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Conference on Iraqi Reconstruction, Mercatus Center, George Mason University

Remarks as delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Washington, DC, Tuesday, November 4, 2003.

Wolfowitz: Thank you, Tim [Roemer, Mercatus Center Distinguished Scholar and former Congressman from Indiana]. That was a warm and generous and unusually provocative introduction and I'm almost provoked to make a comment. I think I will actually, because you asked some very important questions. And let me at least touch on them up front. The question, "Are we winning the peace?" Let's understand, I believe we are winning the peace. I believe we're also winning the war. But let's understand, the war continues, and that is what makes this such a difficult challenge.

You mentioned Abraham Lincoln in 1861. I've been reading some of the things that Lincoln wrote or that were written about him in the summer of 1864. Of course, all of us learned somewhere along the way, probably in junior high school, that the Civil War was won at the Battle of Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. A full year after those so-called turning points in the Civil War, Lincoln faced bitter opposition here in Washington, possible political defeat, and a war that was going very badly -- of course, a war that ultimately was won for the greater benefit of this country and for our moral standing in the world. I don't want to compare anything that we're trying to do today to the greatness of that moment or the greatness of Abraham Lincoln. But the point I would make is that we have two challenges in front of us: to win the peace and to win the war.

And I guess I have to correct the record somewhat -- maybe this is an opportunity to do it -- that I allegedly argued the case for US military intervention to remove Saddam Hussein long before becoming Deputy Secretary. The fact is that, for me, what changed everything was September 11th. The attack on the Al-Rashid Hotel was nothing compared to being in the Pentagon on September 11th and learning that 150 brave Americans had died in that one attack alone. Of course that was nothing compared to what was going on in New York, where not only did 3,000 Americans die -- not just Americans, but innocents of all countries. But keep this statistic in mind: I believe 406 firemen and policemen -- heroes of this country who went into a burning building to rescue others -- died on that day.

It's those numbers that have changed, I think, the way we have to look at the world, including the way we have to look at Iraq. It's my personal belief that, had we done so much earlier, it might have been possible to arm and equip Iraqis to liberate themselves, and we would have been much better off in that eventuality.

But one of the things that September 11th changed was that it made it a war of necessity, not a war of choice. It made it something we had to be certain we could win quickly, not something

that we could contemplate as a protracted Iraqi-style guerilla war. And, therefore, the entire calculation changed.

So I think as we talk about the tragic events of the last week or two weeks, as we talk about the challenges ahead of us in Iraq, it is very important to remember that this is part of a much bigger war on terrorism, a war which is not going to be over with one victory in Afghanistan or another victory in Baghdad or a larger victory in all of Iraq.

Nor will it be over as we arrest, continue to arrest, kill, or capture thousands of members of al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. It won't be over when we finally get Osama bin-Laden and Saddam Hussein, as wonderful as those days will be. We've got to do something very substantial if we want to prevent a repetition of September 11th, not just on a scale of September 11th, but 10 times or 100 times or 1,000 times worse. That is what is at stake for this country, in my view. And winning in Iraq is a significant part of that, but only a part of that.

I am tempted, with these Hoosiers all around me, to note that I'm not from Indiana. I'm from upstate New York. And when I was growing up in Ithaca, Fulton Sheen, some of you may remember, was the nationally known Bishop of Rochester. And I recall his saying that when an audience applauds at the beginning, that's faith. When they applaud mid-way through the speech, that's hope. But if they applaud at the end, that's charity. [Laughter] So I want to thank you for that show of faith there at the beginning, and I will appeal to you for some charity at the end.

In the meantime, let me thank Mercatus Center and George Mason University for sponsoring this conference. Your topic is timely, although I'm not sure about your choice of setting. Every time I come into this building, I wonder what Ronald Reagan -- that apostle of small government -- would think about having a building like this one named after him. On the other hand, he was also an apostle of big ideas, so maybe he would approve.

In any event, it's good to be here and have a chance to talk with you about events of the last few days and the last few months in Iraq. As you know, the last few days have been among the bloodiest since the fall of Baghdad. We lost 15 brave soldiers in a helicopter that was shot down two days ago and many wounded.

Each of those casualties represents a personal story of heroism and tragedy. Every one of their families deserves our gratitude and our appreciation. And we need to keep in mind that these casualties are not statistics or somebody's scorecard. They're individuals who represent the best that America has to offer. They are true American heroes.

