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Keeper of the Flame Award

Remarks as delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Ritz Carlton Hotel, Washington, DC, Thursday, October 9, 2003.

General Peter Pace, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff: Thank you. It's an absolute delight and an honor to be here tonight. There are several reasons for that. First of all, on behalf of all of us in uniform, Dick Myers our Chairman, last year's recipient of this award, and all of us who have the privilege of serving this country, and especially the lance corporals and corporals and sergeants and lieutenants and captains who are doing this country's work around the world and making those incredible decisions that make us so unique and so powerful and so effective. To all of you in this room, very sincerely, for what you do for us in your role as patriots in the many, many ways that have already been recognized tonight by Frank [Gaffney], those of us in uniform thank you for making it possible for us to do our job the way we do. [Applause]

It's always great to be in a room with other Marines, and there are two very special Marines here tonight who are great friends of mine -- General Jim Jones who was our 32nd Commandant, who was the 1999 recipient of the Keeper of the Flame Award, and is currently our Supreme Allied Commander in Europe; and General Spider Nyland, who is our Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps; two great Marines and great friends, and it's great to be here with them. [Applause]

Last and certainly not least, the reason I'm standing here which is to have the honor of introducing a very very special American. Lynne said to me tonight, my wife, when we were sitting at dinner, she said, "You are going to be funny, aren't you?" [Laughter] I said there's nothing funny about Paul Wolfowitz. [Laughter]

I'm at Table 4 and I said, okay, who knows something funny about Paul Wolfowitz? And Dov Zakheim said he didn't know anything funny about Paul Wolfowitz.

The fact of the matter is that Paul is an amazing person, and I like and admire and respect him for several reasons. First of all, I respect his humility. Here's a man who has a doctorate degree, yet he does not prefer to be called doctor. He's a man who served his country three years as Ambassador in Indonesia. He prefers not to be called Mr. Ambassador. He is currently the Deputy Secretary of Defense. He prefers not to be called Mr. Secretary. If you ask him what he'd like to be called he says, "Call me Paul."

Now if you have not had the pleasure of being around him on a day-to-day basis the simple proof of his humility is that when offered the opportunity to be recognized properly in his own right tonight as this year's awardee of the Keeper of the Flame, he elected to receive it in honor of many, many other human beings.

I admire his intellect. Put simply, he's smart. And he does his homework, and he brings a unique perspective to every problem. I enjoy sitting in the same room with him and wrestling over problems, and what I like most about him is that he is so smart, and he realizes that the other folks in the room probably aren't as smart as he is, and he still manages to bring out in us the very best. He makes us all feel like we correctly are participating and that he wants and needs our input, and he makes us all feel very much a part of the solution. It takes a very smart man to not only come up with great ideas and great solutions, but also to elicit from those who might otherwise not willingly participate, to elicit from them their thoughts and their ideas.

I admire his courage. I've known courage in two ways in my life. First I've had the privilege of seeing individuals exhibit physical courage. When you're physically courageous, if you make a mistake, sometimes you pay for it with your life. When you are intellectually courageous as is my friend Paul Wolfowitz, if you make a mistake, you get to live with it.

Now the fora that Paul goes to daily and the senior leaders with whom he meets on a daily basis and with whom he is a colleague are the kinds of meetings where everybody in the room is pretty much a giant in their own right. I have frequently seen this man, when many, many very bright and capable individuals were taking a conversation and a solution down one road, have the temerity to stop and offer a counter view. And when somebody says something like, "Paul, don't you agree?" and he's in a group like that, and he says, "No, I don't," and then explains why he doesn't, and ends up with his idea carrying the day -- I sit back in appreciation of intellectual courage in a man who is very very capable of articulating his position in a way that people understand.

But there's another piece of intellectual courage, and that is when he's wrong, he admits it. And he does it in a way that makes you feel good that you're in the same room with him.

Lastly, the reason I like this man so much is because he is compassionate. Paul Wolfowitz cares about those near him. I cannot tell you the number of times in the last two years that he has pulled me aside and said 'Pete, if you get a chance to say this to that individual, or get a chance to go give that person a special pat on the back, their life is in this particular place right now and it would really help them.'

