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Town Hall Meeting at Luke Air Force Base

Remarks as delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, Thursday, July 22, 2004.

Thank you, thank you very much. [Applause] Thank you, thank you. You know, when I saw this large crowd here I first thought that they're not here as volunteers. And then I remembered what's it like outside, and then I figured that you might have come in just to get out of the heat. [Laughter]

Whatever the motivations are, thank you for turning up. [inaudible] I had a chance to see Col. [Peter A.] Costello [Vice Commander, 56th Fighter Wing]. We've met in the Pentagon. He was honest enough to say with all due respect that he would much rather be here. The same goes for me. [Laughter]

I'm never sorry to have a chance to get away from Washington and especially a chance to visit with our outstanding men and women of the various branches of our Armed Forces.

As some of you may know, I'm on the way to California for the homeporting ceremony for the new aircraft carrier named after one of our greatest Presidents, Ronald Reagan. And it's going to be a real honor to represent Secretary Rumsfeld and the Department at that event. The carrier is named after the President who was one of the leading advancers in the cause of freedom in the world.

The ship's motto comes from one of the President's favorite expressions, "Peace Through Strength." It's an approach that I think most Americans appreciate and understand, especially since 9/11.

And tomorrow I'm going to have a chance to thank the Navy. But today I thank you for the opportunity to come here to Luke and to thank the Air Force for your great contributions here at Luke and throughout the service for that "peace through strength."

And I thank you and everyone in the Air Force -- the active Air Force, the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve -- for the outstanding contributions that you've made to our country for many years, and particularly in the two-and-one-half years since the horrible attacks on Sept. 11th. Without you and without specifically this base's dedication to producing the finest F-16 pilots and finest F-16 flight crews in the world, we would not enjoy the air supremacy that is essential to protecting America's air space and

maintaining air supremacy in the global war on terror.

We saw that displayed astonishingly on October 7th 2001, barely 3 weeks after September 11th when we went to war 7,000 miles from home in a place where no one expected to be. And within six weeks, we had liberated Kabul and liberated 25 million Afghans, almost all of them Muslims, from one of the world's worst tyrannies.

It was achieved through an extraordinary combination of air and ground power. With some incredibly skilled pilots, some of them trained here. Pilots flying for hours, some of them in F-16s from the Persian Gulf, or B-2s and B-52s from CONUS and from Guam. It was something really remarkable.

And I'll give you a personal perspective on this. I was UnderSecretary of Defense 12 years ago during Desert Storm, when our Vice President was the Secretary. And I was kind of his action officer for SCUD hunting in western Iraq, because that was the key to trying to keep Israel out of the war, which was something we succeeded in.

But it was a challenge. I don't know how many sorties were flown over western Iraq or how many brave pilots put their lives in danger. But finally we put Special Forces on the ground. Some of them actually saw some SCUDs. But the end result of that campaign was, while I think we harassed the Iraqis and we reduced the effectiveness of their firing, they still got off 54 SCUD attacks on Israel during that war. [inaudible]

As a matter of fact, in that whole campaign there was one Iraqi SCUD launcher that was destroyed, and it turned out to be a decoy. What a change 10 years have made. The ability to have those eyes on the ground actually connect with those pilots in the air produced that phenomenal result in Kabul.

I had the privilege of meeting with some of the Special Forces guys on the ground, Air Force as well as Army, who were calling in those air strikes. The first group that arrived didn't know whether they were going to be killed or embraced by the Afghan who met them. Fortunately, they were embraced. They were put on horses almost immediately. Only one of them had ridden horses more than once, and even then not in a wooden saddle. But, that didn't stop them. And the end result is history.

