



United States Department of Defense.

News Transcript

On the web: <http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2004/tr20040716-secdef1041.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

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

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Friday, July 16, 2004

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Remarks at Aspen Institute

Q: Mr. Wolfowitz, thank you for joining us. During the sessions of this conference, there's been a great deal of discussion about the Mid East, about terrorism, about Iraq specifically. In one of our sessions, Charlie Rose was interviewing Ted Turner and Ted in his usual understated way in response to the question: How do you view the Iraq wars [Audio Gap] the Godfather, but I'm willing to – since this is a fortune conference, go with architect. But could you give us your reaction to these kinds of emotions and these kinds of feelings? What are we doing there?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: One thing that comes to mind is – and I'm no expert on AOL-Time Warner, but it sounds to me, from what I read, that it probably fits the dictum if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I don't know that anything bad would have happened if AOL and Time Warner hadn't merged.

Iraq was broken. We didn't break Iraq. Saddam Hussein broke Iraq over 35 years. It was a failing state, if not a failed state. When people use the word "reconstruction" as though what we're doing is repairing wartime damage, it's absolutely the wrong word. I've been groping for one. The best I can come up with is resuscitation of a tortured patient and "tortured" is the word to describe this country, that's trying to come up off the critical table.

And there was not an alternative doing nothing. Doing nothing was basically what we've done for the previous 12 years. It was called "containment." It led to the loss of some 50 American lives in the Cole, in Khobar Towers, in the no-fly zone over Northern Iraq. None of those people would have been there, if it hadn't been for containment. It cost billions of dollars -- nothing like what Iraqi Freedom has cost. I acknowledge that immediately, but it was producing not only nothing, it was producing the main recruiting symbol for Osama bin Laden.

If you go and read his infamous fatwa from February of 1998, what's striking is that while Israel gets the usual kind of lip service, the main grievances are that we are bombing Iraq and that we have U.S. forces stationed on the territory of Saudi Arabia, the holy land. This was a very costly policy that was failing. The sanctions were failing, the sanctions, if they weren't hurting the Iraqi people, they were being used by Saddam as an excuse for hurting the Iraqi people. There wasn't the alternative of just not merging.

So I mean, the analogy may be cute, but it doesn't apply.

But if I could also at the risk of amending your introduction, 'cause that word "intellectual" came up at least three times, I think, and it reminds me that when Pat Moynihan and Bill Buckley had their first debate, when they were running against each other for the New York Senate, and Buckley referred, I either used the word "intellectual" or may have referred to Professor Moynihan. And Moynihan said, this debate's only five minutes old and already my opponent is hurling insults.

[Laughter]

I bring it up because to me there have been two very important experiences over the last 20 years personally that very much influence how I think. It's not an intellectual or theoretical point. One has to do with Saddam Hussein. I worked in the Pentagon three times. The first time was in the late '70s. It's in a small office that said, you know, given Iraq's historical ambitions on Kuwait, given the disparity of power between Iraq and its southern neighbors, it is possible that we might have to defend Kuwait or Saudi Arabia someday. The intelligence community dismissed this. One Arab country doesn't invade another Arab country. Frankly, I didn't think it would happen, but I thought it was something worth setting precautions against. I'm known, I guess, for being pretty skeptical about Saddam Hussein. He constantly surprises me in his brutality, in his recklessness, in his continuing the war after the war ended in 1991.

And the mistreatment of his people, even though I've known some of the horrible things over and over again, when I face it, up close and personal, like the seven Iraqi businessmen who had their hands cut off for currency trading in 1995, so that Saddam could blame the state of his economy on someone else. Even I get a little bit surprised. But the other one which, in a way, is more important, I was in the State Department, believe it or not, for eight years, liked it, got along well with foreign service officers. I was three jobs, but the two principal ones was Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs where I got to know [inaudible] very well. And then three years as the U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia, which perhaps not unrelated to our discussion, is the largest Muslim population of any country in the world. And you have to say it that way, because if you say it's a Muslim country, even Indonesian Muslims will object because it's a multi-religious country.

When I became Assistant Secretary of State in 1982, there was one democracy in all of East Asia and that was Japan. Foreign service officers with deep experience in the region said Chinese will never take democracy, it doesn't have Chinese roots. The Koreans have never had a democracy in their history and they aren't ready for it. Marcos is a disgrace, but the Filipinos can't govern themselves. Literally, those were the things.

And I won't take you through 20 years of history, but it started with the People's Power Revolution in Philippines in 1986 that replaced Marcos. I wouldn't say the Philippines is a paradise or a model of great government, but I think we're a lot better off with a democracy there than with what we had. Korea became a democracy the next year. Taiwan is the first Chinese democracy in history perhaps. But I think it puts a lie to the notion that Chinese like being tyrannized. Just look at the demonstrations

in Hong Kong recently. I think freedom and democracy are very powerful forces. I don't think change takes place overnight. I think it's a long, slow process. But when people say we're imposing our values on other people, I'm mystified. I mean, what we are trying to do and what I think we've done successfully as a country, particularly over the last 20 years or over the last 50, is to create opportunities starting with our old enemies, Japan and Germany, to stand on their own feet, to create their own institutions. They inevitably opt for free institutions because that's what people want. They're different everywhere in the world. But we are much better off for it and so are they. And that, to me, is relevant to where we are with Iraq today. I'm sorry. It was a long answer. [Chuckles.]

Q: You know...

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I'm not good with short ones.

