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Wolfowitz Says U.S., Turkey Share Common Vision on Future of Iraq

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz interview with CNN Turk

"The United States and Turkey have a common vision about the future of Iraq, which is that Iraq has to remain a single country, that the national government has to be in charge of the foreign policy and in charge of the army and in control of the borders," Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz told CNN Turk January 29.

Wolfowitz added that "some degree" of "federalism or federation is probably going to be inevitable, but that should be based on administrative and geographic lines, not on ethnic lines."

He rejected the goals of Kurdish separatists in Northern Iraq: "Our message to the Kurds is, your future doesn't lie in separating yourselves from the Iraqis. Your future lies in helping us to ensure that the future Iraq is a free and democratic country."

"It's understandable given the history of that country [Iraq] that the Kurds are seeking some degree of autonomy," Wolfowitz said, "but we think that autonomy has got to be within a national framework." Making sure all people's rights are respected in Iraq is "in everyone's interest," he said, but setting up a separate Kurdish state is "not going to work."

Between the United States and Turkey "there's complete agreement on the need to eliminate Northern Iraq as a sanctuary" for the PKK, a Kurdish terrorist organization responsible for many terrorist attacks in Turkey.

Turkey is heeding its responsibilities and interests in the region "in a magnificent way," Wolfowitz said. "The decision by Turkey to contribute troops to the stabilization effort in Iraq, was a very welcome, useful thing. It's in suspension now, obviously, but that's an important thing."

He said President Bush and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan "had a very, very good meeting" January 28 and the United States and Turkey "are working together as partners." Turkey is supporting the U.S. rotation of troops in Iraq "in every way we need, and we're very grateful and appreciative of that."

He said the Turkish government has also "stepped up to its responsibilities" concerning Cyprus. "It's a little early to predict success," he said, but I think we're very encouraged by the trend."

Regarding the search for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Wolfowitz rejected the notion that the United States misled the world. "I think maybe we overestimated how far along he [Saddam Hussein] was with some of his weapons of mass destruction programs," he acknowledged. But the U.S. estimate of the Iraqi threat was shared by the intelligence services of many countries, including some countries that opposed the war, he said. "You

have to act based on what you know ahead of time, not on what you're going to learn later."

Following is the Defense Department transcript:

(begin transcript)

U.S. Department of Defense News Briefing
Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz
Thursday, January 29, 2004

(Interview with Ali Birand and Cengiz Candar, CNN Turk.)

Question: Welcome, Mr. Deputy Secretary.

Wolfowitz: It's good to be here.

Q: You sir, six months or seven months ago, in May you said let's have a Turkey that steps up and says we made a mistake.

Do you believe that Turkey acknowledge this mistake? What has changed?

Wolfowitz: Eight months ago, actually. What I was saying is, and I think it has happened, that it's important for Turkey to step up to its responsibilities and to its own interests in the region. I think Turkey has done that in a magnificent way. I think the eight months since we met last, a lot has happened. We've seen a whole anti-American opposition in Iraq based on the old regime. We're in the middle of fighting those people, but we made some big successes. The capture of Saddam Hussein himself of course is one of the biggest.

There's been enormous progress in Iraq on the political front and on the economic front, and also the decision by Turkey to contribute troops to the stabilization effort in Iraq, was a very welcome, useful thing. It's in suspension now, obviously, but that's an important thing.

But looking beyond Iraq, too, I think one of the unfortunate tragic things that's happened in those eight months is that Turkey's been attacked by terrorists just as we've been attacked by terrorists. I think the President's comments on that yesterday after the meeting with Prime Minister Edrogan. We both had this experience of terrorists killing innocent citizens of ours.

I think the purpose of the terrorists, both here and in Turkey, is to try to divide Turks from Americans and Turks from Turks, and I'm pleased to say that it seems to me it's had the opposite effect. Turkey is more unified against terrorists than before these terrible acts. Certainly we're unified together in dealing with them, and I know the President had a very, very good meeting with the Prime Minister yesterday. So I think we're, our Turkish-American relations are demonstrating their influence and their importance to this critical region at a critical time.