Over the past few months I've met dozens of heroes like the soldiers who were on that helicopter. Their remarkable stories bear repeating. Just a month ago we had a dinner here in Washington to honor the liberators of Iraq, and we invited a few of those liberators, seriously wounded soldiers from Walter Reed Hospital, to join us that evening. Let me just mention two of the stories of those soldiers.

One was Sgt. Dean Lockhart of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. I met him at the hospital when he was recovering from wounds that had been judged so severe he would not survive. In fact they retired him so his family would have better death benefits when he passed away. His young daughter was just a month old when I saw him in the hospital. All he could talk about, and all his wife could talk about, was how to get back on active duty. And I'm pleased to report that Sgt. Lockhart got his wish and is now back on active duty with the US Army.

Also at Walter Reed was Corporal Ricky Nelson of the 3rd Infantry Division. On May first he was guarding the rear of a bank in downtown Baghdad when his group was ambushed by five enemy combatants. Corporal Nelson responded by returning fire, surprising the men, and

driving them away. Had he not defended his post, the enemy would have gained access not only to the bank, but also to the rest of his squad. During that firefight, an enemy bullet shattered Corporal Nelson's knee. But that injury has not diminished the great spirit with which he served his nation and wished to continue serving.

After the attack on the Al-Rashid Hotel, I met some more American heroes when I visited the casualties in the hospital. One of them is an American Army colonel. When I visited him in the hospital that day, he was still getting oxygen and was in considerable pain. They lifted the mask so that we could talk, and I asked him where he was from. And he said, "Are you asking where I live, or are you asking about my accent?" I didn't notice the accent, but I encouraged him to answer both questions. And he said, "Well, I live in Arlington, Virginia, but I grew up in Beirut." I asked him how he felt about helping to build a new Middle East. And he gave me a big thumbs up -- and an amazing smile for a man in that much pain. And then he asked the nurses to prop him up so that we could have a photo taken together. It's a picture that I will always cherish.

Our heroes include not only soldiers but also civilians as well. And not only Americans, but also heroes from many other nations. It is an appropriate symbol of the joint effort being undertaken in Iraq that those five serious casualties from the Al-Rashid attack included that one military officer and four civilians -- four Americans and one British citizen. The three Americans, symbolically enough, came from three different agencies -- Department of State, Department of Labor, and the National Imaging and Mapping Agency. And they were all volunteers.

The British civilian was from the Finance Ministry. He had helped to produce the new Iraqi currency that eliminates the butcher's face. When I visited him in the hospital I asked him if he was in a lot of pain, and he said, "No." So I said, "Either you're lying, or it's that stiff British upper lip of yours." And he said, "Well, actually I have a lot of American blood in me also." And he was proud of his service.

The Americans included a State Department secretary who had been in Iraq only a few weeks, having volunteered to come from Guatemala. I asked her if she was sorry she was there. And she said, "No, this is important work."

I saw the same dedication and resolve that day in the people working in the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority. It was a Sunday and they were hard at work, even after a terrible attack that had touched hundreds of them and killed one of their number.

We're proud of them -- civilians and military, State Department and Defense Department and Department of Justice and Department of Labor and AID, and I could go on with a long list.

People were wounded in that attack not only from the United States and the United Kingdom, but also from Italy and Kosovo and Nepal. They're all heroes, as was Sergio de Mello, the wonderful man who represented the United Nations and was killed in that attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad, as are importantly the Iraqis who are fighting with us for a future of freedom for their country.

Approximately 100,000 Iraqis now serve in the various branches of the five security forces -- the Iraqi Police Force, the Facilities Protection Service, the new Iraqi army, the Border Guards, and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps.

I have to say "approximately" because the numbers are growing so fast that it's hard for me to have an accurate and precise count. What is unmistakable is that we're bringing eager Iraqi volunteers into the service of their country at a rate unmatched in any corresponding situation that I know of over the last decade. Whatever the precise number, there is no question that by their numbers alone, the Iraqis constitute the second largest member of the Coalition. And another tragic number that testifies to their commitment: More than 80 of them have died in

the line of duty since June first.

One of those committed Iraqis is a senior police official, a man who served a year in jail for denouncing Saddam Hussein. When I first met him in July, I was a little suspicious that anyone would have been foolish enough to denounce Saddam Hussein, much less get away with a year in jail. And he said, "Oh, I only denounced him to my best friend. I couldn't believe I'd be turned in."

A few days after I met him in July, this police officer was shot in the leg while capturing several former Ba'athists and a large cache of weapons. I met him again in Baghdad 10 days ago. He'd been viciously attacked in a newspaper, and he show it to me with enormous pride, proud of what he's doing to eliminate the remnant of the old regime and to move Iraq forward.