[Laughter]

Q: In that answer, you sort of dismissed that the intelligence community's assessment. And over the past week or so, both in England and in the United States, there have been reports about how wrong the intelligence community was on various things leading up to Iraq. Do you feel that you were misled in any way or misinformed by the intelligence community, as we got into Iraq, even though on WMD or the links to al Qaeda?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I'm sorry. I made a glancing comment that in 1979 the intelligence community said Iraq...

Q: Well, you've got somewhat critical of the CIA recently.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: No. By the way – and that was a prediction. And when it comes to predictions, Yogi Berra is right: It's dangerous to make predictions, especially about the future. And I wasn't predicting that Iraq would invade Kuwait. I just said let's have a policy that guards against it. And in fact, because intelligence is such an uncertain business, policy can't base itself on a single-point intelligence estimate. That's why you have to consider the various possibilities. And I think sometimes and I think the reports on the WMD issue would say the uncertainty's got washed out, in a sense, and you got a kind of consensus, partly because the consensus goes back for 12 years. It was the same intelligence the Clinton administration had, the same intelligence the French had, the same intelligence the British and Germans had. And Saddam was doing everything to suggest that that was the right conclusion. But I mean, people need to understand – and I think it's getting lost in this debate – they throw up their hands in shock and horror that the CIA didn't have any human agents inside Iraq. Well, there's a very good – I mean, I wish we had some. But stop and think about North Korea today. How many agents would you guess we have in North Korea?

I mean, it's not an easy place to survive as a foreign agent. It's not an easy place even to tell your best friend what you think. The head of the Iraqi police academy who I met with last summer – an impressive man – but he'd been a policeman in the old regime, so I was a little skeptical. But he said,

“Well, I was in jail for a year. And I said, “why,” and he said, “‘cause I denounced Saddam Hussein.”

And I got really skeptical because I couldn't imagine anyone would denounce Saddam Hussein. I said, “Were you crazy or something?” He said, “Oh, no. I just told my best friend.” You tell your best friend and you're in jail. You do something, you're tongue's cut out. It's very, very hard to penetrate those particular two countries, countries like them, or an organization like al Qaeda, which executes people who are suspect. So it's human intelligence is a very hard business.

And I think if we have unrealistic estimates of what intelligence can do for us, we're going to constantly go wrong. I think we've got to understand that they are deep uncertainties, that you have to try to get those uncertainties flushed out as well as possible, that debating intelligence is a good thing, that consensus products are probably something that shows some skepticism about. But I have enormous admiration for some of the secrets the intelligence community has broken. Sometimes of great ingenuity and sometimes with enormous courage.

Q: So when Director Tenet was out at Sun Valley, though, he said that the agency did fine, but that some of the civilian policymakers took it too – well, you can answer him then.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I don't know how he can say the agency did fine or the intelligence community did fine. I mean, I'm kind of mystified. But you know, we didn't go to war on the basis of the intelligence. We went to the U.N. on the basis of the intelligence. We went to the U.N. The president went in September 2002, saying that Iraq was in material breach of 16 different U.N. resolutions – one of which was a ceasefire resolution from 1991. And if you're in material breach of a ceasefire resolution, one would think – I'm not an international lawyer, but one would think that means that the ceasefire is nullified and you're back to the all-necessary means of, I guess it was resolution 660. It's a – being in material breach of that particular resolution is a serious business. He talked about weapons of mass destruction, he talked about terrorism, he talked about the oppression of the Iraqi people – all of which were subjects of U.N. resolutions. Basically went into a negotiation with the Security Council and out of that negotiation came a couple of good breaks for Iraq. They were going to get a 17th chance. It's supposed to be a final chance. It was going to be only about WMD. If they came clean on their WMD, the idea of all-necessary means would be off the table. We would still have some issues about their support for terrorism and we'd still have big issues about their oppression of their people.

But basically, the cause of military action was narrowed down to this one resolution which was passed unanimously in which David Kay says very clearly Iraq violated, that they didn't have stockpiles suggests that there was something wrong in the intelligence. But by the way, even when you get through all the intelligence, nobody says that Saddam couldn't build the stuff, didn't intend to build the stuff when he got rid of the inspectors, wasn't a dangerous man. So there's a kind of constant raising of the bar. If you say he was in violation of 1441, which should have been taken extremely seriously, people say, yes, but he didn't have stockpiles of anthrax. Well, he could have produced anthrax in six months. The bar keeps going up. If you say, “I'm curious, can I ask...

Q: [inaudible]

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: ...how many people here have heard of Abdul Rahman Yassin, if you'd raise your hand? Abdul Rahman Yassin I mean, it's a well-informed audience. My guess is that – I'll be generous – 20 percent of you have heard of him. He is the only fugitive, indicted fugitive, still at large from the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

The 1993 World Trade Center bombing was pulled off by the nephew and very close buddy of Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, the mastermind of 9/11. These are not separate events. They were the same target. They were the same people. It would seem significant that one major figure in that event is still at large. It would seem significant that he was harbored in Iraq by Iraqi intelligence for 10 years. That's a fact. We don't know why.

We can debate the whys of it. But every time I've tried in the congressional testimony or elsewhere to say this seem to me like a real issue which, by the way, Richard Clarke in his book, I think, devotes two sentences. The last draft I saw of the 9/11-commission report didn't even mention this man. It seems to me it's a rather important subject. And every time you try to raise it, people say, "But there's no proof Saddam was involved in 9/11." Well, isn't it significant if he was harboring somebody who was involved in 1993 and the list goes on.

