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Remarks at U.S.-Arab Economic Forum

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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(7:35 p.m. EDT)

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much. Thank you. Chukran, thank you, Rick, for that very warm introduction, and ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by saying what a great pleasure it is for me to be back in Detroit.

Mr. Mayor, I've come to your city on many occasions to speak and to work with youth programs. I'm pleased to have a school in this city named after me, one of the first charter schools that was ever put into Michigan, and Governor Engler, I hope, is also here. And I regret that I didn't get here early enough this afternoon to go visit my academy. But I am very proud of it.

Now I'm also very proud of the work that the leadership of this city and state have put into youth programs over the years. Governor Engler and I did a great deal of work, and Mrs. Engler was on the board of America's Promise with me, so for that reason it's a great pleasure to be back here in Detroit.

And a very honor, great honor, to be able to thank you all, assembled, for your efforts to get this first U.S.-Arab Economic Forum up and running off the ground. My congratulations to Ahmed Chebbani, Chairman of the Board of the American-Arab Chamber of Commerce. (Applause.)

To Richard Blouse, President and CEO of the Detroit Regional Chamber. (Applause.)

And I know that this will be followed by many, many more such gatherings that will be successful in the years ahead. I would also like to thank the many other organizations and companies that worked so hard to put the program together. The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, known and referred to a moment ago as ACCESS, and the Arab-American Institute have done a terrific job as co-hosts and are deserving of your applause. (Applause.)

And I'm very pleased that my State Department has done its part to make this forum a success. I looked around the room earlier, and half my staff is here (laughter). I'd better get home because somebody is not watching the fort.

The Arab League has also given its full support to this event, and I would like to thank the Secretary General of the League and my good friend Amr Moussa for demonstrating his commitment to U.S.-Arab partnership. (Applause.)

And it's a pleasure to share the evening with my friend and colleague in the Bush Cabinet, Spencer Abraham, an inspiration to Arab-Americans, to the people of Michigan, and indeed, all Americans; and it is my privilege to serve with you in the President's Cabinet.

There are so many others here tonight that I could mention: friends, so many of my friends from the Middle East who I work very closely with -- too many to mention and so I won't even start down this road or it would take all evening.

Let me just say that the importance of this event is demonstrated by who you have attracted to this event, and it is highly fitting that this first U.S.-Arab Economic Forum is taking place in Detroit. Because Detroit, as you have already heard, is intimately linked to the Arab world -- from the first Lebanese immigrants of the 19th century, to more recent arrivals fleeing the tyranny of Saddam Hussein -- Detroit

and the surrounding communities have been immeasurably enriched by the sons and daughters of the Arabs.

Walk through Highland Park, home to one of America's oldest mosques, or stroll along Warren Street in Dearborn and listen to the Arabic spilling from the shops. There and elsewhere you can taste the Arab-American world in all of its beauty and in all of its variety.

Detroit's Arab-American community is celebrated for its commitment, its energy and its passion. You all saw an example earlier this afternoon when ACCESS held the groundbreaking for the new Arab-American National Museum and Cultural Center. And what a contribution that is going to make to this community. (Applause.)

When the museum opens next year after so many years of hard work, it promises to be a showcase for the rich Arab-American cultural heritage, as well as for Arab-American contributions to American life.

Ismail Ahmed, Executive Director of ACCESS is here tonight. Mr. Ahmed, congratulations to you and ACCESS on the museum and on the many accomplishments that you have performed for your community. My congratulations to you, sir. (Applause.)

You know, ACCESS is but one shining example of what Alexis deTocqueville termed as, "the combined power of individuals united into a society." That principle lies at the heart of our democracy.

Indeed, our history has taught us that governments can pave the way to opportunity, but only people can seize those opportunities -- people organized in business and community groups -- people like you.

Tonight I have come to enlist your power and your passion in a great cause for our times; a cause that links America and the Arab world. I have come to ask you to help build the new Middle East -- a Middle East peaceful, prosperous -- a Middle East that is free. We face no task more important.

