





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Wednesday, July 23, 2003

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview on News Hour with Jim Lehrer

GWEN IFILL: And with me now for a Newsmaker interview is Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. He just returned from a four-and-a-half-day trip to Iraq. Welcome.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Nice to be here, thank you.

GWEN IFILL: How much of a turning point is the deaths of the sons, Uday and Qusay?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I think it's very important. I mean, I came away with two major impressions about how Iraqis feel, and one is a sense of celebration, and gratitude to American and British forces, and personally to President Bush and Prime Minister Blair for liberating them. But the second impression is that they still live under a blanket of fear, they're not quite -- they certainly were not sure when I was there that the regime was gone for good.

The kinds of horrors that the world has read about we got to witness, sadly, firsthand, mass graves in Hillah, for example, the marsh Arabs who've been driven practically into extinction; liberation came just in time to save a fragment



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of those people, but not the people in Hillah. So to overcome that fear we need to begin going after the people who committed it, and those two creatures are among the most important. So I think it's going to lead to a much greater willingness for Iraqis to come forward and give us the kind of intelligence we need to finish this job.

GWEN IFILL: Do Iraqis believe in spite of everything we heard, the coalition ground commanders say about the dental records and the other matches that prove that these were indeed Saddam's sons, do they believe it, and if they don't believe it, do they need proof, are you willing to release photographs?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Well, it's something we have to think about, because the disbelief runs very deep. I mean, it goes to the level almost of paranoia. I encountered questions from very sophisticated Iraqis that seem to think we would leave them and let Saddam come back, and we're not going to, and I think one of the great effects of yesterday for Iraqis is to demonstrate our seriousness.

But we need to make sure they believe this, but the other interesting thing about yesterday is the celebrations that were, I mean all that firing in the air in Baghdad and Americans being hugged in restaurants by Iraqis thanking them. Baghdad is a predominantly Sunni city, so the people shooting off those guns were presumably predominantly Sunnis, and what I encountered when I was there was it wasn't just the Shia or the Kurds who hated Saddam, the Sunnis hated him equally, because what he practiced was equal opportunity oppression.

GWEN IFILL: How intense was the manhunt to get these two in particular?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: The manhunt has been intent -- intense looking for mid level Baathists of all kinds because those are the people who were hiring the people who kill our troops. By the way, my knowledge of this is may be the first so-called guerrilla war in which the main tactic was contract killings, killings for hire. We've always been on the lookout.

GWEN IFILL: Who ordered those killings?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Mid-level Baathists; people who used to be in the secret police, people who used to be in the Special Republican Guards, number 11 whom we've just caught, as you announced, was the commander of the Special Republican Guards. These were the secret police of the Republican Guards, the torturers and murderers who kept an eye on the Republican Guards who kept an eye on the regular army. It was a country of spies spying on spies.

GWEN IFILL: How do you know Saddam Hussein isn't ordering these attacks?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: If he's alive, I think he's contributing to it. It's kind of a -- everybody we encountered said the way to understand these people is to think of them as a very large criminal gang with certain Stalinist aspirations, and they are going to continue trying to kill. But they do not enjoy the support of the Iraqi people and that is a crucial thing, as we build their confidence, and we're doing that, and the work the men and women of the U.S. armed forces are doing is outstanding. And it's interesting too, I think, the example of seeing women in uniform and doing the kinds of things American women soldiers do, is having a very nice effect in those places where things are stable.

GWEN IFILL: Will you ever completely be able to build their confidence without eliminating Saddam Hussein the way you have his sons?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: It certainly will make a very big difference. Look, finding one person in a large country is not something ever guaranteed, but it's definitely the most important thing we have to do right now.

GWEN IFILL: You mentioned the guerrilla war. General Abizaid used that term for the first time last week. You were on the ground there. Describe for us what that looks like, what that actually means, the guerrilla war in Iraq right now.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Well, he used the word guerrilla because certain of their tactics are like guerrillas. It's hit-and-run tactics, drive-by shootings, and it's sabotage, blowing up power lines, blowing up pipelines. What they're doing as he has said is targeting success. They don't want us to succeed, so if we're getting electricity going, they will blow up electricity. If we're getting a town council elected, they will try to assassinate the members of the town council.

But we have the Iraqi people on our side and the more confidence they develop, and they're developing more every day, the more intelligence we get on these criminals and the more we're rounding them up. We're having real successes throughout the country. And in the north and southern parts of the country, the situations are basically very stable.

GWEN IFILL: Was this the occupation that the Pentagon planned for with its ups and substantial downs?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: What we planned for, and we planned extensively and we budgeted, it was called reconstruction and humanitarian assistance -- that is to say to reconstruct the war damage, we anticipated there might be massive

destruction of oil fields to assist what we anticipated might be large refugee populations or food or medical crisis. None of those things happened, there is no refugee crisis, there is no humanitarian crisis.