The issue about Saddam's support for terrorism isn't whether or not he was involved in 9/11. The issue is that over a decade, there were a series of meetings between high-level Iraqis—intelligence people – and high-level al Qaeda people. We have from the principal cooperating witness in the 1998 embassy bombings, the report that in 1992-'93, they debated in al Qaeda about whether it was OK to cooperate with Saddam since he was not a religious man. And they came to the conclusion that he was the only real enemy of the west and therefore you could cooperate with him. And this particular witness said one of the leading advocates of cooperating with Saddam was a senior al Qaeda man named Abu Hafs, the Mauritanian. Recently, we've had confirmation from the former Iraqi ambassador to Sudan that in 1998 which, by the way, was after our cooperating witness had any knowledge of this subject.

Abu Hafs, the Mauritanian made a secret trip from Sudan to Baghdad. We don't know what happened in that trip. But you don't meet with Iraqi intelligence and with al Qaeda, which is a terrorist organization, in order to discuss how to build hospitals or schools. So it seems to me if you talk about intelligence, here we're talking about a subject where we know a certain amount, we know there's a lot that we don't know and you've got to figure out what is your policy going to be based on the uncertainties.

If you say we can't do anything about terrorism, until we have proof beyond a reasonable doubt that there's a problem, I think we're just setting ourselves up, once again, to fail to connect the dots.

Q: In addition to the reservations that have been expressed about the decision to go into Iraq, we certainly have gotten a lot of reporting from within the military raising questions about not so much the conduct of the war itself, so much as the conduct of the occupation following the war, as well as reports from military within Afghanistan complaining that neither in Iraq nor in Afghanistan have sufficient

resources been made available for the troops to their job.

Complaints from Afghanistan about shortage of planes, shortage of equipment, inability to really pursue the war on terror because so many resources have gone to Iraq, complaints from general saying that they actually needed twice as many troops on the ground to maintain the peace, following the war that DoD thought was necessary. Can you comment on that kind of thinking and that kind of report which we consistently get from so many men in the military?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Well, I'm not sure where you get it because that's – you've said a lot. Let me start with something Bill Bradley said last night which simply falls. He said General Shinseki was fired. General Shinseki was not fired. General Shinseki served his full four years as chief of staff for the army. I think he also said that President Bush ignored the advice of his senior military advisor that we needed 300,000 troops in Iraq. I presume you're referring to General Shinseki. President Bush's senior military advisors for the war, were not the chief of staff of the army. They were the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff General Myers and General Franks, the combatant commander in Iraq. And General Franks' requirement was exactly what he got and his estimate of what we needed postwar was about a quarter of what General Shinseki talked about in public.

I learned myself for the first time when we – General Myers and I testified together before the Senate a few weeks ago. Senator Clinton was after me for the second time about why did you civilians ignore the wonderful advice of General Shinseki and I said, "This wasn't the military advice." And I said to General Myers, "Isn't that correct?" because he knows everything that was said in all the meetings between Secretary Rumsfeld and the military and the president of the military. And I expected him, as he did, to say, "No, that wasn't the advice." But what surprised me was apparently except for this intervention and Senate hearing, General Shinseki never brought up the 300,000 number in the joint chiefs either. So we're dealing with some urban legends that are very...

Q: Yeah, well, wait, wait. But wasn't General Shinseki, didn't he turn out to be right?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: No, no, no.

Q: Didn't we need more troops?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: No, that's another myth. OK, now let's get to some substance. There's a reason why our numbers in Afghanistan and Iraq are where they are. And it's a judgment that is shared by General Franks, by General Abizaid, and by the civilian leadership. And if you give me a few minutes to get there, a little bit of personal history. In November of 2001, we were into our first quagmire of this war on terrorism, if you recall, because it was three weeks into the war and Mazar-e Sharif hadn't fallen yet and people were getting a little anxious. And you can go back and read it's amazing how quickly the quagmire stories appeared. And I was saying – thinking maybe we do need more troops. And I had a long and recently heated conversation with our combatant commander General Franks, "Don't you need

more troops?” And he said quite eloquently and quite emphatically, “I do not want to make the same strategic mistake that the Soviet Union made in Afghanistan.

If in February we’re still stuck outside Mazar-e Sharif, I will look at more forces. But it’s a big mistake in a country like Afghanistan to have more forces than you need. We’ve actually grown our force over the last 2.5 years from about 10,000 at the beginning to about 17,000 today. Our ally contribution has gone up from about 5,000 to about 9,000. But you do not want to turn Afghanistan into a country occupied by foreign forces. And the same is true in Iraq. A different combatant commander, in this case, General John Abizaid who, by the way, is an Arab-American also what the army calls a foreign area officer who spent time in the Arab world, fluent in Arabic. He said, “I don’t want to be an occupation force. I don’t want more Americans; I want more Iraqis. I want the American footprint lower.

Part of our problem in Iraq is we came in as liberators, we were hailed as liberators. A year later, we’ve earned the label of occupiers. And if we had 300,000 troops there, we’d be even more occupiers. But what would we have done with 300,000 troops? And this is the –people just trot that number out as though somehow we’d be better off. The problem in Iraq is finding the 5,000 or 20,000. It’s not 100,000. We’re dealing with a remarkable group of determined professional killers. Some of them led by this terrorist Zarqawi who was a foreign invader. He comes from Jordan. He’s associated with al Qaeda. He declares open war on the Shia and the Kurds are just 80 percent of the Iraqi population. He has no care for human life. And he’s hand in glove with things like the M14 Division of the old Iraqi Intelligence.