Q: Iraq has been the ground divergence between Turkey and the U.S... (Inaudible.) You say they are overcome at the moment. But still, Turkey always raises up sensitivities concerning, for example establishment of federation-based on ethnic and religious grounds. So do you share the sensitivities of Turkey on Iraq, in order to prevent damage to bilateral relations?

Wolfowitz: I think the United States and Turkey have a common vision about the future of Iraq which is that it has to remain a single country, that the national government has to be in charge of the foreign policy and in charge of the army and in control of the borders. That obviously given Iraq's history some degree of I guess you'd call it federalism or federation is probably going to be inevitable, but that should be based on administrative and geographic lines, not on ethnic lines.

Our message to the Kurds is your future doesn't lie in separating yourselves from the

Iraqis. Your future lies in helping us to ensure that the future Iraq is a free and democratic country.

If I can move to that level I think it's very important to mention, I guess it was two months ago before he went to the United Kingdom, our President gave a very important speech about the importance of democracy in the Muslim world and in the Middle East in particular, and the importance of what we're doing in Iraq to help develop that idea.

Of course Turkey is the sterling example of a Muslim country that has embraced secular democracy. It's an example and also Iraq's close neighbor. I think Turkey has a very important role to play in shaping that future.

Q: We'll get to Iraq and the Kurdish issue, but I want to get back to can we say that now it is all forgiven, all forgotten, we are opening a new page and the past is past? I mean what has changed since?

Wolfowitz: The point eight months ago, the point now is let's look to the future. We're not looking to forgive or not forgive. We're looking to build a future in the Middle East and in the whole region that is positive for democracy, positive for the values that Turkey and the United States share. I think we are working together as partners. That is the important point.

Q: Is looking for, what is the watershed during that eight months that changed the whole scope of the --

Wolfowitz: There are many things. I think I've cited some of them already. I think Turkey stepping up even before a U.N. resolution and saying we're ready to offer troops if you want them. I think actually the subtlety Turkey showed in suspending that offer when the time wasn't right. The way Turkey responded to terrorism.

It's not a single watershed. In fact I don't expect watersheds with a country where our relations cover as many different aspects and --

Q: We're back to square one, and --

Wolfowitz: We're beyond square one. Really, it's very important because the whole region is at a turning point in history. It has to be a turning point. The last 20-30 years of the so-called status quo in the Middle East has bred terrorism, has bred instability. Turkey's suffered from it, the United States has suffered from it. The change in Iraq is an opportunity to begin turning that status quo in a positive direction. It's a historic turning point. That's what the President said in London when he spoke at White Hall about the need for democracy in that region, and Turks understand that. I think you've understood that for a long time. I think Turkey and the United States and frankly the U.K. and other coalition countries participating are natural partners in understanding the importance of a free and democratic Iraq for the whole region.

Q: So would you qualify the relationship between Turkey and the United States as strategic partnership, as it used to be defined?

Wolfowitz: Yes, but it's a very different kind of strategic partnership.

Q: What kind of --

Wolfowitz: In the old days -- it's always been a mixture of values and hard cooperation, if you want to talk about the military sphere. But in the old days it was very much dominated by the military threat from the Soviet Union and our cooperation as military allies. I think in this era the softer side, if you want to call it that, the philosophical side, the common values, the common beliefs in secular democracy, is much more important than the concrete military things, but the military cooperation is another -- you mentioned turning points. They're not turning points, but we are now making extensive use of Incirlik and other Turkish facilities in this massive rotation of American troops.

Q: (Inaudible.)

Wolfowitz: It's [not] mature. We're moving -- think about it this way. A city of roughly a quarter of a million people moving in and out of Iraq with its rotation of American troops. Turkey is supporting that in every way we need and we're very grateful and appreciative of that.

Q: It seems interesting. A new relationship (Inaudible.), a new relationship, not only on the military relationship but more within the greater Middle East. Where do you place Turkey?

Wolfowitz: For nearly 100 years now it's been a leader in the Muslim world in demonstrating that democracy is totally compatible with Muslim culture, with Muslim religion. It's critical because of its, it is Iraq's one democratic neighbor. And it's a neighbor.

It's a very important neighbor from an economic perspective. The economic relations that are developing between Turkey and Iraq, and I think particularly between Southeastern Turkey and Northern Iraq are contributing to the stabilization of Iraq. I think they're also contributing to closer overall relations between Turkey and Iraq. That's a very positive thing.

