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+1 (703) 428-0711**Presenter:** Ambassador Paul Bremer

Sunday, July 20, 2003

Ambassador Paul Bremer Interview on Meet the Press

Tim Russert: And with us now is the man President Bush has placed in charge of rebuilding Iraq. He arrived back just yesterday from Baghdad. He joins us here this morning on Meet The Press.

Ambassador Paul Bremer, welcome.

Ambassador Paul Bremer, Presidential Envoy to Iraq: Nice to be with you.

Tim Russert: In the last 48 hours, four more American servicemen have been killed. That's 37 from hostile fire since May 1, 89 since May 1 when you count all deaths. How do we end this guerilla war against American soldiers?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, let's put it in perspective. The death of the American servicemen is obviously a tragedy, but what we're faced here with is a small group of killers, trained killers, who are basically trying to hold back the tide of history in Iraq. And the tide of history is flowing towards democracy. These are people who are ex-Ba'athists, Fedayeen Saddam, ex-people in the intelligence community there, and we simply have to overpower them, and we will.

Tim Russert: How many are there?



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Ambassador Paul Bremer: We don't know. Obviously, if we knew we'd have better intelligence, and we'd be able to go after them. There were tens of thousands of people in the Republican Guards and the Fedayeen Saddam, and they are concentrated in an area which is where Saddam had his traditional political and tribal support, a small area between Tikrit, which is Saddam's hometown, and Baghdad in the south. That's where 85 percent of the attacks against American forces have taken place since June 1st. So it's a small area of the country we're dealing with.

Tim Russert: Do you believe that Saddam Hussein himself is orchestrating this resistance?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: No, there's no evidence of any central control at this point yet, Tim. What we're seeing is highly professional, a very small set of sort of squad level attacks, five or six people at a time attacking us. Saddam Hussein, I think, is alive, and I think he is in Iraq. And the sooner we can either kill him or capture him, the better, because the fact that his fate is unknown certainly gives his supporters the chance to go around and try to rally support for him.

Tim Russert: You're confident you will kill or capture him?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Oh, I think there's no question. It's a matter of time. We now have a reward out, \$25 million, leading to his capture or certain proof that he's dead. And I think in time we'll get him.

Tim Russert: As you know, there was a report that was put together at the help of the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and yourself. I'm going to show some of that and put it on the screen for you and our viewers. It says, the United States needs to be prepared to stay the course in Iraq for several years. The next 12 months will be decisive, the next three months are crucial to turning around the security situation, which is volatile in many parts of the country. You agree?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Yes. I think basically we need to be patient. We need to understand that this is a long-term process. The problem that we face is difficult, and that is reconstructing a country that really for 35 years was very badly managed, particularly on an economic basis, which suffered from political tyranny. The Iraqis have now begun to exercise their freedoms. These are difficult times for us, but I think over the next 60 to 90 days we'll take some very important steps, as this report suggests, to try to turn the problem around on the security side, and get the economy moving, and to start showing progress on the political front.

Tim Russert: But the report said, stay the course for several years. This is going to be a long and expensive undertaking.

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I think it's clear that given the size of the task, we're going to be there for a while. I don't know how many years. Of course, in terms of what I'm in charge of, which is the coalition authority, there is a pretty clear time table. We took the first step last week with the selection of a governing council, which is the first time the Iraqis have had a representative group. We'll get a constitutional process started here in the next couple of months. Once a constitution is written and we have elections, we'll get a sovereign Iraqi government, and at that point the coalition's job is done. There may still be a need for security forces, but at least the civilian coalition authority, which I head, will then, at that point, hand over sovereignty to an Iraqi government.

Tim Russert: Elections held when?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, if all goes well, it could be as early as next year. It depends on how long it takes the Iraqis to write a constitution. Really the timing of the coalition's stay there is now in Iraqi hands.

Tim Russert: Let me show you a bit more of the report I mentioned, and here it is on the screen. Iraq will require significant outside support, broadening the financial coalition to include a wider range of international actors. The enormity of the task ahead cannot be underestimated, it requires that the entire effort be immediately turbo-charged by making it more agile and flexible, and providing it with greater funding and personnel. More money, more personnel, you agree?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Yes. I agree. But let's understand where we are. We have some 37 nations that have already pledged almost \$3 billion to the reconstruction of Iraq. We have 19 countries which are already contributing troops on the ground in Iraq. This is already a substantial international operation.