Secretary Rumsfeld was once asked at one of his press conferences: What on earth was he doing, bringing back 19th century horse cavalry and 50-year old B-52s? And he said, that's all part of our transformation plan. [Laughter]

And indeed, it is. And we have that buzzword "transformation," which you hear almost everywhere. And it means a lot of things. But most of all, it doesn't always mean new equipment. Very often it means using old things in new and different ways, sometimes partly because of what new technology enables. And there's no question that that incredible achievement in Afghanistan was not just the pilots and the men on the ground, but it was also incredible ingenuity in the air – in JSTARS crews and AWACs crews. [inaudible]

And I got another stunning briefing from General [John] Jumper [Air Force Chief of Staff] and [Air Force] Secretary [James] Roche sometime ago about how young airmen would use chatrooms, not to find girlfriends and not to zip around on the internet, – but to combine and infuse intelligence about locations of bad guys in Afghanistan, so that those strikes could come in to support the good guys.

It's an ingenuity that was developed in video games, but applied to what really counts.

And of course -- and probably, my guess is, I speak for the majority in this room -- none of that great stuff in the air could have happened [inaudible] without the backbreaking work by the crews on the ground. So, let's everybody give a big hand, and especially not just to the air crews but to the ground crews. [Applause]

And anytime you think its hot working on the ground right here at Luke, just stop a minute and think that its at least 20 degrees hotter in Baghdad, and they are shooting mortars at you. [inaudible] That is really tough duty.

And you are also going through cultural changes. In that same briefing, we were being briefed by a woman F-15 pilot. And while that was a culture change from my last tour in the Pentagon, she wasn't flying an F-15 anymore; she was flying a Predator. And I'm sure all the pilots will know, all of you would know of the culture change to go from being in the cockpit to accepting desk duty somewhere in CIA headquarters. But you're flying an airplane 7000 miles away that's doing the Lord's work. In fact, General Jumper said he was going to make sure he was going to take care of her career. But I guess I better go back and check when I get home.

But of course Enduring Freedom was just the first of these two stunning campaigns. Operation Iraqi Freedom has been more difficult, and ultimately it may be more important. I have made four trips to Iraq in the last year, and on each one of them I have been privileged to see members of the Air Force and the [inaudible] sacrifices you have made — pilots and support personnel, active duty and Reserve alike -- and most of the time I can't tell which is which, unless I ask. You are spending long periods away from home as you know. Long periods for the Reservists activated. I wish those times could be shorter. But I am enormously grateful for what they are doing.

I have been able to stand in the cockpits and watch the incredibly stable nerves of our C-130 and C-17 pilots as they make combat landings in Baghdad and Mosul. And in fact, one time taking off from Mosul we got an alarm and had to go into maneuvers. We still don't know if it was real or just a flash of light, but there were real things these men and women encountered. And increasingly now the Army is using brave Air Force truck drivers to keep the main supply routes open on the ground between Kuwait and Iraq.

In fact, to date, 10 Air Force personnel have given their lives during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and 19 in Operation Enduring Freedom. It's a reminder that freedom isn't free. It's a reminder that the sacrifices in the war on terror involve our total force. The biggest burden may be on the ground troops, but all of

you are doing your part.

We want you to know that thanks to your collective efforts, we are winning the global war on terror. We're winning in Iraq because today Iraqis are stepping forward as well, and because the enemy we are fighting there are unbelievable evil. And most of all, we're winning because the men and women in America's Armed Forces know that what they're doing is as important as what their grandfathers did in World War II and what their fathers did during the Cold War. And they're doing the job with the same courage and dedication as those earlier generations.

There are countless stories of brave young Americans in this fight. Like Air Force Sgt. Christian MacKenzie -- who was recently honored by the Marine Corps at one of their Friday night precision drills at the Marine Corps Barracks in Washington, DC. If you haven't had the privilege of seeing this awesome American ceremony and you are in Washington DC in the summer, I urge you to go. This one was in honor of five wounded servicemembers, and Sgt. MacKenzie was the Air Force representative.

You wouldn't know it from his appearance today, but his face had been terribly damaged. Flying with the Marines into Fallujah, he took an RPG round head-on. We're lucky he's alive.

