






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**Presenter:** Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz      Friday, April 25, 2003 - 12:30 p.m. EDT

### Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Briefing with Arab/Muslim Media

(Foreign Press Center briefing with Arab/Muslim media. Also participating was Ambassador Christopher Ross, special coordinator for public diplomacy, U.S. Department of State.)

Ross: Assalamu aleikum. Welcome to everybody at yet another in our series for the Arab and Muslim press corps, both here, and in New York. We understand that New York is present with us today and may ask some questions. We have the pleasure of having with us for the second time Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, whom we introduced last week, and I will turn the podium over to him.

Wolfowitz: Thanks, Chris. Ahlan wa sahlam. My real purpose for coming here today is to talk about the meeting that's going to be held in Baghdad on Monday. It's a follow-on to the meeting that was held in Nasiriya last week. I am quite limited on my time, so I'm going to have to be out of here. I will try to get back here before too long and we can have a broader discussion at some point. But I'm going to try to confine myself mostly to this issue of the Baghdad meeting.

Since the last time I was here at the Foreign Press Center, which wasn't very long



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ago, a great deal has been accomplished in Iraq. With each passing day, the situation is improving. There are still small-scale military operations in some areas, but I think we can now confidently say that the Iraqi people have been liberated from the "Republic of Fear." Today they are working alongside coalition forces to build a free Iraq.

On April 15th, Iraqi leaders met in An-Nasiriya to begin discussing the process that will lead to a new government that will represent and serve the true interests of the Iraqi people -- a government of the Iraqi people, by the Iraqi people, and for the Iraqi people.

Iraqis attending the meeting produced a written agreement on 13 fundamental principles that can help guide future discussions among Iraqis about the future of a free Iraq. The principles set forth are these, and I'm going to quote word for word from them. I think they're important.

The first principle, that Iraq must be democratic. And I will underscore, also, these were not in our plan for the meeting; they emerged quite spontaneously from the Iraqi participants.

First, that Iraq must be democratic. Second, the future government of Iraq should not be based on communal identity. Third, a future government should be organized as a democratic federal system, but on the basis of countrywide consultation. Fourth, the rule of law must be paramount. Fifth, that Iraq must be built on respect for diversity, including respect for the role of women. Sixth, the meeting discussed the role of religion in state and society. Seventh, the meeting discussed the principle that Iraqis must choose their leaders, not have them imposed from outside. Eighth, that political violence must be rejected and that Iraqis must immediately organize themselves for the task of reconstruction at both the local and national levels. Ninth, that Iraqis and the coalition must work together to tackle the immediate issues of restoring security and basic services. Tenth, that the Ba'ath Party must be dissolved and its effects on society must be eliminated. Eleventh, that there should be an open dialogue with all national political groups to bring them into the process. Twelfth, that the meeting condemns the looting that has taken place and the destruction of documents. And finally, thirteenth, Iraqis participating in the Nasiriya meeting voted -- and I would note, I believe this is the first vote in free Iraq -- that there should be another meeting with additional Iraqi participants to discuss procedures for developing an Iraqi interim authority.

That meeting, which we are calling the Central Iraq Meeting, will be held in Baghdad on Monday. It's very existence represents another important step

forward. We are very pleased with this because the United States and other coalition countries have no interest in governing or occupying Iraq.

Our intention, as we have said over and over again, is to stay as long as we are needed, but not one day longer; to leave behind an Iraqi Government that preserves the territorial integrity of the country; that uses the resources of the country for the benefit of all the Iraqi people; and that poses no threat to Iraq's neighbors.

Like the Nasiriya meeting, Monday's meeting will be a meeting of Iraqis who are exercising their newfound freedom to speak. It is the second in what will be a series of inclusive meetings open to Iraqis to be held throughout the country. Iraqis will set the agenda and discuss the vital issues. This should accelerate the dialogue and transition to the establishment of an Iraqi interim authority.

That authority should be broad based and representative of all the Iraqi people, including members of all religious and ethnic groups. It should listen to Iraqis and devise ways in which the new government will come into being. And it will have two main functions: One, to take over -- as quickly as it can be done -- responsibility for the administration of the basic aspects of government in Iraq. But second, and perhaps in the long run even more important, to lead the way to the formation of a democratic government for a free Iraq, to work on drafting a constitution, on developing a legal reform agenda, an economic reform agenda, organizing elections.