Now here's a man who is in the eye of the storm, and he's worried about lance corporals and sergeants and captains whose lives may be in just a little bit of disarray and he's looking to reach out to other people to help them.

So it is indeed a distinct honor for me to introduce Doctor, Ambassador, Secretary, colleague, and very, very good friend, Paul Wolfowitz. [Applause]

Paul Wolfowitz: Thank you General Pace for that exceptional and generous introduction. It reminds me of what Lyndon Johnson once said on a similar occasion: I just wish my late parents could be here —my father would have greatly enjoyed that, and my mother would have believed it. [Laughter]

I think the function of the recipient at an occasion like this is supposed to be like the "dear departed" at an old-fashioned Irish wake: That is to say, the party can't go on without you, but no one expects you to say very much. [Laughter] Don't get your hopes up. [Laughter]

I do feel a very special kinship with Pete Pace. No doubt, part of it is because we're both Number Twos. And Number Twos always seem to get those special "opportunities to excel." They are usually preceded by the rallying cry: "Give that one to the deputy!"

So, naturally, we Number Twos stick together. And I can't think of anyone I'd rather stick with than Peter Pace. He is a remarkable human being and an extraordinary Marine. And I guess another reason we probably stick together is that we were both born in Brooklyn back in the time when there was still an Ebbets Field and still a Brooklyn Dodgers. [Applause]

But as the first Marine officer to serve in the Vice Chairman's role, General Pace is setting a high standard for anyone who follows him. His clarity of mind, his grace under pressure—and you know there's a lot of pressure—and his wit all distinguish him. Among his many great lines—and I'm glad he spared any about me. Among his great lines my favorite one is this one: "You should never let a promising career get in the way of a good joke." [Laughter]

More seriously, General Pace has made invaluable contributions both to our war planning and to the transformation of the military for the 21st Century. But most of all, he is a combat veteran of Vietnam, a warrior's warrior, and a real leader. There is no one I'd rather share a foxhole with. So I'd appreciate it if you'd join me in recognizing him. [Applause]

Another leader we're most fortunate to have at the helm is Don Rumsfeld. And just now in his video message, he was very generous and humble. If you're looking for the brains behind our operations, you do have to start at the top, and then you have to look in many directions because this is truly a team effort.

And what a team it is. I see a lot of them here tonight, so I was thinking we could have a quick staff meeting afterwards. [Laughter] They think I'm joking. [Laughter]

I am, however, thankful that Don did not call me an intellectual. For some reason, Don likes to remind me of a famous moment in the first debate between Pat Moynihan and Jim Buckley, back in 1976 when the two of them were running for the United States Senate seat from New York. They were only a few minutes into a pretty heated discussion when Buckley referred to Moynihan as an intellectual. And Moynihan replied: "This debate is only five minutes old and already my opponent is hurling insults." [Laughter]

Now, another thing Don Rumsfeld didn't mention is that when he welcomed me back to the Pentagon for my third tour, he said, "We're going to keep bringing you back until you get it right." [Laughter]

I was tempted to ask about the significance of his coming back for another try. But, as most of you know, that would not have been wise. [Laughter]

But the truth is, I wouldn't have missed this opportunity. I can't think of a more important time to be part of this President's national security team.

It's been a distinct privilege to work with our President, with Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condi Rice, and, of course, Don himself.

And it's also been a pleasure to work with fine Americans like General Pace and the other members of the Joints Chiefs, including the Chairman, General Dick Myers, our distinguished CENTCOM commanders General Tommy Franks, and now John Abiziad, our distinguished SACEUR and proud Keeper of the Flame recipient, General Jim Jones, who it's great to have with us tonight. And all the other distinguished members of our Armed Forces—and I don't mean just the top leaders, but also the junior officers and the enlisted people. They're the ones most of all who make ours the best armed forces in the world. [Applause]

I feel especially privileged to be part of this evening. For some 15 years now, the Center and its friends have been staunch in supporting America's defense and the idea of peace through strength. Under Frank Gaffney's indefatigable leadership, the Center has done no less than fight for America's Armed Forces—that they always be prepared and that they always be strong.