Another hero I've had the privilege to meet is an Army Sgt. named Adam Roplogle. In May, he and his unit, the 1st Armored Division -- which, as some of you many know, had been extended a couple extra months, unfortunately, but we needed them -- they were fighting near Karbala, when a rocket propelled grenade slammed into him. He lost his left arm and his left eye. He's got a wife and a very young baby, both of whom have been with him in the hospital.

Obviously, he made an enormous sacrifice. But he puts the price he's paid into the following perspective -- and I'm quoting him: "We're fighting for everything we believe in. We've freed Iraqis from a dictator who was killing Iraqis by the millions." Adam described how he had personally changed so many lives in Iraq, how he helped to destroy terrorist cells and got people back into their houses.

He even bought bikes for Iraqi children using his own money. "After all," he said, they only cost me five bucks, and these kids don't have anything." It's the American spirit. It really is. Saddam affected everybody in the country. And something had to be done." And something was done.

And when I heard Adam's story, what came to mind was a line that President Reagan often used about America's military. He would frequently ask, "Where do we find such people?"

And he would answer his own question, "We find them where we found you. Where we always find them in our hours of need -- on the main streets and farms of America. They are the product of the freest, fairest, the most generous and humane society that has ever been created."

And by the way, there are ordinary Americans everywhere in the world doing extraordinary things.

As a result of efforts like Chris MacKenzie's and Adam Replogle's and those of the other men and women of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and the Coast Guard – which lost its first casualty since World War II recently, preventing a major oil disaster a few weeks ago in the Persian Gulf.

As a result of their efforts, in less than three years we have removed two regimes who supported terrorism, and we have liberated 50 million people, most of them Muslims, from tyrannical rulers who terrorized them.

Today both Iraq and Afghanistan are on the road to freedom and representative government. And a new Afghan constitution has been adopted that gives equal rights to men and women. The new Iraqi transitional constitution contains assurances of equal rights and other fundamentals of democracy -- including separation of powers, a bill of rights, and civilian control of the military.

Both of those countries are now heading for free elections. They are becoming examples for the Middle East and Muslim world, and they are becoming America's newest allies against terrorism.

There's still a lot to be done. But the Afghan people and the Iraqi people are stepping up to do their part, with courage and determination like those of our own brave men and women.

One young Iraqi is celebrating the freedom to have his own website and put his comments up on the web. You can find him on line, if you are interested. It's interesting stuff. This one calls himself "The Mesopotamian." By the way its now safe in Iraq to have your own website, but its still not safe to put your own name on it, because somebody may still come around to kill you. Just think about that. But we're half way there, I guess you could say.

He wrote recently, "The liberation is real... there is no turning back. If the terrorist, obsessed by the devil is willing to explode himself to kill the innocent; we, filled with the light of Love of and the Love of light are even more capable of sacrifice.... The enemy is desperate, he is striking left and right, beheading, slaughtering, murdering; blind with the rage of the wounded dying beast.... But, we shall overcome," he writes. "This I know with every fiber of my being.... And thank you America."

I visited Iraq for the fourth time a few weeks ago, and I saw how our troops are helping people like him to stand on their own. Right now, we can count more than 200,000 Iraqis on duty or in training in the five different branches of the Iraqi security forces -- the Army, the National Guard, the police, the Border Guards, and the Facilities Protection Service. And while those numbers are impressive for a force that didn't even exist a year ago, the numbers can still be misleading. Iraqi forces still have significant shortcomings, in training and equipment and in leadership. But we are working to help them fix that.

We saw some of both last April, both weaknesses and strengths. But no one should have expected that Iraqi security forces would be ready that soon to stand up to the kind of fighting they encountered in Fallujah or in the Najaf-Karbala area. Not surprisingly, some of them performed poorly. But some of them performed very bravely.