Over the past half-century alone, we, and the peoples of the Middle East have suffered through war, revolution, boycotts and terrorism. The region has seen the development and use of some of the most lethal weapons known to man. It is no exaggeration to say that without a transformation of the Middle East, the region will remain a source of violence and terrorism fueled by poverty, by alienation, and by despair.

We must not let that happen. We will not let that happen. (Applause.)

We will win a better future by making common cause with the peoples and governments of the region -- those who are committed to the vision we share of a Middle East where all people have jobs that let them put bread on their tables, provide a roof over their heads and offer a decent education to their children; of a Middle East where all people worship God in a spirit of tolerance and understanding; and of a Middle East where respect for the sanctity of the individual, the rule of law, and the politics of participation grow stronger day by day.

There is no clash of civilizations as the terrorists and the prophets of doom would have us believe. There is only a struggle to defend values -- the values we share with our friends and allies in the West, and also with the vast majority of Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East.

These are values we hold in common with all people who aspire to a world at peace and who want to raise their children in prosperity and dignity. This is a struggle that we must contest with every tool at our command: military, diplomatic, political, and economic. This is a struggle that we are contesting with success as we change the strategic environment of the Middle East, and open the way toward a future of hope. We have ended the Taliban's backward and bloody reign in Afghanistan, we have put al-Qaida on the run, and we have mobilized the world against terrorism.

And we have removed Saddam Hussein as a roadblock on the path to hope, not just for the Iraqi people, but for every man, woman and child in the Middle East.

I know that the Detroit area hosts many Iraqis who fled Saddam's brutality. To them, and to all the world, I now proudly say, Saddam is gone, that evil regime is gone, and he and it will not return. He will not return. (Applause)

He will not return, thanks to the outstanding service and the painful sacrifices that the Coalition's men and women in uniform have made, and continue to make this evening in Iraq.

As Secretary of State, as a former soldier, and as an American, I am so proud of the wonderful young men and women that are out there doing their job every day on behalf of the American people, on behalf of the Iraqi people, and on behalf of the sacred cause of freedom. And I know that each and every one of you here tonight is as proud of those young people as I am. (Applause.)

We are grateful, too, for the service of the soldiers from the dozens of other nations contributing to this effort. The victory has come at a

cost. We mourn with the families of all those, Iraqi, American, and other Coalition members who have given their lives so that the world can be more secure, and Iraq can be free. They will not be forgotten. Their sacrifice will not have been in vain.

We know that security in Iraq remains a problem, and lives continue to be lost to Baathist regime remnants, common criminals and terrorists, who would return Iraq to its tragic past. We will not let these assassins of hope succeed. I know that our troops and the Iraqi security forces, as they are built up, will be able to deal with these enemies of peace.

Even as we continue to make Iraq secure, we should not lose sight of the remarkable progress that Iraq has made in a very short period of time. As this year dawned, a brutal dictator was squandering Iraq's treasure in order to strut and bluster on the regional and the world stages. He was holding his people in poverty and ignorance, while filling mass graves with anyone foolhardy enough to challenge his misrule. Saddam Hussein ruled over what Kanan Makiya memorably termed a "Republic of Fear."

For those who question the war, let me say this. Let me illustrate what we have accomplished. Two weeks ago, I went to Halabja in Northern Iraq, where on a March Friday morning in 1988, Saddam Hussein's forces gassed and killed 5,000 people. I paid homage to these victims at a mass grave, and at a memorial that has been created in their honor.

Let there be no doubt about weapons of mass destruction. I saw the results and I dealt with the survivors that day, and I listened to their plaintive tales of what happened to their loved ones and what happened to them. This was an evil regime. The President's words were never more well-directed or deserved as they were toward the regime of Saddam Hussein.

He will invade now no more neighbors, torture no more innocents, and fill no more mass graves. I am proud of the role that we played in ending the horrors of Saddam Hussein. I am proud that today, we see a republic of hope replacing the republic of fear.

