



United States Department of Defense.

News Transcript

On the web: <http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030411-depsecdef0091.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact: <http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html> or +1 (703) 428-0711

Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

Friday, April 11, 2003

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Briefing with Arab/Muslim Media

(Foreign Press Center briefing with Arab/Muslim media. Also participating were Ambassador Christopher Ross, special coordinator for public diplomacy, U.S. Department of State; Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Paul Denig, director, Washington Foreign Press Center.

Denig: Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Foreign Press Center. We are glad to have you here this morning for a very special briefing. And I am pleased to be able to introduce to you the moderator of this morning's briefing, Ambassador Christopher Ross, a Middle East expert, and also the Special Coordinator for Public Diplomacy and the Deputy to the Department of State's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. He will moderate this session, and I will hand this over to him.

Ross: Thank you, Paul. (In Arabic.) Good morning to all of you. It's no secret that events in Iraq and our determination to help free the Iraqi people from the oppression and repression of the regime of Saddam Hussein, a subject that has been of great interest to public opinion in the Arab and Muslim worlds. And this being the case, we thought it would be useful to organize some special briefings for the Arab and Muslim press corps. And we're delighted to and honored to be able to inaugurate this small initiative with a gentleman whose 30 year career in government and academia has run across the spectrum of the Foreign Affairs Agencies, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Department of State, the Department of Defense. This career mirrors the military and diplomatic complexities of the situation as we know it today. I first met this gentleman some many years ago, but my most vivid memory of him is during a visit that he made in the mid-1990's to Damascus where I was Ambassador. And I remember sitting with him and his delegation around my dining room table and having to field some very incisive and probing questions. I won't go on any longer. This man is very well known to you. But for those who read Al Kamen this morning, I present "that" Paul D. Wolfowitz.

Wolfowitz: Thank you. And I have with me our second highest ranking Military Officer, General Peter Pace, United States Marine Corps, and one of the million-and-a-half magnificent men and women who are serving our country -- and I believe the world -- so well. (In Arabic.) And if I may begin the way I learned to begin speeches when I was the American Ambassador in Indonesia -- (in Arabic) -- the rest will be in English.

I'd like to make a few brief comments at the beginning, and then General Pace and I will take questions. I'd like to begin by emphasizing that the United States is sensitive to the fact that people in the Middle East may view the war in Iraq with suspicion. Given the history of that region, it is understandable. But as a nation that had to fight for its own independence more than 200 years ago, Americans have the greatest sympathy for all people who yearn for freedom and independence and a chance to live in peace.

At the end of the American Revolution, the father of our country, George Washington, remarked, "My anxious recollection, my sympathetic feeling, and my best wishes are irresistibly excited whensoever in any country I see an oppressed nation unfurl the banners of freedom." That is how Americans feel today, and it was on our minds as we undertook this war to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime. And I guess it might be worth noting that our own independence was aided by foreign countries and foreign forces, notably from France and Poland. And it's, perhaps, also worth remembering that it took us a little while after our independence to organize the government.

I think a little historical perspective is useful in this era of 24 hour news coverage when we expect everything to happen instantaneously. In fact, the conflict in Iraq now is only three weeks old. Coalition forces are on track and on plan. Tyranny has lost its grip and the Iraqi people are liberated -- or being liberated. While the outcome is not in doubt, however, the war is still going on. Operations are continuing and pockets of resistance are being eradicated, both in Baghdad and a number of other towns and cities, particularly in the north.

From the start, we have made humanitarian assistance a crucial part of our mission. The war did not launch a humanitarian crisis, but it is ending one. In fact, I know that on one of the news channels this morning, an Arab woman, I think in Mosul, or, perhaps, Kirkuk, standing with her children outside one of Saddam's palaces and saying in moderately good English -- although she kept trying to go back to Arabic -- "It's all marble, marble -- 'mar-mar,' I think -- and yet this man didn't give food to his people. He abused his people." And this was an Arab woman.