It's a process that might include the development, for example, of a bill of freedoms to protect the right of all Iraqis to free speech, to freedom of religion, freedom to assemble, freedom to speak, and the sanctity of private property.

Our coalition troops on the ground have been greatly heartened by the cooperation they are receiving as they work together with Iraq citizens to restore civil order, to bring in food and medicine, to get the electrical power grid and water systems back online, and to round up Ba'ath party members and the leaders of a murderous regime that is no longer in power.

It is clear from the help we are receiving from ordinary Iraqis that they are thankful to be able to emerge from the terrifying grip of one of the world's worst dictators. Yesterday, Secretary Powell pointed out that the pilgrimage of huge numbers of Shia Muslims with probably at least a million people gathering near Karbala during an important religious ritual -- a ritual that was banned, I believe, in 1977 by the old dictatorship -- occurred for the first time in 26 years without violence. And let's not forget that none of the Iraqi people enjoyed the freedoms

that made that possible while they lived under the oppressive and brutal regime of Saddam Hussein. These and many other religious activities are an expression of freedom and stand in themselves as a rebuke to the fallen dictator.

Secretary Powell also summarized the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Hussein regime by saying, "We always knew," and I'm quoting the Secretary of State, "We always knew that once you took this regime down and broke the authority of the regime, there would be a period of chaos and instability. That's what one would expect. But slowly, but surely," the Secretary continued, "we are reasserting authority throughout the country, not only with coalition troops, but with Iraqi policemen, with Iraqi institutions."

The thing we should all bear in mind is that any dissent would have been unthinkable throughout central and southern Iraq as recently as a couple of weeks ago. The freedom to assemble and to demonstrate, to worship freely, as we saw this week in Karbala, is proof of just how far Iraq has come in an astonishingly short period of time. Looking ahead, we are enthusiastic about the country's prospect for a future of freedom, peace and prosperity.

And as President Bush said in a speech just yesterday, "One thing is certain, we will not impose a government on Iraq." The President said, "We will help that nation build a government of, by and for the Iraqi people." Thank you.

Moderator: We'll take your questions. There is time for a few. Please identify yourself and your organization. As you pose your question, keep it short; and we'll take questions both from Washington and New York. We're going to give New York the first opportunity, if we may. Go ahead, New York.

Q: Good afternoon Mr. Deputy Secretary. My name is Sylviane Zehil from L'Orient Le Jour, Beirut, Lebanon. How do you foresee the consequences of the war on Iraq on Syria, Lebanon, and the Middle East peace process as a whole?

Wolfowitz: Well, we are, to be honest, focused intensively now on how to help to restore order in Iraq, restore basic services. In fact, restore isn't quite the right word. We have a lot of work to do, actually, to make up for decades of lost development in that country. And as I emphasized in my opening comments, to help the Iraqi people move toward a free and democratic Iraq.

I can't help but think that the existence of a free and democratic country in the Middle East, and particularly one of the largest and most important countries in the Arab world, is going to have an important and positive influence both on political development and on the peace process, at least in the medium to long

run, and perhaps in the short run.

Q: Salemeah Nematt, Al Hayatt newspaper and LBC TV.

The State Department has recently come under strong criticism from different quarters, including -- mainly from the conservative right. It was accused of sabotaging the work of the Pentagon. It's accused of -- actually, the Secretary of State, himself, was described as "the world's ambassador to the U.S. administration;" in other words, representing the interests of "dictatorships in the region" rather than the foreign policy, backing the foreign policy of the U.S. President.

What are your views on these criticisms that have been leveled recently?

Wolfowitz: I can't keep up with all the things that people write. What I can say is that we have a very good relationship between the Defense Department and the State Department and a very close relationship between Secretary Powell and Secretary Rumsfeld. There are always going to be differences in points of view.

I was the American Ambassador for three years to the Republic of Indonesia, the largest Muslim population of any country in the world, and I am sure that some people thought that I had, which is still the truth, fallen in love with Indonesia and that I was representing Indonesian views to the United States. That was part of my job. We can't develop a coherent and successful foreign policy if we don't have people helping us understand how other people think.

