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On Iraq

Remarks by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz , Fletcher Conference, Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, Washington, DC, Wednesday, October 16, 2002 .

Thank you, Bob [Pfalzgraff, President of the Institute of Foreign Policy Analysis], for that nice introduction. And thank you for compromising on my entrance here. Some of you who were at the Fletcher Conference last year, which was co-sponsored with the Army, may know that I arrived here to be told that my entrance that night would be down those stairs, as though this were an Oscar presentation. [Laughter] I found that all a bit embarrassing. But it was suggested that to top it off this year, I could come in on a Harley Davidson. [Laughter] I said that's really a little too embarrassing. Then the suggestion came forward, well, why don't you just rappel down the side there. Then I knew it was the Marines who were sponsoring this conference. [Laughter]

Actually I have a terrific military assistant who's a Marine colonel, who made the astute comment back a little while ago when an impressive senior Marine got himself in a little bit of trouble on the podium at the press briefing by saying a bit prematurely, although presciently, that the Taliban had been eviscerated. And my colonel said, "We Marines may not know exactly what 'eviscerated' means, but we know how to do it." [Laughter]

Let me just mention one fact about the Commandant [General James Jones]. I first met him in Iraq, in Northern Iraq, when he was commanding the 24th MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] as part of Operation Provide Comfort, an incredibly important event historically, and one from which we are still drawing lessons. In that capacity, with, I believe, Army troops under his command as well, after the war ended when some million Kurdish refugees were huddled freezing in the mountains on the Turkish border, the Turks were afraid to let them in their country and we didn't want to let them starve. President Bush ordered U.S. troops to go back into Iraq to create a haven for the Kurds.

Jim Jones and his Marines faced the Iraqi army and, without firing a shot, were able to move them out of the northern third of their country and to create a sanctuary that is still largely observed to this day.

That event and many others convinced me that Marines not only know about evisceration but they know about the peaceful use of power.

Working with people like General Jones, people who know how to do things and do them well, I can't think of a more inspiring time to be part of the country's national security team. It's been a distinct pleasure to serve with members of our Joint Chiefs, including the Chairman, General [Richard] Myers, and the Vice Chairman, who, as we all know is also a Marine, General Pete Pace, with President Bush, with Vice President Cheney, with Secretary [of State Colin] Powell, with [National Security Advisor] Condi Rice, with my old partner [Deputy Secretary of State] Rich Armitage, and of course with our Secretary of Defense who's back to try to get it right the second time, Donald Rumsfeld. He says I'm back for the third time—you can editorialize from that.

Risks of Action versus Risks of Inaction

I want to talk to you today about an extremely important subject and a complicated subject which is the question, how do we weigh the risks of a possible use of force against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq? Let me underscore at the outset that word possible. The President has not made any decision to use force and, to the contrary, he is exercising strenuous efforts to try to find a peaceful resolution to this serious threat that would allow us to avoid the use of force. But that possibility is in front of us. It's being debated. It was obviously debated vigorously when the Congress passed its important resolution last week. So I'd like to share some of my thinking with you. And since it is a complicated subject, and since some of you at least are from Fletcher and you're used to 50-minute segments, this may be a little long. Be patient.

Let me go back to December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Winston Churchill wrote that day in his memoirs, with great relief, that now "the United States was in the war," as he put it, "up to the neck and in to the death." He recalled words that British Foreign Minister Earl Grey had spoken to him nearly a quarter of a century before as the United States entered World War I. "The United States," Grey said, "is like a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate."

I witnessed a quiet but awesome display of that power some 12 years ago this month when I accompanied Secretary of State [James] Baker on a trip to the Persian Gulf. As part of that trip Secretary Baker paid a visit to the 1st Cavalry Division, and a brigade of the division assembled in the desert to greet him. The sight of all those young American men and women standing in the desert, ready to risk all for their country was truly awe-inspiring.