If you haven’t heard of M14, there’s a very good article about it – about it, it about a month ago in The New York Times. The so-called antiterrorism division of the old Iraqi intelligence. Meaning they specialize in bombings, assassinations, hijackings and forgotten the third area. They had a whole division for developing improvised explosive devices. They were doing this for the last 20 years and they’re now doing it in Iraq. Having 300,000 people when you don’t know where to look is not the answer.

The answer – and I guess I should get to the present and the future – ‘cause it is important to win in Iraq. The key to winning in Iraq is not more American troops. It’s Iraqi self-government and Iraqi self-defense. And I think we’ve made a major step in that direction June 28th. Iraqis now believe that they’re fighting for their own country. They’re beginning to beginning to believe that we don’t plan to stay there forever. They’re beginning to believe that we didn’t come there to take their oil and I think it’s making a huge difference.

Q: Well, why is our perception so bad in the Muslim world then if you look at – since the invasion and occupation most surveys in the Muslim world show opinions of the United States have gone way down. Why is that?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I don’t think I can explain it. I think it is complicated. I do think that some of it is an inevitable result of being at war. War is an ugly business and it produces civilian casualties. It, unfortunately, produces abuses like Abu Ghraib. You know, it will look different in five years. Think

about – I pick five years not quite randomly. We certainly didn't look in Europe or Japan as though we were out of woods a year and half after the end of those wars. And this war isn't over yet. The Marshall plan, as you remember, was three years after VE Day and it was a kind of desperate attempt to save a failing situation. By that standard, we're doing better. So the test of this has to come with time, not – I wouldn't argue that right now we're sitting pretty. Right now we're in a very difficult position. But – and part of the problem has nothing to do with what we do and a lot to do with the poison that's fed into the Arab media by Al Jazeera, by some official media. Part of it has to do with the Arab-Israeli issue which is unquestionably an albatross around our necks.

Q: Is it any failure in our public diplomacy?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I think that it hurt us. I don't know that we could have done much about it. For the last 12 months or 14 months, we were in Iraq as an occupying power. The face on what we said was an American face. I think it's already making a huge difference that this prime minister, when there's a bombing, it's the Iraqi prime minister and he's a brave, brave man, who turns up that day that when it's a matter of now going to Arab countries for money or for support, it's the Iraqi government that goes. And I'm told that some surprise Arab governments are now starting to come to them and ask for diplomatic recognition, so I think it'll change.

Q: Maybe we should turn to the audience. One plea here, which is we have lots of discussion at the Aspen Institute, this is not now a forum for discussion or speeches. I'd like these to be one-sentence questions to the secretary, if we could. We can have the discussions later.

Yes, sir? Right there, yeah.

Q: Hi. I'm Cameron Sinclair from Architecture for Humanity – real architects. My question is a policy question to do with post the war. February 27th we pulled out of the treaty to ban land mines. And one of which 140 countries have signed – most recently, I think Libya. And speaking with a spokesman from the department, they mentioned that land mines were needed for the protection in areas that we have conflict. Don't you think that that was a – well, do you think that was a wrong policy move to make as we all know the effects of land mines in Cambodia and Afghanistan and so forth and do you think that lessened respect for the country for the need for security?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: We didn't pull out of the treaty. We never joined the treaty. We said that our policy will be to oppose persistent landmines. That's, I think, the real part of the problem. We have one problem, which is in Korea and we're trying to get beyond that, but we can't do it overnight. We and our Korean allies are facing a major threat from North Korea and we can't give up persistent mines to deal with that. Look, I think landmines are terrible. And I mean, the kind of thing you're saying, Cambodia is terrible. And I think we need to do everything we can to try to clean up those problems. We make big contribution to de-mining everywhere in the world -- I think one of the biggest of any countries. And we're trying very hard to get our own military in a position where we're not leaving stuff around that can kill people later. But it is a complicated issue and it's, frankly, one that involves risking the lives of American soldiers specifically in Korea, if we went with the treaty the way it's

designed. And my understanding, too, is the treaty the way it's designed does nothing about antitank mines; it's only antipersonnel mines, which, in a sense, is a loophole there.

I think the real problem is persistent mines. And I think the policy that we announced in February was actually an attempt to bring our policy somewhat closer to the treaty, although not in conformity with the treaty. I agree with you it is a problem. It's a weapon system that will be nice to make obsolete, but we're not there yet.

Q: I'm going to go the back 'cause we keep – different people who haven't been able to ask before. So, yes?

Q: Vincent McGee (sp). Overall, there's a consensus of feeling of everyone here and I think around the world that a major result of Iraq and the policy has been a loss of the moral standing of the United States as a leader -- perception of our leadership. You are an architect, an intellectual, a proponent of the policies that brought us this. Do you accept responsibility for our loss of this moral authority and dissuasion and if you do, what are you doing about it?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I don't know about the architect label. I certainly will accept responsibility for supporting the decision. I think what Tony Blair said the other day is absolutely correct. Nobody lied. Nobody misled people about the intelligence. If there were mistakes made about the intelligence, I think his words were, it was not a mistake to remove Saddam Hussein. I mean, I would like to ask anyone who takes the position you do why it is moral to leave Saddam Hussein in power, murdering hundreds of thousands of Iraqis over these years or why the Iraqi people would be better off as if we had left him there. I think – I mean, we were – I mentioned these – I think – several Iraqi businessmen had their hands cut off.