When I visited Iraq two weeks ago, I was deeply impressed by the spirit that I saw among the Iraqi people that I had a chance to talk to. I saw a vibrancy fueled by the winds of freedom blowing through the land. Despite the efforts of terrorists and saboteurs, normal life is returning to the cities and to the countryside. Hospitals and clinics are open, treating the sick. Iraqis are going to work now, including the 35,000 Iraqis who have been working to restore Iraq's schools. Over 90 percent of those schools are now open. They will all see students arriving on the first of the month later this week. All of those schools now ready to teach Iraqi children the skills for success in a free market democracy.

Many of these schools are now supported by Parent Teacher Associations, giving parents a voice in the future of their kids. One of the military commanders over there said to me that they were each given \$500, each brigade commander was given \$500 per school in his district. And when they were trying to determine how to spend the \$500, in typical American fashion, and with a great deal of ingenuity on the part of a good infantry officer, these brigade commanders said to the local community, "We'll give you the \$500, but you have to form a PTA. And the PTA has to meet and tell me how you will spend that money. And only then will you get it."

And for the first time, these villagers were participating in their own welfare, participating in their own future, participating in how they would spend money that was coming to them from a higher authority.

Right now, the international community, under American leadership, is restoring infrastructure that was neglected and destroyed by years of misrule.

In my staff meeting this morning it was reported to me that today we have gone above the level of power in the country -- 3700 megawatts -- larger than existed at the time of the demise of the Saddam Hussein regime. And it will improve and improve and improve in the months ahead. It will take time, and we all must do more because the damage runs deep. But we will repair it. It will be repaired through the commitment of people like Nafa Khalaf, an Iraqi immigrant to this community.

Nafa Khalaf lived the American dream and built a successful wastewater treatment company in Detroit. Now, he is using his experience to help the Iraqi people. America was built by millions of such individuals. Iraqis need thousands more to come and to help them.

Most important of all -- all of this, however -- is that Iraqis are now on the road to democratic self-rule. That is the greatest guarantee of Iraq's future. And as President Bush made crystal clear in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, that is the primary goal of our Coalition.

Yes, Iraqis are on the road to democratic self-government. Municipal and village councils are up and operating. In Baghdad, I attended a City Council meeting that was remarkable for its normalcy. It might even have been like a Detroit City Council meeting, but I wouldn't swear to that, Mayor. (Laughter.)

The Council spent its time discussing the topics that city councils everywhere in the world do: jobs, education, the environment, water, sewage, electricity, police protection. All of these things are now happening in towns and cities all across Iraq. At the national level, the Governing Council has appointed cabinet ministers and taken increased responsibility for national policy.

While I was there the new minister of justice announced the legal framework for an independent judiciary in this Arab land. Shortly after, the Council endorsed tariff, tax and banking reforms to underpin a free and open market economy. It also announced important measures to open the country up to direct foreign investment. And now, the Governing Council is turning its attention to the process for drawing up a democratic constitution for a democratic Iraq.

With our help, the Iraqi people are answering the ghosts of the past by moving boldly ahead into the future. But they cannot get there alone. Last week, President Bush challenged the international community to step up and meet its obligations to help rebuild Iraq.

"Every young democracy needs the help of friends," he said. Now, the nations of Iraq -- the nation of Iraq needs and deserves our aid, and all nations of goodwill should step forward and provide that support. I hope very much for Iraq's sake and for the sake of the entire Middle East that the President's words are heeded. But governments can only do so much.

To seize their future and make hope real, the Iraqi people need trade. They need investment. They need you. President Bush has asked Congress for \$20 billion to help rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Next month the international community will meet in Madrid to pledge additional assistance for Iraqi reconstruction. I can assure you that these funds are critical to Iraq's success, and I urge all participants, especially those of you who are foreign ministers, or deputy prime ministers of countries in the region, to be as generous as you can when you come to the conference in Madrid.