As they filed off in loose formation into a setting desert sun it was impossible not to be moved by the willingness of these young men and women to serve their country, to be moved by the recognition that these were some of the smartest and best trained soldiers that this country has ever produced, or to be moved by the sobering thought that the numbers before our eyes, roughly 3,000 human beings, represented lives that might be lost if it came to using force to get Iraq out of Kuwait.

During that visit and others, in informal conversations with both officers and enlisted troops, I developed an informal, and admittedly unscientific, survey of military attitudes. Although every one I talked to made it clear that they would faithfully obey any orders issued by their commander-in-chief, it seemed that those I talked to who thought that we might go to war simply to enforce UN resolutions or to restore the Kuwaiti government were most likely to be skeptics. However, the clear majority of my sample seemed to believe, in the words of one corporal, that if we don't do this job now, our buddies will have to do it later and it will be much more difficult.

That simple but compelling logic was the fundamental reason for undertaking a dangerous course 11 years ago—a course of action [whose] cost proved to be miraculously less than we had feared—and it is the same logic that confronts us today.

But since September 11th we face a grim new reality. As Secretary of State Powell has put it, and I quote, "Since September 11th, 2001, the world is a more dangerous place. As a consequence of the terrorist attacks on that day a new reality was born. The world had to recognize," Secretary Powell said, "that the potential connection between terrorists and weapons of mass destruction moved terrorism to a new level of threat, a threat that could not be deterred ... because of this connection between states developing weapons of mass destruction and terrorist organizations willing to use them without any compunction and in an undeterrable fashion."

It is precisely that concern which now calls our attention to Baghdad. The Iraqi regime's support for terrorism, within and outside its borders, its appetite for the world's most dangerous weapons, and its openly declared hostility to the United States form a combination that needs to be understood in a new light since September 11th of last year.

We cannot continue living safely with a regime, which as the President said, "gathers the most serious dangers of our age in a single place."

President Bush has detailed Iraq's links to international terrorists, its training of al Qaeda members in bomb-making, poisons and deadly gasses. The President spoke about Iraq's growing fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles that could disburse its arsenal of biological and chemical weapons and about the ominous fact that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVs for missions targeting the United States. And, of course, as the President said, and I quote, "Sophisticated delivery systems are not required for a chemical or biological attack. All that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it."

Secretary Rumsfeld recently said that within hours of the Iraqi regime's offer to the Secretary General of the UN, in their words, "to allow the return of United Nations weapons inspectors to Iraq without conditions," Iraq was shooting at and trying to kill coalition pilots. As the Secretary pointed out, it's a familiar routine of playing the world and the media.

But the regime itself speaks more forthrightly on some occasions and it tells deadly tales.

On the anniversary of the September attacks one of Iraq's state-owned weeklies, one of many who had similar issues, featured on its cover the burning World Trade Center with a two-word headline emblazoned in red letters. It read, "Allah's punishment."

In July of last year, an Iraqi columnist wrote glowingly about Osama bin Laden in a provincial newspaper. "Bin Laden," this columnist wrote, "knows that causes pain to America and used the language of dynamite and explosives in the city of Khobar and destroyed two U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Now he continues to smile and still think seriously," this columnist wrote, "with the seriousness of the Bedouin of the desert about the way he will try to bomb the Pentagon after he destroys the White House.... To bin Laden I say that revolution, the wings of the dove and the bullet are all but one and the same thing in the heart of a believer."

That's not unique. In the 11 years since the end of the Gulf War, the state-controlled Iraqi media have been full of such glorification of terrorists and threats of terrorism. Like the editorialist who wrote ten years ago in Babil, the newspaper of Saddam Hussein's son Uday, "Does the United States," this editorial said, "realize the meaning of every Iraqi becoming a missile that can cross countries and cities?"

And some of this rhetoric comes from the mouth of Saddam Hussein himself. He is the only world leader who openly glorified and justified the attacks of September 11th. In his letter to Americans on September 15th of last year, Saddam wrote, "Americans should feel the pain they have inflicted on other peoples of the world so that when they suffer, they will find the right solution and the right path."