Q: In order for Turkey to play a stabilizing role in the area, in the greater Middle East concept [with] the United States, it needs to stabilize itself in this respect. The EU piece is very important. How do you find the prospects for Turkey's EU bid?

Wolfowitz: I'm very encouraged by what I hear from my friends at the State Department about the progress that's been made toward a Cyprus settlement, and clearly that would be a major step encouraging Turkey's accession to the EU.

When you think of all the different challenges Turkey faces at the same time today, it's impressive, but every challenge is an opportunity. I think there may be an opportunity here to move to a settlement on Cyprus that would benefit every --

Q: -- role for all that. We've heard that you've been very active, encouraging the Turkish side to carry on with those changes.

Wolfowitz: I think we've made very clear, I think the President did again yesterday that we think there's an opportunity here, with the leadership of the Secretary General of the U.N., looking for settlement is something we should all take advantage of and I think this Turkish government has stepped up to its responsibilities. So it's a little early to predict success, but I think we're very encouraged by the trend.

Q: Are you positive there is (Inaudible.) question be reached by or before May?

Q: Is it so near now?

Wolfowitz: Well, we hope so. We certainly hope so.

Q: Have you been engaged?

Wolfowitz: I think we have been engaging as a government, yes.

Q: Because the Turks are trying to get the American side, get more involved in the whole process. Do you think this Administration will be really pushing both sides together and find a formula?

Wolfowitz: I know your Foreign Minister is going to be speaking with Secretary Powell later today and I think I should let them work that out but I think that's going to be a major subject of their conversation. It's very important to us and we see real opportunity here.

Q: Let's get back to the Kurds. It's a bad subject. What's going to happen with Kirkuk? I mean who is going to have Kirkuk?

Wolfowitz: We think Kirkuk should belong to the people of Kirkuk. If there are changes to be made there, they should be made peacefully, in accordance with law, not by force. We've been working very hard over the last eight months to try to make sure that it happens that way.

There are issues there. I think you know very well. There was a policy of forced expulsion of Kurds which leaves some very critical issues to be settled, but they should be settled peacefully in accordance with law.

Q: So that means you don't see Kirkuk as a part of the future for the Kurdish federated area (Inaudible.)?

Wolfowitz: Ambassador Bremer has a very tough job right now working with all the Iraqi parties to come up with a transition administrative law, but let me go back, at the risk of repeating what I said earlier.

I think whatever kind of federated arrangements develop in Iraq it is very important that it be within the framework of a single country, with national controls of defense policy and foreign policy, and that it's understandable given the history of that country that the Kurds are seeking some degree of autonomy but we think that autonomy has got to be within a national framework and in fact it's in everyone's interest, including our interest and the Kurdish interest, to make sure that that national government is one that respects the rights of all its people -- not to try to separate out. That's not going to work.

Q: So within this (Inaudible.). Where do you place the (Inaudible.)? Is there (Inaudible.)?

Wolfowitz: I think the way in which that government of a new Iraq treats all of its citizens is going to be a test of whether it really meets that standard of freedom and democracy. We're concerned that women be given a full and equal place. They're not a minority, they're actually, unfortunately because of how many men were killed by Saddam Hussein, they're a clear majority in that country. It's very important they have full rights as equal citizens. I think the same thing is true of Turkamen and Caldians and Sunis and Shia. It's a challenge. It is a very diverse country. But I think they've all suffered under Saddam Hussein. I think they all understand from that bitter experience the benefits of being treated equally and fairly. Now it's up to all of us to work to convince them that each one of them will be.

Q: Simplify for my viewers, the Turks are saying that please, we don't want to see an independent Kurdistan. Washington, do you agree with that? That's what you are saying. Two, no ethnical federation. No separation based on religious beliefs. You are on the same line, if I'm not wrong.

Wolfowitz: Absolutely. We want to see Iraq preserved as a single integrated country. There will be some, political scientists call it devolution of power, I guess you'd call it local governance in important matters. I think that's one way to assure people that they won't once again be oppressed by a Baghdad-based dictatorship. But for everybody's sake including the sake of the Iraqis it needs to be a single country. The oil resources of the country need to be regarded as a part of the national patrimony to be shared equally among people.