This evening I'd like to take a moment to go beyond the headlines, both to get some altitude and to look at what we've accomplished in the global war on terrorism through the prism of those who were central to making it happen—our men and women in uniform.

Back in July, I was honored to speak at an event with General Pace commemorating the 50th anniversary of the armistice that brought the Korean War to its close. Speaking to an audience made up primarily of veterans of the Korean War, General Pace described the debt of gratitude that we owe to our veterans. The audience's respect for this general, himself a veteran of the battle for Hue City in Vietnam, was palpable. General Pace told them that what motivates every soldier or Marine in the heat of battle is the idea that their own personal actions might let our veterans down. General Pace concluded, "We'll never, never let that happen."

In that moment, General Pace captured the essence of what this evening is all about. Your program says that I am accepting this award on behalf of the Liberators of Iraq, which is certainly true. But, I also accept this award on behalf of all the men and women serving America today in this war on terror. They measure their own actions against a standard that Americans before them have fought and died to uphold in our nation's hour of need.

This is our generation's hour of testing. And the men and women who serve today have never let our veterans down. They've never let our allies down. And they've never let their fellow Americans down.

That is why they are the true keepers of the flame—the flame of freedom. And it's with enormous gratitude and a full heart that I will accept this award on their behalf. [Applause]

The phrase, "a soldier's soldier" is the Army's highest form of praise. And last week a true soldier's soldier, General Jack Keane, stood his last formation after 37 years in this nation's service. Stepping down as Vice Chief of Staff, General Keane said farewell to the Army, and we said farewell to a true friend and valued partner. It was a moving occasion because of the man we were honoring and because of the power of his words. I would like to share a few of those words with you tonight.

"Foreign terrorists," General Keane said, "have no idea what they are up against. They do not know our will, our courage, or our character.... To understand America and Americans," the general said, "they need to understand the Marne in 1918, or Tarawa in '43, Omaha Beach in '44 or the Chosin Reservoir in 1950.

"They need to understand," General Keane said, "that a nation that produces Alvin York and Audie Murphy, John Pershing and George Marshall, Chesty Puller and George Patton, Randy Shugart and Gary Gordon produces heroes in every generation. They are out there now performing every day."

General Keane is right.

There are American heroes out there now performing magnificently on the front lines in Afghanistan and Iraq. And instead of fine food like we're eating here tonight, they eat their rations in the blazing heat, and they make their camps in the blinding dust and the driving wind. They take the battle to the enemy and they brave his hatred and brutality to make this country safe.

Among them are heroes who went to war and did not come back who gave their last full measure of devotion for their country and their cause—a just and noble cause. They live on in our hearts as we remember their courage and their deeds. In their memory, we must rededicate ourselves and redouble our efforts to finish the job that they have so nobly begun.

Frank has already paid tribute to all the wonderful men and women in uniform who are here with us tonight. He gave me the privilege to recognize three very special heroes who are with us. They have been to war. They have faced its dangers and borne its wounds. And now they have returned home to us, a grateful nation. I would like to introduce each one of them to you now individually.

And I would ask that each one of them raise their hand when their name is called so that we might

know where you are sitting.

Sergeant First Class Raymond Gilbert was serving in the 10th Mountain Division near Shkin Firebase in Afghanistan. He and members of his platoon were on night patrol near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan when they spotted some enemy. Sergeant Gilbert demonstrated his heroism when he and his platoon pursued the enemy, preventing them from planting explosives in the road. During the resulting firefight, Sergeant Gilbert was wounded severely in the leg. Please join me in recognizing Sergeant Gilbert. [Applause]

Sergeant Dean Lockhart of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment was wounded in Iraq just one month after his baby daughter was born. His wounds were so severe they thought he wouldn't survive and, accordingly, he was medically retired for the prospective benefit of his family. I first met Sgt. Lockhart a few weeks ago at Walter Reed a few weeks ago, when he was well on the way to a truly miraculous recovery. All he could talk about was how he wanted to get back on active duty. He was full of the fighting spirit that has made our victory in Iraq possible, and I am pleased to report that Sergeant Lockhart is now back with the Army. [Applause]