There isn't a lot to reconstruct from war damage, but it turns out there's a lot to rehabilitate, from 35 years of deliberate mis-investment of taking the wealth of that country instead of helping the people, pouring it into weapons and palaces and doing it in a way that was deliberately punitive to the populations he didn't like, like the Kurds or the Shia or these poor marsh Arabs, who he turned a whole area the size of New Jersey from a prosperous, productive marsh land into a vast wasteland desert in order to drive these people. The village we visited had been moved at gunpoint 17 times.

GWEN IFILL: I want to follow up on or just button up this whole discussion about guerrilla war by using some words you used today in your briefing at the Pentagon. You said that the Pentagon consistently underestimated the ability of that regime to terrorize its own people, which begs the question, did you also underestimate the ability of that regime or what remains of it to fight more aggressively in the postwar period than you had counted on?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Well, I think I said we, and by we I mean the U.S. Government as a whole. I didn't mean the Pentagon. We'll take our share, but we're not going to take it by ourselves. It's been my experience over the long period of time that it is somewhere between difficult and impossible for Americans to imagine what it's like to live in a country where the government not only practices torture and summary execution, but will actually torture children in front of their parents in order to pressure the parents. That is unique, with perhaps the exception of North Korea, among the world's tyrannies.

And people who live like that, who live for 35 years like that, are like people who lived in an isolation cell with no light and no news and no knowledge of the outside world for 35 years, and now they're coming into sunlight and they're breathing the fresh air of freedom. I think these, this criminal gang has, which I guess we might have hoped would take its medicine and melt into the background didn't do so, but they're going to lose, we'll get them.

GWEN IFILL: How long will that take?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: As long as it takes. And the troops have the spirit to do it by the way, the morale of the troops is just fantastic. The one thing they keep asking is, we'd like it if you would tell us how long we're going to be here and for a particular --

GWEN IFILL: Which is why I ask that question.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: And what they say is if you tell us it's a year, that would be fine, which is for that kind of work a pretty long time. The temperatures when you're out there hover around 120 degrees all day long. So to say, I'm willing to stay here for a year, but I'd be happier to be told it's a year than to be told it's eight months and have it turn into nine -- the certainty is important, and we are working, as your broadcast indicated, to get that certainty for the troops.

GWEN IFILL: How long do you think Americans can stomach waking up every morning and hearing about another one or two soldiers killed in action or in accidents or in ambushes for a war that they thought had largely been --

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I think as long as they understand the stakes and the stakes here are enormous, the stakes really are not just bringing freedom and democracy to the people that suffered for so long -- Americans have an appetite to do that kind of thing -- but importantly to end Iraq as a place that exports terrorism, as a place that exports instability. It will contribute to a Middle East that is much more, much less friendly to terrorists, and it'll make the world safer for our children and grandchildren. American people can take that when they understand the mission, and the troops understand the mission, they really do.

GWEN IFILL: As you gauge the challenges for reconstruction, the Pentagon dispatched a group of folks from a local Washington think tank, the Center for Strategic International Studies, to come back and report to Secretary Rumsfeld about how difficult it would be, and among other things they reported that the window of opportunity is closing to get reconstruction under way fully. What do they mean by that, and did you see evidence on the ground while you were in Iraq to support that?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I think what they're focused on is at some point if you lose the support of the general population, then it turns from just hit-and-run contract killings for hire into a population that opposes you. I think we're a very long way from that. I do agree with what they, and I saw it everywhere I went, that there is a great sense of urgency about getting basic services going, especially electricity, and getting jobs to get these restless young men back in employment; it is very important -- you can't separate that effort from the security effort. Without security you can't get electric power going, but without electric power people may get disgruntled. So this needs to be approached with a sense of urgency, but I think we can do it.

GWEN IFILL: Are there enough U.S. troops on the ground to provide the kind of

security you're talking about?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Absolutely. What we need more of is not U.S. troops; we need more Iraqi troops, and we're doing that, again as your broadcast I think indicated, as General Sanchez indicated in his briefing. And now that we're recruiting an Iraqi civil defense force, I think 7,000 or 8,000 Iraqis are -- in a very short period of time have come forward and volunteered. But there's no reason to have a young American standing guard on the bank and becoming, frankly, a target for these terrorists, when there are plenty of Iraqis who hate the terrorists, hate the Baathists, who will help us do it.