Yesterday in the Congress, we had a group of Iraqi women who were part of something called the Women's Alliance for Democracy in Iraq. And they've come to Washington for the last 10 days to learn from the National Democratic Institute, the National Republican Institute, members of Congress about things like campaigning, election monitoring, what it's like to be a member of Congress. They are determined to go back to Iraq to be able to organize the voice of women in elections that are scheduled for the end of this year. But at one of these sessions yesterday morning, a congressman asked, "What do I say to my constituents about why their sons and daughters are risking their lives in Iraq?" and the things that poured out from these women were things like: In my village, 48 young men disappeared without a trace. What do you say to their families? We have sons who would – had arms cut off or tongues cut out. What do you say to them? And from this very apparently religious woman, judging from the way she was dressed, speaking in Arabic, a woman from Karbala. She said I would say, "Why didn't you come 10 years ago, 12 years ago? A lot of people have died since." I mean, for me, the hard issue is going to Walter Reed, going to Bethesda talking with a soldier who has lost an eye or an arm or sometimes much worse than that and saying, why is this America's business. But I don't have a problem saying that this is a moral thing to do, at least as moral as the war in Kosovo or the war in Bosnia. And frankly, I really believe, although it's – you know, we have to win this war before we can say this. If we lose it, then you can't defend anything. When we win it, you're going to have 90 percent, if not

more of the 25 million Iraqis – one of the most important countries in the Arab and Muslim world, some of the most educated people in the Arab and Muslim world. And I think potentially some of the most religiously tolerant – although it remains to be seen – will say “thank you, America, for liberating us.” But we haven’t won yet and we have to win.

Q: Yes, back there. Yeah, you, the woman. Sorry.

Q: Yes. My name is Cowdi Saseki (sp) from Japan and I know that in corners of Iraq, however, that North Korea is also very important because hundreds of people from Japan are kidnapped [inaudible] unsolved problem and food is not delivers [inaudible] and no democracy there. And a lot of murders are actually happening in North Korea. So what is your policy and strategy towards North Korea?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Thank you for the question. And if you’d let me get to it, and I’m sorry I’m not giving you short answers, but these are complicated issues.

Q: Could you repeat the question?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: The question is what is our policy toward North Korea where there are hundreds of Japanese kidnapped – I don’t know if the number is right. There’s no question that I think the only country in the world that abused its people were since Saddam Hussein is the North Korean regime. It’s horrible. And the question is what is our policy.

And as I thought across a range of countries, it seems to me – I started with this issue about Iraq. We had a real problem about the intelligence on Iraq and we tried to resolve it and I think correctly by going to the United Nations and basically putting the burden of proof on Saddam and he failed.

We had an issue with the Taliban harboring al Qaeda. We didn’t immediately go to war. We went to the United Nations. We put the burden on the Taliban to give up Bin Laden. They failed. Libya passed the test. Libya has been caught red-handed, thanks in part to cooperation from the Germans and the British and a lot of other people, violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Qaddafi is coughing up his weapons of mass destruction. It doesn’t mean he’s a totally reformed character, but it’s a big step forward.

With North Korea – well, let me comment on North Korea, answer your question. It’s a very difficult problem. We had a deal, we thought, with them eight years ago, which it turns out that they were cheating on. We called them on it. Their first reaction was to say yes, of course, we’re building nuclear weapons. Then they decided we were lying. They switched back and forth.

But the key to working the North Korea problem for a number of reasons has to be working together with the other major affected countries, which is to say Japan, South Korea, Russia and China. It’s the key partly because North Korea is not a problem that lends itself to a military solution, to put it mildly. It’s also a key to working the problem because with some qualifications and none with respect to Japan, we have a common set of objectives and we’ve been able slowly – it’s glacial – but I think we’ve been able slowly to force the North Koreans to face up to the reality of where they are.

But that reality is that this is very much a failed state. It is continuing to fail. The key to getting out of its failure mode is to come clean with its weapons of mass destruction, to come to a reasonable arrangement with those five countries that would like to see North Korea reform and here you can get different versions of what the outcome out to be. And my own view would be the Chinese reform of late – starting under Deng Xiaopeng in 1979 is not a bad model for a totalitarian communist regime to think about how to begin to open up. And if we could get there, I would be very satisfied and I think it'd be a huge step forward for the North Korea people.

I'd just say one other thing, in the meantime, there's a human tragedy going in China with North Koreans refugees. And one of the great humanitarian achievements – and there were some of the last century and Keith Shore (sp) knows about this – was how the United States and France and some other non-Asian powers worked together with the Southeast Asian countries to rescue some two million refugees from Indo-China and resettled virtually all of them outside of Southeast Asia. I think it's a model and you'd have to adapt to it enormously the North Korean situation. But I think if we could find a way, together with the Chinese and the South Koreans and the Russians to do something to help those people, it's not going to change the world, but it would be a positive contribution.

Q: I think our representative from China had a question anyway. Maybe it's a follow-up.

Q: Thank you [inaudible]. And forgive me, if I have a longer question since it's not easy for me to travel all the way here.