We understand that the immediate need is to address basic needs like medical care, water, electrical service, and making sure Iraqi civil servants who administer these functions get paid. Water is being -- I'd make another aside -- people are coming back to Umm Qasr. Iraqi civil servants are coming back to work; the port is functioning. In fact, the population of Umm Qasr has grown from 15,000 before the war to some 40,000 because people see progress. Water is being provided where needed, particularly in Basra where there was a severe shortage imposed by the regime. Water supplies are now, we think, at pre-war levels, but they need to go up further.

Food and other supplies are flowing in. To date, \$375 million worth of food -- that's 590,000 metric tons -- have been provided by the United States. Of that amount, \$200 million was donated to the United Nations World Food Program. Other countries have been making large contributions as well, including Australia and Kuwait. USAID, in addition, has contributed \$246 million of humanitarian relief that includes blankets, hygiene kits, plastic sheeting, and water containers, tanks, and treatment plants. In the last few days, to pick another example, the Spanish ship, Galicia, arrived at Umm Qasr with a 50-bed field hospital that will be moved up into Iraq to help treat Iraqi patients.

There has been a lot of talk about something we have called -- we do call the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. Let me be clear, that office is not a provisional government for Iraq. Its main function is to make sure that basic services are restored and running. And once that happens, the plan is to turn over those functions as rapidly as possible to an Iraqi interim authority, which will assume increasingly greater responsibility for the administration of basic functions in the country.

But beyond that interim authority, the goal is to have a government that truly represents the people of Iraq, that protects their basic rights, and allows them live in democracy and freedom. The people of Iraq now have it within their power to establish a constitution and a political system that will reflect their real wishes and interests. The United States and its coalition partners will support them in this. But make no mistake, the task is an Iraqi task: the task is theirs, just as the country is theirs. We come as liberators, not as occupiers.

Americans have absolutely no desire to occupy Iraq. We will stay as long as necessary, but not a single day longer. As President Bush said just a few days ago, the Iraqis are plenty capable of running Iraq. And that's precisely what is going to happen. That has been a major goal in our willingness to take this fight to Saddam Hussein, along with the urgent need to eliminate his weapons of mass terror, and remove Iraq as a safe haven for terrorists. It is tragic that those worthy goals could not be achieved without the use of deadly force, but this evil regime left no other option. And they tried to make the war as painful as possible, particularly for civilians, by concealing military targets in civilian areas, by using human shields, and by violating the Geneva Convention.

We have been through some hundred schools in Southern Iraq so far. Every single one of them was a regime command and control center with weapons stored in them. As a result of that behavior, innocent people have suffered despite extraordinary efforts to avoid civilian casualties. Those people are victims of this regime just as much as are the heroic men and women in the coalition forces who have sacrificed their lives in the call to Iraq's liberation, or the thousands of Iraqis over the last decades who have lost their lives fighting this regime.

The sacrifices that people have made can only be understood in terms of the dramatic events that the world witnessed two days ago. Those events tell a powerful story, the story of free Iraqis celebrating their new-found freedom for the first time, welcoming coalition troops, and tearing down those hideous statues of Saddam Hussein in Central Baghdad and around the country. It was like watching the Berlin Wall come down all over again. Lovers of freedom everywhere can understand the joy of

the Iraqi people and their hopes for the future, but the best spokesman for Iraqis are Iraqis themselves.

Yesterday, the French news agency, Agence France Presse, reported on a Baghdad street scene that I think kind of sums it up. The reporter narrated what had happened when a group of disillusioned Syrian fighters were looking for a ride back to Damascus. They could not comprehend the celebrations that welcomed American troops. An Iraqi taxi driver heard them and asked, "Who told you to come here?" He added, "You were only fighting for Saddam Hussein, who brought the country to ruins and let you down in the end."

Iraq is full of such stories. And now that people can at last speak freely and candidly, we are hearing them. I would encourage all of you, and all of the people throughout the Arab world, to listen with open minds and help the Iraqis tell their stories to the world.

General Pace.

Pace: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I think I will join with you now, sir, on answering questions.