But this is a fantastic team run led by a very brave and decisive President, and I think we come together in advancing American interests with a sophisticated knowledge of how the world thinks. That's our goal.

Q: You don't think that (Inaudible.) kind of hypocrite?

Wolfowitz: No.

Moderator: Another question from New York, please.

Q: Deputy Secretary, this is Asla Aydintasbas from Turkish Sabah.

Wolfowitz: Hi.

Q: Hi. Jay Garner yesterday said Kirkuk is a Kurdish city. Is this now the official position of your government?

And a quick other question, which is Farouk Hijazi, the former Deputy Head of Iraqi Military Intelligence, has just been caught on the Syrian border. With this arrest and other work that's been going on on the ground, have you more evidence on al-Qaida-Iraqi connection or any suggestion of links to September 11th from those under arrest at the moment?

Wolfowitz: Well, first of all, Kirkuk is not a Kurdish city. Kirkuk is an Iraqi city. It's inhabited by Kurds and Turks and Turkomans, and Arabs. We know there are some important disagreements about crucial issues of property rights in particular. Those have got to be resolved in a peaceful way, and we are looking right now to try to develop a process that can move us in that direction peacefully over time. We have actually been consulting with some of the governments of Central Europe, which faced those same kinds of issues, with the Government of Bosnia which faced that issue in a major way.

But what has impressed me over the last couple of years is to hear emphatically from Kurdish leaders that -- Iraqi Kurdish leaders -- that they think of themselves as Iraqis, understand the Iraqis, and as one of them said to me, "Why can't a Kurd be the president of a free Iraq?"

We are learning more every day about the crimes of this regime, about its weapons developments and about its ties to terrorists, but we're still in the early stages of that kind of learning. Some of the people we're questioning have not been cooperative at the outset. They probably will become more cooperative as they learn that other people are talking. It's a process that takes time, but those connections are there.

Moderator: Fifth row in the middle here.

Q: Thomas Gorguissian, Al Wafd, Egypt. Mr. Secretary, you said we'll not impose any government on the Iraqis, and in recent days it was becoming an issue and, of course, always there is the fear either to be Iranian model or come (Inaudible.) others, and which is obsession with the Algerian experience -- one vote, one time, for one, and that's it. How do you foresee this democratic -- if you can call it -- hyphen-theocratic regime, the possibility of having something like that?

My second question is related to your experience in the region because I know it's gotten back to even your -- you tried to learn Arabic word because of the speech of Sadat at the Knesset. After all these years, I mean, and talking about empowering society, reforming Islam and democratization of Arab societies, how

do you -- why would you think this --assuming these things are good things -- how do you think that -- how do you see that these people rejecting these thoughts or they are kind of -- kind of have doubts and skepticism about what you are saying or what you and you fellows are saying about these wars?

Wolfowitz: Well, first of all, I wouldn't say that because some people are demonstrating and say that they don't want the United States to stay in Iraq that, therefore, they're rejecting the idea of democracy. In fact, they're demonstrating their belief in democracy and the fact that, for the first time in decades, they are able to express their views freely, which is what we want to see.

I think, as Secretary Powell said in the comments I quoted, you can't expect a regime like that to fall and the next day everything is all beautiful and orderly and democratic. It takes time. Look at the time it's taken in Central and Eastern Europe.

But again, if you look at those countries, which were suffocated for decades by tyranny, you see, I think, that when the air is there for democracy and free institutions to breathe, they grow up. And that's -- what we want to help to create is the climate in which Iraqis can determine their own future, not be dictated by external powers, not by the United States certainly, but also not by Iran, not by Syria; to choose in their own way a democratic government that they can also reject in their own way; not one vote, one man, one time, but something that protects the basic rights of all people for all time.

Q: Thank you. My name is Said Arikat from Al Quds newspaper. Secretary Wolfowitz, if, in fact, weapons of mass destruction are not found in the quantities that the President cited, would that in any way erode America's moral standing for justifying this war?

And second, sir, on the disparaging statements that were made by some people who are closely associated with the Pentagon, are said to be intended to sabotage the roadmap and lobby Congress against it, will that complicate the President's effort, the peace efforts in that regard? Thank you, sir.