In judging the nature of the threats we confront it is a classic historic mistake to ignore what our enemies say as mere rhetoric, a mistake that we make at our own peril.

We make a mistake if we depreciate the value of intelligence from open sources, because those sources can be a useful indicator of intentions.

But it is not merely the rhetoric of the Iraqi regime that concerns us, but its actions. When we consider the actions of Iraq under the leadership of the present regime, and particularly since the invasion of Kuwait 12 years ago, there is no question that the Iraqi people are in the grips of an evil regime, a regime that threatens us all -- inside and outside that country.

Scott Ritter, whom we know well, knows well how evil that regime is. He recently described what he called "the most horrific thing," although he said he did so reluctantly because in his words, he is "waging peace now." But he did describe a prison in Baghdad whose stench was unreal, an amalgam of "urine, feces, vomit and sweat," a hellhole where prisoners were "howling and dying of thirst." In this prison, the oldest inmates were 12, the youngest, mere toddlers. Their crime: being children of the regime's political enemies. A children's prison: there can hardly be a more grim symbol of a regime that rules by terror and that embraces terror as a policy against those who oppose it both at home and abroad.

Few in this country at least would deny that the present Iraqi regime is an evil and dangerous one. It would be difficult to find Americans who would not agree that the world would be safer and the Iraqi people would be vastly better off if this regime no longer ruled.

Where we differ is over the issue of what means are necessary and appropriate to effect that kind of change. The real issue, in my mind at least the central issue, comes down to how we weigh the risks and costs of using force should we have to do so. And let me emphasize what I said at the beginning: we are not yet at that point and we hope devoutly to be able to avoid it.

Those risks are very real, and no sensible person would lightly undertake an operation that risks the lives of our marvelous men and women in uniform.

President Bush has demonstrated over and over again that he takes those risks extremely seriously. That is why the President has made it so clear that he will do everything possible to achieve a peaceful disarmament of Iraq that resolves this danger to our country and to the world.

The debate in this country is not between those who desire peace and those who desire war. The issue is how we can best achieve a peaceful outcome that resolves the danger we face. There is a seeming paradox at work here that takes some effort to grasp. Our only hope -- our only hope in my view -- of achieving the peaceful disarmament of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is by having a credible threat of force behind our diplomacy. To be effective, the two must be part of a single policy.

We know from 11 years of stubborn defiance that Saddam Hussein will not easily give up those horrible weapons that he has worked so hard to develop and retain. Eleven years of defiance of UN resolutions has cost his country, and more important his regime which he really does care about, dearly. He has sacrificed tens of billions, perhaps even hundreds of [b]illions of dollars, in lost oil revenues in order to retain the world's worst weapons. He has subjected his country to regular bombing by coalition aircraft. He has caused enormous suffering for his own people, which he turns and blames on the United States

No one should be under any illusions that Saddam Hussein will give up the weapons he is not supposed to have simply because the United Nations passes another resolution. He will only do so if he believes that doing so is a necessary price for his survival and the survival of his regime.

That paradox was well understood by President Kennedy. When he began negotiating with the Soviet Union for the removal of their missiles from Cuba, he assembled a powerful force to demonstrate to Khrushchev that, if the missiles were not removed peacefully, the United States would force their removal. That action was unquestionably risky, but without it, a peaceful resolution of the crisis would not have been possible. As President Bush has said: "There is no easy or risk-free course of action. Some have argued we should wait, and that's an option. In my view, it's the riskiest of all options, because the longer we wait," the President said, "the stronger and bolder Saddam Hussein will become. We could wait and hope that Saddam does not give weapons to terrorists or develop a nuclear weapon to blackmail the world. But I am convinced that is a hope against all evidence."

Over the last 12 months, the President and his advisors have been weighing very carefully the risks of various courses of action. While everything possible is being done to reduce risks, no one is discounting them. The fundamental question is how to weigh the risks of action against the risks of inaction, and to weigh the risks of acting now against the risks of acting much later.