Ross: Good. I'll be moderating the questions. When I call upon you, please identify yourself, your organization, and keep the questions short. And bear in mind please, we have just learned that General Pace must leave by 11, although Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz may choose to stay longer.

Wolfowitz: So you can point your questions to him.

Ross: That's right.

Yes.

Q: Hanan El-badry, Egyptian Television. I have two questions: one for Mr. Wolfowitz, and one for General Pace. My first question, Iraqi federal demilitarized new government will be a great chance for the Middle East (inaudible) the collapsing of Ottoman Empire or (inaudible). If you believe in that, can you tell us more details how the Middle East will be after we have in touch a Democratic new country or new government?

My question for Mr. -- for General Pace, it will be: Are you going to allow bad forces to enter Iraq soon -- or sooner or later?

Pace: The important word you used is democratic. What the shape of Iraq is, and what kind of security forces they have are issues for Iraqis to decide when they have a government that represents them. It is important to the United States, and I think to every country in the region, that Iraq remain a unified country. And that's going to be another challenge, but I think the Iraqi people can rise to it.

The simplest way I would have of saying it is, I remember years ago when people throughout East

Asia and the world said that democracy wasn't possible in East Asia except maybe in Japan; that Koreans had no experience, or that the Filipinos hadn't done very well with it -- the Chinese, and it's a long list.

By now, the Taiwanese have demonstrated that they can do democracy. The Koreans have demonstrated that they can do democracy. I think the example of Iraqis demonstrating that Arabs are just as capable of managing those institutions as anyone else will have a broad and positive and powerful example, but there is a lot of work to be done to get to that stage.

Q: For the Middle East, please?

Pace: I think for the Middle East, in particular.

Wolfowitz: With regard to the Badr Corps, as you know, there have been members of Badr Corps who have been living in Northern Iraq, in northeast section of Iraq for some time now, as there had been members of other military groups. The coalition military forces have their own mission to overthrow a regime, to find and eliminate the weapons of mass destruction, to provide a stable environment inside of which the new Iraqi Government can stand itself up and take over the operations of the government, and then we can leave.

We are going to ensure, as best that we can, that all areas of Iraq remain stable, that we do not favor one group or another group, so that the Iraqi people can meet in the open, have open debate, and select their own form of government so that we can leave.

Ross: In the back, in the back row. No, you've got it. Yes.

Q: Again, (inaudible), Egyptian Television, Nile News Channel. Mr. Wolfowitz, we talked about change in Syria. Now what kind of change you are looking for? And if your demands are not responded to positively, would it include regime change in Syria?

Wolfowitz: You're way, way ahead of everything. You're not unique in that. What we are looking for is a change in the current bad behavior of the Syrian Government in shipping tariff fighters into Iraq, in sheltering fugitives from Iraq, possibly sheltering bad materials out of Iraq. Syria should not meddle in Iraq. It should not be assisting the people who supported that evil regime, and that behavior just has to stop.

Q: I have a follow-up with this.

Ross: Follow-up here, sorry.

Q: Mahtab Farid from Radio Farda. Mr. Wolfowitz, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and Mr. Bolton repeatedly asked Syria and Iran to stay away, and Jack Straw is going to send some envoy to

speak to the governments. Have you guys had a chance to discuss what Mr. Straw is going to discuss with those two governments?

Wolfowitz: I know that Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister Straw have discussed these issues. I think, hopefully, the Syrians are starting to get the message.

Q: Thank you. I'm afraid this is a question again by Egyptian Television.

(Laughter.)

Participant: Raise your hands if you're from Egyptian Television.

(Laughter.)

Q: That's the last one. I'm the last one from Egyptian Television.

Dr. Wolfowitz, the question is -- yeah, the question is for Dr. Wolfowitz. Are you very surprised at all that Saddam Hussein and his regime did not use weapons of mass destruction against you?

Wolfowitz: Clearly, that was perhaps our single greatest fear. But I think it's also clear that this plan of General Franks, which we heard so much second-guessing about two or three days into the war, was actually rather remarkably effective in getting in there with a very capable force before, I think, the regime knew what was happening.