One example of the latter was up north in the city of Mosul. It's a mixed Arab/Kurdish city. The governor of Mosul, a man named [Usama] Kachmula -- He was Sunni-Arab, by the way. I mention that for those of you who are into these differences. Some people say that the Sunni-Arabs are against us. It's only the real killers who are against us. This man risked his life the night of April 19th, to stand and fight off the enemy. And the Iraqi police and the Iraqi National Guard people stayed with him. So while the American Army was nearby in case they were needed, we weren't needed.

Sadly, I have to report that Governor Kachmula in Mosul a few weeks ago -- just a few days ago -- he and his group were ambushed on the way to Baghdad. And he was tragically murdered. It is a great loss.

But more Iraqis are coming forward with great courage to fight for their own country. And it takes courage. By our own account -- and General [David H.] Petraeus [Commanding General, The Office of Security Transition/Multinational Security Transition Command] and I think our count is probably off by a factor of two, because we don't keep track of every single Iraqi as well as we keep track of every single American -- but just by our count, probably 450 Iraqis have died in the line of duty, fighting with us already since the liberation of Baghdad.

And despite the casualties, despite the enemy's attempts to intimidate them -- not only directly, but through their families as well -- Iraqis are continuing to come forward in large numbers to defend their country. For every opening that's advertised in the new security forces, we get, they get -- it's their own government -- they get 5 or 10 Iraqis coming forward to volunteer. A few weeks ago, a suicide bomber attacked volunteers who were lining up outside a recruiting station in Baghdad and killed quite a number of people and wounded many more. But the very next day, long lines of recruits appeared at that very same recruiting station.

When I visited Fallujah in June, we met a young U.S. Marine -- Private First Class Rodriguez -- whose life had been saved by five brave members of what we now call the Iraqi National Guard. When he fell wounded on the battlefield, three Iraqis immediately returned fire, and two others Iraqi Guardsmen raced into the line of fire to pull the American off the battlefield. Their heroism was recognized with two Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals for valor and three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, also for valor. One of those Iraqi privates said after that action that -- quote -- "I feel very, very bad that the Marine was shot, because they are like my brothers now. But I am ready to go out again. I am always ready."

We went in June to meet with the new leaders of the Iraqi government. We spent about eight hours with Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. We also met the President and Deputy Prime Minister.

On the way home, I started thinking about the courage of the people we had just been meeting with. Prime Minister Allawi was nearly chopped in two in 1979 in his apartment in London by one of Saddam's assassins. He woke just in time to get his head out of the way of the ax. But his leg was nearly severed, and he spent nearly a year in the hospital himself. His wife had a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered. Prime Minister Allawi is now number one on Zarqawi's hit list, and he

knows what it is to be number one on somebody's hit list.

Sheik Ghazi al-Yawer, the new President of Iraq, became the rotating president of the old governing council when his predecessor, a man named Izzedin Salim, was murdered by a car bomber as he waited to enter the Green Zone in Baghdad. Sheik Ghazi knows that his life is in danger every day that he serves as President.

The Deputy Prime Minister is a Kurd, named Barham Salih. I've known him for many years. I read with horror two years ago, in 2002, in Northern Iraq, when he just missed being killed by some assassins sent by an Al Qaeda-associated group based in Northern Iraq. He knows what it means.

But it's ordinary people as well. This week in Washington, we hosted a delegation of 13 Iraqi women who had come here to learn the ways of American democracy, so they could take them back to other women in Iraq. Women are a very important part of the future of that country and of the whole Muslim world. I think a measure of progress in the Muslim world is going to be how they treat their women and treating them as full citizens.

These women are very promising. They weren't at all shy about their purpose, about their willingness to stand up, or about their gratitude to the United States for what has been accomplished. And when they were asked what they had to say about the U.S.-led war and the occupation. One of them said, under Saddam "we felt like we were standing in line for the torture chamber." And another said, "My only question is: Why didn't you come sooner?"

On Monday these women met with President [George W.] Bush in the Oval Office. And some of the wounded soldiers from Walter Reed [Army Medical Center] and their family members were there as well. The women embraced them with emotion, and through their tears, they thanked our young heroes over and over again.