If Congress approves the President's request, and if the international community is generous, there will be many opportunities for companies to bring their know-how to Iraq, to help the Iraqi people, and to do good business. The Iraqi people have indeed come a long way from the dark days of Saddam. But we are not naïve about the magnitude of the task remaining before us. Victory in war came at a price. So will victory in peace.

We all want to transfer responsibility for Iraq's governance back to the Iraqi people as quickly as is possible. But the worst thing we could do, the absolutely worst thing we could do, is to move this process too quickly, push it along too fast, and hand off to a government without the legitimacy to govern. That would be a formula -- (inaudible).

The Iraqis need time to bring their ministries fully up to speed. They need time to write a constitution, and to have it ratified by their people. They need time to hold elections. They need time to put good governance into practice. Then, and only then, will our task be done. Then, and only then, we will leave as liberators, not conquerors, and our tradition (inaudible) , not conquering. And we will be successful.

A new Iraq is an essential part of the new Middle East. So, too, is an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Sadly, however, the situation there is more troubling. Last year, President Bush laid out a vision of hope for the long-suffering Palestinian and Israeli peoples: a vision of two democratic states living side by side in peace, security, and dignity -- the state of Israel, and a new state, Palestine.

Earlier this year, we and our partners in the Quartet provided Israel and the Palestinians with a roadmap that would achieve President Bush's vision. The leaders of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, stood at President Bush's side and pledged their support. Today, however, regrettably, those efforts have stalled because of continued terror, and because of those who will not give up power but continue to drag Palestinian dreams further down a tragic, dead-end path.

So let there be no confusion. We remain committed to the President's vision. The President and all of us in the administration, all of us in the Quartet, remain committed to the roadmap as the best way to get to that vision. For that to happen, however, the Palestinians need a leadership fully committed to fighting terror. They need a prime minister empowered with the authority to fight terror and violence and to establish law and order.

Rhetoric aside, the cold, hard fact is that if the new prime minister does not make a solid commitment to follow the roadmap and clamp down on terrorism, it is not clear how we will be able to move forward.

Terrorists murder hope. Every bomb that goes off sets back the day when Palestinians and Israelis can realize their dreams. Terrorist organizations like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad must stop. They must be dismantled. The threat they pose to hope and peace must be eliminated.

Israel, too, has obligations, obligations that must be met as we move forward on the roadmap. Settlement activity must end. (Applause.)

Unauthorized outposts must be dismantled, consistent with the roadmap. Israel must take steps to ease the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza, focusing especially on removing checkpoints, and freeing up the movement of goods and people.

We will also continue to discuss with Israel the plans for a West Bank fence, emphasizing its effect on the lives of the Palestinian

people, and the need to ensure that this fence does not prejudice the outcome of peace negotiations.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight one other country, one where unrepresentative rulers are frustrating the people's yearning for freedom while pursuing policies at odds with their interests. That country is Iran.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, has found conclusively that Iran is pursuing a clandestine program to produce fissile material that could be used to build nuclear weapons. Through the IAEA, the international community has sent Iran a forceful message that this program must stop. It will not be tolerated.

We must also continue to support the aspirations of the Iranian people to improve their lives and live in peace and in security with their neighbors. As President Bush has said, as Iran's people embrace a future defined by greater freedom, greater tolerance, they will have no better friend than the United States of America.

President Bush understands that these and the other challenges we face in the Middle East are part of an integrated whole. Success in one area will bolster progress in other areas. But the reverse is also true. Failure in Iraq or in a search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, or in the effort to control the proliferation of deadly weapons of mass destruction, sets back the cause of peace, prosperity and freedom everywhere in the region.

So we must remain focused and engaged. But we must also be smart in our focus and our engagement. For decades we have played defense, reacting to crises as they have arisen. That is no longer good enough. We must get ahead of the future by starting now to lay the foundation for a future of hope. If we are to win not just ceasefires and respites from repression, if we are to win the peace of the generations, we must use every tool we have to support the governments, associations, businesses and others in the region who are committed to unleashing the human spirit.