Wolfowitz: Well, I have said very clearly, I'm happy to repeat it, that we welcome very strongly the statement by the President, along with the British Prime Minister, of our commitment to the Road Map. We believe -- and I speak for myself; I know I also speak for Secretary Rumsfeld -- in the importance of moving forward on the peace process. And I believe that removing one of the most destabilizing forces in the Middle East has got to improve the climate for peace.

The first part of your question?

Q: The first part of my question is if, in fact, the weapons of mass destruction are not --

Wolfowitz: Oh, yes, okay. Look, you know, we've said over and over and over again that you could not expect 200 inspectors to search through a country the size of France -- or for Americans who don't know how big France is, the size of the state of California -- and find weapons that had been systematically hidden; when scientists who knew about those weapons have been systematically put in situations where they could be coerced.

Jay Garner was talking today on a conference about the efforts, the basic efforts to restore -- or maybe provide for the first time -- basic services in Baghdad. He visited Medina, I guess it's called, where the large Shia population is in open sewers. He said there are open sewers throughout the city. There's garbage collection problems throughout the city. I think it's clear these were not caused by anything we did in the last two months. And then he observed -- we're working to get that back as fast as possible -- but remember, this is a city the size of Los Angeles.

So stop and think about it. We know they were hiding things in houses. We know they were hiding things in tunnels and basements. The places that are most obvious to look are also the most obvious places to move things out of, so it'll take time. We'll have to talk to people, have to get information. I'm not going to speculate at this early stage.

Moderator: Sixth row.

Q: This is (Inaudible.) from Turkish Daily Zeld. Mr. Secretary, can you give us some information? In northern Iraq, in Kirkuk, Time and the AP report that U.S. forces captured almost a dozen Turkish special forces for they are trying to help or aid to Turkomens, or bringing some weapons and weaponries. Do you have any --

Wolfowitz: I would rather not comment on that. I would like to make a more general comment, though, which is we all have to work hard to put the past behind us. We're dealing with a legacy of decades of one of the worst regimes in the world. And one of those legacies was a vacuum in northern Iraq from which terrorists attacked Turkey and killed thousands of Turks, and Turkey adopted some policies to try to deal with it and they, I have to point out, got some fantastic cooperation, I think, from the main Kurdish groups in the north.



We're in a different era; we have to act in different ways. The goal is to have a peaceful, stable Iraq that is not a threat to Turkey, and I think we can get there and I think there's good cooperation between the U.S. Government and the Turkish Government in dealing with any problems, including the one that you alluded to.

Moderator: Second row, here.

Q: Mr. Wolfowitz, you said that we all have to work hard to put the past behind us. This is Tulin Dalogou from Turkish Star TV. But you know, in that region, it's very difficult for people to put the past behind them. And it's not like only this Iraqi regime, but it really goes back the World War I, when the map of the Middle East and then Ottoman Empire, today's Turkish Republic has been redrawn. So one part that your (Inaudible.) think the Kurdish parties are seeking autonomy, a federal body. But then, Turkey says that "This is our red line. If you do that it is going to threaten our territorial integrity." How do you balance it? Can you give us a better understanding, looking into the future, not to the, you know, moment, but to the future -- how you are going to deal with your two partners, Turkey and the Kurdish groups?

Wolfowitz: I think we're going to deal fairly and openly and transparently, and since everybody says that they are for the same goal; we ought to be able to get to the same place.

I happen to love history. I think, in fact, it's very important in approaching any country to understand its history. I also think that people who live in the past will never make progress and I remember at the time of the Gulf War a very wise Omani general commenting on Saddam's observation that the incorporation of Kuwait was a fact of history. He said, "If people around here don't stop talking about history, there will never be any peace." We have to get past the past. The past is fascinating, it's rich, it's important to understand it, but the future is much more promising than the past.

Moderator: Second row, here.

Q: I was attending a news conference by Mr. Kanan Makiya who's also taking part in the Baghdad meeting, and he said that one thing which he think the Pentagon did not do was to provide an Iraqi police force even before the war started so that you can prevent the looting and all the problems that happen, so I just want -- and he blamed the Pentagon for this, you know, or the CentCom, you know, basically they are supplying the war, so what's your comment on this?

And my second question, sir, why is the United States refusing until now to declare that the war is over and what about your responsibilities as occupation force? I mean, how can we hold you accountable?