And the third special hero I would like to recognize tonight is Corporal Ricky Nelson. He was with the 3rd Infantry Division in Iraq, and was guarding the rear of a bank in downtown Baghdad on May 5, when his group was ambushed by five enemy combatants. Corporal Nelson showed his bravery when he returned fire, surprising the men and driving them away. Had Corporal Nelson not defended his post, the enemy would have gained access, not only to the bank, but to the rest of his squad. It was during this firefight that an enemy bullet shattered Corporal Nelson's knee. [Applause]

Our enemies don't seem to understand America. But, they should just look at these men and their comrades. America is a nation that produces heroes like Raymond Gilbert, Dean Lockhart and Ricky Nelson.

Gilbert, Lockhart and Nelson and so many others like them stand for what is right and good and true. They stand for freedom and justice. They stand for America. And they make us all proud to be Americans. [Applause]

By their character and dedication, our servicemen and women speak volumes about this country. And, just ask any one of them about the war on terrorism, because they, above all, understand the war they fight. They understand what's at stake.

General Keane emphasized what's at stake when we testified together recently to the Congress: "In my lifetime," he said, "wearing this uniform for 37 years, we have never ever deployed our soldiers directly for the American people until after September 11th. That was the first time that I've been wearing a uniform we've ever done that. In the past it was always to help another beleaguered nation."

Someone else who understands what's at stake is our President, a leader who stands in the great tradition of Harry Truman and Scoop Jackson and Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. As this country confronts a war like no other in our previous history, we are blessed with a President who combines a strong belief in American values with a belief in the value of American strength. When the history of this era is written, it will have to record that the people of Iraq owe their liberation to the courageous decisions of President George W. Bush. [Applause]

The liberation of Iraq has been an effort of not just years but decades. And Iraqis and Americans and British have sacrificed and given their lives for that cause. So, the title "Liberator of Iraq" is one that must be shared by thousands. But no one deserves it more than this President of the United States. [Applause]

Not long ago, a woman named Christy Ferrer traveled to Iraq with the USO. On September 11th, she'd lost her husband at the World Trade Center. She was going to Iraq to say thank you to the

troops. She wrote a wonderful article about her trip. And in that article, she wondered why our soldiers would want to see her, when they could see movie stars, a model, or even the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. When the soldiers heard that three September 11th family members were there, she found out why.

Young soldiers from across America rushed up to them. One soldier, a mother of two, told Christy that she'd enlisted because of September 11th. Another soldier displayed the metal bracelet he wore, engraved with the name of a victim of 9/11. Others showed Christy mementos from the World Trade Center they had carried into Baghdad.

When it was Christy's turn to present General Tommy Franks with a piece of steel recovered from the Trade Towers, she saw this great soldier's eyes well up with tears. And then, she watched as they streamed down his face on center stage before 4,000 American service men and women.

To those who try to claim that the battle of Iraq is a distraction from the war against terrorism, just try telling that to our troops.

In fact, I think our troops would agree with the President when he says the battle in Iraq is now the central front in the war on terrorism. And I suspect there are just a few people in this audience who would agree. [Applause]

I've seen many of our heroes on the front lines and I can tell you that America's troops are determined to win. And they will win, if we continue to give them the moral and material support they need to do the job.

Those who think the battle in Iraq is a distraction from the war on terror should tell it to the Marines of the 1st Marine Division. When I visited them in Iraq last July, they told me that the two groups who fought most aggressively during major combat operations, were the Fedayeen Saddam—a group of homegrown thugs who have a cult-like attachment to Saddam—and foreign fighters, mostly from other Arab countries. The exit card found in the passport of one these foreigners even stated that the purpose of his so-called "visit" to Iraq was to "volunteer for jihad."

