solutions. One line of action is in fact developing Iraqi security forces that are under disciplined control. I think that's the principal answer to the militia problem which was referred to both directly and alluded to in some of the other complaints. Ultimately we want to disarm or demobilize militias but you can't do that in a vacuum. You can only do it when you establish security for everybody.

The second line of approach is to work on peaceful restitution, peaceful settlement of the property claims because that is one of the big sources of anxiety.

A third line of attack is what you saw at the Village of Hope. There are some half a million, we estimate, internally displaced persons up north here and as long as those people don't have a place to live they're going to be pushing to go back home. Well going back home is one answer, but building new homes is another answer.

The issue of reconciliation which is a pretty undisguised euphemism for dealing with people who are members of the Ba'ath party and participated in the old regime in some form, who by the way are not uniformly Sunni Arabs. There were Kurds in the business, there were Shia in the business, and there were victims among all the communities. But particularly because de-Ba'athification is widely misunderstood, it's only focused at the top ranks of the Ba'ath party; but also because in some places, and [Arwiji] is one of them, I think, there were an awful lot of people that were in the top ranks of the Ba'ath party. Coming to terms with dinging those people who may have been in the party but who don't have blood on their hands, who weren't guilty of real crimes I think is going to be very important for persuading them that the new Iraq is something they want to participate in. Certainly we want maximum participation. That's going to be a key to success.

Finally, and I only partially understand it, but I think what the last gentleman was referring to about elections is Colonel Mayville and the folks from CPA and from Army Civil Affairs have accomplished a kind of small miracle, I think in standing up this town council and having it be as representative as it is. But it's not based on elections. It would be hard to know how to have an election right now since you don't even know who's a legal resident of the city.

Odierno: Sir, I would add to that, if you listen to them talk they all believe they're the majority and that's the problem with elections.

As you saw, the representative of the Turkmen population says we're under-represented. The Arabs said they were under-represented. The Kurds would say they are under-represented. If you talk to them, they're all 60 percent of the population. So that's the problem with elections, because you have to establish some sort of census so you understand what the elections are.

So we did a caucus system that was used here, and I think pretty successful. They had some say representing their community and we've balanced it out about the best we can. And it's fairly close to being balanced. There are objections that the Kurds have a bit of a majority right now here, and they don't feel comfortable with that.

But I would also stress it's an interim government. It's a government until we can establish the laws and establish the final process that we will go through to establish a permanent government.

So I think as an interim government it's worked extremely well.

Wolfowitz: And I'd just add, to think about it too, getting fair elections is an important part of it and it's going to take time to get those for the reasons General Odierno just mentioned. Plus the fact that in many parts of the country there's too much violence to hold an election.

But I think the other strand is that word justice that you heard repeated many times. It's not that elections by themselves will settle things. What will really settle things is for people to be convinced that there's a system that will treat everyone fairly no matter who wins the elections. And they never experienced that before. There's a certain fear, it used to be winner take all, and we have to help them build a system where everyone has rights no matter who the winner is.

So at the same time you work to get fair elections, you've got to work to get a system that isn't, where elections aren't a life and death matter.

Q: I wanted to ask you about --

Wolfowitz: Him and then you. I'm known to misspeak, okay? [Laughter]

I never make that mistake. [Laughter]

I meant him and then him. [Laughter]

Q: I wanted to ask you about the Stryker attack, both the effect on you personally. You had a close call at the Al Rashid hotel. This is not the same thing, but it's an attack on the kind of vehicle you had just climbed out of a few miles away, not long afterwards.

I also want to ask you whether it gives you any greater confidence in the Stryker. There was some controversy as to whether it could take an --

Wolfowitz: If there's any news in that attack since unfortunately attacks are not news, that goes to the discussion we had. I think it's pretty hard to visit a division around here on a day when they're not attacked somewhere. It's a dangerous business. We know that.

The real news is that the Stryker performed exactly as we believed it would and stopped that round. It's a good vehicle. Obviously for the work they have to do here, very much superior to a tracked vehicle. I think you may have noticed that just in the smooth and quiet ride that we had. So it's a basically good news story to me.

Odierno: I would add, as you know -- or might now know -- they worked for me for about 60 days in a tough operation in Samarra and also performed very well down there, the Stryker --

Q: Is that the one that took an IED hit?

Odierno: It took an IED and 24 hours later was operational. Nobody was injured. The driver had a minor injury.

So it really has performed very well and the ability of the Infantry, that they have an Infantry-based organization to operate both in a city environment as well as outside of the city has really proven very valuable in this fight. So I think they'll do very well up there.