Tim Russert: But, Mr. Ambassador, stop there, because we have 147,000 Americans, the other 19 countries combined represent about 13,000 troops.

Ambassador Paul Bremer: That's right.

Tim Russert: That is a pretty difficult ratio for the American people to accept.

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, we have a responsibility for the liberation of Iraq with our British colleagues, and we're not going to duck that responsibility. Obviously, to the extent we can get other countries to contribute, and they are

contributing, that is useful to us. And I think we will see in the months ahead additional forces coming in, General Abizaid, the CENTCOM Commander went out and discussed this yesterday in his press conference, talked about our desire to get other countries in there.

Tim Russert: Have you asked Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld for more American troops?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: No, I have not. I expressed --

Tim Russert: Do we need more?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I do not believe we do. I think the military commanders are confident we have enough troops on the ground, and I accept that analysis.

Tim Russert: You know, General Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, said something months ago, and I asked Secretary Rumsfeld about it last week, I'm going to show you again, this is what he said. I would say what's been mobilized at this point is something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers, Shinseki said, assistance from friends and allies would be helpful. That's what we're going to need. And, at that time, Pentagon officials said that there were about 200,000 troops massed in the area. He was pretty accurate, wasn't he?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, we've got 147,000 already just in Iraq. I don't know what the total number is in the region. But we have substantial, and in my belief adequate, numbers of troops. And, incidentally, I think it's important not to play the numbers game. General Abizaid made it clear yesterday that what he wants to do, and I agree with that, is he wants to change the mix, get us more mobile, more maneuverable troops, reduce the number of heavy troops we've got there. That makes sense to me as a non-military man.

Tim Russert: You wanted very much to have the Indian government send 17,000 troops, they will not do that. Many countries will not do it until the United Nations sanctions or authorizes it, if you will. Should not the United States go to the U.N., and ask for U.N. approval, and help broaden the international coalition that puts troops on the ground in Iraq?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, of course, my understanding is the Secretary of State this week said that he was willing to look into -- we are willing to look into the question of a U.N. resolution, provided it can be done in a way that is useful, and if that makes it easier for people like the Indians to provide troops, and other

countries to provide troops then we ought to pursue that option. But, this diplomacy now has to move to New York it seems to me.

Tim Russert: There was a time when government officials at the Pentagon and the White House were saying that we would have about 50,000 troops this fall in Iraq, that was wildly optimistic, wasn't it?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I'm just not going to play the numbers game. To me this is a question for the military commanders. The important thing is to have adequate combat capability on the ground to deal with the security threat we face, and I believe we have that today. And I have no reason to believe that General Abizaid is going to change his mind on that. He made it very clear in his press conference yesterday that he intends to keep adequate combat capability there.

Tim Russert: We had a situation the other day where one of the ranking Shiite clerics in Iraq called for an Islamic army, saying no to America, no to the devil. This was the scene yesterday as many of his supporters were protesting American presence. Would it be helpful, in order to deal with Iraqis like this, and the clerics solder, that there be more of an international flavor to the occupying force, so it would not be perceived by the Iraqis as simply a made in America operation?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: That I don't think is the problem here. What we're seeing is an understandable reaction by the Shia whom he -- he is a Shia cleric. They were crushed by Saddam over a period of really decades, and in fact, for centuries. We had last week, a week ago today, the first governing council established with a majority of Shia. The Shia had never been in the majority today and they're delighted. And I should add that you showed this story, but in the same story in the Washington Post two members of the governing council, who are leading Shia, basically said -- basically distanced themselves from him and said, look, we've got an ability now in the governing council to carry out the desires of the Shia people. And I think that's where the concentration should be now.

Tim Russert: Is the Iranian government up to no good, trying to motivate some Shia against the United States?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, when one talks of the Iranian government one has to be somewhat precise, because there are elements in the Iranian government which are clearly operating in an irresponsible way, in our view, in Iraq, trying to cause trouble for us. We don't think that's in the Iraqi's interest, we don't think that's in our interest, and I should say, I don't even really think it's in Iran's long-run interest. And we've raised this question with the Iranians.