[Laughter]

Q: And Mr. Secretary, I'm Shun Peng from China. And I hope you won't turn into a more diplomatic way upon hearing this, since I'm not working for foreign affairs ministry for China. I work for national television of China. You know, the name of the United States of America in Chinese is called "A beautiful country." And the people in China, we have learned a great deal of the American values through movies like "Glory, Top Gun, Forrest Gump, or Saving Private Ryan," to name a few and which we value a lot, and we treasure a lot. And we pay highly respect to it. But sometimes we get confused feelings upon seeing you being active lately along the coast of Pan Pacific and you're always keeping close eye on Taiwan. So exactly, in what way do you want the Chinese people to view you? You can make a multiple choice. Choice A, a friend forever, hopefully; Choice B, friend for most of the time – sometimes not sure, you know, talk about business [inaudible], Choice C, the way you put it, thank you.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Which way?

Q: The way you.

Q: Whatever way you choose to put it.

Q: Whichever way you put it.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I think there's no question that we want the Chinese people to see us as their friend. I think we'd like the Chinese government to see us as their friend also. But there is a problem that I think China still has a long way to go before the government of China really speaks for the Chinese people and I think it's made enormous progress. Let me be clear. I've been to China, off and on, over more than 20 years. The progress is stunning including, I think, in the area of human choice and human freedom. I think it's a course that is going to be good for the Chinese people and good for U. S. -China relations. And as for the problem of Taiwan, our only interest is in seeing it solved peacefully.

I remember being at a conference in Singapore and one of your compatriots from a Chinese think tank expressed surprise when I said we'd be happy to see this solved any way. And he said, "You mean even with unification?" I said absolutely. We'd love to see the problem of Taiwan off our agenda, as long as it's peaceful. I think, frankly, the approach that your government is taking of trying through missile buildups and so forth to intimidate the people of Taiwan is strengthening the forces of independence there which we don't like and...

Q: I'm sorry, we don't like the forces of independence there or the...

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: We don't like the push toward independence in Taiwan because it's not a moral matter, it's a matter that this is not an issue to be solved unilaterally, either by the PRC or by Taiwan. But I think frankly, there's a saying in English: You catch more flies with honey. I think more honey for the Taiwanese actually might solve this problem sooner, but above all, peaceful. China is a country with a great past and an incredibly important future. And peaceful relations between China and the rest of the Pacific and we are a Pacific country, I think, is going to be one of the most important keystones for the future. I mean, one of the prices, frankly of this horrible war on terrorism, which was inflicted on us, is that I think it's diverted attention from what I previously thought and still, to some extent, think for the future is the most important set of relationships in the world.

Q: Yes, ma'am. Right there.

Q: Polly [inaudible]. Quick question, if you went into Iraq to combat terrorism, where is Osama bin Laden and what are other ways of combating terrorism?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I didn't catch it. After you said where I Osama bin Laden and what?

Q: Weren't there other ways of combating terrorism?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: There are other ways and we're pursuing many other way. S We're fighting terrorists in Afghanistan, by the way, there'd probably be more in Afghanistan, if they weren't flooding into Iraq. We're working with the PACs to the best of our knowledge ad our knowledge is clear imperfect. Bin Laden is probably somewhere on the sovereignty [inaudible] of Pakistan. We're not going to find him with our military. We can help the Pakistanis work at it and I think they're working at it better. We're helping the Saudis to fight terrorists in Saudi Arabia, which is clearly one of the major

targets of the terrorists. And I think it has helped a lot that we're no longer burdened with a containment policy. It's a striking mixture of dates that on May 12th, the terrorists attacked in Riyadh.

We get very little insight, by the way, into their decision-making. But it does seem as though there was some debate that some of them thought this is a mistake and others felt almost out of desperation they had to make themselves known. In any case, on May 12th the sort of first open successful attack that I know of by al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, it was helpful that on May 7th, five days before Secretary Rumsfeld had been there to say thanks to the success in Iraq. We no longer need it to keep American airplanes and 7,000 American troops in Saudi Arabia. So it's a fight on many fronts.

I will repeat what I said, perhaps glancingly earlier, I think making progress on the Arab-Israeli issue is one of those fronts. And it's a discouraging tough job. I do think the fact that Shimon Peres isn't attending here is a good sign [Chuckles] that Ariel Sharon has embraced the policy of withdrawal from Gaza that his opponent embraced in the election. It's not the solution to the problem, but it would be a major step forward, I think, where we need to work on it. But to come back to Iraq, I was in Iraq, as I said three or four weeks ago and one of the things that really struck me as we were on the plane on the way home, was how much bravery I had encountered.

I met for some eight hours with the new Prime Minister Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. Iyad Allawi was sleeping in his apartment in London in 1979 – woke up just in time to move his head out of the way of an axe that was coming down on him from one of Saddam's assassins. It nearly severed his leg. He was in the hospital for a year. His wife suffered a nervous breakdown from which she and their marriage never recovered. This man is number one on Zarqawi's target list and he knows the risks he's running.

I met with the president of Iraq, the new president Sheikh Gazi al Yawer who is a senior sheikh of the Shamar Tribe, which is, I think, the largest tribe in Iraq. And by the way is half Sunni, half Shia, in case you think that this is a country that cleaves along Sunni-Shia lines, it doesn't. He became the president of the Iraqi governing council, the old governing council, when his president Izzedin Salim was murdered in a car bomb. He knows the risks he's running. Barham Saleh who is an old friend of my, a Kurd, is the deputy prime minister. He was the target of an assassination attempt by al Qaeda-associated people who perhaps were also Saddam-associated people in Northern Iraq in 2002. We met a Marine in Fallujah whose life had been saved by five brave Iraqi members of the Iraqi National Guard, who pulled them off the battlefield under fire and it got Navy achievement and commendation medals for it. We met the then-governor of the province of Nineva in Mosul, a remarkable man who tragically was just murdered two days ago in an ambush -- a Sunni-Arab, a real hero.