Wolfowitz: On the latter point, people are still shooting at Americans. Small, organized elements from the old regime are still trying to kill our people, and we will try to bring an end to the formal hostilities as quickly as we can, but I suppose that also helps me answer the first part of the question.

Kanan Makiya is a wonderful man. The people who want to see instant peace and order in the country and instant democracy in country have totally understandable desires. But to expect the United States to instantly transform a situation is just an unreasonable expectation.

I think when you think about what those brave, young American men and women have accomplished in an astonishingly short period of time, you have to marvel at the speed and the skill and the humanity with which they conducted themselves, speaking of which, I'll take this moment, if I can, to advertise. On the State Department website there's some wonderful photographs of the kinds of things our troops have been doing to bring food and water and medicine and basic care to the Iraqi people.

Q: (Inaudible) museum and the national library and the --

Wolfowitz: I'm sorry. We didn't. You know, that happened as order was collapsing in Baghdad. It may even have been happening while order was still in Baghdad. We're not quite sure when some of that stuff was stolen.

We are doing everything we can in a difficult situation with a lot of demands on our troops to protect those things that are most important to the Iraqi people, to bring food and medicine in. We're getting -- 70 tons of medical supplies were just delivered a couple of days ago from Kuwait. The UAE is delivering supplies. Jordan and Saudi Arabia are bringing in field hospitals. There's a lot of work to be done there. A lot of people are helping.

I think for every story, which, I know it makes better news if it is a bad news story, there are six or seven or eight good news stories. And this is in a country that for the last 30 years has had no good news stories.

Moderator: One last question in the far back.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Secretary; I'm (laughter) --

Wolfowitz: Another Turkish colleague?

Participant: Please maintain some control.

Wolfowitz: I will give you one more.

Q: All right. Okay.

Participant: Yeah, you came earlier. That's the reason why --

(Laughter.)

Wolfowitz: Just in the interest of peace and stability and order (laughter) we can stretch it five more minutes. Kevin is terrified.

Participant: So you see, sometimes it is good to be a backbencher. I'm (Inaudible.) Dawn newspaper [Pakistan]. And yesterday, Iranian foreign minister said that Iran was not interfering in Iraq and he said that instead Americans have deployed troops along their border and they warned Americans from entering the Iranian territory. Your comments, please.

Wolfowitz: Well, I hope they are not interfering in Iraq and I'll welcome that if it's true. And we're not interfering in Iran.

Moderator: Go ahead. Last question.

Q: Thank you. Umit Enginsoy with Turkish NTV Television. Recently, people like Jim Woolsey and Ari Fleischer have said Turkey could be an example and model for a new Iraq, and in a major speech in November at the IISS in London, you evaluated the resulted of Turkish relations. And you said the outcome was significant and you said you were ecstatic to work with a new Turkish Government, Islamist leaning but democratic at the same time. In light of Iraq developments and recent tensions between the Islamist Government and more secular segments of the Turkish state structure, do you feel the need to revise your conclusion or are you concerned over such tensions in Turkey? Thank you.

Wolfowitz: I have a lot of faith in Turkey and in Turkish democracy and I believe -- I continue to believe, as I said in the speech in London -- that having one of the most important countries in the Muslim world be a very committed democracy is important not only for Turkey. I think it's important for the Muslim

world. I think it's important for the United States and, look: democracy is a process of working out problems. It's not a process of burying them or submerging them, but working them out peacefully and with consensual outcome.

Moderator: Last question here in the front row again. The neglected front row.

(Laughter.)

Q: Samir Nader, Radio Sawa. How important to you the capture of Tariq Aziz and what will happen to him since he gave himself up? Will there be a difference if he gives himself up or if the forces will capture him? Will he face war crime charges?

Wolfowitz: Most of that is speculative. I can't answer. I can only say that like many other senior Iraqis whom we are detaining, I think they have an enormous amount of knowledge about the crimes of that regime and I think it's important to get to the bottom of things. And it's very helpful, as General Franks has said, that so many ordinary Iraqis are coming forward and helping us to find these people. And I think as time goes on, we'll find more.

Moderator: Thank you, Paul. Thank you all very much.

Wolfowitz: Thank you.

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