And that very police station, where I had met him a week ago Sunday, was attacked on Monday by a would-be suicide bomber, a Yemeni traveling on a Syrian passport, who was stopped effectively by Iraqi policemen who stood their ground and shot at him and disrupted the attack.

Not only the security forces, but brave Iraqi civilians are standing up for their country. In Hillah in the south -- the site of, I guess, the worst of dozens of mass graves that were uncovered, where possibly as many as 15,000 people were murdered in one field -- on a happier note, I met there a young woman who was wearing very conservative Muslim dress as she confidently stood up for women's rights and asked me what we could do to help. She saw nothing inconsistent between her religion and her traditional dress and human rights and women's rights. And I saw similar courage among those in Hillah who were organizing a center for human rights in a country where those rights have been systematically trampled for over 35 years by a sadistic and evil regime.

And there are the Iraqi heroes who have been assassinated for their leadership and work to build a democratic country. Like Akila Al-Hashimi, one of the women members of the Iraqi Governing Council, who was brutally gunned down some weeks ago. Or like the important Shi'a leader Baqir Al-Hakim, who was murdered by a car bomb on the steps of the holy mosque in Najaf -- one of the holiest mosques of Shi'a Islam -- back in August.

Five of his brothers and some 63 members of their family were murdered by the old regime. And yet today, his sole surviving brother, Abdelaziz Al-Hakim, who's taken over the leadership of their organization, has not hesitated to be a part of the new Governing Council and a spokesman for religious tolerance and moderation. He knows there are risks, but he is undeterred.

Countless individuals are taking their stand for a free Iraq. On the other hand, it doesn't take very many people to mount a terrorist attack. It only took 19 people to kill more than 3,000 on September 11. It only took two, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, to kill 150 in Oklahoma City.

Dramatic violence like that not only grabs attention and drives news coverage, but it can effectively obscure the larger picture, which is, of course, one of the terrorists' main goals. The terrorists don't want the world to know that the real numbers are on our side and that they stand for only a small minority.

It's hard to know exactly how many of the attacks being mounted against our forces today and against their Iraqi allies are conducted or paid for by what are euphemistically called "former regime loyalists" or "FRLs." We love acronyms. They might better be called, "the surviving criminal murderers of the Saddam Hussein gang," because that's who they are.

Certainly anecdotally, when you talk to our troops in the field, the sense they have is that the

majority of the attacks on American troops come from that source. What is more certain is that the Iraqi people report daily on death threats coming from those sources, and they firmly believe that the former members of the Fedayeen Saddam, Uday's personal killers; the secret police, the so-called Special Security Organization; the Iraqi Intelligence, the Mukhabarat; or the Special Republican Guards are still out killing Americans and killing Iraqis in order to bring back that hated regime.

And if you stop and think, if you're an Iraqi in that situation you've got to be fearful, and it is testimony to the enormous courage of the tens of thousands of Iraqis who are fighting alongside us for their country that they're doing so. Remember, this is a regime that did not simply put people in jail for a few years if they were suspected of treason. As reported in some detail in just one example in the Washington Post a few days ago, high school students, 16 and 17 years old, who were suspected of writing anti-regime graffiti, were taken from their homes and executed in large numbers in that industrial-style execution chamber called Abu Gharib Prison some 20 years ago. Their families only now are learning of their fates. This was a regime that ruled by terror. And it still seeks to come back to power by terror. And they cannot be allowed to succeed. [Applause]

To win this battle and to sustain the support of the courageous Iraqis who are on the front lines with us, it is crucial that we send a clear and strong signal that the United States will be with them until we are no longer needed. The bipartisan support that the Congress overwhelmingly gave to the President's supplemental request for \$87 billion dollars is a strong signal of exactly the kind that is needed. So, too, the commitment of \$13 billion dollars by some 70 nations at the Madrid Conference recently is another signal of strong support, that the world will be with the Iraqi people until these murderers are defeated.

As the President pointed out in his press conference a few days ago, it's dangerous in Iraq because there are people who can't stand the thought of a free and peaceful Iraq. As he said, "The Ba'athists try to create chaos and fear because they realize that a free Iraq will deny them the privileges they had under Saddam Hussein. The foreign terrorists are trying to create conditions of fear and retreat because they fear a free and peaceful state in the midst of the part of the world where terror has found recruits, that freedom is exactly what the terrorist fear the most."

It is the same mentality, the President correctly pointed out, that attacked us on September 11th, 2001. Iraq is dangerous, but our troops and their Iraqi and international allies are making progress.