I think if we can get to the bottom of what did and didn't happen, we will find that that had a lot to do with what didn't happen and had a lot to do with the fact that there wasn't an environmental disaster in the south when the oil wells would have been exploded; that the explosives that were put on the oil platforms in the Shahab hadn't been rigged yet; that we haven't had what would have been a true disaster if oil wells in the north are exploded, because they are particularly noxious in what they put out; that we didn't have missiles launched at Israel, which was one of our fears. Many things didn't happen. We don't yet know the reason why.

We do know one thing, though. At least one Iraqi soldier who surrendered in the south told us that while he was very much afraid of what the regime would do to him if he didn't carry out orders to destroy oil wells, he'd read all those leaflets we dropped about what we would do if he did. He was torn between fear of the regime and recognition that we were coming. I'm sure that knowing that we were already there made a big difference.

Pace: If I could add also that there is still fighting going on. It is still possible that there are those in control of some of those weapons. So we still have Iraqi leaders who have freedom of action and freedom of decision, and they need to do what they have been doing, which is to understand that it is their free will; that they can choose to either become part of Iraq's future or to be part of Iraq's past;

and that their actions will be judged when this is completed. But it is still possible that there are those out there who have weapons of mass destruction, who -- so I don't want to leave the impression that this fighting is done, by any means.

Q: This is Umit Erginsey of Turkey's NTV Television. Mr. Secretary and General Pace, regarding the tensions in Northern Iraq, in the event the Turkish army storms into Northern Iraq, despite all warnings by the United States, would you ever consider using military force against Turkish troops? And from this point on, what could be done to re-warm up the relations? Thank you.

Wolfowitz: Look, the premise is that we're -- let me say. A great deal, I think, is going in a positive way between the United States and Turkey, between the coalition forces and the Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq. Those two cities fell. They fell surprisingly quickly when the regular army saw those statues toppling in Baghdad. We have now U.S. forces, a significant presence in Kirkuk. There will soon be a significant presence in Mosul. Turkey is sending liaison officers with those coalition troops so Turkey will have a clear view of what's going on. I think people understand the dangers of pushing things, misbehaving in those crucial cities. You're going to have some problems going forward sorting out competing property claims, as I think you know. That process has to be done carefully in a legal manner, not by force.

But Secretary Powell has had, I know, at least one important, probably several, conversations with Foreign Minister Gul. I think we're in good communication. I think everybody -- Turkey, coalition forces, Kurds -- are behaving responsibly. And I think, going forward, it's a very good sign, not only for the future of Iraq, but I think for the future of U.S.-Turkish relations.

Q: Thank you. My name is Said Arikat from Al Quds Newspaper. To General Pace, how confident are you, sir -- or are you confident -- that you will find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?

And to Secretary Wolfowitz, both Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz advised the Palestinians to learn the lessons of Iraq. And do you expect that an emboldened Sharon will even carry more aggressive policies in the West Bank and the occupied territories, and should the Palestinians have lower expectations as to what kind of peace settlement they will get as a result of this war?

And on a lighter note, sir, some people are calling you Wolfowitz of Arabia. How would you respond to that?

(Laughter.)

Pace: With regard to the first question, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we will find the weapons of mass destruction. He has already used those weapons against Iran. He used those weapons against his own people. He had caches of those weapons that even the UN inspectors who were there found, in part. So the intelligence communities have never been more united, nor had more proof of

these kinds of activities.

And I believe that once the Iraqi people feel comfortable that the stability that we are bringing to them is real, that they will, in fact, have the freedom to devise their own government and that they can freely speak and come forward, that they will begin to show us where these caches are hidden.

Wolfowitz: I would just say very quickly, the President has made it very clear, I think most notably in the meeting in the Azores with Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Aznar, the importance we attach to progress on the Arab-Israeli issues, and particularly Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

I think it's fair to say that some of the more catastrophic scenarios that Palestinians feared might take place if this war happened -- had not happened. I think I'm cautiously optimistic that the events in Iraq may give us a better atmosphere for progress in the peace process. Certainly, the removal of a man who rewarded suicide bombers and funded terrorism cannot but help to move the process forward. I think the key to forward movement is to end the use of violence and to recognize that the ultimate outcome here has to be two states, one Israel and one Palestine, living side by side in peace.