We must step up to our duty to balance the risks of action against the risks of inaction, and, in doing so, we need to work hard to comprehend the fundamental uncertainty that underlies the most important judgments that we have to make.

That famous American philosopher and even more famous New York Yankee catcher, Yogi Berra, once said, "It's dangerous to make predictions, especially about the future." That is true even for the most ordinary predictions. It is doubly true in trying to predict the future actions of terrorists or terrorist regimes where we frequently have difficulty knowing the past, much less predicting the future.

We are still assembling the picture of how al Qaeda set about planning the September 11th attacks, even though we know that they did it. We are still assembling the picture, which we know is incomplete, of the Iraqi relationship with al Qaeda. If that is true about the past, think how much more true it is about the future. We have to look at the evidence as we have it and as it develops to make the best judgments possible, but to recognize the underlying uncertainty.

Four years ago, then President of the United States Bill Clinton, speaking about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, declared, and I quote, "Some day, some way I guarantee you he'll use the arsenal."

Well I personally believe that the combination of weapons of mass destruction capabilities, declared hostility to the United States, and close ties to terrorists make the former President's statement ominously probable. I would not venture to guarantee the future. However, and this is obviously what President Clinton meant in what he said in a simpler way, I share his belief that the risk of the Iraqi regime using those terrible weapons or giving them to terrorists is unacceptably high.

Let me address what I think are some of the most important questions that have been raised in this debate. And while the Congress has acted, the debate continues, as it should continue. It is the great strength of this country.

Some have asked whether an attack on Iraq would disrupt or distract the United States from the global war on terror.

The answer to that, as Secretary Rumsfeld has said, is that Iraq is part of the global war on terror. Stopping terrorist regimes from acquiring weapons of mass destruction is a key objective of that war. "We can fight all elements of this war," the Secretary said, "simultaneously," and I would add we must do so.

Although the demand on our military resources will be significant if it becomes necessary to use force

against Iraq, we have a military that is strong enough to take on that task. The war on terrorism is a global war and one that must be pursued everywhere using all the instruments of national power and every resource at our command.

It is hard to see how we can expect to be successful in the long run if we leave Iraq as a sanctuary for terrorists and its murderous dictator in defiant safety.

Saddam Hussein supports and conspires with our terrorist enemies. He lends them both moral and material support. Disarming Saddam Hussein and fighting the war on terror are not merely related, they are one and the same.

If we can defeat a terrorist regime in Iraq it will be a defeat for terrorists globally.

When we toppled the Taliban regime we sent a powerful message to governments outside Afghanistan that were undecided before that about where they stood in the war on terrorism, and cooperation increased measurably.

When we got to safe houses in Afghanistan, we discovered documents and captured terrorists who led us to break up plots in Southeast Asia and North Africa and elsewhere around the globe. When we drove al Qaeda out of Afghanistan we were able to capture key terrorists like Abu Zubaydah and Ramzi bin al-Shibh who no longer had a sanctuary. Similar effects can be expected if there is a decent government in Baghdad that can help us to uncover evidence, to capture terrorists, and to deny them sanctuary.

Finally, Iraq is part of the global war on terrorism because Iraq represents one of the first and best opportunities to begin building what President Bush has referred to as a better world beyond the war on terrorism. If Saddam Hussein is a danger and a support to terrorists and an encouragement to terrorist regimes, conversely his demise will open opportunities for governments and institutions to emerge in the Muslim world that are respectful of fundamental human dignity and freedom and that abhor the killing of innocents as an instrument of national policy.

Some ask, why act now? Why not wait until the threat is imminent?

In some ways the answer is very simple. As Senator Joseph Lieberman put it recently, "I have felt for more than a decade now," the Senator said, "that every additional day that Saddam Hussein is in power in Iraq is an additional day of danger for the Iraqi people, for his neighbors in the region, particularly for the people and military of the United States and indeed for the people of the world."