Q: So in a way your views do meet the Turkish views on that.

Wolfowitz: Absolutely. I think we have -- I believe we have a completely shared view with Turkey about what the future should look like. Getting from here to the future is not simple. We recognize that too, and I think your government recognizes that. But I believe we've made progress already in the eight months since the liberation of Baghdad and we'll keep moving that way.

I think it's also important for people to understand, because there's been so much talk, appropriately, about this goal now of a transition to a sovereign Iraqi government July 1st, that that doesn't mean the end of American influence in Iraq by any means, or the end of international interests in Iraq. In fact one of our goals, and I think we've made progress, is to get the United Nations engaged in shaping the future of Iraq because I think the whole world has an interest, shared with Turkey, shared with the United States, in preserving

Iraq as a single unified country.

Q: So you don't think that you pushed the situation, where you have, to make preferences between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds?

Wolfowitz: No. There may be specific disagreements over specific issues but I believe --

Q: Between whom?

Wolfowitz: Look, we have a lot of complicated issues going on here, but what makes me feel very optimistic is I think what Kurds want is freedom and democracy. Those are values Turks understand. The Kurds that I talked to say they understand Turkey's absolutely legitimate requirement that Northern Iraq not once again become a haven for terrorists that are attacking Turkey. We're in agreement on that.

Q: What are you going to say about that? PKK. We're talking about PKK.

Wolfowitz: One thing we're not going to do is let them change their name and pretend they're a different organization -- I think what, this is the third name change. But we've been working closely with Turkey for years now including with the capture of Ocalan, we understand it's a terrorist organization. We understand what Turkey has suffered from that organization attacking Turkey from Northern Iraq among other places. But we have a strategic issue, too. The immediate enemy are those anti-coalition forces that are attacking Americans even as we speak here today. And so we have to prioritize in terms of time. But there's complete agreement on the need to eliminate Northern Iraq as a sanctuary.

Q: The Turks are complaining, they're saying that well you promised us you will do, even force them out of the country even militarily, and you are not doing anything. Did you send a message to those people in Northern Iraq saying hey, you will not stay here? Is this message conveyed to them?

Wolfowitz: I think that message is clear and I think Turkey has made some very valuable offers, too, in terms of amnesty for at least the lower levels in that organization to encourage them to reintegrate.

The only issue really is the issue of the timing. As I said, our priorities are --

Q: Timing, just the timing?

Wolfowitz: Timing.

(Pause for break.)

Q: Paul, a number of people do say that Kurds went too far, too quickly, too fast. Do you share this view? It's normal. People do ask this.

Wolfowitz: I think even for those of us who have been following developments in Iraq for many years, I think you couldn't help but be struck by the exhilaration with which people greeted the liberation and then the exhilaration again when Saddam Hussein was captured.

If you suffer the way the Iraqi people have suffered for 35 years it's a very turbulent time, and it takes a little while for that to settle down and people get their feet on the ground. So I think it's probably important to keep that perspective if we react to individual events. But I feel we're on a good track.

Q: You personally are blamed or accused by some that there was no post-war planning. Is the ongoing resistance a big surprise to you? And how (Inaudible.)?

Wolfowitz: There is an enormous amount of post-war planning. That is one of these myths I don't know where it came from. But the basic problem is it's not post-war yet. This regime which murdered and tortured Iraqis for 35 years has continued to fight, in fact it's

basically those same people who continue to fight even after Saddam Hussein has been captured.

One of the pieces of our post-war planning was in fact to build up Iraqi security forces as quickly as possible. We're now, if you count the police and the facilities protection people and the newly created Civil Defense Corps and the border guards and the army -- by the way, that's five different forces. For no planning, that's quite a lot. There are some 200,000 Iraqis now in different ways working for the security of their country, and many of them unfortunately being killed.

But as a key I think to Iraq's future security, is for Iraqis to take on those responsibilities themselves. They're doing so. They're doing so at an impressive rate.

Q: You were not expecting this resistance, right? For you it should be a surprise.

Wolfowitz: I don't think anyone should be surprised by the ruthlessness of this regime. Saddam Hussein didn't kill hundreds of thousands of Iraqis all by himself. He had a gang of thugs and murderers around him who did that kind of killing, and they're very much the same people who are at the heart of the killing that goes on today.