Oh, and on your last question, I think it's amusing but not very accurate.

(Laughter.)

Q: Thank you. I am Yasemin Congar with Turkish newspaper Milliyet and CNN Turk. To go back to the question on Northern Iraq, I have a two-part question on -- especially, on Turkey again. I think the first part maybe goes to the General.

General, should we expect a complete withdrawal of Kurdish pesh merga from Kirkuk? Because there has been a pledge to that effect, but the reports from the region is that they are still in the city. They are in very much control of the city still.

And the second part of the question is a little bit broader and it's to you, Mr. Secretary. You talked about the future -- possible future problems in the region. And, as you know, Turkey has said it is a red line not only for the Kurdish pesh merga to take control of these cities, especially Kirkuk, but also for a massive relocation of Kurds to the city. Now you have on one side Kurds who are having good allies to you in this war, who are claiming that they have been relocated by Saddam from their city; that their families have deeds, and they are ready to reclaim their property in the city.

And, on the other hand, you have your good friend and ally, Turkey, who says this is a *causus belli*, there will be -- thousands and thousands of Kurds are relocating into Kirkuk. How do you reconcile that difference?

Pace: Well, I'll start with the answer to your first question. And that is, as a military person, I, and my compatriots certainly understand the very difficult relationships that exist in Northern Iraq, and the

decades of animosities that have grown in the ebbs and flows of power.

We also know, as military men -- and we are talking military-to-military, U.S. to Turk to Kurd to Turkomen -- we all understand that what is best militarily is just to not have one group get greater influence or take advantage over another group. And we have had these conversations before this topic began. We are having them as we speak, and we will continue to have, and because the intent is to have a stable environment.

And the best way to have a stable environment is not to have one group get any kind of advantage over another group, but to give everybody the opportunity inside of a peaceful environment to speak up as individuals, to vote freely, and to have the dialogue that will allow their people to design their own form of government without resorting to weapons.

Wolfowitz: I have another question here. We spend a lot of time -- I have personally -- with Turkish officials talking about the issues of Northern Iraq going back to -- in most recent episode -- going back to July -- actually, in my case, going back over many years. And we understand Turkey's very legitimate concerns about Northern Iraq. And I would say, particularly the concerns Turkey has is a result of the fact that terrorists who had sanctuary in Northern Iraq killed thousands of Turks during the course of the 1990's.

I think it's worth pointing out that in the war against those terrorists, not only were the U.S. and Turkey close allies, but enormous help came from the two main Kurdish groups in the north, the KDP and the PUK. The question you raised specifically has to do with this issue of disputes over who owns which houses in those major cities, and probably elsewhere in Northern Iraq.

My understanding is there was a fairly systematic and ruthless kind of ethnic cleansing that the old regime undertook to remove Turks, as well as Kurds, from their houses and bring in Arabs. These issues are real, but they cannot be settled by violence, and they cannot be settled by vigilante justice. They have to be settled in an orderly legal process, and we will work [on this]. It's going to take some time, but I think it can be done. And I would say that so far all the parties have behaved pretty responsibly.

Q: Samir Nader, Radio Sawa. Mr. Secretary, what about -- if you can tell us something about General Garner. Is he still in Kuwait? And, if so, when do you expect him to go to Iraq, and what will be his priorities -- like what first resolution -- what relief workers first on as priorities?

And the second question to the General, if you can -- if we can learn your assessment on the disappearance of Saddam and the senior leaders. All of them, as they go, do you feel that they were killed, or fled, or if you can tell us anything about this? Thank you.

Participant: Please don't say, "I don't know."

Wolfowitz: Finally, a new way to say I don't know. (Laughter) Mr. Garner retired from the Army a few years ago. He is a civilian. I am not sure when he is going to go back in, to be quite honest. In spite of some of what you read a couple of weeks ago, this plan is proceeding much faster than anyone expected, and he is going to have to move into Iraq sooner than anyone expected. His main priorities when he gets back in are going to be things like water, sewage, food, medicine -- basic essentials of life.