Indeed, the more time passes the more time Saddam Hussein has to develop his deadly weapons and to acquire more. The more time he has to plant sleeper agents in the United States and other friendly countries or to supply deadly weapons to terrorists he can then disown, the greater the danger.

The notion that we can wait until the threat is imminent assumes that we will know when it is imminent. That was not even true in 1962 with the very obvious threat of Soviet missiles in Cuba. As President Kennedy said then, "The United States cannot tolerate deliberate deception and offensive threats on the part of any nation, large or small. We no longer live in a world," the late President said, "where only the actual firing of weapons represents a sufficient challenge to a nation's security to constitute maximum peril."

If that was true 40 years ago of a threat that was comparatively easy to observe, how much more true is it today of threats developed by evil people who use the freedoms of a democratic society to hide even in our midst?

Who knew in August of last year that there was an imminent threat of an attack that would kill 3,000 Americans? And had we known then, who would have known that it was already too late to deal with that threat by going to its roots in Afghanistan?

The principal hijackers had already arrived in the United States nearly two years ago and the entire group had been assembled by the middle of last year.

As Secretary Rumsfeld has pointed out, even when our intelligence organizations are able to penetrate the veil of secrecy that surrounds terrorist groups and terrorist states, and they often do so only with great skill and ingenuity, it is sometimes, as the Secretary has pointed out, long after developments have actually occurred—sometimes two, sometimes four, in one case as we discovered on the Rumsfeld Commission looking at the ballistic missile threat, once 13 years after dangerous developments had taken place.

We cannot afford to wait until Saddam Hussein or some terrorist supplied by him attacks us with a chemical or biological or, worst of all, a nuclear weapon, to recognize the danger that we face. If that terrible event happens and we look back to examine why we weren't warned, the answer will clearly be that we were. The dots are there for all to see. We must not wait for some terrible event that connects the dots for us.

Some people ask why run the risk of provoking Saddam Hussein? Doesn't the only danger that he will use those weapons of mass destruction come if we threaten his survival?

There is a serious concern here and we must certainly plan on the assumption that a great moment of danger will come if Saddam Hussein believes that his survival in power is at risk and that he has little to lose by using his most terrible weapons. However it is important to recognize how many dubious assumptions underlie the contention that this is a danger we can avoid forever if we simply seek to contain Saddam Hussein indefinitely.

First it assumes that we can guarantee Saddam's survival, that his survival will never be threatened by events beyond our control, such as an internal revolution.

Second, more important I think, it assumes that we understand the way his mind works and that he will always avoid actions that would endanger his survival, even though there is an enormous body of evidence that we do not understand the way his mind works and that he has frequently taken actions that put him and his regime in grave danger.

The evidence that we do have suggests an enormous thirst for revenge. A thirst that was signaled in some of the regime's earliest rhetoric at the end of the Persian Gulf War when Radio Baghdad announced, for example, and I'm quoting, "What remains is for Bush," and he meant the former President, "and his accomplices in crime," by which he clearly meant the regimes of the Persian Gulf, "to understand that they are personally responsible. The Iraqi people will pursue them for this crime even if they leave office and disappear into oblivion. There is no doubt that they will understand what they mean if they know what revenge means to the Arabs."

Indeed, the true significance of the attempted assassination of former President Bush in 1993 is what it tells us about Saddam Hussein's lust for revenge. All rational consideration, at least as we would understand the word rational, would have argued against taking this provocative step when there was a new administration in Washington that had openly signaled its desire to come to peaceful terms with the Iraqi regime. We will probably never know why Saddam Hussein went ahead with that plot, but we must confront the fact that he did. We must confront this enormous appetite for revenge and consider that Saddam Hussein might have concluded from that event that he could undertake an extraordinarily dangerous act and suffer only relatively minor punishment.

The most dangerous assumption of all, however, is the assumption that Saddam would not use terrorists as an instrument of revenge. That is the very danger that Secretary Powell warned of so eloquently in the quote I read you earlier. The use of terrorists as an undeterrable instrument for delivering weapons of mass destruction.