When I was in Iraq recently, my interpreter up in Mosul was a young Iraqi woman. Let me call her Zenab. That's not her real name, but she's in enough danger without me mentioning her real name. Her sister had been assassinated because Zenab was working for the Americans. I asked her why she continued to work with us. And she said, "Because my father told me that you must never retreat in the face of evil."

And the enemy we are fighting is truly evil. You've probably heard about this terrorist named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Secretary [of State Colin] Powell spoke about him at some length in his speech to the United Nations in February of 2003, before the war. He's turned out to be perhaps the single leading killer among the many killers we are confronting in Iraq. Back in January we were lucky enough to capture one of his messengers who was carrying a letter from him to his colleague and former comrade-in-arms in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden. Zarqawi ran a camp in Afghanistan until we drove him out with our victory. In the letter, he wrote -- speaking about the need to kill Shia Muslims -- he said, "this is a battle in which blood will be spilled. This is exactly what we want, since right and wrong no longer have any place in our current situation. God's religion" -- Zarqawi's version of it, I have to say -- "is

more precious than life and souls.”

These are people who worship death, who hate life, and who fear freedom and democracy. In fact elsewhere in that same letter, Zarqawi says that when the Iraqis are governing themselves and there will be a democracy, “this will be for us suffocation.”

We Americans, I think, understand what Zenab’s father said. Like Zenab, we don’t retreat in the face of evil either. We stand up to it. We stand up for the values of our way of life: freedom, equality, religious tolerance, and democracy. And you and your fellow service members have taken the lead.

In June [May 29th] we had another celebration of that “Greatest Generation” that fought in World War II. We dedicated a wonderful memorial in Washington to those heroes. But you and your comrades are the equal of that generation. Like them, you’re not only helping to rid the world of an evil, but you are helping free people build new countries that in the future will be our allies in the fight for freedom and democracy.

So, on behalf of the President, the Secretary of Defense, and myself personally – I would like to thank all of you here at Luke Air Force Base -- and your families who sacrifice along with you – for your commitment to those values, and for your great service to this nation. Keep up the great work. May God bless you, and may God bless this great country. Thank you. [Applause]

Thank you. I’m told that we have eight or nine minutes for questions – as long as they are not nasty and difficult. Only three minutes if they are in the latter category. It’s always hard to be the first one, is anybody volunteering here?

Q: Good afternoon sir, I’m Second Lieutenant White. My question is: Does the Department of Defense have any plans to increase numbers, military numbers to relieve some of the pressure from the deployments?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: That depends on the Service you’re talking about actually. The Army is looking at at least a temporary increase in personnel – on the order of 30,000. But within that increase, they are actually looking at a much bigger increase in Army combat structure, to be able to go from 33 combat brigades, to at least 43 combat brigades, and maybe eventually 48. And that will relieve by that 50 percent factor the strain on the given Army unit.

I think the Air Force feels comfortable with its current active duty strength. I think, like the Army, they are looking at rebalancing to some extent between the active and Reserve.

One of the things we have learned is that we designed a Reserve structure with the idea that for most positions we would only use them once in the – quote -- “big war.” And it’s turned out that we’re using them over and over – people like Civil Affairs specialists. And it’s the euphemism in the Pentagon, “low density, high demand.” And the Secretary’s translation is: That’s something that you didn’t get enough of. And we are trying to fix some of that.

I'm not sure of the Air Force numbers exactly, but I know the Army over the next several years plans to shift some 100,000 positions to rebalance between the Guard and Reserve – the Reserve component and the active component.

But one of the things to keep in mind here, people are our most important commodity. They are also our most expensive. And if you increase your strength now, to have a capability three or four years from now – that three or four years from now you no longer need – then you've made it harder to sustain the quality of what you have left.

So it is a careful management problem, and I know that the leadership of all the services spends a lot of time on it. The Navy, in fact – by the way – is actually reducing active duty numbers. Not hugely, but probably one of the first times in the middle of a war that any of our Services has brought numbers down because they are finding ways to do things more efficiently.