You're hopefully familiar with many examples of that progress -- the reconstituted courts ... the newly independent judiciary ... the reopened universities and colleges, now available to all Iraqis regardless of religion or ethnic group or political party ... the hundreds of rehabilitated primary and secondary schools, with books that no longer teach arithmetic by saying, "two Saddams plus two Saddams equal four Saddams" ... the hospitals and clinics which are now all open and operational ... the clearing of thousands of kilometers of weed-choked canals, now irrigating thousands of farms ... the restoration of potable water and phone service ... the introduction of a unified currency for the first time in 50 years ... an independent central bank ... the mushrooming of satellite TV dishes ... 170 newspapers -- 170 newspapers now publishing in a country that only less than a year ago had no free press at all! ... and the development of professional and civic organizations, what Edmund Burke once called the small platoons of democratic society.

I'm told by some of our military officers who have served in the Balkans and elsewhere that this a record unmatched in any other post-conflict situation in the last 15 years. Unfortunately, it's not correct to describe Iraq as "a post-conflict situation." On the one hand, that makes this progress all the more impressive. But on the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that we must be successful on the security front for this progress ultimately to last.

That said, let me describe several scenes from our recent trip, because I think they tell the story of extraordinary progress in the liberation of a long-oppressed, talented, and energetic people.

I already mentioned the murder of Baqir Al-Hakim. When I was in Baghdad, the Sunday we left I had dinner that night with his sole surviving brother, Abdelaziz Al-Hakim. We discussed that Baqir's death -- tragic as it was -- also provided a demonstration of how far Iraqis have come. Some had speculated that the assassination would trigger attacks of violence by Shi'a Muslims on Sunnis. Instead, hundreds of thousands of people turned out peacefully to mourn and to take part or to witness the funeral procession as it wound its way from Baghdad to the holy city of Najaf.

Hundreds of Iraqi Christians came to offer their condolences personally to Abdelaziz, many weeping inconsolably for a Muslim leader, because when he was in exile in Iran he had petitioned Iranian authorities to permit Christian Iraqi prisoners of war to observe Christmas and then when that permission was granted, he personally joined them for Christmas Day.

I know that Abdelaziz Al-Hakim and I would probably disagree on some important questions about the role of religion in society or the role of women in society. But when leaders like him express a strong and convincing commitment to religious tolerance -- especially leaders from the Shi'a clerical community which so many people have told us we have so much to fear -- I think, in fact, there's strong reason to be hopeful.

In Kirkuk, a very different city in northern Iraq, with a diverse population that includes Kurds and Arabs and Turkmen and Christians, we walked about the marketplace, which is full of life and commerce today. The people we encountered were a mixed crowd of Arabs and Kurds and some others. The Arabs were as vocal in their enthusiasm for liberation and their hatred of Saddam Hussein as were the Kurds. In fact, it was a young Arab girl -- I would guess maybe 10 years old -- who came up to me and said, "Saddam is a donkey" -- a simple statement, which under the old regime would have led to severe punishment for her and surely for her family. But now she could have her say. And her teenage friend came up and said, "thank you," and put her head on my shoulder.

There was also a moneychanger, sitting at a card table, a Kurd, I believe. When he saw us, he held up a piece of the old Iraqi currency with Saddam Hussein's picture on it. And with a great smile and relish, he tore the bill into pieces. Last year, that simple act could have cost him his life. Today instead he can express himself openly and defiantly on any subject he likes.

It's no accident that we encountered such outspokenness in a marketplace, because -- as you at the Mercatus Center know -- trade and commerce are thriving. So many of you have made significant contributions in defense of economic freedom and argued the relationship of economic freedom to social and political freedom. So I think you can understand that at the end of tyranny, the reintroduction of the rule of law and an independent judiciary are beginning to unleash the creative powers of the Iraqi people, who have been suppressed for more than three decades.

Bear in mind that Iraq is a rich country, not only rich in natural resources, not only oil, but water, but even more importantly, I think, rich in human resources as well. What it lacked was the opportunity to translate those riches into real wealth, wealth that will benefit the entire people of Iraq, not just a kleptocracy that steals the nation's treasure to build weapons and palaces and prisons and torture chambers.

What happened to the Marsh Arabs is a case in point. They're one of the oldest civilizations on earth going back thousands of years. In the marshes of southern Iraq, they had made some incredible adaptations of agriculture, breeding water buffalo for example that produced milk in large quantities, something which some of you would know is quite an unusual feat. They provided a large percentage of the country's vegetables. Just a dozen years ago they numbered

about a half million.