Tim Russert: The American troops over there, it has been described as a guerilla war, as a shooting gallery. The whole issue of morale has been front and center, as many American soldiers have been talking to the media. This is what a sergeant at the Second Battle Command Team headquarters said, he was talking about the deck of cards of the Iraqi leadership. And he said this, I've got my own most wanted list, the aces in my deck are Paul Bremer, Donald Rumsfeld, George Bush, and Paul Wolfowitz. How serious is the morale problem with our troops who have been there since September, who believed they were going to be home and should be home?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, I think it's hard to make a general statement. I have visited with all of the American forces there. I have met probably thousands of American troops now. I don't sense a major morale problem among them. Understandably, it's not a very easy place to be. The temperatures when you're lucky are 115 to 120. It's a difficult assignment. But, my sense is the American troops are there, they understand what they're there for, they support the president's goals there, they're doing a magnificent job. So I don't accept the hypothesis that we've got a major morale problem among our troops. I just don't think it's true.

Tim Russert: But, without replacing them with international troops, how are we going to maintain a commitment of 150,000 Americans for years to come?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: The whole question of the troops rotation is a matter, obviously, that the military is looking at, and Abizaid spoke again yesterday about that. He has plans to rotate American troops, we of course are welcoming additional international forces. The Poles are coming in with a full division, which will go into the area of the Marines in the course of the next two months. I think they'll be pretty much in place by the middle of September. So it's not as if we're not seeing international forces come in, we are.

Tim Russert: But, would it be worth, as some would say, eating a little bit of crow, and saying to the U.N., we need your help, and saying to the Germans and French, we need your help?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: You know, I don't think it's -- you're making it sound as if we're resisting the idea of international forces coming in. That's just not true. I've already said we have 12 different nations that have forces on the ground, almost all the NATO members have forces on the ground and committed.

Tim Russert: But, it's a miniscule amount, it's 13,000, we have 147,000, the ratio is a little bit over --

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, Tim, we are the world's great power right now, and with great power goes great responsibility. We have the fundamental responsibility now for winning the peace in Iraq, and we're going to do that. And we should remember how far we've come in the last three months. We have freed people with one of the great military battles of all time, in a period of three weeks, with almost no collateral damage, very few civilian deaths, and they are now free. And that is a fundamental fact we need to keep in front of us all as we work through this difficult time of economic reconstruction.

Tim Russert: What should the American people be prepared for, in terms of life, money, and time, in Iraq?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I think we need to be patient, I think we need to recognize that the job we've got is tough, we've got a strategy for dealing with it in the security, economic, and political fields. We're executing that strategy, it's going to take us time, it will cost money, and we will, unfortunately, have more casualties as we go forward. But, there's no question that we've done the right thing. We have the support of the vast majority of Iraqis for what we've done by freeing them from this tyranny, and we'll find in the months ahead and in the years ahead that this has been the right thing to do.

Tim Russert: And are you confident that you'll also find weapons of mass destruction?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I believe we will find evidence of the programs of chemical and biological weapons, yes.

Tim Russert: How about the actual weapons?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Well, I just don't know, let's wait and see what the team that's over there, we have a very large team of some 1,500 people under General Dayton, with David Kay, who have begun operations there. Let's just see what they come up with.

Tim Russert: In order to secure the country, might you have to seal the borders of Iraq, and also undertake major military combat operations?

Ambassador Paul Bremer: I don't think so. We do have very, essentially open borders. We're in the process now of calling into being a border guard, and we'll put them on critical crossing points. But, as is the case in the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the eastern frontier of Iraq with Iran is very difficult to

seal. In the bottom half, in the south it's marshes, and in the north it's mountains. It's not a place where you're going to ever hermetically seal.

Tim Russert: Ambassador Paul Bremer, thank you for returning home and giving us this update.

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Nice to be with you again.

Tim Russert: And be safe when you go back to Iraq.

Ambassador Paul Bremer: Thank you very much for that.

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