





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Speech at First Shia Muslim Convention in North America

Remarks as delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Washington, DC, Sunday, May 25, 2003.

Wolfowitz: Thank you for the very warm welcome. Let me begin the way I learned to begin speeches when I was the American Ambassador to Indonesia for three years. (Shalam ... (inaudible).

And let me congratulate you on what seems to have been an outstanding event -- a very American event if I might say for people organize themselves with the community to get together to express common interest -- to do it in a democratic and peaceful fashion. In fact the great observer of American politics, some 200 years ago, whom I admit was a Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville who said there were two great things that supported the American constitution that were not in the constitution. One was Americans belief in God and the other he called the American tendency to form associations, which is to say to organize the way you are organizing.

(Applause).

I also appreciate very much the message that Dr. Perviz Shah delivered against terrorism. It's an important message to come from any community but I think you all know that it's particularly important that voices be raised in the Muslim community against terrorism and I applaud you for doing so.



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(Applause).

There are two other things that I detect here that seem to be particularly important in an age where we are threatened by terrible crisis from (inaudible), when we are threatened by people who want to divide people of different religions and oppress people of their own religion. One is opinion diversity represented by the great variety of people here from (inaudible).

The other thing that I heard as a theme that Shia as a minority that have been oppressed as a minority but also Shia in their theological traditions understand the importance of minority rights and if I can quote your new council... (Inaudible) that in the fact if I would study Shia theology I would want to introduce here I would think that civil liberties is a very important thing in Shia theology and I applaud you for that.

(Applause)

And finally I think you've picked a wonderful time to hold these conventions. Memorial Day is the day when we recognize those who have given their lives over the years to make this country, keep this country free and to bring freedom to so many others. And I appreciate very much that tribute just now to the brave young Americans who gave their lives to liberate Iraq.

It's a duty and an honor (inaudible) wounded soldiers out at Walter Reed and at Bethesda -- extraordinary to talk to them who have lost arms or legs or sometimes their eyesight. Without complaint they believe they fought for just cause and they fought to keep and make this country a safer country and they are just amazing. And we all owe them a great debt and I appreciate your recognizing that.

(Applause).

Memorial Day is the day that we remember the sacrifice that previous generations have (inaudible) through our freedom. I think the Shia of Iraq don't need a reminder of the high price of freedom. As we uncover one mass grave after another you are reminded that freedom alone is not enough but justice is also required and that is what America wants now to help to bring to Iraq.

(Applause).

I am amazed sometimes with how much coverage is given to the many pieces of bad news and how little coverage is given to big pieces of good news; yet we received some remarkable good news out of Iraq a few weeks ago -- for the first

time in 26 years that the (inaudible) pilgrimage was permitted.

(Applause).

(Inaudible).

It was (inaudible) somewhere between a million to 2 million Shia who made a pilgrimage that was as far as I can tell completely peaceful. We had quite a few discussions in advance to that event -- it might surprise you -- that General Franks and his commanders out in Central Command recognizing that this would be a very emotional event and (inaudible) not surprising some of us were a little nervous about it and we are all incredibly impressed with the self-discipline that was shown by the Shia community and I guess I have to say...

(Applause).

I was impressed by the way the (inaudible) forces who were able to stay out of sight while the (inaudible) presiding appropriate security. I think that it was a very active cooperation between Shia of Iraq and American armed forces and I hope that is a big symbol of good things for the future.

In some ways that whole demonstration, the whole pilgrimage is a reminder of (inaudible) Hussein own suffering at the hands of the tyrant of his time. Just as in our time the Iraq Shia endured the prosecution of the tyrant of our time Saddam Hussein. But now we need to work for a brighter future for the people of Iraq not just for Shia in Iraq but all the people of Iraq. Like many minorities who have endured persecution throughout the ages it is impressive that Shia has produced more than its share of creative geniuses: scientists like (inaudible), political leaders like (inaudible); poets like (inaudible) become a great popular figure among American campuses these days. And I'm told even that architects who built Egypt in Cairo were Shia.

(Applause).

I think your community and the spirit of the convention this weekend speaks to the fact that there is not a contradiction in a strong belief in religion and a belief of tolerance for people who practice other religions.

(Applause).

