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Foreign Press Center Briefing On Iraqi Interim Authority

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Washington, DC, Friday, April 25, 2003.

Since our last briefing here at the Foreign Press Center, a great deal has been accomplished in Iraq. With each passing day, the situation is improving.

There are still small-scale military operations in some areas. But we can now say that the Iraqi people have been liberated from a Republic of Fear. Today they are working alongside coalition forces to build a free Iraq.

On April 15, Iraqi leaders met in An Nasariyah to begin discussing the process that will lead to a new government that will represent and serve the true interests of the Iraqi people. A government of the Iraqi people, by the Iraqi people and for the Iraqi people.

Iraqis attending the meeting produced a written agreement on 13 fundamental principles that can help guide conversations among Iraqis about the future.

The principles they set forth are these (and I quote directly from them):

1. Iraq must be democratic.
2. The future government of Iraq should not be based on communal



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Updated: 28 Apr 2003

- identity.
3. A future government should be organized as a democratic federal system, but on the basis of countrywide consultation.
 4. The rule of law must be paramount.
 5. That Iraq must be built on respect for diversity, including respect for the role of women.
 6. The meeting discussed the role of religion in state and society.
 7. The meeting discussed the principle that Iraqis must choose their leaders, not have them imposed from outside.
 8. That political violence must be rejected, and that Iraqis must immediately organize themselves for the task of reconstruction at both the local and national levels.
 9. That Iraqis and the Coalition must work together to tackle the immediate issues of restoring security and basic services.
 10. That the Baath Party must be dissolved and its effects on society must be eliminated.
 11. That there should be an open dialogue with all national political groups to bring them into the process.
 12. That the meeting condemns the looting that has taken place and the destruction of documents.
 13. Finally, Iraqis participating in the Nasiriyah meeting voted that there should be another meeting ... with additional Iraqi participants ... to discuss procedures for developing an Iraqi Interim Authority.

That meeting—called the Central Iraq Meeting—will be held in Baghdad on Monday. Its very existence represents another important step forward.

We are very pleased with this because the United States and other coalition countries have no interest in governing or occupying Iraq. Our intention has always been to stay as long as necessary, but not one day longer—and to leave behind an Iraqi government that preserves territorial integrity, uses its resources for the benefit of all of the Iraqi people, and poses no threat to its neighbors.

Like the Nasiriyah meeting, it will be a meeting of Iraqis who are exercising their new freedom to speak. It is the second in a series of inclusive meetings open to Iraqis to be held throughout the country. Iraqis will set the agenda and discuss the vital issues. This will help accelerate the dialogue and transition to the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Authority.

The IIA will be broad-based and representative of the Iraqi people, including members of all religious and ethnic groups. It will listen to Iraqis and devise the way in which the new government will come into being—perhaps performing two main functions:

1. Take responsibility for running government offices and ministries.
2. Draft a constitution, implementing legal reforms and organizing elections. This process could include a Bill of Freedoms to protect the right of all Iraqis to free speech, freedom of religion, freedom to assemble, freedom to speak any language and the sanctity of private property.

Our coalition troops on the ground have been heartened by the great cooperation they are receiving, as they work together with Iraqi citizens to restore civil order, to bring in food and medicine, to get the electrical power grid and water systems back on line, and to round up Baath Party members and the leaders of a murderous regime that is no longer in power. It's clear from their helpfulness that Iraqis are thankful to be able to emerge from the terrifying grip of one of the world's worst dictators.

Yesterday, Secretary of State Powell pointed out that the pilgrimage of huge numbers of Shiite Muslims—with about 1 million persons gathering near Karbala during an important religious ritual—occurred without violence. And let's not forget that none of the Iraqi people enjoyed the freedoms that made that possible while living under the oppressive and brutal rule of Saddam Hussein. These and many other religious activities are an expression of freedom and a rebuke of the fallen regime.

Secretary Powell also summarized the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Hussein regime by saying, "We always knew that once you took this regime down and broke the authority of the regime, there would be a period of chaos and instability. That's what one would expect," he said. "But slowly but surely, we are reasserting authority throughout the country, not only with coalition troops but with Iraqi policemen, with Iraqi institutions."

The thing to bear in mind is that any dissent would have been unthinkable throughout central and southern Iraq as recently as a couple of weeks ago. The freedom to assemble and to demonstrate, or to worship freely—as we saw this week in Karbala—is proof of just how far Iraq has come in an astonishingly short period of time.

Looking ahead, we are enthusiastic about the country's prospects for a future in freedom, peace, and prosperity. And as President Bush said in a speech yesterday, "One thing is certain: we will not impose a government on Iraq. We will help that nation build a government of, by and for the Iraqi people."



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