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Update on Iraq

Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Foreign Press Center Briefing

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COL. MACHAMER: Good morning, everyone. In our continuing series of special briefings for correspondents from Arab and Muslim countries, we are pleased to have with us today the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, [Mr. Doug Feith](#). And we also welcome reporters from New York who are participating via DVC -- I think there may be somebody there.

Mr. Feith's topic today is the future of Iraq as outlined in yesterday's speech by Secretary Rumsfeld to the Council of Foreign Relations. And we respectfully ask that you focus your questions on that topic. He has an opening statement and will then take your questions. As always, please wait for the microphone and identify yourself and media organization.



UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: Good morning. It's a pleasure to have a chance to meet with you this morning.

Last year the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development within the United Nations Development Program issued a report. And there were a number of Arab intellectuals who put this report together and they identified what they called, "the freedom deficit" as a key factor holding back the development of Arab countries.

I will just read you a sentence or two from the report. They said that, "The wave of democracy that transformed governance in Latin America and East Asia in the 1980s, and Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s, has barely reached the Arab states. This 'freedom deficit' undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development."

Now, Iraq's current situation provides an opportunity for a large Arab country to address these issues. Iraq has the chance to make a fresh start and can demonstrate that such a country can become politically and economically prosperous. Iraq can build on its natural advantages, which is a talented population and huge natural resources. This makes for an exciting moment in world affairs right now, and it is an opportunity that we are focused on.

Now, the work that we're doing in Iraq has led a number of people to raise questions about the administration's position on nation-building. And the term has gotten a lot of attention, in part because when the President was running for office, he criticized nation-building, and I've been asked many times by people if the administration doesn't like nation-building, then what, exactly, are we doing in Iraq and what is our attitude toward our responsibilities there. Similar questions were raised about Afghanistan.

So I think it's a good moment to clarify the point. We don't like the term "nation-building" in large part because it is, in

our view, disrespectful of the people in the country. In our view, the Iraqi nation is going to be built by Iraqis, and it is not for non-Iraqis to build Iraq. The role that we are playing there is to help set conditions that will allow Iraqis to build their own country in their own way.

The first step, the first most important step in creating these conditions was, of course, the destruction of Saddam's tyranny. And this has been accomplished.

The collapse of the regime, of course, was accompanied by disorder, which was not a surprise. The disorder was magnified by, first of all, the release by Saddam Hussein's regime since last fall of thousands of criminals from Iraqi jails; and, secondly, by deliberate efforts by remnants of the Ba'ath Party, remnants of the Iraqi regime, to make it as difficult as possible for the coalition to stabilize the situation. And this has been seen mainly, but not exclusively, in Baghdad.

The first and foremost responsibility of the coalition at this point in this task of setting conditions is to restore security. The coalition has to protect the efforts of Iraqis to reconstruct their country from Ba'athists who are trying, as I noted, to create chaos and produce nostalgia for Saddam, and also from anti-democratic interference from neighboring countries. It will be difficult for a free political life in Iraq to flourish until the conditions are set, but it is a project that we're working on. I'll give you a few statistics momentarily to try to illustrate something about our efforts there.

Now, I know that many people in the countries in the Middle East, the countries that are your readership, disagreed with the coalition's decision to use force to enforce the UN Security Council's resolutions regarding Iraq and its disarmament. But whatever the views were about how the war got started, I hope that everybody appreciates that this is an opportunity to create a free and a prosperous Iraq, and it's an opportunity that we should not miss and we should do everything we can to increase its chances for success.

Now, what I'd like to do is quickly run through a few items that one could call a "situation report," and give you a few thoughts about what's happening in different sectors of our work in Iraq. And, first of all, on security, there are around 45,000 troops now in Baghdad, about 21,000 of who are actively involved in security operations. There is an effort being made throughout the country to work with Iraqi police to bring them back to the job to work with coalition forces. There are 500, or so, daily patrols in Baghdad. The Department of State is recruiting 1,000 police advisors and trainers.

We have U.S. military police personnel growing from around 1,800 to 4,000. And we have been soliciting nearly 50 countries for police advisors -- a number of whom have already accepted. And efforts are being made to restart the courts and get the judicial system functioning. There is a major effort that the United States and its coalition partners have underway to recruit additional coalition partners to send in stabilization forces. Fifteen countries have agreed to provide stabilization forces for Iraq.

We hope by July to have two, perhaps three, additional divisions come to help contribute to security in the country. There will be a multinational division commanded by the British. There will be a multinational division commanded by the Poles, and we have recently gotten some good reports that there are one, perhaps two, additional countries that are thinking of organizing divisions to perform stability operations in the country.