That is something that is desperately needed in the modern world and the world after September 11th. I mentioned that I had the privilege of being the American Ambassador for 3 years to Indonesia the country with the largest Muslim

population in the world. I came to know and love many Muslims of Indonesia above all because of their tolerance and their belief that Islam was consistent with the rights of others and their recent President was a good friend of mine, (inaudible), is a Muslim, a devote Muslim and one of the most strong advocates of religious tolerance that I have met in my life.

Americans too are God-fearing people. We have been ever since our founding and we are also people going to be committed to religious tolerance. There's a beautiful letter that our first President George Washington wrote to the Jewish community in Newport, Rhode Island. And there's a great phrase in that letter where he said that the United States is a country that gives to bigotry no sanction and I think those who come from abroad understand that this is country that has no place for bigotry.

(Applause).

I had a wonderful opportunity a couple of weeks ago, thanks to Larry Franklin and my staff who I want to publicly acknowledge to have a meeting with a number of you and quite a few of you here tonight, Shia leaders from many different parts of the community and different parts of the country. And it was educational for me, it was inspiring. What came through to me most of all though was a sense of being misunderstood of needing to explain to me that the Shia community is a diverse community. The Shia community does believe in religious tolerance and when you've had to explain to them, people across the table, that this is something that I've know for quite sometime and I understand the need to stand and feel the need to explain yourselves but you don't need to explain yourselves to me.

(Applause).

At risk of me talking about an unhappy time in the past I unfortunately recall going shortly after the last Gulf War in 1991 with Secretary of State Baker on his first trip to the Persian Gulf at the end of that war and some of us on his plane were having a debate and I confess there were some people who seem to think it would be worse to have a Shia government in Baghdad than to have Saddam Hussein. I felt very strongly that was obvious nonsense. And I was very pleased when he arrived in Saudi Arabia to find that the senior Saudi figures with whom the Secretary of State knew similarly believed it was nonsense. The Saudi Foreign Minister and other Saudis told the Secretary of State the worst thing that could to happen would be to leave Saddam Hussein in power and they said we are not afraid of the Shia of Iraq -- they fought against Iran for 8 years they are not able to be (inaudible).

Tragically as we know that advice was not followed. I will say personally I feel a little bit of pride that we finally contributed to eliminating that tragedy some. I recall somebody told me that our troops were about to leave southern Iraq and there were no instructions for them to take care of the Shia refugees --some 30 to 40 thousand who would come into southern Iraq. And I took this news to Secretary of Defense and then at the time Vice of the United States -- Mr. Cheney. He said we can't allow that to happen and he told me immediately to talk to the Deputy and Security Advisor Mr. Gates and say he would not leave southern Iraq until something is done to take care of those refugees.

We didn't do all that we should have done, we missed an opportunity I think a wonderful opportunity to have ended this terrible regime 12 years ago but better late than never. I think people have suffered but the suffering now can stop and we have an opportunity to build a new and much better Iraq.

(Applause)

I can't help being struck with some of the same people who declared a week or two after the war began I would like to remind you again the war began only about 2 months ago. Only a week or two after the war began you could read that we were buried in a quagmire. We had a terrible military plan and Secretary Rumsfeld did not send enough forces, that the world was about end.

Somehow a week or two later all the people who would have profits of (inaudible) disappeared, you would have thought without a trace and now they are back again. Now we are in a quagmire because our plan did not adequately take care of or provide for and prevent every act of terror that happened after the statue fell in Baghdad. The truth is I believe we had a plan that was very close to brilliant. I will give most of the credit to General Franks and his staff.

(Applause)

And the results of that success remarkable things happened and more importantly remarkable things horrible things that we feared did not happen. There is no food crisis in Iraq in the wake of the war, there have been no major epidemics in Iraq, it was not the refugee crisis that many predicted would destabilize the entire region. There was no wholesale destruction of the oil wells or other environmental disasters that had been predicted. The regime did not use weapons of mass destruction. I think many dynamics (inaudible) one of those scenarios that was much feared was the scenario of fortress Baghdad, in which is the largest city in Iraq might be turned into a younger version of that tragedy in Chechnya.