We have our work cut out for us. Unfortunately as Arab experts and intellectuals, themselves, have told us, many millions of motivated and highly intelligent men and women find themselves in circumstances in which their potential is frustrated, wasted, (inaudible), I am wasted, I am a mess, is a refrain one hears all too often in the poor neighborhoods of the Arab world.

Breadwinners are frustrated. Some 14 million Arab adults lack the dignity of paid work with millions more set to enter the market for scarce jobs every year. Women are frustrated. The female half of the population of the Arab world is largely relegated to the margins of the economic and political life of their countries.

Young people are frustrated. Kids are frustrated. While Arab countries spend a higher percentage of their national income on education than any other region of the developing world, too many Arab children are not learning the skills that will be needed to compete in the 21st century economic world.

With so much potential frustrated in every sphere of life, it's no wonder so many people are angry. The Arab world is home to over 280 million men, women and children -- roughly the population of the United States. Until each and every one of them goes to bed at night facing a dawn of hope, not frustration, our work will not be done.

We are committed to the cause of building hope, not merely quenching conflict. This administration, this President, has developed three major policy initiatives that bear directly on this problem.

The first one is the Millennium Challenge Account. The Millennium Challenge Account represents a revolution in American economic development assistance policy. Its essence is to recognize the primacy of sound policy and economic development.

We are telling developing countries the world over, including those in the Arab world, that we will be generous to the extent that governments show us that the money we give will benefit people, all the people, and not just a small clique. It is money -- a large amount -- that has to be spent wisely and spent in those nations that are committed to democracy, the rule of law, the end of corruption, and involving all aspects of civil society in development of their society.

Ten billion dollars has initially been committed to this effort and more will be forthcoming. The President is deeply committed to getting the funds needed for this account. Each additional year after the first couple of years start up, we'll see another \$5 billion invested.

Last May when President Bush put reform squarely on America's Middle East agenda, he came up with another initiative: a far-reaching and comprehensive approach to supporting growth and economic opportunity focused on trade. As the President said, "Free markets and trade have helped defeat poverty and taught men and women the habits of liberty."

Under the President's initiative, we will rev up the engine of trade with a series of steps, which we hope will lead to a U.S.-Middle East Free Trade Area within a decade. To that end we will help reforming countries such as Lebanon, Algeria, Yemen and Saudi Arabia join the World Trade Organization.

At the same time, we are working with a number of Arab countries through bilateral trade and investment framework agreements to

make them more hospitable to foreign trade and investment.

The final step is to negotiate access to American markets through Free Trade Agreements. Here, too, we are making good progress. We are on track to complete negotiations with Morocco on a Free Trade Agreement by the end of the year, and we look forward to beginning negotiations with Bahrain.

We all know the power of free trade. Just look at Jordan. A few short years after Jordan implemented sweeping economic reforms, established qualified industrial zones, and concluded a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, Jordanians have increased their exports of goods and services to the United States six-fold. At the same time, American companies have increased their sales to Jordan by almost 30 percent.

Economic reform and freer trade work hand-in-hand, and it's a combination that works in Jordan. It is a combination that will work throughout the Middle East as long as the conditions are there for it to work.

But trade is not enough. To share in the wealth of the global economy, people must be empowered with skills, with finance and with freedom. And that's where the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative comes in. While the Millennium Challenge Account and the President's trade initiatives are global in scope, the third initiative of which I spoke a moment ago is aimed squarely at the Middle East, and particularly at the Arab world. That is the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

Through that initiative, we seek a true partnership of opportunity in which we put our support behind those in the region who are already working to broaden economic opportunity, expand popular participation, and improve education.

We do not wish to judge others. We do not wish to preach to others. We certainly do not wish to coerce others. We wish to help others, and by so doing, help ourselves.