That card tells the story. Today in Iraq we still face that poisonous mixture of former regime gangsters and foreign fighters. But, our troops will not be deterred by desperate acts of a dying regime or ideology. We are winning. [Applause]

General John Abizaid—who's stepped in so magnificently to fill General Tommy Franks' giant shoes as the commander of Central Command—has placed into a larger perspective the battle in Iraq. He said, and I quote, "The whole difficulty in the global war on terrorism is that this is a phenomenon without borders. And the heart of the problem is in this particular region"—meaning the Middle East—"and the heart of the region happens to be Iraq. If we can't be successful here," General Abizaid said, "we won't be successful in the global war on terrorism."

Everyone knows that September 11th changed the world. But I think some people don't understand quite how much it has changed. They understand that we're at war with Al Qaida, but they don't seem to recognize that it has to be—it has to be—a much larger war: a war against the very idea of terrorism and state support for terrorism, which is why the President has kept emphasizing that it will be a long and difficult war.

These people seem to think that if we can only capture bin Laden and the top leaders of Al Qaida, we can go back to treating terrorism as an evil—but a manageable evil—the way we did for 20 years, and continue living with a status quo in the Middle East that has been breeding terrorists by the thousands.

No, September 11th changed the way we must approach the world. And those who saw the carnage

and heard the message could no longer stand idly by. Those who heeded the message went on the offensive. They did not shy away from a threat and a mission like no other we've seen in our history.

And they realized that winning this war will require sacrifice and it will require patience. Because it requires no less than eliminating global terrorist networks and getting governments out of the business of sponsoring terrorism.

But we must also recognize that winning this war is about more than just killing and capturing terrorists. It also means winning the battle of ideas, demonstrating to the Muslim world, and particularly to the Arab world, that progress along the lines of this country and countries in Europe and more and more countries in East Asia, too, can also bring success for them.

In other words, winning the war on terror involves what the President described in his State of the Union message last year as "a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror. America will lead," the President said, "by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere."

Afghanistan was an important place to start. And Iraq is where the battle continues.

The terrorists understand that. Foreign terrorists who go to Iraq to kill Americans understand this: if killing Americans leads to our defeat and the restoration of the old regime, they would score an enormous strategic victory for terrorism—and for the forces of oppression and intolerance, rage and despair, hatred and revenge.

Success in the battle for democracy in Iraq will be a major victory in the war against terrorism. Iraqis understand this. And alongside us, they are working hard to fight the forces of anger and hopelessness.

The brave Americans who liberated Iraq have brought us to the possibility of a major victory in the war on terror. We must complete that victory. That is the best way that we can honor the memory of the heroes who have died and the heroes who are still risking their lives for us.

Make no mistake, this will go down in the annals of military history as one of the great acts of liberation of a country from a brutal tyrant. The Iraqi people understand that, and the evidence is in front of our own eyes.

I saw it in the north. I saw it in the south. I saw it in the center of the country: cheering crowds, much like those that accompanied our troops when the statues of Saddam toppled in Baghdad on April 6th as the whole world watched. After the deaths of Uday and Qusay, we saw celebrations go on in Baghdad for hours.

More recently, one of our congressional delegations—in fact, Congressman Lewis is here with us tonight—reported that, as their helicopter flew from Baghdad to Southern Iraq, they were told that crowds still came out to wave at them. And a widely-respected columnist whom I spoke to recently who had just back from Iraq told me that children still rushed out to the street to give his convoy the Victory sign as they drove from Baghdad to Kirkush. And I can tell you personally that as we drove by the holy Shi'a shrines of Abbas and Hussein in Karbala, one of the two holy cities of Shi'a Islam, crowds waved and cheered and shouted, "Thank you!" and "Bush is good" and even the Marine cheer, "Ooh rah, Marines!"

But the most moving experience for me was visiting a remnant of a village of Marsh Arabs, a people who were almost annihilated by Saddam's genocide, who were reduced from half a million to a mere fraction of that number and headed toward almost certain extinction if liberation had been delayed much longer. When we arrived in the remote and miserable village of Al Turabah, we were rushed by

a mob of mostly children who cheered excitedly and called out, "Salaam Bush!" and "Down with Saddam!" I will never forget it.