Q: Can you go back to Irbil, and just really what you're seeing in terms of the threat changing. This was a significant change in the [inaudible]. It was very coordinated. [Inaudible]. What do you see in terms of organization there? Do you know anything? Not even that particularly, but where do you see the threat changing? How much do you think [inaudible] involved in this? It's a larger question of changing threat.

Wolfowitz: First of all I think one of the things about this event was it was, as I gather, a pretty radical departure from normal security practices for both the PUK and the KDP. And it was because it was an unusual holiday, and I think they couldn't imagine that people would attack on exactly those sort of circumstances. So it's not news that those people are under attack. Barham Salih who many of you know was the target of an assassination attempt a couple of years ago. I remember that one because I had been on the phone with him just a few minutes before he went out. That attack we were pretty certain was from Ansar al Islam. These people have been around for quite some time making trouble for quite some time.

One of the things that's coming through in the briefings we're getting is that as a proportion of the problem they are growing, but that's mainly because the former regime part of the problem, which is still the majority, is declining. I wouldn't say it's because Ansar is necessarily growing, but the viciousness is dramatic and the determination to try to disrupt progress in this country is dramatic. But I don't think they're going to succeed, just as they haven't succeeded in destabilizing Turkey with those terrible attacks they did earlier.

But who they are precisely, hopefully we'll learn more, but I'd be speculating right now.

Q: Do you think the goal is the same as former regime elements, to get the Americans out?

Wolfowitz: It's so hard to understand the ultimate goal of the people who simply kill in every direction. I think they, my sense is, and now we're making -- without knowing who did it, but when I look at the people who did the terrible bombing in Bali and then killed more Indonesians in Jakarta and the people who killed Jews and Muslims and Christians in Istanbul and the people who killed people of all faiths in the World Trade Center, and you know what the list looks like. Their goal seems to be to take the Muslim world in particular back to a sort of medieval, fanatical view of life. And progress is their enemy and freedom is their enemy. Where they see it, they attack it. What they think they're going to produce by it isn't clear to me but I think they're losers.

Q: Can I ask General Odierno one more?

We keep hearing that a lot of intelligence is coming since the capture of Saddam. Can you tell us anything about the character of the guerrillas that you didn't know before the capture of Saddam?

Odierno: I don't think so. It kind of gets to the last question that was asked too. What we're seeing is that the threat is different and we have to look at it from a different perspective. I break it down into several groups. One is a nationalistic threat which is what I call probably some of the former FRE, but are joining with other people who kind of just want coalition forces out of Iraq. Then you have some other elements that are from the outside, however you want to define it, AQ (Al Qaeda) or AI (Ansar al Islam), who want to defeat coalition

presence in the Middle East for a number of reasons.

First, the effect that we could have on the future of the Middle East as well as the effect we're having here in Iraq, which if you look around has an awful lot of potential. I think there's some worry around the rest of the Middle East potentially of the potential of this great country here. Not of the rest of the Middle East, but of the AQ and Al. So I think you see them starting to conduct these attacks.

What I'm seeing on a daily basis has been a definite shift. The shift in attacks are now going to bigger IEDs to make a bigger statement, as well as more attacks on the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, the Iraqi National Police, and just plain Iraqi civilians. And what you're seeing is they're trying to destabilize the country from moving forward. They think if they can do that now there's still a chance that they can have control of what goes on here in the future. If they let it go on much longer they will lose control and it's going to move on its own to a new Iraq and I think they're afraid of that and the effect it could have in the Middle East as a whole.

That's what I'm seeing on a daily basis.

The attacks on coalition forces are going down. There's been a little bit of an increase of attacks on Iraqi civilians and Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. In my mind that talks to their success, that they are in fact every day out there with us; they're conducting independent operations; they're conducting independent raids.

One of the reasons our intelligence is getting better, it's not only based on the capture of Saddam but based on the fact that we have Iraqi police and Iraqi Civil Defense Corps out there every day who they like to go to and give information to. It's for us become now a whole new way to get information.

We've stood up joint operation centers in every one of our major cities where you have coalition forces, Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, Iraqi National Police all operating together with communications collecting intelligence and then coordinating our efforts against that. We've just started that in the last two to three weeks and it's already shown great success.

So that's the next step as we move forward in putting Iraqis in charge of their security. As Mr. Wolfowitz has said, I think that's an extremely important way ahead. I think that's the goal, the key.

Q: Thanks very much.

Wolfowitz: Let me -- It's a chance also to say thank you. You've done a magnificent job. I know you're success will be very good. We're going to miss you.

Odierno: Thank you, sir.