With regard to basic human services, there is a very important point here that I don't think is widely understood. Some of the basic human services in Iraq are in very bad shape: water, electricity in different parts of the country, hospital services, schools. And there are many people who believe that these institutions are in bad shape because of the war. And the fact is that the war did cause some damage, but the really sorry state of a lot of these institutions goes back before the war. For example, only 60 percent of Iraqis before the war had safe drinking water. About half of Basra's water treatment plants didn't work. Iraq, before the war, produced only 40 percent of its annual grain requirements and 23 percent of children under the age of 5 were malnourished.

Now, in making this point I want to emphasize this was not the case throughout Iraq, and it was not a problem that could be attributed, I think, really, to the UN sanctions because you didn't have this problem and the malnourishment problem in Northern Iraq, which was under Kurdish governance even though Northern Iraq was under the same UN sanctions regime as the rest of the country. The autonomous area in the north under Kurdish governance did not have leaders that chose to abuse and starve their people. And so the argument that this terrible statistic is attributable to the sanctions, I think, is a false argument. Schools were in terrible shape before the war. There was an average of six students per book and 80 percent of schools were in poor condition with up to 180 students per

classroom.

Now, a word on progress to date: Baghdad now has water at about 75 percent of its pre-war level. And Ambassador Bremer's organization, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, and UNICEF are planning to supply clean water to all of the regions of Iraq. There is no food crisis. There are no major epidemics. There is no major health care crisis in Iraq now. The Iraqi grain harvest was just purchased, and the World Food Program is distributing nearly half a million metric tons per month of food. Primary schools opened on May 4th. Other schools will be open shortly and money has been approved, \$10 million, for the purchase of math and science textbooks, reducing the student-book ratio by two-thirds.

With regard to electricity, the power system in the south is actually -- as I understand it -- there are five major power generating stations in the south and they are all now working. Those five have not all been working since before the first Gulf War back in 1991. So there's actually more electricity in the south than was the case for a dozen years. Baghdad is not yet up to pre-war electricity levels yet, but progress is being made daily on that point. It's being worked on very hard.

On oil, partly because of the speed with which the military operations progressed, the oil wells that were wired and were set up for destruction by Saddam Hussein did not get blown up. There were a few that did and were set on fire, but most didn't. And oil production is underway and marketing should begin within the next few weeks. The actual lifting of the oil should begin within the next few weeks. There is dredging: In Umm Qasr, the port is being dredged, and that will facilitate humanitarian relief and commercial transactions.

Payments are being made to pensioners, civil servants. As you probably all know, recently Ambassador Bremer issued an order dissolving the Defense Ministry and the armed forces and telling people who were in the armed forces that they can reapply for admission into the new Iraqi Corps that will be created for Iraq's self-defense. There were severance payments made to the people affected by that dissolution. And civil servants have been getting paid and, as I said, pensioners, likewise. And those payments are being made out of the Iraqi assets that coalition provisional authority controls.

I think there are more statistics I could give, but I think that I'll stop there and take your questions. And if there are other sectors that you would like to ask about, I'll be happy to see if I can come up with specific answers for you.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, this is Umit Enginsoy with Turkey's NTV Television. In terms of your efforts to bring stability to Northern Iraq, what's the status of your relations with Turkey and the Turkish Army?

Do you see Turkey and the Turkish Army as a de-stabilizer in Northern Iraq in terms of their relations with the Kurds? And do you want the Turkish Army to pull back its troops from Northern Iraq? Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: We understand that -- and we understood all along -- that the issue of Turkey's interest in Northern Iraq and the relation with the Kurds was an important subject that we had to address. We are pleased that we were able to work things [out] in the military operations, in our cooperation with the Kurds and in our cooperation with the Turks so that one did not see any major clashes in the north between the Turks and the Kurds, and that the key interests that everybody had -- that the Turks had with regard to the danger of possible, large, refugee flows, and that the Kurds had -- were addressed satisfactorily and without large-scale violence.

So I think that is a success story. And we're pleased that we were able to have the cooperation that we got there. We're working right now on stability. The security situation in the north is reasonably good. There are still some problems. There were some tensions in the area, especially Kurdish-Arab tensions, having to do with property claims. The coalition has announced that there will be an orderly process for resolving property claims. And this is especially important in a place like Kirkuk, where the Saddam Hussein Government made a purposeful policy of driving the residents of various areas in Kirkuk out and replacing them through their policy of "Arabization." And it's created a lot of bitterness and risk, and we're addressing that through an orderly property settlement process that has international participation, and we hope will keep things in an orderly channel, so that we don't have to have any kind of violence, or, you know, rough dislocations.