As our President has said, Saddam Hussein is harboring terrorists and the instruments of terror, the instruments of mass death and destruction, and he cannot be trusted. The risk is simply too great that he will use them or provide them to a terror network.

Some ask why not wait until other crises in the world are resolved so that we can deal more easily with this one?

The world isn't going to leave us alone. There will always be problems with acting at any time, but one thing we can say with certainty. The danger of acting grows with time because if military action does become necessary—and let me again repeat I think for the third time the hypothetical nature of that comment—the greatest danger will come from his weapons of mass destruction. Those capabilities we can be sure will be steadily increasing as well as the means to deliver them.

Unless we mean to defer action forever and effectively acknowledge that the Iraqi regime can successfully deter us, the longer we wait to act the more dangerous it will be if we finally have to do so.

Some ask why act unilaterally? Why not assemble a coalition?

In fact the President has already made it clear that we do not plan to act unilaterally. Indeed, we have already begun to assemble an impressive coalition. Some countries have indicated they will be with us, with or without a UN resolution, and many others will surely join once there is one.

What is also true is that many countries, particularly those who feel directly threatened by the Iraqi regime, those "accomplices in crime" that Radio Baghdad referred to in the earlier quote, will not openly support us this time until they are certain that we're going to act to remove the regime that threatens them. That is why American resolve and determination to act, not to be hamstrung by the waverings of the weak or those who still hope to seek favors from the Baghdad regime, is important to embolden others to join us.

Finally, and this is the last question I'll raise, many wonder whether Iraq will be even more unstable and dangerous after Saddam Hussein is gone.

In fact if I go back to my comment about the coalition, there will be a coalition after Saddam is gone and there is little doubt that many other countries will want to be with us when that evil regime is removed from power. For the Iraqi nation is one of the most important nations in the Arab world with some of the most talented people and some of the richest natural resources of any country in the Middle East.

If a moment of liberation comes, many countries and many individuals, including some who now criticize us, will want to be part of that very positive opportunity to build a more peaceful and just and representative nation in this critically important Arab and Muslim country.

Indeed, while there are many risks that would be associated with a decision to use force to resolve this threat, the one risk that seems frequently exaggerated is the risk that the removal of a Saddam Hussein regime will be a cause of instability in the region.

Of course the caution about predicting the future applies here as well, to both the optimists, of whom I am one, and the pessimists. But it seems to me that the optimists have a better factual case. Unlike the Balkans, Iraq's recent history is not one of bloody ethnic conflict but rather one of bloody repression by the regime of all ethnic groups.

In the northern part of Iraq, beyond the reach of Baghdad for a decade, Iraqi Kurds have already demonstrated an impressive ability to manage longstanding differences and even to develop relatively free and prospering societies despite laboring under the same economic sanctions that applied to the rest of Iraq.

The enormous talent pool of Iraqis, both in the country and among the four million in exile, also bodes well for its future. And just as the experience of decades of tyranny in Central Europe and the Soviet

Union seems to have engendered a deep resistance to going back to the communist past, it is a reasonable hope that the experience of Ba'athist tyranny will encourage powerful resistance to the emergence of another harsh dictatorship.

The pessimists in this argument have a heavy burden. Do they really believe that the only way to preserve what they call stability in this important Arab country and in the Middle East more generally, the stability that the once-tyrannized Poles used to call the "stability of the graveyard," is by preserving indefinitely the rule of a despotic tyranny? If so, and I sincerely doubt that many believe that, then they would have to explain how this so-called stability is to be preserved even after the eventual demise of Saddam Hussein. Do they believe that his sons will successfully carry on his despotism after him like the sons of Hafez el-Assad and Kim Il Sung? I doubt that.

In fact for better or for worse, and I am convinced it will be for far far better, sooner or later the Middle East and the world will have to cope with the reality of the demise of the Iraqi regime. For the sake of the suffering Iraqi people it would be far better for that to happen sooner rather than later.