Q: Sir, its an honor to speak with you today. My name is Staff Sergeant Thompson from the Munitions Flight.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: From where?

Q. The Munitions Flight – the equipment maintenance squadron here, sir. My question is concerning Iraq: What are the indications that you are looking for for us to claim total victory and bring us home, sir?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: That's a great question. I think given the nature of the enemy there, total victory is not going to have anything corresponding to the surrender ceremony on the deck of the Missouri, or even I guess the armistice in Korea. We were fighting there in unconventional... So I think the measure of success is when the Iraqis are bearing most, or all of the fight. And that, I think, although it's hard to predict, I think we're on a very fast track to having that happen.

My shorthand for victory in Iraq is Iraqi self-government and Iraqi self-defense. And transferring government, transferring power from an American occupation role to an Iraqi government on June 28th was a huge step forward. We had a big debate about this last fall. And there were some people who thought that we don't know how these Iraqis are going to manage things, and MacArthur-like, they thought that we could just run an occupation there for years. General [John]Abizaid [Commander, U.S. Central Command] and I were very strongly for the other side. We said, look, we came as liberators. We were welcomed as liberators. But people don't want liberators occupying their country indefinitely.

They need us, but they also want us to leave. And I think we got in, just into the right window of convincing them – from a government point of view – it's now their government. Interestingly, getting that done on June 28th we speeded it up a couple of days, mostly to confuse the terrorists. But it also suddenly said to the Iraqi people, "Wow, we thought the Americans were just lying when they said... Like other dates in this part of the world, it would come and go. But they speeded things up. Maybe

they really do want to get out of here. Maybe we better get our act together before they leave.”

And that’s exactly the effect you want to have. It was the kind of psyops effect that would not have been much better if we had actually planned it that way. Better to be lucky than smart, right?

But self-government is really important. And that doesn’t just mean in the political sphere, it means in the military sphere too. One of the weaknesses of the Iraqi security forces has been that they didn’t have their own officers corps. But we are working on that. We are working on it with the new government.

And I think, if you think that he’s always avoiding predictions, you’re right. I am avoiding predictions. As Yogi Berra said, “It’s dangerous to make predictions, especially about the future.”

But I do think that we are going to be able to progressively over time to hand over to the Iraqis. General Petraeus [inaudible] up in Mosul is now in charge of this force in Iraq. He, if anybody, can do it. And I think it can definitely be done, and he’s the right guy for the job.

You can predict with some certainty how fast equipment will flow. [inaudible segment]

Q: [inaudible]

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: [inaudible] What you can’t predict is the enemy. The enemy so far has grown. But I think that the word, “suffocation,” that Zarqawi uses is the thing that will start to affect the enemy.

When the people realize that it is Iraqis they are fighting, and the people don’t want them around anymore – even in places like Fallujah – we’ll start to see a turn. But you can’t predict. The more the enemy believes that we are patient, the sooner they will quit the fight. The more that they believe we are impatient, that we may give up, that’s their main incentive to go.

Yes, ma’am.

Q. Hi sir, my name is Capt. Eichner. My question is on the topic of outsourcing. Here at Luke we have a maintenance squadron, and we have partially contracted out our security, and I was just wondering what the future is of the Air Force privatization and outsourcing?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I guess I would like to ask if you think it is a good thing. But I go back to my comment that our personnel are our most valuable asset. And if there is something that can be done by a civilian contractor that doesn’t require all of the special training that goes into a military professional, then it seems to me that that is the best thing to do.

And so I think you’ll find a continued look at outsourcing and privatization, but it obviously shouldn’t be taken to the point where military jobs that need that special kind of training are done by amateurs. [unintelligible]

I hope I'm not going to get myself in trouble at Andrews [Air Force Base], because I need their hospitality. But the first flight out of Andrews in this job, it struck me: Why do we have an Air Force enlisted person driving the bus? Lots of civilians can drive buses. This guy volunteered for a military career, and he's got the talent to be a military officer. Is there something special about the bus at Andrews? I just don't know. So, don't get me into trouble.