QUESTION: What about the role of the Turkish army?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: We have a dialogue going with Turkey on the security situation in the area, and I am not going to get into details on that here.

QUESTION: My name is Said Arikat from *Al Quds* newspaper. Mr. Feith, in the last few days we have witnessed increased attacks on American forces in Iraq. Do you attribute this to the dissolution of the Iraqi Armed Forces? And was that wise to do? And in retrospect, do you think that the -- the policy -- not in retrospect -- in effect, the policy of applying "de-Ba'ath-ification" to the entire bureaucratic

infrastructure in Iraq is really wise, in terms of getting Iraq back on its feet since a lot of this talent and ability and technical capabilities, and so on? Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: We view the "de-Ba'ath-ification" policy not only as wise but as indispensable to the effort to create a free Iraq. One of the things that we heard from Iraqis throughout the country was a request -- in some cases it came in the form of a demand -- that we assume our responsibility to liberate the country from the grip of the Ba'ath that's spread in various ways through all the major institutions in the country.

We got a lot of Iraqis coming forward and saying that people would not feel comfortable cooperating with us, talking to us, working with us if they felt that they were going to remain subject to retaliation by the Ba'ath party elements. And it is clear that the future of Iraq as a free country depends on people in the country believing and seeing that the Ba'ath Party is gone and that it's not going to come back, and that the remnants of the Ba'ath Party are not going to be in a position to control the administration of the country or to physically attack the people who are going to be creating a free Iraq. So this is something that was an important element of our policy. It was clearly at the fore of Ambassador Bremer's mind when he got to Baghdad and he made it the first major announcement and project of his when he arrived in the country.

QUESTION: Is that a result of the connection of the (inaudible)?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: No, it's not clear to me why one would even think that there is any connection there at all. The Iraqi Army was not defending the Americans. And I don't see any connection at all. We know that there are elements of the country -- elements of the old regime -- from the military, from the intelligence, from other institutions that remain at-large, hostile, armed, and they're going to try to attack us, and we're going to be defending ourselves, and we're going to be working on, as I said, restoring security by the range of forces that are needed to do that: police forces, military forces, and the kind of gendarmerie forces in the middle. One of the contributions that we've received is Carabinieri forces from Italy and Guardia Civile forces from Spain who will be able to contribute valuably to the security of the country.

QUESTION: Al-Barazi from *Al Watan Al Arabi* magazine. Sir, what about Ayatollah Hakim, who is apparently refusing to disarm his Badr brigade?

And, secondly, you said 15 countries would contribute the -- by 15th of -- by July, to the stabilization force. Is there any Arab country between them, or do you -- are you against any Arab country participating in Iraq's stabilization force?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: I don't have the list in my head of the 15 countries that are participating. There are different ways that different countries are contributing to the stabilization force project: Some are providing light infantry; some are, as I mentioned, providing gendarmerie type forces; some are providing the financial support necessary for some of the countries that want to contribute forces to be able to transport and sustain those forces in Iraq. So what we're getting are different kinds of contributions from different countries, and I do believe there are some Arab countries that are participating.

QUESTION: About Ayatollah Hakim refusing to disarm his Badr brigade?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: The coalition provisional authority just issued an order regarding weapons, and it makes a distinction between heavy weapons and small arms. And it says that procedures will be set up to require persons or organizations that have heavy weapons to turn them in. This will be enforced and it will be enforced throughout the country. The only exceptions will be granted by the coalition provisional authority on a case-by-case basis. But if there are any organizations that have these types of weapons that have to be turned in, they're going to have to turn them in.

With respect to small arms, there are regulations about carrying them in -- you know, on the street, and those regulations too will be enforced as the local commanders put out the procedures. And so the basic answer is that we are going to be getting to the situation where there will be control by the coalition provisional authority of weapons in the country by all of the various individuals and groups. And people will be required to comply with the regulations, as they should in any orderly country.

QUESTION: My name is Khaled Dawoud from Egypt's *Al-Ahram* newspaper. I'd first like to ask on the reasons for the delay in forming an Iraqi government, which is reportedly angering several factions there, and they are seeking like a speeding up of this operation?