Saddam Hussein undertook one of the great engineering projects of the last 10 years to deliberately drain the marshes in which those people lived and to take an ecologically rich environment and turn it into a man-made wasteland the size of the state of New Jersey.

Today it is estimated that instead of a half million, the Marsh Arabs number somewhere between 40,000 and at most 200,000. When we visited the little Marsh Arab village of Al-Taraba last July we were mobbed by a crowd shouting "Salaam Bush" and "Down with Saddam," a crowd that was mostly women and children, because few of the men survived.

Liberation did not come in time for many of the Marsh Arabs and many other victims of this regime. But it has come, and there's progress. A long oppressed people are emerging and are taking their rightful place in the community of nations.

But the job is far from done. It will take time to dispel the fear that remains and for normal life to return. We can debate whether the glass is half full or half empty, but I think there's no question that it is filling and filling at a rate that is impressive compared to some other examples in modern history.

Secretary Rumsfeld recently compared it to the post-war situation in Germany. As he put it, our plan in Iraq called for an Iraqi cabinet of ministers, which took office in four months; it took 14 months to reach that milestone in post-war Germany. Our plan for Iraq called for an independent central bank, which was achieved in two months; it took three years in post-war Germany. Our plan called for establishing a new Iraqi currency, which was announced in two months and in circulation in five; it took three years to do that in post-war Germany. The plan called for new Iraqi Police Force, which was accomplished in two months; it took 14 months in post-war Germany. The plan called for the establishment of a new Iraqi army. It began training within three months and completed training of the first battalion in less than five; it took 10 years to stand up the German army.

And there are other examples, more recent ones that put the Iraqi situation today into perspective. When we visited Hillah, we met with Polish Major General Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, the commander of the Multinational Division that has responsibility for the entire area that's called the Shi'a heartland, including Najaf and Karbala and Hillah and Babil. He told me that when Iraqis come to him and complain about electricity shortages or unemployment, he tells them that almost 15 years after the end of Soviet occupation, Poland still has 18% unemployment and blackouts from time to time and many challenges still to confront. But, he adds, his country has made progress in the last 10 years and is incomparably better off than it was under Soviet tyranny.

In Kosovo and Bosnia we see progress today, but it has taken many years. And the people in the Balkans do not have to contend with Fedayeen Saddam or Ansar Al-Islam or other elements that continue to wreak havoc.

I think, compared to those situations, Iraq has come an enormous distance in a relatively short time. Consider the fact that we attracted more recruits for the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps than we had planned for. These young Iraqis are not trained as well as Americans. They're not equipped as well as Americans. But they can do some things that our brave soldiers can't do. They can communicate with people with a speed that our people obviously can't match without translators. They can read the local situation in ways that we can't and find explosive devices or stolen cars. They're in a better position than our troops to attract information from other Iraqis. And what's more they're enthusiastic about their role. In fact, one of the biggest complaints I learned these recruits have is that the only uniforms available to them so far are the uniforms of the old Iraqi army. We will fix that.

Do the Iraqis want us to leave? Of course they do, eventually. But the polls do show that most Iraqis want us to stay as long as necessary to ensure that the defeated bitter-enders cannot return to power.

So the challenge for us is to help the Iraqis see the job through, to help them set up a viable democratic government with reliable security forces. In that respect, as the Wall Street Journal pointed the day after the Al-Rashid bombing, the most important news of those few days was the news from Madrid, from the Donor Conference that brought together some 70 nations and 20 international organizations and produced billions of dollars of support pledged for Iraqi reconstruction. The consensus at Madrid was in line with the international community's unanimous adoption not only of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 that preceded the war, but three post-war resolutions, including the unanimous adoption of 1511 last month.

President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have placed a high priority on securing international support and on spelling out an international consensus for how to move forward in Iraq and to establish a multi-national force under US command. I believe that this is a great venture, which the international community will one day be able to look back at with pride, and that is what we all want to see.

From our vantage point here in the United States, the good news in Iraq is especially important because of what it means for the global war on terror. As the President put it, "The world is safer today because Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are gone. We're now working with many nations to make sure Afghanistan and Iraq are never again a source of terror and danger for the rest of the world."

We learned in the last century that democracies cannot live peacefully and undisturbed in a world where evil people control whole nations and seek to expand their bloody rule. We may have forgotten that lesson in the euphoria over the end of the Cold War. The attacks of September 11th were a shocking wake-up call. And President Bush has made it clear that America got the message and that we will not neglect its obvious implications.

With that I thank you for your patience, I appeal for your charity and perhaps now I can hear from you. [Applause]



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