And the one that really got to me was our interpreter in Mosul who was a young Iraqi woman in her mid-20s. My military assistant had spent seven months up in Mosul knew her and when he went up to talk to her and ask her how she was doing she said, "I'm fine, but my sister was assassinated seven weeks ago, because I'm working for the Americans." And he said, "Well, why do you continue to work for us and she said, "Because my father told me you mustn't retreat in the face of evil." The enemy in Iraq is colossally evil to go back to the question earlier. It's largely made up the killers of the old regime and the new killers of Zarqawi and his foreign terrorists. And I think our greatest problem is these people

are very good at blowing things up and I think our greatest strength is that that's all they offer. They offer nothing positive to the Iraqi people and it is stunning to me how much bravery there is there and how much willingness to stand up and fight, especially now that they have their own government to defend.

Q: Thank you for the excellent presentation. In listening to your presentation, I couldn't but make a parallel between Saddam and our own homegrown Saddam in Latin America, Mr. Chavez. Mr. Chavez sounds, looks, acts like Saddam 10 years ago or Qaddafi, but more like Saddam. Certainly, [inaudible] Colombia is not going to work if Chavez continues helping the [inaudible]. And he poses great challenges long term to democratic countries in Latin America. And certainly, long-term challenges to the long-term interest of the United States and our own hemisphere. Could you care to comment on U.S. policy on Mr. Chavez?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Yes, but can I first object to your comparison. I mean, I don't – I may be wrong, I don't know Chavez that well. And of course, you're saying we don't know what he's going to be like 10 years from now. But when people say, "We all know Saddam Hussein was a bad guy, but . . .," I immediately know that the person that's saying that doesn't know who they're talking about. Saddam Hussein was not just another bad guy. I have dealt, as they would say, up close and personal with Ferdinand Marcos who was a bad guy. As the ambassador to Indonesia for three years from Suharto was the – let's be frank about it – the dictator of Indonesia. I knew Ferdinand Marcos, if I could paraphrase that old saying, I knew Ferdinand Marcos and Ferdinand Marcos was no Saddam Hussein. Ferdinand Marcos didn't put children in jail to punish their parents. He didn't cut out the tongues of people who were suspected of leaking secrets. He didn't take 130,000 or 400,000 people and butcher them and put them in mass graves. He didn't gas his own people. The list, I mean, we're talking about one of the 20th century's real monsters. And it makes a difference and it is part of the reason why Iraqis to this day are fearful that maybe he and his gang will come back if we don't have the will. . . .

Q: If that indictment that you're making is correct – and I think most of us accept that it is – how do you look back on our support for Saddam against the Iranians, our support for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Russians? How do you respond to the charge that if these people were as bad as they are, we have some responsibility for having created it?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Probably so. And there are lots – I don't want [Chuckles] this gentleman to feel like I was filibustering his question, so let me just say very quickly...

Q: We'll get to Chavez and then...

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Yeah. I mean, and I don't know the answer on Chavez. I do think one answer is to really work hard with the Colombians and they now have a president who's really stepped up quite courageously to taking on this fight and I think with some real success. And anytime you want to think about the drug problem in Afghanistan and we have to think about how hard it is to deal with it in Colombia, this is not something you root out quickly. And I agree with you, if Chavez heads the way, he seems to want to head, it's going to make it very, very tough for [President] Uribe and for the great

number of Colombians who are struggling to build a democracy. I do think we, as the United States have to be careful not to give Chavez the excuses he's looking for to say that his crackdown is justified by something the United States has done. But I think working through the OAS, through the Carter Center to push for a real honest show of what the Venezuelan people think, I think is the best hope. Remind me, I'm sorry.

Q: I was asking about our support for...

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Oh, the...

Q: ... Saddam for the Mujahedeen.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: There is [inaudible]...

[Cross Talk]

Q: ... for the forces...

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: ... over the years. I mean, one part of the answer is the past is past and let's move forward. I mean, the president in his – well, it's true. I mean, just because you made mistakes in the past doesn't mean you should continue making them. Just because you were in bed with dictators in the past, doesn't mean you should continue sleeping with them. And when the president made his remarkable speech to the National Endowment for Democracy last fall, he was quite explicit that we have looked the other way too often in the Arab world at practices by dictators.

The particular case you mentioned was a very, very difficult one because it presented the United States and I don't – I was doing East Asia policy at the time. I don't have to have a personal – I'm not that knowledgeable personally, but I think there was a real dilemma of what would happen particularly to the weaker countries of Saudi Arabia, if the Iranians won that war. And strikingly, I bet for the only thing that some Iraqis will really give Saddam credit for is to defending the country against Iran. But I think – go back to the point – I think – I thought for some time that for whatever set of reasons, we have been too often willing to make compromises.

Let me take the Philippines. I referenced it. We gave ourselves kind of the excuse that they weren't really capable of democracy and I think some people honestly believed it. And it was convenient because Marcos let us have bases and we made that kind of raire politique (sp) compromise. I'm not against raire politique (sp) compromises. I'm sure I've made more than a few of them myself. And I don't believe that you can have a policy that, even if it's aimed at moral improvement, can not recognize the limitations of what can be done and can't recognize the need for different countries to have different approaches. But I think the fundamental point which the president said very clearly in that speech is that September 11th showed us what 20 or 30 years of a failing status quo in the Middle East was bringing the world and we've got to change the course of history there. And I think we're changing in the right direction.