It's interesting though, it's the first insurgency I know of where the main tactic was murder for hire. They have a lot of money and they dole it out to unemployed young men to take a shot for a few hundred dollars. But they seem to have less money and fewer people willing to take that kind of stupid risk. We have more and more, and this is the important thing, more and more Iraqis out in front doing the fighting for themselves.

Q: Now we jump to the key question which we are told by some celestial powers to ask you. Why did you mislead the world opinion on WMD?

Wolfowitz: Repeat the question. Why did we do what?

Q: Why did you mislead the world opinion on WMD?

Wolfowitz: We didn't mislead the world. What we have been saying, what we were saying all along, was the unanimous conclusion of our various intelligence services. I think if you go and check you will find that it was an opinion that was shared with us by the intelligence services of many countries including some countries who oppose this war. It's also very important if you look at the report of Dr. Kay and his people that while we don't know what he did with the programs that he had, and there are some things we still have to find out, it's also true that he was not complying with the U.N. resolutions that said he has to show everything he has and he has to cooperate fully with inspectors. So there are still some things there that we don't understand fully.

But you have to act based on what you know ahead of time, not on what you're going to learn later.

Q: But Paul, I feel, I thought at the beginning, yes, the United States has the right, has to intervene because this is some -- but now I have question marks. People do think there wasn't enough evidence. Perceptions are realities. Now the perception is really getting in a way like Cengiz is saying that with little evidence the United States stepped in. This uneasiness is there. Let's face it.

Wolfowitz: I think people need to understand that intelligence, when you're dealing with a dictator like Saddam Hussein who kills people if they tell you the truth, who cuts out people's tongues if they talk too much, that you're never going to have a clear picture of what's going on inside. Before the first Gulf War in 1991 we didn't think he was very far along with his nuclear program at all, and U.N. inspectors got in in 1991, we discovered it was a very extensive program. So we underestimated it that time.

What has been clear, what was clear was a pattern of 12 years of defying some 17 or 18 U. N. resolutions. A man who with his rhetoric and his actions was in a threatening posture. And it was a threat that challenged the will of the international community. I think maybe we overestimated how far along he was with some of his weapons of mass destruction

programs. The Iraqis will tell you we underestimated how many people were murdered in mass graves. That was a weapon of mass destruction.

We're where we are now, and I think the very important thing is that where we are now it's important to work together to build a free and democratic Iraq because that is going to be a positive contribution. However we got here, it's going to be a positive contribution to improving the whole region.

Q: If you don't have any questions, I'll have the last one.

Q: Go ahead.

Q: Okay, last question. The Middle East. Greater Middle East Project. That's something that people do not understand well. What is this and, because we do hear from the President's meeting with the Prime Minister, which was (Inaudible.), good people are very happy and people are telling us that in this Greater Middle East Project Turkey has a very important place and a very important --

What is this project and where do you put Turkey in this whole area?

Wolfowitz: I think the best thing I could say is that it's a view of an evolution in the Middle East. Not that suddenly the Middle East is going to be transformed into an image of the United States or an image of Turkey.

I go back 20 years, I think it was almost exactly 20 years ago I became Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia. In 1982 Japan was the only democracy in East Asia. Japan, by the way, I don't want to press this analogy too far, but like Turkey I think a very important example for the rest of the region. And example matters in this case. But over the last 20 years we've seen the Philippines go through a democratic transition, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia. Each one of them different. Some of them more successful than others. But it's a trend now in that part of the world. People no longer say that Asians are incapable of democracy.

I look forward to a day ten years from now when people no longer say Arabs are incapable of democracy. And when one sees a trend in the Arab world, that Turkey is no longer the only Muslim democracy in the Middle East, that there are others, and the ones that aren't there yet are moving in that direction.

Q: It is so precious for you?

Wolfowitz: We had a wakeup call on September 11th, an understanding that the way things had been going in the Middle East for the last 30 years was not healthy. The so-called stability that was provided by these dictators of various stripes was a stability that was breeding terrorism, and something has to change. I think it's a very important part of moving the whole world in a direction where freedom and democracy triumph over terrorism.

Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

(end transcript)

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