Pace: With regard to the question about Saddam and the leadership of the regime, the intelligence that we had the night that we made the first strike where we thought he was, was very, very good intelligence corroborated by several different means, and all that told us that at that point and time he was in that location. Since that time, all of our intelligence has not shown him to be alive any place. That does not mean that he is dead. It just means that the same intelligence that led us to believe he was alive in a particular location before we struck does not point us to any new locations for him, so he has disappeared. He either disappeared because of the bombs that helped him disappear, or he is still alive. And if he is still alive, he has proved himself to be one of history's worst generals.

Q: My name is Adu-Asare, Africa Newscast, Ghana. In order not to upstage my Middle Eastern colleagues, I am going to ask a general question. You, Dr. Wolfowitz, come from the academic background, from the academic world. In recent times -- I mean, in the past couple of days, the most ardent critics of U.S. action in Iraq have come from your former colleagues in the academic world.

You have told us that U.S. is not going to stay any time longer than is necessary in Iraq. But the critics on the radio and in the press have indicated that you have a plan advising the President to use the victory in Iraq as a spring board to restructure the political dynamics in the Middle East; and that after that it is going to be a focus on U.S. led world imperialism. I would --

Wolfowitz: Let me stop you. I can't -- I can't respond to every piece of nonsense that is written by thousands of academics. I think on the basic question you asked, we have academics saying one thing, we have the Iraqi people saying something else. I think the Iraqi people are the authorities, and tell you how to think about quite a bit of the nonsense that we have heard over the last few weeks, or months actually, or years, for that matter.

Iraq is -- with the possible unfortunate exception of North Korea -- unique in the way it mistreats its people. It's unique in the way it has defied some 17 UN Security Council resolutions, or it was. I think it's a real mistake to generalize. I think every country is different. Every country has to be approached differently. I think people who try to generalize from this Iraqi case are making a mistake.

Ross: Salameh, back there.

Q: Thank you very much. Dr. Wolfowitz --

Ross: Identify yourself please.

Q: Yes, my name is Salameh Nematt, Al Hayat newspaper and LBG TV. People are wondering in the region when they are going to start seeing an Iraqi face to the new Iraq. People were shown on television today because of the looting, and because of the food and water shortages, they are appealing to the President, the U.S. President, to come and save them. They don't have an Iraqi reference point.

All the talk is about the Iraqis determining their own future, yet there is no Iraqi partner in this campaign, basically to address people, to handle political issues. The ambassadors of Iraq abroad, many of whom today were shown basically speaking on behalf of the Iraqi regime. Who takes a decision on the foreign diplomats that represent Iraq today? This is one question.

The other question: Did you watch the movie, "Lawrence of Arabia?" If not, do you intend to, and what do you think of it?

Wolfowitz: No, I haven't. And after that question, I think maybe I'd better not.

But, on the first part, which is -- it's a very important serious question. But let's remember, as General Pace has said a couple of times, there is still a war on; there is still even the possibility of chemical or biological weapons being used; there is still execution squads out trying to kill Americans, to kill civilians, to kill Iraqis.

This whole thing has happened with extraordinary speed, and while the questions you ask are legitimate ones, the expectation that these issues would be resolved at this point is totally unreasonable. That's point number one. In fact, I mentioned -- I made an allusion to our own history and I hope things will go fast in Iraq, but just think about how long it took the United States to get its act together after a revolution. And you can go back and read about stories of scores being settled and people driven out and so forth. There will be some messiness, no question about it. But on this issue of "an Iraqi face," which is very important, there is a dilemma here.

On the one hand, we'd like an Iraqi face. On the other hand, every time somebody thinks that somebody is the American choice to be the Iraqi face, we immediately get accused of imposing a government on Iraqis. We want the Iraqis to pick an Iraqi face, and that means we have to try to create conditions for a process in which Iraqis can begin to talk with one another in a way that, except in the north, they haven't been free for 30 years to do, to identify what the issues are, to put forward positions. And let's see what positions Iraqis generally applaud and what positions they generally boo.