And in the interest of minimizing whatever risks there are to larger regional stability, it would be far better for this admittedly enormous change to take place when the eyes of the world are upon Iraq and when the United States and a strong coalition are committed to seeing it through to a successful conclusion—in short, to take place on the world's terms, not on Saddam's terms or on some fateful throw of the dice.

Indeed, I'm surprised that so many people who know the Middle East well and who admire the talents of the Arab people believe that the demise of this despotic regime would be harmful to the Arab cause. To the contrary, I believe there is actually an opportunity here to help liberate one of the most talented populations in the Arab world with positive effects throughout the Middle East and indeed throughout the world's two billion Muslims. That also constitutes a huge strategic advantage for us should it become necessary to use force.

The Future of Iraq

Because the Iraqi regime, like every other regime that supports terrorism, rules by terror. We saw with the Taliban what a huge weakness that is. There can be very few people in Iraq who want to be the last to die for Saddam Hussein. Once their fear of Saddam is removed, he will have to fear them.

In Saddam Hussein we have a despotic warden who in turning his country into the most savage kind of prison has enslaved the talents and resources of a richly endowed people, but as we've seen in Afghanistan, when the yoke of terrorism is removed, people used their newfound freedom to sing, to work, to learn, to build a better future for themselves and their children. For there is no true way that the fundamental desires for freedom, justice and prosperity can be extinguished.

In his beautiful book "Dream Palace of the Arabs," the great Middle East scholar Fouad Ajami begins

by telling the story of an Iraqi poet who like so many intellectuals had fled the government of Iraq. When this poet died in London in 1996 he symbolized for Ajami how people of such intellectual and artistic bents have been alienated from their cultural home by forces opposed to "secular enlightenment and modernity."

In this poet who sought freedom of expression and desired political change, we may see a metaphor for the people of Iraq, whose rich history speaks of gifted people whose talents emerged from the very cradle of civilization. And if we get the chance, we will serve ourselves as well as the Iraqi people if we can assist them in putting those gifts into building a future for Iraq that is stable and free and prosperous.

For there is no question that doing all of this with the world's help will remove yet another haven for terrorists. That will be a significant step in helping remove some of the fetters to progress in other parts of the Muslim world.

Success in Iraq would demoralize those who preach doctrines of hatred and oppression and subjugation. It would encourage those who dream the ancient dream, the ageless desire for freedom.

In the last half century, those ideals of freedom and self-government have been the most powerful engines of change in the world. They give us hope for further development in the Muslim world, a development that will benefit every nation throughout the world and bring us important allies in the war against terrorism.

Back when America was getting started, our friends abroad watched us closely. They sensed a fragile experiment underway. But they also sensed that from the beginning our founders showed a bias toward freedom that would not deter them from the effort and the sacrifices and the risks that lay ahead. And when our nation underwent its moment of greatest trial, when it seemed like our very fabric was tearing apart, Abraham Lincoln knew that we would endure because we struggled for something unique and extraordinary.

What our founding fathers struggled to found and what Lincoln struggled to keep, as he wrote, "holds out a great promise for all the people of the world for all time to come."

These are indeed difficult times. The prophet Jeremiah expressed our present truth so long ago in these words, "We wait for peace to no avail, for a time of healing, but terror comes instead." But in these times of terror, men and women who cherish freedom and seek peace may be strengthened by remembering also the words of the prophet Isaiah, who spoke saying, "See upon the palms of my hands I have written your name. Your walls are ever before me. Your builders will outstrip your destroyers."

To those here who help build peace, who help us build, as the President has said, "a better world beyond the war on terror," a great mission lies ahead. But we will not be deterred from the truth. And this truth we know: that the single greatest threat to peace and freedom in our time is terrorism.

So this truth we must also affirm: that the future does not belong to the terrorists. The future belongs to all those who dream the oldest and noblest dream of all—the dream of peace and freedom.

Thank you all for your attention. [Applause]

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