And my second question is like, don't you think that the model Iraq now presents to the rest of the Arab world is a very bad model because of the disorder that spread immediately after the fall of the government, in terms of democratization, you know, or any other cooperation with the United States?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: I don't think that any thoughtful person believed that the Saddam Hussein tyranny could collapse without a degree of disorder arising in the aftermath. I mean, that's simply not a serious notion. Everybody understood there would be a degree of disorder. There has been after any revolution or war or any major change in a political situation anywhere, and that was understood.

There has been a serious effort to address this, and the disorder is getting under control. It's not fully under control yet. And, as I said, we're working hard on getting additional security forces in to bring it under control throughout the country.

The security situation throughout the country is uneven. There are places where, essentially, you have security. And then there are places, in particular in Baghdad, where it's more difficult to get a handle completely on the problem yet, but we're making progress steadily.

I don't think at all that the disorder that inevitably follows the collapse of a tyrannical regime becomes, in retrospect, an argument for the tyranny. One of the terrible things about tyranny, you could argue, is that it always leaves a degree of disorder in its wake. But that is a problem that one should lay at the feet of the tyrant and not the liberators. And I think we're actually doing a good job in getting the law and order situation under control.

Now, you asked a --

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: On the issue of organizing an Iraqi administration, we retained the intention and the policy that we have had of getting as large a role, as much responsibility into the hands of Iraqis as early as possible. This has been our view all along. Iraq belongs to the Iraqis. And the coalition has no interest whatever in owning the country and running the country -- there are all kinds of wild reports that one reads about colonialist ambitions and the like, and that's nonsense.

What we are interested in seeing is Iraqi self-government. We want Iraq to achieve freedom and prosperity and a place in the world as a respected country and a country that governs itself proudly.

As I said, we have to set the conditions to make this possible. Defeating and overthrowing Saddam was part of it. Getting rid of the major instruments of repression in the country: the military, the intelligence service, the Ba'ath party -- that's another part of it.

We have been asked by all the Iraqis that we've spoken to who've focused on these kinds of problems, please make sure that the United States and the coalition countries don't simply overthrow Saddam and then run out quickly and leave the country in the hands of the remnants of the former regime because Iraq will never get going properly if that's the case. We're taking that admonition seriously.

Some people had some unrealistic expectations about the ability to turn responsibility over to the Iraqis within a matter of days. We hope within a matter of some weeks that we will be able to begin to put together the leadership of an Iraqi interim administration -- to use the terminology from the recent UN Security Council resolution. And we expect that Iraqis are going to design their own government. We expect they're going to design their own constitution and their own judicial system, their own laws, their own electoral system. And we expect that Iraqis are going to be increasingly in a position to perform administrative responsibility, with respect to ministries that we can transfer to Iraqi control. And this is a project that is underway and we're talking with Iraqis about it. And the speed with which we can progress is going to hinge, to a large extent, on the ability of the Iraqis to get organized and assume the responsibilities that we would like to transfer to them.

COL. MACHAMER: Right here.

QUESTION: Samir Nader with Radio Sawa. I'd like to ask you on Iran, there is a report in the *Washington Post* that the meeting that was supposed to be held among the -- at the White House to discuss new strategy on Iran is postponed at least till Thursday. First, is this meeting going to be held? And that the Pentagon, according to the reports in the *Post* and other publications, is urging a new strategy to destabilize Iran because of the type of elements who were planning the recent bombings in Saudi Arabia, so can you tell us anything about this?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: To tell you the truth, the calendar for interagency meetings is so complex that I can't possibly keep it in my head and so I just can't comment on that for you on which meetings are on and which meetings are off on what topics in which departments. That's a hopeless thing to try to memorize.

What you have been hearing recently about Iran, I believe, is mainly expressions of serious unhappiness on the part of the President and administration officials about the harboring by Iran of terrorists, and in particular, important al-Qaida personnel. And after the recent bombing in Riyadh, which killed Americans and people from -- I don't remember exactly how many other countries, probably a half a dozen other countries -- there is a renewed intensity to the reasonable demand that the Iranians stop harboring al-Qaida terrorists and this is a demand that it is in Iran's interest to heed.

QUESTION: What does it mean, to harbor terrorists?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: It means allowing them to live in the country and to operate there, and it's an important type of support that some states provide to terrorists.

QUESTION: My name is Yasemin Congar; I'm with Turkey's CNN Turk and *Milliyet*. I would like to follow up on Iran first. Yesterday, the Secretary talking to the Council on Foreign Relations in NY said that Iran should be put on notice -- that if it continues its efforts to remake Iraq in Iran's image, those efforts would be aggressively put down.