GWEN IFILL: What happened to troops from other countries, that coalition of the willing, which Michael Gordon in the New York Times wrote this week, the "not that willing" and the "not that able" is the way he described it, what happened to them?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Michael is wonderful. But I can give you some great counter examples. For one thing the British have been with us from the beginning, I visited Basra, they're doing a great job there. They're going to replace their all-British division with a multinational division that includes an Italian brigade that will be responsible for one whole province. The British say these Italians are exactly what we need because they have 3,000 very professional Carabinieri.

Up north the Marines, in the northern part of the southern region, the Shia heart land -- our Marines are getting ready to hand over command to a multi-national division commanded by a Pole. The Poles are enthusiastic and very confident. Where you get into the hard territory there are very few countries besides us and the British that want to take on these areas that are still combat areas, but that's why we need Iraqis, because Iraqis are ready to help us in those areas too.

GWEN IFILL: I know you weren't there to personally go searching for weapons of mass destruction, but certainly this is something that you have always stood by, that they existed, that they were part of the reasons to go to war in Iraq. You were quoted, famously in Vanity Fair Magazine as saying the truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. Government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason. It sounded cynical.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Not cynical at all. I said there are three reasons, I mentioned the other two, we can go into them later, let's stay on this main one. It's not my opinion. It's been the unanimous opinion of the intelligence

community for many years going way back into the last administration, there are quotes from President Clinton on this issue that sound exactly like President Bush.

You know, Baghdad is a city, I believe, an area something like ten times Washington D.C., I think it's comparable to Los Angeles. As we were flying over looking at thousands of houses and thinking, any one of those could have enough anthrax in the basement to kill a whole city, we're not going to find it by house to house searches. We're only going to find it by painstakingly getting people to talk to us and that's going to take time. I would hope the fate of Uday and Qusay might encourage people to talk a little more. But it's going to take time.

GWEN IFILL: You're still counting on human intelligence on the ground?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: It's the only way.

GWEN IFILL: And point the direction to where these weapons might be?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: It's really the only way it will work.

GWEN IFILL: Is that something that the U.N. inspectors could have done?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: They could have done more of it than they did do, but it's a hard job, it would have been a very hard job for them also.

GWEN IFILL: As we talk about intelligence, as you know, certainly this happened before you left and while you were gone, there's been much discussion about the role that intelligence played in supporting our decision, the U.S. decision to go to war, a big drama in Britain as well as here. How important do you think pre-war intelligence was and how useful and accurate do you think it was in providing the underpinnings for the argument to go to war in Iraq?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I think Prime Minister Blair said it with an eloquence that I can't reproduce, but I can try to paraphrase it when he spoke to the joint session of Congress, and he said that if it were to turn out that they didn't have weapons of mass destruction, what we've done for the people of Iraq in building a free and democratic Iraq would have been worth it in itself. But he said, and I agree with him on this, that he remains deeply convinced that this regime had those weapons, that this regime was a threat to the whole region and to the rest of the world, and that that threat has gone away.

GWEN IFILL: If there was a strong humanitarian argument to be made about the

atrocities being committed in Iraq as a reason to go to war, why wasn't that the core reason?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Well, I think putting young American lives at risk is something that I believe, and I think the president believes, you do to preserve the security of this country. But if you're looking at the issue of was this war moral or immoral, was it a war against Iraq or for Iraq, there's no question it was moral. There's no question it was for Iraq. The only question is whether it advanced America's security.

And I'm absolutely convinced that it did advance America's security because that whole part of the world which has been a breeding ground for terrorists now for over a decade will be less of a breeding ground when we succeed, and we will succeed in helping the Iraqi people build a better country.

GWEN IFILL: There has also been quite a substantial debate going on about the source of a claim in the president's State of the Union speech about uranium buys from Iraq, from Niger. Did the Department of Defense have a hand in any of that? By now we've heard that the head of the CIA say it was my fault, the deputy national security adviser say it was my fault, did this ever pass through the Department of Defense?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: We're in the lucky position in the end, we'll say that particular one never went by us but, at least to the best of my knowledge. But look --

GWEN IFILL: Do you believe it to be true?

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I think that everybody is focused on a very tiny minor issue. If you look at the intelligence assessments about chemical, biological, nuclear weapons, and personally I always believed the chemical and biological were much more dangerous because the assessments were they have them now, not that they're just working on them, there was never any basic doubt that this was a man who was consumed with acquiring those capabilities, and just look, for twelve years, he sacrificed an enormous amount of money, which means to him enormous numbers of palaces, enormous numbers of Mercedes Benz, tanks, artillery, all kinds of, terrorists, all the things he liked to buy with his money, he gave them up in order not to have to give up his chemical, biological, nuclear programs. I'm pretty sure they were there.

GWEN IFILL: Secretary Wolfowitz, thank you very much for joining us.

PAUL WOLFOWITZ: Nice to be here. Thank you.



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