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Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

Thursday, June 17, 2004

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Press Conference in Mosul

GOVERNOR AL JUBURI: First of all, I want to thank you, Mr. Wolfowitz, for visiting us over here in this secure city and hopefully he will have a great and good time in this province. First of all, we are very happy to have Mr. Wolfowitz over here. And maybe you can have some type of discussion for Mr. Wolfowitz, talking about the period before turning the sovereignty to the Iraqi hands?

WOLFOWITZ: Thank you, Mr. Governor. We just had a very informative and lively discussion with the members of the local governing council and also with local citizens' groups and it's my third time back in Mosul and I must say I've enjoyed it every time I've been here.

One can't help being struck here in Mosul by the enormous diversity of the population, the different religious groups, the different ethnic groups and also the great history of this city. And I must say I've been impressed by the progress I've seen in this city over the last year. I was particularly impressed reading reports back in April about the fighting that took place here on April 9th. And we were impressed by the courage with which Mosulawis (sp) stayed and this city against an evil enemy.

We are impressed by your courage, Mr. Governor, but also by the courage of the Iraqi security forces, but we've seen that courage before. We've had American troops rescued and battled by Iraqi security forces and that is the kind of courage Iraqis will need as you've entered what we hope was going to be an important new chapter in Iraq's history, as Iraq assumes sovereignty as a free country for the first time in decades.

I've just been in Baghdad, where I had some very good discussions with Prime Minister Allawi and with ministers of the new government. We were very impressed with the quality of the new government. We very much look forward to ending the occupation and being in a position where we can support a sovereign government of Iraq.

But as it's been pointed out to me, the citizens of Mosul have largely assumed responsibility for most of your local affairs already some time ago and I think that bodes very well for the future. I just

conclude by commenting on the discussion we just had for the last hour. I think maybe some Americans coming in for the first time might say, my gosh, these people don't agree about anything and they have all kinds of complaints and criticisms. But I would answer two things: First of all, it is a wonderful thing that people in Mosul can complain and criticize -- they couldn't do that a year and a half ago; but the second most important thing is that we've seen already in the last year, an ability of people who disagree, people who come from different backgrounds to agree about the importance of building a new Iraq and working together to do that.

Starting July 1st, Iraq will have its own government again.

TRANSLATOR [to Wolfowitz]: Pardon me. Sir?

WOLFOWITZ: Starting July 1st, Iraq will have its own government again, but you won't be alone. We will still be supporting you. We have spilled blood with you and for you and your success will be our success. I'd be happy to take a few questions. Yes, sir.

Q [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: He's a reporter from El Bahara and Ashur (sp) newspapers. After (inaudible) sovereignty of the Iraqi after the 13th of June, what will the role be for the coalition forces, whenever probably will happen, are they going to just look at these problem or they will be the supervisor or the supporter? And also what will be the future for the former prison of Iraq and especially the ministry of defense of the United States, give him the -- call on the name of the prisoner of the war? Are you going to turn him to Iraqi hands or you're going to try to consider him as a [Inaudible]?

WOLFOWITZ: First of all, on your first question, the role of the coalition forces after July 1st will be to support Iraqi security forces, as much as they need help and we know for some time to come they will need substantial help. During the conversations we just had, one of the Iraqi's side said that during the fighting on April 9th, it was very important that the coalition forces were there, if needed, to support the Iraqi forces, but that he hoped Iraqi forces would be strong enough some day so that they would be the ones who supported Iraqis. That is what we would like to accomplish also.

And a great effort is now going into strengthening Iraqi security forces. That was the principal subject, in fact, in my discussions with Prime Minister Allawi in Baghdad. And I think you're familiar with Maj. Gen. David Petraeus who even says "Ana" (sp) Muslawi (sp) or used to. Now he's Lieut. Gen. Petraeus. He's been promoted. And now he says "Ana (sp) Iraqi." But he is in Baghdad working for the citizens of Mosul and all Iraqis to strengthen Iraqi security forces.

We know they aren't yet ready to assume that full job and until they are, you can count on us. But we believe strongly that the key to Iraqi defense is Iraq's self-defense. Just briefly, too, on the question of Saddam Hussein which is obviously one of enormous importance, and there are armies of lawyers telling us what we can and can't do. But I think the president of the United States has made it clear that it's our view that it's, first and foremost, up to the Iraqi people to determine justice for Saddam Hussein.

I'll try

Q [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: (Inaudible) from Mosul News. He say what's the type of agreement that happened between the military headquarter and also with a new government about after the 30th of June and what the future will be for the Coalition Provisional Authority? Was the first the time or wherever they had the program for employing people and the [Inaudible] also [Inaudible] construction that they did it, are they going to pull out from the project that they just started?

WOLFOWITZ: The answer to second question is no. We have committed more than \$18 billion of U.S. taxpayer money to the reconstruction of this country. A good deal of that still remains to be expended and we're going to see this whole thing through. Relationship after July 1st with the new government of Iraq will be one of partnership. We approach the security issues from a common perspective, with common objectives and we will be consulting, coordinating between the coalition forces – what'll now be called the Multinational Force Iraq -- and the new government of Iraq on a daily basis.

WOLFOWITZ: The woman in back.

Q: [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: Duta Heria (sp) from Freedom Newspaper, sir. First of all, I want to welcome our guests from the United State to this...

WOLFOWITZ: Thank you.

Q [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: ... peaceful city – to this beautiful city. I have one question. First of all, I want to raise my kids to my question to you, sir, is about the forming of the ICDC. They formed the ICDC battalion here in this province according to the ethnic rules, like we have a Kurdish battalion, we have Arabic battalion, we have a Turkmen battalion. What we want, we want to have one united Arab. We don't have any problem with the different nationality or different ethnics, so we just – what's your comment about it and how it will be in the future, forming these ICDC battalions?

WOLFOWITZ: I think the goal, clearly, is to have a single unified Iraq and that means single unified armed forces with all Iraqis of different kinds working together. In fact, that was the view expressed by – I believe it was the minister of defense or the minister of interior, when we met with him yesterday, so I think the direction is clear.

Sir.

Q [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: From Kurdistan KTV – from KTV, sir, I was asking a question about the Pesh Meurga. And as you know, that the Pesh Meurga, they are very qualified professional people and they used to serve and fight for the different area. So what – what's your idea about these Pesh Meurga? Is that right to consider and to cause them as a militia?

WOLFOWITZ: Well, of course, after July 1st, what matters is what is the Iraqi idea about the Pesh Meurga. But I think everyone can agree that in the long term, the goal should be a single integrated Iraqi armed forces. But you need to move in that direction in a careful way that recognizes how we got to where we are and, in particular, in the case of the Pesh Meurga recognizes the important they've played in the last 10 years. Yes, sir.

You want this last question? You get to pick.

[Laughter]

Q [THROUGH TRANSLATOR]: The question is, Admiral, as you know that with the dissolving of the former military has being Iraq had a lack of the military system. And now, keeping the security – secure the area and the country as being under the shelter of the coalition forces. What's your comment about it and how things will be and all the borders are open.

WOLFOWITZ: Clearly, Iraq needs stronger security forces. That's at all levels, from the police on up to the army and there clearly are many very capable Iraqis with military experience and many others without experience who are ready to volunteer to be trained. And I have to say that I'm impressed that these people keep volunteering even though the enemy keeps killing them. I think the two things the enemy fears the most are Iraqi self-government and Iraqi self-defense. And we will be working with a new self-government of Iraq to build Iraq's self-defense as rapidly as possible. Thank you very much.

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