First of all, I would like to ask you what he meant by that? And is he putting on notice Tehran only or is he also putting on notice the pro-Iranian Shi'ite clerics in Iraq? And secondly I would like to ask you about the stability force.

More and more we hear from sources here in Washington that the Pentagon, the top officials at the Pentagon, like yourself, are supportive of Turkey's participation in the stability force in the south, but that the State Department has some serious concerns about that and that's why there's no green light. Is there any truth to that? What's Pentagon's position about Turkish participation in stability?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: As you know, harmony reigns in the relationship between the different departments of the U.S. Government, so I'm certainly not going to be commenting on interagency debates.

As for what Secretary Rumsfeld meant when he said what he said yesterday --

QUESTION: I'm sorry. Could you tell me what Pentagon's position is regarding Turkish participation in stability?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: The only entity that has positions is the U.S. Government, and we're talking with the Turks, we're talking with our other NATO allies and we're talking with numerous countries around the world about possible roles that they could play in contributing to the reconstruction of Iraq. And I'm not going to get into any details on what we're talking about with which countries.

And I think that Secretary Rumsfeld's remarks were pretty clear. And he's a pretty lucid spokesman for his own views and I would not presume to try to tell you what he meant. I mean, he said what he meant and I think it's a pretty clear statement. And what you read does not seem to require a lot of explanation.

QUESTION: Hasan Hazar, *Turkiye Daily*. Mr. Secretary, recently, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz gave us some (inaudible) of one off the Turkish TV and he uses some verse about in this interview, about the Turkish military is still discussing in U.S. press and the Turkish press. Nowadays in the Turkish Government and also the Turkish Minister has some kind of tension. Don't you think that this kind of remarks from the U.S. officials in adding to more tension and the more political role and this late frustration?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: Well, my understanding is that Paul Wolfowitz's remarks pre-dated the recent issues that have arisen in the domestic Turkish politics and my understanding of the remarks that Paul Wolfowitz made was very different from the press accounts of it that I read. I think there were some serious misunderstandings and, kind of, misreporting of what he said.

I mean, one example, which came up at a congressional hearing that I participated in the other day, and I was asked about it, somebody said that Secretary Wolfowitz had asked for an apology and this was widely played in the Turkish newspapers that Secretary Wolfowitz had asked for an apology, and that's just plain not correct. He never asked for an apology and it was -- I don't know if it was a mistranslation or a misinterpretation, but in any event -- as I was glad to have the opportunity in front of the congressional committee to clarify the record on that, I'm glad to have that opportunity here, too.

So I don't see any problem at all with what Secretary Wolfowitz said, whatever it was, a few weeks ago.

QUESTION: (inaudible) more powerful role has to play about this Iraqi, knows (inaudible).

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: I don't think that he said anything that should cause any problems in that connection.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, this is Thomas Gorguissian of *Al Wafd*, Egypt. You mentioned in the (inaudible) disorder that some undemocratic, you are refer to the Ba'ath first, and then you say, "undemocratic interference from neighboring countries." Can you be more elaborate about that?

The second thing which I want to ask you about it is that you start your remarks with the deficit of the freedom, and then when you talk about the status report of the status there, most of the measurements were related to the security. And as any thoughtful person, you know, usually, security, excess security, means deficit of freedom. How you make this harmony that's an interagency harmony between these two words?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: Well, I mean, you're pointing up a very interesting connection between two concepts, security and freedom. Without security, there's no freedom. If the security forces are excessive and oppressive, there's no freedom either. And obviously you need to find the golden mean -- a well-ordered society that is free and has a proper amount of security and activity by its security forces: It doesn't have too little, and it doesn't have excessive amounts. And that's what we're aiming to see in Iraq. These are ultimately decisions that Iraqis are going to make for their own country, but as I said, we're hoping to lay a foundation for them that will allow them to create a free country for themselves. And when they do, we will be gone. We're not interested in hanging around in Iraq and having any kind of interference in their affairs once the Iraqis are in a position to run their own affairs, which we hope will be soon.

QUESTION: Can you mention an example of undemocratic interference from neighboring countries?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: Well, one obvious example is Iran.

COL. MACHAMER: Unfortunately, that's all the time we have. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: Nice meeting with you.

QUESTION: How long will coalition forces remain in Iraq? One year, two years, five years?

UNDER SECRETARY FEITH: I don't know. But our intention is to put the Iraqis in a position to be running their own country as soon as possible. It's hard to say and it's not prudent to be speculating about dates like that. There are all kinds of bad things that happen if you're speculating about stuff like that. What we're doing is we're going about our business in a systematic way to try to make the transition as short as possible.

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