None of these terrible things happened and don't know entirely why but I would

submit that a large part of the reason it didn't happen was because the plan emphasized speed. We moved before Saddam even expected us to move. We moved with our ground forces when he expected us to start with weeks of bombing and we moved to Baghdad at a speed that even astonished our own military we were there in two weeks. When we got to Baghdad we didn't wait to build up big forces to level the city in order to take it. We started armed raids into the heart of the city and to our surprise the armed raids (inaudible).

We know emphasizing speed and the way we did it that we would leave behind problems that would have to be taken care of later but we are taking care of those problems and we are doing it systematically and we are doing it diligently, rapidly.

(Applause).

Some of those problems involve the deterioration in electric power, some of it was a result of the war but much of it was resulted in deterioration under the previous regime. Today I am told for the first time in 12 years that the city Basra has power 24 hours a day for the first time 12 years. All five power plants in southern Iraq are up and working and now that the UN sanctions have been lifted we will be able to restore another 700 mega watts of power that depend on Iraqi natural gas. So progress is being made and things like the restoration of basic services.

But the biggest challenge and I think you all recognize is the challenge of personal security. The fact that particularly Baghdad remains a very dangerous place, particularly at night. The criminals that were released when Saddam opened all the jails, of course they weren't all criminals many of them are political prisoners but the criminals along with them need to be rounded up. But most importantly something that needs to be better understood I think by the American press and the American public while major combat ended a month ago, combat has not ended. And on a daily basis American forces are encountering organized elements, small elements of the old regime. There are still (inaudible) and dangerous, when I was keeping track which was when I was testifying before the Foreign Relations Committee last Thursday, in just the preceding 24 hours there had been some 5 or 6 incidents, in which our troops were attacked with sniper rifles with rocket propelled grenades in which some 10 or 20 Baathist criminals had been captured or wounded.

There is real combat going on particularly in Baghdad and some areas in central Iraq. I believe a creed (inaudible) Ambassador Bremer issued a week ago outlining the Ba'ath Party and the declaring de-Ba'athification – a very important and symbolic message. It's also a very critical step toward restoring confidence

and creating an atmosphere in which Iraqis can feel for the first time in decades that they can express political opinions freely and without fear. And you need to recognize that we are not there yet, it takes time.

John Abizaid, who by the way, is an outstanding American of Lebanese origin and one of the best lieutenant generals in the United States Army and an Arabic speaker. I first met him when he was a Commander in northern Iraq 12 years ago as part of Operation (inaudible). John Abizaid is now the Deputy Commander of US Central Command and he has commanded US troops in Bosnia; he commanded US troops in Kosovo. I talked to him a few days ago after he had been to Baghdad and he said we are way ahead in Iraq of where we were in Bosnia and Kosovo this early in a post-war situation.

(Applause)

So while there is a lot of work to do, it is getting done. Those incredibly professional young men and women on our forces continue to do that important work and (inaudible) on a daily basis getting more and more help from the civilian side. We set up an office actually back in January. The first time by the way that I know of that we've ever set up a post-war office before a war even began -- called the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. It turned out that there was no humanitarian crisis, we didn't need large supplies of food and tents and things like that that we expected. And the task is more on construction and reconstruction but we have the people, we have the resources and we are going to get that job done.

(Applause).

But finally the most important challenge is the challenge of creating the conditions where the Iraqi people can build for the first time a free and democratic country. I said it the way that I said it because it's not for Americans to build a democratic Iraq; Iraqis have got to do it. The decisions have got to be made by Iraqis.

(Applause).

But I think that we and our coalition partners have two absolutely critical roles. One role falls principally to the military, is to create the secure conditions where people can in fact speak their minds freely without fear of being (inaudible) or intimidated. It's difficult I think for Americans even Americans like me who had the misfortune of reading for many years just how terrible this regime is. Unless you've actually lived it though I think it's hard to understand the fear and the terror that is left over from years of that kind of intimidation. It's going to take a

lot work and a lot demonstrated commitment by the coalition forces for people who genuinely believe that they can speak their minds freely.

But I think the other thing also in political fear, while it's not for us to tell Iraqis what kind of democracy Iraq should have. You know sometimes I hear it said we shouldn't have never use the word democracy for the times like we want to export the American system to some people who want something different but there are many, many different forms of democracy.