But where we have enlisted people in my office, doing what some might call civilians' work, they are handling incredibly classified information. Their training is in information handling. They are really information specialists that account for, and you have to have confidence in. So it's going to be a judgment call all the time. The more we can do that kind of thing, the more we can resource our uniformed force more effectively. At the end of the day, resources are finite. So we need to do the best we can.

Yes, sir.

Q: Yes sir, Tech Sergeant [inaudible]. I have a question on the other side of the world, about Korea. The Army is [inaudible], and yet the Air Force is offering money for troops to extend as we upgrade our F-16s over there. Are we withdrawing forces? What is our mission there in Korea?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: No, we are not. We really are trying to restructure. We are persuading the Koreans that that's what this is about. I've been through Inchon, the first time was in the late seventies, when we did this unilateral withdrawal which had a terrible effect on the Koreans. They thought, I think correctly, that we might abandon our commitments to South Korea. And fortunately, after a year, President Carter thought better of it, and he stopped the withdrawals. Korea was in a much, much rockier state at that point in time years ago.

The progress of South Korea in the past 25 years is stunning. And if you ever want to see a dramatic satellite photograph, get a night map of the Korean peninsula. It's all lights south of the DMZ, and north of it is one little spot that is Pyongyang.

And if anybody ever tells you that culture determines everything, bring up that map. Because it is Koreans in the North, and Koreans in the South. The difference is good government in the South, and one of the most rotten governments in the world in the North. But all that progress means, especially when it comes to the ground fight, that the Koreans can continue to take a bigger chunk of it. I think when it comes to the air fight that we still have an absolutely crucial role to play. It seems that the disparity you describe fits exactly the fact that our commitment to Korea is as solid as ever.

But one more thing is that we look forward to a day when we were not in a terrible conflict, when this tension in Korea ends. It could end with peaceful unification, it could frankly even end with two separate governments, if the government in the North would finally decide that instead of spending half of their measurable GNP. I think by now the South Korean defense budget is higher than half of the entire North Korean GNP. Think about that. And one of the reasons is because, [the North Koreans] abuse their people so badly, and because they put so much money into a military they don't need to have.

One day hopefully, what happened in Europe will happen in Korea, one way or another. Then we need the same kind of commitment to defend against North Korea. But we will still want a security relationship with the south, with Korea if it's unified.

We've talked a lot about that with Korean officials of both parties. I think they understand. It's a pretty big country – 60 million people. I think I've got the numbers right. Sixty million in North and South, with 40 million in the South. Twelfth largest [inaudible] in the world.

But it's got Japan on one side, and China on the other. And they feel very small. And for us to have an ally out there, so I think we shouldn't just think short-term about Korea. We should think long-term. And we are.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: And I guess we are just about out of time. But if I could just close with where you opened. You must be pretty proud to have one of twelve outstanding Airmen of the year. And when I heard what Staff Sgt. [Aaron] Davenport does, I was reminded of a visit to Walter Reed not too long ago – meeting one of your friends who had been seriously wounded. I believe he lost a foot, I believe in Afghanistan. It was because of ordnance.

It is incredibly dangerous work, and requires an incredibly high level of skill. We are, by the way, we have just created a DoD-wide task force to focus every resource that can be usefully applied to the problem of Improvised Explosive Devices – or IEDs as we call them. Or VBIEDs, Vehicle-Borne IEDs. It's a nasty acronym. But I'm afraid it's something that is going to be with us not just in Iraq, but around the world. It is a weapon of choice of terrorists. And we are applying all kinds of technology and armor and brave EOD [explosive ordnance disposal] people to try to defeat the problem every way we can.

So join me in not only a big hand for Sgt. Davenport, but for all the EOD personnel in the Air Force.

[Applause.]

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