Did someone get up and demonstrate that he can be an effective speaker, an effective leader, or someone get up -- else get up and try to be a leader and have everybody say yes, but I know he's a criminal who executed prisoners? Those are the kinds of things that can only happen in the course of a process. We're trying to get a process organized.

But I think, people, it will help -- that's why I sort of talk about the premise of your question -- if you who write about this situation and the people in the region and people outside calibrate their expectations to understand this is an extraordinary historical event, incredible things are happening every 24-hour period. You can't expect everything to gel and solidify in a short period of time.

Q: I'm Perez Trut with the Parasuram of India. Supposing that non-Arabs are also interested in Iraq, and one question I want to ask is different kinds of democracy. The British parliament, this is termed (inaudible) system. And I want to ask you whether Iraqi democracy will (inaudible) constitute an assembly, or go to an institutional arrangement for establishing democracy.

Wolfowitz: You know, I'm the wrong person to ask that because you'd have to ask an Iraqi, and all you'd get is the opinion of one of 20 million, which is why I talked about the need for this process. But I appreciate the question very much because I think one of the sort of myths we've been coping with for the last year or more, or even longer, I would say, is this idea that there's only one system of democracy, it's the Anglo-American system. The truth is, that's already an acknowledgement of two different systems, because we don't have the same one.

I know quite a few Asian countries that are democratic. Every one of them has a different version of democracy. If you look at the newly liberated countries of Central/Eastern Europe, you will find that almost every one of them has a different system.

This is an opportunity for the first time, with the tragic partial exception of Lebanon, for Arabs to make decisions about what kind of democracy they want -- excuse me, for Iraqis -- for Iraqis to make decisions. Some of them are Arabs, some of them are Turks, some of them are Kurds. And they may make decisions that people in another Middle Eastern country will say, well, we don't like that Turkish -- that Iraqi system, we like ours.

The essence of democracy is that people choose their system, but that they are free to choose their system; that the system respects their rights, that torture and evil practices of that kind are gone, that people have freedom and they have freedom to change and redirect their government. I think that's the heart of it.

Q: My name is Tamar Alabarazi from Alwatan Alarabi Magazine [Egypt]. Sir, when you said every country will choose its own democracy, now we see -- I mean, like what happened in Najaf yesterday, killing of al-Khoei by reported -- we don't know if we are sure -- by Hakim group, you know, the people who Ayatollah Baqir Hakim, they accuse him.

So now what we are seeing that people want maybe their democracy replacing (inaudible) Saddam now (inaudible) Hakim, so it will be another ayatollah --

Wolfowitz: That's not what democracy --

Q: No, no, but will you accept that, I mean, if they choose that?

Wolfowitz: I think that the essence of a democratic process is that people resolve issues and debates peacefully and not through the use of force and violence.

The killing of -- the murder of Ayatollah Khomeini is a tragedy and all the more so because I think he was a moderate leader of enormously important standing. We still don't know the circumstances exactly or who was responsible or whether he was the main target or a regime cleric was the main target. It's a setback, there's no question. There may be other setbacks.

But I think the essence of what we hope can happen, and many people around the world have demonstrated they're capable of it, is to put behind the era when politics is decided by bullets and go to an era when politics is decided by ballots.

Q: Thank you. The question is for Dr. Wolfowitz. I'm Shafaq Mehraliyeva with Azer TA News Agency. Dr. Wolfowitz, what do you see as a role for Caucasus countries, and particularly for Azerbaijan, as an active member of coalition? What are your expectations from them in Iraq's reconstruction stage?

And I know that this month Defense Minister of Azerbaijan Abiyev is visiting Washington on the invitation of Secretary Rumsfeld. Is this issue going to be one of the items on the agenda of negotiation?

Wolfowitz: I know Azerbaijan is one of several Muslim majority countries that have offered to assist in what we call stability operations, the need to provide some safety and security in the post-Saddam era. And I think particularly given the possible sensitivity of issues like protecting religious sites, it will be particularly helpful to have the assistance of countries like Azerbaijan.