I remember the time when people use to say Korea could never have a democracy -- well they have a democracy today. It's Korean democracy it's different from ours. For that matter even ours is different from the British. I don't know a single democracy that is exactly like another but what is essential I think in all of them is the principle of equal justice under law, the protection and the rights all individuals, the protection of the rights of minorities -- that's what democracy is about, not just one man one vote.

(Applause)

And I believe and I know the President of the United States believes that that example of democracy in Iraq can have a powerful influence throughout the Middle East and I believe and again I know the President of the United States believes that the opportunity for the Shia in southern Iraq or the Shia in Iraq principally in the south to be able to create a free and democratic society in this heartland of the Shia that the two holy cities of Shia (inaudible) can have a powerful influence to the entire Shia community in the world.

So we think that the sacrifice that's been made by those brave young Americans, the sacrifices that have been made by heroic Iraqis over decades can in fact be repaid a thousand fold in a brighter future for the Iraqi people a brighter future that will influence the whole Middle East and the whole Muslim world and I thank you.

(Applause)

Question: (inaudible) Iraqi Canadians would like to offer services in Iraq and we ask you help us make that happen.

A: Thank you and I take the comments and I think I might commission Larry Franklin to find out more about your organization. Understand 2 things: number one, until the security positions have been firmly established, there are limits on how many people we can bring in and that unfortunately includes very senior members of the US House and Senate who are not very happy with us because

they want to visit and we have had to tell them that it's only safe to come into very limited areas. But we are working on that. And it improves every day.

Secondly, with respect to (inaudible) organizations, we have to be a little bit careful and I am not talking about yours, but there are some that want to come in that probably should not be allowed at all and I don't think you need me to name names. So I think we need to have some proper principals there.

Question: (inaudible) Shia are most tolerant among Muslim – seeking justice and peace. (inaudible) We would like to ask you and your authority to respect religious concerns of Shia community in Middle East. There are some media attacking that region which does not mesh with our culture and religion..... negative images come from media....

A: I think we are among friends here.

(Applause)

A: I am sure the media could improve. We could all improve. By the way I have learned over many years as a government official increasingly (inaudible) the media is constantly criticizing the government and I understand more and more that without a free media the potential of the government to abuse the people is enormous. We have to allow a free media.

The first point and I don't want to dwell on this but part of the problem is not the media. Part of the problem is the image the tyrannical of Iran has projected to the world, a false image of Shia. This group I believe is wonderful because you're speaking American words of Shia and the message you're sending and the message I have heard tonight is an America message of tolerance and diversity.

(Applause)

The second and I think this is terribly important and I think the opportunity in Iraq is enormous. And I should have mentioned but we hear the stories about insecurity in Baghdad. In the southern part of the country the stories are much better.

In Basra, the 2nd largest city in Iraq, has been (inaudible) stable for quite some time. The story I love most that I forgot to tell you is about Kabala – is it Kabala? You don't need me to tell you why Kabala is important. But you may need me to tell you that in one battalion a group of US Marines has established conditions in Kabala where the people of that important city have organized themselves in a way that will do us all proud. Not only have they created very

secure conditions and begun to restore basic services -- it's not easy by the way -- but we have had a chance recently to start looking at Oil for Food contracts.

It may not surprise you but it surprised Americans to learn that result of their money was going to buy \$90,000 Mercedes, tank transporters and the list goes on and on. There are problems. There is neglect.

But the most impressive thing in Kabala is that the local people with the protection of the Marines have formed a local council that I think could be a model for what we hope for the future. There is a man named (inaudible) who wanted the distinction of being a (inaudible) prophet to represent one of the major tribes in the area. And a member of (inaudible) intelligencia—the council represents tribal figures, religious figures, (inaudible) that have been imprisoned 12 years by Saddam Hussein, businessmen, ophthalmologists, lawyers. It really sounds like American pluralism reflected in Iraq in such an important city. So you as Shia and we as Americans have a great stake in creating (inaudible) conditions in southern Iraq where very different messages will come out and we'll see what you're capable of.

(Applause)

Question (Inaudible)

I know Ambassador Bremer is looking forward to (inaudible). This is going to be the last question. I thank you very much and I thank you (inaudible) for letting me speak first. You are very kind and I appreciate it. I look forward to the second annual convention. Thank you.

(Applause)



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