If people wonder why there are still some parts of Iraq where we are less than welcome, they should remember what happened in the early battle for Basra, when the population of that overwhelmingly Shi'a and anti-Saddam city was intimidated by the systematic repression of the Fedayeen Saddam. This is the force of killers that I mentioned earlier; they were specially organized by Uday Hussain to commit torture and murder on behalf of the regime. In a regime noted for sadism and brutality, the Fedayeen Saddam had a special horrible distinction.

I just received from Iraq a videotape made by Fedayeen Saddam authorities, a videotape of them carrying out punishments against what appeared to be their own members. I apologize, but you've finished your dinner. I think I have to describe it. The punishment techniques include chopping off of fingers on right hands, breaking wrists with a heavy stick, tossing people off a multi-story building, bound and unbound, cutting off the tips of tongues, and partial beheading with a sword, finished with a heavy-duty knife. These are some of the killers we are still fighting in Iraq today, and these killers still intimidate many Iraqis.

But, of course, there was more than the brutality of Saddam toward his own people that the President had to consider. The Iraqi regime's support for terrorism, within and outside its borders, its appetite for the world's most dangerous weapons, and its openly declared hostility to the United States were a combination that had to be understood in light of the lesson of September 11th.

David Kay's work has already demonstrated undeniably that Saddam Hussein was in clear violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 – his last and final chance to comply with demands of the international community. As the President reminded us in a speech earlier today, the UN Security Council finally "demanded that Saddam disarm, and prove his disarmament to the world. The choice was up to the dictator—and he chose poorly."

And we might say that those who are holding out for the fallen dictator have also chosen poorly. As the President also said today: "Saddam holdouts and foreign terrorists are trying desperately to undermine Iraq's progress and throw that country into chaos. The terrorists in Iraq believe their attacks on innocent people will weaken our resolve. They believe we will run from a challenge. They are mistaken. Americans are not the running kind." [Applause]

Life may not be perfect in Iraq today, but because we haven't run from that challenge, it's getting better day by day. And already it is an immeasurable improvement over the horror that was inflicted by one of the most brutal regimes in modern history.

I'd like to close tonight with a remarkable observation by another great wartime leader. It's from Sir Winston Churchill's wartime diary, from December 8, 1941.

Upon learning about the attack on Pearl Harbor, it won't surprise you that Churchill's emotions on hearing that the United States was into the war were feelings of joy. He said, "I knew the United States now was in the war up to the neck. So we have won after all," Churchill said, four years before the war actually ended.

And he went on to talk about "silly people here in England [not just in Germany or in enemy countries] who," in his words, "discounted the force of the United States." "Some said the Americans were soft, others that they would never be united. They would fool around at a distance. They would never come to grips. They couldn't stand the bloodletting. Their democracy and system of recurrent elections, these people were saying, would paralyze the American war effort. They would be just a vague blur on the horizon to friend or foe. Now," these people said, "we would see the weakness of this numerous, remote, wealthy, and talkative people."

We haven't changed much, have we? [Laughter]

"But," Churchill went on, "I had studied the American Civil War fought out to the last desperate inch. American blood flowed in my veins. I thought of a remark which Edward Grey [the British Foreign Minister] had made to me more than 30 years before" as the United States entered the First World War." Grey had said "that the United States is like 'a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it, there is no limit to the power it can generate.'"

As the son of an immigrant, I have a deep appreciation of that power. I know how lucky and blessed we are to live in this country—to live free from persecution and fear. I have long believed that, even more than our vast resources, more than the beauty we see all around us, more than our melting pot culture and our remarkable military might, America's greatest power is what it stands for. We stand for peace and freedom and justice. These ideas and our resolve—embodied in the heroes we've talked about tonight—are more powerful than any other ideas or systems yet known to man.

And this evening, in the presence of heroes, let us affirm the truths we know: the single greatest threat to peace and freedom in our time is terrorism.

So this truth we must also affirm: that the future does not belong to the terrorists. The future belongs to those who dream the oldest and noblest dream of all—the dream of peace and freedom.

May God bless the heroes of our armed services who serve our country so faithfully. And may God bless this wonderful country. Thank you. [Applause]



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