And I am struck – read a report about a conference of Arab Democrats in Cairo just a week ago, quite a remarkable thing. In fact, remarkable to me that the Egyptian government permitted it. That’s interesting in itself, where they were openly critical of their governments. And I’m told that their main complaint about American action in Iraq was that we hadn’t been successful yet.

Q: Since it’s raining, I think we should continue a little bit longer and hope the rain passes, so that – yes, ma’am. This rain will be over in about five minutes and then we’ll.

Q: Thank you. My name is Farida Aladi. I’m from Libya. I’m sorry, Mr. Wolfowitz, the past is not the past. The past led to the present. And part of the reason that we as Arabs in the region are perplexed and angry to the American policy in our region is that, indeed, you supported Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. You trained him. He was able to open his eyes and to build his capacities that has led to what has led. You supported Saddam Hussein against Iran when we were opposing Saddam Hussein. You didn’t speak about the violations of human rights when he was violating human rights. You supported the dictatorship in the Arab region and you called them your friends. And for the last 30 years because of these regimes, we have been losers on many, many fronts. So the past is not the past.

And I hope that the new changes of your policy is, indeed, a genuine one and it’s not only a tactful one for your personal agenda. I think we as Arab people would respect very much if you are very honest about your stance in the region. Say you are a superpower, you are. Say you have a strategic interest in our region, you are. You need the oil, you need many other things, but I’m afraid to tell you [that] none of the Arabs believe that you are there to bring democracy or human rights. We still have on daily basis lots of human rights violation by rules and by governments that you call them your friend. And as mother, as a woman, the war devastated us.

Q: Why don’t we let the secretary respond to that because it is a future-looking question, as well, about supporting regimes whose policies we may not agree with.

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: I wasn’t at all dismissive of the mistakes of the past. Don’t misunderstand me. I said I don’t think because we made mistakes in the past that we should continue to make those mistakes. I think we need a fundamental change. The president called for a fundamental change. I believe we’re working toward that. And I think one of the terrible shames on everybody in the past, not just the United States, was the willingness by so many people – Arabs as well as American officials – to look the other way at Saddam’s crimes. I think it was terrible and particularly, that it continued after that war ended. And I think it was terrible. And I think frankly right now I’d like to see us standing up a little more strongly for people like Fatil Jakmi (sp) in Libya – your country – who was freed by Qaddafi and it was a great step forward and he’s been thrown back in jail again. I think we should keep the pressure up for people like that. We can’t change everything overnight. I don’t believe if the implication is that we shouldn’t have tried to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan, that the Afghans would be better off if the Soviet Union were still there. I don’t buy that.

I think after the Soviets left, we kind of walked away from our responsibility for 10 years and we paid a

big price for that. I would agree with that. I don't think the implication of what you're saying and I don't think you would mean it, is that we should have left Saddam Hussein in power. Yes, we have strategic interests, yes, the oil of the Middle East is incredibly important. But frankly, our only interest is that it be sold. And if the people to whom it belongs own it, they're going to sell it.

We didn't go to Iraq to take Iraq's oil. We went to Iraq to eliminate a man who was a great danger to the world and a terrible, terrible torture and abuser and rapist to the Iraqi people and I don't apologize for that.

Q: Robert?

Q: I'm Robert Heffner (sp). I don't think that anyone takes exceptions with all the things you've said today and the justification of the war. My question is in a globalized world; it seems to many of us that you really rushed at a time where you could have focused harder, possibly for another nine months on a globalized coalition to then go in. Why did you go – what forced you to go when you did?

SEC. WOLFOWITZ: Look, you can always debate those things. It's – the costs of waiting were real. They included the cost of sustaining a very large force under very difficult conditions. And if you think – and I do think – that our army is under some considerable strain right now, it would have been far worse for every month you'd added on of waiting and waiting.

But I think the bigger cost was that we had put together a coalition that included some very important countries in the region who, to this day, wouldn't like it if I named them as members of the coalition. By the way, I just did the count the other day at its height and, of course, we've lost three or four of them – at its height, I think we had 34 members of the coalition in Iraq and that compares with 19 in Kosovo, for example.

But we have put together something that was absolutely critical to winning the war. Let's take that bombing in Saudi Arabia, May 12th. If we'd been sitting in a desert waiting and I don't know for what, exactly and the bomb had gone off in Riyadh and the Saudis said gentlemen, we have our problems, get your planes out of Saudi Arabia. We want nothing to do with you. We would have had some very serious difficulties.

The suggestion is well, maybe if we'd waited long enough we would have had the French on board. I guess, we can debate that endlessly. If there were a way to determine the outcome, I'd be happy to take the bet that they were never going to come on board. And if they come on board, yes, it would have been a good thing. We wanted as much international U.N. support as we could get. But the Gulf support was critical. The French support was not. And we ran a risk of losing it. So I think the president would describe that as the most difficult decision he ever made in his life and it was difficult. But the people who just cavalierly say we could have waited sound to me like the people who were ready to wait for another 12 years and that was not an acceptable course.

Q: We could easily continue our questions for quite a long time, but we've already gone significantly

over our limit. So with regret I'm afraid we're going to have to end on that note.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2004/tr20040716-secdef1041.html>