I think you should have the next question go to General Pace. He's getting off too easy here.

Ross: One more for General Pace and one more for Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. Right there.

Q: Thank you. Just to follow up the previous question about the fate of President Saddam, I mean, we're not -- sorry, my name is Khaled Dawoud from Al-Ahram Newspaper, an Egyptian. My question is not just the fate about President Saddam, but we are talking about a whole government. We're talking about his deputies, ministers, everybody. Just to be able to get a whole picture, where did these all people go and did you expect that, you know, people in our part of the world -- and I'm sure Mr. Wolfowitz knows that -- are already speaking about a deal of some sort. So if you can just give us a picture.

And for Mr. Wolfowitz, for you, sir, what does it represent the fact that for the first time an Arab country is being occupied by the United States? What does that mean for you? Thank you.

Pace: From the standpoint of the leadership, and where they are right now, not only with Saddam but with the top leadership of his regime, we have tracked them very, very closely, as best we could, with various means of intelligence. They are military targets, may have been attacked militarily. It's going to take us a while to sift through all the rubble where they used to be to find out whether or not we actually killed them.

But the point of the matter is that the regime itself no longer is commanding and controlling, and that the Iraqi people are beginning to emerge as free people. And as they do, they will point out to us what has happened to the leaders whose bodies we don't have. But right now, our focus is on the military battle. The leadership is part of that military battle. When we know where they are, we target them with our weapons, and when we have the stable operations inside of which we can do so, we will determine what their fate was.

Wolfowitz: We are not occupying -- let me say very clearly -- we are not occupying an Arab country. We are removing a regime that is a threat to the United States, a threat to the world, and has clearly been a threat and an abuser -- that isn't even an adequate word -- of the Iraqi people for decades. We're not yet finished with that job. When we are finished, we'll leave as soon as we can.

And if you have any doubt about it, we liberated Kuwait and we left. We liberated Northern Iraq in early April of 1991. We left on September 1st of 1991. We will leave as soon as we can because, believe me, we don't need extra work to do. But if we leave too soon, everyone will say you left the place in chaos and created more suffering by departing too quickly. We will leave when there is a legitimate government of Iraq to hand over to.

Ross: This is the last question. It's right there.

Q: Savas Suzal from the Turkish daily VATAW Journal. Is Turkish officers in the Northern Iraq, are they the observer will be, or the liaison officer?

Pace: You may be making a distinction that's not perfectly clear to me. First of all, as you know, there have been Turkish officers with some small units in Northern Iraq for many, many years. The ones that --

Q: I am talking about Secretary Powell and the Secretary -- the Turkish Foreign Minister Gul, they reach an agreement that some kind of Turkish officer will be (inaudible) under the control of the American commander in the Northern Iraq.

Pace: I do not know what the Prime Minister -- excuse me, the Foreign Minister -- and my Secretary of State talked about. I can tell you what we know on the ground militarily, and that is that there are military officers from the Turkish armed forces who have come to locations like Kirkuk who are observing what is happening so that there is no doubt to the Turkish government that, in fact, we are

all playing on a level playing field and that we are all working together, as we promised each other we would, to assure that nobody takes advantage. So whether or not you call them liaison officers or observers, I'm not sure of the distinction you're making. But what they're doing is observing what is going on, reporting back to their government, and assisting all of us in making sure that each group that has interests, has visibility on what's going on, so there are no surprises, and no one is taking advantage of a particular situation.

Wolfowitz: Thank you. General Pace will be glad to come back another time.

Pace: Thank you all.

Wolfowitz: Thank you very much. (In Arabic.)

"THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS PREPARED BY THE FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE INC., WASHINGTON, D.C. FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE IS A PRIVATE COMPANY. FOR OTHER DEFENSE RELATED TRANSCRIPTS NOT AVAILABLE THROUGH THIS SITE, CONTACT FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE AT (202) 347-1400."

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030411-depsecdef0091.html>