Now, we know that deep changes that are needed, the deep changes the Arab peoples want, will not come overnight. There are no magic bullets, no painless shortcuts; it will take a generation of hard work, but we can do it. We can do it because we are Americans, we believe in change, we believe in the future, we trust in change, and we can help our Arab friends.

We know that patience and hard work pays off, and we are ready to do that hard work. We will also welcome every partner in the Middle East and Europe anywhere and everywhere who will join us in making this hopeful future a reality.

We're already off to a good start. Just two weeks ago, for example, we held our first regional forum on judicial reform in Bahrain. That forum was sponsored by the Government of Bahrain, and I'm very pleased that his Royal Highness, Crown Prince Sheikh Salman is with us this evening, and Your Highness, I want to thank you for Bahrain's support to the forum.

At this forum, United States Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor led a team of American jurists in a series of workshops with the region's most senior judges and justice ministry authorities on issues such as human rights and legal procedures. Now, we will build on this program's success with two follow-on projects later this year.

Elsewhere, in Yemen, we have already begun a program to link high schools to their American counterparts using that powerful instrument: the Internet. In this way, we will create a collaborative learning network that will benefit Yemeni and American students.

We are also taking steps to expand economic opportunity. For example, to give women-entrepreneurs access to capital, the very life-blood of business, we will set up a new micro-enterprise program to support women.

We are also launching an internship program to expose women from Arab countries to American companies. Working with businesses like yours, we will be giving these future business leaders the opportunity of a lifetime.

In these and in so many other ways, we are committed to supporting Arab efforts at reform and development. But we cannot do it alone. We need partners in the region and in the international community. So we invite the international financial institutions and our friends throughout the world, especially in the European Union, to join us in promoting reform and economic advancement throughout the Middle East.

We welcome the opportunity to work with our European colleagues as they devise similar partnership programs of their own. The European Union has a well-known expertise and a longstanding commitment to peace reform and security embodied in its own outreach programs to the Middle East.

Still, even with our friends and allies from around the world, there are limits to what we in government can do. We can open the door, but you are the ones who must walk through. Where conditions are ripe, invest, trade, buy and sell. You will reward your workers and shareholders with good business.

You will reward Arab workers and families with good wages. You will reward Arab governments with incentives for continued good policies. And in these ways, you will be doing your part to lay the foundations for a new Middle East.

My friends, we stand at an historic juncture, when a new Middle East is struggling to be born. We know in our heads and in our hearts that we must help the peoples of the region to deliver a future of hope.

Given the stakes involved for every American man, woman and child -- and for every Arab man, woman and child -- failure is not an option. I know I can count on everyone in this room -- your very presence says that -- I know I can count on you to continue working with energy and commitment to bring this new Middle East to life.

As you do so, I ask that you never lose sight of what we are doing this for. We are doing this for mothers and fathers who will not read our speeches or watch them on television, but who go to bed every night wondering whether their children will be properly clothed or fed or educated.

We have told these people that participatory politics and the free market economic system would work to make their lives and the lives of their children better. And now they look to us to deliver. If we let them down, then democracy and free markets have no meaning, and the future of hope will recede.

But I'm not worried about going backward. I'm only thinking about moving forward. I look out across this room and see people so dedicated to this task, so dedicated to this mission.

When I see all of the foreign leaders who have assembled to be a part of this first forum, when I know that this process will continue into the future, then I leave here this evening hopeful -- hopeful of a better future for the children of the Middle East; for all of the people of the Middle East. Hopeful in the knowledge that we will be working with them. They are not alone; we will be their partners. Hopeful in the knowledge that President Bush, and every member of his team, is dedicated to doing everything that we can to bring peace and opportunity to the Middle East; hopeful that each and every one of us who has benefited from this society is willing to share not only with our fellow citizens here, but our fellow citizens of the world, and especially our fellow citizens of the world in the Middle East.

Let us rededicate ourselves to the proposition of peace and hope in the Middle East. The peoples of the Middle East are counting on us.

Thank you so very much. (Applause.)

[End]

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